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**Bridging the Divide Between Consumers and
Employees in Brand Relationships**

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**A thesis submitted to Imperial College London for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

ABSTRACT

The employee as an advocate for his/her own brand has achieved heightened attention of late. However, despite a wealth of research into consumer-brand relationships, how employees relate to their own brands and subsequently exhibit specific brand-behaviours is poorly understood. Particularly, little attention has been directed towards the concept of the employee as forming brand relationships as compared with consumers.

This thesis examines the nature of the employee-brand relationship; more specifically we discuss functional, symbolic and experiential brand value as drivers of employee-brand self-connection and employee-brand identification and subsequently the effect on brand-specific behaviours.

Given the relative paucity of literature on employees and brands we adopt a grounded theory approach and conduct a series of in-depth interviews to access employees' insights and experiences with the brand. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded. The themes that emerge are used to construct a conceptual framework that is subsequently tested using a survey instrument and Structural Equation Modeling. Our findings suggest a number of similarities and differences between the way in which employees relate to the brand and the way in which consumers relate to the brand. Our findings have far reaching implications for academics and practitioners alike.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is my own composition and that, unless otherwise referenced, the material presented herein is my own original work.

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DEDICATION

For my children – Lucia and André

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The overarching objective of this thesis is to examine the nature of the employee-brand relationship. Since the mid-1990s, a great number of empirical studies have been conducted in the field of consumer-brand relationships (e.g. Hoyer 2012; Cheng, White and Chaplin 2012; Schmitt 2013). However, to date, despite the growing recognition that employees play a significant role in brand delivery, there are, to the best of my knowledge, no widely recognized studies that serve to investigate the nature and foundation of the employee-brand relationship. Specifically, this thesis aims to address this dearth of research, and furthermore to develop a starting point for further employee-brand relationship research.

This thesis seeks to build a model that conceptualizes the interaction between the employee and the brand and to draw attention to some of the similarities and differences that exist between employees and their brands compared with consumers and their brands. It aims also to highlight some of the factors and processes involved in eliciting brand-specific behaviour on the part of employees. By adopting a mixed methods approach, the use of qualitative research inquiry together with a quantitative study provides a comprehensive and robust model from which future research may be explicated. I present a series of findings and novel connections which inform and progress my understanding of brand relationships. This chapter offers a brief description of the thesis.

1.1 Background of Study

Marketing scholarship has evolved over the last few decades from a focus on better understanding the customer-firm relationship towards a better understanding of the customer-brand relationship. Consequently, how and why consumers form relationships with brands is well documented in the literature (e.g. Fournier 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg 2009; Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005; Park, Eisingerich, Park 2013).

Over time, marketing research has sought to examine the consumer-brand relationship in more detail taking into consideration the constructs having direct and indirect effects on the relationship such as brand personality (Aaker 1997; Belk 1988), brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007), brand identification (Hughes and Ahearne 2010; Lam

et al.) and brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002). Prior research has examined outcomes in the form of brand supportive behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth, loyalty and willingness to pay a premium as a result of brand relationships (e.g. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi 2012; Badrinarayanan and Laverie 2011). Notably, the consumer has largely been the focus of this body of literature. While extant literature has set out to understand and delineate how consumers develop meaningful relationships with brands they purchase thus providing important insights into the consumer-brand relationship from an external consumer perspective, little attention has been directed towards the employee and how he/she perceives the brand, relates to the brand or interacts with the brand. There have however been a few notable exceptions. Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak (2009) explored the role of leaders in enabling employees to act on behalf of the brand. Hughes and Ahearne's (2010) work revealed that brand identification can increase the effort on the part of salespeople behind a specific brand which ultimately improved brand performance. They further report that the psychological connection between brands and salespeople should be strengthened. Earlier work from Gilly and Wolfinbarger (1998) considered employees as an internal audience for the company's advertising. The authors revealed that employees evaluate their own brand advertising based on the dimensions of accuracy, value congruency and effectiveness. They argue that advertising communicates with employees as well as consumers. This thesis builds upon the concepts initiated here which positions the employee as instrumental in brand delivery and correspondingly also as a member of an internal audience for the brand. More specifically, I consider the key mechanisms of the employee-brand relationship.

1.2 Research Problem

One of the most significant marketing changes in the past few decades involves the way in which the brand has progressed in its role from identifier to a source of functional, experiential and symbolic value for the consumer (Copeland 1923; Low and Fullerton 1994; Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009). With these changes and faced with growing competition, companies are seeking to leverage their position through brand strategies and consequently brands are viewed increasingly as a source of competitive advantage (Keller 2003).

As the firm-brand relationship gained significance in marketing research, it has since emerged that the employees (sometimes referred to as internal customers, see Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998; Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009) are instrumental in the co-creation of brand value (e.g. King 1991; Hoyer et al. 2010). Therefore it appears that the role

of the employee is effective in the delivery of the brand and its promise to consumers. Employees are considered as a vital resource of the firm that contribute to the corporate effectiveness of an organisation (Barnes, Fox and Morris 2004). In fact, frontline employees are known to shape the customer's experience particularly in the service context. (Bettencourt, Brown and Mackenzie 2005; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1985). Through satisfying the needs of internal customers, employees become more motivated and committed to the cause which subsequently leads to external customers being well served (Kotler 1991).

Employees are viewed as an important element in brand value co-creation and it is through this involvement that a competitive advantage is achieved (King 1991). Employees are responsible for carrying out the 'promise' the brand makes to the external consumer at all touch-points. The brand carries the vision and culture of the organisation and the employees help create and represent the firm's values. Employees are thus seen as the crux of the brand value creation and promise (De Chernatony 1999). Since employees communicate the brand they have become operant resources in the creation of brand value for the firm (Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009).

It seems therefore, that in the same way as the brand has evolved, the role of employees has also evolved on a similar trajectory from seller/maker of the brand to brand ambassador. In particular, the employee is considered a brand enabler and co-creator of brand value and furthermore, 'the employees are the very people who can make the brand come alive for customers' (Mitchell pp. 99: 2002). If the free press is any indication, companies such as Starbucks, Ritz-Carlton, Zappos and Southwest Airlines appear to have achieved the goal of turning employees into brand champions, i.e. those who consistently deliver on the brand promise and in so doing have set themselves apart from the rest within highly competitive market situations. Thus, for companies, the employee as an advocate for his/her own brand has achieved heightened attention of late. Specifically, Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak (2009) suggest the recent evolution of research in internal brand management has prompted investigation into the key factors driving brand-supportive behaviours on the part of employees.

However, despite a growth in research into the nature of the employee-organisation relationship and its effect on employee behaviours (e.g. Bell and Menguc 2002; Morrison 1996; Bettencourt and Brown 1997) and despite the increasing recognition of the changing role of the employee and the common use of terminology such as employees 'living the brand' (Ind 2001) and acting as 'brand champions' and as 'brand ambassadors' (VanAuken 2003), and employees who transform brand vision

into brand reality (Berry 2000), exactly how employees perceive their own brands and subsequently exhibit on-brand behaviours remains poorly understood. The aforementioned brand success stories coupled with the lack of research in this area provide the backdrop to this thesis which ultimately addresses the 'problem' of what is the nature of the employee-brand relationship?

When considering why it is relevant to examine the employee-brand relationship more closely, at least three arguments present themselves. a: Employees are expected to deliver the brand promise, b: The way in which employees relate to the brand is not well understood, c: The process involved in demonstration of brand-specific behaviours is not understood from an employee perspective.

1.3 Research Question and Objective

Given the background of the study and the insight into the research problem, there appears to be an opportunity in the marketing literature to provide some understanding of the brand relationship from an employee perspective and furthermore to understand what are the factors that elicit brand-specific behaviours in employees. As far as I am aware, no research has previously examined the employee-brand relationship in detail, in other words, little academic research has paid attention to the processes involved in enabling brand ambassadorship. The objective of my research therefore, is to investigate the nature of the employee-brand relationship and more specifically to advance a conceptual framework and propositions which explain the role of brand benefits, self-brand connections and brand identification in eliciting brand-specific behaviours.

Based on this main objective, my overarching research question is 'what is the nature of the employee-brand relationship' which may be broken down into sub-questions such that my research questions are articulated as follows:

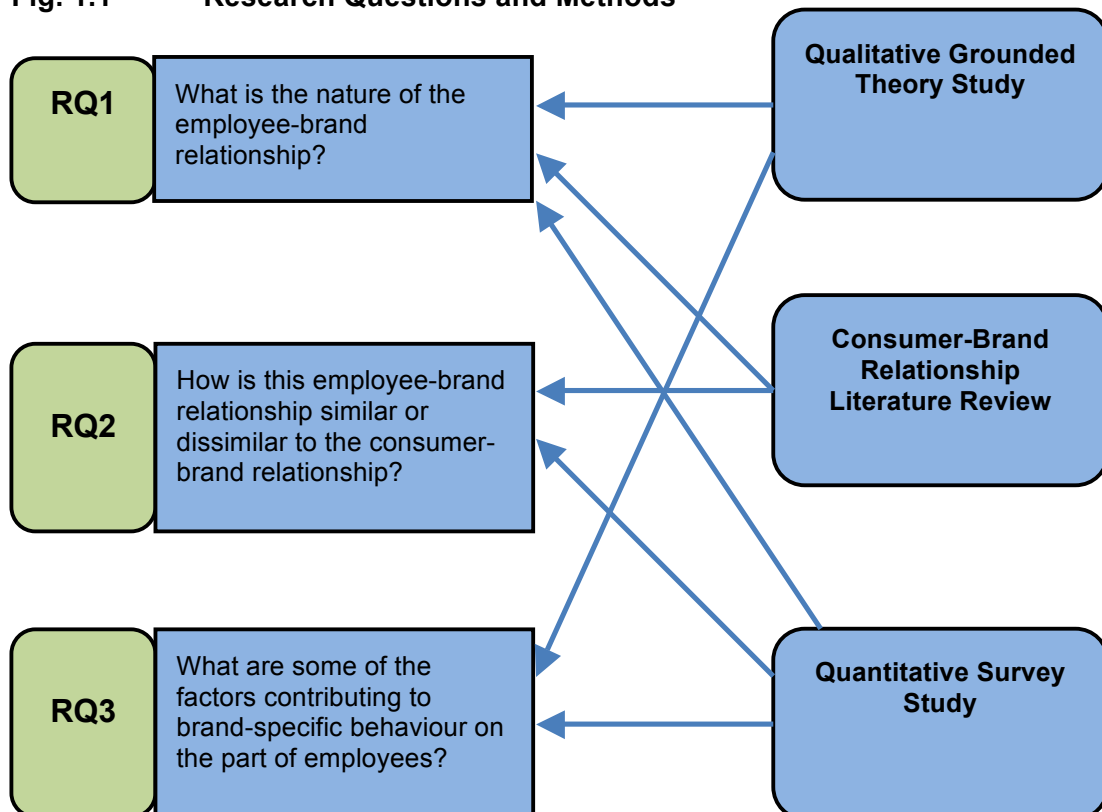
Research Question 1: What is the nature of the employee-brand relationship?

Research Question 2: How is this employee-brand relationship similar or dissimilar to the consumer-brand relationship?

Research Question 3: What are some of the factors contributing to brand-specific behaviour on the part of employees?

Research question 1 is answered using the outcomes of both a qualitative and quantitative study and by drawing upon extant consumer-brand based literature. Research question 2 is answered by drawing upon the consumer-brand relationship literature and comparing the findings therein with the results of my hypothesis testing. Research question 3 is answered by using a quantitative study to determine the model with the best fit to the data (Fig. 1.1).

Fig. 1.1 Research Questions and Methods



1.4 Research Methods and Analyses

In order to effectively conduct the proposed research both qualitative and quantitative approaches are used and described in Chapters 3 and 5. By using a combined approach of qualitative and quantitative methods this study achieves triangulation in empirical evidence and thus overcomes some of the limitations associated with singular methods. Given that there is insufficient theoretical guidance in the literature in the employee-brand relationship domain to support the research inquiry, a grounded theory approach is taken (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Since I want to gain a broad insight into the nature of the employee-brand relationship it made sense for me to establish the views of employees from a number of different brands. I therefore

sought employees from different geographies, different industry sectors and differing job roles to give me a cross-section of views. I conducted in-depth interviews with employees from a number of different well-known brands in the USA, UK and Europe. I then coded and analyzed the data using the full set of tenets of the grounded theory approach such that core categories were developed and the relationship between them hypothesized into a conceptual framework (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Measurement items were developed for each construct and the framework subsequently tested using a survey approach and analyzed using structural equation modeling (SEM). The survey was conducted in a large technology firm in the USA, whose identity has not been disclosed herein, but is referred to in my study as InnoCo. for the purpose of this research. SEM enables me to test the hypothesized model versus a rival model; the model with the best fit for the data was identified. The hypotheses were tested and rejected or accepted; conclusions were drawn about the nature of the relationships.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The proposed study compares the empirical findings of the study (Chapters 4 and 6) with the theoretical considerations of the consumer brand relationship literature (Chapter 2) to conceptualize the employee-brand relationship. Such an approach encompasses the following:

- Six constructs are identified and defined in the employee context: functional brand value, symbolic brand value, experiential brand value; employee self-brand connection, employee-brand identification and brand-specific behaviour
- The concept of the employee-brand relationship is determined across a number of different employee settings and conceptualized into a testable framework
- The consumer-brand relationship literature is examined and the relationship between consumers and their brands is compared with the relationship between employees and their brands
- The antecedent conditions for self-brand connection, brand identification and brand-specific behaviours are determined
- A competing model is tested and the mediating effects of some of the predictor variables and their relative explanatory power are determined

1.6 Major Areas of Contribution

It is expected that this thesis can make a number of contributions to the extant literature and knowledge in several ways.

The main contributions of this thesis are to the employee-brand relationship domain and to a lesser extent to the consumer-brand relationship research domain. In terms of employee-brand relationships this thesis makes the following contributions:

- The thesis identifies and develops six key constructs implicit in the employee-brand relationship; functional brand value, symbolic brand value, experiential brand value, employee self-brand connection, employee-brand identification and brand-specific behaviour
- A conceptual framework is advanced which explains the relationships amongst the aforementioned constructs thus identifying the key causal pathways in elicitation of brand-specific behaviour
- I suggest that employees draw on brand associations, more specifically the benefits they perceive the brand to offer, which in turn enable self-brand connections in employees. My theoretical contribution is determining brand value as an antecedent to self-brand connections in employees.
- I argue that brand experience plays a central role for employees in self-brand connection formation. My theoretical contribution suggests therefore that experiential brand value mediates the effect of other forms of brand value on employee self-brand connection.
- I propose that for employees self-brand connection is an antecedent condition of brand identification and offer useful theoretical and empirical insights into the working mechanisms of the two constructs and their relationship to one another. These findings may also contribute to the consumer-brand relationship dyad.
- With a lack of 'consumption' in the employee setting, brand associations are not antecedent to brand identification in employees, instead this relationship is mediated by employee self-brand connection. This makes a theoretical contribution to both employee and consumer research domains.
- By identifying employee-brand identification as an antecedent to brand-specific behaviour, this makes an important contribution for practitioners.

In sum, I expect the contribution of my thesis to have far reaching implications for researchers and practitioners alike.

1.7 Thesis Structure

The remainder of this thesis is structured as shown in Fig 1.2. In chapter 2 I review the literature which enabled me to situate the findings of my grounded theory. Until now little attention has been given to research in employee-brand relationships such that how employees relate to their own brands is poorly understood. I draw on the large body of theoretical and empirical consumer-brand literature which enables me to compare my own findings with some of the key concepts in consumer-brand relationships. Consumer-brand relationship theory particularly in brand associations, self-brand connection and brand identification theory is used to help explain the rationale behind the findings from my grounded theory qualitative study. My research questions are also presented in this chapter.

As mentioned previously, a mixed methods research approach is adopted in this thesis. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology for the first part of the study, namely the qualitative grounded theory approach. The procedures for the data collection and data analysis are explained. I explain my rationale for this choice based on my epistemology and research point of view. In-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with employees; details of the research design are described in this chapter. Moreover, I describe how I conducted the qualitative study and also how I ensured rigor, reliability and validity and trustworthiness in my qualitative research inquiry. I highlight how I overcome the many pitfalls associated with an a la carte approach to grounded theory.

Chapter 4 presents the empirical results generated from the qualitative study. In particular the chapter explains in detail how the employees relate to their brands and more specifically the nature of the relationships. It reveals how the constructs of employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification lie at the heart of the relationship between brand and employee. A series of hypotheses and a conceptual framework are presented here based on the extant literature and analysis of the interviews.

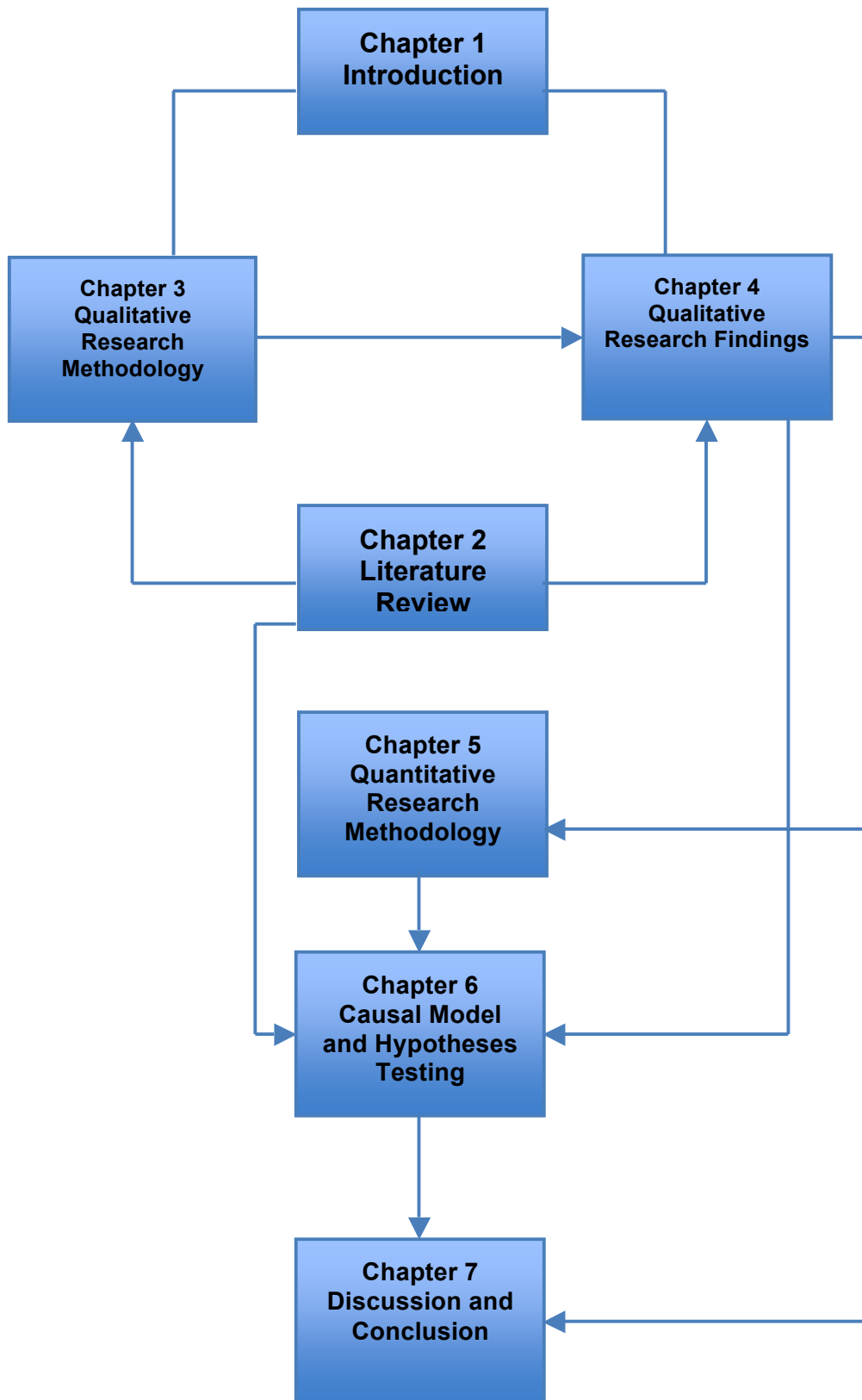
Chapter 5 describes the methodology for the quantitative component of this thesis. The quantitative data is collected with the use of a survey to employees of a major US-headquartered technology company. The development of survey questions and measurement items are explained in this chapter. Respondent characteristics are detailed. Due to the confidentiality restrictions, I experienced great difficulty gaining

access to employees; the issues associated with these difficulties are addressed in this chapter. The procedures for data collection and analysis using SEM are described.

Chapter 6 presents the empirical results of the quantitative study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is conducted to assess the proposed measurement model in the structural equation model. Given the CFA results adjustments are made to the measurement model. SEM is then conducted to assess the fit of the data with the proposed conceptual model and to test for mediation. A non-mediation rival model is compared with the hypothesized model and a final model presented which best fits my data. The hypotheses proposed in Chapter 4 are either accepted or rejected. The similarities and differences in the relationships between employees and the brand and consumers and the brand are discussed.

The thesis is concluded in Chapter 7 with a discussion of the main findings and their implications for research and practice. In addition it will outline the limitations of this study and offer suggestions for future research.

Fig. 1.2 Thesis Structure



CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Overview

In this chapter I review the literature providing the theoretical foundation to my study. The consumer-brand relationship literature comprises a number of streams relevant to this particular study; more specifically I examine the role of brand benefits as a source of brand meaning in consumer brand relationships, self-brand connection and brand identification theory. I also examine the literature pertaining to brand-specific behaviours as an outcome of self-brand connection and brand identification in consumers. Finally, I conduct a review of the relatively scant literature relating to employees and brand-specific behaviours. In critically reviewing the literature I am able to draw up a detailed picture of the processes involved in the self-brand connection construction and what leads to brand identification and brand supportive behaviour in consumers which together with my qualitative study findings provides the theoretical background which I draw upon to build an employee-brand relationship conceptual framework, thus informing my research questions which are outlined at the end of this chapter.

2.2 Introduction

In 2004, Vargo and Lusch, proposed marketing was evolving towards a new logic identified as service-dominant logic which has been mirrored by a change in brand logic (Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009). In accordance with this new logic, brand value is perceived to be co-created between the firm and its stakeholders. It is process-oriented and views all stakeholders as endogenous to the brand value-creation process.

Merz, Yi and Vargo (2009) identify different eras which were defined by how the brand was viewed and the primary purpose of the brand's value. One such era was described as the relationship-focus era which encompassed the customer-firm relationship focus, the customer-brand relationship focus and the firm-brand relationship focus. Each particular focus positions the brand in a different role. For instance, in the customer-firm relationship focus, the brand as knowledge and customers operate as co-creators of brand value. In the customer-brand relationship focus, the brand operates as a relationship partner. This particular focus proposed that brands possess personality that makes customers form dyadic relationships with the brand. Brand scholars have acknowledged that the brand value co-creation process is relational and requires a process orientation (Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998).

In the firm-brand relationship focus the brand serves as a promise in its own right and employees serve as instrumental in brand-value co-creation and serve as operant resources (Berry 2000; Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998). Thus, it is apparent that as the role of the brand has changed so too has the role of the employee in delivery of the brand. The authors identified the period from 1930s to 1990s as the value-focus brand era. During this time, the brand evolved from being viewed as an identifier to being viewed as both a functional and symbolic image. Since goods were seen as increasingly similar in terms of their utilitarian attributes, brands were selected to solve internally generated consumption needs and to differentiate products (Merz, Yi and Vargo (2009). Since then, firms increasingly recognise brands as valuable assets (Madden, Fehle and Fournier 2006). However, the concept of more than just utilitarian aspects of products came to light as far back as the 1950s. Levy (1959) noted, 'people buy products not only for what they can *do*, but also for what they *mean*'.

In the most recent era, more specifically the stakeholder-focus brand era, brands are viewed as dynamic and social processes. In this view, it is not only the individual customers but also the brand communities and other stakeholders who constitute operant resources. The brand value co-creation process becomes a continuous, social and dynamic and iterative process between the firm, the brand and all stakeholders (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002; Muniz Jr and O'Guinn 2001). Consequently, consumption research has moved towards incorporating an experiential view with the traditional functional view (Mano and Oliver, 1993; Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986). Contrary to functional values which may be physically expressed with material items and objects, symbolic values are intangible and derived through socialization processes. Since the self is frequently embedded in social practices, one's self-identity is validated through social interaction. Brands thus generate value for consumers in more than one way. Traditionally, they signal to the consumer the quality of the offering (Wernerfelt 1988) and furthermore provide meaningful associations which provide value above the attributes of the product/service itself (Fournier 1998; Gardner and Levy 1955).

The relationship perspective has become increasingly familiar as a theoretical lens for understanding consumer-brand interactions (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004; Fournier 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2005). Consumers are known to form strong relationships with those brands which they perceive to have values and personality associations that are congruent with their self-concept (Sirgy 1982). Brand relationships are thus viewed as expressions of consumers' own identities (Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007).

Research suggests that hedonic and utilitarian aspects of products are an important factor in consumer choice (Chernev 2004). Hedonic products are associated with more experiential consumption compared with utilitarian products which are typically more functional and instrumental (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Babin, Darden and Griffin 1994; Childers et al. 2001). Furthermore, hedonic products are generally associated with pleasure, fun and experience whereas utilitarian products are practical and associated with life functions deemed necessary (Strahilevitz and Myers 1998). This is reflected in early brand research which suggests both symbolic and utilitarian variables can drive the relationships between consumers and their brands (Katz, 1960). Researchers concur that consumer-brand relationships can be a mixed exchange driven by both utilitarian and symbolic values (Bagozzi 1995; Gardner and Levy 1955; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Solomon 1983). According to Mittal et al. (1990), the functional value corresponds with the need to manage one's physical environment thus satisfying utilitarian motives. On the other hand, the symbolic value refers to the need to manage one's social and psychological environment i.e. self-esteem, social and self-fulfillment needs and to help communicate to others their link to social groups, values and personal features. Keller (1993) describes brands as carrying associations which are defined as the informational nodes linked to the brand node in the memory and thus contain the meaning of the brand for consumers. Brand associations can be functional (product related) and/or symbolic (e.g. self-expressive) and experiential.

2.3 Brand Benefits

Brand associations are based on the functions or benefits that the consumer associates with the brand. Brand associations may be distinguished by how much information is summarized in the association. Associations may be classified in to three categories: attributes, benefits and attitudes. Benefits are the personal value consumers attach to the brand attributes, i.e. what consumers think the brand can do for them (Del Rio, Vazquez and Iglesias 2001; Keller 1993, 1998).

A major distinction is often made between the categories of benefits provided by a brand. Brands possess functional, symbolic and experiential meaning and a single brand may offer a mixture of benefits. (Park, Jarworski and MacInnis 1986; Keller 1993; 1998). Some researchers suggest that a distinction lies between functional, symbolic and experiential beliefs thus evoking differing behaviours such as purchase intentions by consumers according to belief category (Orth and De Marchi 2007; Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986; Park, Eisingerich and Park 2013). A functional concept is a firm-derived brand meaning which is designed to solve consumption

needs generated outside the organisation. A symbolic concept on the other hand is designed in such a way as to provide the consumer with association to a particular group, role or self-image. An experiential concept is internally generated and answers the needs for stimulation and variety (Park, Eisingerich and Park 2013).

Expanding on Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) earlier work, Keller (1993, 1998) specifies functional benefits are those that provide a solution to a specific and practical problem. Symbolic benefits on the other hand fulfill needs generated internally such as self-enhancement and they allow the consumer to signal to others one's self-image or one's association with a desired group or role. Experiential benefits are those providing 'sensory pleasure and cognitive stimulation' (Park, Eisingerich and Park 2013; Richins 1994). Benefits from brands may exist in a mixture of the forms described, providing all benefits at once. This idea is further supported by Bhat and Reddy, 1998's empirical work which suggests that a brand's value to consumers may be concurrently symbolic and/or functional. When brands meet the functional, symbolic and experiential needs of consumers, benefits are created which deliver value to the consumer. Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991) propose there is a wider range of different types of value, namely functional value, social value, emotional value, epistemic value and conditional value. As one would expect, functional value provides functional benefits, social value provides symbolic benefits and emotional value provides experiential benefits.

In a similar manner, Del Rio, Vazquez and Iglesias (2001) refer to the nature of brand utilities for the consumer. More specifically the authors suggest that brand utilities may be classified based on two basic dimensions, the functional value and the symbolic value. The delimitation of what is understood as a functional or a symbolic utility is defined by the needs to be satisfied by the brand.

