

Copyright
by
Jhih-Syuan Lin
2012

**The Dissertation Committee for Jhih-Syuan Lin Certifies that this is the approved
version of the following dissertation:**

**The Nature and Effects of Consumer Identity Fusion in Consumer-
Brand Relationships**

Committee:

Yongjun Sung, Supervisor

Matthew Eastin

Lucy Atkinson

Vincent Cicchirillo

William B. Swann, Jr.

Ed Emmer

**The Nature and Effects of Consumer Identity Fusion in Consumer-
Brand Relationships**

by

Jhieh-Syuan Lin, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
The University of Texas at Austin
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2012

Dedication

To my family for their unconditional love and support.

The Nature and Effects of Consumer Identity Fusion in Consumer-Brand Relationships

Jhih-Syuan Lin, Ph.D.

The University of Texas at Austin, 2012

Supervisor: Yongjun Sung

While existing literature describes strong brand relationships along several dimensions, this research sheds light on the identity perspective of brand relationships through the lens of consumer identity fusion, aiming to understand the extent to which consumers incorporate brands into their self-perceptions. Specifically, this research investigates the nature and effects of consumer identity fusion and its motivational consequences following brand transgressions. Study One examines whether consumer identity fusion out-predicts brand identification in estimating the tendency for consumers to endorse pro-relationship behavior with regard to minor or severe transgressions. The results show that highly fused consumers are more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies and are less likely to engage in destructive coping strategies than are weakly fused consumers. The fusion \times perceived severity interaction effect is found only for the exit coping strategy. Study Two assesses how consumer identity fusion influences consumers' responses to personal-related versus societal-related brand transgressions. The findings demonstrate that the effect of consumer identity fusion is stronger than that of brand identification across different behavioral outcomes; it has a greater effect on participants' relationship-serving responses to personal-related transgressions than to societal-related brand transgressions. However, the fusion \times brand transgression types

interaction effect is found only for exit responses. Finally, Study Three incorporates an additional self-affirmation manipulation to determine the interplay of consumers' personal and social identities, aiming to disentangle the source of the motivational machinery needed for consumers' pro-relationship behaviors. The findings underscore that highly fused consumers in the affirmation condition are less likely to exit the brand relationship than those in the no affirmation condition when facing personal-related brand transgressions, even though self-affirmation should reduce the negative effect of brand transgressions. Nevertheless, the expected relationships are not found for consumers' change in brand evaluation and other behavioral measures. The findings of this research together suggest that consumer identity fusion is applicable for understanding connections between consumers and the brand relationship partner in consumer-brand relationships. Implications of these findings and directions for refinement and future research are discussed.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Consumer-Brand Relationships	7
Transgressions in Consumer-Brand Relationships	12
Chapter 3: Self-Brand Identity Connections.....	19
Social Identity Approach to Self-Brand Identity Connections	23
Identity Fusion	28
Chapter 4: Hypothesis Development	34
Consumer Identity Fusion and Brand Transgression Severity	35
Consumer Identity Fusion and Brand Transgression Types	41
The Effect of Self-Affirmation	43
Chapter 5: Overview of Empirical Research	47
Chapter 6: Study One	50
Method	51
Results	58
Discussion	67
Chapter 7: Study Two	71
Method	72
Results	79
Discussion	92
Chapter 8: Study Three	95
Method	97
Results	104
Discussion	120

Chapter 9: General Discussion.....	124
Summary of Findings.....	125
Implications and Contributions.....	128
Limitations and Future Research	132
Appendix A: Stimuli and Measures for Study One	135
Appendix B: Stimuli and Measures for Study Two.....	140
Appendix C: Stimuli and Measures for Study Three.....	146
References.....	153

List of Tables

Table 6.1: Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis	60
Table 6.2: The Effectiveness of Manipulation– Study One	61
Table 7.1: Model Fit Statistics for the Confirmatory Factor Analyses	80
Table 7.2: The Effectiveness of Manipulation–Study Two	82
Table 8.1: Sample Demographic Information	105
Table 8.2: The Effectiveness of Manipulation–Study Three	107

List of Figures

Figure 6.1: Exit as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Perceived Severity	63
Figure 6.2: Voice as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Perceived Severity	64
Figure 6.3: Voice as a Function of Brand Identification and Perceived Severity ..	65
Figure 6.4: Relationship Continuous Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Perceived Severity	67
Figure 7.1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results of the Two-Factor Model	81
Figure 7.2: Exit as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types	85
Figure 7.3: Exit as a Function of Brand Identification and Transgression Types ..	85
Figure 7.4: Voice as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types	86
Figure 7.5: Loyalty as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types	88
Figure 7.6: Neglect as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types	89
Figure 7.7: Relationship Continuous Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types	90
Figure 7.8: Repurchase Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types	91
Figure 8.1: Exit as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation	110

Figure 8.2: Voice as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation	111
Figure 8.3: Loyalty as a Function of Brand Identification, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation.....	113
Figure 8.4: Neglect as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation	114
Figure 8.5: Relationship Continuous Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation	116
Figure 8.6: Repurchase Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation.....	118

Chapter 1: Introduction

Ever since the notion of consumer-brand relationships was introduced by Fournier's (1998) seminal work, the multifaceted relationships developed between consumers and brands have rendered for both marketing academics and practitioners profound implications for understanding consumers' perceptions and behaviors (Belk, 1988; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Fournier, 2009; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). In her theorizing, brand relationships are a central part of consumers' lives: they involve a meaning provision process, range across several dimensions, and take a variety of forms as well as evolve and change over a series of interactions and in response to contextual changes (Fournier, 1998; 2009). While the fruitful theoretical background of a brand relationship perspective paves the way for researchers to conceptualize and examine the bonds between consumers and brands, the relationship metaphor also facilitates in-depth knowledge about orientations of consumers' attitudes and behaviors that shed light on how marketers can encourage, manage, and maintain strong brand relationships and secure a sustainable competitive advantage.

The importance of building strong consumer-brand relationships is more pronounced in today's marketplace, given that companies and their brands do not always behave according to consumers' expectations and that the relationship trajectory is highly susceptible to interruptions caused by negative events (J. Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Andreassen, 2001; D. Aron, 2001; Chung & Beverland, 2006; Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009; Rusbult, Verette, Whitney, Slovik, & Lipkus, 1991). Examples over recent decades include the Exxon and BP oil spills, Johnson & Johnson's series of product recalls, Firestone's tire failures that caused deaths, Nike's use of sweatshop labor, and Dow

Corning's release of potentially harmful silicone breast implants, among others. Consequently, brand transgressions, ranging from product failure and poor service to companies' violations of social codes, may serve as defining moments that lead to significantly negative financial and psychological consequences (J. Aaker et al., 2004; Dawar & Lei, 2009; Fournier & Deighton, 1999; Huber, Vollhardt, Matthes, & Vogel, 2010).

Despite this, extant research has stated that strong brand relationships may mitigate such destructive effects when brand integrity is challenged by negative circumstances (e.g., Ahluwalia, Burnkrant, & Unnava, 2000; Hess, Ganesan, & N. Klein, 2003; Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998; Wiseman, 1986). In this sense, strong brand relationships are important as they can provide the "most reliable sources of future revenues and profits" for marketers (Lemon, Rust, & Zeithaml, 2001, p. 21). In order to characterize the intensity of strong brand relationships, researchers have applied interpersonal constructs to the brand context, such as brand attachment (e.g., Thomson, MacInnis, & C. Park, 2005), brand commitment (e.g., Warrington & Shim, 2000), brand love (e.g., Ahuvia, 2005), brand loyalty (e.g., Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), and more.

Some of these concepts, such as identification (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), underscore the critical role of self and identity in investigating consumers' perceptions of, and responses to, their consumption (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005; Kirmani, 2009; Reed, 2004). Existing consumer research on identity has been developed based on different theoretical frameworks, including meaning transfer (McCracken, 1986), self-schema (Markus, 1977), and social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and has focused on different levels (Lam, Ahearne, & Schillewaert, 2011). Considering that a more complete understanding of consumers' self-brand connections requires a grasp of

the underlying mechanism of such relationships and its effect on important marketing outcomes, this research aims to disentangle the motivational consequences of consumers' feelings of oneness with brands in the face of brand transgressions through the application of identity fusion (Swann, Gómez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, Hart, & Jetten, 2010; Swann, Jetten, Gómez, Whitehouse, & Bastian, 2012).

In social psychology, identity fusion (Swann et al., 2012) is a relatively unexplored state of alignment with social entities, suggesting that individuals' personal and social aspects of identity may relate to one another. Although most people may experience clear boundaries between their personal self and their social self as suggested by the principle of functional antagonism (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987), the identity synergy principle of identity fusion holds that individuals' personal self and social self may combine synergistically and influence one another when they feel fused with a social entity (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012). Existing empirical evidence has shown support for this viewpoint, indicating that identity fusion provides the motivational machinery needed for individuals to work for the benefit of the social group and to undertake radical actions on behalf of the group (Gómez, Morales, Hart, Vázquez, & Swann, 2011; Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010; Swann, Gómez, Huici, Morales, & Hixon, 2010).

Because brands can represent self-relevant social categories with which consumers identify (Belk, 1988) and are often perceived as partners in socially constructed relationships (Fournier, 1998; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), the current research applies the notion of identity fusion to understand consumers' perceptions, emotional

significance, the sense of shared essence, and self-definitional attributes with brands in the context of consumer-brand relationships, namely consumer identity fusion.

Based on literature drawn from social psychology (e.g., Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010; Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010), the consumer identity fusion construct is considered related to, but distinct from, brand identification. In the consumer-brand dyad, fused consumers possess a visceral feeling of oneness with the brand relationship partner; the borders between their personal and social identities become porous and permeable to them. Their sense of who they are enmeshes with what they think the brand represents (i.e., brand identity) while maintaining a potent personal self. Therefore, fused consumers see losses to the brand as equivalent to losses to themselves. They should, therefore, perceive brand transgressions as threats to their identities and strive in compensatory attempts to reaffirm their identities with whatever means are available. In this sense, when fused consumers' autonomous personal selves become merged with a brand, they respond to brand transgressions as they do to personal failure and are willing to undertake pro-relationship maintenance behaviors. Their coping responses and strategies are likely to emerge corresponding to the degree to which they feel fused with the brand.

In response to recent calls for empirical studies in relation to brand transgressions (J. Aaker et al., 2004), there has been growing concern about consumer responses to brand transgressions, the efficacy of various coping strategies, and factors that can moderate the process (e.g., Ahluwalia, Unnava, & Burnkrant, 2001; J. Klein & Dawer, 2004; Roehm & Tybout, 2006). However, until now, no satisfactory knowledge exists about the reason why some consumers in strong brand relationships are more inclined to

be immune to the negative impact of brand transgressions, and the extent to which brand transgressions may influence the trajectory of the relationship.

My dissertation research, therefore, adds to the body of marketing and consumer psychology research by investigating the nature and effects of this newly constructed identity perspective, consumer identity fusion, and its motivational consequences following brand transgressions through A. Hirschman's (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) exit-voice-loyalty-neglect framework. Specifically, voice-loyalty measures deal with consumers' constructive coping behaviors, whereas exit-neglect measures assess consumers' destructive coping behaviors. Besides, additional attitudinal and behavioral measures (i.e., relationship continuous intention, repurchase intention, and brand evaluation) are added to further determine consumers' coping behaviors.

Moreover, this research brings to light the conceptual properties of consumer identity fusion that distinguish this psychological construct from brand identification. This research seeks to validate the distinction empirically and demonstrate that the two constructs have different behavioral implications, arguing that consumer identity fusion is a stronger predictor of consumers' constructive coping strategies that favor brands in trouble. This research further delves into the process of consumers' coping with brand transgressions and aims to determine the specific conditions under which consumers' personal versus social self will motivate pro-relationship maintenance behaviors. Through the use of self-affirmation manipulation, this research extends Cheng, White, and Chaplin's (2012) "brand as self" conceptualization and attempts to provide insight into the underlying drivers that motivate consumers' pro-relationship behaviors. As there is still a dearth of empirical knowledge about whether consumers' personal and social identities individually or interactively guide consumers' responses to brand

transgressions, this research fills a gap in the existing literature and renders meaningful theoretical implications to current brand relationship research.

Besides being of theoretical interest, the results of this research have significant managerial implications, suggesting that consumer identity fusion may serve as the ultimate destination for consumer-brand relationships. Considering that brands are increasingly designed around the need for belonging, and owning certain brands can help craft, affirm, and manage consumers' self-construction process (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; S. Kleine, R. Kleine, Allen, 1995; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008; McCracken, 1989), the current research helps illuminate the dynamics of consumers' self-brand connections and proves sufficiently beneficial in expanding the scope and depth of work on research and practice pertaining to strategic development and maintenance of strong consumer-brand relationships.

To this end, the following two chapters (Chapter 2 and 3) begin with a review of literature in advertising, marketing, and psychology that is relevant to the key constructs and goals of this research. A theoretical framework that explicates the motivating role of consumer identity fusion in determining consumers' responses to different brand transgression incidents and the interplay of consumers' personal and social identities in the face of brand transgressions is further proposed. Five hypotheses and one research question are then presented based on the theoretical framework (Chapter 4), followed by an overview of the experiments (Chapter 5). The next three chapters (Chapter 6, 7, and 8) describe the hypotheses, method, results, and discussion of the three studies, respectively. Finally, the last chapter (Chapter 9) discusses the expected theoretical and managerial contributions of this study and outlines directions for future research.

Chapter 2: Consumer-Brand Relationships

In marketing and consumer research literature, there has been a burgeoning focus on the nature and functions of consumer-brand relationships and the processes whereby these relationships are developed by consumers and marketers (Fournier, 1998; 2009; Fournier & Yao, 1997). Grounded in the notion of consumers as active meaning makers rather than passive recipients of marketing communications (Belk, 1988; E. Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; McCracken, 1986), consumer-brand relationship research has paved the way for the concept of consumer co-creation embraced in contemporary marketing (Allen, Fournier, & Miller, 2008). Fournier (1998) noted that some consumers form brand relationships akin to their interpersonal relationships; they not only care about brand features and benefits but also about a relational aspect of brand perception (Fournier, 2009) and the emotional makeup of brand relationships (Ahuvia, 2005; Thomson et al., 2005). Consumers tend to rely on diverse sources derived from what a brand represents to define their relationships with the brand (O'Malley & Tynan, 1999; Patterson & O'Malley, 2006), including the possession of the brand (Belk, 1988), consumers' brand usage (Fournier, 1998), interactions with service or sales personnel (Price & Arnould, 1999) and the organization (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1996), and other brand users in the brand community (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Consequently, consumers obtain functional aids for living as well as enjoy meanings bestowed upon different aspects of their lives through their relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998). These relationships begin in childhood and continue throughout the life span (Braun-LaTour, LaTour, & Zinkhan 2007; Inman & Zeelenberg 2002; Ji, 2002); they are complex psychological as well as cultural phenomena (Fournier, Breazeale, & Fetscherin, 2012).

However, the metaphor of interpersonal relationships is not without controversy. Previous research suggests that different approaches may be needed to study how consumers interact with other human beings and objects (Fiske & Taylor, 1991; Lingle, Alton & Medin, 1984; Wyer, Srull & Gordon, 1984). On the one hand, people tend to rely on inferred, abstract information (e.g., traits) to make judgments of social stimuli (i.e. people); on the other hand, they tend to rely on concrete attributes to make judgments of non-social stimuli (e.g., products) (Lingle et al., 1984). Moreover, people usually judge others using self as a reference frame (Fong & Markus, 1982) but not in judging non-social objects (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Besides, some consumer researchers have criticized the relationship metaphor based on arguments that interdependence is missing from a brand relationship and that the nature of interactions in brand relationships is different from those in interpersonal relationships. For example, Bengtsson (2003) stated that “the personification of brands does not necessarily imply that the brand can become an active partner with the consumers. A brand is an inanimate object and cannot think or feel; thus it is likely to respond to consumers in a highly standardized manner” (p. 154). Although the relationship metaphor has its limitations as brands cannot appropriately be perceived as “human-like” (Aggarwal, 2004, p. 88), there are several reasons why people may interact with brands in ways that parallel human interactions in a social context.

According to the theory of animism, which posits that people tend to anthropomorphize objects to facilitate interactions with them (McDougall, 1911; Nida & Smalley, 1959), consumers may think of a brand as a living being or, at least, that it possesses human-like properties (McGill, 1998). Because the execution of marketing communication constitutes a set of behaviors enacted on behalf of the brand, it is reasonable that consumers may perceive brands as relational partners rather than as

passive, economically defined objects (Fournier, 1998). With this in mind, marketers often design an anthropomorphized representation of a brand, imbue brands with images and distinct personalities, or present a product itself in human terms as part of the overall marketing strategy (J. Aaker, 1997; Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Biel, 2000; Fournier & Alvarez, 2012). Once products and brands are associated with human characteristics, it is easy to see how consumers interact and create companionships with brands.

Moreover, brands may be possessed by the spirit of another person (McCracken, 1989) and, therefore, “the personal consciousness and volition of its corporeal owner to cause life and thought in the object it animates” (Tylor, 1874, p. 429). Examples of this strategy for anthropomorphizing brands include the use of endorsers (e.g., William Shatner for Priceline, Kobe Bryant for Nike), showcased connections with corporate leaders (e.g., Steve Jobs and Apple, Bill Gates and Microsoft), or embodiment in a corporeal person-brand entity (e.g., Rachael Ray, Martha Stewart). These marketing efforts have been found to impact consumer evaluation of products (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007), affect brand perceived credibility (Keller, 2002), and foster consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). The relationship metaphor facilitates in-depth knowledge about consumers’ needs and, therefore, helps marketers develop better products and improve their marketing communications (Monga, 2002). Apparently, the relationship metaphor has proven to be a powerful tool for understanding brands as long as appropriate contextual adaptations and adjustments are taken into account (Swaminathan & Dommer, 2012).

The fruitful theoretical background of a brand relationship perspective provides researchers with abundant opportunities to explore and examine the bonds between consumers and brands and the roles that brands play in consumers’ daily lives (Breivik &

Thorbjørnsen, 2008). Both qualitative (e.g., Fournier, 1998; Ji, 2002; Kates, 2000) and quantitative approaches (e.g., Aggarwal, 2004; Monga, 2002; J. Park & Kim, 2001) have been employed to study a wider range of topics, such as the nature and properties of different types of consumer-brand relationships (e.g., J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995; Aggarwal, 2004; Miller, Fournier, & Allen, 2012), goals and motivations that foster these relationships (e.g., Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reimann & A. Aron, 2009), factors responsible for the dissolution of these relationships (e.g., J. Aaker et al., 2004; Fajer & Schouten, 1995), and the psychological and behavioral effects of strong brand relationships (e.g., Wegner, Sawicki, & Petty, 2009; Ahuvia, Betra, & Bagozzi, 2009). Several interpersonal constructs have been applied to characterize the intensity of consumer-brand relationships, such as identification (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003), attachment (e.g., Chaplin & John, 2005; C. Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), involvement (e.g., C. Park & McClung, 1986), commitment (e.g., Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002; Sung & Campbell, 2007), feelings of loyalty (e.g., Rust, Ambler, Carpenter, Kumar, & Srivastava, 2004), brand love (e.g., Ahuvia et al., 2009), and more. In sum, the notion of consumer-brand relationships has been studied in a number of different ways that capture various components and possibly different antecedents and consequences of the relationship itself.

While acknowledging that consumer-brand relationships do not necessarily share the same richness and depth as social relationships, it is important to note that consumers often behave as if they develop relationships with brands that are similar to relationships with other human partners (Aggarwal, 2004; Aggarwal & Law, 2005). The nature of consumer-brand relationships may take on a wide spectrum of intensity, including “committed partnerships,” “arranged marriages,” “causal friendships,” and more

(Fournier, 1998). The perceived ability (competence) and intentions (warmth) of a brand may impact how consumers perceive, feel, and behave toward the brand, as they do for people, stereotypes, and social groups (Kervyn, Fiske, & Malone, 2012). Consumer-brand interactions may be mediated by the same norms that govern and define the appropriateness of social relationships. For example, Aggarwal and colleagues have adopted the two-relationship version, *exchange* or *communal* relationships (Clark & Mills, 1979; 1993; Goffman, 1961), to study consumer-brand relationship norms and to better understand the complex nature of consumer-brand interactions (Aggarwal, 2004; 2008; Aggarwal & Larrick, 2012; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Aggarwal & Zhang, 2006). It is important to note that these two types of relationships are not necessarily mutually exclusive in the brand context; the relationship norms in such contexts are likely to be somewhat moderated by the underpinning of exchange-ness even in a communal relationship (Aggarwal, 2004). Given that both norms may co-exist in one relationship, consumer researchers tend to focus on the relative salience of exchange versus communal norms in consumer-brand relationships and treat them as two ends of a continuum rather than two orthogonal dimensions (Aggarwal, 2004; 2009; Aggarwal & Law, 2005; Clark & Mills, 1993; Mills & Clark, 1982; J. Johnson & Grimm, 2010). Empirical studies have shown that brand relationship norms may help consumers evaluate the actions of the brand and guide their own behavior (Aggarwal, 2009).

Taken together, this research stream sheds light on the appropriateness of using the interpersonal relationship metaphor in the context of consumer-brand relationships. When consumers perceive a brand as a relationship partner, it is reasonable to assume that norms of that particular relationship will then be invoked to guide the way they evaluate the brand and judge the legitimacy of brand actions. In line with this assumption,

the literature shows that the communal-exchange relationship distinction is a useful framework for gaining insight into different aspects of consumer behavior and actions. Despite the effect of differences in people, products, and context-specific factors that lead to different relationships developed between a consumer and a brand, the notion of relationship norms provides an important tool for researchers to understand and make predictions about consumer behavior in the current context.

TRANSGRESSIONS IN CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS

As Fournier (2009) suggested, consumer-brand relationships may evolve and change over a series of interactions and are in response to contextual changes. Considering their dynamic and interdependent nature, fluctuations in person, brand, and environmental factors may trigger the evolution of relationships or precipitate a decline. Prior research has suggested that, analogous to interpersonal relationships, increasing durations of relationships and frequencies of interaction allow for the increased likelihood of engaging in a potentially destructive act to occur (Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009; Rusbult et al., 1991). On the other hand, consumers in long-term brand relationships are more likely to have higher expectations for brands and, therefore, greater likelihood of dissatisfaction (Grayson & Ambler 1999; Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpandé, 1992). Because companies and their brands do not always behave according to consumers' expectations, such failures can have significant implications for consumers' buying decisions, brand evaluations, and relationship strength (J. Aaker et al., 2004; Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Huber et al., 2010).

Drawing upon the notion that not all consumer-brand relationships are successfully maintained over time and that the relationship trajectory is highly susceptible to interruptions caused by negative events, empirical studies have investigated the effects

of negative brand publicity on consumer-brand relationships to provide a valuable lens for studying the developmental mechanisms that shape ongoing brand relationships (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Fournier, 2009). Specifically, the literature suggests that one factor often singled out for its determinant effects in consumer-brand relationships is the commission of a transgression (J. Aaker et al., 2004; Huber, et al., 2010; Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009), which indicates a violation of the implicit or explicit rules guiding relationship performance and evaluation (Metts, 1994). Akin to social relationships, relationship transgressions may range from preference conflicts to inconsiderate and irritating acts to acts of betrayal (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003); these transgressions may result in feelings of injury and resentment and adversely influence the stability of relationships (Hoyt, Fincham, McCullough, Maio, & Davila, 2005). The term betrayal is often used as a synonym when referring to relational transgressions (Holloway, Wang, & Beatty, 2009; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Metts & Cupach, 2007).

Although it is believed that transgressions seem to be inevitable in long-term relationships (Rusbult, et al., 1991), consumers' expectations toward brand transgressions are antithetical to this view (Smith, Bolton, Wagner, 1999; J. Aaker et al., 2004). Brand transgressions are of focal relevance as consumers derive inferences and draw conclusions about brands, especially from negative events (Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009). The high level of salience and diagnosticity of negative incidents provide consumers with a way to evaluate the dispositional qualities of the relational partners and the status of the relationships at hand (Ahluwalia et al., 2001; Fiske, 1980; J. Klein, Smith, & John, 2004; Ybarra & Stephan, 1999). Therefore, brand transgressions can be detrimental to the core

of consumer-brand relationships and influence consumers' willingness to continue relationships.

Some marketing scholars indicated that strong relationships can magnify consumers' unfavorable responses to brand transgressions (Goodman, Fichman, Lerch, & Snyder, 1995; Grégoire & Fisher, 2006). For example, Kelley and Davis (1994) found that committed consumers possess higher recovery expectations than less committed consumers after experiencing a brand failure. A systematic set of investigations by Grégoire and colleagues (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire, Tripp, Legoux, 2009) explored the "love becomes hate" effect in the area of service marketing. They confirmed that brand failure is a key motivational factor that leads consumers to restore fairness by all means possible; loyal consumers may have the longest unfavorable reactions toward the brand following the failure. In addition, J. Klein et al. (2004) found that the perceived egregiousness of brand actions was a significant predictor of consumer boycott participation. The more severe a consumer perceived the brand misconduct, the more likely the consumer was to boycott. Similarly, Weun, Beatty, and Jones (2004) contended that the severity of failure has a great impact on satisfaction, trust, commitment, and negative word-of-mouth communication.

Along this line of logic, the general view of the literature suggests that transgressions are inherently damaging as they threaten the relationship core (Buysse et al, 2000; J. Aaker et al., 2004). Although transgressions may vary in their severity and cause and differ in their ultimate negotiations, all are considered significant in their ability to impact the relationship process (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002). However, some argue that there are several contingencies that may mitigate the destructive influence of transgression incidents. For example, Folkes (1984) noted that the negativity effects of

transgressions on satisfaction and subsequent consumer responses depend, in part, on how consumers attribute those product failures. Hess et al. (2003) further stated that higher consumer expectations of relationship continuity lead to more favorable attributions about the stability of a failure, which in turn leads to higher satisfaction with a recovery. Berry (1995) noted that consumers may exhibit greater tolerance for failures when involved in affective and social relationships with brands. Tax and colleagues (1998) also suggested that positive prior experience with brands may buffer the negative effects of poor service handling on consumers' commitment and trust toward brands. Hence, relationship-serving biases may dilute the negativity effects and past positives may cancel these effects in long-term relationships (Wiseman, 1986).

Considering that people with positive attitudes toward a target tend to engage in biased assimilation, resisting counter-attitudinal information more than pro-attitudinal information (Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Edwards & Smith, 1996), Ahluwalia et al. (2000) conducted a series of experiments and concluded that commitment is an imperative moderator of consumer response to negative brand information. Highly committed consumers are more inclined to question the validity of the information source, to be insulated from the impact of negative information, and to be more benevolent and immune to brand transgressions. In a follow-up study, Ahluwalia et al. (2001) suggested that commitment is useful for marketers in its ability to limit the impact of negative brand information on consumers. The value of committed consumers may be measured in terms of the defensive processes they exhibit when encountering negative versus positive brand information, therein resisting other attempts at persuasion and retaining the current relationship with the brand. Moreover, Ahluwalia (2002) presented that brand familiarity may lead to increased attention paid to new information about a brand and attenuate

negativity effects. However, whether the increased attention translates into strengthening or buffering negativity effects is dependent on the goals of consumers.

Building on Ahluwalia and colleagues' (2000) work, Einwiller, Fedorikhin, A. Johnson, and Kamins (2006) identified that the effect of negative brand information on consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions is moderated by their identification with a company, namely consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). They further demonstrated a boundary condition, suggesting that the buffering effect of identification has its limits when brand information becomes extremely negative. These findings were consistent with Bhattacharya and Sen's (2003) assumption of consumers' resilience to negative information about companies.

J. Aaker et al. (2004) conducted a longitudinal field experiment to further study the negative effects of brand transgressions on the evolution of consumer-brand relationships. In their study, researchers found that brand personality is another factor that moderates the effects of transgressions on relational outcomes. Specifically, transgressions were found to be damaging to relationships with sincere brands in that the fundamental meaning of close partnership with brands was called into question, the bases of self-connection weakened, and consumer satisfaction and commitment levels diminished. However, development patterns were shown to be different for relationships with exciting brands in that transgressions seemed to operate in part as a means of (re)invigorating exciting brand relationships. Inferences concerning partner quality were found to mediate the results. This study offered support to Grayson and Ambler's (1999) findings and highlighted the risks involved in the invariant pursuit of strong brand relationships grounded in foundations of trust.

To further understand the phenomenon, Paulssen and Bagozzi (2009) employed an attachment theory approach to examine individual relationship differences in behavioral responses to brand transgressions. The results showed that, in response to brand transgressions, securely attached consumers were likely to develop an attribution bias that decreased the tendency to enact destructive behavior and increased the tendency to enact constructive behavior. Moreover, secure consumer attachment was found to decrease stability attributions and reduce the intensity of emotional response patterns to relationship transgressions, which in turn drive consumers' behavioral responses. That is, both cognitive and emotional response patterns of securely attached consumers help decrease the vulnerability of their ongoing relationships with brands to transgression incidents. Recently, Huber and colleagues (2010) studied the consequences of brand transgressions on consumer-brand relationships with a focus on consumers' actual and ideal self-congruence with brands. The results showed that the extent of consumers' ideal and actual self-congruence had a positive impact on the establishment of consumer-brand relationships. The importance of the antecedents and the effects of brand relationship quality on consumers' repurchase intention are independent from brand transgressions.

As noted above, scholarship concerning brand transgressions devotes itself to identifying the significance of negative events and factors that serve to magnify or buffer the negative effect of brand transgressions across various domains. However, as Fournier and Brasel (2002) mentioned, only a few studies have investigated how consumers respond to breaches in the context of consumer-brand relationships (Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009). Because there is considerable variability in consumers' predispositions to form relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998; Price & Arnould, 1999), more research is needed to increase sensitivities to distal factors that might moderate or qualify the effects

of brand transgressions on relationship development dynamics within the consumer-brand relationship domain. This offers a path for the current inquiry.

Chapter 3: Self-Brand Identity Connections

In its most common usage, the self refers to “a representation or set of representations about oneself, parallel to the representations people have of other individuals” (Swann & Booson, 2010, p. 591). The self has been defined in terms of the *I* (the knower) and the *me* (the known), or self-as-object, that William James (1890/1950) suggested in his research. Self-concept and identity are what come to our mind when we think of ourselves (Neisser, 1993), our personal as well as our social identities (Stryker, 1980; Tajfel, 1981). Self and identity are often used as interchangeable terms and are considered as our theory of our personality (Markus & Cross, 1990). Self-theorists have acknowledged that self and identity not only serve as a useful explanatory frame but also as a perspective from which an individual’s behavior can be understood (Cross & Madson, 1997; Epstein, 1973; Markus, Smith, & Moreland, 1985). In light of this, there has been an increased focus on self and identity among scholars in diverse disciplines over the past several decades.

Ever since self-concept was applied to the consumer domain, researchers have seemed to agree that self-concept denotes the “totality of the individual’s thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object” (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). Self-concept is considered significant and relevant to consumer research as many purchases made by consumers are affected by the image that individuals have of themselves (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Consumers are both identity seekers and makers (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). The marketplace has become a preeminent source of symbolic resources through which they construct narratives of identity (Belk, 1988; Hill & Stamey, 1990; Levy, 1981; Reimann & A. Aron, 2009). This research stream has been insightful for describing, explaining, and predicting the role of consumers’ self-concepts in consumer

attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Gardner & Levy, 1955; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Heath & Scott, 1998; Levy, 1959; Sirgy 1982; 1986; C. Park et al., 2010).