The significance of brand associations for consumers is recognised in that they have an influence on consumer behaviour, choice, intention of purchase, willingness to pay a price premium for the brand and recommend the brand to others (Park and Srinivasan 1994; Cobb-Walgreen et al. 1995; Aggarwal and Rao. 1996; Hutton, 1997; Yoo et al. 2000). Particularly, consumers are more inclined to recommend the brand when they associate the brand with relevant emotional experiences (Westbrook 1987).

2.3.1 Functional Benefits of Brands

Functional benefits of brands are often product-oriented and satisfy immediate and practical needs. Such benefits are often associated with problem-solution or avoidance (Keller 1993). Functional benefits, particularly those based on attributes link directly to consumer decisions, but are not without their limitations since they fail to differentiate and moreover are easily replicated (Aaker 1996).

Functional congruity in consumers is led by utilitarian motives and expresses the extent to which functional attributes of the brand matches the expectations of the consumer in terms of how the product should perform to accomplish the main goal of the product (Kressman et al. 2006). The greater the functional congruity as perceived by the consumer, the more likely they are to identify with the brand. Brand loyalty is also an outcome of the functional utility of a brand as derived by the consumer (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn, 1995). Widely studied, utilitarian value is described as instrumental (i.e. functional, task-related) and primarily related to cognitive evaluation on the part of the consumer. Utilitarian value is linked with the notion of product performance and usefulness (Mano and Oliver, 1993). For example, savings, convenience and product quality are classified amongst utilitarian values or benefits (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Ailawadi, Neslin and Gedenk 2001).

2.3.2 Experiential Benefits of Brands

How consumers experience brands and the benefits derived from brand experience (experiential benefits) has gained a lot of attention in marketing practice (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello 2009). Consumers' 'experiences' occur when they 'search for products, shop for them and receive service, and when they consume them'. When they go through this process they are exposed to the utilitarian benefits of the product. At the same time they are also exposed to brand-related stimuli which prompt subjective, internal responses which constitute 'brand experience'. Such brand-related stimuli include design, logo, identity and packaging and the environment in which it is sold. Brand experiences include particular sensations, feelings, cognitions and behaviours on the part of consumers which occur in response to particular brand-related stimuli. Such stimuli are the source of 'subjective, internal consumer responses' such as sensations, feelings and cognitions which are referred to as 'brand experience' (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello 2009). Brand experience is not necessarily motivationally based,

experiences occur even when the consumer has no particular connection to the brand.

Research on experiential consumption highlights the important role of particular experiential needs in consumption. Adopting a hedonic perspective to consumption, Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) suggest that products evoke an emotive response by consumers. A brand designed with an experiential concept is to fulfill the needs of stimulation and or/variety on the part of the consumer. In empirical work conducted by Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009), four dimensions of brand experience were identified: sensory, affective (includes emotional and social relationships and belonging), behavioural and intellectual. In other words, brands differentially evoke four types of experiences. The authors also demonstrated how brand experience affects consumer satisfaction and loyalty directly and such a relationship is indirectly mediated by brand personality. Consumers' experience with the brand is more than the fulfillment of their functional needs (Underwood, Bond and Baer 2001). However, brand experiences provide the consumer with value in a similar way to utilitarian benefits (Brakus, Schmitt and Zhang 2008).

Experiential needs are internally generated and include the need for pleasure and cognitive stimulation (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986). Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) have similarly suggested that fun and enjoyment are experiential benefits of consumption. Brand experiences may be short lived or long lived and it is those that are long-lasting which consumers store in their memories thus affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty (Oliver 1980; Reicheld 1996).

Since the experiential nature of the brand evokes feelings in consumers, different types of feelings emerge. Keller (2001) described brand feelings as customers' emotional responses and reactions with respect to the brand and further elaborated on six significant types of brand-building feelings.

- Warmth. Warmth is the extent to which the brand makes consumers feel a sense of 'calm or peacefulness'. Consumers may consequently feel sentimental or affectionate towards the brand.
- Fun. Feelings of fun are upbeat. Consumers may feel amused, joyful and cheerful.
- Excitement. Excitement relates to the extent to which the brand makes consumers feel that they are energized and are experiencing something special. Brands which evoke the feeling of excitement may result in feeling of elation or the described feeling of 'being alive'.

- Security. Feelings of security occur when the brand induces the feeling of safety, comfort and self-assurance in the customer.
- Social Approval. Feelings of social approval occur when the brand results in consumers' feeling positively about the way others perceive them.
- Self-Respect. Self-respect occurs when the brand makes consumers feel better about themselves through a sense of pride, accomplishment or fulfillment.

'Brand experience' is also used in the inference of the brand personality: the consumer draws upon his/her specific experience to extract information to form a judgment about the brand's personality (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarontello 2009).

Brand experience is also key in the self-brand connection process since consumers use their experiences with the brand to infer meaning. The impact of a brand is dependent upon the quality of consumers' experiences with that brand and the extent to which such experiences create vivid linkages in the mind of the consumer (Fournier, 1998). Some consumers form meaningful and personal connections between themselves and a brand to the extent that the brand is closely associated with the individual's self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003). For consumers, meaning associated with the brand may be derived from the image or 'personality' of the brand that develops with time from advertising and the 'dynamics of popular culture in society' (Keller 2008) and also from the individual's own personal experiences with the brand (Escalas 2004). The underlying notion of the self-brand connection construct is that when brand associations (meanings) are used to construct one's self or to communicate one's self to others, a strong connection is formed between the brand and the consumer's self identity (Escalas 2004). This is discussed in detail in section 2.4.

2.3.2.1 *Emotional Connections*

Experiential benefits create emotional benefits which enable emotional brand connections in consumers. According to Aaker 2009, 'it makes sense for marketers to consider emotional, self-expressive and social benefits' as a source of value. The author describes emotional benefits as 'the ability of the brand to make the buyer or user of a brand feel something during the purchase process or user experience'. Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) and Whan Park et al. (2010) emphasize the role of emotional reactions to the brand in forming consumer-brand connections. On a similar note, brand affect is defined as 'a brand's potential to elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a result of its use' (Sung and Kim

2010). Customers are known to form affect-laden relationships (emotion-based) with brands that match their personality which provides a means to self-expression, self-definition and self-enhancement. Brand value is subsequently co-created through the affective relationships that customers form with their brands and may be determined through both direct (i.e. through usage or consumption) or indirect (i.e. through pure perception) contact with the brand (Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009). It is widely accepted in the literature that brands are built through a combination of rational and emotional elements and that emotions evoked by brands may enhance buying and consumption processes (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982).

Research suggests that consumers can become emotionally attached to consumption objects such as brands which subsequently predicts their commitment to the brand (brand loyalty) and their willingness to pay a price premium for it (Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005). Such attachment reflects an emotional bond with the brand (Shimp and Madden 1988). Researchers and practitioners have recognised the importance of creating emotional connections between consumers and brands. Berry (2000) cites that any great brand makes an emotional connection with the intended audience. He further argues 'they reach beyond the purely rational and purely economic level to spark feelings of closeness, affection and trust. Consumers live in an emotional world; their emotions influence their decisions.' The author suggests an even deeper connection by stating that 'brands that connect with customers' emotions are those that reflect customers' core values.' For consumers, advertising often connects brands to the emotional benefits associated with product use. Emotional benefit information is thought to provide data about affect-based experiences such as excitement and joy associated with the brand (Ruth 2001).

A key driver in emotional brand connection is the concept of self-congruence which is the fit between the consumer's self and the brand's personality or image (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1982; Malär et al 2011). The consumer's self-concept is involved in emotional brand attachment (Chapin and John 2005; Whan Park et al. 2010). Consumers purchase brands with a specific personality to use in expression of their self-concept (Aaker 1999; Belk 1988). I review the self-congruity literature in more depth in section 2.3.3.2.

2.3.3. Symbolic Nature of Brands

Brands serve as symbolic resources which users may employ to construct social identities, to assign meaning to themselves and further to signal meaning to others (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; McCracken 1988). The more 'symbolic' the brand,

the more likely the brand is to enable the user to communicate their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). The symbolic nature of brands, specifically the range of distinctive images they reflect (Chaplin and John 2005), has meant that they are particularly useful as a means for satisfying consumers' self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Fournier 1998). In some cases, consumers derive symbolic meaning from the association between the brand and the typical user of the brand (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

Symbolic benefits of brands allow consumers to construct their self-identity and to signal this to others. Individuals select brands which bear unique personalities and images which they use to express a self-image or an idealized self-image which can serve a self-enhancing or self-consistency role (Aaker 1997; Sirgy 1982).). The idea of the signaling component of the brand concurs with Ligas and Cotte's (1999) holistic framework in which the process of brand meaning negotiation is explained using symbolic interactionism. The authors suggest consumers do not always necessarily act independently when interpreting marketer-induced brand meaning in the cultural system since social forces also exert their influence. It is within the social environment that the consumer most often attempts to signal his/her own intended meaning to others.

Earlier work from Belk (1988) suggested that consumers possess symbolic meanings of brands which they then use to 'extend and bolster a consumer's self-concept'. More specifically, by owning brands which they perceive to possess symbolic images which are congruent with certain elements of their own self-concept, consumers maintain or strengthen their self-concept (Dolich 1969). As an extension of this ownership, consumers are also able to express their own identities, in that the brands they choose project images similar to their own self-image (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1982). This view was supported by other researchers who suggest symbolic benefits correspond with the need for social-approval, self-expression and outer-directed self-esteem. Consumers may value the exclusive nature of a brand because of the way in which it relates to their self-concept (Solomon 1983 in Orth and De Marchi 2007). Self-congruity is driven by self-consistency motives such that the greater the similarity between the brand image or brand personality and the consumer's self-concept, the higher the self-congruity. Since self-consistency is a means of self-expression, the greater the self-congruity the more likely consumers are to identify with the brand to uphold their self-consistency (Kressman et al. 2006).

Symbolic needs are internally generated and are motivated by social meaning (Solomon 1983). For example, self-enhancement, group membership and ego-identification are defined as symbolic needs (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986). A

symbolic need helps the consumer to be defined as a member of a specific group (Hoyer and MacInnis 1997). The branding literature exploring the role of brands in consumers' lives reveals that brands can provide self-definitional benefits beyond utilitarian benefits (Aaker 1999, Escalas and Bettman 2005, Fournier 1998, Keller 1993, Keller and Lehmann 2006). Brands as a means for self-expression has come to the fore since brand consumption allows consumers to express their identities by choosing brands whose images are perceived to be similar to their own self-images (Aaker 1999).

Since consumers by nature seek to reaffirm their self-image, brands allow consumers to not only express their identities, but also to reaffirm their principles or beliefs (Kleine III, Kleine and Kernan 1993; Levy 1959; Solomon 1983 in Chernev, Hamilton and Gal, 2011).

As inferred earlier by Hoyer and MacInnis (1997) consumers may choose brands to allow them the particular association with other stereotypical brand users (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005). Consumers' choice of brand may be used to send social signals to other consumers about themselves as is particularly the case with luxury brands (Han, Nunes and Dreze 2010). In some instances, consumers extract meaning from the brand by assessing the brand's personality such that the signal effect may not only be based on a stereotypical user of the brand but also on the brand's personality (Lee 2009).

Symbolic values of brands extend deeper than as a signaling device in that they help consumers to retain the sense of the past, to categorise themselves in society, to communicate cultural meanings such as social status and group identity (Belk 1988). Consistent with this view, it is apparent that symbolic consumption of brands enables consumers to communicate some of their cultural categories such as age, gender, social status and other cultural values such as family and tradition (McCracken 1993).

In an attempt to explain the symbolic nature of the brand, Menneaghan (1995) suggests that the brand is separate from the product, the product performs the function and the brand is 'grafted on by advertising'. Since products are easy to replicate, the emergent symbolic meanings form a basis for brands' positioning and differentiation.

According to some researchers, consumer purchasing behaviour is influenced by the symbolic meaning of the brand in the form of shared values (Sirgy et al. 1997; Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg 2000). According to Zhang and Bloemer (2008) consumer-brand value congruence describes the similarity between a consumer's own personal values and his or her perceptions of the brand's values'. Further, the authors provide

empirical evidence for consumer-brand value congruence as having a significant and positive effect on satisfaction, trust, affective commitment and loyalty.

2.3.3.1 *The Symbolic Nature of Brands and Brand Personality*

Two streams of literature are applied to symbolic benefits of brands: self-congruity research (Sirgy et al.1991) and brand personality research (Aaker 1997). Self-congruity refers to how much a consumer's self-concept is congruent with the personality of a typical user of the brand. Brand personality is the set of human characteristics associated with a brand (Aaker 1997). Consumers tend towards those brands having similar personality traits to themselves. Noteworthy is the symbolic interactionist perspective study of brand personality which proffers the brand personality is not only negotiated in the social environment but also within the individual environment. The unique personality dimensions of the brand tailor its intended meaning beyond the aggregate perspective to an individual level (Aaker 1997; Ligas and Cotte 1999).

For consumers, the symbolism and meanings which constitute brand personality are not necessarily inherent in brands but are usually intentionally and sometimes unintentionally included with corporate communications and customer reactions (Wee 2004). A traditional view of brand personality is that its traits become associated with a brand via the people who represent it, for example a typical user of the brand, the company's employees or CEO and the endorsers of the brand (McCracken 1989). Batra, Lehmann and Singh (1993), on the other hand suggest that a brand's personality is indirectly created over time by the entire marketing mix.

The personality of the brand may be considered the non-functional benefit element of the brand (Plummer 1984) and is of importance in building competitive advantage and brand loyalty amongst consumers (Plummer 1984; Aaker 1996; Aaker 1997). Why and how brand personalities affect consumer brand loyalty is explicated by Kim, Han and Park (2001). Their study suggests that it is the self-expressive value and distinctiveness of the brand that influence the attractiveness of the brand's personality and thus loyalty towards the brand. Aaker, Fournier and Brasel (2004) emphasize the determinant role of brand personality in establishing consumer brand relationships.

Brand personality enables a consumer to articulate his/her self (Belk 1988), an ideal self (Malhotra 1988) or exact aspects of the self (Kleine III, Kleine and Kernan 1993). It is thus an important determinant of consumer preference and usage (Biel 1992). Later research supports this idea articulating that consumers tend towards brands with particularly salient personality characteristics that enable them to highlight their

own personalities in particular situational contexts (Aaker 1999; Helgeson and Supphellen 2004). In other words, consumers exhibit a strong desire to build relationships with brands that project a personality that they are comfortable with in the same way as interacting with someone they like (Aaker 1996; Phau and Lau 2001). To enhance their connections with brands, consumers view brands anthropomorphically and assign various characteristics and personality to specific brands thus forming connections between certain brands and their own identities (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Once products and brands are associated with 'human' qualities, people may interact with them in ways that parallel social relationships and their interactions are guided by the norms that govern these relationships (Aggarwal 2004). This mechanism further reinforces the consumers' self-concept through self-worth and self-esteem enhancement (Aron, Paris and Aron 1995).

The concept of brand personality is considered to be a subset of brand image and thus the two constructs are very closely associated (Aaker 1996; Biel 1992; Keller 1993). Personality expression is a key dimension representing the image of symbolic brands (Bhat and Reddy 1998; Keller 1993). Not only do people use objects and brands to remind themselves of who they are but also often imbue brands with human characteristics that define a distinct brand personality (Aaker 1997) leading to the formation of relationships with brands that reinforce self-concept through mechanisms of self-worth and self-esteem (Fournier 1998). Krohmer, Malär and Nyffenegger (2007) suggest that a match between a consumer's personality and the brand personality has important brand performance implications in that consumers are more likely to positively evaluate a brand which they perceive to have similar personality characteristics. It appears therefore that self-congruence affects brand performance. The authors argue that since brand personality specifies personality traits, this may have more influence on consumers than brand image which focuses more closely on the functional attributes and benefits of the brand.

2.3.3.2 *The Symbolic Nature of Brands and Self-Congruity*

Individuals are driven by a need to feel good about themselves and try to maintain as well as enhance their own self-esteem (Malär et al. 2011). One way towards achieving this is to consume brands that are congruent with one's own view of self or ideal self (Sirgy 1982).

Indeed brands may be viewed as a system of signs in construction of the self (Schembri, Merrilees and Kristiansen 2010). Consumers evaluate the symbolism of the brand and determine whether it is appropriate for their 'selves' (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Schouten 1991). According to Levy (1959) the sign is appropriate for a

consumer if it reinforces or enhances the self. Self-congruity according to Helgeson and Supphellen (2004) is viewed as 'how much a consumer's self-concept matches the personality of a typical user of the brand'. More specifically self-congruity refers to the extent to which a consumer compares the image of his/herself and the image of the brand which is defined in accordance with a stereotypical user of the brand which influences consumer behaviour. The concept of 'self' is of great importance to individuals and by nature individuals' behaviour reflects the desire to both protect and at the same time enhance their self-concept (Kleine III, Kleine and Kernan 1993; Sirgy 1982; Underwood 2003). Aaker (1999) later proposed that self-concept encompasses all aspects of self including readily accessible or 'schematic traits and those that are not necessarily schematic'. Schematic traits are those that are very descriptive of and important to an individual. The need to express a self-schema stems from the need for consistency and positivity which in turn improve self-esteem and help self-presentation (Aaker 1999).

By owning brands which they perceive to possess symbolic images which are congruent with certain elements of their own self-concept, consumers maintain or strengthen their self-concept (Dolich 1969). As an extension of this ownership, consumers are also able to express their own identities in that the brands they choose bear images similar to their own self-image (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1982). Consistent with this view, such ownership leads to strong relationships with those brands that have values and personality associations that are congruent with their self-concept (Sirgy 1982). The subsequent brand relationships can therefore be viewed as expressions of consumers' identities (Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007).

Consumers psychologically compare their self-images with those of the stereotypical user of a brand. The psychological comparison involving the interaction between the product-user image and consumer's self-concept creates a subjective experience called self-image congruence and is considered an important predictor of consumer behaviour. According to Sirgy et al (1997) brands also possess 'personal image attributes' which themselves are reflective of the stereotypical user of the brand e.g. young, hip or cool.

Consumers not only draw on the perceived stereotypical user of the brand to form congruity judgments, but also on the brand personality itself. The greater the congruence between brand personality and the self-concept the more likely the consumer is to exhibit a favourable attitude to the brand (Kuenzel and Halliday 2010). It is widely held that self-congruity explains consumer preferences in that they seek products and brands having higher self-congruity than lower self-congruity

(Helgeson and Supphellen, 2004). According to Puzakova, Kwak and Rocereto (2009), self-concept/brand image congruity is defined as 'the level of congruity between key elements of one's own self-concept and brand image'. It follows that consumers evaluate brands such that if they perceive there to be a level of congruence between the brand image and their self-concept they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of both brand preference and brand loyalty (Hong and Zinkhan 1995).

Other researchers validate this idea, suggesting further that customer behaviours in the form of positive word-of-mouth and brand attitudes also develop as a result of self-concept/brand image congruency (Sirgy et al. 1997, 1991; Jamal and Goode 2001). Self-image congruence has also been shown to influence brand satisfaction (Sirgy et al. 1997).

2.4 Self-Brand Connections (SBCs)

How and why consumers form connections with brands is well documented in the branding literature (Fournier 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Sprott, Czellar and Spangenberg 2009; Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005). As my review in sections 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 have shown, consumers form complex relationships with some brands which they use to construct their self-concepts and to create their personal identity (Escalas and Bettman 2003, Aaker 1997, Richins 1994, Kleine III, Kleine and Kernan 1993, Ball and Tasaki 1992, Belk 1988). In this way, consumers form connections to brands (McCracken 1989). Possessions and brands can be used to satisfy psychological needs such as actively creating one's self-concept, reinforcing and expressing self-identity and allowing one to differentiate oneself and assert one's individuality (Ball and Tasaki 1992, Belk 1988, Fournier 1998, Richins 1994). Consumers appropriate the meaning of a brand from the brand's personality (Keller 2008) and the consumer's personal experience with the brand (Escalas 2004). When brand associations or meanings are used to construct one's self or used in the communication of one's self to others a self-brand connection is made (Escalas 2004). When a consumer categorizes the brand as part of the self, he/she develops a sense of oneness with the brand thus forming links connecting the brand with the self. Consumers may form connections with the brand since it represents who they are or because it is meaningful in terms of goals, personal concerns and life projects (Park et al. 2010).

According to Escalas and Bettman (2003) a set of brand associations can be more meaningful the more closely it is linked to the self. The authors further suggest that to achieve their identity goals people use products and brands to create and represent

self-images and to present these images to others or to themselves: a link bridges the brand and the self. Furthermore, the authors posit that consumers actively construct themselves using brand associations arising through reference-group usage and non-usage. In their research examining consumers' self-brand connections; they demonstrate that brand use by reference groups is a source of brand associations, which become linked to consumers' mental representation of self as consumers actively construct themselves by selecting brands with associations relevant to an aspect of their current self-concept or possible self. When consumers appropriate the brand images of brands used by their reference group they do so to meet self-related needs such as self-enhancement or self-verification.

Self-brand connections need only occur between the brand and one particular aspect of the self, the more schematic aspects of self, resulting in stronger connections. The connection between a brand and an individual's aspect of self may be made in a number of ways as consumers appropriate brand associations to meet self-motivated goals. Brands can be used to construct and cultivate one's self-concept and to express one's self-concept either publicly or privately or they may also be used as tools for social integration or to connect one to the past. They may act as symbols of accomplishment, provide self-esteem and allow one to differentiate oneself and to express certain conditions of individuality. In using brands to construct one's self-identity the set of brand associations can thus become linked to the consumer's mental representation of the self (Krugman 1965). Self-brand connections capture an important part of consumers' construction of self (Escalas 2004).

Consumers have stronger self-brand connections to brands which are associated with an in-group than those brands which are inconsistent with an in-group and weaker self-brand connections to brands associated with an out-group than brands inconsistent with an out-group. Such effects are more pronounced for symbolic brands i.e. those communicating something to others about the user's identity (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Consumers also use brands to meet self-needs such as self-verification or self-enhancement (Escalas and Bettman 2003). The self-brand connection measures the extent to which a brand connects the brand personality to his/her self-concept (Moore and Homer 2008). In such cases, the brand acts as a symbolic representation of who consumers believe they are or aspire to be (Chaplin and John 2005; Escalas, 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998).

Escalas (2004) expands on the concept of self-brand connections by examining how brands become more meaningful for consumers through the construction of narratives or stories to create a link between a brand and a consumer's self-concept.

To make sense of what goes on in the world, people naturally construct stories. Narratives are a mental organizing structure that provide meaning by combining elements towards a specific goal or conclusion. The meaning of a brand is often the result of its being part of a story. Through the narrative meaning-making process, some brands become more important and valuable than others to consumers and therefore become connected to consumers' sense of self. Research demonstrates that advertising eliciting increased narrative processing is associated with enhanced self-brand connections. Those brands perceived as meaningful are evaluated more favourably and have a higher likelihood of purchase than brands with few or no self-brand connections.

Over time, research has shown a greater depth to the meaning of possessions. Possessions serve as an expression of one's ties to family, community or cultural group as is the case in brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Some brand researchers have extended the same notion to apply to the use of brands in the same way as possessions. Particularly, Escalas and Bettman (2003) suggest that consumers 'construct their self-identity and express themselves to others through their brand choices' which they make based on the congruence between the perceived stereotypical brand user and their own self-image associations.

Some researchers have examined how the matching process between self and brand occurs. For instance, early work found that consumers enter into a specific process of matching brands or products which are congruent with their self-images (Birdwell 1968; Dolich 1969; Gardner and Levy 1955). Sirgy (1982) suggests that products induce specific images which activate beliefs about the self as a result of which a comparison process takes place to assess the congruence of the product-image with the self-image. Escalas and Bettman (2003) on the other hand imply that consumers select brands based on the similarity between imagined stereotypical users of the brand and their own actual or desired self-concept. Either way, for self-brand connections to occur certain requirements must be met. Firstly, consumers must hold brand associations that can be related to the self e.g. user characteristics, personality traits and reference groups. Secondly, consumers must hold an idea of their self-concept, either their actual self or ideal self which is inclusive of characteristics and traits which they can begin to align with those of the brand. Thirdly, consumers must go through a comparison process which determines whether aspects of their self-concept are congruent with perceived brand images (Chaplin and John 2005).

As asserted earlier by Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli (2007), based on social identity theory, connections with brands may be at an individual-level (self-concept

connection) i.e. as a contribution to one's own identity or at a group-level (e.g. country-of-origin connection) or as a contribution to one's group identity. More specifically, connections with brands may be made as a consumer seeks autonomy or as he/she seeks group affiliation, for instance a brand country-of-origin connection is defined as 'the extent to which a brand is used to express one's patriotic national identity'.

Other research has focused on the outcomes of such connections. Within this literature it has been widely established that brand connections provide consumers with a feeling of security (Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Wong 2009). Consumers often boost their feeling of security by forming strong connections with their brands (Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007). In accordance with Fournier's (1998) work, self-brand connections bring order and predictability to consumers' lives. Self-brand connections not only foster security but also help to form predictable routines (Thompson 1996). Self-brand connections have a positive relationship with attitudes towards the brand as well as intended positive behaviours towards the brand (Escalas 2004). Similarly, Moore and Homer (2008: p. 708) suggest that connections to the self 'influence attitudes towards an organisation (for example a branded sports team) to which respondents are attached or connected'.

2.5 Brand Identification

2.5.1 Consumer-Brand Identification (CBI)

Although only in recent years has the concept of consumer brand identification (CBI hereafter) gained momentum within the marketing literature, the idea that consumers may identify with companies has earlier origins. The notion of company identification has since transferred to the brand domain. In Bhattacharya and Sen's (2003) seminal work, the authors suggest customers may have their self-definitional needs partially satisfied by companies and thus identify with the company (Pratt 1998; Scott and Lane 2000) In Ahern, Bhattacharya and Gruen's (2005) study, expanding early ideas that customers identify with companies suggest that identification has an impact on both in-role and extra-role behaviour. More specifically, consumers who identify with a company exhibit greater product utilization which in itself serves as an act of self-expression. Consumers also exhibit stronger extra-role behaviours such as positive word of mouth when they identify with the company.

In accordance with Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), brands may be meaningful social categories for consumers to identify with where identification is defined as 'an active, selective and volitional act motivated by the satisfaction of one or more self-

definitional needs'. In line with social identification theory, authors suggest that the more consumers identify with brands the more likely they are to engage in brand-supportive behaviours such as brand reputation protection and brand loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005).

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) suggest that when a consumer identifies with a company they receive more than typically thought of utilitarian benefits such as product value, consistency and convenience. Instead they receive company-based value at a higher level in the form of social identities which help consumers satisfy specific self-definitional needs.

Brands as 'concrete actualizations' of firms represent social categories with which consumers are able to identify since meaning between brands and the self may be transferred (Belk 1988; Fournier 1998; McCracken 1988). In their conceptualization of CBI, Lam et al. (2010) suggest that the brand serves as a relationship partner to both the 'private self', i.e. such that individuals use the brand to define who they are and the 'social self' i.e. such that individuals consider themselves part of an in-group identifying with the brand. CBI is a psychological state that goes beyond just the cognitive overlap between the brand and the self; it also includes the affective and evaluative facets of psychological oneness with the brand. CBI can be argued to be at a higher level of abstraction than the less abstract concept of self-brand congruity (Lam, Ahearne and Schillewaert 2012). More specifically, CBI is 'a customer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand' which thus indicates CBI as a formative construct consisting of three dimensions namely, cognitive, emotional and evaluative. The belongingness refers to the psychological oneness resulting from an actual membership or a symbolic membership such as a user of the brand. In accordance with Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2012) who concur with three aforementioned components, CBI may be more extensively defined as 'the extent to which the brand is incorporated into one's self-concept through the development of cognitive connection with the brand, valuing this connection with the brand and the emotional attachment to the brand.' As a result of self-categorization a cognitive connection is formed between the individual and the brand. The evaluative component is the degree to which consumers' value their connection with the brand and the value placed on this connection by others. More specifically it describes the consumer's feelings towards the brand and towards others' evaluations of the brand. The emotional component is the emotional attachment to the group and to the evaluations associated with the group i.e. the brand.