In an early analysis, Levy (1959) asserted that consumers are not functionally oriented. Instead, consumer behavior is directly influenced by the symbols that identify products in the marketplace. Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) found that consumers' consumption, display, and use of products tend to incorporate symbolic meanings linked to enhancing their self-concepts of themselves. Products and brands may be used to portray a particular image that communicates how consumers desire to appear or for instrumental purposes that help further some aspects of the self (Mittal, 2006). After examining the relationship between possessions and the sense of self, Belk (1988) articulated that consumers use possessions not only to reflect but also to actively shape and maintain self-views across a lifespan, suggesting a connection between one's identity and one's possessions. As such, material objects and possessions, such as products or brands, are re-cast from simply informational vehicles to meaning-rich tools for identity construction (Allen et al., 2008). That is, brands can serve as symbols that represent socially shared meanings that create, reinforce, and express the owners' sense of identity and reflect their relations with others (Belk, 1988; Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992; Solomon, 1983). Consumers may engage in symbolic consumption to construct their self-concepts as well as to create and manage their identities (Ball & Tasaki, 1992; S. Kleine et al., 1995; R. Kleine, S. Kleine, & Kernan, 1993; McCracken, 1989; Richins, 1994). A link between a consumer and a brand may then be bridged through usage experiences, advertising, and the relevance of the brand to desired reference groups (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2000; 2003; 2005). Although such a link is cognitive in its representation, it is inherently emotional in that it involves myriad

and complex feelings about the brand (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; C. Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005).

The literature suggests that consumers form self-brand connections through a matching process to identify products or brands that are congruent with their self-images. Much research that falls into this realm involves examining consumers' product and brand preferences, purchase intentions, and usage in terms of self-brand congruity (e.g., J. Aaker, 1997; 1999; Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, & Sirgy, 2011; Birdwell, 1968; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2005; Gao, Wheeler, & Shiv, 2009; Heath & Scott, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). The core of self-brand congruity is that consumers prefer brands associated with a set of personality traits congruent with their own (Kassarjian, 1971; Sirgy, 1982). Empirical studies offer support for this view, showing that congruence between the symbolic image of a product/brand and a consumer's self-image implies a greater likelihood of positive evaluation, preference, or ownership of that product or brand (Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Jacobson & Kossoff, 1963; Kassarjian, 1971; Sung & Choi, 2012).

Specifically, Sirgy (1981) and Sirgy and Danes (1981) took into account the inter-relationship between the self and ideal self-concept and claimed that different states of self-image/product-image congruity may influence consumers' purchase motivation differently. These relationships can be explained through the mediation of self-esteem and self-consistency needs (Sirgy, 1982). J. Aaker (1999) focused on schematic traits (Markus, 1977) and suggested that brands associated with a set of personality traits may be used for self-expressive purposes. In other words, personality traits associated with brands can affect consumer attitudes through their relationships with consumers' self-concept. In addition, J. Aaker (1999) assumed that the function of self-concept depends on self-motives (e.g. self-monitoring) as well as social situations. Later, building on

McCracken's (1986) model of meaning transfer, Escalas and Bettman (2003) attested that consumers appropriate symbolic brand associations to meet self-needs (i.e., self-enhancement and self-verification) and form connections between their self-concepts and brands. Because brands acquire and represent symbolic meanings that are of significance to consumers, consumers use brand symbolism in their self-construction processes.

The notion of the self-brand connection is explained also in Fournier's (1998) seminal work on consumer-brand relationships, which indicates that brand contributes to one's identity, values, and goals. As a facet of brand relationship quality, the self-brand connection reflects "the degree to which the brand delivers on important identity concerns, tasks, or themes, thereby expressing a significant aspect of self" (Fournier, 1998, p. 364). These connections may support relationship maintenance through the development of protective feelings of uniqueness and dependence (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992) and encouragement of accommodation in the face of adversity (Lydon & Zanna, 1990). In her investigation, Fournier (1998) argued that brand meanings are not necessarily inherent in the product or reinforced through marketing communications. Rather, brand meanings are crafted by consumers as brands intersect with important identity themes and life projects. As a result, a brand may represent different meanings for different consumers, depending on how consumers evolve and seek expressive meanings throughout the process. Furthermore, theorizing about the notion of "inclusion of other in self" (e.g., A. Aron & E. Aron, 1986; A. Aron, E. Aron, Norman, 2003; A. Aron, E. Aron, & Smollan, 1992; A. Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991), Reimann and A. Aron (2009) suggested that consumers may include close brands in the self, because brands serve as resources that can be viewed as part of the self, perspectives through

which consumers see the world, and identity that becomes part of the cognitive structure of the self.

While the identity perspective on consumer-brand relationships highlights the symbolic mechanisms of these relationships (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2005; Fournier, 1998; S. Kleine et al., 1995; Solomon, 1983), recent investigations have applied the social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to understand the phenomenon. Because symbolic meanings can be transferred between brands and the self (McCracken, 1986; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2005), and because brands can represent self-relevant social categories that consumers feel identified with (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998), this line of research has shed light on consumers' sense of connectedness to companies (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Einwiller, et al., 2006) and brands (e.g., Donovan, Janda, & Suh, 2006; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008) through the lens of identification.

SOCIAL IDENTITY APPROACH TO SELF-BRAND IDENTITY CONNECTIONS

In its original form, group identification is a perception of oneness with a group of persons (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An important contribution to our understanding of the role of group identification in social perceptions and behaviors is provided by the social identity approach, subsuming both social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987). This approach emphasizes the distinction between the personal and social self (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). While one's personal self indicates idiosyncratic properties of the individual, his or her social self indicates those aspects of self in relation to the connections with a social entity (Swann et al., 2012).

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) postulates that human interaction ranges on a spectrum of interpersonal-intergroup continuum: an interpersonal interaction involves individuals relating entirely as individuals, whereas an intergroup interaction involves individuals relating entirely as representatives of their groups (Hornsey, 2008). This implies that group-related behaviors are motivated by either the salience of one's social self or the salience of one's personal self, not by the salience of both. As a result, this theory has been useful in explaining why and under what circumstances individuals may act in terms of their group memberships (Ellemers, Spears, Doosje, 1997).

By sharing most of the same assumptions, self-categorization theory (Turner et al., 1987) elaborates in greater detail the role of identification through the specification of how salience of either one's personal or social identity may determine his or her social perceptions and behaviors. Social categorizations are considered cognitive tools that classify and order the social environment and, therefore, allow individuals to enact different forms of social action (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). When category distinctions are salient, individuals perceptually enhance similarities within the group and enhance differences among groups. Specifically, as individuals increasingly identify with a social group, their self-perceptions tend to become depersonalized such that in-group members perceive themselves as interchangeable representatives of the social category (Turner, 1985). Moreover, they will view other group members through the lens of group memberships rather than based on personal relationships that they have developed with one another. In other words, categorization changes the way individuals see themselves, in the sense that a different level of one's self-concept is activated (Billig & Tajfel, 1973; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975). One's social identity not only describes what it is

to be a group member but also prescribes the kinds of attitudes and behaviors that are appropriate in a given context (Terry & Hogg, 1996; Hogg & Reid, 2006).

The social identity approach provides researchers with a structure for understanding identification in various contexts (e.g., Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; R. Kleine et al., 1993; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). For example, management scholars applied this notion to examine organizational identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; 1996; Mael & Ashforth, 1992), which has been defined as “the degree to which a member defines him-or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes define the organization” (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994, p. 239). In this sense, if one’s beliefs about an organization become self-referential or self-defining, he or she is considered as being identified with the social entity. Formal membership is not required for identification to occur (Pratt, 1998).

Following this theoretical framework, some marketing research focuses on collective identities and illustrates that brand community identification may elicit a sense of emotional attachment, promote kinship between members, and lead to both positive (e.g., community engagement) and negative consequences (e.g., normative community pressure) (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001). In addition, Bhattacharya & Sen (2003) proposed that consumer-company identification, as the extent to which customers perceive themselves and the company as sharing the same defining attributes, is “the primary psychological substrate for the kind of deep, committed, and meaningful relationships that marketers are increasingly seeking to build with their customers” (p. 76). In their conceptual framework, identity similarity, identity distinctiveness, and identity prestige are the antecedents that make the company’s identity

more attractive to consumers, which in turn lead to consumer-company identification. In line with this view, extant research has provided preliminary support that consumer-company identification can lead to both identity-sustaining behavior, such as greater product utilization, and identity-promoting behavior, such as positive word of mouth (Ahearne et al., 2005).

Moreover, Einwiller and colleagues (2006) pinpointed that when consumers identify with a company, they tend to have positive attitudes and denote favorable associations about it. Strongly identified consumers are motivated to maintain connections with a company as a source for preserving positive identities and self-esteem. Their positive beliefs about the company can, therefore, have an immunizing effect on negative information about the company. However, the buffering effect of consumer-company identification has its limits when the information is extremely negative. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) concluded that strong consumer-company relationships often result from consumers' identification with the companies, which helps them satisfy one or more important self-definitional needs, such as self-continuity, self-distinctiveness, and self-enhancement (Dutton et al., 1994; Pratt, 1998).

Recently, some researchers applied the identification concept to the consumer-brand context, given that brands can represent self-relevant social categories with which consumers identify (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998). Brand identity is "a set of associations the brand strategist seeks to create or maintain" (D. Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000, p. 40). Along this logic, brand identification refers to "a social construction that involves the integration of perceived brand identity (or brand image) into self-identity" (Hughes & Ahearne, 2010, p. 84). Donovan et al. (2006) found that the degree to which consumers identify with a brand is influenced by physical proximity (place) and significant others

(people). As a result, brand identification leads to heightened self-esteem and an increased tendency to purchase brand-related merchandise. Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) noted that prestige, satisfaction, and corporate communications help develop brand identification. Consequently, brand identification can help generate favorable marketing outcomes, such as repurchase and word of mouth. Indeed, the notion of brand identification suggests that consumers develop relationships with a brand due to the ability of that brand to contribute to the identity consumers would like to obtain or maintain (Ashworth, Dacin, & Thomson, 2009). Hence, brand identification is considered the psychological foundation underlying deep and meaningful consumer-brand relationship building success.

Considering brands as valued relationship partners (Fournier, 1998), Lam, Ahearne, Hu, and Schillewaert (2010) proposed the concept of customer-brand identification, referred to as “a customer’s psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand” (p. 130). They conceptualized customer-brand identification as multidimensional, consisting of a cognitive component, an emotional component, and an evaluative component. Their study empirically examined the longitudinal effect of relative customer-brand identification and relative perceived value in predicting consumer loyalty when facing market disruption. The results showed that both constructs inhibit consumers’ switching behavior; however, their effects vary over time. That is, relative customer-brand identification with the incumbent exerted a stronger longitudinal restraint on consumers’ brand switching behavior than relative perceived value of the incumbent. All in all, the literature underscores that the social identity approach appears to be appropriate for investigating the nature of consumer-

brand relationship, as identification offers important implications for relationship maintenance despite relational disruptions.

However, in social psychology, some researchers (e.g., Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010; Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010) have argued that use of the social identity approach may overlook the interplay of personal and social identities in analyses of group processes. Theoretically speaking, when individuals feel identified with a social group, they undergo a cognitive process of depersonalization. They may be well-suited for following group norms, but they seem to lack the initiative to perform pro-group behaviors (Swann et al., 2009). To address this gap, recent research on identity fusion has received preliminary empirical support, showing that identity fusion is an imperative determinant of pro-group behaviors, while controlling for identification. Although both identification and identity fusion theoretically promote significant alignment with a group, the core assumptions are considered fundamentally disjunctive.

Applied to the context of consumer-brand relationships, the current study attempts to investigate the nature of consumer identity fusion and provide a better and richer understanding of consumers' sense of being interconnected with brands and their behavior in response to brand transgressions. To conceptualize consumer identity fusion, research from the field of social psychology is presented in the following section.

IDENTITY FUSION

In essence, personal identities include properties of an individual, while social identities include various social entities to which an individual belongs. An individual has a unitary and continuous awareness of who one is (Baumeister, 1998). Individuals also have a range of different, cross-cutting, social identities, including those derived from

highly meaningful and clearly delineated groups as well as those obtained from more abstract and ambiguous social categories (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002). Although both personal and social identities are integral aspects of one's self-perceptions, conventional studies have a long tradition of drawing a sharp distinction between the two (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987).

In contrast to this view, Swann and colleagues (e.g., Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011; Gómez, Morales, et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010; Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010) have proposed that identity fusion is a form of alignment with a social entity that entails the merger of the personal and social self. For fused individuals, the self-other distinction is blurred. Their personal and social identities may become a powerful union wherein the boundaries between these two become highly permeable without diminishing the integrity of either construct (Swann et al., 2012). Social identities are intensely personal for fused individuals as they care as much about the outcomes of the social entity as their own outcomes. They feel strongly connected to a social entity yet remain a potent personal self. Once the boundaries become porous, the influence of both personal and social self may readily flow into the other, which encourages a visceral feeling of oneness and shared essence with the social entity.

Drawing on the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which lays the groundwork for understanding the role of social self in group context, and the self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), which offers insights into a highly agentic personal self in such contexts, Swann et al. (2009) noted that activating fused individuals' personal or social identities will motivate pro-group behaviors. Considering the porous borders between the personal and social self, the identity synergy principle suggests that to activate either self-view will activate the other and, therefore, amplify pro-group

behavior activities that are emblematic of the fused individual's commitment to the social entity (Swann et al., 2012). Moreover, identity fusion is associated with beliefs that the group defines and provides meanings to the self and is like a "family" whose members are mutually obligated to each other. They possess strong commitment to the group and feel a profound, familial connection to the group and in-group members (Swann et al., 2009). From this relational ties perspective, the state of fusion may be a function of whether fusion is local versus extended. In local fusion, individuals form actual relational ties with others with whom they have direct personal contact and shared experiences. Differently, in extended fusion, individuals may project imaged relational bonds onto large groups despite having little or no direct personal contact or shared experiences with others. That is, people may feel fused with groups based on a common cause, important values, and others (Swann et al., 2012). Researchers also noted that individuals may fuse with abstractions, such as brands or products. In this sense, individuals may experience feelings of oneness with the object of their devotion even though there is no social group associated with the object of their attachment (Swann et al., 2012).

Considering that identity fusion is related to, but distinct from, identification, Swann and colleagues further underlined how these two forms are different from each other. Strong identifiers feel collective ties to the group (Brewer & Gardner, 1996); they tend to cognitively categorize themselves as prototypical of the group and are interchangeable and undifferentiated with other in-group members (Turner et al., 1987; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Their pro-group actions are not motivated by their personal agency but are regulated by a "depersonalized" social self associated with the group. However, strong identifiers tend to remain identified with the group only when immediate contextual influences support their devotion; changes in contextual support

may result in diminutions in levels of identification (Turner, 1999; Turner et al., 1994). Conversely, highly fused individuals feel relational ties to other group members (Brewer & Gardner, 1996) in addition to their bond to the collective. They retain salient personal as well as social identities, which may combine synergistically to motivate them to work for the benefit of all and take radical action on behalf of the group even in the absence of intergroup comparisons (Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010). The actual or imagined relational ties may buttress feelings of fusion so that fused individuals tend to stay fused despite changes in the context (Swann et al., 2012). Note that such relational ties are not essential for fusion to emerge (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011). Hence, Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al. (2010) stated that identity fusion “complements social identity theory (especially early versions that emphasized ideas such as functional antagonism) by highlighting a form of alignment with the group that involves tethering individual agency to the outcome of the group” (p. 1177).

In support of the above-mentioned principles, recent research has provided evidence that, while controlling for group identification, fused individuals are inclined to rate higher in their tendencies to individually undertake pro-group behaviors than nonfused individuals when either personal or social identities are activated (Swann et al., 2009), when the feelings of agency are amplified by physiological arousal (Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010), or when they are ostracized by either the ingroup or an outgroup (Gómez, Morales, et al., 2011). Because fused individuals’ personal and social identities may combine synergistically to complement and reinforce, rather than compete with each other, they are vigilant to identity challenges and respond to them by engaging in compensatory activities on behalf of the group (Swann et al., 2009). Group memberships do not cause fused individuals to lose sight of their personal identities.

Rather, the formation of fusion adds to group-related behaviors as a way of personal self-expression (Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010).

From this vantage point, Swann and colleagues focused on the nature and motivational consequences of the state of fusion and explicated that fusion with one's country predicts a host of pro-group behaviors, such as expressed willingness to fight and die for the group (Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio, et al., 2010), willingness to donate to the group, and increased speediness of motor responses enacted on behalf of the group (Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010). Moreover, irrevocable social ostracism increases fused persons' likelihood to display three distinct types of compensatory activities: endorsement of extreme actions for the group, stiffened resolve to remain in the group, and increased charitable donations to the group (Gómez, Morales, et al., 2011). Gómez, Brooks, et al., (2011) further commented that agency and invulnerability mediate the effects of fusion on endorsement of pro-group behavior. In sum, although there may be considerable variability in how people translate identity fusion into behavior, fused individuals are markedly more committed to enacting on behalf of the group compared to nonfused individuals (Swann et al., 2009).

Following the tradition of the social identity approach, some researchers (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Einwiller et al., 2006; Lam et al., 2010) suggested that once consumers perceive themselves and a brand as sharing the same self-defining attributes and value their belongingness with the brand, they are likely to maintain the brand relationships despite marketing disruptions (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Lam et al., 2010). This implies that the relative salience of social category consumers ascribed from the brand may trigger a uni-directional flow of influence to determine and regulate consumer behaviors, such as to view the world and even act from the perspective of the brand

(Reimann & A. Aron, 2009). However, this theoretical framework makes it unclear as to why identification would promote attributional and cognitive biases in relation to brands and consumers' endorsement of pro-relationship maintenance behaviors. Moreover, the proposition of the social identity approach of a functional antagonism between one's personal and social identities may be misleading, given that a full understanding of consumers' relationship-sustaining behaviors require coming to grips with the contribution of both personal and social influences (Baray, Postmes, & Jetten, 2009; Swann et al., 2012). On the contrary, the notion of identity fusion is believed to help sidestep such difficulties by assuming that fused individuals retain a strong sense of personal identity while the social identity is salient. When one's autonomous self becomes merged with the social self, it can offer the motivational machinery needed for taking pro-relationship behaviors (Swann et al., 2009). Hence, this research suggests that analysis of exclusively personal or social aspects of identity would be insufficient to characterize consumer behaviors in the context of consumer-brand relationship.

By applying identity fusion to the realm of consumer-brand context, it is my belief that identity fusion can address why complete commitment to a brand does not necessarily entail irrational loyalty to a brand that has gone out of control (e.g., brand transgressions). This framework suggests that consumer identity fusion may reflect and capture the psychological oneness and constitute a sustainable competitive advantage for marketers. It will be insightful for illuminating how such self-brand connections affect consumers' processing of brand information, brand-oriented behavior, and the brand's market performance through the lens of consumer identity fusion.

Chapter 4: Hypothesis Development

Following the tradition of viewing possessions as an important component of sense of self (Belk, 1988) and the understanding that consumers are active meaning makers rather than passive recipients of marketing communications (McCracken, 1986; 1988), recent consumer research has borne fruit in showing that consumers relate to brands in ways that mirror their interpersonal relationships (e.g., J. Aaker & Fournier, 1995; Aggarwal, 2004; Fournier, 1998; Ji, 2002; Kates, 2000). Considering that brands are symbols of identity (Levy, 1959), consumers may benefit from adding the meanings of brands into their lives through the development of brand relationships (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; 2005; Fournier, 1998). Fournier (1998) noted that brand meanings may range from functional and utilitarian to psychosocial and emotional: “The processes of meaning provision, manipulation, incorporation, and pronouncement authenticate the relationship notion in the consumer-brand domain” (p. 361). Brands allow consumers to fulfill their identity-related goals (Mick & Buhl, 1992), such as self-expression (J. Aaker, 1999) and signaling (Berger & Heath, 2007). In addition, consumers appropriate the symbolic brand meanings to meet self needs, including self-verification or self-enhancement (Escalas & Battman, 2003).

However, consumer-brand relationships may evolve and change over a series of interactions and in response to contextual changes (Fournier, 2009). Analogous to interpersonal relationships, increasing durations of relationships and frequencies of interaction allow for the increased probability of engaging in a potentially destructive act, such as brand transgressions (J. Aaker et al., 2004; Huber, et al., 2010; Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009; Rusbult et al., 1991). Transgressions, referring to violations of the implicit or explicit rules guiding relationship performance and evaluation, are a particular

class of relational events that may increase uncertainty in a relationship and cause conflict (Metts, 1994). Although brand transgressions may vary in their severity and cause and differ in their ultimate negotiations, all are conceived of as significant in their ability to derogate the trajectory of the relationship (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002).

A growing body of work shows that there are several contingencies that may mitigate the destructive influence of transgression incidents (e.g., Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Berry; 1995; Einwiller et al., 2006; Folkes, 1984). This line of research converges on the notion that relationship-serving biases may dilute the negativity effects of brand transgressions and past positives may cancel these effects in long-term relationships (Wiseman, 1986). Therefore, consumers in strong brand relationships are relatively insulated from negativity effects and are more forgiving, benevolent, and immune when brand perception is challenged by negative circumstances (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Ahluwalia & Gurhan-Canli, 2000; Ahluwalia et al., 2001; Chung & Beverland, 2006; Hess et al., 2003; Tax et al., 1998).

CONSUMER IDENTITY FUSION AND BRAND TRANSGRESSION SEVERITY

Building on findings across several domains, the current research employs the idea of identity fusion to understand the extent to which consumers feel the sense of connectedness to brands and how fusion may impact their responses to brand transgressions. Based on the theoretical underpinning of identity fusion (Swann et al., 2009; Swann, Gómez, Dovidio et al., 2010; Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010; Swann et al., 2012), consumer identity fusion is conceptualized as a distinct form of allegiance to brands, which entails the merger of a consumer's personal and social identities (i.e., brand identity) in brand relationships. As brands are often perceived as partners in socially constructed relationships (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), the inclusion of close

brands in the self can, therefore, function as resources, perspective, and identity that fulfill consumers' self-related motives (Reimann & A. Aron, 2009).

Extending from this view, highly fused consumers experience a visceral feeling of oneness with a brand. They are likely to possess a strong sense of personal identity while the brand-related social identity is salient. The union with the brand is so strong among fused consumers that the self-brand distinction is blurred to them. The borders between their personal and social self become highly permeable so that aspects of both constructs can readily flow into the other. As a result, the personal and social identities of fused consumers may reinforce, rather than compete with, one another (Swann et al., 2012). Such mutual influence processes offer the motivational machinery needed for taking pro-relationship behaviors (Swann et al., 2009). Based on Swann and colleagues' theorizing, it is important to note that consumer identity fusion is considered related to, but distinct from, identification discussed in the consumer literature. Consumer identity fusion complements prior research based on the social identity approach in that it emphasizes a form of alignment that involves tethering individual agency to the outcomes of consumer-brand dyad. Fusion theory's identity synergy principle further suggests that fused consumers' personal and social self may combine synergistically to promote pro-relationship behaviors; activating either one will activate the other and, therefore, amplify relationship-sustaining activities. Hence, compared with identification, consumer identity fusion is expected to be more predictive and enduring in explaining consumers' biased assimilation and the mechanism through which they would resist counter-attitudinal information and would engage in pro-relationship maintenance behaviors.

Because highly fused consumers theoretically experience strong feelings of connection with the brand they consider having relationships with, it seems to be

plausible that brand performance will reflect on consumers' self-perceptions (Cheng et al., 2012; C. Park et al., 2010). Prior research has demonstrated that consumers use brands to construct, maintain, and communicate a positive self-view (J. Aaker, 1999; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Fournier, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). In this sense, strong self-brand connections in consumer-brand relationships may, therefore, connect brand associations and performance with consumers' own interpretation of self. Through the merger of the personal and social self, losses to the brand mean losses to the self. Therefore, fused consumers may respond to brand transgressions as they do to personal failure (Cheng et al., 2012), suggesting that they will perceive brand transgressions as a challenge to their personal identities.

According to the self-verification theory (Swann, 1983; 2011), individuals are motivated to maximize the extent to which their experiences confirm and reinforce their self-concepts through attentional, encoding, retrieval, and interpretational processes (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003). To construct self-confirmatory social worlds, individuals may seek social environments that meet their needs and communicate their self-view to others systematically. Insofar as individuals use their self-concepts to guide their behavior, they may evoke self-verifying reactions that bring perceivers to see them as they see themselves. Specifically, any event that causes individuals to question who they are may intensify their active efforts to self-verify (Swann, 1987; Swann & Hill, 1982). Thus, fused consumers should strive in compensatory attempts to reaffirm their identities while encountering identity threats (i.e., brand transgressions). They have an underlying desire to maintain positive self-perceptions through their relationships with brands and, if such positive self-perceptions are threatened, they will use whatever means are available to restore threats to the self.

In addition, the motivated reasoning theory (e.g., Kunda, 1990) suggests that individuals may process information and form judgments based on two sets of goals: they may be motivated to obtain an accurate conclusion or to obtain a particular desired conclusion (Chaiken, Giner-Sorolla, & Chen, 1996; Kunda, 1990). When consumers want to draw a particular conclusion, they may then access only a biased subset of relevant beliefs and rules. In doing so, cognitive processes play an important role in producing self-serving biases in that they provide the mechanisms through which motivation influences reasoning. Informed by these assumptions, it seems reasonable that strong consumer-brand relationships would promote the motivation to protect self-defining beliefs as well as meanings and associations derived from the brand. Therefore, highly fused consumers maybe more likely to engage in defensive information processing, counter-arguing negative brand information, making more brand-favoring attributions, and demonstrating resilience in response to brand transgressions, compared with weakly fused consumers. On the contrary, because weakly fused consumers do not see relationships with brands as important to their sense of self, their judgment may be more likely motivated by accuracy concerns that lead to declined brand evaluation.

Based on the aforementioned theoretical frameworks and conceptualization, the current study proposes that consumer identity fusion will play an important role in determining consumers' responses to brand transgressions in the context of consumer-brand relationships. Results from numerous studies in social psychology and marketing together suggest that highly fused consumers, compared with weakly fused consumers, are more likely to perceive brand transgressions as a threat to the self. It is hypothesized that highly fused consumers would perceive a deep connection with the brand that would motivate constructive pro-relationship behaviors. They are more apt to use prior brand

knowledge to buffer negative effects and are willing to continue the ongoing relationships with the brand. The thesis that consumer identity fusion should discourage destructive reactions and encourage constructive reactions is further discussed in more systemized behavior patterns of the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology.

A. Hirschman (1970) examined individual reactions to the decline in formal organizations in three patterns of coping strategies: (a) exit: actively ending the relationship; (b) voice: actively working with the relational partner and constructively attempting to remedy problems; or (c) loyalty: passively but optimistically waiting for situations to improve. Following this research stream, Rusbult and Zembrodt (1983) later added a fourth important category to responses: (d) neglect: passively allowing the relationship to deteriorate. These responses differ from each other in terms of constructiveness and destructiveness. In essence, voice and loyalty are constructive responses as they are concerned with reviving or maintaining a relationship. On the other hand, exit and neglect are destructive in nature as they threaten the existence of a relationship (Rusbult et al., 1991; Rusbult, Zembrodt, & Gunn, 1982; Geyskens & Steenkamp, 2000). By applying the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology, Paulssen and Bagozzi (2009) found that secure consumer attachments enable the development of attribution bias, which decreases the likelihood of destructive coping (exit, neglect) and increases the likelihood of constructive coping (loyalty) when facing transgressions. However, no significant findings were found for voice in their study.

Taken together, this research predicts that consumer identity fusion with brands will promote tendencies to accommodate relationships with brands when brands do poorly. That is, highly fused consumers, compared to weakly fused consumers, will be more likely to endorse constructive coping strategies to reaffirm their relationships with

brands. They are likely to be galvanized to perform pro-relationship behaviors on behalf of the consumer-brand dyad and express greater intentions to maintain ties with brands in the future. Such an intention implies their willingness to stay committed to the relationships and to meet any conditions (Algesheimer et al., 2005). In contrast, because weakly fused consumers consider their selves as somewhat distinct from the brand, brand transgressions will not amplify the tendencies for them to enact constructive pro-relationship maintenance. In line with this logic, highly fused consumers, rather than weakly fused consumers, will be less likely to engage in destructive behaviors, given that they develop a feeling of oneness with the brand and a sense of shared essence. Thus, the following sets of hypotheses are formulated.

H1: When facing a brand transgression, highly fused consumers will be more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies than weakly fused consumers, while controlling for identification.

H2: When facing a brand transgression, highly fused consumers will be less likely to undertake destructive coping strategies than weakly fused consumers, while controlling for identification.

In addition, the literature suggests that the severity of a transgression, as the magnitude of loss consumers experience due to a negative incident (Hart, Heskett, & Sasser, 1990; Hess et al., 2003), may moderate how consumers respond to brand transgressions. For example, research on service failure highlights that the greater the severity of a transgression, the lower the level of consumer satisfaction and evaluation (Gilly & Gelb, 1982; Richins, 1987; Smith et al., 1999). J. Klein et al. (2004) found that the perceived egregiousness of a brand wrongdoing is a powerful predictor of consumers' boycott participation. Likewise, recent studies (e.g., Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000;

Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Einwiller et al., 2006) have underscored that although consumers with strong connections with a brand tend to overlook and downplay negative brand information, the resilience to negative information is likely to be nonlinear. In this sense, this research proposes that if a brand transgression is of a relatively major magnitude, the buffering effect of consumer identity fusion on consumers' coping responses to the brand transgression will be limited. The following hypothesis is put forth:

H3: The effect of consumer identity fusion on consumer coping strategies will be stronger when the severity of a brand transgression is minor versus severe.

CONSUMER IDENTITY FUSION AND BRAND TRANSGRESSION TYPES

As brand transgressions may negatively affect consumer-brand relationships, it is also important to understand whether the types of brand transgressions impact the way consumers respond to negative occurrences. Past studies have shown that actions constituting brand transgressions can be categorized into either product- and service-related defects or socially and ethically debatable actions (Huber et al., 2010). Product- and service-related crises are discrete, well-publicized incidents in which products are found to be defective (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Siomkos & Kurzbard, 1994), such as the Peanut Corp. of America salmonella typhimurium outbreak. The outcomes of this type of transgression usually affect consumers' personal interests directly (Reuber & Fischer, 2010; Whalen, Pitts, & Wong, 1991). Socially debatable actions are business practices that breach social, moral obligation, or legal codes (Alexander, 2002; Keaveney, 1995), such as Nike's use of child labor in Pakistan and other questionable working conditions. The outcomes of this type of transgression usually impact the society at large (Whalen et al., 1991). Taken together, the current research refers to these two types as personal-

related and societal-related transgressions, depending on whether the outcomes would most likely impact consumers' personal interests or the society as a whole.

Although the spectrum of brand transgressions may vary, the existing literature suggests that they all have a destructive influence on the essence of the brand and the stability of consumer-brand relationship (Ahluwalia et al., 2001; Greyser, 2009; Keaveney, 1995; Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2006; Roehm & Tybout, 2006). For instance, Sutton and Callahan (1987) argued that when a potentially discrediting predicament arises, consumers may suffer from the spillover effects from stigmas (Goffman, 1963; Jone et al., 1984). They may, therefore, change enacted relationships (i.e., disengagement, reduction in the quality of participation, and bargaining for more favorable exchange relationships) and espouse negative evaluations associated with the brand (i.e., denigration via rumor or confrontation) (p. 416). However, Whalen et al. (1991) found that consumer's personal well-being may over-ride any consideration of the wider social impact of brand transgressions. Similarly, Reuber and Fischer (2010) proposed that the relationship between brand transgressions and brand reputational loss is positively moderated by the extent to which consumers have outcomes tied to those actions. That is, consumers are likely to judge brand reputation in a more negative fashion if the transgressions threaten their personal interests directly.

Building on these findings, this research suggests that for highly fused consumers, brand reputation damage is linked to their personal reputational loss. Therefore, they are likely to attempt to improve the standing of the brand following both personal-related and societal-related brand transgressions. In line with the previous set of hypotheses, highly fused consumers will be more likely to enact constructive coping strategies and be less likely to incorporate destructive coping strategies than weakly fused consumers upon the

receipt of information about brand transgressions. The effect, however, may be moderated by the types of brand transgressions. Because product defects usually affect brand associations directly (Dawar, 1998) and the outcomes damage consumers' interests personally (Reuber & Fischer, 2010), consumers may respond to the incidents through a personal perspective (Whalen et al., 1991). In contrast, because the outcomes of socially debatable business practices usually impact the society rather than consumers' personal interests, their evaluation may take place from a distant, vicarious perspective (Whalen et al., 1991). Thus, this research projects that personal-related transgressions are likely to result in greater erosion to the brand value than societal-related transgressions. In many respects, it seems logical that, while the severity level is the same, highly fused consumers will perceive personal-related transgressions as greater threats to their identities than societal-related transgressions and, as a result, they may more readily display defensive reactions through the engagement of constructive coping strategies. In summary, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: The effect of consumer identity fusion on consumer coping strategies will be stronger when the type of brand transgression is personal-related versus societal-related.