The authors further infer antecedent conditions for CBI suggesting that in the consumption domain identification is driven by the need for self-continuity or self-verification, self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement (Berger and Heath 2007; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Chernev, Hamilton and Gal 2011). Thus identification with a brand is likely to be related to the extent to which a person perceives the brand 1) to have a personality that is similar to his or her own, 2) to be distinctive and 3) to be prestigious. The authors propose that other more affect-laden factors (as opposed to the former cognitively-driven antecedents) come into play in predicting brand identification, namely the extent to which consumers: 1) feel that their interactions with a brand helps them connect with important others, 2) perceive a brand in warm, emotional terms rather than cold and rational ones and 3) have fond memories of brand consumption experiences. In a similar vein, Kunda (1999) suggests that people's need for self-continuity goes together with their need for self-enhancement which encompasses the maintenance and affirmation of positive self-views which subsequently lead to greater self-esteem. Such identity-related needs are also met through identification with prestigious entities such as brands (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005; Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Wong 2009). Brand prestige (the status or esteem associated with the brand) is thus also perceived as antecedent to brand identification in consumers. Hughes and Ahearne (2010) define brand identification as 'the degree to which a person defines his or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes defines a brand'. The authors expand on this definition to include the concept of the integration of the brand identity with self-identity describing brand identity as 'the set of brand associations from which a person derives functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits'. Other authors highlight how CBI is distinct from other constructs in the branding literature describing CBI as distinct from the emotional bond that is central to concepts of emotional brand attachment (Malär et al. 2011) and distinct from brand love (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012).

Social identity affects the perceptions, cognitions and evaluations of individuals which impacts emotions as well as behaviours. Increased group identification marks out boundaries between in-groups and out-groups enabling the categorization process of people into 'us' versus 'them' and 'we' versus 'they'. Through this process, individuals create order in their social environment positioning themselves and other people within it. Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), hold a similar view suggesting people associate themselves with highly regarded brands and in so-doing increase their self-esteem and thus positive identification with the brand is generated.

The extent to which the brand expresses and enhances one's identity is determined by the level of brand identification and has a positive effect on word-of-mouth reports (Kim, Han and Park 2001).

Identification is often linked to the causes and aims of the organisation; in instances where the organisation is known to stand for a particular cause, consumers are likely to identify with the mission of the company and furthermore to demonstrate loyalty to its products (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995). Concurring with this idea, Du, Bhattacharya and Sen 2007's research illustrates how consumers of a brand are more likely to identify with the brand and be loyal to the brand when it is perceived to be a socially responsible brand. The authors further suggest that corporate social responsibility satisfies consumers' self-definitional and self-enhancement needs causing them to become brand champions as opposed to buyers.

Other research has examined what causes consumers to identify with brands. Social identity with a brand community impacts the consumer's brand identification where brand identification describes the 'extent to which the consumer sees his or her own self-image as overlapping with the brand's image'. As the consumer's social identity with the brand community strengthens through greater involvement in the community which subsequently promotes the assimilation of the brand image into the consumer's identity (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006).

Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) suggest that self-brand congruity is an antecedent of CBI. Since self-brand congruity captures only a symbolic driver of CBI, it is a necessary but not sufficient condition for developing CBI. Functional drivers also play an important role in CBI formation (Lam, Ahearne and Schillewaert 2012).

Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen (2005) posit that as an extension of the identification occurring within the context of formal memberships (such as those of academic institution alumni and members of museums), identification does indeed occur in the consumer-company relationship. Particularly, their empirical evidence points towards outcomes of identification in the form of in-role behaviour such as product utilization and extra-role behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth. Functional congruity between the brand and the expectations of the consumer leads to higher identification in consumers.

Homburg, Wieseke and Hoyer (2009) report a strong influence of customer-company identification on customer loyalty. Whan Park et al. (2012) propose that the more the brand is incorporated into the self, the more likely consumers are to expend social, financial and time resources in the brand to maintain the brand relationship. For example, consumers are more likely to support the brand with which they identify by repurchasing the brand, exhibiting a long term preference for the brand and the

willingness to pay a price premium. Lam et al. (2010) claimed that CBI inhibits consumers from switching brands.

CBI produces brand advocacy in the form of positively promoting the brand to social others. CBI is positively related to brand advocacy, i.e. positive word-of-mouth and recommendation behaviour (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005).

A number of positive outcomes of identification have been empirically identified such as loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986), commitment (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000) and brand advocacy (Badrinarayanan and Laverie 2011). According to Badrinarayanan and Laverie (2011), when individuals identify with a brand they form a psychological relationship with the brand and consequently demonstrate favouritism and work to the benefit of the brand.

Consumer-brand identification is positively associated to consumer-brand relationship quality.

People who identify with a particular brand experience a positive psychological outcome in the form of enhanced self-esteem and engage in positive action strategies towards the brand (Donavan, Janda and Suh 2006).

As mentioned previously, identification is driven by the need for self-continuity, self-distinctiveness and self-enhancement. The necessity for self-continuity suggests that to try to understand themselves and their social worlds, people are motivated to maintain a consistent sense of self (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Consumers are therefore expected to consume and identify with those brands which match their own sense of who they are, and in so-doing, satisfying their need for self-expression.

2.6 Brand-Specific Behaviours

Brand-specific behaviours have been described in the literature both in the context of consumers and employees. The idea of 'employee-brand-building behaviour' evolved from the work of Miles and Mangold (2004). Such behaviours on the part of employees, particularly frontline employees are thought to contribute to retention and loyalty of consumers towards the brand. Explicating this idea, Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak (2009) define 'employee-brand-building behaviour' as 'employee's contribution (both on and off the job) to an organisation's customer-oriented branding efforts'. 'In-role' brand-building behaviour refers to employees meeting the standards required in their roles as brand representatives. More specifically, brand-building behaviour may be viewed as fulfilling the following criteria: membership in the brand community, enactment of brand-based role identity, exhibition of in-role brand-building behaviours and exhibition of extra-role brand-building behaviours. In-role brand-building behaviour refers to employees meeting the standards prescribed by

their organisational roles as brand representatives. 'Extra-role' brand building behaviour refers to employee actions that go beyond the prescribed roles for the good of the brand and are optional.

Expanding on this idea, employee-brand extra-role behaviours are described by Hughes and Ahearne (2010) as proactive behaviours that are outside of the regular job requirements which contribute directly to the 'viability and vitality of the brand'. Such behaviours may include consuming the brand at home or in public, recommending the brand to friends, defending the brand from criticism, encouragement of other employees to focus on the brand, reporting competitor action deemed threatening to the brand.

In an empirical study of the effects of brand-specific leadership style on employee behaviours, Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak (2009) propose brand-specific *transactional* leaders have been shown to influence their employees via compliance which leads to an increase in intention to leave the organisation and a decrease in demonstrated brand-building behaviours both in-role and extra-role. Brand-specific *transformational* leaders on the other hand influence their employees via internalization which leads to a decrease in intention to leave the organisation and an increase in demonstrated brand-building behaviours both in-role and extra-role.

Researchers have suggested that in the case of consumers, brand-specific behaviours emerge in the form of positive word-of-mouth and brand attitudes as a result of self-concept/brand image congruency (Sirgy et al. 1991; Sirgy et al. 1997; Jamal and Goode 2001) as I reviewed in section 2.3.3.

2.6.1 Brand-specific Behaviour and Identification

Identification has been identified as a key mediating variable in the examination of interpersonal, consumer and company and employee-company relationships (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). A number of positive outcomes of identification have been empirically identified such as loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986), commitment (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000) and brand advocacy (Badrinarayanan and Laverie 2011). According to Badrinarayanan and Laverie (2011), when individuals identify with a brand they form a psychological relationship with the brand and consequently demonstrate brand-oriented behaviour in the form of brand favouritism and work to the benefit of the brand.

The idea that employees may identify with specific brands was first suggested by Hughes and Ahearne (2010) in their examination of the effect of brand identification

amongst salespeople on in-role effort towards the brand and also on extra-role behaviours which themselves are in direct support of the brand. The authors define brand identification as 'the degree to which a person defines his or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes defines a brand'. Expanding on this definition the authors suggest identification requires the integration of the brand identity with self-identity describing brand identity as 'the set of brand associations from which a person derives functional, emotional and self-expressive benefits'.

When salespeople strongly identify with their employer or a particular brand, they become actively involved in its success or failure. Hughes and Ahearne (2010) provide empirical evidence that brand identification can increase the effort on the part of salespeople behind a specific brand and ultimately improve brand performance. A positive relationship between brand identification and brand-specific extra-role behaviours may over time further contribute to the brand's strength in the marketplace. Earlier work from Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen (2005) reported similar findings, particularly, their empirical evidence points towards outcomes of identification in the form of in-role behaviour such as product utilization and extra-role behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth. Similarly, Kim, Han and Park's (2001) research indicates that brand identification has a positive effect on word-of-mouth reports.

2.7 Summary and Research Questions

From the review of the literature I make a number of key observations:

1. Consumers draw on brand associations in the form of benefits to form impressions of brands (Keller 1993).
2. Brands offer different types of benefits including self-definitional benefits (Keller 1993; Park et al. 1986; Keller and Lehman 2006).
3. Consumers use brands to express their identities since brands they choose bear images similar to their own self-image (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1982).
4. The brand not only offers the consumer the ability to express the self but also to create his/her identity (McCracken 1989).
5. Self-brand connection measure the extent to which the brand personality connects to his/her self-concept (Moore and Homer 2008).
6. Consumer brand identification is a consumer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling and valuing his or her belongingness with the brand (Lam et al. 2010).

7. Brand identification results from self-definitional needs such as self-continuity (consistency of self-concept) or self-distinctiveness or self-enhancement (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003).
8. Brand identification leads to brand loyalty and positive word-of mouth (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995; Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005).
9. Over time the role of the employee has evolved from a seller of the brand to brand ambassador (Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009).
10. Employees who identify with brands exhibit brand-supportive behaviours (Hughes and Ahearne 2010).
11. Different types of leadership lead to variable levels of brand-supportive behaviour (Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak 2009).

Following this synthesis these observations lead me to identify a number of gaps in the literature which when taken together form the premise to my research questions. More specifically, the importance of the role of employees has been well recognised in the literature. However, there is a paucity of literature examining employee-brand relationships and brand behaviours on the part of employees. Observing the gaps in the extant literature, this study intends to explore in more detail the nature of the employee-brand relationship and to uncover how it is similar or dissimilar to the consumer-brand relationship in terms of drawing on brand associations and the development of subsequent brand supportive behaviours. More explicitly, I pose the following questions:

RQ1: What is the nature of the employee-brand relationship?

RQ2: How is this employee-brand relationship similar or dissimilar to the consumer-brand relationship?

RQ3: What are some of the factors contributing to brand-specific behaviour on the part of employees?

A mixed methods research approach is adopted in this thesis to answer these research questions. In the next chapter the methodology will be presented in detail.

CHAPTER 3 QUALITATIVE STUDY RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the methodological approaches adopted to answer the research questions outlined earlier. Furthermore, it provides an explanation for the choice of methodological approach, describes the data collection process and mode of analysis and describes how reliability, validity and generalisability of data was ensured.

3.1.1 Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods

In order for us to gain insight into an as yet unexplored phenomenon, in this case the employee-brand relationship, a qualitative approach combined with a quantitative approach is optimal. I answer the calls from several researchers to engage in the use of qualitative methods combined with quantitative methods to build and refine theory to fully understand the phenomenon of interest i.e. the relationship employees have with their brands (Shah and Corley 2006). Combining quantitative and qualitative techniques within a research approach helps to develop and extend theory and to test applications, and also this serves to triangulate findings (Denzin and Lincoln 1994; Jick 1979; Van Maanen 1979). In my research I support Jick's (1979) thinking that a combined approach to the methodology provides a more complete picture of my phenomenon of employee-brand relationships than either method could accomplish on its own. Healy and Perry (2000) indicate that different methodological approaches are relevant depending on whether the aim of the research is theory building or theory testing. Theory testing requires measurement whereas theory building emphasizes the discovery of meaning. A combination of research methods allows both theory building and testing to occur within a single research project which is the case in this thesis.

Whether adopting a qualitative approach or a quantitative approach or a mixed methods approach as in this thesis, each approach takes on different characteristics (Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Characteristics of Quantitative and Qualitative Paradigms (Adapted from Reichardt and Cook 1979 in Deshpande 1983).

Qualitative Paradigm	Quantitative Paradigm
Qualitative methods preferred.	Quantitative methods preferred.
Concerned with understanding human behaviour from the actor's frame of reference.	Seeks the facts or causes of social phenomena without advocating subjective interpretation.
Phenomenological approach.	Logical-positivistic approach.
Uncontrolled, naturalistic observational measurement.	Obtrusive, controlled measurement.
Subjective; 'insider's' perspective; close to the data.	Objective; 'outsider's' perspective; distanced from the data.
Grounded, discovery-oriented, exploratory, expansionist, descriptive, inductive.	Ungrounded, verification-oriented, confirmatory, reductionist, inferential, hypothetico-deductive
Process-oriented.	Outcome-oriented
Validity is critical; 'real', 'rich', and 'deep' data	Reliability is critical; 'hard' and replicable data
Holistic-attempts to synthesize	Particularistic – attempts to analyze

Since in the first instance I am seeking to build theory I require a rich description of the phenomenon, according to Mintzberg (1979) 'richness comes from anecdote'. It has similarly been argued that theory building requires the rich knowledge that only qualitative methods can provide (Shah and Corley 2006). Furthermore, the development of theory that is grounded in the experiences of individuals living with and creating the phenomenon of interest is crucial to continued research and subsequent generalization (Van de Ven 1989; Weick 1995). Qualitative research thus enables establishment of theoretical meaning through a conceptual framework which can then be tested with quantitative research.

3.2 Research Epistemology

Paradigmatic thinking involves particular assumptions based on the nature of reality (ontology), how to get to know that reality (epistemology) and how to access what I need to know about that reality (methodology) (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Before choosing the appropriate method for the study therefore, it is important that I clarify

my epistemological and ontological standpoint, this subsequently informs us of the most appropriate method to adopt.

A research paradigm is a set of beliefs or assumptions which guides researchers (Cresswell 1998). A number of research paradigms exist and similarly a number of research approaches. According to Lincoln and Guba (2000) the main research paradigms (a basic set of beliefs that guide action) are positivism, post-positivism, and realism and critical theory, all with specific approaches to research.

According to Kuhn (1970), there are two broad 'scientific' paradigms in marketing. The dominant paradigm comprises the empiricist, objectivist or positivist view of knowledge which applies natural science methods and principles. The alternative paradigm is otherwise known as the interpretivist, subjectivist or social constructivist view in that inter-subjective meanings are interpreted as the way in which the informants themselves view their own world. In other words, the interpretive paradigm is based on the view that people socially and symbolically construct and sustain their own realities (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Morgan and Smircich 1980).

Marketing research from a social constructionist perspective favors qualitative methods of inquiry that directly involve marketers with subjects in the research process. Marketing research from a social constructivist view is based on the assumption that it is unlikely that subjects will be open and informative with researchers who are distanced from the phenomenon they experience (Marsden and Littler 1996). It therefore makes sense in this case to adopt a subjective-qualitative methodology in order to 'get at the world of the agent or subject' (Maykut and Moorehouse 1994).

Interpretive theory building is inductive in nature and researchers enter the research domain with as few a priori ideas as possible. Since my research domain remains relatively untapped my theory building is based on no pre-conceived ideas.

The goal of my research is therefore to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation. Rather than starting with a theory as is the post-positivist approach I intend to generate or inductively develop a theory (Crotty 1998; Lincoln and Guba 2000; Schwandt 2001 and Neuman 2000). As a researcher I make sense of the meanings others have about the world, i.e. an interpretive approach is taken. The epistemological stance is toward theory building by becoming a part of the evolving events to see the perspective of the employees experiencing the brand relationship (Gioia and Pitre 1990).

The interpretations should be rigorously gathered and the researcher should develop her own interpretations that make sense to the informants who experienced it in the first instance and it should be expressed in relation to extant theory. 'By placing

oneself in the context where the phenomenon is occurring and developing interpretations of the phenomenon based on personal experience as well as the experiences living it' a researcher develops insights which are not feasible through other methods of analysis (Shah and Corley 2006). Miles and Huberman (1984) who suggest that qualitative methods provide a means for developing an understanding of often complex phenomena from the perspective of those living it. Furthermore, qualitative methods allow the researcher to discover new variables and relationships which indeed is the purpose of this research from the outset.

The interpretive research paradigm is such that results are representative of the interpretation of those actors experiencing the phenomenon under study and that the development of theory is plausible. The analysis of interpretive data is assessed on its ability 'to provide reasonable and plausible insight into a phenomenon such that a deeper understanding of the phenomenon can be gained'. Interpretivism or postmodernism can be categorized within the paradigms of constructivism and critical theory.

Reviewing the objectives of my study, it is apparent that the study sits under the epistemological umbrella of social constructivism within the interpretive tradition (Charmaz 2006; Crotty 1998). My ontological assumption is one of multiple local and specific constructed realities and my epistemological standpoint is as a researcher I am a participant in the world being investigated, I am thus able to make a decision on the technique to use to discover that reality.

My research objectives are to gain insight and understanding as to 'what goes on' with employees and their brands. I require a methodology which can embrace the complexities and nuances of the employee/brand interface relationship. Therefore, at the outset, methodologies which emphasize subjective and social meaning are considered to be most appropriate (Charmaz 2006; Crotty 1998; Guba 1990). My aim is to explore employees' feelings about the brand, their experiences with the brand and to learn about their behaviours towards the brand rather than any form of absolute truth.

Since grounded theory favors research methods known for collecting rich data directly from those experiencing the phenomenon a qualitative approach is taken. In-depth interviews with employees is the most appropriate method of investigation (Table 3.2).

In this case, methodologies that emphasize subjective and social meanings are considered most appropriate (Charmaz 2006; Guba 1990). This study can be seen to encompass critical theory and post-structuralism. Given that there must be a clear epistemological link between research question and methodology chosen, I adopt a

grounded theory approach with in-depth interviewing which I describe in the following sections.

In the second half of my study, to test the conceptual framework I develop in the qualitative grounded theory study, my epistemological and ontological view experience a shift. I adopt a positivist research approach where my ontological assumption is that reality is real and apprehensible and epistemology is objectivist, in other words findings are true. Common methodologies adopted are surveys, verification of hypotheses, chiefly using quantitative methods. I address this phase of my research in Chapters 5 and 6.

Table 3.2 Approach to Constructivism/Critical Theory (Adapted from Bonoma 1985; Guba and Lincoln 1994)

Dimension	Constructivism/Critical Theory
Research position/Goal of Investigation	Descriptive
Direction of Research Inquiry	Development of idiographic knowledge based social experiences such as human ideas, beliefs, perceptions, values etc.
Ontology	Multiple local and specific 'constructed realities'
Research Strategies	In-depth interviews, participant observation
Methodology	Observation, process oriented
Causality	Not addressed
Interview Questions	Very Open
Judgment of Research Quality	Credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability
Sample Size	Very small
Data Collection	Unstructured
Interaction of interviewer and phenomenon (Epistemology)	Passionate participant
Respondent's perspective	'Outsider's' perspective, distanced from data
Information per respondent	Extensive

3.3 Research Method and Design

3.3.1 *The Grounded Theory Approach*

Grounded theory as a methodology emerged from the sociology discipline which focuses specifically on society and individuals. However, given the broadening of the marketing field to embrace more behavioural related phenomena such as ethical marketing, social marketing and experiential consumption grounded theory has become increasingly applied in the marketing literature (e.g. Noble and Mokwa 1999; Celsi, Rose and Leigh 1993; Schouten 1991).

Since my research intention is to develop rich insights into the employee relationship with the brand the grounded theory perspective appears to be the most appropriate particularly given that the purpose of grounded theory is to 'elicit fresh understandings about patterned relationships between social actors and how these relationships and interactions actively construct reality' (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Suddaby 2006). Since as a researcher I had no preconceived ideas of the nature of the employee-brand relationship I had neither constructs nor hypotheses to guide my data collection.

An inductive grounded theory approach allows the collection of rich data thus aiding in circumstances where little is known about a given phenomenon and is particularly relevant in new areas of study (Eisenhardt 1989). It seeks to uncover processes and to understand poorly understood phenomena (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Marshall and Rossman 1995; Miles and Huberman 1994; Yin 2003). With two notable exceptions (see Hughes and Ahearne 2010; Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak 2009) as far as I am aware, no previous studies have directly examined the employee-brand relationship.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) argue that the theorizing process which is generated by the data collection is in the first instance substantive in nature i.e. developed for a substantive area of inquiry which in my case is employee-brand relationships. The substantive level theory is tested for its empirical verification with quantitative data to determine if it can be generalized to a sample and population. Formal theory follows and is developed for a formal, conceptual area of inquiry which may be generalized to other contexts.

Grounded theory is in itself a process comprising a series of components which include the identification of a theoretical question of interest, choosing the appropriate context, sampling within that context such that data collection facilitates emerging theory and the drawing of constant comparisons between the collected data (Shah and Corley 2006).

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1 Sampling

The first part of this research study sought to examine how employees felt about their brands and to propose a framework, rather than to measure or analyze causal relationships between variables which is the purpose of a quantitative study (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Guba 1990).

In the first instance, purposive sampling was used since theoretical sampling requires the presence of data. As a first step, a pilot study was conducted which involved interviewing seven informants from a number of different well-known brands. These unstructured in-depth interviews incorporated primarily senior brand/marketing managers and were conducted to inform the data collection process by identifying some key issues, providing background information and ideas for what may be relevant to guide the interviews in the more general population of employees (Table 3.3).

Table 3.3 Pilot Study

Name	Participant Background	Company Location & Activity
Gary	Chief Marketing Officer	Philips, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Electronics
Jurgen	Senior Branding Director	Siemens, Munich, Germany Electronics
Anna	Director of Brand Management	Mayo Clinic, Rochester, USA Healthcare
Chris	Senior Brand Manager	ING Bank, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Banking
Larry	Department Manager, Brand Marketing	AudiUSA, Michigan, USA Automobiles
Simon	Brand and Marketing Communications Manager	3M, Bracknell, UK Technology
Mark	Head of Group Brand Strategy	Virgin Management, Hammersmith, UK

Theoretical sampling guided me towards the next round of interviewees. Theoretical sampling is 'the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses the data and decides what data to collect next

and where to find it, in order to develop the theory as it emerges' (Glaser 1987). My only sampling criteria were that this round of employees should have a minimum of two years tenure with the brand since I felt this was adequate time for them to 'get to know' the brand and that they should 'not work directly in branding' since I felt this may bias answers due to the excessive proximity to the brand.

My final sample consisted of six participants across five organisations. Table 3.4 displays key sample characteristics. In developing my sample I aimed to diversify the brands to discover common relationship drivers and their underpinnings across brands from different industry sectors.

Table 3.4 Sample Characteristics

Name	Participant Background	Company Location & Activity
James	Product Lifecycle Manager Age 56, 26 years with the brand	Nikon, New York, USA Optical lenses
Susan	Marketing Supervisor Age 33, 3 years with the brand	3M, Minnesota, USA Technology
Sophie	Recruitment Advisor Age 50, 10 years with the brand	Mayo Clinic, Rochester, USA Healthcare
Claire	Nurse Age 29, 4 years with the brand	Mayo Clinic, Rochester, USA Healthcare
Janine	Product Communications Manager Online Age 31, 4 years with the brand	Philips, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Electronics
Sally	VP Trade Banking Age 35, 9 years with the brand	ING Bank, Amsterdam, The Netherlands Banking

With a total number of 13 participants informing my theory, this exceeds the number deemed sufficient for generating themes or categories according to McCracken (1988). As McCracken (pp17 1988) states, 'eight participants may suffice since the purpose of the qualitative interview is not to discover how many and what kinds of people share a particular characteristic'. Indeed, its purpose is to 'gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the

world'. The respondents were not chosen to represent some part of the larger world but offer a 'glimpse' of the phenomenon under investigation.

3.4.2 Interviews

Unstructured in-depth interviews are commonly used in the collection of qualitative data and are considered as the formal interview technique of grounded theory.

For us to derive a theoretically grounded model of the relevant constructs involved in the employee-brand relationship, in-depth interviews with employees are the sole providers of evidence. Although unstructured interviews may have a general guide at the outset, listening to respondents recounting their stories in a broad manner is prominent in the early stages of the research before theoretical sampling sharpens the focus of later interviews (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

My data collection with employees took place in the context of in-depth one-on-one interviews in the USA and The Netherlands (Table 3.4). Interviews were employed with six participants; five female and one male and ranging in ages from 25 to 57. Informants were scheduled for a 90-minute to 2-hour time period in a location away from the work place, typically a hotel lobby or nearby coffee shop. Interviewing was used to elicit as many data points, stories/categories and as much authentic detail and contextual information from each interviewee. Anonymity was guaranteed and participants were made aware of this. All interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews with employees were initiated with 'grand tour' questions (McCracken 1988; Spradley 1979) revolving around their feelings and experiences with the brand. Interviews were loosely structured thus allowing employees to address the topic in their own way. Since adhering to strict interview guidelines inhibit discovery I used broader questions such as 'tell me about', 'what happened when' etc. (Corbin and Strauss 2008).

I used a rough guide to guide my interviews in the first instance but after the first interview I used the constant comparison method such that the data guided the subsequent interviews (Table 3.5). At the outset I aimed to broadly find out 'what is going on with employees and their brands', I had no pre-conceived conceptual ideas about the nature of the relationship. I began by asking informants 'tell me about this brand, what does it mean to you, how does it make you feel?' The aim of this was to allow informants the freedom to talk as they wished about what the brand means to them. I further asked them to describe what it felt like to them when they told other people where they worked, how mentioning the brand name made them feel. This

was to delve further into their feelings about the brand and to get them to think about what their association with the brand actually means to them.

The final part of the interview was aimed to examine how much they think about the brand in their daily work, so I invited them to describe how present the brand is in their minds when making work-related decisions this aimed to give us some insight to brand-specific behaviour. This was a rough guide, some questions were discarded and others were added and explored further as theory began to emerge.

After each interview, notes (memos) were made both related to what I would expect to find but also what I did not expect to find. For instance, I expected to find that employees would 'like the brand they worked for, even 'feel proud to work for the brand' but not necessarily that they 'felt a connection to the brand' or indeed that they are working 20 hours a day 'because it's all about the brand'. Certain pieces of data required further exploration and these guided the next interview. This process described was repeated for each participant such that data categories were consistently refined for fit and relevance. For example, using this constant comparative method I was able to explore employees' insights not only into the employee-brand relationship but also the intricate workings of the relationship including the factors that contribute to the formation of self-brand connection and the employee-brand identification.

On the other hand, some questions I initially perceived as having the potential to provide rich insights proved to be not useful. For instance, in the search for comparisons between the employee-brand relationship and the consumer-brand relationship I posed the question "how does your relationship with the brand you work for compare with those that you buy?", this question was met with confusion and it soon became apparent that it was redundant so the question was quickly discarded. Thus, by ably recognizing importance of some data and irrelevance of others I demonstrate theoretical sensitivity. To some degree therefore, I used the researcher's knowledge as if it were another informant (Goulding 2002).

Much of the analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection to help to determine the direction of the study. As new data came to light they were analyzed in the context of the previous data and examined for similar points and similarly contrasting points. The constant comparison occurred informally during the interviews and more formally in between interviews. Emerging themes subsequently guided but did not restrict the interviews that followed.

Table 3.5 Original Interview Guide and Research Questions

Research Question	Discussion Topics or Probes
What is the employee relationship with the brand?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feelings when talking about the brand Feeling when talking to others about brand What does the brand mean to the employee? Association with the brand Engaged with the brand Brand affect the person Others living the brand
How does this relationship affect employee behaviour?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think about the brand on a daily basis Affect decisions Improve the brand Care about reputation Living the brand

A constant comparative method of data analysis was used (Glaser and Strauss 1967). The data was continually analyzed as it was collected for categories and emergent themes which was then used to guide subsequent data collection. As the transcripts became available, I independently coded the data for thematic content which was subsequently ordered into broader and more abstract categories. This is described in detail in the following section 3.4.3.

3.4.3 Theoretical Coding

Initially, the interview transcripts were read and reread. I employed customary coding techniques to create conceptual categories from the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Strauss and Corbin, 1990). A rigorous and systematic reading and coding of the transcripts allowed major themes to emerge. Segments of the transcripts containing information pertaining to the employee-brand relationship were open-coded enabling an analysis of the interviews according to themes, the documentation of relationships between themes and the identification of themes important to employees. For an example of the early open-coding process see Figure 3.1. Codes were broken down by phrases, sentences, or paragraphs, with the aim of capturing key ideas. This process generated over 400 codes. The first set of codes served as a first conceptual lens through which to examine the nature of the relationship between

the employee and the brand. I then grouped these codes according to similarities and differences, or by themes.