THE EFFECT OF SELF-AFFIRMATION

To further scrutinize the nature of consumer identity fusion and the interplay of consumers' personal and social identities in determining consumers' responses to brand transgressions, the notion of self-affirmation is applied to understand consumers' relationship-serving biases. In its original form, Steele (1988) theorized that the purpose of one's self-system is to "maintain a phenomenal experience of the self-concept and images - as adaptively and morally adequate" (p. 262). The theory addresses how

individuals respond to threats to their self-integrity (Aronson, Cohen, & Nail, 1999; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Steele, 1988). Individuals are motivated to sustain the integrity of the self and are vigilant to events and information that call their self-integrity into question (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). When facing threats to self-integrity, individuals tend to cope with threats in such a way as to restore or reassert self-worth. To cast the threatened self in a positive light, they may cope with threats in three ways: (a) accommodate to the threat, (b) ameliorate the threat through direct psychological adaptations (i.e., defensive biases), and (c) employ indirect psychological adaptation of affirming alternative resources (e.g., an important aspect of the self that is irrelevant to the threat) (Aronson et al., 1999; Sherman & Cohen, 2002; 2006). Much research within this stream has investigated whether an affirmation of self-integrity, unrelated to a specific threat, can attenuate or eliminate individuals' responses to the threat (e.g., McQueen & W. Klein, 2006; Sherman & Kim, 2005; Steele & Liu, 1983).

Cheng et al. (2012) were the first to examine the moderating effect of self-affirmation on consumers' responses to negative brand information in the context of consumer-brand relationships. Theoretically speaking, consumers in strong brand relationships are likely to be reluctant to lower brand evaluations and are benevolent toward the brands following transgression incidents. The researchers found, however, that the tendency of such relationship-serving biases decreased after participants were given the opportunity to reaffirm one of those important core qualities of their personal self-views. The findings suggested that, after self-affirmation, consumers can then focus not on implications for personal identity of a given brand transgression, but on its informational value (Sherman & Cohen, 2006). In this sense, committed consumers are self-focused rather than brand-focused in response to brand transgressions. The

inclination to engage in pro-relationship behaviors is motivated by a desire to protect the self-concept rather than the threatened brand.

In contrast to this view, consumer identity fusion suggests that fused consumers should still evaluate brands in a positive light even though their self-integrity is affirmed. Because consumer identity fusion entails a porous and permeable border between consumers' personal and social identities in the consumer-brand dyad, there should not emerge a breach after self-affirmation tasks. That is, self-affirmations may reduce the self-threatening capacity and defensiveness by making identity-fused consumers feel more secure in their self-worth (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Sherman & Kim, 2005). However, fused consumers should still show favoritism toward the brand in trouble as they consider that their sense of who they are is thoroughly enmeshed with what the brand represents. In line with that theorization, this research hypothesizes that when self-protective pressures are reduced by self-affirmation, highly fused consumers may be less likely to feel the need to perform pro-relationship behaviors for protecting valued identities. Nevertheless, their brand evaluation should not slip after their personal identities are affirmed. In addition, self-affirmations should not influence how weakly fused consumers cope with brand transgressions, because weakly fused consumers consider their selves as somewhat distinct from the brand. Considering that there is a dearth of empirical knowledge regarding the motivating role of consumers' personal and social identities in guiding their responses to brand transgressions in the consumer-brand dyad, the following hypothesis and research questions are presented:

H5: Self-affirmation will moderate the effect of types of brand transgressions on consumer coping strategies for highly fused consumers (but not for weakly fused consumers).

RQ1: Will self-affirmation influence the effect of types of brand transgressions on brand evaluations for highly fused consumers versus weakly fused consumers?

Chapter 5: Overview of Empirical Research

The proposed hypotheses and research question are examined in three experimental studies. Because the measure of consumer identity fusion has not been tested in the context of consumer-brand relationships, it is important to demonstrate that the fusion scale is distinct from extant measures of identification. For that reason, this dissertation follows a two-stage process for establishing discriminant validity (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011): the sample of Study One was used for conducting an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and the sample of Study Two was used for conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The process helped to test the assumption that consumer identity fusion is related to, but distinct from, identification.

To test the first set of hypotheses (H1, H2, and H3), Study One focuses on deepening existing understanding of strong consumer-brand relationships through the conceptualization of consumer identity fusion. This experiment seeks to investigate whether consumer identity fusion will out-predict identification in estimating the tendency for consumers to protect consumer-brand relationships at hand and to endorse pro-relationship maintenance behavior with regard to minor or severe brand transgressions.

Building on the results of Study One, Study Two aims to expand understanding of whether consumer identity fusion acts as a stronger predictor than identification in promoting consumers' relationship-sustaining behaviors. In addition, Study Two assesses how consumer identity fusion may influence consumers' responses to different types of brand transgressions, personal-related or societal-related transgressions, for the purpose of further explaining the mechanism that underlies consumers' coping strategies following brand relationship disruptions (H4). In an effort to enhance the generalizability

of the study results generated in Study Two, Study Three replicates the experimental design of Study Two by using personal-related and societal-related brand transgression manipulations. Moreover, Study Three incorporates an additional manipulation of self-affirmation to further investigate the role of one's personal and social identities in determining consumers' coping responses and brand evaluations after brand transgression incidents (H5 and RQ1).

Although these three experiments are similar in the way that they all attempt to address the applicability of fusion theory in the consumer-brand context and to further understand the nature of consumer identity fusion, the methods used for these studies are different in several aspects. Considering that fusion entails the feeling of oneness with a brand, the state of consumer identity fusion was measured with real brands in all experiments to capture an established real-life brand relationship. For this reason, the brand, Apple, was chosen as the target brand in Study One, while a brand of participants' own choice was referred to in Study Two and Study Three. Product categories used for examining consumer identity fusion were also different in these three studies to ensure external validity and to increase the generalizability of the research findings. Specifically, while Study One applied the consumer electronics brand, Apple, in the experimental design, Study Two asked participants to fill in the brand of their primary personal computer and Study Three asked participants to fill in the brand of their primary automobile.

Moreover, participants' specific coping responses to diverse brand transgression incidents were measured using A. Hirschman's (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) behavioral outcomes of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect, along with additional attitudinal evaluation and behavioral measures in these studies. Participants were

presented with fictitious brand transgression articles regarding different severity levels in Study One and different transgression types in Study Two and Study Three to explore the factors that moderate how consumers respond to brand transgressions.

Furthermore, this research includes samples that were drawn from both the college student population and the general population. The college student samples of Study One and Study Two were used to first establish the predicting power of consumer identity fusion on consumers' coping strategies proposed by the conceptual framework. To increase the validity of current research findings, Study Three used a sample of U.S. automobile consumers to investigate the source of consumers' pro-relationship activities and how they may react to different types of brand transgression with or without the manipulation of self-affirmation.

Chapter 6: Study One

The Effect of Consumer Identity Fusion and Brand Transgression Severity on Consumer Responses

This dissertation research proposes that consumer identity fusion is an important predictor in determining consumers' responses to brand transgressions in the context of consumer-brand relationships. Considering that highly fused consumers experience strong feelings of connection with the brand they feel having a relationship with, this study hypothesizes that consumer identity fusion with brands will promote tendencies to accommodate relationships with brands when brands do poorly. Since this research is the first to apply the fusion theory for understanding consumer behavior in the context of the consumer-brand dyad, it is crucial to demonstrate that the conceptualization and the measure are applicable and distinct from the measures of identification. Hence, Study One assesses discriminant validity and the extent to which consumers' feelings of connectedness motivate them to protect relationships at hand following brand transgressions that vary in severity. In other words, Study One intends to answer the first set of hypotheses proposed in Chapter 4.

H1: When facing a brand transgression, highly fused consumers will be more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies than weakly fused consumers, while controlling for identification.

H2: When facing a brand transgression, highly fused consumers will be less likely to undertake destructive coping strategies than weakly fused consumers, while controlling for identification.

H3: The effect of consumer identity fusion on consumer coping strategies will be stronger when the severity of a brand transgression is minor versus severe.

METHOD

This section details the research method and the pretest conducted for refining experimental stimuli used in Study One.

Study Design

The experiment involves a 2 (transgression severity: minor versus severe) × consumer identity fusion (measured) between-subjects design to test proposed H1, H2, and H3. The degree of consumer identity fusion was measured using the verbal fusion scale developed and validated by Gómez, Brooks, et al. (2011), while the severity of brand transgressions was manipulated. Each participant was exposed to one of the two brand transgression stories. Participants' specific coping responses to brand transgressions were measured using the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology and a relationship continuous intention measure based on Algesheimer and colleagues' (2005) membership continuous intention scale.

In this study, the consumer electronics brand, Apple, was selected as the target brand because it provides consumers with self-expressive benefits (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011) and is familiar to college students. Thus, a wide range of consumer identity fusion towards this brand was expected to emerge through this procedure. For that purpose, a pre-screening question asking whether participants had used Apple products or services was presented at the beginning of the study.

Sampling and Data Collection

Participants were recruited from introductory and advanced advertising classes at the University of Texas at Austin where instructors agreed for their students to participate in the study in exchange for course credit. The experiment was administrated online. Participants were told that the purpose of the study was to learn about consumer

behaviors relative to a well-developed brand. Overall, 265 undergraduate students participated in Study One, including a pre-test and the main experiment. The entire data collection period of Study One was about two weeks, from April 13 to April 26, 2012.

Stimuli Development

To provide a meaningful examination of the hypotheses, two vignettes were created in the form of news articles because consumers usually come across negative brand information from news sources in today's market. In addition, this approach allowed minor or severe manipulations to be more easily operationalized and enabled control over otherwise unmanageable variables. While this approach could not replicate the richness of an actual brand transgression incident, it permitted this study to make stronger causal inferences about the hypothesized relationships and avoided response bias due to memory lapses or rationalization (Smith et al., 1999). Hence, this vignette-based approach is considered a desirable and valid method for this study.

In process of constructing these two news articles, the most common transgression incidents for consumer electronics brands that actually happened in the field were first identified from consumer review Websites (e.g., consumerreport.org, pissedconsumer.com, and complaints.com). Professional writers were employed to create stimuli that fit the scope of the study. Episodes of actual customers who had experienced product or service problems with consumer electronics brands were referred to and incorporated in the news creation to increase credibility and believability. Specifically, information about a computer product defect (i.e., MacBook Pro's display failure) was chosen to manipulate the transgression experimentally, given that such an occurrence may significantly erode corporate reputation, market share, even consumer impressions

(Dawar & Pillutla, 2000; Greyser, 2009; J. Klein & Dawar, 2004; Reuber & Fischer, 2010).

For this purpose, the valence of the information content and the extremity of the problem (i.e., the number of cases that have been documented and the number of units estimated to be affected) were manipulated in the vignettes (Einwiller et al., 2006; Lee, Rodgers, & Kim, 2009). That is, two fictitious news articles used in minor and severe conditions both disclosed that Apple's product, MacBook Pro, had been reported to have a display failure, prompting the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission to issue a recall on the LCD panel. Specific descriptions about an overwhelming number of consumer complaints, the seriousness of the LCD screen trouble, and how retail locations were unable to warrant replacement in a timely manner were read differently in the two conditions. As part of the minor brand transgression story, the reader learned that 50 cases had been documented during the past three months and more than 500 units of MacBook Pros were estimated to be affected by the problem. The severe brand transgression story read that 5,000 cases had been reported and 50,000 units were expected to be impacted by the problem. The two vignettes appear in Appendix A.

These two vignettes were presented with a sample of 55 students (average age = 20.25; 70.9% female), 26 were in the minor condition and 29 were in the severe condition, to determine whether the conditions were perceived as significantly different in severity from one another. Participants were randomly assigned to read about either the minor or the severe brand transgression incidents and then asked to complete manipulation check questions (i.e., severity and believability of brand transgression measures). The pretest results were in the predicted directions. Participants presented with the minor condition provided a lower score on perceived severity than participants in

the severe condition ($M_{minor} = 4.35, SD_{minor} = 1.33; M_{severe} = 5.35, SD_{severe} = 1.23; t(53) = -2.92, p \leq .005, d = -.78$). However, the difference of the believability was not statistically significant ($M_{minor} = 5.34, SD_{minor} = .77; M_{severe} = 5.20, SD_{severe} = .68; t(53) = .70, p = .49, d = .19$).

Procedure

In the main experiment, participants were randomly assigned to either of the two conditions—minor or severe brand transgressions. In the main study, participants were first asked to rate the verbal fusion scale (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011) to indicate the degree to which they feel fused with the brand. Next, they were requested to complete the identification measure adopted from Mael and Ashforth (1992). Upon completion of this section, participants were then randomly assigned to different conditions, a minor or a severe brand transgression. Depending on the assigned condition, participants were presented with a news article about either a minor or severe incident, allegedly released recently by the Associated Press. Following exposure to the fictitious news article, participants then completed questions pertaining to their coping responses toward the brand, Apple, regarding the incident presented in the article. Once participants finished all the questions, they were debriefed and thanked. The whole study took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Measures

Several measures were used to assess consumer identity fusion, brand identification, the effectiveness of manipulation, and coping responses to a brand transgression (see Appendix A). Order effects were controlled as the questionnaires

varied the presentation order of the measures with the demographic questionnaire always presented last.

Consumer Identity Fusion

The fusion measure was adapted from Gómez, Brooks, and colleagues' (2011) verbal scale that has been developed and validated in the field of social psychology. In its original form, Gómez, Brooks, and colleagues (2011) assumed that the porous borders between personal and social identities among fused individuals would give rise to two complementary aspects of fusion, the feeling of connectedness with the group and the reciprocal strength of identity fusion. This verbal measure of fusion was found to have greater fidelity than the pictorial measure of fusion (Swann et al., 2009) and a measure of identification (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) in predicting endorsement of pro-group behaviors (Gómez et al., 2011). Therefore, the seven-item verbal measure of fusion was utilized in this study to examine consumers' feelings of oneness with a brand. All items were modified in order to reflect the contextual differences of the consumer-brand dyad. These items were ranked along a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" ($\alpha = .91$). A single index was formed by averaging the items.

Brand Identification

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item scale was adapted for this study to test the extent to which consumers feel identified with a brand. This well-respected and widely cited scale was chosen because it has been considered as the representative identification scale (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011) and has been applied to study brand identification (e.g., Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). In addition, Mael and Ashforth's scale was found to be a stronger predictor of endorsement of extreme pro-group behavior than other measures

of identification (Swann, Gómez, Huici, et al., 2010). Thus, this scale is considered the most appropriate standard of comparison with the fusion scale. All question items were modified to fit the current context and were measured along a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree” ($\alpha = .86$). The items were averaged to create an index score.

The Effectiveness of Manipulation

Questions to measure the effectiveness of manipulations included (a) perceived severity of the brand transgression incident adopted from Weun et al. (2004) and (b) the believability of the fictitious news article

The four-item severity of brand transgression measure investigated participants’ perception of the severity of the presented brand transgression incident, which was tested on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= “not at all” to 7= “extremely” ($\alpha = .78$). The four-item news believability scale was measured on a seven-point, semantic differential scale, anchored by not believable-believable, not credible-credible, not convincing-convincing, and unlikely-likely ($\alpha = .84$). Two index scores were formed by averaging four severity items and four believability items, respectively.

Coping Responses to a Brand Transgression

The main dependent variables of this study measured participants’ specific coping responses to brand transgressions. Consumer coping responses were operationalized using A. Hirschman’s (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt’s (1983) behavioral outcomes of exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect. This framework has been used to examine responses to negative events in social relationships based on four reactions to conflicts in relationships: (a) exit: actively ending the relationship; (b) voice: actively working with

the relational partner and constructively attempting to remedy problems; (c) loyalty: passively but optimistically waiting for situations to improve; and (d) neglect: passively allowing the relationship to deteriorate. Specifically, voice-loyalty measures deal with consumers' constructive coping behaviors, whereas exit-neglect measures assess consumers' destructive coping behaviors.

The exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of responses was selected because it has been empirically tested and validated across different contexts, including employee-employer relationships (Rusbult, Farrell, Rogers, & Mainous, 1988), romantic relationships (Rusbult & Zembrodt, 1983), business-to-business relationships (Ping, 1993; Geyskens & Steenkamp, 2000), and consumer-brand relationships (Paulssen & Bagozzi, 2009). The measures for each subscale included three items. All question items were modified to suit the context of this study; they were measured using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." All items were found to be reliable for measuring participants' exit ($\alpha = .86$), voice ($\alpha = .88$), loyalty ($\alpha = .80$), and neglect responses ($\alpha = .81$). Corresponding items were averaged to create exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect index scores.

In addition, a relationship continuous intention measure, based on Algesheimer and colleagues' (2005) membership continuous intention measure, was included to further determine participants' relationship-sustaining responses. These measurement items were examined along seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" ($\alpha = .86$). A single index was formed by averaging the items.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Out of 210 voluntary participants, the final sample of 190 respondents was used for data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses and respondents who exhibited extreme and consistent rating patterns. As a result, the final sample was comprised of 28.9% of males ($N = 55$) and 71.1% of females ($N = 135$). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 37 with a mean age of 20.11 ($SD = 1.99$). The racial composition of the sample was 61.6 % Caucasian, 20.5 % Asian, 11.1 % Hispanic, 3.2% African-American, and 3.7% indicated they were either multiracial or chose “other.” The sample consisted of a variety of majors, ranging from Advertising and Public Relations to Engineering and Natural Sciences. More than 27% of the participants were seniors, followed by 26.8% juniors, 23.7% freshmen, and 21.6% sophomores.

As for participants’ usage of Apple products, they reported that they had used Apple products for an average of 5.59 years, ranging from five months to 12 years. Each participant owned about three Apple products on average; 171 participants (or 90%) claimed that they had a Mac, followed by iPod ($N = 160$, or 84.2%) and iPhone ($N = 121$, or 63.7%).

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

This study first conducted an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to identify the factor structure, testing the assumption that consumer identity fusion and identification were distinct constructs. Overall, the item correlations were positive and generally moderate in strength (r range from .24 to .77). The examination of the values of skew and kurtosis for each item did not suggest substantial departures from normality as the magnitude of skew and kurtosis did not exceed 2 and 3, respectively, for any item (Kline,

2005). Thus, a total of 13 items pertaining to participants' fusion and identification responses were submitted to the EFA.

Specifically, principal axis extraction was employed with oblique rotation ($\delta = 0$). Common factor analysis was used as it is an appropriate method when latent variables are presumed to underlie responses to a set of items (Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986). An oblique rotation was selected because consumer identity fusion and identification have been empirically documented as correlated in the literature (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011; Swann et al., 2012). Two factors were initially specified to be retained in the solution. Moreover, items were retained only if their factor loading (pattern coefficient) exceeded 0.40.

For the solution of the EFA, two factors had eigenvalues exceeding 1.0 and accounted for about 57.49% of the variance. As shown in Table 6.1, the first factor included the six items from the brand identification scale, while the second factor included the seven items from the consumer identity fusion scale. The correlation between the two factors was -.63. The factor structure was further verified in Study Two using a CFA.

Table 6.1: Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis (N = 190)

Item	Factor Loading	
	Brand Identification	Consumer Identity Fusion
If a story in the media criticized this brand, I would feel embarrassed.	.85	.12
When I talk about this brand, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”	.82	.10
Successes of this brand are my successes.	.75	-.08
When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment.	.69	-.12
When someone criticizes this brand, it feels like a personal insult.	.63	-.15
I am very interested in what consumers of other brands think about this brand.	.40	-.09
I am one with this brand.	-.06	-.87
I feel immersed in this brand.	-.08	-.86
I have a deep emotional bond with this brand.	-.02	-.84
This brand is me.	.08	-.80
I make this brand strong.	.25	-.50
I’ll do for this brand more than any of the other consumers would do.	.33	-.48
I am strong because of this brand.	.35	-.45
Eigenvalues	6.36	1.11
Percentage of explained variance	48.9	8.57
Factor correlation	-.63	

Manipulation Check

To test the effectiveness of the manipulation of the severity of brand transgressions, participants were asked to rate the extent to which the news article they read was considered as a minor or a severe brand transgression incident ($N_{\text{minor}} = 98$, $N_{\text{severe}} = 92$). As expected, the fictitious news article used for the minor condition was perceived to be significantly less in severity than the one used for the severe condition ($M_{\text{minor}} = 4.70$, $SD_{\text{minor}} = .94$; $M_{\text{severe}} = 5.06$, $SD_{\text{severe}} = .94$; $t(188) = -2.65$, $p < .01$, $d = -.38$).

In addition, the believability of the vignettes was not different across the two conditions ($M_{minor} = 5.23, SD_{minor} = .96; M_{severe} = 5.12, SD_{severe} = .93; t(188) = .82, p = .41, d = .12$).

Table 6.2: The Effectiveness of Manipulation– Study One

	Minor		Severe		t-value	p-value
	(N=98)		(N=92)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Perceived Severity	4.70	.94	5.06	.94	-2.65	.009
Believability	5.23	.96	5.12	.93	.82	.41

Hypothesis Testing

The first set of hypotheses collectively suggested that highly fused participants would be more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies than weakly fused participants when facing brand transgressions. They would also be less likely to undertake destructive coping strategies than weakly fused participants. However, the perceived severity of a brand transgression would also influence highly fused participants reactions; thus, the resilience to brand transgression maybe nonlinear. To test these assumptions, a series of multiple regression analyses with cross-product terms rather than ANOVAs was employed as the latter would have required splitting the continuous variable data into subgroups, which would have wasted information and been inferior to the multiplicative model (Govindarajan & Fisher, 1990).

Coping Responses to a Brand Transgression

Prior to conducting multiple regression analyses, a centered version of consumer identity fusion and identification were created by subtracting the mean scores ($M_{fusion} =$

4.02, $SD_{\text{fusion}} = 1.25$; $M_{\text{identification}} = 3.18$, $SD_{\text{identification}} = 1.21$), respectively. Cross-product variables were created for testing interaction terms of interest. Consumers' responses to a brand transgression were measured using exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of responses and relationship continuous intention. Each outcome variable was regressed onto consumer identity fusion (centered), perceived severity (coded 0 for minor and 1 for severe), brand identification (centered), and the two- and three-way interactions (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011). Multicollinearity was diagnosed in each regression model as consumer identity fusion and brand identification were positively correlated ($r(188) = .65, p < .001$).

The exit regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .11, F(7, 182) = 3.26, p < .005$). The predicted interaction between consumer identity fusion and perceived severity of a brand transgression was marginally significant ($\beta = .25, t(182) = 1.72, p = .087$). Two separate regression models (minor versus severe) further suggested that, while controlling for identification, highly fused participants were less likely to exit the relationship with Apple than were weakly fused participants in the minor brand transgression condition ($R^2 = .16, F(3, 94) = 5.80, p \leq .001$). As Figure 6.1 shows, however, such a relationship did not emerge in the severe brand transgression condition ($R^2 = .01, F(3, 88) = .36, p = .79$). The interaction between consumer identity fusion and brand identification was also significant ($\beta = .38, t(182) = 3.03, p < .01$), with identification exerting a stronger influence among highly fused participants than among weakly fused participants. The foregoing interaction effects qualified a main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = -.36, t(182) = -2.49, p < .05$), suggesting that highly fused participants did not prefer to exit the existing brand relationship with Apple as compared to weakly fused participants. The main effect of perceived severity also emerged ($\beta = .26,$

$t(182) = 3.23, p \leq .001$), such that participants in the severe brand transgression condition ($M_{\text{severe}} = 3.14, SD_{\text{severe}} = 1.28$) were more likely to exit the brand relationship with Apple than were participants in the minor brand transgression condition ($M_{\text{minor}} = 2.67, SD_{\text{minor}} = 1.13$). To note, the brand identification had no main effect ($\beta = .15, t(182) = 1.01, p = .31$) nor interaction effect with perceived severity in the current investigation ($\beta = -.08, t(182) = -.57, p = .57$).

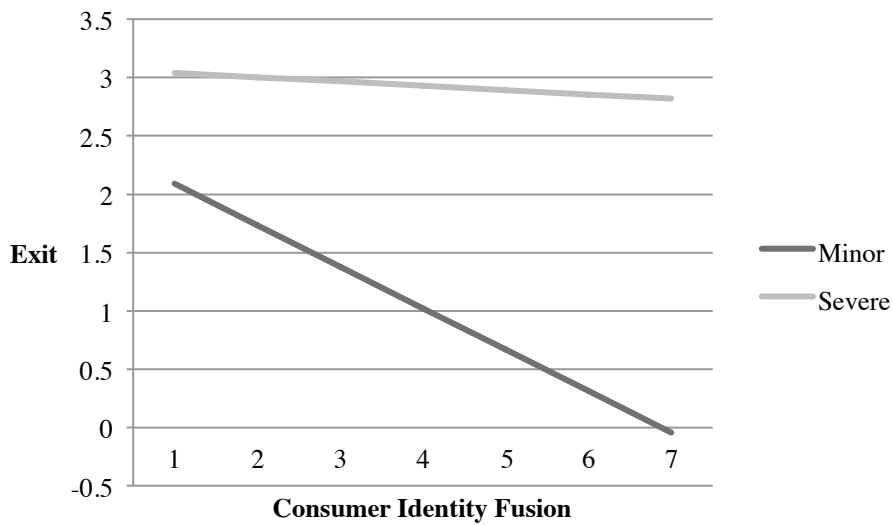


Figure 6.1: Exit as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Perceived Severity

The voice regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .15, F(7, 182) = 4.43, p < .001$). There was no significant main effect of perceived severity ($\beta = -.01, t(182) = -.13, p = .89$), suggesting that there were no differences in participants' voice responses across the two conditions ($M_{\text{minor}} = 3.89, SD_{\text{minor}} = 1.45; M_{\text{severe}} = 3.14, SD_{\text{severe}} = 1.28$). A marginal main effect of consumer identity fusion emerged ($\beta = .26, t(182) = 1.78, p = .078$), indicating that highly fused participants were more likely to work with Apple and constructively attempt to remedy problems than were weakly fused

participants in both conditions (Minor: $R^2 = .17$, $F(3, 94) = 6.60$, $p < .001$; Severe: $R^2 = .10$, $F(3, 88) = 3.42$, $p < .05$). Because the predicted interaction between consumer identity fusion and perceived severity of a brand transgression was not significant ($\beta = -.001$, $t(182) = -.01$, $p = .99$), it was reasonable to conclude that, while controlling for brand identification, highly fused participants were more likely to undertake voice behavior than weakly fused participants regardless of the severity of brand transgressions (see Figure 6.2).

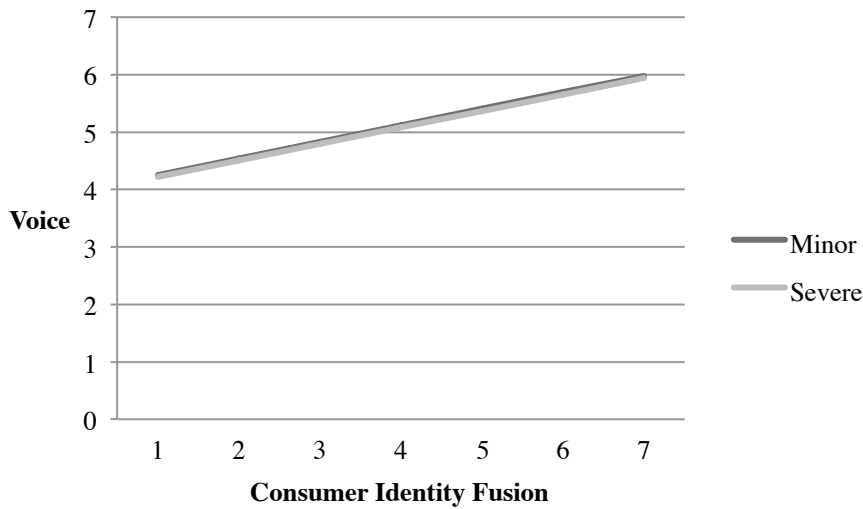


Figure 6.2: Voice as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Perceived Severity

A main effect of brand identification was also revealed ($\beta = .28$, $t(182) = 1.96$, $p = .05$), with greater brand identification being associated with more endorsement of voice coping responses. Further, the interaction between brand identification and perceived severity was not significant in the current investigation ($\beta = -.23$, $t(182) = -1.57$, $p = .12$) (see Figure 6.3).

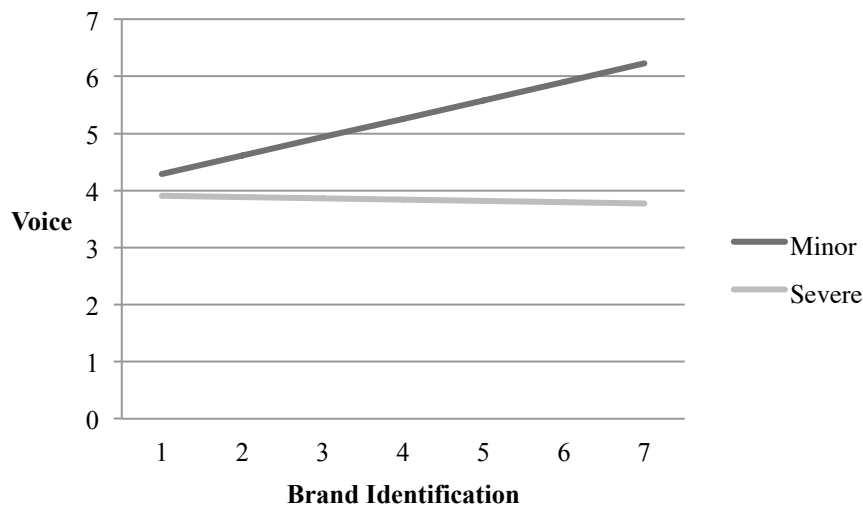


Figure 6.3: Voice as a Function of Brand Identification and Perceived Severity

The loyalty regression model was not significant ($R^2 = .03$, $F(7, 182) = .68$, $p = .69$). The results showed that there was no main effect of perceived severity ($\beta = -.03$, $t(182) = -.39$, $p = .70$). There were no differences in participants' loyalty responses toward the brand regardless of the severity of brand transgressions ($M_{\text{minor}} = 4.46$, $SD_{\text{minor}} = 1.25$; $M_{\text{severe}} = 4.45$, $SD_{\text{severe}} = 1.18$). No main effect of consumer identity fusion emerged ($\beta = .09$, $t(182) = .58$, $p = .56$) nor an interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and perceived severity ($\beta = -.06$, $t(182) = -.37$, $p = .72$). In addition, brand identification had neither a main effect ($\beta = .003$, $t(182) = .02$, $p = .99$) nor an interaction effect with perceived severity ($\beta = -.03$, $t(182) = -.18$, $p = .86$).

The neglect regression model was not significant ($R^2 = .06$, $F(7, 182) = 1.53$, $p = .16$), even though there were a significant main effect of perceived severity ($M_{\text{minor}} = 2.65$, $SD_{\text{minor}} = 1.07$; $M_{\text{severe}} = 2.95$, $SD_{\text{severe}} = 1.15$; $\beta = .17$, $t(182) = 2.00$, $p < .05$), a marginally significant main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = -.26$, $t(182) = -1.71$, $p = .09$), a marginally significant interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and

perceived severity ($\beta = .25, t(182) = 1.70, p = .09$), and a significant interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and identification ($\beta = .26, t(182) = 2.04, p < .05$). In this model, brand identification had no main effect ($\beta = .17, t(182) = 1.13, p = .26$) or interaction effect with perceived severity ($\beta = -.18, t(182) = -1.20, p = .23$).

The relationship continuous intention regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .16, F(7, 182) = 4.80, p < .001$). The main effect of perceived severity was significant ($\beta = -.17, t(182) = -2.11, p < .05$), indicating that participants in the minor brand transgression condition were more likely to continue the relationship with Apple ($M_{\text{minor}} = 5.46, SD_{\text{minor}} = 1.12$) than were participants in the severe brand transgression condition ($M_{\text{severe}} = 5.33, SD_{\text{severe}} = .98$). The main effect of consumer identity fusion also emerged ($\beta = .40, t(182) = 1.78, p = .078$), showing that highly fused participants were more likely to stay in the relationship with Apple than were weakly fused participants in both conditions (Minor: $R^2 = .15, F(3, 94) = 5.61, p \leq .001$; Severe: $R^2 = .15, F(3, 88) = 5.30, p < .005$). However, the predicted interaction between consumer identity fusion and perceived severity of a brand transgression was not significant ($\beta = -.16, t(182) = -1.00, p = .32$). Hence, highly fused participants were uniformly more likely to continue the relationship with Apple than were weakly fused participants regardless of the severity of brand transgressions, while controlling for brand identification (see Figure 6.4). To note, brand identification had no main ($\beta = .08, t(182) = .57, p = .57$) or interaction effect with perceived severity ($\beta = .04, t(182) = .26, p = .78$).

To summarize, while controlling for brand identification, highly fused participants were less likely to exit the brand relationship, more likely to perform voice behavior, and more likely to continue the brand relationship when facing brand transgressions. However, the predicted relationships did not emerge for participants' responses in terms

of loyalty and neglect. Therefore, H1 and H2 were partially supported. Moreover, the expected interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and perceived severity on consumers' coping responses was found only for the exit coping strategy. That is, the effect of consumer identity fusion on participants' exit behavior was stronger when the severity of the brand transgression was minor rather than severe. In this sense, H3 was also partially supported.

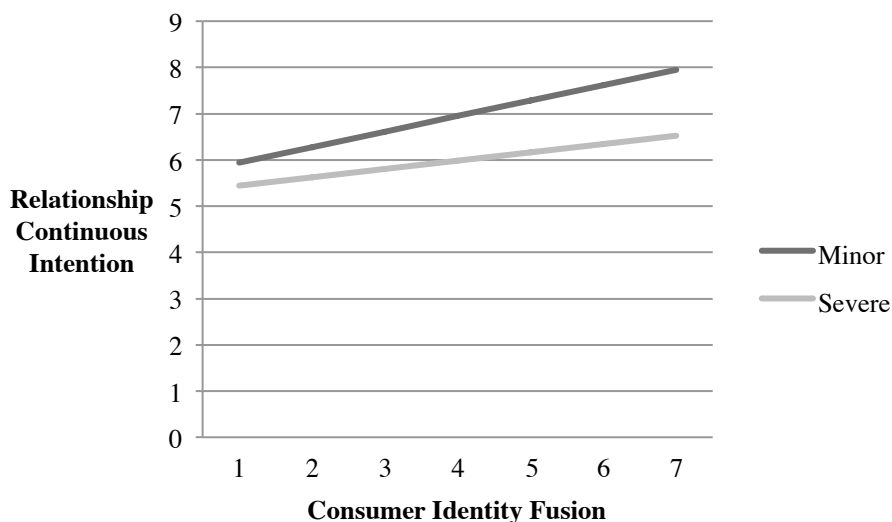


Figure 6.4: Relationship Continuous Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Perceived Severity

DISCUSSION

Study One was designed to understand the nature and effects of consumer identity fusion in the context of consumer-brand relationship. Considering that consumer-brand relationships are diverse and varied, and they change in response to consumer and brand behaviors, this study applied the fusion theory to explore the extent to which consumers' feelings of oneness with a brand would mitigate the destructive influence of brand transgressions.

Theorizing about the tenet of identity fusion (Swann et al., 2012), consumers may experience a visceral feeling of connectedness with a brand and see the brand's resources as their own (Mittal, 2006); the union can be so strong among highly fused consumers that the boundaries that ordinarily distinguish the personal and brand-related social self become highly permeable. As the personal and brand-related social self can readily flow into the other, activating either one will activate the other. As a result, these two identities may combine synergistically to motivate and amplify pro-relationship behavior in the face of brand transgressions. According to this logic, Study One predicts that highly fused consumers may view threats to the brand as threats to the self, thereby responding to brand transgressions as they do to personal failure. They should strive in compensatory attempts to reaffirm their identities and engage in defensive information processing. Thus, highly fused consumers would be more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies and less likely to undertake destructive coping strategies than weakly fused consumers, while controlling for identification.

The results of Study One first showed that consumer identity fusion is related to, but distinct from, brand identification. Two factors obtained from the EFA included the corresponding items from the fusion scale and the identification scale, respectively. Moreover, the empirical examination found partial support for the hypotheses and indicated that compared with brand identification, consumer identity fusion is a stronger predictor for understanding consumers' relationship-sustaining behaviors. Specifically, highly fused consumers were more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies than were weakly fused consumers, such as to voice for the brand in trouble and continue the brand relationship, regardless of the severity of a brand transgression incident. In addition, highly fused consumers were less likely to engage in destructive coping

strategies than weakly fused consumers, such as to exit a brand relationship, when facing brand transgressions. However, such buffering effect of consumer identity fusion on consumers' exit coping responses to a brand transgression was moderated by the perceived severity of an incident.

The findings of this study resonate with the literature in the way that strong consumer-brand relationships tend to moderate how consumers react to negative brand information (e.g., Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Edwards & Smith, 1996). This study examined consumers' relationship-sustaining activities in the form of exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, and relationship continuous intention. Through the lens of consumer identity fusion, the findings proved that the fusion theory is applicable for understanding consumers' biased assimilation when encountering brand transgressions. It is also important to note that consumer identity fusion outperformed brand identification in predicting consumers' reactions. Thus, the conceptualization of consumer identity fusion integrates the existing self-brand connection themes by considering new ways in which consumers perceive that their personal identity is thoroughly enmeshed with what the brand represents. The conceptualization also provides a basis for understanding the motivational machinery of consumers' behavioral tendencies when facing threats to the brand they feel connected with. Although the moderating effect of perceived severity has been documented in the literature (e.g., Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Einwiller et al., 2006), the nonlinear pattern of consumers' reactions to brand transgressions was found only in their exit behaviors. That is, highly fused consumers were inclined to engage in some pro-relationship activities (i.e., voice and relationship continuous intention) even through the brand transgression was of a relatively major magnitude.

However, consumer identity fusion did not significantly predict loyalty and neglect behaviors in the current study. As existing fusion studies have focused on investigating extreme pro-group activities following challenges, such as self-sacrificial behavior (Gómez, Morales, et al., 2011), it is possible that, when compared with brand identification, consumer identity fusion is more appropriate for probing active behavioral outcomes. As suggested in A. Hirschman's (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983), the exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect responses differ from each other along the dimensions of active versus passive in addition to constructiveness versus destructiveness. Voice and loyalty are constructive responses as they are concerned with reviving or maintaining a relationship, whereas exit and neglect are destructive in nature. Moreover, exit and voice are active behaviors wherein individuals would like to deal with transgressions, while loyalty and neglect are passive and diffuse behaviors (Rusbult et al., 1991; Geyskens & Steenkamp, 2000). Thus, the findings of this study found that highly fused consumers respond to brand transgressions by actively endorsing pro-relationship activities to reaffirm their identities. In sum, Study One provides further evidence of how consumers in strong brand relationships perceive their personal self and the brand-related social self as interconnected. Different from what the social identity approach suggests, highly fused consumers feel strong and in control of their actions and thoughts and may rationally undertake pro-relationship behaviors.

Chapter 7: Study Two

The Effect of Consumer Identity Fusion and Brand Transgression Types on Consumer Responses

Study One provides empirical evidence showing that consumer identity fusion is a stronger predictor than brand identification for understanding consumers' relationship-sustaining behaviors. Highly fused consumers were more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies (i.e., voice and relationship continuous intention) and were less likely to engage in destructive coping strategies (i.e., exit) than were weakly fused consumers. The effect of consumer identity fusion was so strong that the moderating effect of perceived severity of brand transgressions was effective only on consumers' exit coping responses.

To extend the empirical implications of the findings, Study Two further examines whether consumer identity fusion would influence the way consumers respond to different types of brand transgressions (i.e., personal-related versus societal-related). Recent research suggests that consumers tend to judge brand reputation more negatively if the outcomes of a negative event are tied to their personal interests than to those that otherwise impact the society as a whole (e.g., Reuber & Fischer, 2010; Whalen et al., 1991). Following this logic, Study Two predicts that brand transgression types, personal-related versus societal-related brand transgressions, may change how highly fused consumers cope with negative incidents. Considering that the outcomes of personal-related brand transgressions (i.e., product defect and service-related crises) usually affect consumers' interests personally and the outcomes of societal-related brand transgressions (i.e., socially debatable business practices) usually affect the society at large, it is reasonable to expect that highly fused consumers will view the personal-related brand transgressions as greater identity threats than societal-related transgressions. As a result,

they may more readily engage in defensive responses toward personal-related brand transgressions than toward societal-related transgressions. Study Two aims to investigate the following hypothesis proposed in Chapter 4 from Whalen et al. (1991).

H4: The effect of consumer identity fusion on consumer coping strategies will be stronger when the type of brand transgression is personal-related versus societal-related.

METHOD

Study Design

A 2 (transgression types: personal-related versus societal-related) × consumer identity fusion (measured) between-subjects experimental design was employed for Study Two. Akin to Study One, the degree of consumer identity fusion was measured, while the type of brand transgressions was manipulated. Each participant was presented with one of the two brand transgression reports, personal-related or societal-related. Their specific coping responses were examined using the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology, the relationship continuous intention scale, and Huenzel and Halliday's (2008) repurchase intention measure. Considering that participants' existing ethical orientation may be a potential moderator to consumers behaviors, especially when they judge issues related to ethics and society (Alexander, 2002; J. Klein & Dawar, 2004; Whalen et al., 1991), an ethics related orientation was included as a covariate to control for its effect on consumers' coping responses. Ethical orientation was measured using the item adopted from Whalen et al. (1991).

Different from Study One, Study Two expands the research scope by asking participants to write down the brand of their current primary personal computer. The

brand that the participants filled in was then referred to in the experimental manipulation and measures. Because college students are familiar with their own personal computers and may form a meaningful relationship with them, this study expects to discover a wide distribution of consumer identity fusion toward the participant's brand of choice. Considering that consumer-brand relationships are diverse and varied, this approach enabled the findings to reflect participants' established brand relationships in the consumer electronics product category and capture how these relationships may change in response to different brand transgressions without limiting the transgressions to any particular brand.

Sampling and Data Collection

Participants were recruited from introductory and advanced advertising classes at the University of Texas at Austin where instructors agreed for their students to participate in the study in exchange for course credit. The experiment was administrated online. Participants were informed that the purpose of the study was to learn about consumer behaviors relative to the brand of their primary personal computer. Overall, 247 undergraduate students participated in Study Two, including a pre-test and the main experiment. The entire data collection period of Study Two was about two weeks, from April 27 to May 10, 2012.

Stimuli Development

As in Study One, the base product category for this study was the consumer electronics type. Two vignettes were created in the form of consumer reports. The most common personal- and societal-related transgression incidents for consumer electronics brands were first identified from consumer review Websites. Professional writers were

employed to craft stimuli for the purpose of the study. While the personal-related vignette described a product defect that might impact participants' personal benefit, the societal-related vignette illustrated a socially debatable business practice that might influence the society's interests.

Specifically, for the personal-related condition, the vignette concerning how the brand of participants' personal computer had been reported to have a display failure was revised based on the vignettes used for Study One. The revised personal-related vignette aimed to determine participants' responses toward the brand transgression in which they might be directly affected by the outcomes of the product defect (Reuber & Fischer, 2010; Whalen et al., 1991). In the societal-related condition, the vignette showed that the brand of participants' personal computer had been accused of using underage workers for manual labor in assembling computer parts. This vignette aimed to explore participants' responses toward the brand transgression in which they might not be personally affected by the outcomes but about which they would be aware of another party's being harmed by the unethical business practice (Whalen et al., 1991).

This vignette-based experiment allowed personal-related or societal-related manipulation to be more easily operationalized and enabled the researcher to control over extraneous factors that might influence the results of the study. As many different types of brand transgressions are experienced by consumers, this approach expected to reveal different responses toward two types of negative brand information from participants. See Appendix B for details about the two vignettes.

The two vignettes were presented to a sample of 67 students (average age = 20.38; 60.5% female): 35 received the personal-related condition and 32, the societal-related condition, to determine whether the participants would perceive the transgressions

as being significantly different. Participants were randomly assigned to read either the personal-related or societal-related brand transgression incident and then they were asked to complete manipulation check questions (i.e., types, believability, and severity of brand transgression measures). The pretest results were in the predicted directions. Participants in the personal-related condition provided a higher score on personal-related questions than participants in the societal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 5.21, SD_{personal} = 1.46; M_{societal} = 4.20, SD_{societal} = 1.57; t(65) = 2.92, p \leq .005, d = .67$), indicating that the incident would cause a problem in their lives. In contrast, participants in the societal-related condition provided a higher score on societal-related questions than participants in the personal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 4.20, SD_{personal} = 1.57; M_{societal} = 5.64, SD_{societal} = 1.14; t(65) = -4.31, p < .001, d = -1.05$), showing that the incident would cause a problem in society. The believability ($M_{personal} = 4.46, SD_{personal} = 1.40; M_{societal} = 5.02, SD_{societal} = 1.09; t(65) = -1.83, p = .07, d = -.45$) and the perceived severity of the brand transgression vignettes did not differ across the two conditions ($M_{personal} = 4.37, SD_{personal} = 1.30; M_{societal} = 4.91, SD_{societal} = 1.17; t(65) = -1.76, p = .08, d = -.43$).

Procedure

The procedures of the current study were similar to those of Study One but with different brand transgression manipulations. First, all participants were asked to fill in the brand name of their primary personal computer. After responding to the consumer identity fusion measure and brand identification items in reference to the brand of their primary personal computer, participants were then randomly assigned to either the personal-related or societal-related condition. They received a vignette based on a report, allegedly released recently by *Consumer Reports*. Depending on the assigned condition, either a personal-related or a societal-related brand misconduct was presented to

participants. Following exposure to the vignette, participants proceeded to answer questions concerning the main dependent variables. Upon completion, participants were debriefed and thanked. The whole study took approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Measures

Several measures were used to assess consumer identity fusion, brand identification, ethical orientation, the effectiveness of manipulation, and coping responses to a brand transgression (see Appendix B). Order effects were controlled as the questionnaires varied the presentation order of the measures with the demographic questionnaire always presented last.

Consumer Identity Fusion

The seven-item fusion measure was adapted from Gómez, Brooks, and colleagues' (2011) study to investigate the feeling of connectedness with a brand and the reciprocal strength of consumer identity fusion. These items were ranked along a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree." A single index was formed by averaging the fusion items ($\alpha = .95$).

Brand Identification

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item measure served to examine the extent to which consumers feel identified with a brand. All question items were measured along a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree." The identification index score was created by averaging the corresponding items ($\alpha = .89$).

Covariate

This study also accounted for participants' ethical orientation to minimize the potential confounding effect across two conditions, given that consumers may use such

global, abstract considerations to evaluate brands and to determine their behaviors, such as purchase intentions (Alexander, 2002; J. Klein & Dawar, 2004; Whalen et al., 1991). The one-item measure, “it is impossible to conduct profitable business in this country and follow strict ethical standards,” adopted from Whalen et al. (1991) was rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.”

The Effectiveness of Manipulation

To assess whether the brand transgressions described in the two consumer reports were indeed perceived to be personal-related or societal-related based on their corresponding manipulation, a four-item scale was constructed. Two items measured the extent to which the incident would cause a problem in participants’ lives or in society, whereas the other two items measured the extent to which the outcomes of the incident would be associated with their own interests or society’s interests. These questions were investigated along with a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree” (personal-related: $\alpha = .80$, societal-related: $\alpha = .92$). Personal-related and societal-related items were averaged to create index scores, respectively.

The four-item believability measure was examined on a seven-point, semantic differential scale (not believable-believable, not credible-credible, not convincing-convincing, and unlikely-likely) (average index: $\alpha = .87$).

To ensure the equality of the two vignettes, the four-item severity scale was adopted from Weun et al. (2004) to assess participants’ perception of the severity of the presented brand transgression incident. These items were tested on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= “not at all” to 7= “extremely” (average index: $\alpha = .81$).

Coping Responses to a Brand Transgression

The main dependent variables of this study were participants' specific coping responses to brand transgressions. The exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of behavioral outcomes was adapted from A. Hirschman's (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) scales where each subscale included three items. All question items were measured using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." They were found to be reliable for measuring participants' exit ($\alpha = .88$), voice ($\alpha = .88$), loyalty ($\alpha = .83$), and neglect responses ($\alpha = .77$). A single index score for each construct was created by averaging the corresponding items.

The relationship continuous intention measure was employed based on Algesheimer and colleagues' (2005) membership continuous intention scale. This measure attempted to determine whether participants would be willing to stay in the relationship they had with a brand after reading a brand transgression report. These measurement items were examined along seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" ($\alpha = .90$). The items were averaged to create an index score.

In addition, consumers' repurchase intention measure was added using Kuenzel and Halliday's (2008) three-item scale. This measure was used to assess whether the brand would remain preferred and be purchased again in the future. All items were modified to suit the context of this study and examined along seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" (average index: $\alpha = .91$).

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Out of 180 voluntary participants, the final sample of 156 respondents was used for data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses and respondents who exhibited extreme and consistent rating patterns. As a result, the final sample was comprised of 32.7% males ($N = 51$) and 67.3% females ($N = 105$). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 29 with a mean age of 19.99 years ($SD = 1.68$). The racial composition of the sample was 50.6 % Caucasian, 28.2% Hispanic, 10.3% Asian, 7.7% African-American, and 3.2% indicated they were either multiracial or chose “other.” The sample consisted of a variety of majors, ranging from Advertising and Public Relations to Engineering and Natural Sciences. About 36% of the participants were freshmen, followed by 28.8% sophomores, 19.2% juniors, and 16 % sophomores.

The brands of participants’ primary personal computer varied. A total of 14 brands emerged from the sample: about 55.8% (or 87) were Apple, followed by HP (14.7%, or 23), Dell (6.4%, or 10), Toshiba (5.8%, or 9), and others. The participants reported they had used their computer for an average of 2.01 years, ranging from eight months to 9.33 years.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In this study, a CFA was conducted using SPSS AMOS 20 to test whether the two-factor model (seven-item fusion factor and six-item brand identification factor) generated by the EFA could be confirmed in a new data set. As recommended for structural equation modeling applications (Keith, 2006; Kline, 2005), this study used a variety of indices to evaluate model fit, including the comparative fit index (CFI), the

normed fit index (NFI), the goodness-of-fit index (GFI), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

Following Gómez, Brooks, and colleagues' (2011) procedure, items were permitted to load on only the components they were expected to load on, and no item errors were permitted to correlate. As shown in Table 7.1, the fit indices associated with the two-factor model revealed a moderate fit. The Goodness-of-fit criteria were somewhat satisfactory with the CFI of .87, NFI of .84, and GFI of .75. Unfortunately, the RMSEA of .16 were higher than the .10 (Keith, 2006). Figure 7.1 provides the factor loadings for the two-factor model that ranged from .61 to .94 which were all statistically significant. The correlation between consumer identity fusion and brand identification was .67 and was statistically significant.

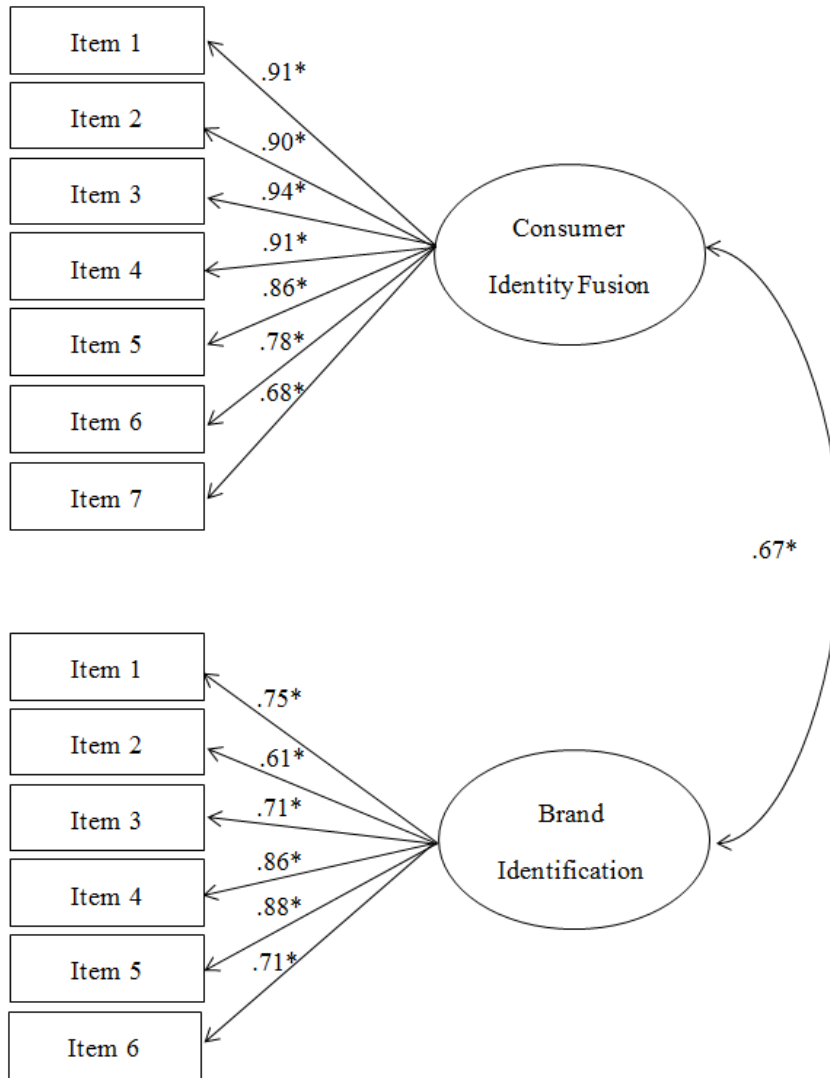
Table 7.1: Model Fit Statistics for the Confirmatory Factor Analyses (N=156)

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	CFI	NFI	GFI	RMSEA	χ^2_{diff}	<i>df</i> _{diff}
Two-factor	302.62*	64	.87	.84	.75	.16	--	--
One-factor	541.74*	65	.74	.72	.59	.22	239.12*	1

* $p < .001$.

Given that the eigenvalue for brand identification was much greater than the eigenvalue for consumer identity fusion in the EFA and that the two factors were fairly highly correlated in the EFA and CFA, the fit of a one-factor model was conducted with the current sample. In the one-factor model, all of the items were specified to load on a common factor, implying that the two factors are not conceptually or statistically distinct. The resulting fit of the one-factor model was not acceptable (see Figure 7.1). Moreover, the chi-square test result for the difference in model fit provided further support for the

superior fit of the two-factor model ($\Delta \chi^2_{(1)} = 239.12, p < .001$). Taken together, the results of EFA and CFA suggested that consumer identity fusion and brand identification are two distinct constructs.



* $p < .001$.

Figure 7.1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Results of the Two-Factor Model

Manipulation Check

To test the effectiveness of the manipulation of the types of brand transgressions, participants were asked to report whether the presented brand transgression would cause a problem in their lives or in society ($N_{personal} = 76$, $N_{societal} = 80$). As expected, the fictitious consumer report used for the personal-related condition was perceived to be significantly more related to their personal interests than the one used for the societal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 3.96$, $SD_{personal} = 1.28$; $M_{societal} = 2.88$, $SD_{societal} = 1.24$; $t(154) = 5.35$, $p < .001$, $d = .86$). In contrast, the consumer report used for the societal-related condition was perceived to be significantly more related to the society's outcomes ($M_{personal} = 3.58$, $SD_{personal} = 1.41$; $M_{societal} = 4.88$, $SD_{societal} = 1.21$; $t(154) = -6.18$, $p < .001$, $d = -.99$). The believability ($M_{personal} = 4.61$, $SD_{personal} = 1.20$; $M_{societal} = 4.63$, $SD_{societal} = 1.28$; $t(154) = -.08$, $p = .93$, $d = -.02$) and the perceived severity of the vignettes did not differ across two conditions ($M_{personal} = 5.06$, $SD_{personal} = .84$; $M_{societal} = 5.28$, $SD_{societal} = 1.09$; $t(154) = -1.45$, $p = .15$, $d = -.23$).

Table 7.2: The Effectiveness of Manipulation—Study Two

	Personal (N=76)		Societal (N=80)		t-value	p-value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Personal	3.96	1.28	2.88	1.24	5.35	.000
Societal	3.58	1.41	4.88	1.21	-6.18	.000
Believability	4.61	1.20	4.63	1.28	-.08	.93
Severity	5.06	.84	5.28	1.09	-1.45	.15

Hypothesis Testing

Building on the findings obtained from Study One, Study Two further examined the assumptions that highly fused participants would be more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies and less likely to undertake destructive coping strategies than weakly fused participants in response to brand transgressions, while controlling for brand identification. In conjunction with the consideration of the effect of brand transgression types, Study Two predicts that highly fused participants may take the personal-related brand transgressions as greater identity threats than societal-related transgressions. They may, therefore, more readily engage in defensive responses toward personal-related brand transgressions than toward societal-related transgressions. That is, consumer identity fusion may exert a stronger effect among those exposed to personal-related brand transgressions than among those exposed to societal-related brand transgressions. To test these assumptions, a series of multiple regression analyses was employed.

Coping Responses to a Brand Transgression

Prior to conducting multiple regression analyses, a centered version of consumer identity fusion, brand identification, and ethical orientation was created by subtracting the mean scores ($M_{\text{fusion}} = 3.04$, $SD_{\text{fusion}} = 1.38$; $M_{\text{identification}} = 2.99$, $SD_{\text{identification}} = 1.25$; $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.99$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.25$), respectively. Cross-product variables were created for testing interaction terms of interest. Consumers' responses to a brand transgression were measured using exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of responses, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention. Participants' ethical orientation was controlled for by entering it in the first step of the regression. Each outcome variable was then regressed onto types of brand transgressions (coded 0 for personal-related and 1 for societal-

related), consumer identity fusion (centered), brand identification (centered), and the two- and three-way interactions (Gómez, Brooks, et al., 2011). Multicollinearity was diagnosed in each regression model as consumer identity fusion and brand identification were positively correlated ($r(154) = .63, p < .001$)

The exit regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .23, F(8, 147) = 5.38, p < .001$). Overall, participants' ethical orientation did not predict their use of exit coping strategies ($\beta = .09, t(147) = 1.25, p = .21$). There was a significant main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = -.70, t(147) = -5.32, p < .001$), indicating that the willingness to exit the brand relationship decreased with consumer identity fusion, while controlling for brand identification. The fusion main effect was qualified by a marginal interaction between consumer identity fusion and transgression types ($\beta = .24, t(147) = 1.74, p = .08$). As shown in Figure 7.2, highly fused participants were less likely to leave the brand relationship than were weakly fused participants in the personal-related condition ($R^2 = .37, F(4, 71) = 10.20, p < .001$). Such effect was marginally significant in the societal condition ($R^2 = .11, F(4, 75) = 2.23, p = .07$). The main effect of transgression types was not significant ($\beta = -.10, t(147) = -1.10, p = .27; M_{personal} = 4.21, SD_{personal} = 1.31; M_{societal} = 4.30, SD_{societal} = 1.30$). The identification main effect also emerged ($\beta = .33, t(147) = 2.48, p < .05$), suggesting that greater brand identification was associated with more endorsement of exit responses following brand transgressions. The interaction effect with brand transgression types was not significant ($\beta = -.07, t = -.51, p = .61$) (see Figure 7.3).

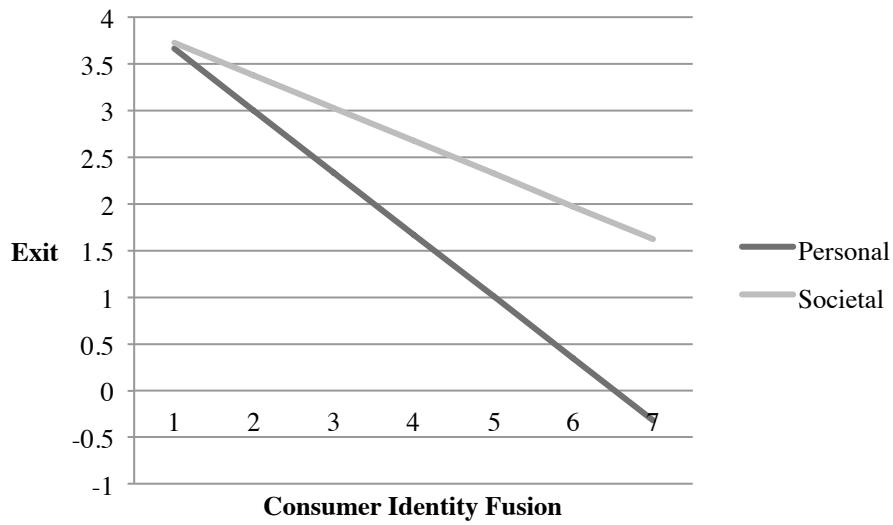


Figure 7.2: Exit as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types

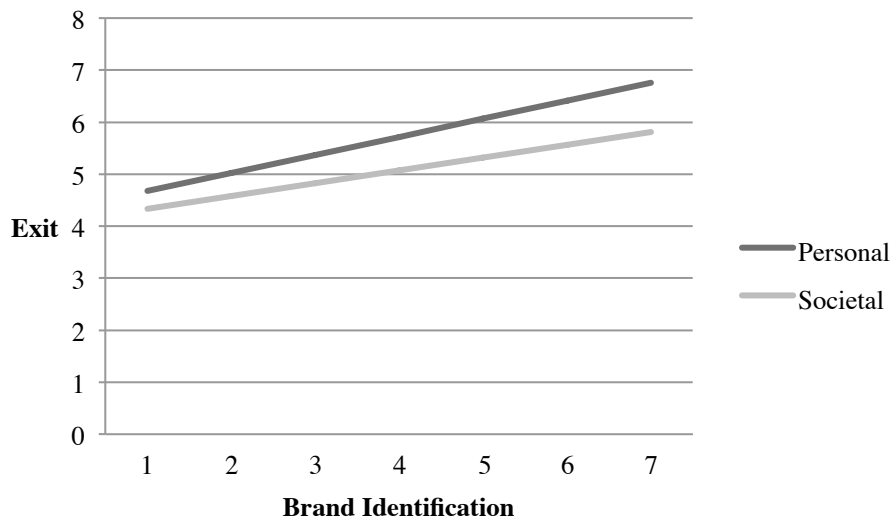


Figure 7.3: Exit as a Function of Brand Identification and Transgression Types

The voice regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .19$, $F(8, 147) = 4.43$, $p < .001$). Participants' ethical orientation did not predict their use of voice coping strategies ($\beta = -.03$, $t(147) = -.35$, $p = .72$). The expected interaction between consumer

identity fusion and transgression types did not emerge ($\beta = -.03, t(147) = -.25, p = .81$). In addition, the main effect of transgression types was not significant ($\beta = -.15, t(147) = -1.68, p = .10$), suggesting that there were no differences in participants' voice responses across the two conditions ($M_{personal} = 3.95, SD_{personal} = 1.28; M_{societal} = 3.69, SD_{societal} = 1.35$). There was a significant main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = .30, t(147) = 2.26, p < .05$), such that highly fused participants were more inclined to endorse voice coping strategies than weakly fused participants regardless of the types of brand transgressions (Personal: $R^2 = .21, F(4, 71) = 8.12, p \leq .001$; Societal: $R^2 = .20, F(4, 75) = 4.72, p < .005$), while controlling for brand identification (see Figure 7.4). The identification main effect was not significant ($\beta = .18, t(147) = 1.33, p = .19$) and neither was the interaction effect with brand transgression types ($\beta = -.004, t(147) = -.03, p = .98$).