Fig. 3.1 Tentative Preliminary Open Codes (in bold) Derived from Data

Participant Data

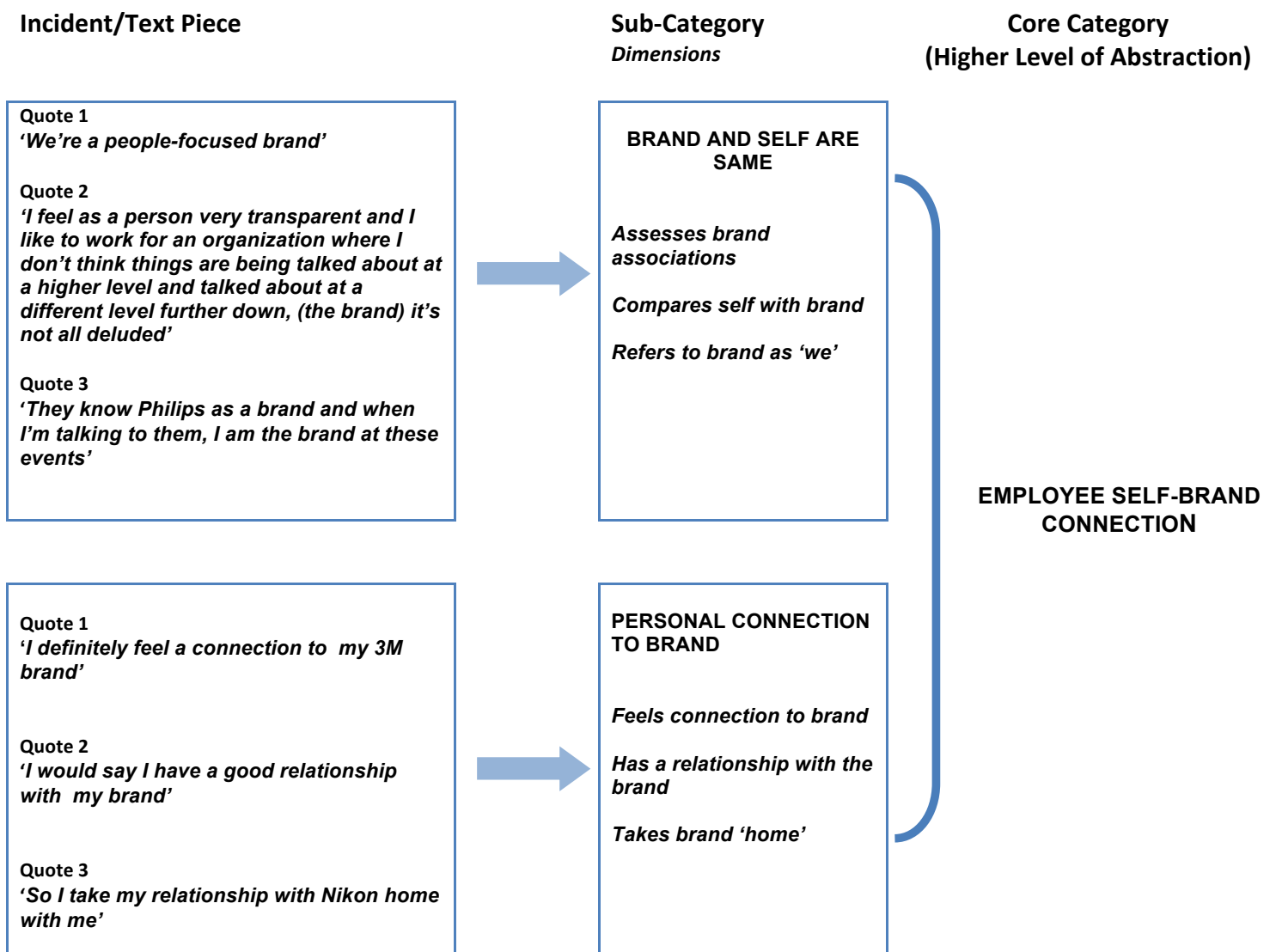
I'm much **entwined** with the 3M brand. I've just finished doing some recruiting for our program and I definitely **felt a connection** to our 3M brand, you know it's really **exciting** for me to work for such a leader in so many spaces and it's hard to find an industry or even a sector that 3M actually isn't a part of so I find that really **empowering** and that says a lot about the brand....

I think we also really value a **work-life balance**. I know that can be just kinda like a tagline but I do think it's pretty telling, lights go out at six and people are gone. Ok people may be working from home but they're not there and I think that **speaks for the 3M brand** a lot so I definitely **feel a connection** to this brand

Theoretical coding is the process through which sense is made of the data by categorizing and grouping similar text pieces from the data. The coding process enabled us to identify properties, dimensions and boundaries of each data category. I adopted the constant comparative method which requires simultaneous coding and analysis of data. The naming of data fragments and comparing incidents and names occur concurrently (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 2001). As data are collected the goal is to 'compare incident to incident and then incident to concept to generate categories and saturate their properties' (Glaser 2001). This is the method by which I assigned and created meaning from our data. Through cycling back and forth collecting, coding and analyzing the data, the theory started to develop in my mind. This was an iterative process whereby I named and compared events occurring in the data then subsequently examining them for similarities and differences until the consistent themes in the data emerged to the surface (Goulding 2002). I coded each relevant event in the data into as many subcategories as possible. Since each subcategory had different dimensions, each piece of new data was

examined for correspondence with existing dimensions, if it did not correspond, new subcategories were created. As a result I ensured that subcategories were driven by the data. The continued coding process allowed us to generate theoretical properties of the subcategories which enabled us to discover the ‘core categories’ (Glaser and Strauss 1967) which at a higher level of abstraction serve as the key indicators and explanation for my phenomenon. Through this entire process I am able to guarantee a good fit between my empirical observations and the conceptual categories they claim to indicate (Locke 2001). For an example of this process see Figure 3.2 which illustrates how the core category employee self-brand connection emerged from the data.

Fig. 3.2 Coding Schema Employee Self-Brand Connection



From Figure 3.2 it is apparent how different segments of text became different dimensions of one sub-category. Sub-categories however are not mutually exclusive such that some events may fit in to either of the sub-categories. For example, one event may fit both viewing the brand and self as the same and indicate a personal connection to the brand. As a result, it became apparent that the theoretical framework begins to form around a single core category; in this case I labeled the core category employee self-brand connection.

The complete data analysis emerged from a set of reiterative steps that allowed us the freedom to conceptualize emerging relationship components. A number of rounds of coding were conducted at differing levels of abstraction until the key variables and relationships were established thus leading to the development of my proposed conceptual framework. Six key core categories emerged which I termed: functional brand value, symbolic brand value, experiential brand value, employee self-brand connection, employee-brand identification and brand-specific behaviour. Constant comparison facilitated the identification of concepts which progressed from plain descriptions of the data (open coding) to explaining the relationships between and across incidents i.e. axial coding and involved the process of abstraction onto a theoretical level (Goulding 1999). Thus the development of substantive theory was enabled.

I describe these findings and the development of the conceptual framework in detail in Chapter 4.

3.4.4 Theoretical Saturation

Robust theory generation depends on the completeness of the data categories otherwise referred to as 'category saturation' (Goulding 2002). More specifically, category saturation is said to have been reached when 'subsequent data incidents that are examined provide no new information, either in terms of refining the category or of its properties or of its relationship to other categories' (Locke 2001).

More simply stated: saturation is reached when no additional data are found which can be used to further develop the properties of the category. As incidents are coded into a category, subsequent incidents should highlight new aspects of the category, if this is not the case, then saturation has been reached. I conducted data analysis until theoretical saturation was reached which was indicated by redundancy of information indicating categories would not change given more information.

To verify saturation of the data, researchers may evaluate whether the formulated substantive theory explains a reasonably accurate statement of the phenomenon

under investigation and what the practical and relevant implications for others studying this phenomenon might be (Glaser and Strauss 1967). This I achieved by presenting my newly developed theory to two of the participating companies to ensure that the substantive theory is relevant in the environments from which my data had been gathered and furthermore that my newly developed theory had useful application in practice. Following my inquiry, feedback I received from managers provided evidence that the substantive theory had both relevance and fit for the situations they were encountering in their everyday lives which thus indicates saturation had been reached. I am also able to demonstrate saturation given the dimensions I suggest explain each category thereby indicating depth to each construct (Fig. 3.2).

3.5 Analysis of Research Trustworthiness

I adopted formal and systematic methods for data collection and analysis in order to ensure the trustworthiness of my work. Specifically, to assess the trustworthiness of my research I applied two sets of criteria. From interpretive research I focused on a set of criteria by which ensure the rigor of qualitative research, it is to these criteria that I subscribe, more specifically the notions of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability are addressed (Hirschman 1986; Lincoln and Guba 1985; Wallendorf and Belk 1989; Strauss and Corbin 1998; Corbin and Strauss 1990). Additionally, I applied the criteria of fit, understanding, generality and control from grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Table 3.6 demonstrates how I perceive my research meets these criteria. Besides the aforementioned criteria I also paid close attention to avoid the pitfalls of an a la carte approach to the grounded theory methodology. Below I describe the common pitfalls and how they were avoided.

3.5.1 Avoiding Pitfalls of an A La Carte Approach

1. Getting trapped in the concentration site

Data collection starts with a concentration site, in my case, I started out with Senior Brand Managers (Table 3.3). In cases when theoretical sampling is not applied researchers may collect data until they perceive saturation is achieved within the concentration site but they may never move beyond the concentration site to test further limits of meaning (across various participants) or indeed to push and to challenge the boundaries of the coding categories as well as to add depth to the dimensions associated with the assigned categories. Theoretical sampling however,

naturally leads me to additional sites as a means to validate theoretical codes, proposed categories and dimensions of sub-categories. Without theoretical sampling my study may have concentrated on senior managers and their thoughts about the brand instead of moving away to other employees in different roles. Such findings would have lacked significant impact, relevance and practical value in other working environments due to limited scope of the study and the narrow view of one set of managers. I therefore adopted theoretical sampling which consequently guided the study beyond the initial concentration site and thereby challenged me to consider viewpoints beyond the specifics of the concentration site's employees and events. Managers often told me 'it's important that our employees understand and live the brand', had I stayed within this concentration site I would have been unable to develop a theory which provided intricate details into the workings of *how* employees may live the brand or relate to the brand.

2. Failing to follow the story in the data

If one fails to employ the constant comparative method described previously, data analysis becomes separated from data coding and collection. In such cases, each subsequent point of data collection lacks the insight and learning gained from previous data points and consequently limits the researchers' ability to follow the unfolding story in the data. When I consider the relative distance between the initial general research inquiry at the outset (how do employees relate to the brand?) and the final report of findings as described in Chapter 4, it is apparent how the story developed and changed from the start. As the conceptual relationships crystallized the crux of theoretical sampling and constant comparison of data was apparent. Constant comparison efforts moved my research enquiry along from 'how do employees relate to the brand?' to the more granular 'what do employees feel about the brand', 'how does the brand contribute to their lives' and 'what do they give if at all in return'? These ideas provide the key building blocks to the interviews as well as core material for the constant comparison and theoretical sampling efforts and thus enabled us to find and to follow the story in the data.

3. Coding for content, not theory

Another common research pitfall is the selective use of some grounded theory techniques independent of the other components of the method. This can result in research findings with weak connections to theory. The connection between the raw interview data and theory constitutes the main core categories of a grounded theory

study which are illustrative of the underlying themes within the data. The core category gives the researcher scope and perspective that goes beyond the limits of particular incidents or differing events in the data. The core category or the substantive theory of for examples employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification only developed through the integration of the data subcategories into a single core category which occurred after recursive comparison, in-depth analysis and abstraction. This illustrates how I remained on the story that the data was telling me about the formation of self-brand connections and brand identification and indeed the other core categories which emerged. This enabled substantive theory to form.

4. Using grounded theory where it is not well suited

Qualitative methods such as grounded theory are particularly appropriate when 1) there is insufficient theoretical guidance to support the research inquiry, 2) the researcher's experience and viewpoints are essential to the inquiry, and 3) the meanings of and relationships between concepts are fragile. Since it is exploratory, open-ended and its goal is to create theory, grounded theory is not well suited for research that a) is well documented in the literature, b) has been used to test previously established hypotheses, or c) attempts to replicate other similar studies. I described in section 3.2 my epistemological and ontological reasons for choosing grounded theory as a method for this particular research inquiry thus avoiding the pitfall of using grounded theory where inappropriate.

Table 3.6 Analysis of Research Trustworthiness (Adapted from Lincoln and Guba 1985)

Trustworthiness Criteria	Method of Addressing in this Study
<p>Credibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which results appear to be accurate representations of the data 	<p>Our participants guided the inquiry process</p> <p>A good rapport was built with interviewees and checks were made that researcher interpretations were accurate and well understood</p> <p>Data collection and interpretation was discussed with other research team members</p> <p><i>Result: Participants bought into and could relate to my interpretations of the data</i></p>
<p>Transferability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which findings from one study in one context will apply to other contexts 	<p>Theoretical Sampling</p> <p>A diverse group of informants from different types of brands and employment types</p> <p>USA and Europe</p> <p><i>Result: Theoretical concepts were representative of all participants</i></p>
<p>Dependability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which findings are reliable and represent the conditions of the phenomenon under study 	<p>Inquiry audit of data collection, management and analysis processes</p> <p><i>Result: Findings are reliable and consistent</i></p>

<p>Confirmability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which interpretations are the result of the participants and the phenomenon as opposed to researcher biases 	<p>Meticulous data management and recording: Verbatim transcription of interviews Clear notes on theoretical and methodological decisions Accurate records of contacts and interviews</p> <p><i>Result: Interpretation driven by participants</i></p>
<p>Integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which interpretations are influenced by misinformation or evasion by participants 	<p>Interviews were professionally conducted, of a non-confrontational nature and anonymous and conducted away from the workplace.</p> <p><i>Result: never believed that participants were untruthful or trying to evade issue being discussed</i></p>
<p>Fit</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which findings fit/resonate with the experience of the professionals for whom the research was intended and the informants 	<p>Addressed above through methods used to assess credibility, dependability and confirmability</p>
<p>Understanding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which participants buy into results as possible representations of their worlds 	<p>Ask the participants if they ‘see themselves in the story’. Executive summary of findings was distributed to participants and asked if they reflected their stories Summary also presented to managers</p> <p><i>Result: Employees and managers bought in to findings</i></p>

<p>Generality</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which findings discover multiple aspects of the phenomenon 	<p>Interviews were long enough and open enough to capture many complex underpinnings of the employee-brand relationship.</p> <p><i>Result: Captured multiple aspects of the phenomenon under investigation</i></p>
<p>Control</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which organisations can influence aspects of the theory 	<p>Some variables within the theory are under the control of participants and managers</p> <p><i>Result: Participants and management can control elements of the employee-brand relationship</i></p>

CHAPTER 4 QUALITATIVE FINDINGS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter presents the findings from my qualitative study. We provide a thorough analysis of the in-depth interviews based on the techniques described in Chapter 3. Using the grounded theory approach I described, I developed a series of constructs which are illustrated in the following sections based on quotations of key informants. With the constructs fully developed, these are subsequently used to develop a conceptual framework which is presented at the end of this chapter, the inter-relationships are hypothesised and tested in the following part of my study, the findings of which are described in Chapter 5.

4.2 Introduction

The coding analysis of my interviews led to the emergence of six core categories with multi-dimensional aspects thus indicating category depth in each case (Figs 4.1 – 4.6). In the sections that follow I explain how each core category which emerged from the theory fits with the existing literature which was examined after the theory was generated. Many similarities emerged with the consumer-brand relationships. Firstly, when describing how employees feel about the brands for which they work, informants referred extensively to three types of benefits which they perceive their brands to offer them, these may be categorised as functional, symbolic and experiential benefits. Secondly, informants described feelings consistent with a self-brand connection and thirdly, feelings characteristic of employee-brand identification were frequently acknowledged. Fourthly, employees showed evidence of self-described brand-specific behaviours. We therefore consider the two constructs, employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification as directly relevant in the demonstration of brand-specific behaviours. In each of the following sections I present the employees' views followed by a series of hypotheses the rationale for which are derived from both the interviews and the existing literature.