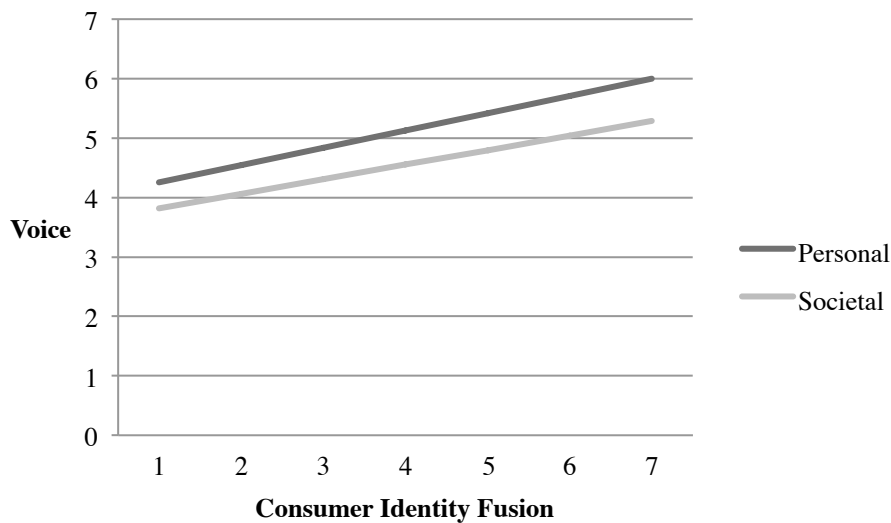


Figure 7.4: Voice as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types

The loyalty regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .21$, $F(8, 147) = 4.86$, $p < .001$). Participants' ethical orientation did not predict their use of loyalty coping strategies ($\beta = .001$, $t(147) = .01$, $p = .99$). The expected interaction between consumer identity fusion and transgression types was not significant ($\beta = -.20$, $t(147) = -1.48$, $p = .14$). The main effect of transgression types was also not significant ($\beta = -.002$, $t(147) = -.02$, $p = .98$; $M_{personal} = 4.18$, $SD_{personal} = 1.34$; $M_{societal} = 4.24$, $SD_{societal} = 1.10$). A significant main effect of consumer identity fusion emerged ($\beta = .63$, $t(147) = 4.72$, $p < .001$), indicating that highly fused participants displayed more endorsement of loyalty coping responses than weakly fused participants across the two conditions (Personal: $R^2 = .29$, $F(4, 71) = 7.31$, $p < .001$; Societal: $R^2 = .09$, $F(4, 75) = 1.90$, $p = .12$), while controlling for brand identification (see Figure 7.5). The interaction between consumer identity fusion and brand identification was also significant ($\beta = -.36$, $t(147) = -3.45$, $p \leq .001$). The identification main effect was not significant ($\beta = -.11$, $t(147) = -.78$, $p = .44$) and neither was the interaction effect with brand transgression types ($\beta = -.04$, $t(147) = -.26$, $p = .80$).

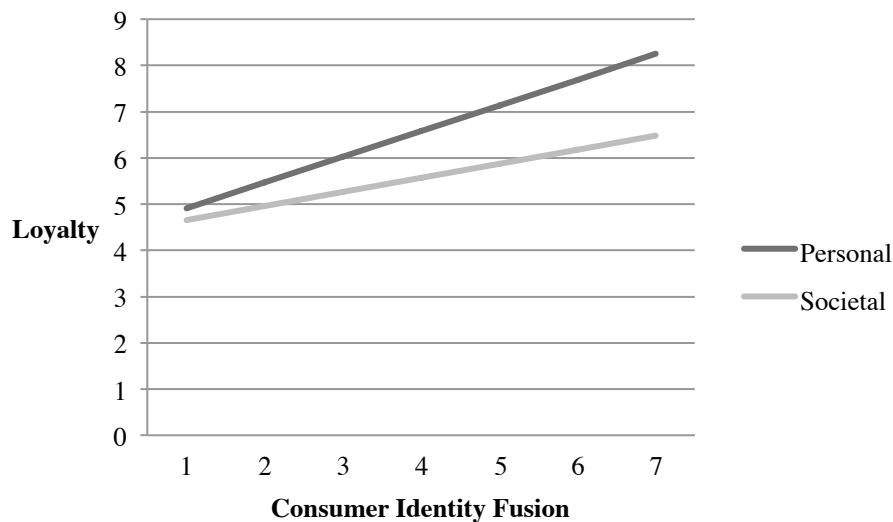


Figure 7.5: Loyalty as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types

The neglect regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .08$, $F(6, 149) = 2.12$, $p = .054$). The effect of ethical orientation was significant ($\beta = .17$, $t(149) = 2.16$, $p < .05$), such that the more participants agreed it was impossible to conduct profitable business by adhering to strict ethical standards, the more likely they would be to employ neglect responses. The expected interaction between consumer identity fusion and transgression types was not significant ($\beta = .11$, $t(149) = .78$, $p = .44$) nor was the main effect of transgression types ($\beta = .05$, $t(149) = .58$, $p = .57$; $M_{personal} = 3.62$, $SD_{personal} = 1.18$; $M_{societal} = 3.77$, $SD_{societal} = 1.10$). The consumer identity fusion main effect emerged ($\beta = -.35$, $t(149) = -2.50$, $p < .05$). The results suggest that highly fused participants expressed lower tendency to undertake neglect coping strategies than weakly fused participants regardless of brand transgression types: even the separate personal model was significant ($R^2 = .13$, $F(4, 71) = 2.53$, $p < .05$) while the societal model was not ($R^2 = .03$, $F(4, 75) = .63$, $p = .64$) (see Figure 7.6). The identification main effect was not

significant ($\beta = .16, t(149) = 1.11, p = .27$) nor was the interaction effect with brand transgression types ($\beta = -.005, t(149) = -.04, p = .97$).

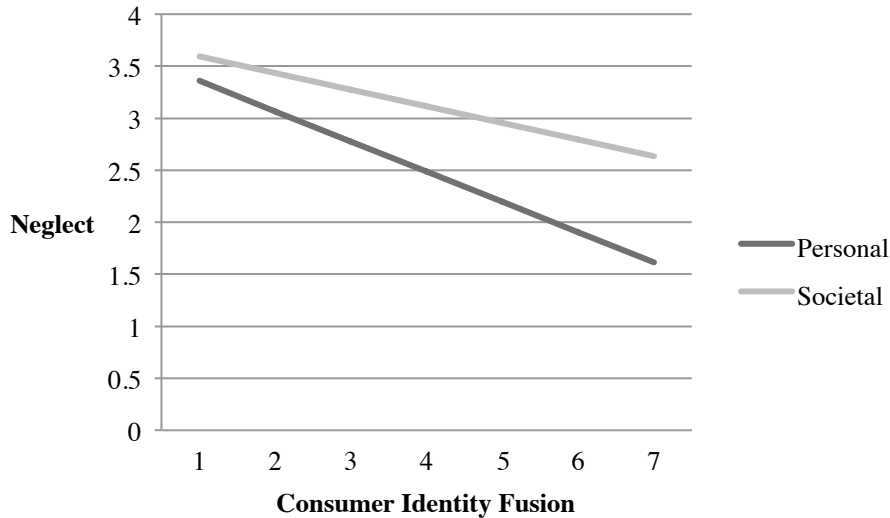


Figure 7.6: Neglect as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types

The relationship continuous intention regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .32, F(8, 147) = 8.50, p < .001$). The effect of ethical orientation was not significant ($\beta = .003, t(147) = .04, p = .97$). The expected interaction between consumer identity fusion and transgression types was not significant ($\beta = -.06, t(147) = -.44, p = .66$) nor was the main effect of transgression types ($\beta = -.06, t(147) = -.73, p = .47; M_{personal} = 4.17, SD_{personal} = 1.59; M_{societal} = 3.88, SD_{societal} = 1.58$). The main effect of consumer identity fusion emerged ($\beta = .71, t(147) = 5.68, p < .001$). The results suggested that highly fused participants were more inclined to continue the brand relationship than weakly fused participants regardless of brand transgression types (Personal: $R^2 = .38, F(4, 71) = 10.65, p < .001$; Societal: $R^2 = .25, F(4, 75) = 6.27, p < .001$), while controlling for brand identification (see Figure 7.7). Both the identification

main effect ($\beta = -.15, t(147) = -1.15, p = .25$) and its interaction with brand transgression types were not significant ($\beta = -.07, t(147) = -.54, p = .59$).

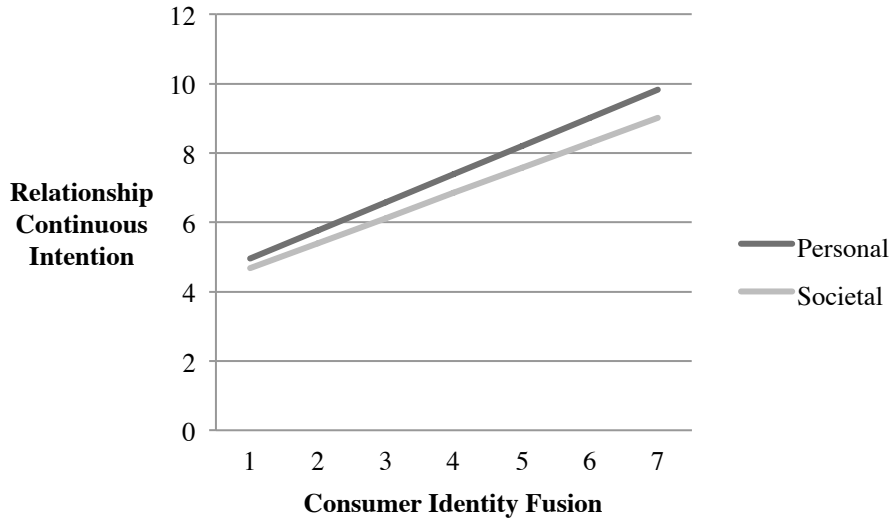


Figure 7.7: Relationship Continuous Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types

The repurchase intention regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .24, F(8, 147) = 5.94, p < .001$). The effect of ethical orientation was not significant in predicting whether participants would choose to repurchase from the brand or not ($\beta = .02, t(147) = .21, p = .84$). The interaction between consumer identity fusion and transgression types was not significant ($\beta = .003, t(147) = .02, p = .98$) and neither was the main effect of transgression types ($\beta = .06, t(147) = .71, p = .48; M_{personal} = 4.54, SD_{personal} = 1.55; M_{societal} = 4.57, SD_{societal} = 1.47$). Only the consumer identity fusion main effect emerged in this investigation ($\beta = .62, t(147) = 4.76, p < .001$). The results suggested that highly fused participants were more likely to buy from the brand again than weakly fused participants regardless of brand transgression types (Personal: $R^2 = .25, F(4, 71) = 5.93, p < .001$; Societal: $R^2 = .24, F(4, 75) = 5.84, p < .001$), while controlling

for brand identification (see Figure 7.8). Neither the identification main effect ($\beta = -.19$, $t(147) = -1.41$, $p = .16$) nor its interaction with brand transgression types was found to be significant ($\beta = -.10$, $t(147) = -.74$, $p = .46$).

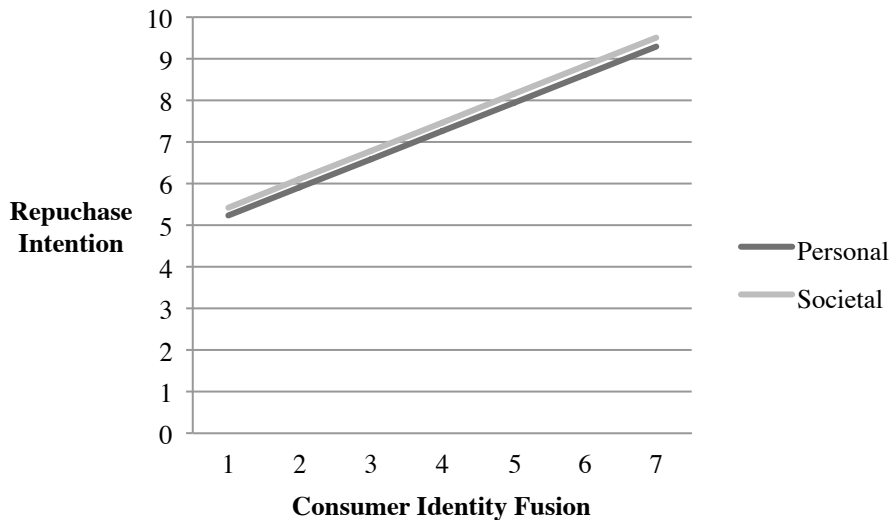


Figure 7.8: Repurchase Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion and Transgression Types

In summary, the research findings suggested that, while controlling for brand identification, highly fused participants were more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies (i.e., voice, loyalty, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention) than weakly fused participants despite the types of brand transgressions. Moreover, highly fused participants were less likely to endorse destructive coping strategies (i.e., exit and neglect) than weakly fused participants. Therefore, H1 and H2 were supported by the study. However, the expected interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types on consumers' coping responses was found only for exit responses. That is, the effect of consumer identity fusion on participants' exit behavior was stronger among those in the personal-related brand transgression

condition than among those in the societal-related brand transgression condition. In this sense, H4 was partially supported.

DISCUSSION

In Study Two, a CFA was first conducted to further verify that consumer identity fusion and brand identification were distinct constructs. Having shown that these constructs are distinct from each other, this study proceeded to examine whether consumer identity fusion would impact the way consumers react to personal-related versus societal-related brand transgressions.

In line with expectations, the results of Study Two demonstrated that, while controlling for brand identification, highly fused consumers were more likely to engage in constructive pro-relationship behaviors and less likely to engage in destructive responses than weakly fused participants. The effect of consumer identity fusion was stronger than that of brand identification across different behavioral outcomes despite the types of brand transgressions. It is important to note that consumer identity fusion had a greater effect on participants' coping strategies among those in the personal-related brand transgression condition than among those in the societal-related brand transgression condition. However, the expected interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types on consumers' coping responses was found only for exit behavior.

The findings of Study Two provided additional evidence of the moderating effect of consumer identity fusion on consumers' coping with different types of brand transgressions. Depending on whether the outcomes would most likely impact consumers' personal interests or the society as a whole, the intensity of the effect of consumer identity fusion varied. As personal-related brand transgressions often affect

consumers' interests personally (Reuber & Fischer, 2010), they usually consider this type of brand transgressions as greater erosion to the brand value, thereby responding to this type of incident from a personal perspective (Whalen et al., 1991). On the contrary, because the outcomes of societal-related brand transgressions usually influence the society rather than consumers' personal interests, their evaluation would take place from a distant, vicarious perspective (Whalen et al., 1991). In line with this logic, the results showed that highly fused consumers took personal-related brand transgressions as greater threats to their identities than societal-related brand transgressions, given that the boundaries between fused consumers' personal and brand-related social identities are highly permeable. The greater threats to highly fused consumers would then increase the tendency for them to engage in compensatory reactions to reaffirm their identities. Hence, this study built on the literature and showed that consumer identity fusion effectively moderated consumers' reactions toward brand transgressions. Even though personal-related brand transgressions have been documented as having a more negative effect than societal-related brand transgressions on consumers' coping responses, the buffering effect of consumer identity fusion proved to over-ride such negative effects and motivate consumers to become involved in biased assimilation that favored the brand in trouble. The interaction effect was evidenced in consumers' exit behavior in the way that, while highly fused consumers were less likely to leave the exiting brand relationship than were weakly fused consumers in both brand transgression conditions, the effect of consumer identity fusion was stronger when the type of the brand transgression was personal-related versus societal-related. In sum, this study not only provided another validation of the effect of consumer identity fusion but also extended the practical implications of Study One in that Study Two examined consumers' feeling of oneness with their primary

personal computer rather than fixed with consumers of a brand. Overall, the results showed great support for study predictions in Study Two.

Chapter 8: Study Three

The Moderating Effect of Self-Affirmation

The results of Study One and Study Two together suggest that consumer identity fusion and brand identification are two related but distinct constructs; the moderating effect of consumer identity fusion on consumers' coping behavior is stronger than brand identification. While controlling for brand identification, highly fused consumers were more likely to engage in constructive pro-relationship behaviors (i.e., voice, loyalty, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention) and less likely to engage in destructive responses (i.e. exit and neglect) than weakly fused consumers despite the perceived severity and brand transgression types in most cases (except for exit).

Building on these findings, the goals of Study Three are twofold. First, Study Three aims to further scrutinize the nature of consumer identity fusion and see how it may influence consumers' coping strategies in response to different types of brand transgression in a different product category, automobile. Second, Study Three delves into the interplay of consumers' personal and social identities, aiming to disentangle the source of the motivational machinery needed for consumers' pro-relationship behaviors when facing brand-related identity threats (i.e., brand transgressions). This study extends the findings of Study Two and the "brand as self" conceptualization (Cheng et al., 2012) and seeks to examine the underlying drivers of consumers' relationship-serving responses.

Current research has documented that an affirmation of self-integrity, unrelated to a specific threat, can attenuate or eliminate individuals' responses to a threat (e.g., McQueen & W. Klein, 2006; Sherman & Kim, 2005; Steele & Liu, 1983). Considering

this, Study Three predicts that highly fused consumers may still evaluate brands in a positive light even though they feel more secure in their self-worth after self-affirmations (Sherman & Cohen, 2002; Sherman & Kim, 2005). Although highly fused consumers may feel less self-protective pressures, they may still engage in biased assimilation favoring the brand in trouble as they consider that their sense of who they are is thoroughly enmeshed with what the brand represents. Different from Cheng and colleagues' (2012) findings, Study Three suggests that because fused consumers experience highly permeable boundaries between their personal and social identities, these two identities should combine synergistically to motivate pro-relationship activities. Hence, different from Cheng and colleagues' (2012) conclusion, highly fused consumers should not be self-focused but instead be brand-focused in response to brand transgressions. The brand evaluations of highly fused consumers may not slip after their personal identities are affirmed. In other words, their pro-relationship behaviors should not rest entirely on the shoulders of their personal selves. The hypothesis and research question raised in Chapter 4 that were examined are as follows. .

H5: Self-affirmation will moderate the effect of types of brand transgressions on consumer coping strategies for highly fused consumers (but not for weakly fused consumers).

RQ1: Will self-affirmation influence the effect of types of brand transgressions on brand evaluations for highly fused consumers versus weakly fused consumers?

METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a 2 (transgression types: personal-related versus societal-related) \times 2 (affirmation status: affirmation vs. no affirmation) \times consumer identity fusion (measured) between-subjects design to test the above-mentioned hypothesis and research question. The degree of consumer identity fusion was measured, while the types of brand transgressions and self-affirmation status were manipulated. Each participant was presented with one of the two brand transgression reports, personal-related or societal-related. After reading the brand transgression vignette, each participant was then randomly assigned to either the self-affirmation or no affirmation condition. Their specific coping responses were examined using the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology, the relationship continuous intention scale, the repurchase intention measure, and Aggarwal's (2004) brand evaluation scale. As in Study Two, ethical orientation was included as a covariate to control for its effect on consumers' coping responses.

Study Three first asked participants to write down the brand of their current primary vehicle, which was referred to in the experimental manipulation and following measures. The product category, automobile, was chosen because cars are known to elicit high levels of involvement in many consumers (e.g., Brown, Kozinets, & Sherry, 2003; McAlexander & Schouten, 1998) and has been employed in self-related consumer research (e.g., Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Algesheimer et al., 2005; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). Considering that consumers are familiar with their own automobiles and may form meaningful relationships with their vehicles, Study Three expects to capture a wide range of consumer identity fusion toward the brand of their primary vehicle. The use of another

product category for stimuli also helped increase the generalizability of the research findings.

Sampling and Data Collection

In this study, participants were recruited from a crowd-sourcing system, Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), which allows requesters to distribute Human Intelligence Tasks (HITs) to a large number of workers. Started in 2005, MTurk is a Web-based platform for recruiting and compensating subjects to perform tasks. The Website has more than 500,000 people in its workforce; while about 40% are from America, a third are from India and the rest come from about 100 other countries worldwide (*The Economist*, 2012). Both workers and requesters remain anonymous, even though workers' responses can be linked through an ID provided by Amazon.

In recent years, a growing number of scholars across the social sciences have begun using MTurk for experimental subject recruitment (e.g., Austin & Shaw, 2012; Erikson & Simpson, 2010; Horton, Rand, & Zeckhauser, 2011), given that relative to other experimental pools, MTurk is considered inexpensive both in terms of the cost of participant recruitment and the time required for implementing studies (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012; Bohannon, 2011; Mason & Suri, 2011). According to Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling's (2011) evaluation, they suggested that this online panel provides more demographically diverse samples than standard Internet samples and is significantly more diverse than typical college samples; the data obtained through MTurk are high-quality and are as reliable as those obtained from traditional methods. Similarly, Berinsky, Huber, and Lenz's (2012) analysis showed that MTurk subjects are more representative of the U.S. population than convenience samples often used in experimental research. Based on existing empirical evaluations, MTurk is considered a viable alternative for

conducting online experiments (Paolacci, Chandler, & Ipeirotis, 2010) and, therefore, is used for Study Three. Overall, 295 MTurk workers in the U.S. participated in this study, including a pre-test and the main experiment. The entire data collection period of Study Three was about three weeks, from May 25 to June 12, 2012.

Stimuli Development

Types of Brand Transgressions

Similar to Study Two, two fictitious consumer reports were created after reviewing the most common personal- and societal-related transgression incidents for automobile brands from consumer review Websites. However, product category was changed to that of the automobile for Study Three to examine the constructs of interest. Professional writers were hired to draft stimuli for the purpose of the study. While the personal-related condition focused on a product defect that might impact participants' personal benefits, the societal-related condition stressed a socially debatable business practice that might influence the society's interests. Specifically, in the personal-related condition, the vignette revealed that the vehicle the participant purchased might have a defective air conditioning and heating system. In contrast while in the societal-related condition, the vignette reported that the brand of the participant's vehicle had been accused of having unsafe factory working environments. See Appendix C for details about the two vignettes.

The two vignettes were presented to a sample of 45 U.S. automobile consumers (average age = 35.18; 52.5% female) to determine whether they were perceived as significantly different from one another in terms of the types of transgressions. While 25 participants were assigned to the personal-related condition, 20 participants were

assigned to the societal-related condition. After reading about either the personal-related or societal-related brand transgression incident, participants completed manipulation check questions (i.e., types, believability, and severity of brand transgression measures). The pretest results were as expected. Participants in the personal-related condition gave higher scores on personal-related questions than participants in the societal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 5.02, SD_{personal} = 1.40; M_{societal} = 3.53, SD_{societal} = 1.74; t(43) = 3.20, p \leq .005, d = .94$). The results suggest that the incident was perceived as causing a problem in their lives and would impact their personal interests. In contrast, participants in the societal-related condition gave higher scores for societal-related questions than participants in the personal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 2.62, SD_{personal} = 1.09; M_{societal} = 5.95, SD_{societal} = .97; t(43) = -10.66, p < .001, d = -3.23$), showing that the incident would impact the society as a whole. The believability ($M_{personal} = 5.04, SD_{personal} = .91; M_{societal} = 4.84, SD_{societal} = .80; t(43) = .78, p = .44, d = .23$) and the perceived severity of the brand transgression vignettes did not differ across the two conditions ($M_{personal} = 4.54, SD_{personal} = .71; M_{societal} = 4.63, SD_{societal} = .66; t(43) = -.47, p = .64, d = -.13$).

Self-Affirmation Manipulation

The self-affirmation manipulation consisted of five values scales: aesthetics, religion, social, political, and theoretical, adopted from Allport, Vernon, and Lindzey (1960). Participants were asked to rank order these five values, ranging from 1 (most important value) to 5 (least important value). They were then asked to write about why their first-ranked value is important to them and to describe a time in their lives when the particular value was meaningful to them (White & Lehman, 2005). The five value scales have been used in previous self-affirmation studies and were found to provide key elements of self-affirmation manipulation (e.g., Sherman & Kim, 2005; Steele & Liu,

1983; Tesser & Cornell, 1991). In the no-affirmation condition, participants were asked to recall their personal schedule over the past 48 hours. Similar to Cheng and colleagues' (2012) study, the affirmed participants had the chance to affirm important values. In contrast, non-affirmed participants completed a task unrelated to those important values.

Procedure

The procedure of the current study is similar to that of Study Two, with the addition of a self-affirmation manipulation. After responding to the consumer identity fusion measure and identification items in reference to the brand of their primary vehicle, participants were randomly assigned to either personal-related or societal-related brand transgression conditions. They received a vignette based on a report, allegedly released recently by *Consumer Reports*. Depending on the assigned condition, either a personal-related or a societal-related brand misconduct was presented to participants. Upon completion, participants were then randomly assigned to either the affirmation or no affirmation condition. Following the self-affirmation manipulation, participants completed questions pertaining to the main dependent variables. Once participants finished all the questions, they were debriefed and thanked. The whole study took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

Measures

Several instruments were used to investigate consumer identity fusion, brand identification, ethical orientation, the effectiveness of manipulation, and coping responses to a brand transgression (see Appendix C). Order effects were controlled as the questionnaires varied the presentation order of the measures with the demographic questionnaire always presented last.

Consumer Identity Fusion

The seven-item fusion measure was adapted from Gómez, Brooks, and colleagues' (2011) study in order to investigate the visceral feeling of oneness with an automobile brand and the reciprocal strength of consumer identity fusion. These items were ranked along a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" (average index: $\alpha = .94$).

Brand Identification

Mael and Ashforth's (1992) six-item measure served to investigate the extent to which consumers feel identified with a brand. All question items were measured along a seven-point Likert scale, with 1 = "strongly disagree" and 7 = "strongly agree" (average index: $\alpha = .84$).

Covariate

This study also accounted for participants' ethical orientation to minimize the potential confounding effect across two conditions. The one-item measure adopted from Whalen et al. (1991) was rated on a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree."

The Effectiveness of Manipulation

To ensure successful manipulation of personal-related versus societal-related brand transgressions, a four-item scale was used to measure the extent to which the incident would cause problems in the participants' lives or in society, and the extent to which the outcomes of the incident would be associated with their own interests or society's interests. These questions were investigated along with a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" (personal-relate: $\alpha = .80$,

societal-related: $\alpha = .90$). Two index scores were formulated by average corresponding personal-related and societal-related items, respectively.

The four-item believability measure was assessed on a seven-point, semantic differential scale (not believable-believable, not credible-credible, not convincing-convincing, and unlikely-likely) (average index: $\alpha = .91$).

The four-item severity scale was adopted from Weun et al. (2004) to assess participants' perceptions of the severity of the presented brand transgression incident. These items were tested on a seven-point scale, ranging from 1= "not at all" to 7= "extremely" (average index: $\alpha = .75$).

Coping Responses to a Brand Transgression

The main dependent variables of this study were participants' specific coping responses to brand transgressions. The exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of behavioral outcomes was adapted from A. Hirschman's (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) scales where each subscale included three items. All question items were measured using a seven-point scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." They were found to be reliable for measuring participants' exit ($\alpha = .84$), voice ($\alpha = .89$), loyalty ($\alpha = .79$), and neglect responses ($\alpha = .79$). A single index score for each construct was formed by averaging the corresponding items.

The relationship continuous intention measure was adapted from Algesheimer and colleagues' (2005) membership continuous intention scale to determine subjects' willingness to stay in the brand relationship after reading about the brand transgression. These measurement items were examined along seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" (average index: $\alpha = .81$).

Consumers' repurchase intention was measured using Kuenzel and Halliday's (2008) three-item scale, aiming to examine whether the brand would remain preferred and be purchased again by the subjects in the future. All items were rated along seven-point Likert scales, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree" (average index: $\alpha = .92$).

Finally, participants' brand evaluation (repeated measure) was taken on three items adopted from Aggarwal (2004) (dislike-like, dissatisfied-satisfied, unfavorable-favorable) using a seven-point scale ($\alpha = .96$). Participants answered this set of questions before their exposure to the brand transgression manipulation and after their exposure to the self-affirmation manipulation. The brand evaluation change score was created by taking the before and after differences.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

A total of 250 U.S. automobile consumers were recruited through Amazon's MTurk. The final sample of 191 respondents was used for data analysis after eliminating incomplete responses and respondents who exhibited extreme and consistent rating patterns. Of the 191 participants, 48.2% (or 92) were male and 51.8% (or 99) were female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 74 with a mean age of 37.56 years. The majority of the respondents classified themselves as Caucasian (84.8%, or 162), single (38.7%, or 74), holding a college degree (40.3%, or 77), and having an annual household income level at \$20,000-\$29,999. Table 8.1 demonstrates sample distributions by age, gender, ethnicity, education, marital status, and annual household income.

Table 8.1: Sample Demographic Information (N = 191)

Demographic Variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
<i>Male</i>	92	48.2
<i>Female</i>	99	51.8
Age		
<i>18-30</i>	75	39.3
<i>31-40</i>	46	24.1
<i>41-50</i>	33	17.3
<i>Over 50</i>	37	19.4
Ethnicity		
<i>Caucasian</i>	162	84.8
<i>Asian</i>	8	4.2
<i>African-American</i>	12	6.3
<i>Hispanic</i>	5	2.6
<i>Other</i>	4	2.1
Education		
<i>High school or equivalent</i>	17	8.9
<i>Vocational/technical school (2 years)</i>	7	3.7
<i>Some college</i>	58	30.4
<i>College graduate (4 years)</i>	77	40.3
<i>Master's degree</i>	24	12.6
<i>Doctoral degree</i>	4	2.1
<i>Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)</i>	4	2.1
Marital		
<i>Single</i>	74	38.7
<i>Married</i>	69	36.1
<i>Divorced</i>	15	7.9
<i>Living with someone</i>	28	14.7
<i>Separated</i>	1	5
<i>Widowed</i>	3	1.6
<i>Other</i>	1	5
Annual Household Income		
<i>Under \$10,000</i>	10	5.2
<i>\$10,000-\$19,999</i>	18	9.4
<i>\$20,000-\$29,999</i>	36	18.8
<i>\$30,000-\$39,999</i>	25	13.1
<i>\$40,000-\$49,999</i>	23	12.0
<i>\$50,000-\$74,999</i>	35	18.3
<i>\$75,000-\$99,999</i>	23	12.0
<i>Over \$100,000</i>	18	9.4
<i>Other</i>	3	1.6

The brands of participants' primary vehicles varied. A total of 31 brands emerged from the sample: about 18.8% (or 36) were Ford, followed by Honda (13.1%, or 25), Toyota (12%, or 23), Chevrolet (6.3%, or 12), and others. About 60.2% (or 115) participants claimed that their vehicle was a pre-owned car when they bought it, while 38.7% (or 74) purchase their vehicles new and 1% (or 2) leased or had another arrangement. On average, they reported that they had been driving the vehicle for about 4.58 years, ranging from eight months to 18 years.

Manipulation Check

To ensure the effectiveness of the manipulation, participants were instructed to report whether the presented brand transgression report would cause a problem in their lives or in society (Personal: $N = 99$, 40 were in the self-affirmation condition; Societal: $N = 92$, 50 were in the self-affirmation condition). As expected, the fictitious consumer report used for the personal-related condition was perceived to be significantly more related to participants' personal outcomes than the one used for the societal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 3.79$, $SD_{personal} = 1.53$; $M_{societal} = 2.99$, $SD_{societal} = 1.16$; $t(189) = 4.07$, $p < .001$, $d = .59$). In contrast, the consumer report used for the societal-related condition was perceived to be significantly more related to the society's outcome ($M_{personal} = 3.00$, $SD_{personal} = 1.41$; $M_{societal} = 4.36$, $SD_{societal} = 1.32$; $t(189) = -6.84$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.00$). The perceived believability ($M_{personal} = 4.89$, $SD_{personal} = 1.32$; $M_{societal} = 4.82$, $SD_{societal} = 1.17$; $t(189) = .39$, $p = .70$, $d = .06$) and severity of the fictitious report did not differ across the two conditions ($M_{personal} = 4.53$, $SD_{personal} = 1.00$; $M_{societal} = 4.73$, $SD_{societal} = .95$; $t(189) = -1.42$, $p = .16$, $d = -.21$).

Table 8.2: The Effectiveness of Manipulation–Study Three

	Personal		Societal		t-value	p-value
	(N=99)		(N=92)			
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Personal	3.79	1.53	2.99	1.16	4.07	.000
Societal	3.00	1.41	4.36	1.32	-6.84	.000
Believability	4.89	1.32	4.82	1.17	.39	.70
Severity	4.53	1.00	54.73	.95	-1.45	.16

Hypothesis Testing

By employing the manipulation of self-affirmation, Study Three further investigated the assumptions that highly fused participants would still be benevolent toward their preferred brands following transgression incidents, even when the self-threatening capacity and defensiveness was reduced by affirming their self-worth. Study Three proposes that self-affirmation manipulation may influence how highly fused participants cope with different types of brand transgressions; however, the manipulation should not create a breach between the brand and the self. Expanding the set of coping responses used in previous studies, Study Three also examined participants' evaluation of the brand in trouble to determine whether they would be self-focused rather than brand-focused. To test the mechanism through which highly fused participants would engage in relationship-serving activities, a series of multiple regression analyses was employed.

Coping Responses to a Brand Transgression

As in previous studies, a centered version of consumer identity fusion, brand identification, and ethical orientation was created by subtracting the corresponding mean

score ($M_{\text{fusion}} = 3.26$, $SD_{\text{fusion}} = 1.25$; $M_{\text{identification}} = 3.13$, $SD_{\text{identification}} = 1.13$; $M_{\text{ethical}} = 2.77$, $SD_{\text{ethical}} = 1.70$). Cross-product variables were created for testing interaction terms of interest. Consumers' responses to a brand transgression were measured using the exit-voice-loyalty-neglect typology of responses, relationship continuous intention, repurchase intention, and brand evaluation (repeated measure). The brand evaluation change score was created by taking the before and after differences. Participants' ethical orientation was controlled for by entering it in the first step of the regression. Each outcome variable was then regressed onto types of brand transgressions (coded 0 for personal-related and 1 for societal-related), self-affirmation (coded -1 for affirmation and 1 for no affirmation), consumer identity fusion (centered), brand identification (centered), and the expected interactions. Multicollinearity was diagnosed in each regression model as consumer identity fusion and brand identification were positively correlated ($r(189) = .68$, $p < .001$).

The exit regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .18$, $F(14, 176) = 2.71$, $p \leq .001$). Overall, participants' ethical orientation was only marginally significant in predicting their use of exit coping strategies ($\beta = .13$, $t(176) = 1.80$, $p = .07$), indicating that the more participants agreed it was impossible to conduct a profitable business by adhering to strict ethical standards, the more likely they would employ exit responses. There was a significant main effect of brand transgression types ($\beta = .18$, $t(176) = 2.16$, $p < .05$), such that participants in the personal-related condition were less likely to exit the brand relationship than were participants in the societal-related condition ($M_{\text{personal}} = 3.67$, $SD_{\text{personal}} = 1.34$; $M_{\text{societal}} = 3.98$, $SD_{\text{societal}} = 1.13$). Also, there was a significant fusion main effect ($\beta = -.47$, $t(176) = -3.08$, $p < .01$); thus, highly fused participants were less likely to exit the brand relationship than weakly fused participants. Moreover, the

interaction between consumer identity fusion and brand identification was significant ($\beta = .32, t(176) = 3.03, p < .005$). No self-affirmation main effect ($\beta = -.05, t(176) = -.53, p = .60$) and two-way interaction effects emerged between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = .08, t(176) = .53, p = .60$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = .08, t(176) = .56, p = .58$), and brand transgression types and self-affirmation ($\beta = .05, t(176) = .48, p = .63$). However, the predicted three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation emerged ($\beta = -.27, t(176) = -1.84, p = .068$). To evaluate this interaction, the fusion and self-affirmation interaction effects were investigated separately for the personal-related and the societal-related condition, respectively. The personal-related model was significant ($R^2 = .21, F(7, 91) = 3.43, p < .01$), while the societal-related model was not ($R^2 = .12, F(7, 91) = 1.66, p = .13$). As shown in Figure 8.1, the self-affirmation manipulation significantly moderated how highly fused participants coped with personal-related brand transgressions. That is, compared with highly fused consumers in the no affirmation condition, highly fused consumers in the affirmation condition were less likely to exit the brand relationship when facing personal-related brand transgression incidents. Moreover, the effect was not significant for weakly fused participants in the face of personal-related transgression incidents. Nevertheless, the effect of self-affirmation did not significantly influence the way participants coped with societal-related brand transgressions. To note, the identification main effect, ($\beta = .06, t(176) = .46, p = .65$), the interaction effect between identification and brand transgression types ($\beta = -.04, t(176) = -.29, p = .77$), identification and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.14, t(176) = -1.06, p = .29$), and the three-way interaction ($\beta = .22, t(176) = 1.59, p = .11$) were not significant.

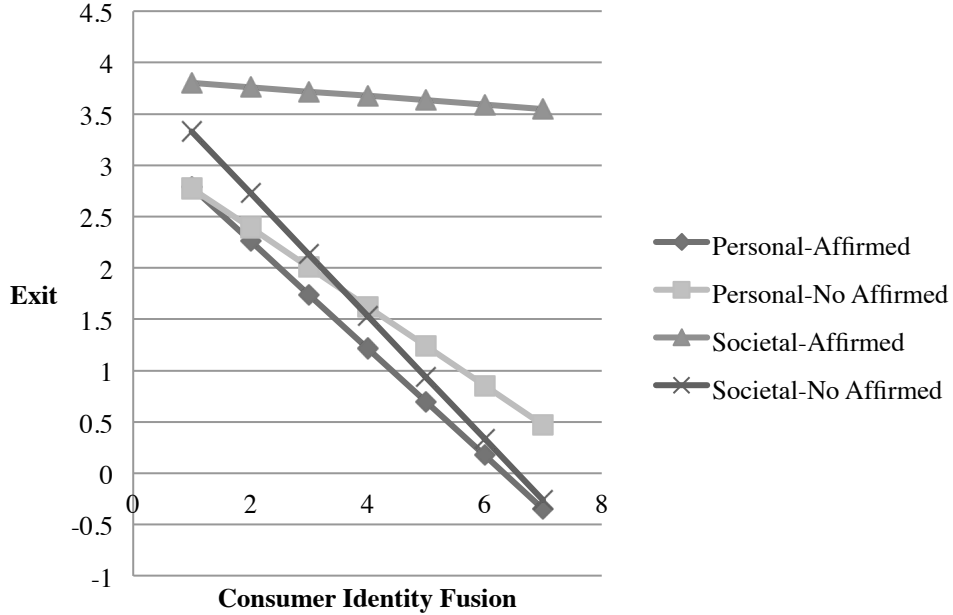


Figure 8.1: Exit as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation

The voice regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .29$, $F(14, 176) = 5.06$, $p < .001$). Participants' ethical orientation did not influence their use of voice coping behaviors ($\beta = -.02$, $t(176) = -.36$, $p = .72$). There was a significant main effect of brand transgression types ($\beta = -.21$, $t(176) = -2.58$, $p < .05$), suggesting that participants in the personal-related condition were more likely to undertake voice coping strategies than participants in the societal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 4.09$, $SD_{personal} = 1.33$; $M_{societal} = 3.37$, $SD_{societal} = 1.50$). No other significant effects emerged from the analysis, including the main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = .23$, $t(176) = 1.65$, $p = .10$), the main effect of self-affirmation ($\beta = .05$, $t(176) = .51$, $p = .61$), two-way interaction effects between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = -.05$, $t(176) = -.34$, $p = .73$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.04$, $t(176) = -.32$, $p = .75$),

brand transgression types and self-affirmation ($\beta = .06, t(176) = .69, p = .50$), and the three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation emerged ($\beta = .08, t(176) = .58, p = .57$) (see Figure 8.2). Moreover, the identification main effect, ($\beta = .21, t(176) = 1.63, p = .10$), the interaction effect between identification and brand transgression types ($\beta = .15, t(176) = 1.07, p = .29$), identification and self-affirmation ($\beta = .03, t(176) = .25, p = .80$), and the three-way interaction identification \times brand transgression types \times self-affirmation ($\beta = -.03, t(176) = -.20, p = .85$) were not significant.

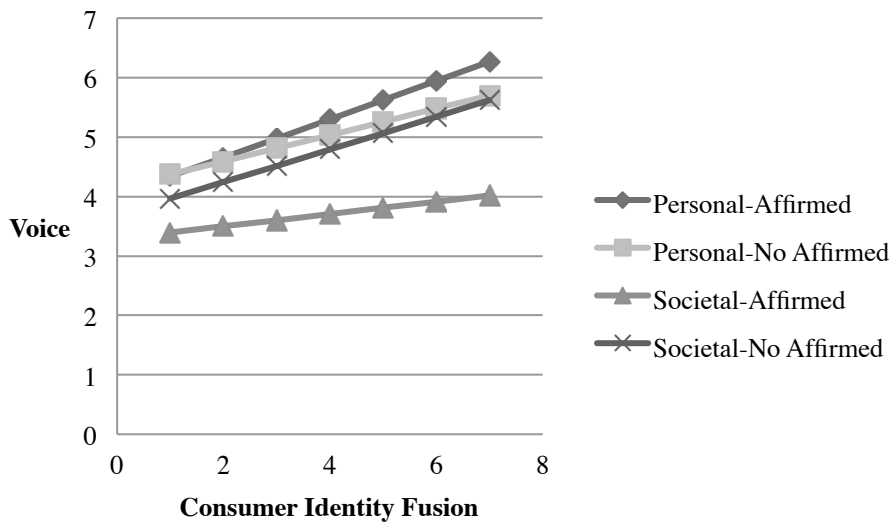


Figure 8.2: Voice as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation

The loyalty regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .15, F(14, 176) = 3.06, p < .01$). Participants' ethical orientation was not significant ($\beta = -.04, t(176) = -.57, p = .57$). Some expected effects did not emerge, including the main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = .23, t(176) = 1.46, p = .15$), the main effect of brand transgression types ($\beta = .07, t(176) = .90, p = .37$), the main effect of self-affirmation ($\beta = .08, t(176)$

= .80, $p = .43$), two-way interaction effects between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = -.02$, $t(176) = -.11$, $p = .91$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.23$, $t(176) = -1.5$, $p = .12$), brand transgression types and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.14$, $t(176) = -1.37$, $p = .17$), and the three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .2$, $t(176) = 1.538$, $p = .13$). Interestingly, the three-way interaction between identification, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation was significant ($\beta = -.29$, $t(176) = -2.03$, $p < .05$). There was also a marginal two-way interaction between identification and self-affirmation ($\beta = .25$, $t(176) = 1.78$, $p = .076$) and an identification main effect ($\beta = .26$, $t(176) = 1.85$, $p = .065$). To further probe these effects, the identification and self-affirmation interaction effects were investigated separately for the personal-related and the societal-related condition, respectively. While the personal-related model was significant ($R^2 = .18$, $F(7, 91) = 2.78$, $p < .05$), the societal-related model was not ($R^2 = .11$, $F(7, 91) = 1.40$, $p = .22$). Therefore, the self-affirmation manipulation moderated how participants' coped with personal-related brand transgressions. Specifically, highly identified participants in the no affirmation condition were more likely to incorporate loyalty coping strategies than weakly identified participants when facing personal-related brand transgressions ($R^2 = .18$, $F(4, 54) = 2.84$, $p < .05$). However, such differences did not emerge in the affirmation condition when facing personal-related brand transgressions ($R^2 = .19$, $F(4, 54) = 1.98$, $p = .12$) (see Figure 8.3).

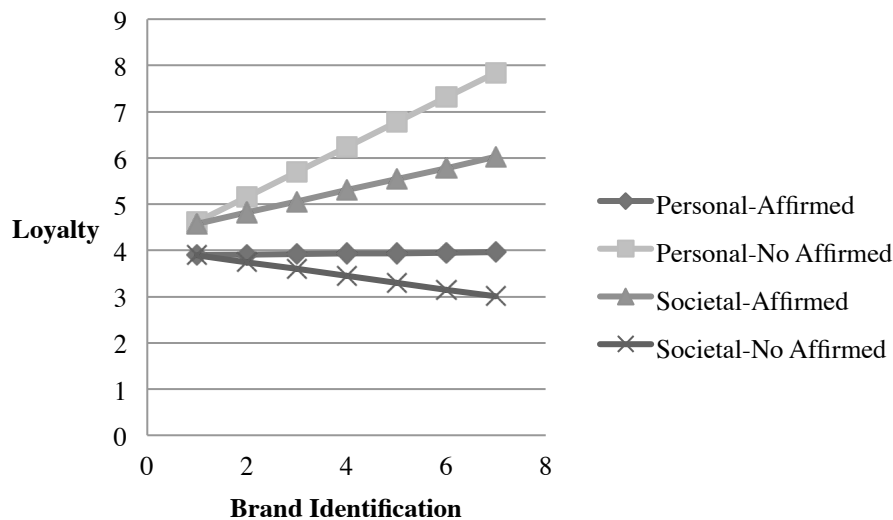


Figure 8.3: Loyalty as a Function of Brand Identification, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation

The neglect regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .16$, $F(14, 176) = 2.25$, $p < .01$). Participants' ethical orientation influenced their use of neglect coping behaviors ($\beta = .21$, $t(176) = 2.98$, $p < .005$), such that the more participants agreed it was impossible to conduct a profitable business by adhering to strict ethical standards, the more likely they would be to engage in neglect responses. There was also a significant main effect of brand transgression types ($\beta = .21$, $t(176) = 2.38$, $p < .05$), suggesting that participants in the societal-related condition were more likely to neglect the effect of negative brand information than were participants in the personal-related condition ($M_{personal} = 3.09$, $SD_{personal} = 1.14$; $M_{societal} = 3.20$, $SD_{societal} = 1.01$) (see Figure 8.4). The interaction between consumer identity fusion and brand identification was also significant ($\beta = .31$, $t(176) = 2.86$, $p \leq .005$). However, no other effects emerged from the analysis, including the main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = -.21$, $t(176) = -1.38$, $p = .17$), the main effect of self-affirmation ($\beta = -.08$, $t(176) = -.75$, $p = .45$), two-way interaction

effects between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = -.05, t(176) = -.33, p = .74$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = .05, t(176) = .36, p = .72$), brand transgression types and self-affirmation ($\beta = .06, t(176) = .63, p = .53$), and the three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.10, t(176) = -.64, p = .52$). In addition, the identification main effect, ($\beta = -.01, t(176) = -.10, p = .93$), the interaction effect between identification and brand transgression types ($\beta = .15, t(176) = 1.05, p = .30$), identification and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.15, t(176) = -1.12, p = .26$), and the three-way interaction ($\beta = .13, t(176) = .91, p = .36$) were not significant.

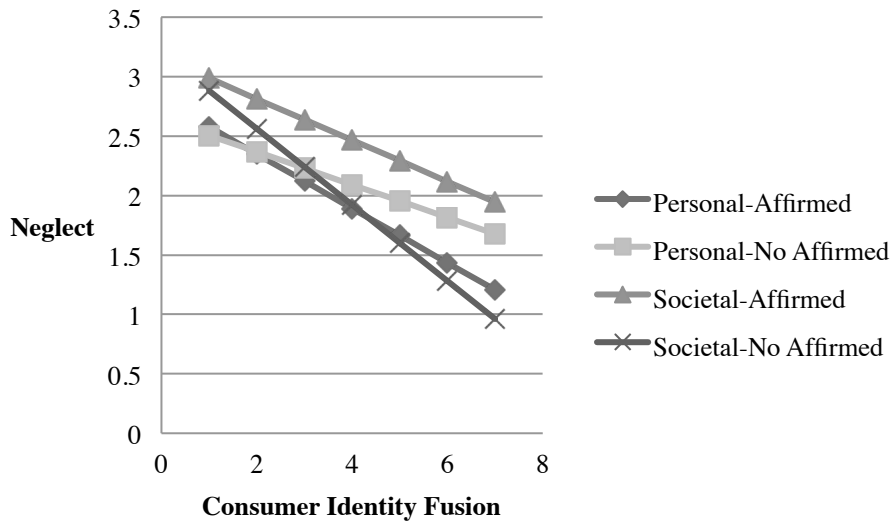


Figure 8.4: Neglect as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation

The relationship continuous intention regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .50, F(14, 176) = 12.75, p < .001$). Participants' ethical orientation influenced whether they would be willing to continue the brand relationship ($\beta = -.13, t(176) = -2.43, p < .05$), with relationship continuous intention decreasing with the idea

that it was impossible to conduct a profitable business by adhering to strict ethical standards. There was a significant main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = .67, t(176) = 5.71, p < .001$), suggesting that participants' willingness to stay in the brand relationship after brand transgressions increased with the degree to which they feel fused with the brand. Interestingly, the interaction between brand transgression types and self-affirmation appeared ($\beta = -.17, t(176) = -2.20, p < .05$). The results showed that, in the face of a personal-related brand transgression incident, participants who received the self-affirmation manipulation were less likely to continue the brand relationship than were participants in the no affirmation condition (Personal: $N = 40, M_{Affirmation} = 3.53, SD_{Affirmation} = 1.31$; $N = 59, M_{No Affirmation} = 4.07, SD_{No Affirmation} = 1.35$; $t(97) = -1.98, p = .05, d = -.41$). Differently, participants who obtained the self-affirmation manipulation after societal-related brand transgression incidents were more likely to continue the brand relationship than were participants without affirmation condition (Societal: $N = 50, M_{Affirmation} = 3.96, SD_{Affirmation} = 1.28$; $N = 42, M_{No Affirmation} = 3.90, SD_{No Affirmation} = 1.18$; $t(90) = .21, p = .83, d = .05$) (see Figure 8.5). The findings qualified the main effect of self-affirmation ($\beta = .19, t(176) = 2.47, p < .05$), showing that participants tended to be less likely to continue the brand relationship if their self-worth was affirmed after brand transgressions ($M_{Affirmation} = 3.77, SD_{Affirmation} = 1.31$) than those whose self-worth was not affirmed ($M_{No Affirmation} = 4.00, SD_{No Affirmation} = 1.28$). The interaction between consumer identity fusion and brand identification was also significant in this model ($\beta = -.23, t(182) = -2.76, p < .01$). However, no other effects emerged from the analysis: the main effect of brand transgression types ($\beta = -.01, t(176) = -.19, p = .85$), two-way interaction effects between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = -.03, t(176) = -.25, p = .80$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = .03, t(176) = .02, p = .98$),

and the three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .07, t(176) = -.63, p = .53$). In addition, the identification main effect, ($\beta = .09, t(176) = .82, p = .41$), the interaction effect between identification and brand transgression types ($\beta = .07, t(176) = .66, p = .51$), identification and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.06, t(176) = -.63, p = .53$), and the three-way interaction among identification, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .03, t(176) = .28, p = .78$) were not significant.

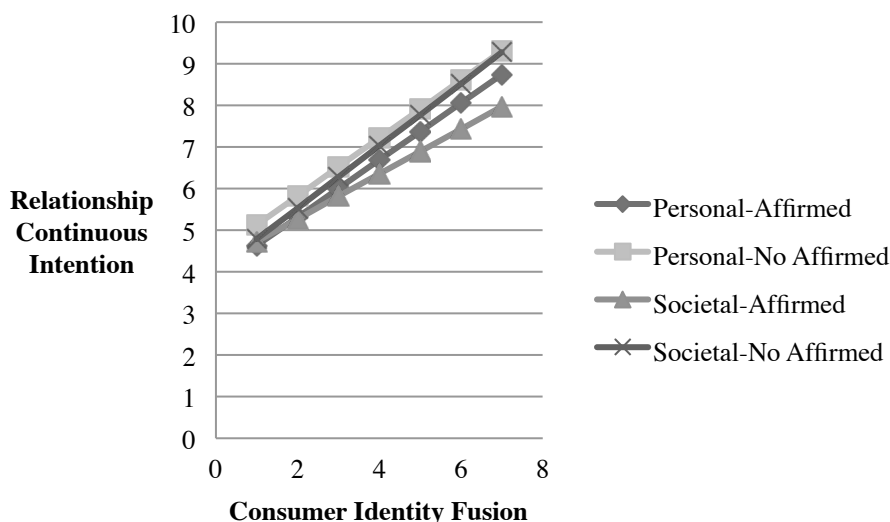


Figure 8.5: Relationship Continuous Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation

The repurchase intention regression model was statistically significant ($R^2 = .26, F(14, 176) = 4.40, p < .001$). Note that participants' ethical orientation was not significant in determining their repurchase intention ($\beta = -.11, t(176) = -1.61, p = .11$). There was a significant main effect of consumer identity fusion ($\beta = .38, t(176) = 2.64, p < .05$), such that participants' repurchase intention following brand transgressions increased with the

consumer identity fusion level. The main effect of self-affirmation also emerged ($\beta = .19$, $t(176) = 2.47$, $p < .05$), showing that participants in the affirmation condition were less likely to repurchase from the brand after brand transgressions ($M_{Affirmation} = 4.48$, $SD_{Affirmation} = 1.30$) than those in the no affirmation condition ($M_{No Affirmation} = 4.81$, $SD_{No Affirmation} = 1.37$) (see Figure 8.6). Besides, other effects did not show significance from the analysis, including the main effect of brand transgression types ($\beta = -.06$, $t(176) = -.69$, $p = .49$), two-way interaction effects between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = .03$, $t(176) = .21$, $p = .84$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = .18$, $t(176) = 1.31$, $p = .19$), brand transgression types and self-affirmation ($\beta = .14$, $t(176) = 1.07$, $p = .29$), and the three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .002$, $t(176) = .01$, $p = .99$). Moreover, the identification main effect, ($\beta = .14$, $t(176) = 1.07$, $p = .29$), the interaction effect between identification and brand transgression types ($\beta = .006$, $t(176) = .05$, $p = .96$), identification and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.23$, $t(176) = -1.80$, $p = .07$), and the three-way interaction effect among identification, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .12$, $t(176) = .87$, $p = .39$) all were not significant.

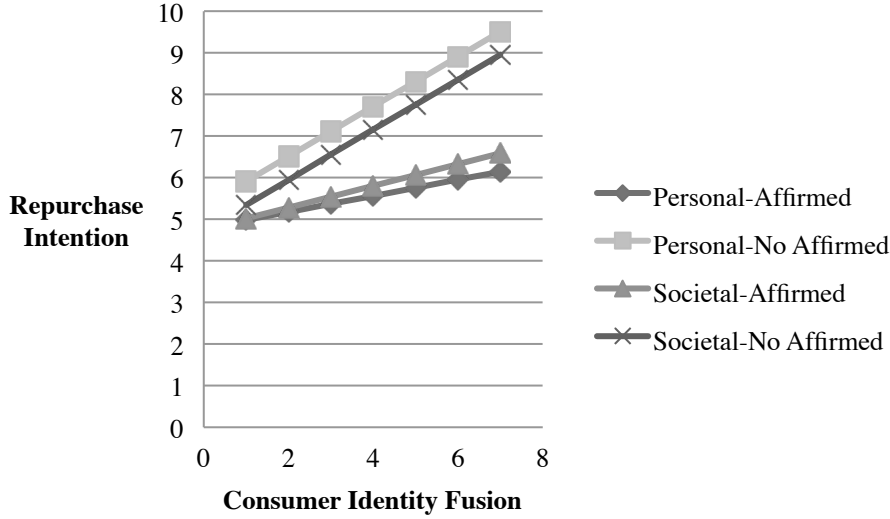


Figure 8.6: Repurchase Intention as a Function of Consumer Identity Fusion, Transgression Types, and Self-Affirmation

The brand evaluation regression model was not significant ($R^2 = .10$, $F(14, 176) = 1.41$, $p = .16$). Participants' ethical orientation was not significant in predicting their brand evaluation change after encountering brand transgressions ($\beta = .12$, $t(176) = 1.60$, $p = .11$). The results showed that there were no main effects of brand transgression types ($\beta = -.03$, $t(176) = -.38$, $p = .71$), consumer identity fusion ($\beta = -.01$, $t(176) = -.07$, $p = .94$), and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.08$, $t(176) = -.81$, $p = .42$). Moreover, there were no two-way interaction effects between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types ($\beta = -.22$, $t(176) = -1.42$, $p = .16$), consumer identity fusion and self-affirmation ($\beta = -.02$, $t(176) = -.10$, $p = .92$), brand transgression types and self-affirmation ($\beta = .14$, $t(176) = 1.32$, $p = .19$), and the three-way interaction between fusion, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .08$, $t(176) = .52$, $p = .61$). Finally, the identification main effect, ($\beta = .15$, $t(176) = 1.06$, $p = .29$), the interaction effect between identification and brand transgression types ($\beta = .08$, $t(176) = .49$, $p = .62$), identification and self-affirmation ($\beta =$

-.01, $t(176) = -.10, p = .92$), and the three-way interaction effect among identification, brand transgression types, and self-affirmation ($\beta = .01, t(176) = .09, p = .93$) all were not significant either.

In sum, the results of Study Three indicated that, compared with brand identification, consumer identity fusion was a stronger predictor in predicting participants' coping responses in terms of exit, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention. Highly fused participants were more likely to continue the exiting relationship with the brand, more likely to buy from the brand again, and were less likely to exit the brand relationship when encountering brand transgression incidents. Moreover, the expected three-way interaction among fusion, transgression types, and self-affirmation on consumers' reactions to brand transgressions was found only for exit responses. Specifically, the self-affirmation manipulation significantly moderated how highly fused participants coped with personal-related brand transgressions but in a different direction. The findings showed that highly fused consumers in the self-affirming condition were more likely to undertake pro-relationship coping responses (i.e., exit) than those in the no affirmation condition, even though they received an affirmation of self-integrity that were supposed to reduce their self-protective pressures. Therefore, H5 was only partially supported.

Note that brand identification appeared to be a stronger predictor than consumer identity fusion in predicting loyalty coping strategies. The findings showed that the self-affirmation manipulation moderated how highly identified participants' coped with personal-related brand transgressions. Highly identified participants in the no affirmation condition were more likely to incorporate loyalty coping strategies than weakly identified participants when facing personal-related brand transgressions; however, highly

identified participants' loyalty responses did not differ from weakly identified participants in the personal-related condition after receiving self-affirmation manipulation.

Finally, the brand evaluation model was not statistically significant. Hence, not much information was available to further the discussion about whether self-affirmation would influence the effect of brand transgression types on brand evaluations for highly fused consumers specifically (RQ1).

DISCUSSION

To further understand the nature of consumer identity fusion and the interplay of fused consumers' personal and social identities in the face of brand transgressions, Study Three examined whether highly fused consumers' intention of engaging in pro-relationship behaviors would decrease, rather than maintain, following the self-affirmation task. Similar to earlier studies, the results of this study first showed that consumer identity fusion is a stronger predictor than brand identification in understanding why consumers would undertake pro-relationship behaviors (i.e. exit, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention) when facing brand transgressions. This study also extended the practical implication of earlier studies by examining the application of consumer identity fusion in a different product category, automobile.

Moreover, the conceptualization of consumer identity fusion yielded a different prediction with regard to consumer reactions to brand transgressions than existing empirical findings currently suggest. Because fused consumers experience porous borders between their personal and social identities, their relationship-sustaining behaviors would reflect both their personal and the brand-related social identity. Therefore, Study Three predicted that highly fused consumers would maintain favorable pro-relationship

behavioral tendencies toward the brand in trouble, following self-affirming activities. In this sense, even though highly fused consumers can find a way to protect their perceived integrity and worth of the self without defending the brand in trouble, their defensive pro-relationship behaviors would not then be absent. Specifically, the study findings showed that highly fused consumers in the affirmation condition were less likely to exit the brand relationship than those in the no affirmation condition when facing personal-related brand transgressions, even though self-affirmation should reduce the negative effect of brand transgressions (Ahluwalia & Gurhan-Canli, 2000).

One explanation for these findings could be that the self-affirmation task did not decrease highly fused consumers' tendency to defend the failed brand by protecting a valued identity or a positive self-view. Instead, their personal identities were accessed and activated through the self-affirmation manipulation, thereby combining with the brand-related social identities synergistically to amplify pro-relationship behaviors (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012). The literature suggests that self-affirmation may distort the effect of brand transgressions on consumers' coping responses (Meloy, 2000): thus, self-affirmation manipulation of identities may also prompt highly fused consumers to maintain the relationship with the brand. Hence, the conceptualization of consumer identity fusion found in this study identified behavioral consequences that differ from those found by Cheng and colleagues' (2012). For highly fused consumers, their connections with the brand are also personal so it is logical to expect that they, too, would undertake pro-relationship behaviors to protect the brand in trouble after receiving the self-affirmation manipulation.

It is important to note that brand identification emerged as a stronger predictor than consumer identity fusion in promoting loyalty responses following brand

transgressions. Similar to results of Cheng et al.'s (2012) study, if highly identified consumers were given a way to defend themselves without defending the brand in trouble, their inclinations to engage in loyalty responses would be lower despite being highly committed to the brand. Specifically, in the personal-related condition, highly identified consumers that received no affirmation were more likely to incorporate loyalty coping strategies than weakly identified participants. However, as mentioned above, highly identified consumers' pro-relationship responses were decreased, rather than maintained, following the self-affirmation manipulation. These findings further suggest that consumer identity fusion and brand identification differ in the motivational implications and predict different outcomes. This is a novel investigation as existing research has not yet distinguished the differential effects each predicts empirically in the context of consumer-brand relationship.

While highly fused consumers perceive their personal self and brand-related social self as being so deeply connected that they view brand transgressions as a direct threat to their personal identity and respond to it actively (i.e. exit), as they do to personal failure, highly identified consumers' brand-related social self determines how they respond passively (i.e., loyalty) to threats concerning the category they are identified with (Ellemers et al., 2002; Levine & Crowther, 2008). That is, highly fused consumers react to brand transgressions in ways to protect both their personal and social identities, whereas highly identified consumers are concerned about whether the brand performance may reflect on their self-concept and rely on the guidelines of the brand-related social category when responding to brand transgressions. Thus, what is characteristically seen as relationship-serving behavior of highly identified consumers can also come about as an attempt to compensate for more individual concerns in terms of what they may be seen as

when threats originate from the category of inclusion (Ellemers et al., 2002). As contextual changes influence self-definitions and identity concerns and result in a substantial change in one's level of identification (Turner, 1987, 1999), the self-threatening capacity and tendencies of engaging in pro-group behaviors among highly identified consumers would therefore decrease following the self-affirmation task.

Taken together, the findings of this study underline the importance of consumer identity fusion as a powerful feeling of connectedness with a brand, which is beyond a consumer's allegiance to the social category associated with the brand. Highly fused consumers enact pro-relationship behaviors in the face of personal-related brand transgressions; their coping responses reflect both their personal and brand-related social identities, working together by virtue of the porous boundaries that define them. Such mutual influence processes that occur between highly fused consumers' personal and social self increase the chances that highly fused consumers would tether their feelings of personal agency to protect the brand in trouble more readily after self-affirmation tasks. Despite this, the interaction effect was found only for highly fused consumers' exit coping strategies. Besides this behavioral outcome, no significant results emerged for determining highly fused consumers' change in brand evaluations. Considering that this study proposed a motivational dynamic of relationship coping strategies among highly fused consumers that differs from findings by Cheng and colleagues (2012) regarding the impact of self-affirmation on consumers with strong brand relationships, more examination is needed to further understand the nature and distinct characteristics of consumer identity fusion both conceptually and empirically.

Chapter 9: General Discussion

Considering that strong consumer-brand relationships offer beneficial economic profits to marketers and provide meaning-laden resources to consumers, scholarship concerning the value and the underlying mechanism of strong consumer-brand relationships is growing in both size and sophistication (Fournier, 1998; C. Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2009). While existing literature describes strong brand relationships along several dimensions, this research sheds light on the identity perspective of brand relationships through the lens of consumer identity fusion, aiming to investigate the extent to which consumers incorporate brands into their self-perceptions.