Fig. 4.1 Coding Structure – Functional Benefits of the Brand

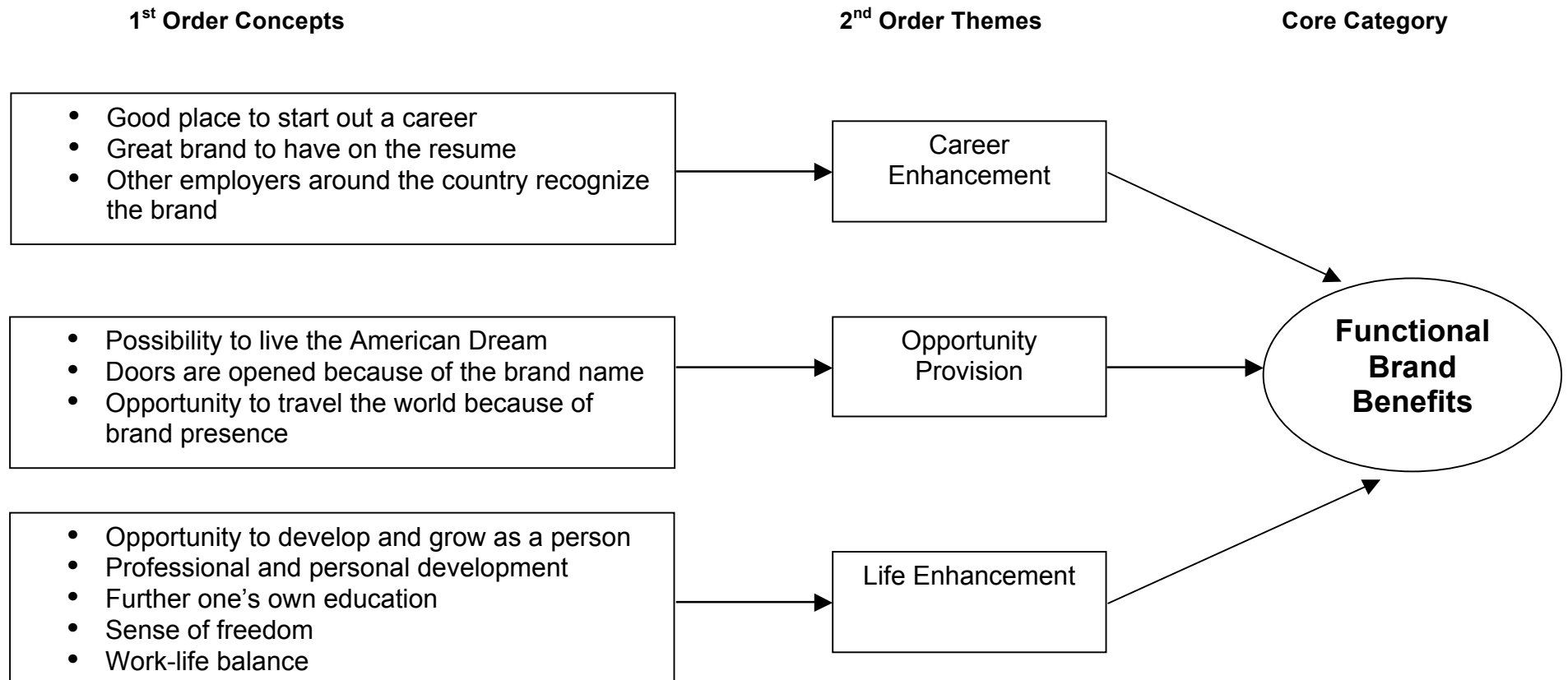


Fig. 4.2 Coding Structure – Symbolic Benefits of the Brand

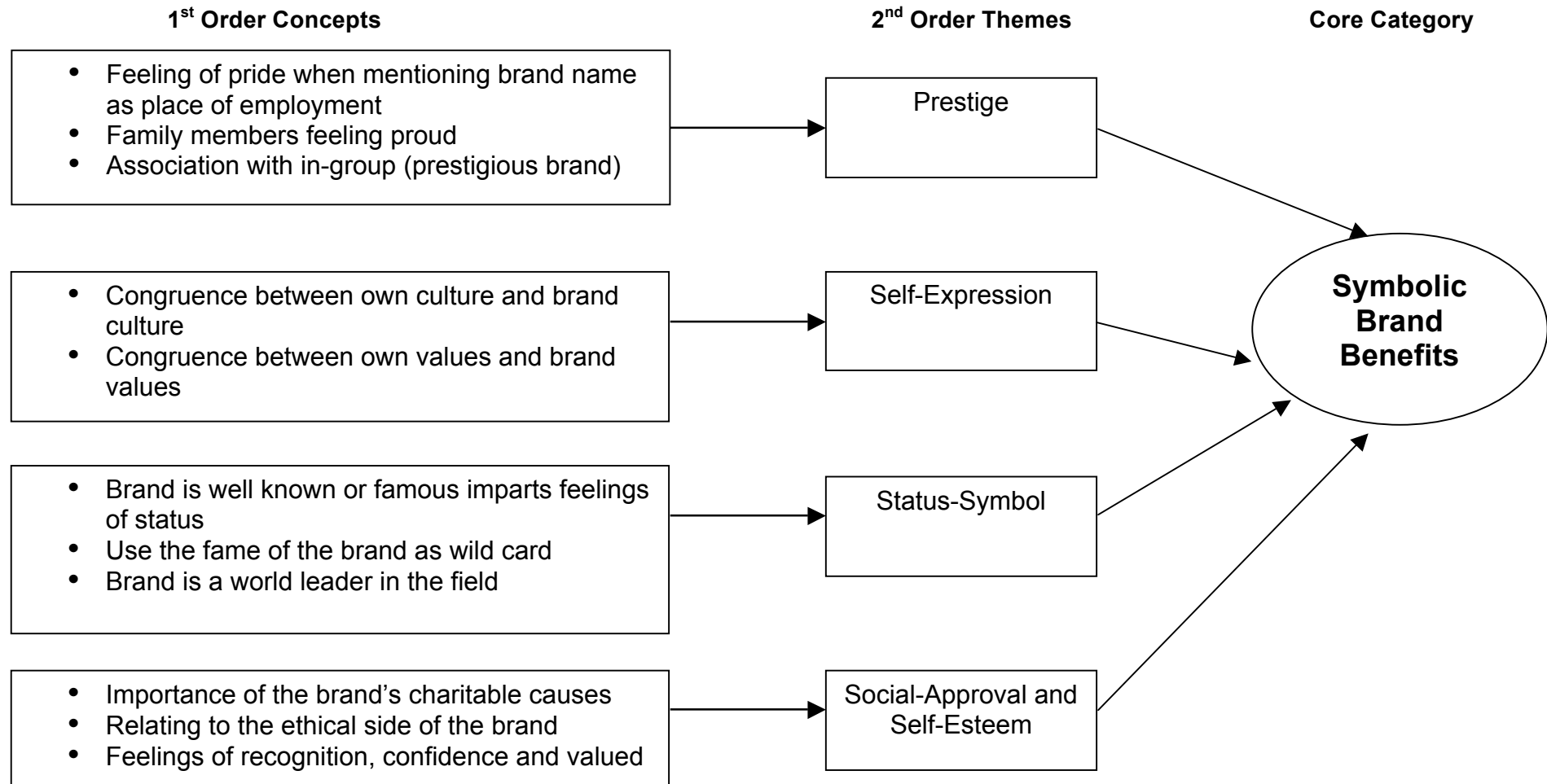


Fig. 4.3 Coding Structure – Experiential Benefits of the Brand

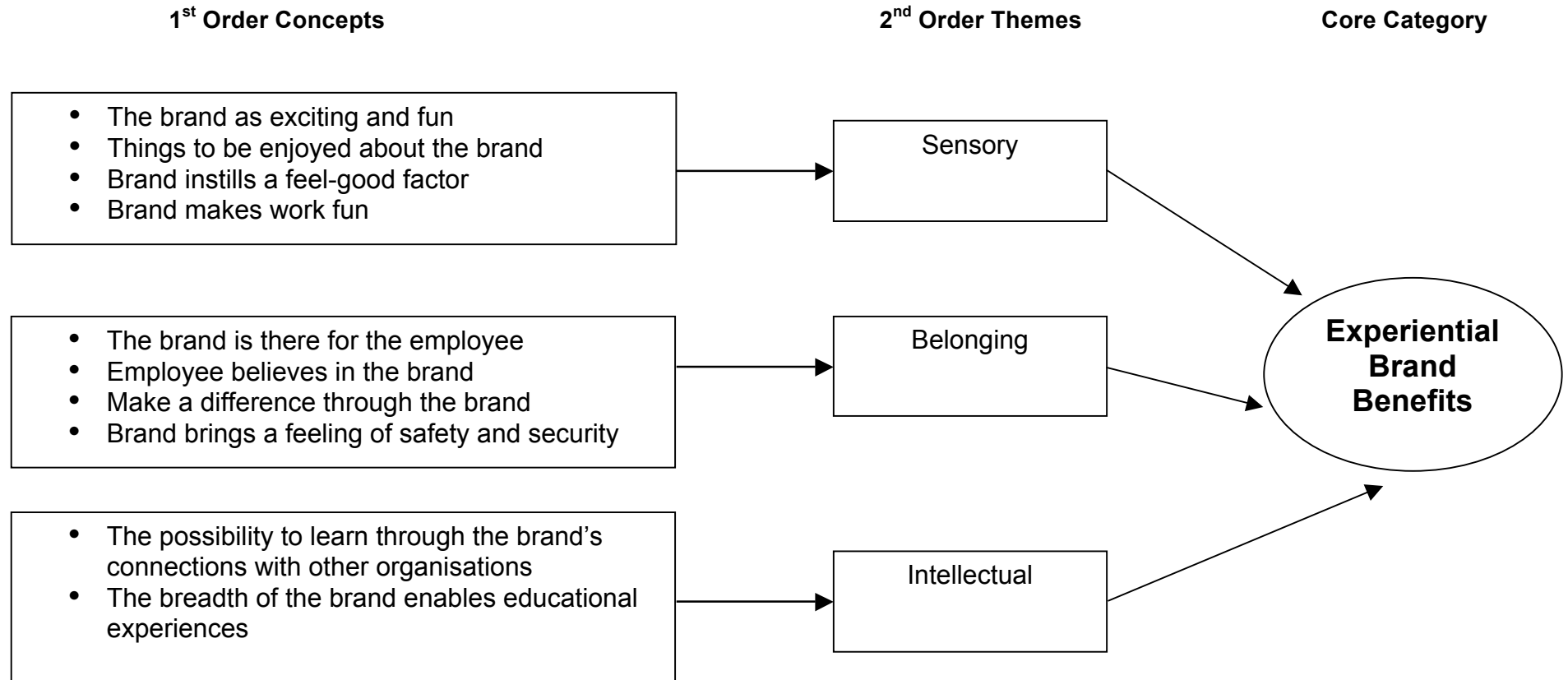


Fig. 4.4 Coding Structure – Employee Self-Brand Connection

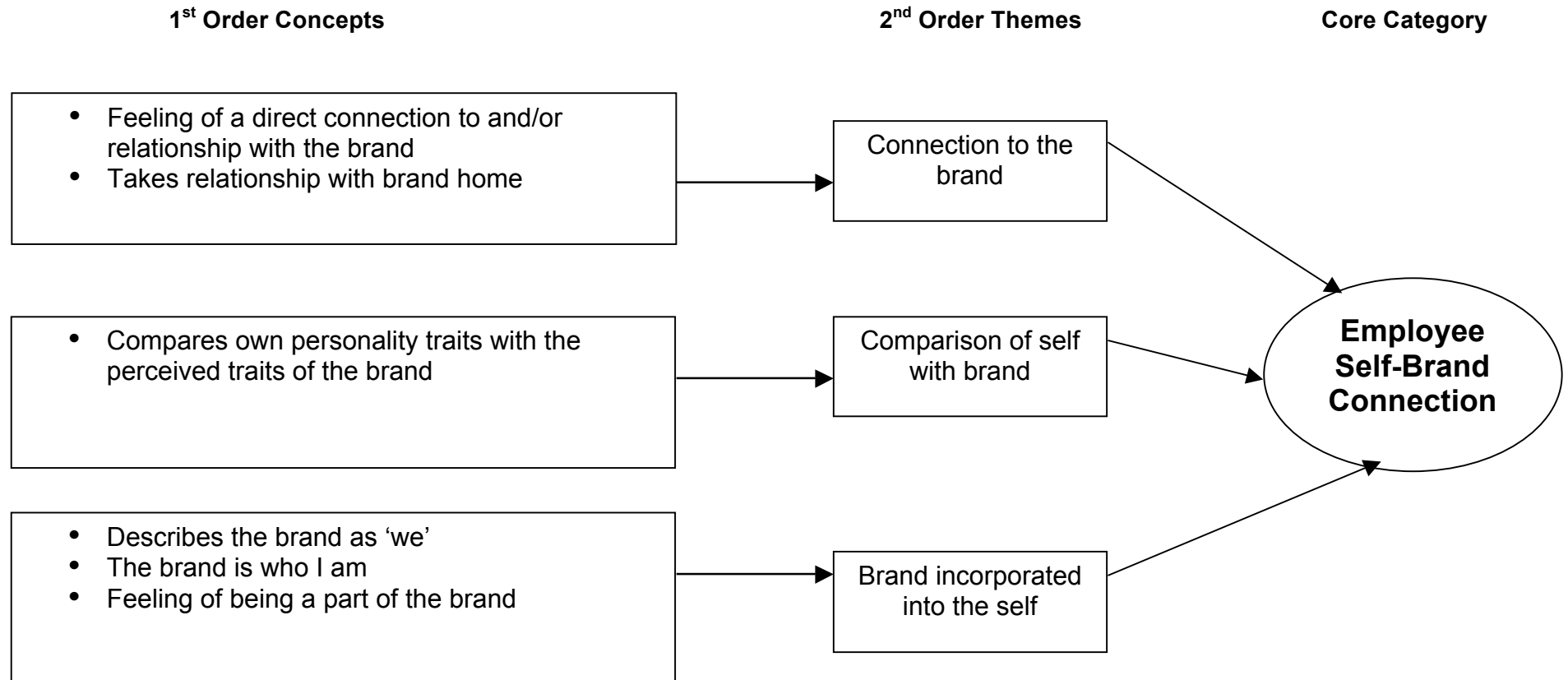


Fig. 4.5 Coding Structure – Employee-brand Identification

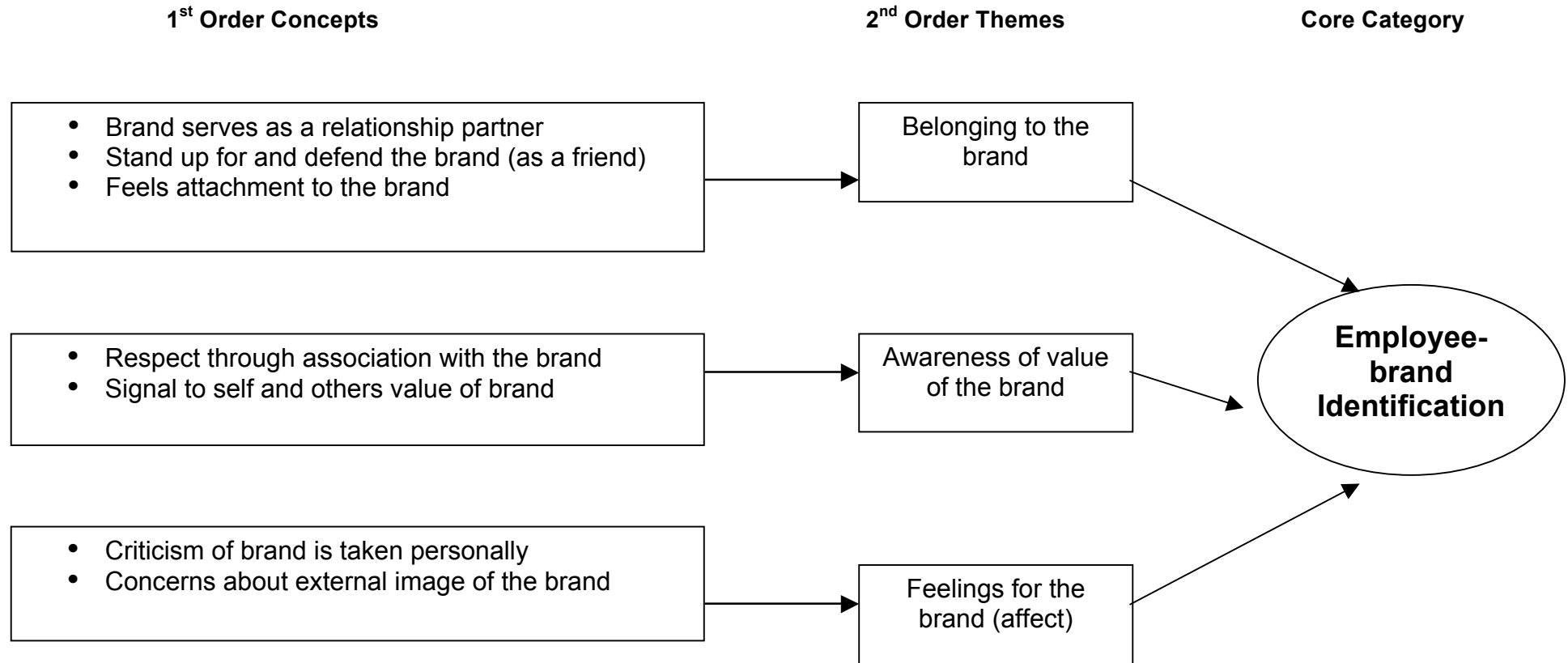
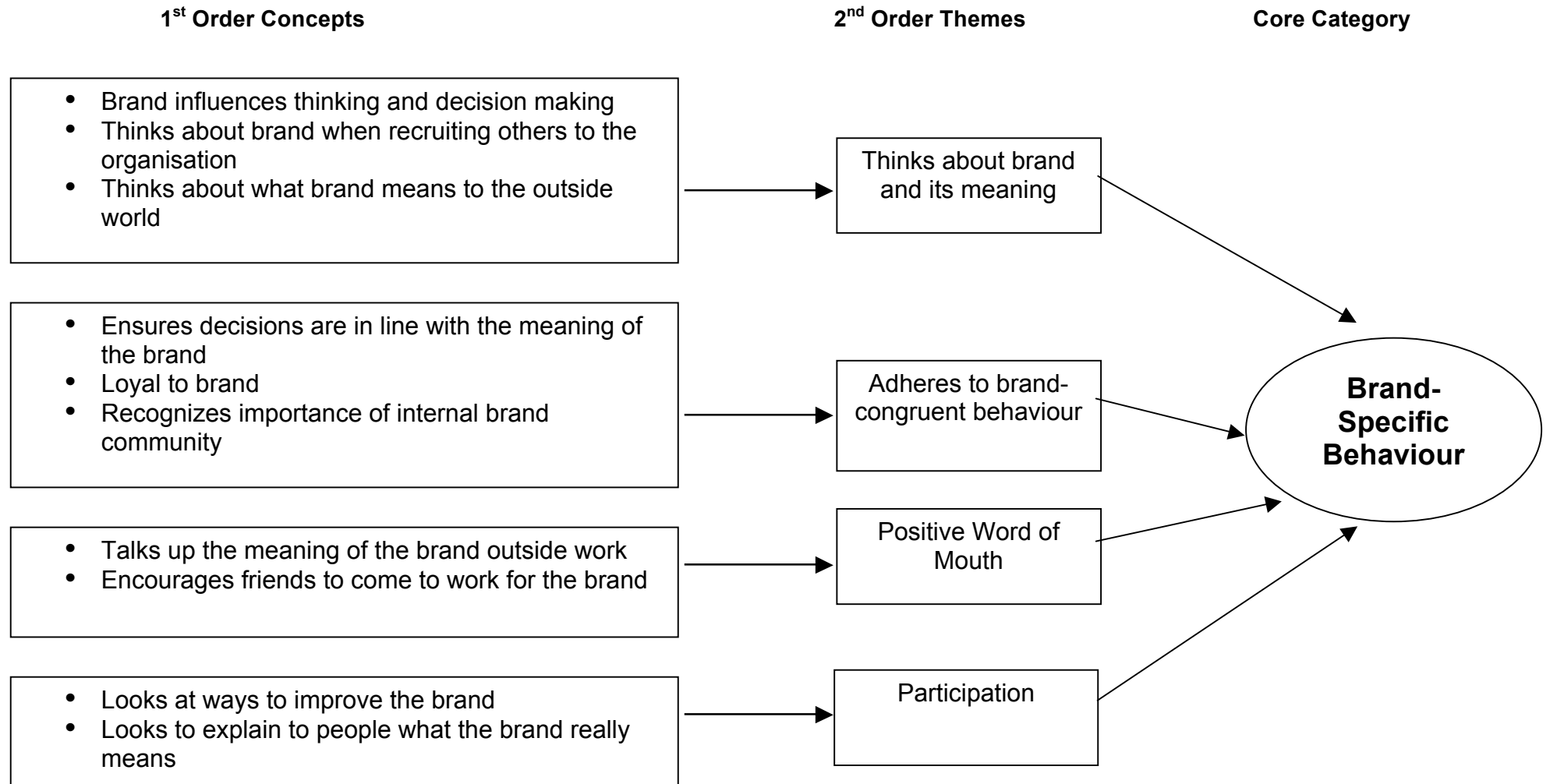


Fig. 4.6 Coding Structure – Brand-specific Behaviour



4.3 Perceived Functional Benefits of the Brand

This theme highlights those aspects of the brand that participants perceive as possessing functionally beneficial characteristics. Functional benefits are primarily instrumental and utilitarian in nature satisfying immediate and practical needs and are often associated with problem-solution or avoidance (Chandon, Wansink and Laurent 2000; Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986; Keller 1993). Employees were found to perceive their brand as offering them functional benefits in differing forms. For employees, functional benefits are those which are perceived to be career-enhancing, to provide opportunities and to be life-enhancing.

In terms of career enhancement, informants spoke of how employment with the brand serves them with an advantage, providing them with improved prospects for the future.

As Claire, a Registered Nurse at Mayo Clinic asserted:

Let's just say it was good place for me to start out in my career, it'll open many more doors for me as far as different career opportunities, different education pathways I'm gonna take, different connections you make.....It'll look good on my resume and I know there are other employers around the country who will recognize that too.

On the same note, Sophie, an HR manager at Mayo Clinic also declared:

It's a great brand to have on your resume

Similarly, Susan a marketing executive at 3M considers the brand useful in providing her with networking opportunities which in turn are career enhancing.

I know I like the company and you know what's great about 3M is that we're a highly networked culture so the networking is really a big thing for me because you really get to think about where you wanna go in terms of your career path and you know what's exciting it's what you make of it

Another functional benefit category described by informants was opportunity provision. Informants spoke widely of the opportunities they have which they perceive to be as a result of employment by a specific brand. Such opportunities include the opportunity to achieve things, opportunity to obtain access where otherwise access may have been denied, and the opportunity to travel.

Janine, a communications manager at Philips declared:

It's almost like the American Dream, in Philips you can believe that everything is possible, if you work hard, if you show initiative

Sally, a financial analyst at ING Bank recognized that it was through her employment with the brand that 'doors were opened':

while working for a company like ING you have that, it open doors for you, if I go to...well, I just went to this really large banking conference held every year in Latin America and I went there two weeks ago and you meet there all the major banks and when I set up meetings with other banks they always accept because I'm with ING and they always want to do business with me and that's very positive I think but that's nothing to do with me that's to do with ING on the business card

Employees also described how the opportunity to travel arose from the global reach of the brand:

Sally: The interesting thing is that this is a strong bank, it's a strong brand, it's a global bank and personally I like that I've had the opportunity to work everywhere, all over the place for ING. ING have given me a lot of opportunities so far to travel the world, to have different jobs.

Janine: I just love a dynamic kind of life, I'm not someone who can just sit in an office doing the same thing all the time and Philips gives me that dynamic that I'm looking for. You know I get to travel quite a lot and I love that, I get to go all over.

The final category of functional benefits described by employees included those that the brand offers in helping them as individuals to develop and grow, to further their education and to generally enhance their lives.

Some employees described how the brand has helped them to develop and grow.

Susan: I have to get my work done but I can go and do other personal development things, I can do volunteer efforts alongside my normal work in one day and because I do all of this I know a lot of people in different functions at various levels so I think through that you make connections and connect to the brand too...so there's the professional development but also the personal development that you get from the brand which makes you a little more centered.

Sophie: Obviously the patient care piece of it is important but also at an individual level it's about what's in this for me, I see what we can do but you have to think what can the organisation do for me, to help me to grow and to expand so I think Mayo does a really good job at this with its employees

Others spoke of the impact the brand has on their education and how through employment with the brand they are able to further their education. James, a project manager at Nikon described his experience.

So whichever photographer you're working with, NASA have been a partner with Nikon for 30 something years so I do a lot of work with NASA so going and doing these things has just been the greatest possible education of my life better than any college you're gonna get!

Furthermore, on a similar note:

Claire: Another factor that came into play is that I'm interested in continuing my education and Mayo really value education and they reimburse you for continuing your education... so you know to me Mayo is a very well-known hospital, we're very famous for our research and our practice and yeah education plays a big role in why I work here

Sophie, who had previously worked in PR at an ad-agency before moving into healthcare compared her experiences with Mayo brand and the ad agency explaining how she feels a sense of freedom with the Mayo brand and furthermore that the Mayo brand 'gives her value':

Well, I think I like the brand's honesty, integrity and transparency, what you see is what you get, I think with our leadership there are no real hidden agendas, I feel they value their employees, I think supervisors are trained to get their employees to keep morale up and to be able to provide them with tools and resources to do their jobs better. I like that they take ideas and if you go forward with an idea and if you say I think this could save us some money, how about we look at that, they say 'sure, you go ahead and run with that idea and come back to us with a presentation and if it's something that we like then we'll go ahead and implement that' so there's that freedom which I like. So you know these are all very important things to me that give value to me.....

Another employee cites the work-life balance she has as indicative of the brand itself.

Susan: I think we also really value a work-life balance. I know that can be just kinda like a tagline but I do think it's pretty telling, lights go out at six and people are gone. Ok people may be working from home but they're not there and I think that speaks for the 3M brand a lot

The above passages illustrate how the brand is perceived by employees as offering benefits which employees are seeking and which are life-improving

4.4 Perceived Symbolic Benefits of the Brand

A second category of benefits widely expressed by all employees are those perceived to offer symbolic benefits. According to the consumer-brand relationship literature, symbolic benefits are those allowing users to construct social identities, to

assign meaning to themselves and to signal meaning to others (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998; McCracken 1988). The symbolic nature of brands, specifically the range of distinctive images they reflect (Chaplin & John 2005) has meant that they are particularly useful as a means for satisfying consumers' self-definitional needs such as social approval, self-expression and outer-directed self-esteem (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Fournier, 1998). Consumers evaluate the symbolism of the brand and determine whether it is appropriate for themselves (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1988; Schouten 1991). According to Levy (1959) the sign is appropriate for a consumer if it reinforces or enhances the self. Brands are thus valued according to how much they relate to the self-concept (Solomon 1983 in Orth and De Marchi 2007).

Brands not only allow consumers to express their identities but also to reaffirm their principles or beliefs (Kleine III, Kleine and Kernan 1993; Levy 1959; Solomon 1983 in Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). Thus, the brand serves as a symbol whose meaning serves as a definition of the consumer's self-concept, consumers therefore choose brands with a desirable personality as a reflection of their own (Ahuvia 2005; Belk 1998). Symbolic consumption of brands also enables consumers to express some of their cultural categories such as age, gender, social status and other cultural values such as family and tradition (McCracken 1993), more specifically the brand itself may serve as an expression of one's ties to family, community or cultural group as is the case in brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001).

Several parallels may be drawn between consumers and employees in terms of the impact of symbolic benefits. For several of our informants, the satisfaction of self-definitional needs was central to their accounts of the symbolic benefits of the brand. In this context, the brand often represented a vehicle for employees to express themselves in some form or other, enhance their self-esteem and self-worth and to achieve a sense of pride and status. Five subcategories of such self-definitional needs emerged from my interview data, prestige, self-expression, status symbol, social approval and self-esteem.

4.4.1 Prestige

Key feelings described in relation to this theme were pride in telling others about their employment with the brand, with some participants extending this even to other family members feeling proud. In telling others of their place of employment, they signal to others their self-image and also reaffirm their image to themselves.

Susan: *I feel proud and I also feel there's an explanation piece as not everyone knows what 3M do but I must say for the most part say with my peers from my MBA school there's a great sense of pride on my part when I say I work at 3M*

Sally: *I am still very proud though to say I work for ING*

Claire: *Proud, very proud. I hope actually the standard of healthcare, I think it sets a really good example of how healthcare should be across the United States, I know it's not like this everywhere, I've been in a lot of hospitals but I have my patients tell me Mayo Clinic is a well oiled machine, you guys have everything down to a basic tee, so yeah I think it sets a standard for how hospitals should operate in the United States and that's really important for me*

Sophie: *It makes me feel proud to be part of an organisation which offers the utmost care for its patients, one which is really very transparent in what it does*

James: *Oh yes, extremely proud, every time I see a Nikon something goes off in my head 100% because I personally feel a little part of that.....You feel pride that we had the common sense to say 'go' on this product, I feel proud that I took part in the product and getting the product out, helping our customers understand that product and I take a lot of pride in working with the photographers who take those photos, helping them do their work or do their job better*

Janine: *Also, I think the fact that Philips is a strong brand makes me proud of my company and the fact that we are a large brand, whenever I talk to suppliers or a third party or whatever kind of people about our brand I always tell our story with a lot of pride and that we are a consumer-focused brand and that we really look at consumer behaviour and we design our products and services for the consumer..... I'm proud to say I work for Philips, very proud*

The prestigious component of brands not only serve as an external signal but also establish and reaffirm the consumer's self-concept and identity (Belk 1988; Fournier 1998) thus having a self-signaling effect (Chernev, Hamilton and Gal 2011). All of the above passages illustrate how my participants feel a great sense of pride in working for their brand. In consumers, identity prestige enables the consumer to view themselves in the reflected glory of the brand which enhances their self-worth. My evidence here with employees similarly suggests the brand also satisfies their particular self-definitional needs.

Both Janine and Claire expressed that not only are they proud, but their parents too share in that pride. Claire adopts the metaphor of 'a card which may be pulled out' which offers an apt expression of the position to 'use' one's relationship with the brand to signal one's image to others

Claire: They're proud of what I do for a living, they tell people my daughter works at Mayo Clinic, they pull that card out when they want and that makes me feel good, that I'm not the only one who takes pride in the name

Similarly Janine makes reference to her parents' sense of pride:

My parents are very proud of me, they're very happy for me in this job, that I work for such an established brand and that I'm happy with my work

Our participants not only reap prestigious benefit from telling others of their employment with the brand, but also in what the brand does for others. For example Sophie declares:

It makes me feel proud to be part of an organisation which offers the utmost care for its patients, one which is really very transparent in what it does

In the same manner, Susan added:

'I mean generally I do feel a sense of pride when I say see a 3M truck go by or you see someone talking about a certain 3M product on TV or if someone has some kind of a problem and you can say 'oh you can use this product for that''

Employees also indicated that they would only want to work for a brand which has a certain prestige as opposed to a brand with lesser prestige. Here I observe the desire for association with an in-group (i.e. prestigious) as opposed to association with an out-group (less prestige). In the same way, consumers have stronger self-brand connections to brands which are associated with an in-group than those brands which are inconsistent with an in-group, and weaker self-brand connections to brands associated with an out-group than brands inconsistent with an out-group. (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Both Sophie and Sally hold parallel views:

Sally: I would only want to work for a bank with a similar standing in the market place, that has the presence of ING, that has the international foot print, that has the push from management to be large and I like all of these things because I'm out going, I'm out there, I'm ambitious

Not only does Sally express here her desire to be associated with the in-group but also makes reference to her self-congruence with the brand in that she perceives herself as a person to be similar to the brand.

In a similar fashion, Sophie also expresses her desire to be associated with the in-group rather than the out-group, in this case 'Joe Schmoe'. The brand serves as a vehicle for enhancing her self-esteem and self-worth in that she seeks the prestige and extra confidence.

Sophie: You know, it's the name recognition, this is Mayo Clinic! You know being out there in their fields and especially residents and fellows the Mayo name is really well known out there and I feel this is a very premier, well renowned place to work.....I don't wanna say I work for Joe Schmoe down the street, I wanna be out there and up there, I want people to be impressed by where I work... I want that prestige and I want that confidence

4.4.2 Self-Expression

Brands are frequently used by consumers to express and to validate their identity (Aaker 1997; Berger and Heath 2007; Escalas and Bettman 2005). Research has shown that the value of brands is assessed to the extent that they reiterate consumers' principles or beliefs (Kleine, Kleine and Kernan III 1993; Levy 1959; Solomon 1983). Brands can be used to communicate knowledge of culture, status, taste and style and/or membership of a particular social or professional group (Amaldoss and Jain 2005; Twitchell 2002, Braun and Wicklund 1989; Escalas and Bettman 2005; Wicklund and Gollwitzer 1981).

The brand as a symbol of a consumer's self-concept, provides symbolic benefits by providing a vehicle for self-expression (Aaker 2009). Employees frequently described certain congruencies which they felt to exist between the brand and their own culture or origin, their family and their own values. Some informants described feeling a connection to the brand as a result of such congruence. Consider Susan's account:

We're very rooted in the mid-Western values but I think that's actually spread across geographies as well and I think you know having that.....well family's very important, collaboration is very important, we love to share.

You know, there are plenty of things to get engaged in, so say connecting to our communities on behalf of 3M through volunteer work, we're definitely encouraged to do that and I feel that speaks really highly of the brand. We're not just about making money; we're about making a difference so I think that's what my connection with the brand is.

What's important is that the values are very similar to the mid-Western culture and I grew up here so I feel the values of 3M are similar to like how I grew up,

I mean the community piece is really important to me, doing things for the community

Susan is able to connect with the brand since it reflects and reminds her of her own Mid-Western origins (Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007). Connections with brands may be at an individual-level (self-concept connection) i.e. as a contribution to one's own identity or as is apparent here at a group-level (e.g. country-of-origin connection) i.e. as a contribution to one's group identity (Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007). Since the origin of the brand lies in Minnesota and is a brand with Minnesotan values, Susan is able to relate to the brand in this context. More specifically, connections with brands may be made as a consumer seeks autonomy or as he/she seeks group affiliation, for instance a brand country-of-origin connection is defined as 'the extent to which a brand is used to express one's patriotic national identity' (Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007) which is reflected in Sally's (Dutch nationality) following statement:

I was ING so I had to represent as I am Dutch and yeah that made me feel quite ok (laughs).....personally I would make it all orange, it would make me feel more connected, more proud. That Dutchness and that history helps. People like the Dutch color and I like it.

For both of these employees brand-origin is a prominent factor in their assessments of their connection to the brand, Sally suggests the more Dutch the brand feels for her the more connected she is.

Berry (2000), suggests that 'brands that connect with customers' emotions are those that reflect customers' core values.' In other words, customers connect with brands if the brand values reflect their own. my informants spoke of the congruence between the perceived values of the brand and their own values and of the importance of such congruence. For instance, Sally claims she would not fit in if her values did not match those of the brand:

Sally: definitely there is overlap between my own values and those of ING. I wouldn't like working for a company that is unethical, I wouldn't fit in because that wouldn't match my values

Similarly Claire expresses how important value congruence is to her:

Claire: As a nurse I give thorough patients care, I take pride in doing this as a job and in what I do as a nurse so it is important to me that I work somewhere that has the same values as I do. I value the same things that Mayo does.

Sophie similarly relates to the brand through her own values particularly in terms of transparency:

You know Mayo values are the same as mine.....I feel as a person very transparent and I like to work for an organisation where I don't think things are being talked about at a higher level and talked about at a different level further down, it's not all deluded, it's all talked about and then communicated at the same level, it's the same thing, it's not deluded in any way. I feel a lot of information is shared.

In the same way as transparency holds importance for Sophie in that she perceives the brand's transparent values to match her own, for Janine a brand which treats everyone the same is of equal importance. Perceiving her own self as non-hierarchical, self-congruence is thus highlighted as a central factor in her perception of the brand :

Yes, for example you know I am totally not a hierarchical kind of person generally in life, I always get kinda annoyed when people act like that in just normal life, you know when people act with sort of hierarchy in their voice or their behaviour and I believe in life that all people are equal and all people are the same and that's cool because that's how it is at Philips, everyone's equal

Both Claire's and Susan's reference to family reflects how they perceive the brand as having similar or the same values as those of their families.

Claire: I'm a family oriented girl, I'm close to my family you know and that's all very similar to Mayo. I grew up in a very tight-knit Catholic conservative family, we're very close, they raised me with good values, to look for meaningful work, to be a good person, to do the right thing, to be a hard worker, to be a good citizen.

Susan: I think that in general my family and in fact all of Minnesotan families have values that are centered around family and being very collaborative, being very friendly and I think that's also the case at 3M, globally actually.

Implicit in these value-congruence statements is that the brand serves as a vehicle for expressing components of self such as personal, family and cultural values (McCracken 1993).

4.4.3 Status-Symbol

Del Rio, Vazquez & Iglesias (2001) suggest that brands possess a social identification function which they describe as 'the brand's ability to act as a communication instrument allowing the consumer manifesting the desire to be integrated or to dissociate himself from the groups of individuals that make up his closest social environment'. The status function expresses feelings of admiration that

consumers feel when using the brand. The status function is aligned with the individual's desire to achieve prestige and recognition from others.

That the brand gives employees a sense of status was widely felt by informants. Status associated with employment by the brand emerged from different sources. Some of my informants made reference to the fact that their brand is well-known or famous and therefore may be perceived as a status symbol, thus imparting to employees a feeling of a particular status.

Claire: I hear about famous people travelling to Mayo for treatment. The Dalai Lama just left last year and that makes pretty major news even across state borders in Wisconsin.....we're very famous for our research and our practice

In commenting on the fame of the Mayo brand, Claire also notes:

Yeah so I have the Mayo ticket in my back pocket and I can use it when I feel like it but I don't need it

Claire's comments reinforce her earlier statement that the fame associated with the brand allows her to 'use' her employment with the brand to her advantage if she chooses. In other words, she can use the brand to signal her self-image to others. On a similar note, Janine speaks of the fame of the brand:

I do feel proud though to be working for such a famous brand, especially here in the Netherlands everyone knows Philips, everyone wants to work for Philips so I see working for Philips as an achievement

Her reference to 'everyone wants to work for Philips' implies a certain status applies to employment with the brand.

Susan compares the status associated with her employment with the brand with the status which comes with where she went to school and in keeping with her earlier comments she consequently feels a connection to the brand:

it's kinda like being proud of where you went to school and that kind of a connection you have from your experiences and I think I have that same kind of connection, I'm proud to be a 3M employee and happy to represent the brand

Sally refers to the events which the brand sponsors and it is through this notion of sponsorship that the brand gives her a sense of status:

In our office in Brazil, it was really cool, if you walked in there, it was totally black, they had a pool, they had a big screen where they showed Formula One and every event that ING was sponsoring and that made me feel proud, you think yeah, ok, this is a really great company

James comments:

When you say to me 'what is it (the brand) about it?' It's about the commitment, drive, dedication of pushing the envelope of technology quality wise to being a world leader, not just a follower but being a leader in these technologies

Implicit in this statement is the emergence of a sense of status from a brand which endeavours to be the leader within its field.

4.4.4 Social-Approval

Du, Bhattacharya & Sen's (2007) research illustrates how consumers of a brand are more likely to identify with the brand and be loyal to the brand when it is perceived to be a socially responsible brand. The authors further suggest, that CSR satisfies consumers' self-definitional and self-enhancement needs causing them to become brand champions as opposed to buyers.

Similarly, my informants expressed their feelings towards specific brand initiatives.

Sally: Lately I've seen a lot of initiatives for good causes for UNICEF or Chances for Children and that corporate social responsibility stuff and I like that, it's a good thing definitely. We used to do much better things in the years of microfinance like five years ago but this initiative now has grown worldwide quite substantially and I like these causes.

Susan: We're very community minded here and also CSR is very much a part of the Minnesota values so I think that helps tie in as well.....I like representing 3M if we go to volunteer at a food shelter, you're proud to say you're part of the 3M foundation, it won a volunteer award in 2009 and we donated money to the charity I volunteer with and it's you know very rewarding, yeah very rewarding

These passages illustrate the importance to the employees of the brands' associations with CSR and charity causes; thus the brand in these cases satisfies the social-approval needs of the employees. A socially responsible brand satisfies self-definitional and self-enhancement needs (Du, Bhattacharya and Sen 2007).

Janine's reference to the implied honesty of the Philips brand also illustrates the satisfaction of social-approval needs in that she 'relates' to the brand through its honesty:

We're not the kind of company that is completely closed and say this is our strategy or this is our secret thing, whenever we find a nice solution in a product it's out there... I think that relates also to how I feel about Philips as a brand, as an employee... as to how it matches you know its external image

4.4.5 Self-Esteem

Individuals are driven by a need to feel good about themselves and try to maintain as well as enhance their own self-esteem (Malär 2011). One way towards achieving this is to consume brands that are congruent with one's own view of self or ideal self (Sirgy 1982). According to Bergami and Bagozzi, (2000), people associate themselves with highly regarded brands to increase their self-esteem. Brands not only provide users with self-esteem and offer individuality but also signal personal achievement (Escalas 2004).