The central tenet of this research is that consumer identity fusion, as a distinct form of allegiance to brands, entails the merger of a consumer's personal and brand-related social identities in consumer-brand relationships. Such interconnectedness suggests that consumers may include close brands in the self, because brands serve as resources that can be viewed as part of the self, perspectives through which consumers see the world, and that help to create identity that becomes part of the cognitive structure of the self (Reimann & A. Aron, 2009). Along this line of reasoning, highly fused consumers possess a strong sense of personal identity while the brand-related social identity is salient. The borders between consumers' personal and social identities become so permeable that the activation of either one will activate the other, thereby promoting activities that are emblematic of consumers' commitment to the brand. Thus, both types of identities support the connectedness that highly fused consumers feel toward the brand. This form of self-brand connection is particularly important when consumers encounter brand transgressions, given that their desire for stable self-views may trigger compensatory self-verification strivings (Swann, 2011). These compensatory behaviors

will then reaffirm the identities that have been challenged due to brand transgressions and thus shore up feelings of fusion that they support. Hence, this research investigated the nature and effects of consumer identity fusion and its motivational consequences following brand transgressions, thus providing insights into important aspects of consumer-brand relationships.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

As an early examination into the nature of consumer identity fusion in the context of consumer-brand dyad, this research is considered the first to assess the discriminant validity of the measure of consumer identity fusion. The psychometric analyses performed in Study One and Study Two supported the distinction between consumer identity fusion and brand identification scales. Specifically, the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) of all items of the fusion scale and the brand identification scale revealed two factors, with each factor including corresponding items. The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) further verified the two-factor solution. The findings together suggest that consumer identity fusion is related to, but distinct from, brand identification.

Through a comparison with brand identification, the empirical findings resulting from an expanded set of brand transgression conditions (i.e., severity and types of transgressions) showed that, in most cases, consumer identity fusion is more predictive and enduring in explaining consumers' biased assimilation and the mechanism through which they would counter-argue for the brands and actively engage in pro-relationship maintenance behaviors. Generally speaking, highly fused consumers are capable of acting in ways that differ from the group prototype assumed in social identity theory (e.g., Tajel & Turner, 1979); their personal and social identities complement rather than compete with one another to promote pro-relationship coping strategies when encountering brand

transgressions. The feelings of connectedness among highly fused consumers foster strong relational ties to the brand relational partner.

Study One showed that, on the one hand, highly fused consumers were more likely to undertake constructive coping strategies (i.e., voice and relationship continuous intention) than were weakly fused consumers regardless of the severity of a brand transgression incident, while controlling for identification. In this sense, the powerful effect of consumer identity fusion surpasses the moderating effect of perceived severity that has been documented in the literature (e.g., Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Einwiller et al., 2006). On the other hand, highly fused consumers were less likely to engage in destructive coping strategies (i.e., exit) than weakly fused consumers when facing minor brand transgressions. Thus, highly fused consumers tended to respond to brand transgressions by endorsing active pro-relationship behaviors to reaffirm their identities. However, such a buffering effect of consumer identity fusion on consumers' exit coping responses to a brand transgression was absent when presenting consumers with severe brand transgressions.

Similarly, Study Two demonstrated that the effect of consumer identity fusion was stronger than that of brand identification across different behavioral outcomes (i.e., exit, voice, loyalty, neglect, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention) despite the types of brand transgressions. Consumer identity fusion had a greater effect on participants' coping strategies among those in the personal-related brand transgression condition than among those in the societal-related brand transgression condition. As the outcomes of personal-related brand transgressions usually affect consumers' personal interests, highly fused consumers tend to perceive this type of brand transgressions (i.e., product defect and service-related crises) as greater threats to their self-integrity

Therefore, highly fused consumers may more readily perform defensive responses toward personal-related brand transgressions than toward societal-related transgressions. Specifically, the expected interaction effect between consumer identity fusion and brand transgression types on consumers' coping responses was found for exit responses.

Study Three further supported the notion that consumer identity fusion is a stronger predictor than brand identification for determining consumers' tendencies to undertake pro-relationship behaviors (i.e. exit, relationship continuous intention, and repurchase intention) when facing brand transgressions. To scrutinize the interplay of highly fused consumers' personal and social identity and the underlying motivational mechanism of their relationship-sustaining behaviors, Study Three extended Cheng et al.'s (2012) "brand as self" conceptualization and employed the self-affirmation task in the examination. The findings underscored that highly fused consumers in the affirmation condition were less likely to exit the brand relationship than those in the no affirmation condition when facing personal-related brand transgressions, even though self-affirmation should reduce the negative effect of brand transgressions. In contrast, highly identified consumers' loyalty responses were decreased, rather than maintained, following the self-affirmation manipulation. One explanation could be that, instead of reducing highly fused consumers' need to defend the failed brand and protect their positive self-view, the self-affirmation task helps to access and activate their agentic personal self and, in turn, promote and amplify pro-relationship behaviors (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012). This is novel in that it differs from findings by Cheng and colleagues (2012), concluding that highly fused consumers would remain in the exiting brand relationships following brand transgressions even when they have a chance to reaffirm their positive self-view.

To note, the expected relationships were not found for consumers' change in brand evaluation toward the brand in trouble.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Both academics and practitioners have highlighted the importance of relational ties between consumers and brands. Following that logic, this research contributes to the advertising, marketing and consumer psychology fields in that it provides a new perspective on self-brand connections, seeks to advance the current understanding and intensity of such connections, and shows insight into the formulation of brand relationship strategies in the context of consumer-brand relationships. Drawing on the concept of identity fusion as considered in social psychology as well as studies carried out in the consumer-object context, this research developed and validated the effect of consumer identity fusion on consumers' coping behaviors in the face of brand transgressions.

The findings of this research together suggest that consumer identity fusion is applicable for understanding connections between consumers and the brand relationship partner in consumer-brand relationships. Consumer identity fusion is not a variant of brand identification, given its distinct theoretical assumptions (Swann et al., 2009; Swann et al., 2012) and empirical findings. Highly fused consumers tend to perceive the brand favorably when encountering a brand transgression incident, given that the failure is viewed as a direct threat to their own positive self-view. This appears to occur because the union between the personal self and the brand is so strong that the self-brand distinction is blurred to them. The borders between fused consumers' personal self and social self are highly permeable so that aspects of both constructs may reinforce, rather than compete with, one another (Swann et al., 2012). In this sense, the failure on the part

of the brand would be experienced as a personal failure among highly fused consumers. As a result, both constructs may combine synergistically to promote constructive and active pro-relationship coping responses among highly fused consumers. In that vein, the conceptualization of consumer identity fusion reveals a form of alignment that involves tethering individual agency to work for the outcomes of the consumer-brand dyad. The application of fusion theory demonstrates the degree to which fused consumers endorse relationship-serving behaviors that favor brands in trouble, ranging from different severity to different types to different product categories. Although the results of three experiments varied somewhat in their predicting outcomes, consumer identity fusion stayed as a strong predictor in predicting consumers' exit and relationship continuous intent behaviors.

Moreover, the results of Study Three showed the irrevocable nature of consumer identity fusion. Once fused, consumers tend to remain fused (Swann et al., 2012). The relational ties they develop with the brand relationship partner actually buttress their feelings of fusion. The powerful alignment with the brand would lock highly fused consumers into self-perpetuating interconnected bonds that stabilize the psychological structures that initiated such deeply committed consumer-brand relationships. By contrast, highly identified consumers' defensive reactions are derived from the desire to protect their positive personal selves rather than the threatened brand. Considering that brand identification research suggests that consumers develop relationships with a brand due to the ability of that brand to contribute to the identity consumers would like to obtain or maintain (Ashworth et al., 2009), highly identified consumers care more about what they may be seen as and, therefore, would respond to brand transgressions constructively but passively when threats originate from the brand-related social category

of inclusion. Thus, when the self-affirmation task reduces the intensity of highly identified consumers' self-threatening capacity, such removal of contextual support for their devotion to the brand would produce diminutions in the level of their brand identification (Swann et al., 2012).

This research provides theoretical and empirical support for the argument that consumer identity fusion is related to, but distinct from, brand identification. The conceptualization of consumer identity fusion integrates the existing self-brand connection themes by considering new ways by which consumers perceive that their personal identity is thoroughly enmeshed with what the brand represents. The self-brand connections are so strong among highly fused consumers that the feelings of oneness become relevant to their identity and self-concept and lead them to react to brand failure as they do to their own failure. Through the application of A. Hirschman's (1970) and Rusbult and Zembrodt's (1983) behavioral measures and additional branding outcomes, the findings of this research provide empirical evidence for determining how consumer identity fusion differs from brand identification in the motivational implication and resulting outcomes. Specifically, consumer identity fusion outperforms brand identification in predicting consumers' coping with brand transgressions. Highly fused consumers are more likely than weakly fused consumers to undertake active and constructive pro-group behaviors and are less likely to engage in destructive coping strategies, even after receiving self-affirming tasks. Therefore, this research adds to the literature observations about the moderating effect of strong consumer-brand relationships that may dilute the negativity effects of brand transgressions (Ahluwalia et al., 2000; Ditto & Lopez, 1992; Edwards & Smith, 1996; Wiseman, 1986), even though

some recent research has documented the downside to strong, self-relevant relationships with a brand (A. Johnson, Matear, & Thomson 2011).

While acknowledging contextual differences between consumer-brand relationships and social relationships, the current investigation focused on the consumer-brand dyad and is expected to further recognize the psychological implications of consumer-brand relationships that consumers develop and maintain. As the literature of consumer-brand relationships have borrowed the frameworks and typologies from the field of interpersonal relationships, this research applied the notion of identity fusion to the brand context and found unique and novel insights with regard to consumer-brand bonds. Considering the paralleled findings across contexts, this research further legitimizes that brand relationships are akin to interpersonal relationships in many ways, rather than serving as merely an exercise in metaphor.

In addition, this research has important implications for brands and marketers in that the conceptualization of consumer identity fusion reflects and captures the psychological oneness and constitutes a sustainable competitive advantage. For example, the findings of this research synthesized the core elements needed for strong consumer-brand relationships, highlighted some specific consumer profiles (e.g., diehard brand enthusiasts), and demonstrated how and why some consumers would undertake pro-relationship activities despite the level of severity and types of brand transgressions. Highly fused consumers tend to remain fused and more readily to engage in relationship-serving activities after their self-integrity is affirmed. In this regard, advertisers and marketers need to pay more attention to articulate and communicate their brand identities, images, and associations clearly and coherently. Besides the functional value proposition of a brand, a well-defined brand identity may engender consumer identity fusion,

immunize the brand from market disruptions, and lead to desirable attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Furthermore, advertiser and marketers may pursue strategies to nourish and transform brands from transactional to long-term communal-based relationship partners in consumers' minds to protect brands from the negative impact of brand transgressions.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the findings of this research are provocative, there are several limitations that should be considered when interpreting and applying the results. First, this research employed real brands with hypothetical transgression scenarios in an experimental setting. Though this approach helped control for confounding effects in relation to brand transgressions that happen in the real world, questions have been raised about the validity of such results as they do not mirror actual negative brand incidents and cannot capture consumers' actual behaviors when encountering brand transgressions. It would be of great value, therefore, to determine whether the pattern observed in this study recurs in field studies of the brands used in this research. In addition, other research methods, such as the critical incident technique, may be used to provide supplemental findings with regard to how consumers respond to real brand transgressions in ongoing consumer-brand relationships. In addition, an in-depth qualitative inquiry may be employed to further illuminate the lived experience and formation of fusion and fused consumers' behavioral intentions, such as the willingness to sacrifice and the willingness to endorse extreme pro-relationship behaviors, when dealing with brand transgressions in strong brand relationships.

While brands of two product categories (i.e., consumer electronics and automobiles) were included in the experiments with the intention of making the research

findings generalizable, a larger set of product categories that offer a wide variety of relationship types is needed to see whether the findings of this study are to be disproved or confirmed and extended. As for the samples used in the experiments, the lack of diversity in terms of gender in Study One and Study Two may limit the understanding and application of the study findings. As the student samples and the responses collected through MTurk may not accurately represent the general population (Berinsky et al., 2012), future research should draw on samples that are more diverse in their composition.

Since the notion of consumer identity fusion was established and deemed desirable through the current investigation, the scope and depth of work on strong consumer-brand relationships was then further expanded. Given the utility of consumer identity fusion in predicting pro-relationship behaviors, more empirical research is needed to elucidate the nature and effects of consumer identity fusion on the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships across different brands and product categories. The antecedents and consequences of consumer identity fusion are also of focal interests regarding implications for the substantive marketing domain. Besides, the current idiographic focus can be extended to study group-based brand relationships, such as brand communities, or be combined with other psycho-socio-cultural contexts. Another important area of future research is to expand the existing analysis from a focus on a single consumer-brand relationship to multiple consumer-brand relationships, given that consumers may engage in multiple relationships that vary in length and depth with different brands.

This theoretical framework can also be applied to discover additional brand-related research issues that have been guided by other rival identity-related theories in the past. For example, future research may be devoted to understanding the relationship

between consumer identity fusion and forgiveness, which may provide an improved understanding of the underlying mechanism through which fused consumers cope with brand transgressions. Considering that the new empirical findings obtained from the experiments were not consistent across three studies and have called into question what the literature has documented about consumers' responses to brand transgressions, more research is warranted to better understand the effect of consumer identity fusion and the role of other moderating factors, such as self-affirmation, in determining consumers' use of coping strategies. In sum, findings along this line of research will contribute to existing empirical knowledge in the realm of marketing and consumer psychology and will advance theoretical and practical understanding of the process of brand relationship maintenance among consumers who hold strong relationships with brands and offer an opportunity to consider strong consumer-brand relationships as a practical tool for better and more effective brand management.

Appendix A: Stimuli and Measures for Study One

THE SEVERITY OF BRAND TRANSGRESSIONS

Minor Brand Transgression



03/15/2012

CPSC to Recall Apple's MacBook Pro LCD Panel

By Karen Woodruff

WASHINGTON (AP) – Due to complaints filed by consumers frustrated by their MacBook Pros' display failure, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission on Wednesday issued a recall on the LCD panel. The MacBook Pro LCD Panel was reported to have a design flaw that causes LCD screen trouble, such as intermittent display flickering, a number of artifacts that include single-pixel lines spanning the length of the screen, and color washed out. Multiple sources indicate that at least some 13 and 15 inch MacBook Pros sold since February 2011 may have shipped with defective displays. As many consumers who spend a great deal of time using their MacBook Pros for multimedia work, affected consumers find a display in this condition unusable.

According to the report released by Consumer Union, over 50 cases have been documented during the past three months. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 500 units of MacBook Pros were affected and urged Apple to take necessary actions to repair the defects. Apple has no official comments at this point and a spokesperson for Apple could not be reached for comment on the matter.

Severe Brand Transgression



03/15/2011

CPSC to Recall Apple's MacBook Pro LCD Panel

By Karen Woodruff

WASHINGTON (AP) – Due to overwhelming complaints filed by consumers frustrated by their MacBook Pros' display failure, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission on Wednesday issued a recall on the LCD panel. The MacBook Pro LCD Panel was reported to have a design flaw that causes serious LCD screen trouble, such as intermittent display flickering, a number of artifacts that include single-pixel lines spanning the length of the screen, and color washed out. Multiple sources indicate that at least some 13 and 15 inch MacBook Pros sold since February 2011 may have shipped with defective displays. As many consumers who spend a great deal of time using their MacBook Pros for multimedia work, affected consumers find a display in this condition unusable. When taking their defective devices back into the Apple stores, consumers have reported retail locations are unable to warrant replacement in a timely manner.

According to the report released by Consumer Union, over 5,000 cases have been documented during the past three months. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that more than 50,000 units of MacBook Pros were affected and urged Apple to take necessary actions to repair the defects. Apple has no official comments at this point and a spokesperson for Apple could not be reached for comment on the matter.

INDEPENDENT MEASURES

Consumer Identity Fusion

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- I am one with Apple.
- I feel immersed in Apple.
- I have a deep emotional bond with Apple.
- Apple is me.
- I’ll do for Apple more than any of the other Apple consumers would do.
- I am strong because of Apple.
- I make Apple strong.

Brand Identification

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- When someone criticizes Apple, it feels like a personal insult.
- I am very interested in what consumers of other brands think about Apple.
- When I talk about Apple, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”
- Successes of Apple are my successes.
- When someone praises Apple, it feels like a personal compliment.
- If a story in the media criticized Apple, I would feel embarrassed.

MANIPULATION CHECK

Severity of Transgressions

- In the context of the average business practice, how serious is this incident?
(1) Not at all serious --- (7) Extremely serious
- If this problem were really happening to me, I would consider the problem to be:
(1) Not at all serious --- (7) Extremely serious
- If this problem were really happening to me, it would make me feel:
(1) Not at all angry --- (7) Extremely angry
- If this problem were really happening, it would be unpleasant to me
(1) Not at all unpleasant --- (7) Extremely unpleasant

Believability

- Below is a list of word pairs that describe what you think about the news story you have read. Please check the appropriate buttons which reflect your perception.
(1) Not believable--- (7) Believable
(1) Not credible --- (7) Credible
(1) Not convincing --- (7) Convincing
(1) Unlikely --- (7) Likely

DEPENDENT MEASURES

Exit

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would consider ending the business relationship with Apple.
2. I would look for a replacement brand.
3. I would consider other brands in the near future.

Voice

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would try to discuss the problem with Apple.
2. I would try to solve the problem by suggesting changes to Apple.
3. I would talk constructively to Apple about how I feel about the situation

Loyalty

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would wait patiently and hope the problem with Apple fixes itself.
2. I would disregard it because problems with Apple always seem to work out themselves.
3. I would assume the problem with Apple will go away, so I will still buy products from Apple as usual.

Neglect

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would not plan anything to improve relations with Apple and expect the problem becomes worse.
2. I would only try to use Apple products when absolutely necessary.
3. I would passively let the relationships with Apple slowly deteriorate.

Relationship Continuous Intention

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. It would be very difficult for me to leave Apple.
2. I am willing to pay more money to be a part of Apple consumers than I would for other brands.
3. I intend to stay on as an Apple consumer.

Appendix B: Stimuli and Measures for Study Two

THE TYPES OF BRAND TRANSGRESSIONS (PERSONAL COMPUTER)

Personal-Related Brand Transgression

3/27/2012

A recent consumer report has given attention to the possibility of your *[BRAND]* computer incurring a display failure, after consumers filed a number of complaints.

On Monday, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission issued a recall on the faulty LCD panels. Problems associated with the screen design flaw included, intermittent display flickering, a number of artifacts that include single-pixel lines spanning the length of the screen, and display colors too light/washed out. Affected individuals find the display quality in this condition to be unusable, as many consumers expend a significant amount of time using their personal computers engaging in multimedia work. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission urged a swift recourse to repair the defective screens.

No additional follow-up information was available at the time this article was published.

For more information, you may visit ConsumerReports.org/Reviews.

Societal-Related Brand Transgression

3/27/2012

A recent report has surfaced regarding unfair factory working conditions overseas for the *[BRAND]* computer you have purchased in the last few years.

According to the Fair Labor Association, these electronic devices are commonly found in households across the world, with factories producing such items in Asian and European countries. Select factories, which names have yet to be disclosed, have reportedly employed underage workers for manual labor in assembling computer parts. With rising complaints from human interest groups requiring action to be taken, an internal investigation was completed to find the offending factories violating labor laws. The underage laborers often work in harsh conditions, with problems ranging from excessive overtime to safety issues. The Fair Labor Association urged an ethical supplier code of conduct to correct such bleak working conditions.

No additional follow-up information was available at the time this article was published.

For more information, you may visit ConsumerReports.org/Reviews.

INDEPENDENT MEASURES AND COVARIATE

Consumer Identity Fusion

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- I am one with this brand.
- I feel immersed in this brand.
- I have a deep emotional bond with this brand.
- This brand is me.
- I’ll do for this brand more than any of the other consumers would do.
- I am strong because of this brand.
- I make this brand strong.

Brand Identification

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- When someone criticizes this brand, it feels like a personal insult.
- I am very interested in what consumers of other brands think about this brand.
- When I talk about this brand, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”
- Successes of this brand are my successes.
- When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment.
- If a story in the media criticized this brand, I would feel embarrassed.

Ethical Orientation

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- It is impossible to conduct profitable business in this country and follow strict ethical standard.

MANIPULATION CHECK

Types of Transgressions

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- This incident would cause a problem in my life.
- This incident would cause a problem in society.
- This incident would be associated with my own interests.
- This incident would be associated with society’s interests.

Believability

- Below is a list of word pairs that describe what you think about the article you have read. Please check the appropriate buttons which reflect your perception.
(1) *Not believable* --- (7) *Believable*
(1) *Not credible* --- (7) *Credible*
(1) *Not convincing* --- (7) *Convincing*
(1) *Unlikely* --- (7) *Likely*

Severity of Transgressions

- In the context of the average business practice, how serious is this incident?
(1) *Not at all serious* --- (7) *Extremely serious*
- If this problem were really happening to me, I would consider the problem to be:
(1) *Not at all serious* --- (7) *Extremely serious*
- If this problem were really happening to me, it would make me feel:
(1) *Not at all angry* --- (7) *Extremely angry*
- If this problem were really happening, it would be unpleasant to me
(1) *Not at all unpleasant* --- (7) *Extremely unpleasant*

DEPENDENT MEASURES

Exit

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would consider ending the business relationship with this brand.
2. I would look for a replacement brand.
3. I would consider other brands in the near future.

Voice

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would try to discuss the problem with this brand.
2. I would try to solve the problem by suggesting changes to this brand.
3. I would talk constructively to this brand about how I feel about the situation

Loyalty

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would wait patiently and hope the problem with this brand fixes itself.
2. I would disregard it because problems with this brand always seem to work out themselves.
3. I would assume the problem with this brand will go away, so I will still buy products from this brand as usual.

Neglect

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would not plan anything to improve relations with this brand and expect the problem becomes worse.
2. I would only try to use this brand’s products when absolutely necessary.
3. I would passively let the relationships with this brand slowly deteriorate.

Relationship Continuous Intention

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. It would be very difficult for me to leave this brand.
2. I am willing to pay more money to be a part of the brand’s consumers than I would for other brands.
3. I intend to stay on as this brand’s consumer.

Repurchase Intention

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- I intend to purchase from this brand again.
- I would consider buying another personal computer from this brand
- If I need another personal computer this brand would be my preferred choice.

Appendix C: Stimuli and Measures for Study Three

THE TYPES OF BRAND TRANSGRESSIONS (AUTOMOBILE)

Personal-Related Brand Transgression

4/27/2012

According to a recent consumer automotive report, your [*BRAND*] vehicle may have a defective air conditioning and heater system.

On Wednesday, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued a recall alert for the vehicle you purchased due to malfunctioning of defective parts in the air conditioning and heating system. Per the report, consumers have sought to correct the problem by replacing parts such as the relay unit, the blower resistor, and the compressor. However, those repairs have proven unsuccessful and with higher temperatures during the summer months and lower temperatures during the winter months, consumers have become frustrated with the malfunctioning and unreliable equipment. Based on the large number of consumer complaints, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration advocated for attention to be given to this vehicle defect.

No additional follow-up information was available at the time this article was published.

For more information, you may visit ConsumerReports.org/Reviews.

Societal-Related Brand Transgression

4/27/2012

A current labor report has emerged pertaining to unsafe factory working environments potentially related to your *[BRAND]* automobile purchase.

According to the National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health, labor workers at a factory in the Philippines were exposed to a toxic chemical that can cause respiratory dysfunction during a glass-making process. The factory is responsible for manufacturing auto parts, such as windows, including windshields, side and rear windows, and sunroofs. The toxic chemical fumes were found to be inhaled by workers, and heavy exposure has led some to need medical attention. The National Advisory Committee on Occupational Safety and Health advocated for attention to be given to these hazardous conditions inside the factory.

No additional follow-up information was available at the time this article was published.

For more information, you may visit ConsumerReports.org/Reviews.

SELF-AFFIRMATION MANIPULATION

Self-Affirmed

- Please rank order the following five values in terms of how personally important each value is to you (*1 = most important value, 5 = least important value*)
 - ✓ Aesthetics
 - ✓ Religion
 - ✓ Social
 - ✓ Political
 - ✓ Theoretical
- Next, please write about why the first-ranked value is important to you and describe a time in your life when that particular value was meaningful to you.

(open-ended)

No Affirmed

- Please recall and write down your personal schedule in the last 48 hours.

(open-ended)

INDEPENDENT MEASURES AND COVARIATE

Consumer Identity Fusion

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- I am one with this brand.
- I feel immersed in this brand.
- I have a deep emotional bond with this brand.
- This brand is me.
- I’ll do for this brand more than any of the other consumers would do.
- I am strong because of this brand.
- I make this brand strong.

Brand Identification

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- When someone criticizes this brand, it feels like a personal insult.
- I am very interested in what consumers of other brands think about this brand.
- When I talk about this brand, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”
- Successes of this brand are my successes.
- When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment.
- If a story in the media criticized this brand, I would feel embarrassed.

Ethical Orientation

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- It is impossible to conduct profitable business in this country and follow strict ethical standard.

MANIPULATION CHECK

Types of Transgressions

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- This incident would cause a problem in my life.
- This incident would cause a problem in society.
- This incident would be associated with my own interests.
- This incident would be associated with society’s interests.

Believability

- Below is a list of word pairs that describe what you think about the article you have read. Please check the appropriate buttons which reflect your perception.

(1) Not believable --- (7) Believable

(1) Not credible --- (7) Credible

(1) Not convincing --- (7) Convincing

(1) Unlikely --- (7) Likely

Severity of Transgressions

- In the context of the average business practice, how serious is this incident?
(1) Not at all serious --- (7) Extremely serious
- If this problem were really happening to me, I would consider the problem to be:
(1) Not at all serious --- (7) Extremely serious
- If this problem were really happening to me, it would make me feel:
(1) Not at all angry --- (7) Extremely angry
- If this problem were really happening, it would be unpleasant to me
(1) Not at all unpleasant --- (7) Extremely unpleasant

DEPENDENT MEASURES

Exit

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would consider ending the business relationship with this brand.
2. I would look for a replacement brand.
3. I would consider other brands in the near future.

Voice

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would try to discuss the problem with this brand.
2. I would try to solve the problem by suggesting changes to this brand.
3. I would talk constructively to this brand about how I feel about the situation

Loyalty

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would wait patiently and hope the problem with this brand fixes itself.
2. I would disregard it because problems with this brand always seem to work out themselves.
3. I would assume the problem with this brand will go away, so I will still buy products from this brand as usual.

Neglect

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. I would not plan anything to improve relations with this brand and expect the problem becomes worse.
2. I would only try to use this brand’s products when absolutely necessary.
3. I would passively let the relationships with this brand slowly deteriorate.

Relationship Continuous Intention

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

1. It would be very difficult for me to leave this brand.
2. I am willing to pay more money to be a part of the brand’s consumers than I would for other brands.
3. I intend to stay on as this brand’s consumer.

Repurchase Intention

1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”

- I intend to purchase from this brand again.
- I would consider buying another car from this brand
- If I need another car this brand would be my preferred choice.

Brand Evaluation (Repeated)

- Please select the corresponding number that adequately describes your overall evaluation of the brand.

(1) Dislike --- (7) Like

(1) Dissatisfied --- (7) Satisfied

(1) Unfavorable --- (7) Favorable

References

- Aaker, D. A., & Joachimsthaler, E. (2000). *Brand Leadership*. New York: Free Press.
- Aaker, J. L. (1997). Dimensions of brand personality. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *34*, 347-356.
- Aaker, J. L. (1999). The malleable self: The role of self-expression on persuasion. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *26*, 45-57.
- Aaker, J. L., & Fournier, S. (1995). A brand as a character, a partner and a person: Three perspectives on the question of brand personality. In F. R. Kardes, & M. Suajan (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (Vol. 22, pp. 391–395). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Aaker, J. L., Fournier, S., & Brasel, S. A. (2004). When good brands do bad. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*, 1-16.
- Aggarwal, P. (2004). The effects of brand relationship norms on consumer attitudes and behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*, 87-101.
- Aggarwal, P. (2008). *Interactional fairness and consumer responses: The moderating role of relationship norms*. Working paper, University of Toronto.
- Aggarwal, P. (2009). Using relationship norms to understand consumer-brand interactions. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park, & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 24-42). New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Aggarwal, P., & Larrick, R. P. (2012). When consumers care about being treated fairly: The interaction of relationship norms and fairness norms. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, doi:10.1016/j.jcps.2011.11.009.
- Aggarwal, P., & Law, S. (2005). Role of relationship norms in processing brand information. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*, 453-464.
- Aggarwal, P., & McGill, A. L. (2007). Is that car smiling at me? Schema congruity as a basis for evaluating anthropomorphized products. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *34*, 468-479.
- Aggarwal, P., & Zhang, M. (2006). The moderating effect of relationship norm salience on consumers' loss aversion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *33*, 413- 419.
- Aguirre-Rodriguez, A., Bosnjak, M., & Sirgy, M. J. (2011). Moderators of the self-congruity effect on consumer decision-making: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Business Research*, doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.031
- Ahearne, M., Bhattacharya, C. B., & Gruen, T. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of customer-company identification: Expanding the role of relationship marketing. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *90*, 574-585.

- Ahluwalia, R. (2002). How prevalent is the negativity effect in consumer environments? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 270-279.
- Ahluwalia, R., Burnkrant, R. E., & Unnava, H. R. (2000). Consumer response to negative publicity: The moderating role of commitment. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37, 203-214.
- Ahluwalia, R., & Gurhan-Canli, Z. (2000). The effect of extensions on the core brand evaluation: An accessibility-diagnostics perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27, 371-381.
- Ahluwalia, R., Unnava, H., & Burnkrant, R. E., (2001). The moderating role of commitment on the spill-over effect of marketing communications. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 35, 458-470.
- Ahuvia, A. C. (2005). Beyond the extended self: Loved objects and consumers' identity narratives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32, 171-184.
- Ahuvia, A. C., Betra, R., & Bagozzi, R. (2009). Love, desire, and identity: A conditional integration theory of the love of things. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park, & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 342-357). New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Akerlof, G. A., & Kranton, R. E. (2000). Economics and identity. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115, 715-753
- Alexander, E. C. (2002). Consumer reactions to unethical service recovery. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 36, 223-237.
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69, 19-34.
- Allen, C., Fournier, S., & Miller, F. (2008). Brand and their meaning makers. In C. P. Haugtvedt, P. M. Herr, & F. R. Kardes (Eds.), *Handbook of consumer psychology* (pp. 781-822). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Allport, G. W., Vernon, P. E., & Lindzey, G. (1960) *Manual for study of values* (3rd. ed.). Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- Andreassen, T. W. (2001). From disgust to delight: Do consumers hold a grudge? *Journal of Service Research*, 4, 39-49.
- Arnould, E. J. & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 868-882.
- Aron, A., & Aron, E. (1986). *Love and the expansion of self: Understanding attraction and satisfaction*. New York, NY: Hemisphere.
- Aron, A., Aron, E., & Norman, C. (2003). Self-expansion model of motivation and cognition in close relationships and beyond. In M. Brewer, & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *Self and social identity* (pp. 100-123). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

- Aron, A., Aron, E. N., & Smollan, D. (1992). Inclusion of other in the self scale and the structure of interpersonal closeness. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *63*, 596-612.
- Aron, A., Tudor, M., & Nelson, G. (1991). Close relationships as including other in the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *60*, 241-253.
- Aron, D. (2001). Consumer grudgholding: Toward a conceptual model and research agenda. *Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior*, *14*, 108-119.
- Aronson, J., Cohen, G. L., & Nail, P. R. (1999). Self-affirmation theory: An update and appraisal. In E. Harmon-Jones & J. Mills (Eds.), *Cognitive dissonance: Progress on a pivotal theory in social psychology* (pp. 127-148). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*, 20-39.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. A. (1996) Organizational identity and strategy as a context for the individual. *Advances in Strategic Management*, *13*, 17-62.
- Ashworth, L., Dacin, P., & Thomson, M. (2009). Why on earth do consumers have relationships with marketers? In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park, & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 82-106). New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Austin, J., & Shaw, A. (2012). Social desirability bias and self-reports of motivation: A study of Amazon Mechanical Turk in the US and India. Proceedings of the ACM SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 2925-1934.
- Bagozzi, R., & Dholakia, U. M. (2006). Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small group brand communities. *International Journal of Research Marketing*, *23*, 45-61.
- Ball, A. D., & Tasaki, L. H. (1992). The role and measurement of attachment in consumer behavior. *Journal of consumer Psychology*, *1*, 155-172.
- Baray, G., Postmes, T., & Jetten, J. (2009). When I equals we: Exploring the relation between social and personal identity or extreme right-wing political party members. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *48*, 625-647.
- Baumeister, R. F. (1998). *The Self*. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 680-740). (4th ed). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *15*, 139-168.
- Bengtsson, A. (2003). Towards a critique of brand relationships. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *30*, 154-158.
- Bergami, M., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2000). Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *39*, 555-577.