Our informants provide evidence that through working for a particular brand they experience feelings of self-esteem which varied in form from feelings of recognition, to added confidence and of being valued. Consider the following passages:

Sally: As a person I like it that when you come somewhere and you say I'm from ING, people are like 'oh yes I know ING' and 'oh yes, ING, nice' and that makes me as a person feel recognized..... I do have a relationship with ING, I wouldn't really want to leave ING, I have a good network with ING, I have good prospects with ING, I'm appreciated by ING, I feel generally that I am valued by ING

Sophie: You know it feels like they hire you for your expertise, they bring you in and they count on you to be able to do your job and to do it well and you're valued for what you do and to me that's very important.

I want to know that what I'm doing is contributing to the organisation and I feel like people thank me for that and that makes me feel that I actually wanna get up and do a better job and do better at what I do.

Janine: I felt valuable and yeah, I find it here again at the corporate centre it's that feeling that people value me here for who I am and for what I do and all of this I relate to our brand and the way the brand works

This whole engagement thing is a two way process. If I do all of these things, it makes me feel valuable, it makes me feel part of something big... I see working for Philips as an achievement because I started out being not particularly highly educated....it's Philips that gave me new confidence

Central to the informants' accounts of enhanced self-esteem were the described notions of feeling useful or valuable. In this regard, the brand served to satisfy individuals' self-esteem requirements. Implicit in these passages, informants linked the satisfaction of such requirements to their relationship with the brand.

4.5 Experiential Benefits

Consumers 'experiences' occur when they 'search for products, shop for them and receive service, and when they consume them' (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello 2009). When consumers interact with a product, they are also exposed to brand-related stimuli which prompt subjective, internal responses which constitute 'brand experience'. Experiential benefits are typically sensory, affective, social, behavioural and intellectual.

Consumers experience the brand through consumption (Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello 2009), employees on the other hand widely described how through their employment with the brand, particular feelings and emotions were evoked which could be broadly categorised as experiential since they arise as a result of the employees' working experiences with the brand.

Brand experiences may be short-lived or long-lived and it is those that are long-lasting which consumers store in their memories thus affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty (Oliver 1997; Reicheld 1996). Employees' experiences are by nature long lived on a daily employment basis. Employees described sensory benefits such as excitement, fun and freedom, empowerment and feeling-good, social/affective benefits which arise from the feeling of belonging to or being a part of the brand and intellectual benefits which arise from the feeling of intellectual stimulation through the brand.

4.5.1 Sensory

Some employees commented on how they encountered feelings of excitement, fun, feeling-good and freedom through their employment associations with the brand. Central to Susan's account of how she felt about the 3M brand was a sense of excitement and fun:

you know it's really exciting for me to work for such a leader in so many spaces and it's hard to find an industry or even a sector that 3M actually isn't a part of so I find that really empowering and that says a lot about the brand.....I think a lot of brands generally don't have that excitement so they have to drum it up somehow, we don't have to drum it up, it's there

The Twin Cities really is a fun place and kinda like a hidden gem and I think that's set up the 3M culture too and once they're in it you know it's great so you know I enjoy it and it's fun

Sally described how she separates herself from the brand and at the same time experiences enjoyment from the brand:

I separate myself from the brand but at the same time there are the things that I enjoy about the brand

Sophie's account represents several feelings emerging from her experience with the brand:

I think getting up in the morning and coming to work here is something that really adds to my life. It makes me a better person knowing that I'm helping people, not directly but by recruiting individuals to come to this organisation who are the best for this organisation and who are the best of the best and provide the kind of care our patients need and really kind of instill to them what Mayo Clinic means.....

It's really exciting and it gets you excited about what you do and you feel good when you go to sleep at night

In this context, the brand often represented a source of Sophie's experience of feeling better about herself. Janine similarly describes her experiences of feeling good and also of freedom which she associates with the brand:

As I told you (before the interview), I've worked in several buildings and in different parts of Philips and I've always felt that after a couple of months of sitting on a department that I've felt good myself, I have felt free, there's this freedom associated with Philips

4.5.2 Belonging

This theme highlights instances where employees have expressed their belief in the brand, a feeling of making a difference through the brand and also a feeling that the brand 'is there for them'. Implicit in these feelings is a sense of connection with or belonging to the brand. Consider the passages below:

Susan: We're not just about making money; we're about making a difference so I think that's what my connection with the brand is... because we are making a difference and that's really important to me and it's very important that I work for a company that does that and that it has done it before it was even popular to do so.

Sophie: And I do personally believe in all these things we claim to be, I believe in the mission and values of the brand, I see it all for myself. I feel it. You know I don't have so many stories of my own but there are plenty of stories from other people and that's where the belief comes from.

I just feel like I really contribute and I really feel as if I make a difference and that makes me feel really good about what I do.....I mean really it's because

I can make a difference, I like it, it fulfils me, I'm doing good in this world and basically it's the same as how I feel

In her discussion, Susan stresses how the feeling of making a difference is important to her. Similarly, Sophie links her feeling of making a difference with the feeling of fulfillment. She also emphasises her belief in the brand.

In the same way as consumers derive a feeling of security from their 'belonging to' brands my informants described how their brand gives them a feeling of safety and security. For example:

Sophie: I'm not sure, the job kinda came looking for me and it was the change I needed. I felt an attraction and I thought why not? I think also as regards this safety and this feeling secure, I had two boys at home still and I wanted something with you know a little bit more security. Ad agencies you know work you to death so I thought this may give me that (security) and it did.

Interviewer: What do you think of when I say the Philips brand?

Janine: You know the first thing that comes into my head is safety. I can't even explain why I think safety. Working for Philips and thinking about the Philips brand gives me that feeling of comfort. Somehow it's always there, it's safe, it's secure...

Claire: It (the brand) gives me security; it makes me feel safe actually.

4.5.3 Intellectual

The final theme to emerge was the intellectual stimulation employees described as a result of their employment with the brand. Both James and Susan enthused about their intellectual experiences, both drawing a connection between what they learned from the brand and the feeling of reward:

James: Let's face it you may be the early adopter but hey I'm the early, early adopter because I heard about this project three years ago when it was still on a piece of paper and then it was a discussion and then it was a prototype and then it was more fully fledged out and I got to handle that product long before you even heard of it and by the time you're hearing about it, I'm working on the next product which you're gonna hear about two years from now

Because I have a unique perception of the products and the applications for the products, I can write about that and translate what I know into articles in layman's talk that will hopefully engage the reader and to basically make a soft sell on buying our Nikon products. It also gives them a justified reason for

why they made that purchase on that product and they say 'I knew I could do that, this guy just wrote about this, I saw what he shot with that so now let's go out and do it and that's really cool as it justifies that purchase. I write because I'm passionate about the brand ... I really enjoy it though, my work is on the Nikon website where people can learn and explore and at the end of the day it all goes to promoting our brand and that's very rewarding to me

Susan: innovation comes to mind first of all and I think also being a leader in a science and technology and being a leader in those platforms. I also think about creativity and that curiousness, everyone I've met at 3M has that curiosity. With all of the various, you know product lines or even people or technologies, you know you can always learn something new and I find that really rewarding and that's what I'm looking for.

4.6 Employee Self-Brand Connection (ESBC)

A self-brand connection may be conceptualized as 'the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept'. When the consumer's self and the brand image overlap, a brand connection is formed (Aaker 1999; Sirgy 1982). More specifically, 'When brand associations are used to construct the self or to communicate the self-concept to others, a connection is formed with the brand' (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). There are two main motivations for the development of a link between a person's self-concept and objects, namely self-consistency (Sirgy 1982) and self-enhancement (Beggan 1992). Consistent with most employees' accounts was the notion that the brand was incorporated to some extent into the concept of self, i.e. that an employee self-brand connection (ESBC) is formed (Escalas and Bettman 2003). We define ESBC as 'the connection an employee forms with the brand when brand associations are used to construct the self'. We have already shown that employees demonstrate a desire to be associated with an 'in-group' and dissociated from an 'out-group' thus suggesting that the brand satisfies an identified psychological need from which a strong and meaningful self-brand connection results. In some instances the notion of a relationship or a connection with the brand was described directly as such. In other instances, employees made reference to the brand in such a way that they implied that they viewed the brand and the self as being the same or that the brand is incorporated into the self. Consider the following passages as illustrative of those making direct reference to a connection or relationship with the brand:

Susan: *I've just finished doing some recruiting for our program and I definitely felt a connection to our 3M brand*

Janine: *I would say I have a good relationship with our brand*

James: *So I take my relationship with Nikon home with me and develop the exact same relationship with the brands that I buy, well with some of them at least*

On other occasions my informants referred to the brand as 'we' or 'our' thereby insinuating the brand to be connected to themselves:

Janine: *We're a people-focused brand*

Susan: *I think that's led to our success in a particular innovation space*

A key inference made in relation to this theme of employee self-brand connection was 'the brand is who I am':

Sally: *I was representing ING, every Dutch drinks I went to, I was ING because I was representing ING as a company, I was the only person going there, perhaps once our CEO would go. I was invited places because I was ING, I was invited to business dinners because I was ING*

Sophie: *I feel like Mayo is who I am.....I care for what I do and I don't want the brand being attacked because that's personally who I am....*

Janine: *You know when I'm sitting there I'm the business card of this company talking to the Mayor of London and all these other 'Bobos', they know Philips as a brand and when I'm talking to them I am the brand so at these events it's very important to me that I represent the brand and I'm very happy to do so*

These passages illustrate the close association between the brand and the concept of the self. Some employees' accounts provided further evidence for the employee self-brand connection formation process (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Chaplin and John 2005).

For self-brand connections to form, consumers enter into a process of matching brands or products which are congruent with their self-images (Birdwell 1968; Dolich 1969; Gardner and Levy 1955). For self-brand connections to occur certain requirements must be met. Firstly, consumers must hold brand associations that can be related to the self e.g. user characteristics, personality traits and reference groups. Secondly, consumers must hold an idea of their self-concept, either their actual self or ideal self which is inclusive of characteristics and traits which they can begin to align with those of the brand. Thirdly, consumers must go through a comparison process which determines whether aspects of their self-concept are congruent with perceived brand images (Chaplin and John 2005).

Consider the following extract from Sophie, here I observe the ESBC construction process. Brand associations are held: 'it's not all deluded', an idea of her own self-concept is held: 'I feel as a person transparent' and the comparison process takes place: 'Mayo values are the same as mine'.

You know Mayo values are the same as mine.....I feel as a person very transparent and I like to work for an organisation where I don't think things are being talked about at a higher level and talked about at a different level further down, it's not all deluded, it's all talked about and then communicated at the same level, it's the same thing, it's not deluded in any way. I feel a lot of information is shared.

Thus I observed employees draw on functional, symbolic and experiential benefits, as a form of brand associations, (see Keller 1993) to construct or to communicate the self which is the basis for the ESBC (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Since the evidence for provision of brand benefits is clear and the formation of employee self-brand connections is apparent I may logically hypothesise:

H₁: the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

Consumers value symbolic brand benefits since these benefits can help consumers construct their self-identity and to present it to others (Escalas 2004). In the same way, I hypothesise:

H₂: the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

Similarly, I hypothesise:

H₃: the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

Given the significance of the brand consumption experience in consumers forming self-brand connections, particularly in the inference of brand meaning, I expect experiential brand value in the non-consumption domain to have an equally significant role for employees. Self-brand connections result from the consumer's own experience with the brand and are particularly strong and meaningful when the customer's own experience with the brand is tied closely to the image of the brand and when the brand satisfies an identified psychological need such as feeling to belong to an in-group or distinct from an out-group. Therefore, I hypothesize:

H_{3a}: experiential brand value mediates the effects of functional brand value and symbolic brand value on employee self-brand connection

4.7 Employee-brand Identification (EBI)

This theme highlights the feelings and experiences that participants expressed in response to external opinions of the brand. Some of my informants expressed their interest in what others think and say about the brand outside of the organisation. Others described how if the brand is criticised in the public domain they take such criticism personally and invariably expressed how they defend the brand personally in light of criticism. These factors point towards a deep relationship with the brand at a level which may be described as brand identification (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006; Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Brand identification is thought to occur when the brand serves as a relationship partner to both the 'private self', i.e. such that individuals use the brand to define who they are and the 'social self' i.e. such that individuals consider themselves part of an in-group identifying with the brand (Lam et al. 2010).

Consider Susan's account in which she describes how she feels about how the brand is perceived outside of the organisation:

3M undersells itself in the marketplace and sometimes I think people may only hear about the negative things like some clean up story from seventies, you know those environmental type things so some of that stuff gets publicized especially locally. So I would like people to know our overall message and some of the great things that we're involved in terms of our community involvement, our innovations in breakthrough technologies, I just think the public face should be stronger. I'd like to hear positive stories about us on the radio... I'm disappointed in a way that there are so many people out there who really do not know what our company is truly about...The reputation of the brand is important though on the outside because it's a reflection of where you work, it would be nice though if we were more overt in talking about what we do and who we are as a company

This passage highlights Susan's disappointment with how the brand is represented in the marketplace, her disappointment reflects how important it is to her that the brand is perceived in a positive light outside the organisation since it reflects where she works. Claire similarly highlights the importance of the brand's external image not only locally but also State-wide and furthermore likes to associate herself with the brand's positive image and the brand serves as a relationship partner to her 'social self':

People in California know what Mayo Clinic is, they've heard of some of the latest research to have come outta there and I like that, it's good to know that people are paying attention to the name and they realize we're competitive and I'm happy to be a part of that

Some informants further revealed that they take criticism of the brand personally:

Susan: Well when I hear bad things I want to defend the brand, I want us to have a louder voice and correct things. It feels a little bit personal when you hear that negative stuff

James: I get really upset when people say bad things about our products. I find it really insulting actually and people get very personal about the products on the internet and I really hate that, anonymity breeds contempt. I know how hard people work and when you read these things on the forums them it's a personal insult to me for sure, I take it personally, it's offensive to me

Sophie: I care for what I do and I don't want the brand being attacked because that's personally who I am, you know Mayo values are the same as mine

These passages represent the perception by employees of being personally criticized when the brand is criticized which suggests that they define themselves to some extent as being a part of the same unified entity as the brand.

An alternative view was expressed by both Janine and Sally whom, when asked how they felt about criticism of the brand replied:

Janine: If it's not true, I feel defensive, definitely defensive because I want to protect our brand. I don't take it personally though

Sally: Generally now, if I hear negative things I try to put them in perspective but it doesn't affect me personally unless they say it about my part of the business then I would take it personally.

These comments illustrate how they feel a connection to the brand and are willing to defend the brand but not one that runs so deep that criticism of the brand as a whole is personal. They therefore define themselves to a lesser extent as being a part of the unified brand entity. Like Janine, Claire and Sophie expressed their desires to defend the brand in light of criticism:

Claire: Oh, I get defensive, I always ask why or what their reason is for it. I've had people do that, who come here and patients who aren't satisfied with some of the doctors they see or the care that they're getting or maybe it's not what they were expecting or they get news they weren't expecting and I get defensive because I take pride in where I work and what I do so I like to think that I'm in one of the best hospitals so it bothers me and it feels personal, I

take it personally even if it's nothing to do with me or my department so there is an attachment between me and Mayo. I would defend it like I would a friend!

Sophie: I feel like Mayo is who I am; it's my reputation that's out there. If I hear negative things about Mayo I get like this ooooooh in my stomach, that's really unfortunate and I would wonder if there was anything we could have done to avoid that person feeling that way.

You know a good example is I was doing interviews at the Mayo Health System and I was sitting in a crowd of people and there was this couple sitting over on the other side and he was very frustrated with something, I don't know what it was but he was just spouting off, 'this is the worst place I've ever been and the standard of care is terrible and the nurses don't get back to us' and so on and I really wanted to do something, and I was thinking what do I do and how do I handle this situation and who do I go to tell that this individual is very upset and how do I make it better for this person and he was going on, 'they promised this and that' so there were serious frustrations that made me feel so bad and wish I could have done something. I felt I was being attacked and who knows who he's gonna go to and tell the same story to and so on.

Both informants above merge the idea of feeling defensive with the feeling that the criticism is personal. Their emphasis on the motive for defensive feelings or behaviour reinforces their view that they themselves may be defined by the same attributes that they believe define the brand i.e. they identify with the brand (Hughes and Ahearne 2010).

Considering that CBI may be defined as 'the extent to which the brand is incorporated into one's self-concept through the development of cognitive connection with the brand, valuing this connection with the brand and the emotional attachment to the brand' (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003), it is apparent that employees also go through a similar identification process. Consider Claire's comments:

There is an attachment between me and Mayo.

This indicates a sense of awareness of belonging which accounts for the cognitive component of identification.

She continues:

You know if I'm in a different city and I say Mayo Clinic I usually get the 'oh, wow, you work at Mayo, oh cool' and you know that makes me feel really good that people recognize I work at a very well-known hospital and that gives good carepeople then respect me.

By suggesting others respect her for her association with Mayo, this indicates an awareness related to value which is the evaluative component of the identification process. She adds, when asked about how she feels when the brand is criticised:

I like to think that I'm in one of the best hospitals so it bothers me and it feels personal, I take it personally even if it's nothing to do with me or my department.

This describes how she is feeling from her sense of belonging with the brand which is thus indicative of the affective/emotional component of identification.

Therefore it appears employees also identify with the brand for which they work such that following on from Lam et al. (2010) employee-brand identification (EBI) may be defined as 'the extent to which the brand is incorporated into the employee's self-concept through the cognitive connection with the brand, valuing this connection with the brand and the emotional attachment to the brand'.

Since consumers identify with prestigious companies to maintain a positive social identity and to enhance their self-esteem it has been proposed that the greater the brand is perceived as prestigious by consumers the more likely they are to identify with the brand to enhance their self-esteem. Similarly the more distinct the brand is perceived to be i.e. standing apart from the out-group and positively associated with the in-group the more likely consumers are to identify with that brand (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Since I uncovered similar evidence with employees I hypothesize therefore that the functional, symbolic and experiential benefits as associations of the brand contribute to the process of identification with the brand and thus surmise the following hypotheses:

H₄: the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

H₅: the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

H₆: the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

4.8 Employee Self-Brand Connection and Employee-brand Identification

Since with the formation of a self-brand connection the brand is already incorporated into the self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003; 2005), and brand-identification as a social construction process involves the integration of perceived brand identity into self-identity (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005; Lam et al. 2010) I hypothesise:

H₇: the formation of employee self-brand connection has a positive influence on employee-brand identification

4.9 Employee Self-Brand Connection and Employee-brand Identification and Brand-Specific Behaviours

Our informants referred to a number of different brand-related behaviours which they enacted. Such behaviours could be categorised into in-role behaviours, which may be described as ‘meeting the standards prescribed by their organisational roles as brand representatives’ and extra-role behaviours, which may be described as ‘employee actions that go beyond the prescribed roles for the good of the corporate brand and are discretionary’ (Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak 2009).

4.9.1 In-Role Brand Behaviours

In-role behaviours include thinking about the brand, adhering to brand-congruent behaviour and recognition of the significance of the internal corporate brand community.

The following passage illustrates the salience of the brand in the mind of James:

For me it always comes back to the brand, it's about this brand. You know even if the worst has just happened and you think 'oh my God, they want us to do what?' and then all of a sudden you get that new product and soon as you have it in your hands it's like 'wow, this is the coolest thing I've ever seen, how did you even think of this stuff, you guys are maniacs, what did you guys do here?' I just love it and I love to promote the brand. I'm so into the meaning of Nikon.....I'll look at a product and I'll look at the technologies in the product and I'll think about what does this mean for this product and then you can make a conclusion about where you're going in accordance with the brand.

The brand is constantly in my mind and it does influence my thinking. You're thinking about it always, that fact that's Nikon we're talking about and it affects the way I work. It's there all the time, in everything I do, in every conversation I have. Subconsciously it's always there, it has to be there.

James's passage reflects how the brand influences his thinking and decision making. This is also highlighted in comments made by other informants. When asked whether they ‘think about the brand often’ they responded:

Susan: I think about the 3M brand on a daily basis and I try to provide counseling to our clients to do the same.....Hmm, yes, well for me it (the brand) does play a big part, it's always on my mind

Sophie: *Almost every day, I'll be doing my daily work and I think about what we stand for*

Janine: *More and more, the longer I work for the brand yes*

In contrast to the passages above, Sally asserted:

No, not at all, I don't think about it

Similarly, Claire, when asked whether the 'brand is often on her mind' commented:

No, it's not. As with any job, you show up to work some days and you do feel like working and other days you just don't feel like it.

Brand Congruent Behaviour

Sophie describes how she thinks about the brand in her decision making and her efforts to adhere to decisions which are in line with the brand:

You know Mayo is very soft spoken and very conservative and they don't want people rocking the boat, so those are some of things you just have to balance and learn, there are some things that fit and some things that just don't and when I make my decisions I think 'is this gonna fit with Mayo brand, because if it doesn't I'm gonna have to build a pretty big case'.

James explains how despite his frustrations with the organisation he is able to adopt a positive outlook due to the nature of the brand:

the corporate side of things here is still the most challenging and frustrating aspect of our business but when you think about the brand because it's all about the brand, you realize that all that hard work that goes into promoting the brand then it becomes a whole different outlook that you take on

Loyalty

Some informants spoke of their loyalty to the brand:

James: *You know there's such a sense of loyalty here at Nikon, the average employee has 14 years tenure. I have colleagues who've been at Nikon for thirty years and thirty five years. I'm actually called the newcomer sometimes.*

Janine: *I am loyal but not more than that. I am though engaged, I would say I'm engaged with the brand*

Sally: *Well, I'm a very loyal person, I feel loyal to ING.*

The loyalty evident in the passages above was not found to be consistent across all accounts as Claire explains:

It's a bit like brands I buy, I'm not loyal, if something better comes along I'll try it, I may go back to the original if that's the one I feel comfortable with and I feel that same way with Mayo too, if I had a better offer that was maybe bigger or different that I thought would be better then I would try it.

Recognition of the Corporate Brand Internal Community

Expanding on Escalas and Bettman's (2003) view of brand connection, Rindfleisch, Burroughs and Wong (2008) recognize that connections to brands may also have communal aspects (Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Furthermore, consumers not only forge self-brand connections but also seek connections with fellow brand users i.e. communal-brand connections. Communal brand connections are known to provide participants with enhanced self-esteem (Schouten and McAlexander 1995). In keeping with this view, employees recalled how in different ways, they recognised the importance of the internal brand 'community' within the organisation. Some informants acknowledged the importance of having colleagues as friends in the workplace. Consider the following comments:

Claire: I work with alot of people my age, we're not just co-workers, we're friends, and I see them outside of work quite often. I have a really good relationship with my nurse manager, if I were to ever have a problem she would be there to give a lending ear. She's a good role model, she does the whole Mayo thing, she works in a different role, more on the managerial side.

Susan: I also work with a great group of people and we bounce ideas off each other all the time. We also have lots of fun outside of work and I think that helps in work. We have great managers and we're really allowed the autonomy to do our work and to trust us that we're gonna do the right thing and to provide good deliverables to our clients and I find that empowering.

Sophie: People who we hire you know really have to wanna be in a team environment, it's not about standing alone and being the shining star, it's more about working in the team atmosphere.

In line with Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak's (2009) findings, the role of leaders in inspiring brand-specific behaviours was highlighted by some of my informants as significant, particularly, some informants acknowledged the role of managers as brand representatives.

Sophie: The leaders serve as good role models and they model all the right behaviours.....so to go in front of people and show how much they care I think really spoke volumes to me about the organisation and the brand. This displays real brand behaviours, you know honesty and integrity and we're gonna fix this.

James: There are a couple here, a senior technical manager and someone who works for Nikon professional services group and a couple of other marketing manager types who feel exactly the same way, who go the extra mile all the time, who get upset when things aren't going right.....people are

just people and not everybody feels the same way as me, there are many people who are here and who are very dedicated to the company and promoting the brand but who are not into photographywe've got people here working on our internet, when they came here they were just internet people, within months of working here they see what goes on and then they become entrenched in our environment.

Janine: My boss has scared a lot of people off and my team are not happy anymore and they won't work as brand ambassadors anymore because of her so how leaders demonstrate the brand is very important to us as employees

4.9.2 Extra-Role Brand Behaviours

Extra-role brand behaviours include positive word-of-mouth and participation in the development of the brand.

Positive Word-of-Mouth

Some informants described how they talk about the brand when outside of work. When asked whether she talks about the brand outside work, Sally declared:

Well, let's put it this way, now half my family are working for ING since I started with this company so I guess in that sense I do talk up the brand, yeah half of my cousins are working for ING now so yes I do talk up ING to my family so yes I'm thinking now I'm positive about the brand. I talk about ING to my family, my husband, I definitely talk about it being a good brand and they've all sort of followed in my footsteps. I'm a little bit of a brand ambassador I just don't always acknowledge it (laughs).

The 'talking-up' of the brand outside of the organisation was evident in others' accounts:

Sophie: Yes, absolutely, all the time, with my sons, my spouse, my Mom and Dad, yeah I talk to them about what I do or I show them a brochure I've produced, it makes me feel good, it's important, like you know here's something I've created and it's working really well for us. I take the pride in my job home with me. I share things with them and tell them what I do. And you know if any of my family God forbid got sick I would want them to come here. I would be very confident in the care they would receive here....I always speak up about Mayo, I go that extra mile outside of work too to speak up about it too.

Sally: Well yes, there's the pride factor, I'm excited to share the things that I'm working on with my friends and family. You know I talk up the brand with my

parents and with my husband, I talk about it. My Dad actually worked for 3M for about five years in the early seventies so it's fun to talk to him about his experiences too so there's definitely a history there too. I tell stories to my husband; he works for Target so he has some vendors who are from 3M so he has similar stories to share.

Evident in these passages is personal advocacy of the brand outside of the work context; such advocacy is discretionary since this is not behaviour required of the employees.

Participation

Some informants described their experiences of ways in which they have contributed to the development of the brand in a context over and above of what is expected of them in their roles as employees of the brand. Consider the following excerpts:

Sophie: I'm always thinking of ways to improve things here because I want Mayo to be successful, I think it's great but there are always things to improve to stay being the best and that's got a lot to do with the talent they hire into this organisation

Susan: I would say also that I'm deeply involved throughout 3M, I'm part of a women's leadership network, I do a lot of volunteer work for the 3M foundation and I do the community giving, I'm on the United Way steering committee and I participate in a number of other kind of sub teams outside of the daily work.

James: This last week we had an advertising shoot that started on Sunday and the products that we used were my responsibility and I needed to be there on set with the photographer working with our advertising people and our communications people and I felt the real need to be there to make sure the product was being presented in the best possible way for the goals and statements that we've been making to make sure it all comes out in the right way. These products are almost like children to me, I need to know they find their way in the world and that they are successful.

These passages illustrate the importance of the brand to the employees such that they are willing to engage in extra-role behaviours for the benefit of the brand.

In line with social identification theory authors suggest that the more consumers identify with brands the more likely they are to engage in brand-supportive behaviours such as brand reputation protection and brand loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005). Empirical evidence points towards outcomes of identification in the form of in-role behaviour such as product utilization and extra-role behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005; Kim, Han and Park 2001).

Other positive outcomes of identification have been empirically identified such as loyalty (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; O'Reilly and Chatman 1986), commitment (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000) and brand advocacy (Badrinarayanan and Laverie 2011). According to Badrinarayanan and Laverie (2011), when individuals identify with a brand they form a psychological relationship with the brand and consequently demonstrate favouritism and work to the benefit of the brand. My evidence points towards the same outcomes in employees, we therefore hypothesise:

H₈: The greater the level of employee-brand identification, the more likely employees are to demonstrate brand-specific behaviours

4.10 Hypotheses and Development of Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework emerging from my qualitative findings for the study is presented in Figure 4.7. The independent variables are functional brand value, symbolic brand value and experiential brand value. The dependent variable is brand-supportive behaviours. ESBC and EBI serve as both independent and dependent variables. The proposed direct and indirect relations are specified in the model.

Based on the following hypotheses I propose the following conceptual framework which highlights several important aspects of my findings.