- Berger, J., & Heath, C. (2007). Where consumers diverge from others: Identity signaling and product domains. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *34*, 121-134.
- Berinsky, A. J., Huber, G. A., & Lenz, G. S. (2012). Evaluating online labor markets for experimental research: Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk. *Political Analysis*, doi: 10.1093/pan/mpr057
- Berry, L. L. (1995). Relationship marketing of services - growing interest, emerging perspectives. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *23*, 236-45.
- Bhattacharya, C. B. & Sen, S. (2003). Consumer-company identification: A framework for understanding consumer's relationships with companies. *Journal of Marketing*, *37*, 76-88.
- Biel, A. L. (2000). Converting image into equity. In D. A. Aaker, & A. L. Biel (Eds). *Brand Equity and advertising: Advertising's role in building strong brands* (pp. 67-82). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Billig, M., & Tajfel, H. (1973). Social categorization and similarity in intergroup behavior. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *3*, 27-52.
- Birdwell, A. E. (1968). A study of influence of image congruence on consumer choice. *Journal of Business*, *41*, 76-88.
- Bohannon, J. (2011, October 21). Social science for pennies. *Science*, *334*, 307.
- Bougie, R., Pieters, R., & Zeelenberg, M. (2003). Angry customers don't come back, they get back: The experience and behavioral implications of anger and dissatisfaction in services. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences*, *31*, 377-391.
- Braun-La Tour, K., LaTour, M., & Zinkhan, G. (2007). Using childhood memories to gain insight into brand meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, *71*, 45-60.
- Brevik, E., & Thorbjørnsen, H. (2008). Consumer brand relationships: An investigation of two alternative models. *Journal of the Academic Marketing Science*, *36*, 443-472.
- Brewer, M. B., & Gardner, W. L. (1996). Who is this "we"? Levels of collective identity and self representations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *71*, 83-93.
- Brown, S., Kozinets, R., & Sherry J. Jr. (2003). Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro branding and the revival of brand meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, *67*, 19-33.
- Buhrmester, M., Kwang, T., & Gosling, S. (2011). Amazon's Mechanical Turk: A new source of inexpensive, yet high-quality, data? *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, *6*, 3-5.
- Buysse, A., DeClerq, A., Verhofstadt, L., Heene, E., Roeyers, H., & Van Oost, P. (2000). Dealing with relational conflict: A picture in milliseconds. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *17*, 574-597.

- Chaiken, S., Giner-Sorolla, R., & Chen, S. (1996). Beyond accuracy: Defense and impression motives in heuristic and systematic information processing. In P. M. Gollwitzer, & J. A. Bargh (Eds.), *The Psychology of Action: Linking cognition and motivation to behavior* (pp. 553-578). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Chaplin, L. N. & John, D. R. (2005). The development of self-brand connections in children and adolescents. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25, 119-129.
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. (2001). The chain of effects from brand trust and brand affect to brand performance: The role of brand loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 65, 81-93.
- Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. (2002). Product-class effects on brand commitment and brand outcomes: the role of brand trust and brand affect. *Brand Management*, 10, 33-58.
- Cheng, S., White, T., & Chaplin, L. (2012). The effects of self-brand connections on responses to brand failure: A new look at the consumer-brand relationship. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22, 280-288.
- Chernev, A., Hamilton, R. & Gal, D. (2011). Competing for consumer identity: Limits to self-expression and the perils of lifestyle branding. *Journal of Marketing*, 75, 66-82.
- Chung, E., & Beverland, M. B. (2006). An exploration of consumer forgiveness following marketer transgressions. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 33, 98-99.
- Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. (1979). Interpersonal attraction in exchange and communal relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 12-24.
- Clark, M. S., & Mills, J. (1993). The difference between communal and exchange relationships: What it is and is not. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 19, 684-691.
- Cross, S. E., & Madson, L. (1997). Models of the self: Self-construals and gender. *Psychological Bulletin*, 122, 5-37.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M., & Rochberg-Halton, E. (1981). *The meaning of things-Domestic symbols and the self*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dawar, N. (1998). Product-harm crises and the signaling ability of brands. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 28, 109-119.
- Dawar, N., & Lei, J. (2009). Brand crises: The roles of brand familiarity and crisis relevance in determining the impact on brand evaluations. *Journal of Business Research*, 62, 509-516.
- Dawar, N., & Pillutla, M. M. (2000). Impact of product-harm crises on brand equity: The moderating role of consumer expectations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37, 215-227.

- Dittmar, H. (1992). *The social psychology of material possessions: To have is to be*. Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Ditto, P. H., & Lopez, D. F. (1992). Motivated skepticism: Use of differential decision criteria for preferred and non-preferred conclusions. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *63*, 568-584.
- Dolich, I. J. (1969). Congruence relationships between self images and product brands. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *6*, 80-84.
- Donavan, D., Janda, S., & Suh, J. (2006). Environmental influences in corporate brand identification and outcomes. *Journal of Brand Management*, *14*, 125-136.
- Drigotas, S. M., & Rusbult, C. E. (1992). Should I stay or should I go? A dependence model of breakups. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *62*, 62-87.
- Dutton, J. E., Dukerich, J. M., & Harquail, C. V. (1994). Organizational images and member identification. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, *39*, 239-263.
- Edwards, P., & Smith, R. A. (1996). Competitive disadvantage and voluntary disclosures: the case of segmental reporting. *British Accounting Review*, *288*, 155-172.
- Einwiller, S., Fedorikhin, A., Johnson, A., & Kamins, M. (2006). Enough is enough! When identification no longer prevents negative corporate associations. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *34*, 185-194.
- Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (1997). Sticking together or falling apart: Group identification as a psychological determinant of group commitment versus individual mobility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *72*, 123-140.
- Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosje, B. (2002). Self and social identity. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *53*, 161-186.
- Epstein, W. (1973). The process of "taking-into-account" in visual perception. *Perception*, *2*, 267-285.
- Eriksson, K., & Simpson, B. (2010). Emotional reactions to losing explain gender differences in entering a risky lottery. *Judgment and Decision Making*, *5*, 159-163.
- Escalas, J. E. (2004). Narrative processing: Building consumer connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *14*, 168-179.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2000). Using narratives to discern self-identity related consumer goals and motivations. In R. Ratneshwar, D. Mick, & C. Huffman (Eds.), *The why of consumption: perspectives on consumer motives, goals, and desires* (pp. 237-258). New York: Routledge.

- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *13*, 339-348.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *32*, 378-389.
- Fajer, M. T., & Schouten, J. W. (1995). Breakdown and dissolution of person-brand relationships. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *22*, 663-668.
- Fiske, S. T. (1980). Attention and weight in person perception: the impact of negative and extreme behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *38*, 889-906.
- Fiske, S. T., & Taylor, S. (1991). *Social cognition*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Folkes, V. S. (1984). Consumer reactions to product failure: An attributional approach. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *10*, 398-409.
- Fong, G. T., & Markus, H. (1982). Self-schemas and judgments about others. *Social Cognition*, *1*, 191-204.
- Ford, J. K., MacCallum, R. C., Tait, M. (1986). The application of exploratory factor analysis in applied psychology: A critical review and analysis. *Personnel Psychology*, *39*, 291-314.
- Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *24*, 343-373.
- Fournier, S. (2009). Lessons learned about consumers' relationships with their brands. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 5-23). Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe.
- Fournier, S., & Alvarez, C. (2012). Brands as relationship partners: Warmth, competence, and in-between. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *22*, 177-185.
- Fournier, S. & Brasel, A. S. (2002). Making good of doing bad: Negotiating transgression in consumer product relationships. *Advanced in Consumer Research*, *29*, 102-104.
- Fournier, S., Breazeale, M., & Fetscherin, M. (2012). Introduction: The why, how, and so what of consumers' relationships with their brands. In S. Fournier, M. Breazeale, & M. Fetscherin (Eds.), *Consumer-brand relationships: Theory and practice* (pp. 1-11). London and New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Fournier, S., & Deighton, J. (1999). Assimilating innovations: how consumers make new technologies part of their lives. Paper presented at the Association for Consumer Research Conference, Columbus, OH.
- Fournier, S., & Yao, J. L. (1997). Reviving brand loyalty: A reconceptualization within the framework of consumer-brand relationships. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *14*, 451-472.

- Gao, L., Wheeler, S. C., & Shiv, B. (2009). The “shaken self”: Product choices as a means of restoring self-view confidence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *36*, 29-38.
- Gardner, B. B., & Levy, S. J. (1955). The Product and the Brand. *Harvard Business Review*, *33*, 33-39.
- Geyskens, I. & Steenkamp, J. (2000). Economic and social satisfaction: Measurement and relevance to marketing channel relationships. *Journal of Retailing*, *76*, 11-32.
- Gilly, M. C., & Gelb, B. D. (1982). Post-purchase consumer processes and the complaining consumer. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *9*, 323-328.
- Goffman, E. (1961). *Asylums: Essays on the Social Situations of Mental Patients and other Inmates*. New York: Doubleday
- Gómez, Á, Brooks, M., Buhrmester, M., Vázquez, A., Jetten, J., & Swann, W.B. (2011). On the nature of identify fusion: Insights into the construct and a new measure. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *100*, 918-933.
- Gómez, Á, Morales, J.F., Hart, S., Vázquez, A., & Swann, W. B., Jr. (2011). Rejected and excluded forevermore, but even more devoted: Irrevocable ostracism intensifies loyalty to the group among identity fused persons. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *37*, 1957-1986.
- Goodman, P. S., Fichman, M., Lerch, F. J., & Snyder, P. R. (1995). Customer-firm relationships, involvement, and customer satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, *38*, 1310–1324.
- Govindarajan, V., & Fisher, J. (1990). Strategy, control systems, and resource sharing: Effects on business unit performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, *33*, 159-185.
- Grayson, K. & Ambler, T. (1999). The dark side of long-term relationships in marketing services. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *36*, 132-141.
- Grégoire, Y., & Fisher, R. J. (2006). The effects of relationship quality on customer retaliation. *Marketing Letters*, *17*, 31-46.
- Grégoire, Y., & Fisher, R. J. (2008). Customer betrayal and retaliation: When your best customers become your worst enemies. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *36*, 247-261.
- Grégoire, Y., Tripp, T. M., & Legoux, R. (2009). When customer love turns into lasting hate: The effects of relationship strength and time on customer revenge and avoidance. *Journal of Marketing*, *73*, 18-32.
- Greyser, S. A. (2009). Corporate brand reputation and brand crisis management. *Management Decision*, *47*, 590-602

- Grubb, E., & Grathwohl, H. (1967). Consumer self-concept, symbolism and market behavior: a theoretical approach. *Journal of Marketing*, 31, 22-27.
- Hart, C., Heskett, J. L., & Sasser, E. (1990). The profitable art of service recovery. *Harvard Business Review*, 68, 148-156.
- Heath, A. P., & Scott, D. (1998). The self-concept and image congruence hypothesis: An empirical evaluation in the motor vehicle market. *European Journal of Marketing*, 32, 1110-1123.
- Hess, R. L., Ganesan, S., & Klein, N. M. (2003). Service failure and recovery: The impact of relationship factors on customer satisfaction. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 31, 127-145.
- Hill, R. P., & Stamey, M. (1990). The homeless in America: an examination of possessions and consumption behaviors. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 17, 303-321.
- Hirschman, A. (1970). *Exit, voice, and loyalty: Responses to decline in firms, organizations, and states*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Hirschman, E. C., & Holbrook, M. (1982). Hedonic consumption: Emerging concepts, methods and propositions. *Journal of Marketing*, 46, 92-101.
- Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory*, 16, 7-30.
- Holloway, B. B., Wang, S., Beatty, S. E. (2009). Betrayal? Relationship quality implications in service recovery. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 23, 385-396.
- Hornsey, M. J. (2008). Social identity theory and self-categorization theory: a historical review. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 2, 204-222.
- Horton, J. J., Rand, D. G., & Zeckhauser, R. J. (2011). The online laboratory: Conducting experiments in a real labor market. *Experimental Economics*, 14, 399-425.
- Hoyt, W. T., Fincham, F. D., McCullough, M. E., Maio, G., & Davila, J. (2005). Responses to interpersonal transgressions in families: Forgiveness, forgivability, and relationship-specific effects. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 375-394.
- Huber, F., Vollhardt, K., Matthes, I., & Vogel, J. (2010). Brand misconduct: Consequences on consumer-brand relationships. *Journal of Business Research*, 63, 1113-1120.
- Hughes, D. E., & Ahearne, M. (2010). Energizing the reseller's sales force: The power of brand identification. *Journal of Marketing*, 74, 81-96.
- Iacobucci, D., & Ostrom, A. (1996). Commercial and interpersonal relationships; using the structure of interpersonal relationships to understand individual-to-individual,

- individual-to-firm, and firm-to-firm relationships in commerce. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 13, 53-72.
- Inman, J. J., & Zeelenberg, M., (2002). Regret repeat versus switch decisions: The attenuation role of decision justifiability. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29, 116-128.
- Jacobson, E., & Kossoff, J. (1963). Self-percept and consumer attitudes toward small cars. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 47, 242-245.
- James, W. (1950). *The principles of psychology*. New York: Dover. (Original work published 1890)
- Ji, M. F. (2002). Children's relationships with brands: "True love" or "one-night" stand? *Psychology and Marketing*, 19, 369-387.
- Johnson, J. W., & Grimm, P. E. (2010). Communal and exchange relationship. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 20, 282-294.
- Johnson, A. R., Matear, M., & Thomson, M. (2011). A coal in the heart: Self-relevance as a post-exit predictor of consumer anti-brand actions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38, 108-125.
- Jones, E. E., Farina, A., Hastorf, A. H., Markus, H., Miller, D. T., & Scott, R. A. (1984). *Social stigma: The psychology of marked relationships*. New York: W. H. Freeman & Co.
- Kassarjian, H. H. (1971). Personality and consumer behavior: A review. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 8, 409-418.
- Kates, S. M. (2000). Out of the closet and out on the street!: Gay men and their brand relationships. *Psychology and Marketing*, 17, 493-513.
- Keaveney, S. (1995). Customer switching behavior in service industries: An exploratory study. *Journal of Marketing*, 59, 71-82.
- Keller, K. L. (2002). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Kelley, S., & Davis, M. (1994). Antecedents to customer expectations for service recovery. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 22, 52-61.
- Kervyn, N., Fiske, S. T., & Malone, C. (2012). Brands as intentional agents framework: How perceived intentions and ability can map brand perception. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 22, 166-176.
- Kirmani, A. (2009). The self and the brand. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 19, 271-275.

- Klein, J., & Dawar, N. (2004). Corporate social responsibility and consumers' attributions and brand evaluations in a product-harm crisis. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *21*, 203-217.
- Klein, J., Smith, N., & John, A. (2004). Why we boycott: Consumer motivations for boycott participation. *Journal of Marketing*, *68*, 92-109.
- Kleine, S. S., Kleine, R. E., III, & Allen, C. T. (1995). How is a possession “me” or “not me?” Characterizing types and an antecedent of material possession attachment. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *22*, 327-343.
- Kleine, R. E., Kleine, S. S., & Kernan, J. B. (1993). Mundane consumption and the self. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *2*, 209-235.
- Kline, R. B. (2005). *Principles and practice of structural equation modeling* (2nd ed.). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Kuenzel, S., & Halliday, S. V. (2008). Investigating antecedents and consequences of brand identification. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, *17*, 293-304.
- Kunda, Z. (1990). The case for motivated reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, *108*, 480-498.
- Lam, S. K., Ahearne, M., Hu, Y., & Schillewaert, N. (2010). Resistance to brand switching when a radically new brand is introduced: A social identity theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*, 128-146.
- Lam, S. K., Ahearne, M., & Schillewaert, N. (2011). A multinational examination of the symbolic-instrumental framework of consumer-brand identification. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *Journal of International Business Studies*, doi: 10.1057/jibs.2011.54.
- Lee, M., Rodgers, S., & Kim, M. (2009). Effects of valence and extremity of ewom on attitude toward the brand and website. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *31*, 1-11.
- Lemon, K. N., Rust, R. T., & Zeithaml, V. A. (2001). What drives customer equity? *Marketing Management*, *10*, 20-25.
- Levine, M., & Crowther, S. (2008). The responsive bystander: How social group membership and group size can encourage as well as inhibit bystander intervention. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*, 1429-1439.
- Levy, S. J. (1959). Symbols for sale. *Harvard Business Review*, *37*, 117-124.
- Levy, S. J. (1981). Interpreting consumer mythology: A structural approach to consumer behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, *45*, 49-61.
- Lingle, J. H., Altom, M. W., & Medin, D. L. (1984). Of cabbages and kings: Assessing the extendibility of natural object concept models of social things. In R. S. Wyer

- & T. K. Srull (Eds.), *Handbook of social cognition*, (Vol. 1, pp. 71-117). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Lydon, J., & Zanna, M. (1990). Commitment in the face of adversity: A value-affirmation approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *58*, 1040-1047.
- Mael, F. A., & Ashforth, B. E. (1992). Alumni and their alma mater: A partial test of the reformulated model of organizational identification. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *13*, 103-123.
- Markus, H. (1977). Self--schemata and processing information about the self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *35*, 63-78.
- Markus, H., & Cross, S. (1990). The interpersonal self. In LA Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 576-608). New York: Guilford.
- Markus, H., Smith, J., & Moreland, R. L. (1985). Role of the self-concept in the perception of others. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *49*, 1494-1512.
- Mason, W., & Suri, S. (2011). Conducting behavioral research on Amazon's Mechanical Turk. *Behavior Research Methods*, *44*, 1-23.
- Maxham, J. III & Netemeyer, R. (2002). A longitudinal study of complaining customers' evaluations of multiple serve failures and recovery efforts. *Journal of Marketing*, *66*, 57-72.
- McAlexander, J. H., & Schouten, J. W. (1998). Brandfests: servicescapes for the cultivation of brand equity. In John F. Sherry, Jr. (Ed.), *Servicescapes: The concept of place in contemporary markets* (pp. 377-402), Chicago: NTC Business Books.
- McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W., & Koenig, H. F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, *66*, 38-54.
- McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *13*, 71-84.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *Culture and consumption: new approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *16*, 310-321.
- McDougall, W. (1911). *Body and mind: A history and defense of animism*. New York: Macmillan.

- McGill, A. L. (1998). Relative use of necessity and sufficiency information in causal judgments about natural categories. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75, 70-81.
- McQueen, A., & Klein, W. (2006). Experimental manipulations of self-affirmation: A systematic review, *Self and Identity*, 5, 289-356.
- Meloy, M. G. (2000). Mood-driven distortion of product information. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27, 345-359.
- Metts, S. (1994). Relational transgressions. In W. R. Cupach & B. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communications* (pp. 217-239). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Metts, S., & Cupach, W. R. (2007). Responses to relational transgressions: Hurt, anger, and sometimes forgiveness. In B. H. Spitzberg, & W. R. Cupach (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (2nd ed., pp. 243-274). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Mick, D. G., & Buhl, C. (1992). A meaning based model of advertising experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19, 317-338.
- Mikulincer, M., & Shaver, P. R. (2007). *Attachment in adulthood: Structure, dynamics and change*. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Miller, F. M., Fournier, S., & Allen, C. T. (2012) Exploring relationship analogues in the brand space. In S. Fournier, M. Breazeale, & M. Fetscherin (Eds.), *Consumer-brand relationships: Theory and practice* (pp. 30-56). London and New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Mills, J., & Clark, M. (1982). Communal and exchange relationships. *Review of Personality and Social Psychology*, 3, 121-144.
- Mittal, B. (2006). I, me, and mine: How products become consumers' extended selves. *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, 5, 550-562.
- Monga, A. B. (2002). Brand as a relationship partner: Gender differences in perspective. In S. M. Broniarczyk, & K. Nakamoto (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (pp. 36-41). Valdosta, GA: Association for Consumer Research.
- Moorman, C., Zaltman, G., & Deshpandé, R. (1992). Relationships between providers and users of market research: The dynamics of trust within and between organizations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 29, 314-329.
- Muñiz, A. M., & O'Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27, 412-432.
- Neisser, U. (1993). The self perceived. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The perceived self: Ecological and interpersonal sources of self-knowledge* (pp. 3-21). New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Nida, E., & Smalley, W. A. (1959). *Introducing animism*. New York: Friendship Press.
- O'Malley, L., & Tynan, C. (1999). The utility of the relationship metaphor in consumer markets: A critical evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Management*, *15*, 587-602.
- Onkvisit, S. & Shaw, J. (1987). Self-concept and image congruence: some research and managerial implications. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *4*, 13-23.
- Paolacci, G., Chandler, J., & Ipeirotis, P. G. (2010). Running experiments on Amazon Mechanical Turk. *Judgment and Decision Making*, *5*, 411-419.
- Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., & Priester, J. (2009). Research directions on strong brand relationships. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park, & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 379-3932). New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., & Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. *Journal of Marketing*, *74*, 1-17.
- Park, C. W., & McClung, G. W. (1986). The effect of TV program involvement on involvement with commercials. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *13*, 544-548.
- Park, J.-W., & Kim, K.-H. (2001). Role of consumer relationships with a brand in brand extensions: Some exploratory findings. *Advances in Consumer Research*, *28*, 179-185.
- Patterson, M., & O'Malley, L. (2006). Brands, consumers and relationships: A review. *Irish Marketing Review*, *18*, 10-20.
- Paulssen, M., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2009). Customer coping in response to relationship transgressions. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 358-375). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Ping, R. A. (1993). The effects of satisfaction and structural constraints on retail exiting, voice, loyalty, opportunism and neglect. *Journal of Retailing*, *69*, 320-352.
- Pratt, M. G. (1998). To be or not to be: Central questions in organizational identification. In D. A. Whetten, & P. C. Godfrey (Eds.), *Identity in organizations* (pp. 171-207). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Price, L. L., & Arnould, E. J. (1999). Commercial friendships: Service provider-client relationships in context. *Journal of Marketing*, *63*, 38-56.
- Pullig, C., Netemeyer, R. G., & Biswas, A. (2006). Attitude basis, certainty, and challenge alignment: A case of negative brand publicity. *Journal of the Academy Marketing Science*, *34*, 528-542.
- Reed II, A. (2004). Activating the self-importance of consumer selves: Exploring identity salience effects on judgments. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *31*, 286-295.

- Reimann, M., & Aron, A. (2009). Self-expression motivation and inclusion of brands in self. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park, & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 65-81). New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Reuber, R., & Fischer, E. (2010). Organizations behaving badly: When are discreditable actions likely to damage organizational reputation? *Journal of Business Ethics*, *93*, 39-50
- Richins, M. L. (1987). Media, materialism, and human happiness. In M. Wallendorf, & P. Anderson (Eds.), *Advances in consumer research* (Vol. 14, pp. 352-356). Provo, UT: Association for Consumer Research.
- Richins, M. L. (1994). Valuing things: The public and private meaning of possessions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, *21*, 504-521.
- Roehm, M. L., & Tybout, A. M. (2006). When will a brand scandal spill over and how should competitors respond? *Journal of Marketing Research*, *43*, 366-373.
- Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. New York: Basic Books.
- Rusbult, C. E., Farrell, D., Rogers, G., & Mainous, A. G. III. (1988). Impact of exchange variables on exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: An integrative model of responses to declining job satisfaction. *Academy of Management Journal*, *31*, 599-627.
- Rusbult, C. E., & Van Lange, P. A. M. (2003). Interdependence, interaction, and relationships. *Annual Review of Psychology*, *54*, 351-375.
- Rusbult, C. E., Verette, J., Whitney, G., Slovik, L., & Lipkus, I. (1991). Accommodation processes in close relationships: Theory and preliminary research evidence. *Journal of Personality and social psychology*, *60*, 53-78.
- Rusbult, C. E., & Zembrodt, I. (1983). Responses to dissatisfaction in romantic involvements: A multidimensional scaling analysis. *Journal of Experimental social Psychology*, *19*, 274-293.
- Rusbult, C. E., Zembrodt, I., & Gunn, L. (1982). Exit, voice, loyalty, and neglect: Responses to dissatisfaction in romantic involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *43*, 1230-1242.
- Rust, R. T., Ambler, T., Carpenter, G. S., Kumar, V., & Srivastava, R. K. (2004). Measuring marketing productivity; current knowledge and future directions. *Journal of Marketing*, *68*, 76-90.
- Sherman, D. K., & Cohen, G. L. (2002). Accepting threatening information: Self-affirmation and the reduction of defensive biases. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *11*, 119-123.
- Sherman, D. K., & Cohen, G. L. (2006). The psychology of self-defense: Self-affirmation theory. In M. P. Zanna (Ed.) *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 38, pp. 183-242). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

- Sherman, D. K., & Kim, H. S. (2005). Is there an “I” in “team”? The role of the self in group-serving judgments. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 88, 108-120.
- Siomkos, G., & Kurzbard, G. (1994). The hidden crisis in product-harm crisis management. *European Journal of Marketing*, 28, 30-41.
- Sirgy, M. J. (1981). Introducing a self-theory to consumer personality research. *JSAS, Catalog of Selected Documents in Psychology*, 11, 33, Ms. 2250.
- Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9, 287-300.
- Sirgy, M. J. (1986). *Self-congruity: Toward a theory of personality and cybernetics*. New York: Praeger Publishers.
- Sirgy, M. J., & Danes, J. (1981). Self-image/product-image congruence models: testing selected mathematical models. In A. Mitchell (Ed.), *Advances in consumer research* (Vol. 9, pp. 556-561). Ann Arbor: MI: Association for Consumer Research
- Smith, A., Bolton, R., & Wagner, J. (1999). A model of customer satisfaction with service encounters involving failure and recovery. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 36, 356-372.
- Solomon, M. R. (1983). The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic interactionism perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10, 319-329.
- Steele, C. M. (1988). The psychology of self-affirmation: Sustaining the integrity of the self. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.), *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (vol. 21, pp. 261-302). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Steele, C. M., & Liu, T. J. (1983). Dissonance processes as self-affirmation. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45, 5-19.
- Stryker, S. (1980). *Symbolic interactionism: A social structural version*. Menlo Park: Benjamin Cummings.
- Sung, Y., & Campbell, W. K. (2007). Brand commitment in consumer-brand relationships: An investment model approach. *Journal of Brand Management*, 17, 97-113.
- Sung, Y., & Choi, S. M. (2012). The influence of self-construal on self-brand congruity in the United States and Korea. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 43, 151-166.
- Sutton, R. I., & Callahan, A.L. (1987) The stigma of bankruptcy: Spoiled organizational image and its management. *Academy of Management Journal*, 30, 405-436.
- Swaminathan, V., & Dommer, S. L. (2012). When is our connection to brands like our connection to people? Differentiating between consumer-brand relationships and

- interpersonal relationships. In S. Fournier, M. Breazeale, & M. Fetscherin (Eds.), *Consumer-brand relationships: Theory and practice* (pp. 15-29). London and New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (1983). Self-verification: Bringing social reality into harmony with the self. In J. Suls & A. G. Greenwald (Eds.), *Social psychological perspectives on the self* (Vol.2, pp. 33-66). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (1987). Identity negotiation: Where two roads meet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *53*, 1038-1051
- Swann, W. B., Jr. (2011). Self-verification theory. In P. Van Lang, A. Kruglanski, & E.T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (pp. 23-42). Sage: London.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., & Bosson, J. (2010). Self and Identity. In S.T. Fiske, D.T. Gilbert, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (5th ed., pp. 589-628), New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Swann, W. B. Jr., Gómez, A., Dovidio, J. F., Hart, S., & Jetten, J. (2010). Dying and killing for one's group: Identity fusion moderates responses to intergroup versions of the trolley problem. *Psychological Science*, *21*, 1176–1183.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., Gómez, A., Huici, C., Morales, F., & Hixon, J. G. (2010). Identity fusion and self-sacrifice: Arousal as catalyst of pro-group fighting, dying and helping behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *99*, 824-841.
- Swann, W. B. Jr., Gómez, A., Seyle, C. D., Morales, J. F. & Huici, C. (2009). Identity fusion: The interplay of personal and social identities in extreme group behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *96*, 995–1011.
- Swann, W. B., Jr., & Hill, C. A. (1982). When our identities are mistaken: Reaffirming self-conceptions through social interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *43*, 59-66.
- Swann, W. B. Jr., Jetten, J., Gómez, A., Whitehouse, H., Bastian, B. (2012). When group membership gets personal: A theory of identity fusion. *Psychological Review*, doi:10.1037/a0028589.
- Swann, W. B. Jr., Rentfrow, P. J., & Guinn, J. (2003). Self-verification: The search for coherence. In M. Leary, and J. Tangney, (Eds.) *Handbook of self and identity*, (pp. 367-383). New York: Guilford press.
- Tajfel, H. (Ed.) (1978). *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Tajfel, H. (1981). *Human groups and social categories: Studies in social psychology*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33-47). Monterey, CA: Brooks-Cole.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of inter-group behavior. In S. Worchel, & L. W. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7-24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Tax, S. S., Brown, & Chandrashekar, M. (1998). Customer evaluations of service complaint experiences: Implications for relationship marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 62, 60-76.
- Terry, D. J., & Hogg, M. A. (1996). Group norms and the attitude-behavior relationship: A role for group identification. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 776-793.
- Tesser, A., & Cornell, D. P. (1991). On the confluence of self processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 27, 501-526.
- The Economist (2012, May 26). Experimental psychology: The roar of the crowd. Retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/node/21555876>.
- Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15, 77-91.
- Turner, J. C. (1975). Social comparison and social identity: Some prospects for intergroup behavior. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 5, 5-34.
- Turner, J. C. (1985). Social categorization and the self-concept: A social cognitive theory of group behavior. In E. J. Lawler (Ed.), *Advances in group processes* (pp. 77-122), Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.
- Turner, J. C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorization theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity context, commitment, content* (pp. 6-34). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell.
- Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: Cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 20, 454-463.
- Tylor, E. B. (1874). *Primitive culture: Researches into the development of mythology, philosophy, religion, language, art, and customs*. New York: Holt.

- Warrington, P., & Shim, S. (2000). An empirical investigation of the relationship between product involvement and brand commitment. *Psychology and Marketing, 17*, 761-782.
- Wegner, D. T., Sawicki, V., & Petty, R. E. (2009). Attitudes as a basis for brand relationships: The roles of elaboration, metacognition, and bias correction. In D. J. MacInnis, C. W. Park, & J. R. Priester (Eds.), *Handbook of brand relationships* (pp. 283-304). New York: M. E. Sharpe.
- Weun, S., Beatty, S. E., & Jones, M. A. (2004). The impact of service failure severity on service recovery evaluations and post-recovery relationships. *Journal of Service Marketing, 18*, 133-146.
- Whalen, J., Pitts, R. E., & Wong, J. K. (1991). Exploring the structure of ethical attributions as a component of the consumer decision model: The vicarious versus personal perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics, 10*, 285-293.
- White, K., & Lehman, D. R. (2005). Looking on the bright side: Downward counterfactual thinking in response to negative life events. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31*, 1413-1424.
- Wiseman, J. P. (1986). Friendship: Bonds and Binds in a voluntary relationship. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 3*, 191-211.
- Wyer, R. S., Srull, T. K., & Gordon, S. (1984). The effects of predicting a person's behavior on subsequent judgments. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 20*, 29-46.
- Ybarra, O. & Stephan, W. G. (1999). Attributional orientation and the prediction of behavior: The attribution-prediction bias. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76*, 718-727.