H₁: the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

H₂: the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

H₃: the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

H_{3a}: experiential brand value mediates the effects of functional brand value and symbolic brand value on employee self-brand connection

H₄: the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

H₅: the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

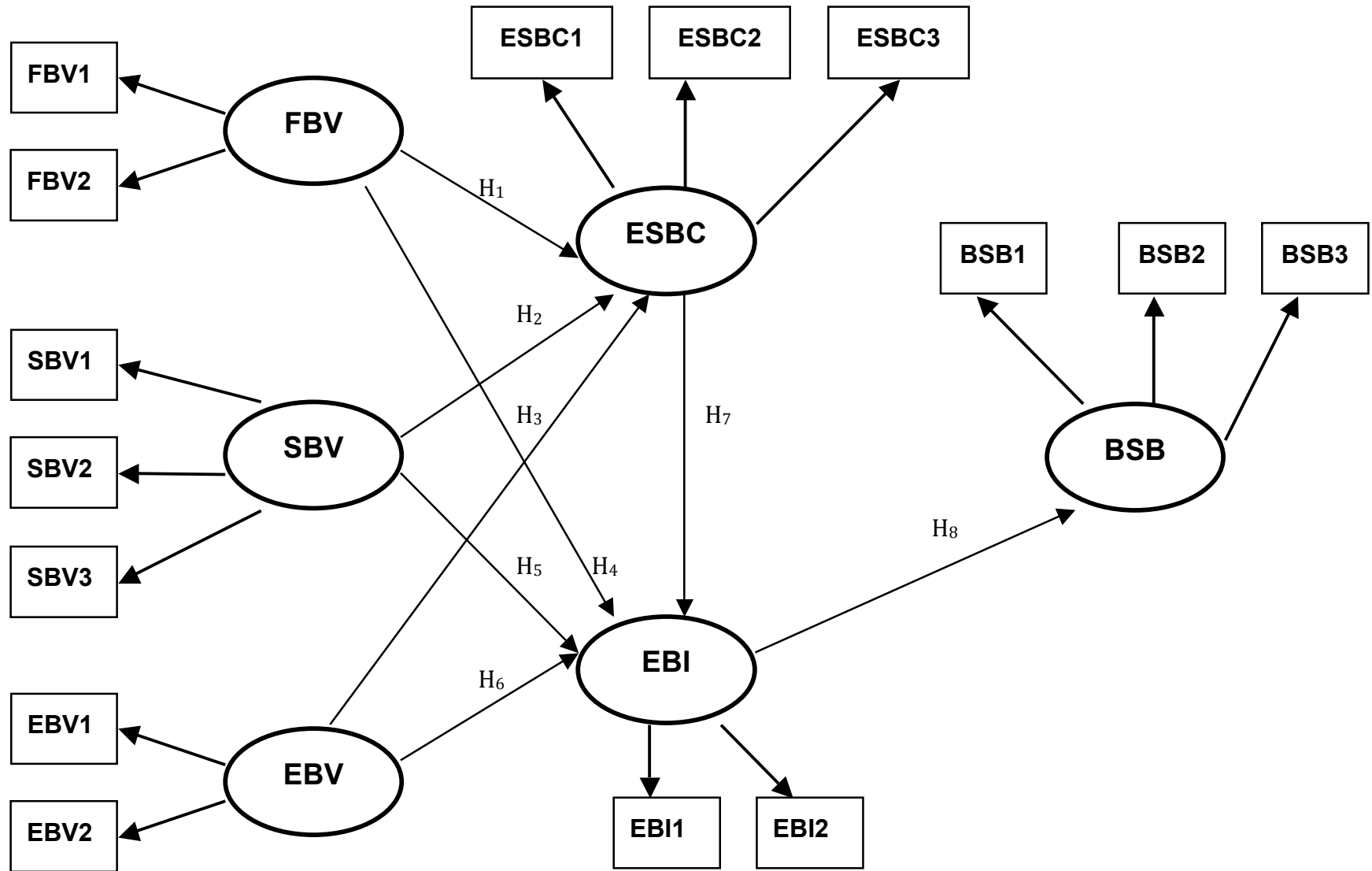
H₆: the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

H₇: the formation of employee self-brand connection has a positive influence on employee-brand identification

H₈: the greater the level of employee-brand identification, the more likely employees are to demonstrate brand-specific behaviours

The conceptual model enables me to test the direct impact of functional, symbolic and experiential brand value on employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification and the direct effect of employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification on brand-specific behaviour. The impact of some of the variables could be mediated by other variables in the model. The proposed conceptual model is tested in Chapter 6 using empirical data.

Fig. 4.7 Proposed Conceptual Framework



CHAPTER 5 QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described the grounded theory methodology of the qualitative study. To take my theory from the substantive level to the formal level I need to take my research and apply it to a wider population.

In this chapter, I turn my attention to the next part of my study which is to test the proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses using the survey method.

The quantitative method is based on the positivist approach to explore scientific inquiry of the phenomenon under investigation. Quantitative techniques are designed to measure particular characteristics through specific structured data collection procedures from a large representative sample so that the result can be extended to a larger population. The quantitative result can thus be generalized and inferred in another similar context. In this case the employee-brand relationship findings in this particular context may be inferred in other companies between their employees and their brand.

From my qualitative study, a model of the relationship between perceived brand value and employee-brand-specific behaviour has been developed and is subsequently tested using a survey instrument followed by Structural Equation Modelling (SEM). A causal relationship approach will validate the conceptual framework and achieve generalisability. SEM is most suited to confirmatory modeling and theory testing as opposed to theory development as in the first part of this thesis (Byrne 2001; Kline 2005). In this chapter, the data collected from employees is analyzed to test the construct measures and to test the hypotheses proposed earlier. The construct measures are assessed for scale reliability and validity. A measurement model in Structural Equation Modeling is used for confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 18.0 followed by specification and estimation of models (Schumacker and Lomax 1996).

Our SEM model is based upon a priori research, more specifically the findings of my qualitative study which provide the source of the conceptual framework which serves as a basis for hypothesizing causal paths amongst the latent variables.

5.2 Survey Research Methodology

5.2.1 Population and Sample of the Study

To conduct the study I needed to obtain access to a sample of employees from any brand. Immense difficulty was encountered in my efforts to gain access to companies for employee surveying due to confidentiality and ownership of data issues. Despite interest in the study and the potential outcomes, many companies refrained from granting access. (For an example of some responses received from companies see Appendix 5.1).

I eventually secured access to InnoCo. with a series of particular conditions attached which are described below.

The survey-based study involved sampling from a large multi-national US-headquartered technology firm (InnoCo). InnoCo. is a market leader in a number of technological markets worldwide. The final sample frame consisted of 7500 company worldwide employees out of a total of 80,000.

Since I was seeking results for generalization which can be inferred in other similar contexts i.e. between employees and other brands, InnoCo. offers an effective study context. As a conglomerate of 29 companies operating in 65 countries around the world and providing access to a diverse workforce InnoCo. gives me a broad research context such that generalization of results should be readily facilitated. I was able to survey employees at multiple levels within the company including laboratory, public relations, sales, and general management.

To reduce inconvenience to employees and to enhance the response rate to the questionnaire and furthermore to overcome employee data confidentiality issues I was given permission to insert my questions in to an existing web-based employee innovation survey fielded annually by the firm. Employees were not made aware that my questions were from a different source to those asked by the company. InnoCo. took complete control of administering the questionnaire. Participation was thus voluntary and responses were anonymous and uploaded to a central response system for analysis. Of the total sample of 7500 employees, 1226 (17%) completed the questionnaire. The sample's demographics are described in section 5.3.1.

The dominant consensus has been that SEM requires a large sample size to ensure better outcomes and increased likelihood of results replication. In accordance with Hair et al. (2006), when considering sample size one must take into account the number of

latent variables, the lowest number of indicators in a latent variable and communalities (squared factor loadings measuring the variance percentage in a given indicator explained by its latent variable). When the number of latent variables is six or greater and the lowest number of indicators in a latent variable are less than three and communalities are low appropriate sample size is greater than 500. With a sample size of 1226 my sample meets the necessary size requirements.

InnoCo. informed me that the response rate was exactly in line with the response rate from previous years. The responses were forwarded to me in SPSS format via email. I had no direct access to employees and with only one wave of responses, I was not able to control for non-response bias.

5.2.2 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis of a study refers to the extent to which the level of aggregation or the level of investigation of collected data focuses on objects or an object (an organisation, department, group, activity and individuals). Most marketing research thus far has focused on individuals or groups of individuals in the form of a community as the unit of analysis in brand relationship research (e.g. Fournier 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak 2009). Since my study aims to explore the relationship between the individual employee and his/her brand, the individual serves as my unit of analysis. This enabled me to capture the employee's individual perception of the brand.

5.2.3 Instrument Development (Construct Measurement)

I designed my quantitative study to address the issues raised in this research. The quantitative phase of the study validates the measurement model. This section discusses the operationalisation of the constructs based on the conceptual framework. Development of constructs follows recommendations by Churchill (1979) and the procedures from Gerbing and Anderson (1988). To operationalise measures, items were derived from both existing literature and from the outcomes of my earlier qualitative study. Multi-items were used to increase scale sensitivity (Churchill 1979) although I was greatly restricted by 'space' in the survey imposed by InnoCo.

To test the model, a series of measures corresponding to each variable was developed (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Construct Measurement Items

Construct	Items
Functional Brand Value (FBV)	FBV1: Working for InnoCo. enhances my career opportunities FBV2: Working for InnoCo. opens doors for me
Symbolic Brand Value (SBV)	SBV1: My personal values align with InnoCo.'s values SBV2: My culture and InnoCo.'s culture are similar SBV3: InnoCo. is a brand that behaves in similar ways to me
Experiential Brand Value (EBV)	EBV1: InnoCo. is an exciting brand EBV2: InnoCo. brings excitement to my life
Employee Brand Connection (ESBC)	ESBC1: I feel a personal connection to InnoCo. ESBC2: InnoCo. reflects who I am ESBC3: When someone criticizes InnoCo. it feels like a personal insult
Employee-brand Identification (EBI)	EBI1: When I talk about InnoCo. I usually say 'we' rather than 'it' EBI2: I take pride in InnoCo.'s successes
Brand-Specific Behaviour (BSB)	BSB1: I always try to do the right thing when faced with something that could have an impact on InnoCo.'s reputation BSB2: The decisions I make are consistent with InnoCo.'s values BSB3: To what extent do you discourage or encourage people you know to come to work for InnoCo.?

I was able to draw on some of the consumer-brand relationship literature for existing measurement scales. Other constructs which thus far had not received previous empirical attention required scale development. In total I generated 50 items which I forwarded to InnoCo. I was asked to reduce the number significantly, this process was

reiterated three times. Purification of measures were conducted by two researchers and members of a management team with experience of employee/brand relationships. Items were purified for brevity and according to relevance, appropriate wording, perceived understanding by employees and representation of the construct under consideration. Through this process the item pool was significantly reduced to the 15 items used in the survey. According to Hair et al. (1998), parsimony encourages researchers to use the smallest number of indicators to represent the construct, they further suggest that more items are not necessarily better. For measuring each theoretical construct in the proposed model, the measurement variables are described in detail below and summarized in Table 5.2.

The aim of the questionnaire is to meet the research objectives as follows:

Objective One

To measure the perceived functional value of the brand

To meet the first objective, the questionnaire seeks to measure employees' perception of the functional value provided by the brand. Functional brand value refers to the benefits the brand offers employees that are perceived to possess benefits which are instrumental and utilitarian in nature and satisfy practical needs. Two items represent this construct which were commonly referred to in the qualitative phase: career enhancement and opening of doors because of the brand.

Objective Two

To determine the perceived symbolic value of the brand

To meet the second objective, the questionnaire seeks to measure employees' perception of the symbolic value provided by the brand. Symbolic brand value refers to the benefits the brand offers employees that are perceived to allow construction of social identity and to assign meaning to themselves. Three items represent this construct which were commonly referred to in the qualitative phase: value alignment, culture similarity and behaviour similarity.

Objective Three

To determine the perceived experiential value of the brand

To meet the third objective, the questionnaire seeks to measure employees' perception of the experiential value provided by the brand. Experiential brand value (EBV) refers to the benefits the brand offers employees that are perceived to provoke particular feelings of fun, excitement and enjoyment. Two items represent this construct which were commonly referred to in the qualitative phase: exciting brand and excitement in life.

Excitement encompasses a number of different affective elements.

Objective Four

To determine the level of employee self-brand connection

To meet the fourth objective, the questionnaire seeks to measure levels of employee self-brand connection. my qualitative study revealed that employees incorporate the brand into their sense of selves. Three items represent this construct which were commonly referred to in the qualitative phase and that have been used to measure self-brand connection in consumers before: personal connection, reflects 'who I am' and criticism is personal (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

Objective Five

To determine the level of employee-brand identification

To meet the fifth objective, the questionnaire seeks to measure levels of employee-brand identification. my qualitative study revealed that employees identify with the brand at a cognitive, affective and evaluative level. Two items represent this construct which were commonly referred to in the qualitative phase and that have been used to measure consumer brand identification previously: refer to the brand as 'we' rather than 'it', take pride in brand's successes (Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn 2005).

Objective Six

To determine the level of brand-specific behaviour

To meet the sixth objective, the questionnaire seeks to measure levels of brand-specific behaviour. my qualitative study revealed that employees exhibit positive brand-specific behaviours. It is important to measure this across a broader population. Three items represent this construct which were commonly referred to in the qualitative phase: do the right thing for the brand, make decisions matching brand's values, encourage others to come to work for the brand.

Objective Seven

To determine the relationships between all constructs and the mediating role of EBV

To meet the final objective of my study, the questionnaire allows me to determine the relationships posed in Figure 4.7.

Table 5.2 Model Constructs, Definitions, Items, Sources

Construct	Conceptual Definition	Construct Items	Scale Anchors	Source of Items
Functional brand value	The extent to which the brand offers employees functional value	Enhances career opportunities Opens doors	Strongly disagree/agree	Qualitative Phase
Symbolic brand value	The extent to which the brand offers employees symbolic value	Values alignment Culture similarity Brand behaviour and employee behaviour similarity	Strongly disagree/agree	Qualitative Phase
Experiential brand value	The extent to which the brand offers employees experiential value	The brand is exciting The brand brings excitement to employee's life	Strongly disagree/agree	Qualitative Phase
Employee Self-Brand Connection	The extent to which the brand is incorporated into the self	A personal connection to the brand The brand reflects the employee Criticism of the brand is a personal insult	Strongly disagree/agree	Escalas and Bettman (2003); Escalas (2004)
Employee-brand Identification	The extent to which employees identify with the brand	The brand is 'we' rather than 'it' Pride in the brand's successes	Strongly disagree/agree	Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn (2005)
Brand-Specific Behaviour	Positive behaviour towards the brand	Do the right thing for the brand Decisions in line with brand values Encourage others to come to work for the brand	Strongly disagree/agree Encourage/discourage	Qualitative phase Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak (2009)

5.2.4 Pre-Testing

We pretested the questionnaire with a group of InnoCo. employees (who were not on the recipient list of the main questionnaire) and asked them to comment on any items they found difficult to understand. Minor changes were made to the wording of some questions following this process. All items, unless indicated otherwise used nine point scales (1 = 'strongly disagree,' and 9 = 'strongly agree').

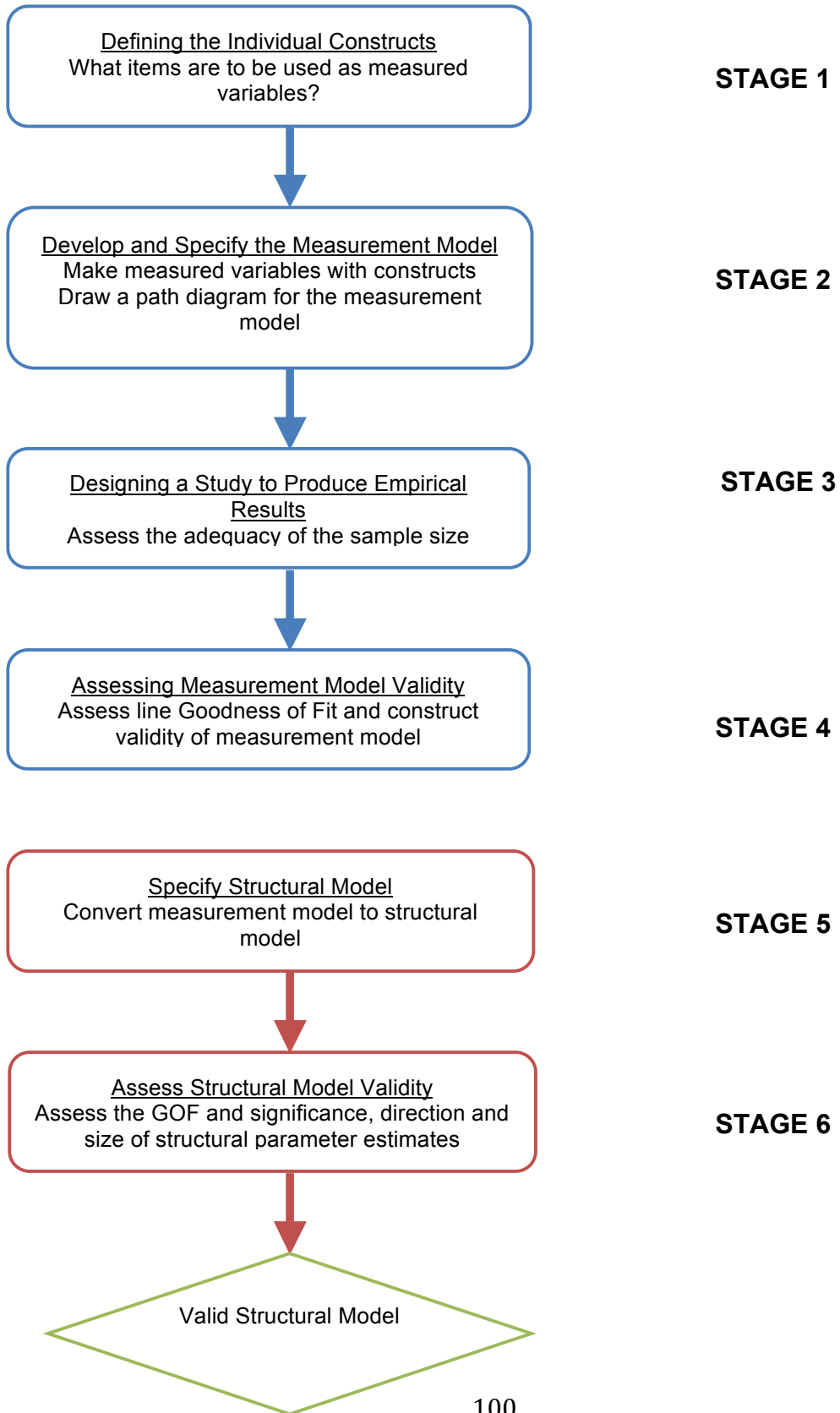
5.2.5 Analysis of Data Using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

SEM has been described as 'a hybrid of factor analysis and path analysis' (Weston and Gore 2006) that allows researchers to build, test and confirm models of complex relationships. my choice of SEM as a process for my analyses is based on the fact that SEM allows me to test hypothesized relationships among several different concepts (Figure 5.1). It is a useful tool for my analysis given its ability to estimate relationships between latent variables thus enabling me to test the process conceptualized in Chapter 4.

SEM offers researchers advantages over other multivariate techniques. It provides researchers with the means to assess and modify theoretical models and furthermore to frame and address complex questions about data (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). It takes into account measurement error in variables and enables the researcher to specify structural relationships amongst the latent variables (Schumacker and Lomax 2004; Ullman 1996). Bagozzi and Yi (2012) suggest further advantages of SEM lie in the provision of more straightforward tests of mediation and methods to assess construct validity in broader and deeper ways than with traditional correlation analyses. They further suggest that it offers ways to correct for systematic bias in tests of substantive hypotheses.

Analysis normally starts with an examination of the measurement model using a confirmatory factor analysis of all measured variables where the factors are allowed to intercorrelate freely. Once a suitable measurement model is obtained, the theoretical relationship model is then tested and validated (Gallagher, Ting and Palmer 2008).

Fig. 5.1 The SEM Process (Adapted from Hair et al. 2006)



5.3 Measurement Model Assessment

In the sections that follow, the respondents' profiles, sample characteristics, data screening, measurement model assessment and structural model fit are described.

5.3.1 Respondent Profile and Sample Demographics

The demographic information provided highlights the cross-sectional nature of my data in terms of job grade, role, region, tenure and age.

By demonstrating the diversity of my sample I aim to show that my sample is adequate to represent the population of interest i.e. the entire employee set.

The purpose of profiling and analyzing respondents is to provide a clear picture of those who answered the questionnaire. The total number of questionnaires returned was 1226 from 7500 invited which equates to 17%. The response to the survey indicates there are more than sufficient observations to analyze the data set with SEM. Hair et al. (1998) consider 200 to be sufficient. The other criterion to be met before adopting the SEM technique is the number of parameters in the model compared to the sample size. Hair et al. (1998) states there should be at least five observations for every parameter in the model. With a sample of 1226 and 15 items, those requirements have been met.

Figures 5.2 - 5.7 provide insight in to the respondent sample demographics. Respondents were from a wide variety of business divisions of the brand and similarly a broad range of job grades. The majority of respondents worked in sales or marketing roles but other work areas were well represented. The majority of respondents were based in either the US or in Western Europe but other regions were also well represented. The number of years employees with the brand were varied ranging from two years to over 30 years. The majority of respondents were over 35 years of age.

Fig. 5.2 Employee Work Area

Division	%	Division	%
Industrial Adhesives & Tape	8%	Abrasive Systems	2%
Occupational Health	8%	Office Supplies	2%
InnoCo. ESPE	5%	Building & Commercial Services	2%
Automotive Aftermarket	4%	Communications Markets	2%
Research and Development	4%	Construction & Home Improvement Markets	2%
Infection Prevention	4%	Electronics Materials	2%
Corporate Marketing & Sales	3%	Food Safety Department	2%
CUNO Incorporated	3%	InnoCo. Unitek Corporation	2%
Commercial Graphics	3%	Electronic Solutions	1%
Electrical Markets	3%	Stationery Products	1%
Home Care	3%	Energy & Advanced Materials	1%
Traffic Safety Systems	3%	Renewable Energy	1%
Skin and Wound Care	3%	Security Systems	1%
Health Information systems	3%	Aerospace & Aircraft Maintenance Department	1%
Automotive	3%	Drug Delivery Systems	1%
		Other	9%

Fig. 5.3 Job Grade

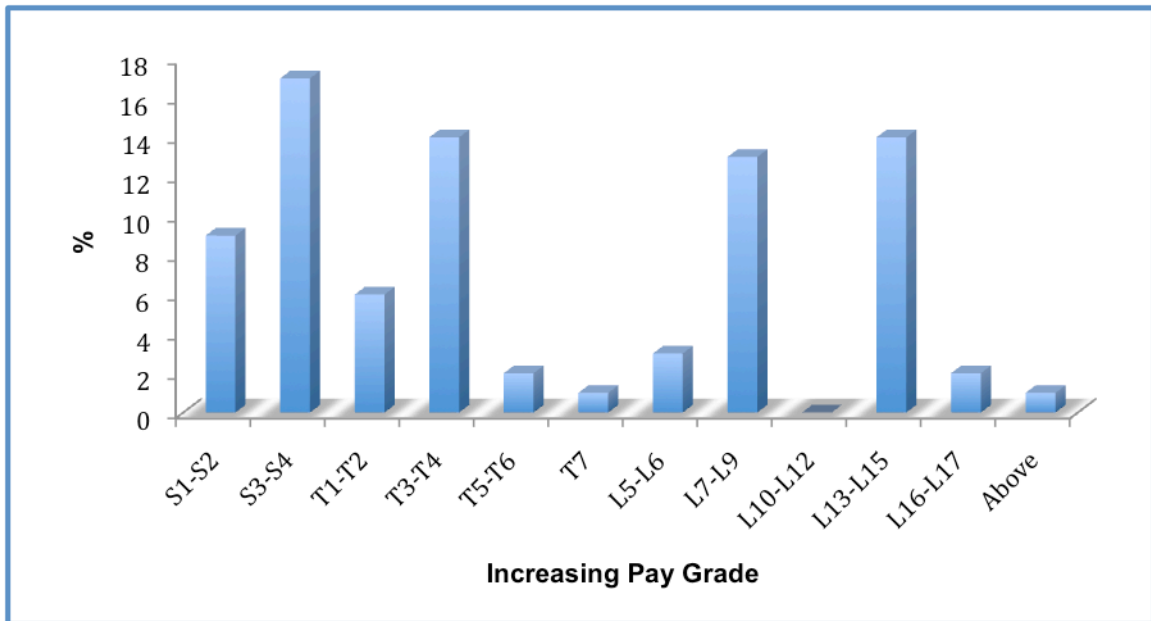


Fig. 5.4 Work Area

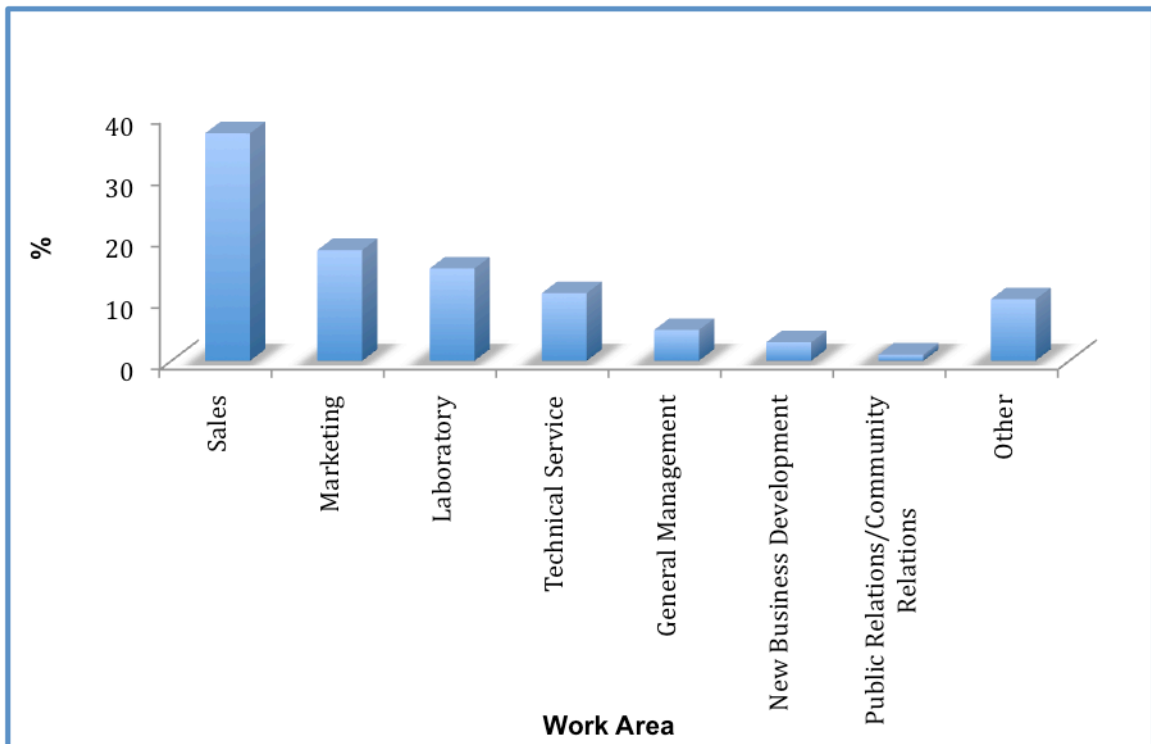


Fig. 5.5 Region

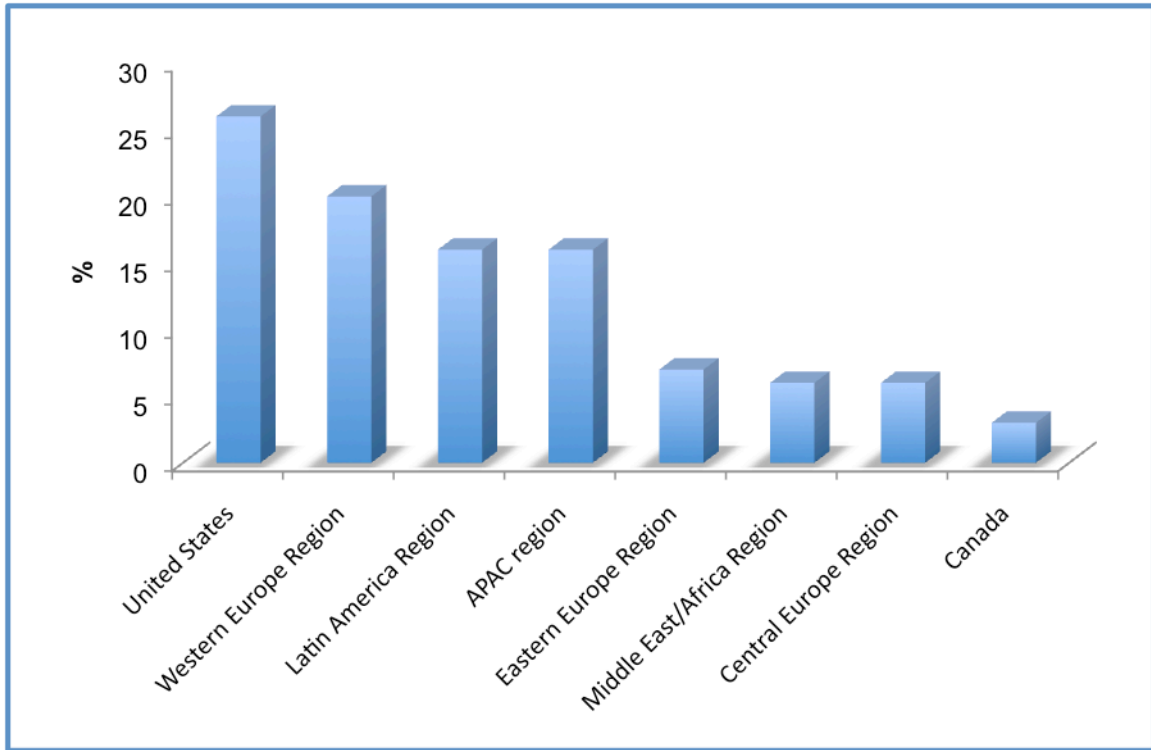


Fig. 5.6 Tenure

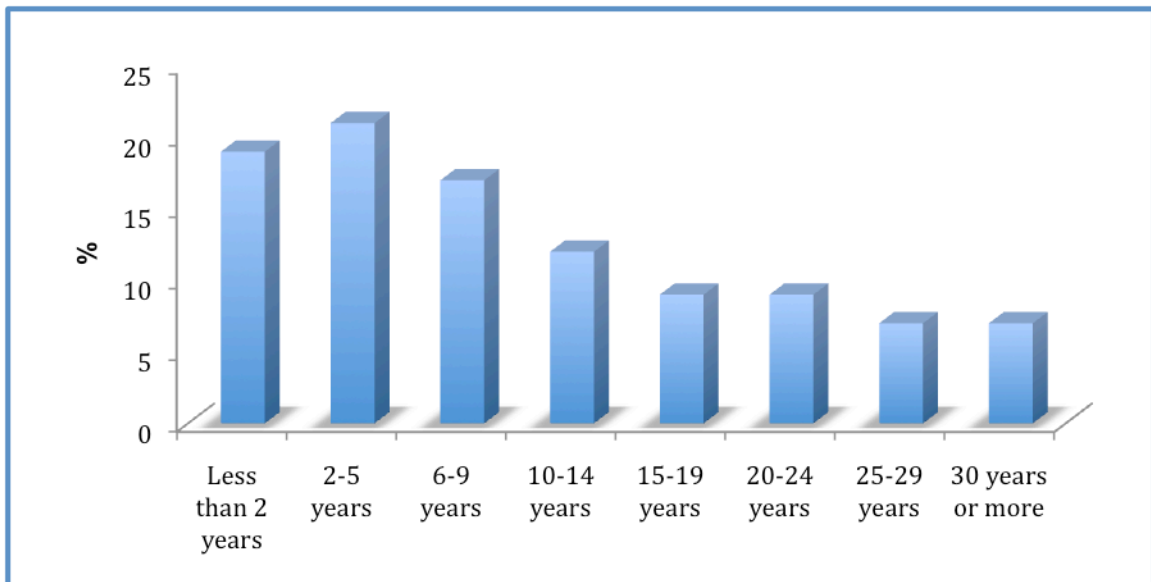
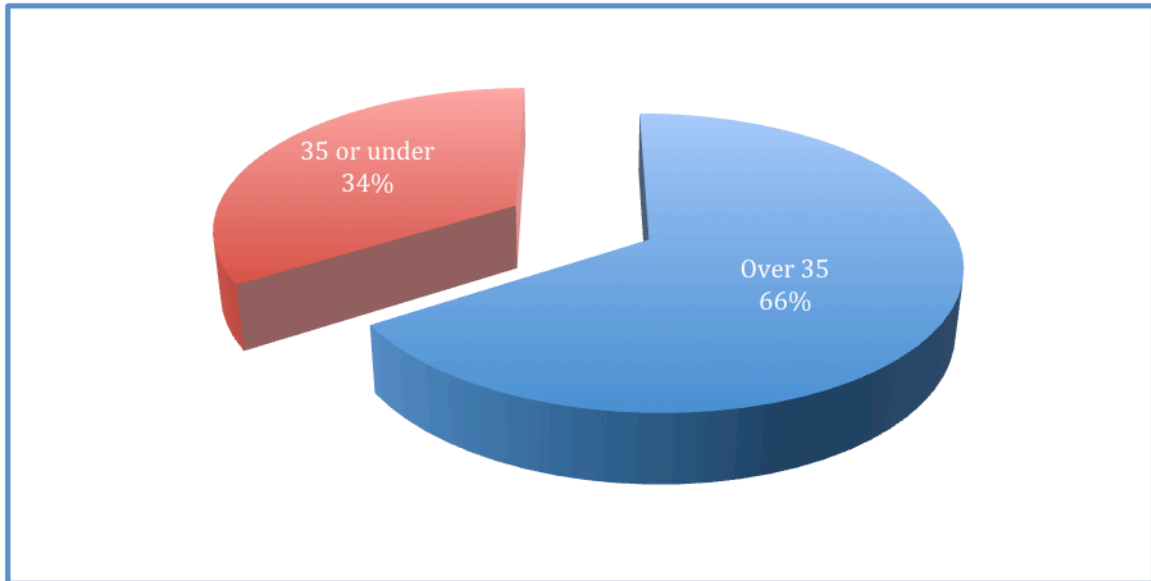


Fig. 5.7 **Age**



5.3.2 Assessment of Missing Data

There were no cases of missing data, thus 1226 cases were used for confirmatory factor analysis and structural model testing.

5.4 Measurement Model Assessment

To begin measuring the fit between the data I collected and my proposed conceptual framework there are some standard interrelated statistical techniques which are employed to analyse the data. I begin my assessment by assessing the measurement model which specifies how well the indicators are representative of my latent variables. To do so, I employed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). I performed this by co-varying all the constructs in the model and assessing the validity of each construct through the assessment of model fit and through the processes of construct validity and reliability (Bagozzi 1984). The reliability tests examine the internal consistency of the items in each measure to determine whether any items should be retained or removed.

5.4.1 Model Fit evaluation - Fit Indices

Goodness of fit (GOF) indicates how well the specified model reproduces the covariance matrix among the indicator or observed variables. If GOF is acceptable then the model argues for the plausibility of hypothesized relationships amongst variables. Many

indexes of goodness of fit exist to appraise an entire model but the chi square statistic is the most fundamental (Bagozzi and Yi 2012). For SEMs a good fit is obtained when the chi squared statistic is non-significant which is the case for p-values $\geq .05$.

Similarly, Gallagher et al. (2008) suggest the chi square be used as an initial assessment of GOF and to subsequently use the chi square/df ratio, GFI, CFI, RMSEA and PGFI to determine fit further.

There are three main measures of GOF: absolute fit, comparative fit and parsimonious fit.

Absolute fit indices assess how well a researcher's theoretical model fits the observed data they have collected. The chi-square or CMIN statistic is used and should not be statistically significant for a good model fit. For overall model fit, the chi-square value of between 2.0 and 5.0 show a good fit of the model to the data (Hair et al. 1988).

This alone as a measure is insufficient since chi-square test is sensitive to sample size. As a result a computation of the ratio between chi square and degrees of freedom as a measure has been developed and a ratio of 2 or 3 to 1 is a good fit (Schlermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger and Müller 2003). The GFI and Adjusted GFI indices are also Absolute Fit Indices with .85 considered acceptable in AGFI. Root Mean Squared Residual (RMSR) and Standardised Root Mean Residual (SRMR) and Roots Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) can also be used to measure absolute fit. These are better known as 'badness-of-fit indices' and use lower values as an indication of better fit. Values less than .05 are a good fit but values between .05 and .08 are also acceptable (Schlermelleh-Engel, Moosbrugger and Müller 2003).

Incremental Fit Indices (also known as Comparative Fit Indices) assess how well a theoretical model fits, relative to an alternative baseline model most commonly known as a null model. The Comparative Fit Index and Relative Fit Index suggest a .95 cut off acceptability.

Parsimonious fit is tested using parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI) and parsimonious goodness-of-fit index (PGFI) to compare two competing models in order to achieve a certain level of fit with less estimated free parameters.

Acceptable fit levels are summarized in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3 Structural Model Fit Evaluation Criteria (Adapted from Schumacker and Lomax (1996))

Criteria	Acceptable Fit
Absolute Fit	
Normed χ^2 (χ^2/df)	Between 1.0 – 2.0
Goodness-of-Fit (GFI)	>0.90
Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit (AGFI)	>0.90
RMSEA	<0.08
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	>0.90
Non normed fit index (NNFI)	>0.90
Comparative Fit	
Comparative Goodness-of-Fit (CFI)	>0.95
Incremental Fit Index (IFI)	>0.95
Relative Fit Index (RFI)	>0.95
Parsimonious Fit	
Parsimonious goodness of fit index (PGFI)	Compares values in alternative models
Parsimonious normed fit index (PNFI)	Compares values in alternative models
Other	
Composite Reliability	>0.700
Variance Extracted	>0.500
t-test for convergent validity	$t > 1.96$

5.4.2 Construct Validity

When validating survey instruments, there are two measures, content and construct validity which can be used to assess the uniqueness of the measures. Content validity is the subjective assessment of the measures associated with the face validity for informal and common sense evaluation of the scales and measures.

Construct validity is of paramount importance when evaluating a research measure. It establishes how well inferences can be made from the operationalisation of a measure to the theoretical construct which underpin it. According to Bagozzi and Burnkrant (1979) the convergent validity of the measures is necessary to establish predictive validity. Convergent validity refers to 'the degree to which multiple attempts to measure the same concept are in agreement'. Different measures should load on different constructs (Bagozzi and Yi 1993). Convergent validity evaluates the extent to which indicators share a high proportion of variance in common. Standardized factor loadings should exceed .50 and ideally be above .70 with statistical significance to demonstrate high convergence on a common construct (Hair et al. 2006). Variance extracted (VE) is the average of the squared factor loading for each given construct. The VE should be .5 or higher to be regarded as adequate indication of convergence (Hair et al. 2006). Reliability is based on quality, consistency and reliability of the measurement. For such a test Cronbach's Alpha is most frequently used. Reliability is generally indicated by .70 or above with each individual indicator's reliability greater than .05 for a set of items to be considered as a particular scale (Nunnally 1967; Fornell and Larcker 1981; Hair et al. 2003).

5.4.3 Initial Measurement Model Fit (CFA Results)

One common way to assess construct validity is through first order confirmatory factor analysis model (CFA) (Steenkamp and Van Trijp 1991). Convergent validity may be achieved by examining the factor loadings of each measure which should be significant. CFA tests how well measured variables represent a smaller number of constructs.

Item reliabilities are above the recommended value of .4 (Bagozzi and Baumgartner 1994). This section focuses on key findings in relation to initial model fit with CFA. The key relationships link constructs to variables (factor loading estimates) and constructs to each other (construct correlations). The measurement models for each construct

measure are discussed in the following sections and summarized in Table 5.4.

5.4.3.1 *Functional Brand Value*

Functional brand value was measured using two items. Inspection of the inter-item correlation matrix reveals significant correlation between items ($p > .01$). Both items exhibit an acceptable loading of .87 and .92. The composite construct reliability for this two item measure is .89 which is well above the acceptable level as indicated in the literature (Hair et al. 1995). This means the two items are considered reliable and valid for this construct measure.

5.4.3.2 *Symbolic Brand Value*

Symbolic brand value was measured using three items. Inspection of the inter-item correlation matrix reveals significant correlation between items ($p > .01$). The three items exhibit an acceptable loading of .85, .85 and .79. The composite construct reliability for this three item measure is .89 which is well above the acceptable level as indicated in the literature (Hair et al. 1995). This means the three items are considered reliable and valid for this construct measure.

5.4.3.3 *Experiential Brand Value*

Experiential brand value was measured using two items. Inspection of the inter-item correlation matrix reveals significant correlation between items ($p > .01$). Both items exhibit an acceptable loading of .88 and .75. The composite construct reliability for this two item measure is .80 which is well above the acceptable level as indicated in the literature (Hair et al. 1995). This means the two items are considered reliable and valid for this construct measure.

5.4.3.4 *Employee Self-Brand Connection*

Employee Self-Brand Connection was measured using three items. Inspection of the inter-item correlation matrix reveals significant correlation between items ($p > .01$). The three items exhibit an acceptable loading of .85, .85 and .79. The composite construct reliability for this three item measure is .84 which is well above the acceptable level as indicated in the literature (Hair et al. 1995). This means the three items are considered reliable and valid for this construct measure.

5.4.3.5 *Employee-brand Identification*

Employee-brand identification was measured using two items. Inspection of the inter-item correlation matrix reveals significant correlation between items ($p > .01$). Both items exhibit an acceptable loading of .70 and .83. The composite construct reliability for this two item measure is .72 which is above the acceptable level as indicated in the literature (Hair et al. 1995). This means the two items are considered reliable and valid for this construct measure.

5.4.3.6 *Brand-Specific Behaviours*

Employee Self-Brand was measured using three items. Initial inspection of the inter-item correlation matrix reveals significant correlation between items ($p > .01$), however, only two of the three items exhibit an acceptable loading of .73, .78 while the third item showed a poor loading of .55. The composite construct reliability for this three item measure is .67 which is below the acceptable level as indicated in the literature (Hair et al. 1995). Item 3 – ‘Do you encourage or discourage people you know from coming to work for InnoCo?’ was removed from this measure. Removal of the item meant the new composite construct reliability is .78 which is above the acceptable level.

The final measurement model includes 14 items across six constructs (see Table 5.4 and Table 5.5). Factor loadings demonstrate convergent validity when they are of sufficient magnitude and are significant (Steenkamp and van Trijp, 1991).

Table 5.4 Summary of Initial Findings (CFA)

Construct	Items	Standardised Loading
FBV	FBV1	.92
	FBV2	.87
SBV	SBV1	.79
	SBV2	.85
	SBV3	.85
EBV	EBV1	.75
	EBV2	.88
ESBC	ESBC1	.84
	ESBC2	.85
	ESBC3	.71
EBI	EBI1	.70
	EBI2	.83
BSB	BSB1	.73
	BSB2	.78
	BSB3	.55 (Removed)

5.4.4 Overall Measurement Model Fit

Following this, an overall measurement model test was conducted to examine the adequacy of the measurement model. Initially all 15 items were examined in the measurement model. Fit statistics shown in Table 5.5 show a better fit with one of the items removed (the item BSB3) thus the statistics justify the deletion of one item from one construct measure. The remaining 14 items suggest a good congruence between the data and the measurement model. Although the normed χ^2 is significant and indicate poor fit, these indices are sensitive to sample size. The other indices show good fit of the model to the data and provide evidence of convergent validity of the items for each construct.

Table 5.5 Overall (Initial and Final) Measurement Model Fit

Fit Indices	Overall Measurement Model	
	Original (15 items)	Final (14 items)
χ^2	540.97	431.91
CMIN (d.f.)	7.213	6.966
IFI	.962	.968
TLI	.946	.953
CFI	.962	.968
RMSEA	.073	.071

Significant at *** 0.001 level

5.4.5 Results of Construct Validity

As I show in Table 5.4 the CFA results lend some support for the convergent validity for all the measures since all estimated loadings of indicators for the underlying constructs are above the acceptable level. Next I calculate the construct reliability of each construct using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) formula. This measures the internal consistency of the items within the particular construct. Cronbach's alpha of the constructs exceeded the .7 threshold (Nunnally 1978). The minimum reliability is .72. Furthermore, the average variance extracted (AVE) across the constructs exceeds the .5 threshold (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The smallest AVE of the constructs is .57 (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6 Modified Model: SEM Output

Constructs/Indicators	Standardized Loading (λ)^a	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
<i>Functional Brand Value</i> FBV1 FBV2	0.92 0.87	0.89	0.80
<i>Symbolic Brand Value</i> SBV1 SBV2 SBV3	0.85 0.85 0.79	0.87	0.69
<i>Experiential Brand Value</i> EBV1 EBV2	0.88 0.74	0.80	0.67
<i>Employee Self-Brand Connection</i> ESBC1 ESBC2 ESBC3	0.85 0.84 0.72	0.84	0.65
<i>Employee-brand Identification</i> EBI1 EBI2	0.69 0.81	0.72	0.57
<i>Brand-Specific Behaviour</i> BSB1 BSB2	0.76 0.84	0.78	0.64

^a All loadings are significant at $p < .001$

Notes: Descriptive fit statistics: CMIN/DF = 431.31/62 ($p < .001$); RMSEA = .071; CFI = .968; GFI = .950; NNFI = .963

5.4.6 Construct Level Correlations

Construct level correlation analysis was performed between the latent constructs to check for preliminary statistical validity of the hypotheses. A composite score was calculated for each construct and Pearson correlation was used to test the correlations. To access fundamental theoretical precision from the data, correlations between the construct measures were then examined by conducting overall measurement model analysis using retained items in SEM. The covariance matrix shown in Table 5.7 shows that BSB as the dependent variable is significantly correlated with all independent variables in the hypothesized model and that ESBC and EBI as dependent variables are significantly correlated with all independent variables.

Table 5.7 Bivariate Correlation Matrix

	FBV	SBV	EBV	ESBC	EBI	BSB
FBV	1.00					
SBV	0.75***	1.00				
EBV	0.82***	0.89***	1.00			
ESBC	0.77***	0.94***	0.95***	1.00		
EBI	0.72***	0.83***	0.82***	0.92***	1.00	
BSB	0.48***	0.65***	0.46***	0.59***	0.77***	1.00

Significant at *** 0.001 level

The fit indices for the model are as follows: $\chi^2 (62) = 431.9 (p < .001)$; RMSEA = .071; CFI = .97. Given the size of the sample and the number of constructs it is not surprising that the χ^2 statistic is significant ($p < .01$). Therefore the more robust RMSEA and CFI values are used to assess model fit. The fit indices are above the accepted thresholds (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Hair et al. 1998). Thus there is evidence that my measurement model fits the data. Summarizing, the measurement model is clean with evidence for unidimensionality, convergent validity and reliability, which enabled me to proceed to the structural model evaluation.

CHAPTER 6 CAUSAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESES TESTING

To address the research question posed in Chapter 1 (Section 1.3), a proposed framework and series of hypotheses were developed in Chapter 4 and are now tested using SEM. This chapter tests the hypotheses proposed in Chapter 4 using AMOS for structural equation modeling. Although the bivariate correlations (see Table 5.7) are statistically significant for all hypothesized relationships it may not be the case when all the relationships are put together in a multivariate complex model due to interactions amongst variables. Since the measurement instruments for all six constructs in the current study have already been validated (Chapter 5) the hypotheses which I propose can be tested in a much more rigorous manner using the structural equation modeling (SEM) framework.

The standard SEM comprises two parts: the measurement model (a sub-model in SEM that specifies the indicators of each construct and assesses the reliability of each construct for use in estimating the causal relationships) described in Chapter 5, and the structural model (the set of dependence relationships linking the model constructs). This chapter focuses on the structural model. The significance of each path will be tested and the overall goodness-of-fit of the entire model is assessed.

The proposed model aims to identify the valid and reliable causal paths to brand-specific behaviour. Further, a competing model is proposed to verify the mediating role of experiential brand value in the employee self-brand connection building process. The proposed hypothesized and competing models are tested and assessed in this section to identify the best fitting model.

The path terms used are as follows:

FBV – Functional brand value

SBV – Symbolic brand value

EBV – Experiential brand value

ESBC – Employee self-brand connection

EBI – Employee-brand identification

BSB – Brand-specific behaviour

6.1 Proposed Structural Model

The proposed structural model shown in Figure 6.1 is the same as the conceptual framework I presented at the end of Chapter 4 in Figure 4.7. There are six variables: FBV, SBV, EBV, ESBC, EBI, BSB. Of these, FBV, SBV, EBV, ESBC and EBI are regarded as independent (exogenous) variables, and BSB as the dependent (endogenous) variable.

ESBC and EBI also serve as dependent variables. The 9 hypotheses proposed in Chapter 4 are represented by 9 causal relationships. Hypothesis 1 is represented by the relationship $FBV \rightarrow ESBC$; Hypothesis 2 is represented by the relationship $SBV \rightarrow ESBC$; Hypothesis 3 is represented by the relationship $EBV \rightarrow ESBC$; Hypothesis 4 is represented by the relationship $FBV \rightarrow EBI$; Hypothesis 5 is represented by the relationship $SBV \rightarrow EBI$; Hypothesis 6 is represented by the relationship $EBV \rightarrow EBI$; Hypothesis 7 is represented by the relationship $ESBC \rightarrow EBI$; and Hypothesis 8 is represented by the relationship $EBI \rightarrow BSB$. Hypothesis 3a is represented by $FBV \rightarrow EBV \rightarrow ESBC$ and $SBV \rightarrow EBV \rightarrow ESBC$. The mediating hypothesis 3a, proposed in Chapter 4 is tested in section 6.3.1.

6.2 Structural Model Results and Discussion

Fig. 6.1 shows the structural model and Table 6.1 shows the path analysis resulting from the model analysis. The model fit properties are evaluated using the series of fit statistics described in Chapter 5 (Table 5.2).

Out of the eight hypothesized relationships, four were found to be significantly supported. Hypotheses 2, 3, 7 and 8 were all found to be significant at the 0.001 level. The supported relationships have both statistical and practical significance. I describe the outcome of each hypothesis in the sections that follow.

Fig. 6.1 Proposed Structural Model

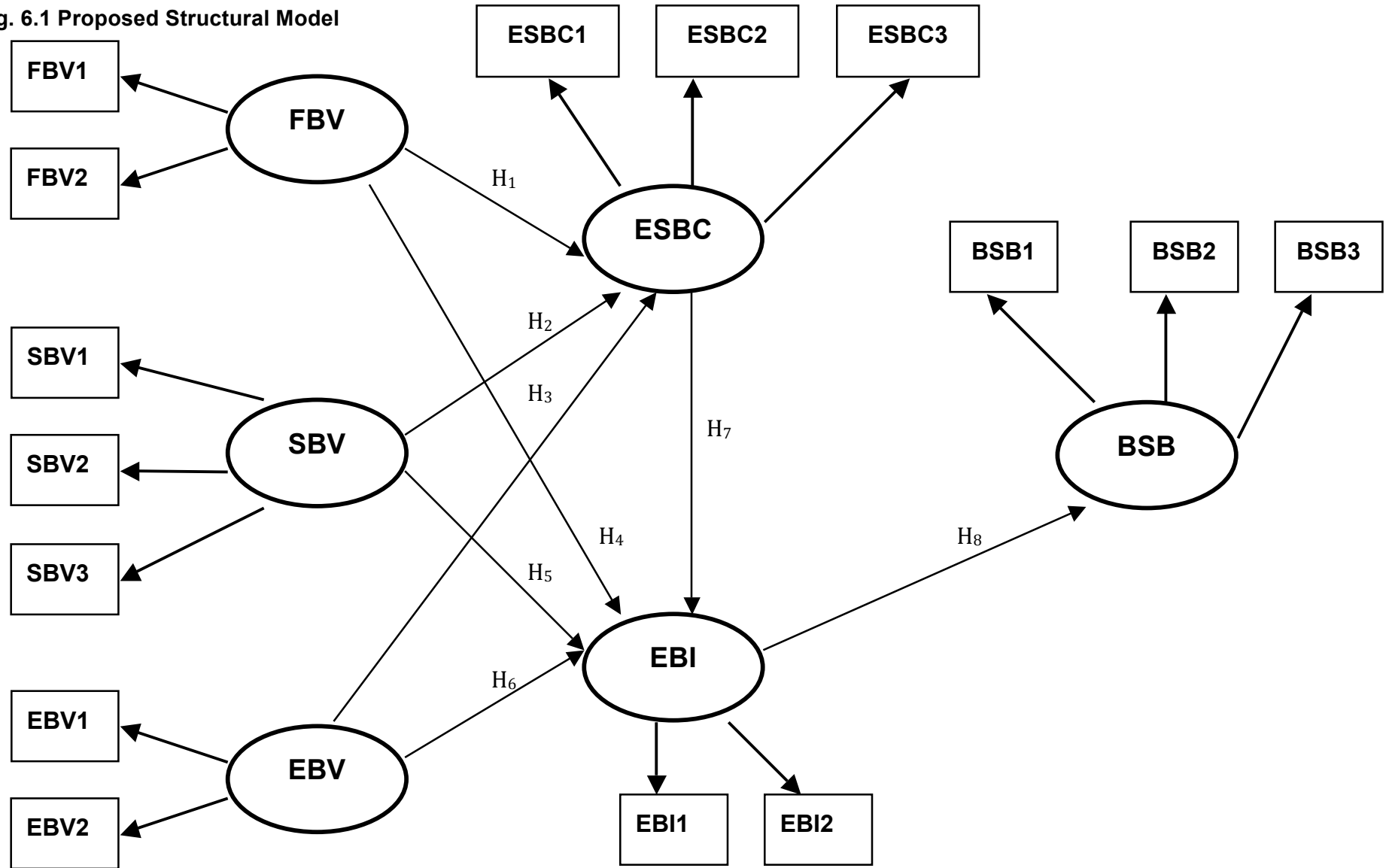


Table 6.1: SEM Output for Hypothesized Paths In Proposed Model

Hypotheses	Paths	(β)	S.E.	C.R. (t)	P	Support ***
H ₁ : the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand	FBV → ESBC	-.06	.041	-1.43	.152	Not supported
H ₂ : the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand	SBV → ESBC	.48	.073	7.58	***	Supported
H ₃ : the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand	EBV → ESBC	.57	.085	6.66	***	Supported
H ₄ : the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification	FBV → EBI	.23	.052	2.83	.005	Not supported
H ₅ : the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification	SBV → EBI	.09	.147	-.478	.633	Not supported
H ₆ : the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification	EBV → EBI	-.78	.195	-2.59	.010	Not supported
H ₇ : the formation of employee self-brand connection has a positive influence on employee-brand identification	ESBC → EBI	.99	.258	3.86	***	Supported
H ₈ : the greater the level of employee-brand identification, the more likely employees are to demonstrate brand-specific behaviours	EBI → BSB	.73	.029	18.59	***	Supported

*** Supported at significance level $p < .001$, GFI = .939; AGFI = .902; RMSEA = 0.07

6.2.1 Functional Brand Value and Employee Self-Brand Connection

H₁: the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is not significant and therefore rejects the hypothesized relationship between functional brand value and employee self-brand connection.

In other words, the functional, instrumental and practical benefits bear no significant influence on employee self-brand connection. This is not altogether surprising since drawing on the consumer-brand relationship literature, the formation of the self-brand connection, however weak, requires construction of the self-concept and the incorporation of the brand to some extent into the self (Escalas and Bettman 2003; McCracken 1989; Ball and Tasaki 1992). Functional brand benefits satisfy immediate and practical needs rather than self-oriented needs required for the self-brand connection (Keller 1993). Similarly, for employees, it appears that utilitarian motives do not directly contribute to the cultivation of one's self-concept. According to Escalas (2004) multiple forms of SBCs exist including those formed from personal accomplishment and provision of self-esteem. However, my findings indicate that despite functional brand value providing employees with a sense of accomplishment thus contributing to one aspect of the self, alone this is not enough to influence the ESBC. However, I cannot rule out that when combined with other perceived benefits it does not contribute to the formation of the employee self-brand connection. I will return to the implication of this finding when I consider my rival model in section 6.4.

The rejection of this hypothesis is consistent with the theoretical expectations in the consumer context.

6.2.2 Symbolic Brand Value and Employee Self-Brand Connection

H₂: the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is significant and thus supports the hypothesized relationship between symbolic brand value and employee self-brand connection.

Symbolic brand value has a direct significant influence on the formation of the self-brand connection in employees. In other words, employees perceive the brand to possess symbolic value which contributes to them forming a self-brand connection.

This finding is supportive of a similarity between employees and consumers in the role that SBV plays in the SBC process. Through symbolic brand value, the brand becomes more closely linked to the self thus positively influencing the SBC (Escalas and Bettman 2003). My findings are congruous with Belk's 1988 work which suggested consumers possess symbolic meanings of brands which they 'use to extend and bolster consumer's self-concept' which is a prerequisite for the SBC.

The support of this hypothesis demonstrates employees also use the symbolic brand value to reinforce and express their self-identity.

6.2.3 *Experiential Brand Value and Employee Self-Brand Connection*

H₃: the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the greater the likelihood they are to form a self-brand connection to the brand

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is significant and thus supports the hypothesized relationship between experiential brand value and employee self-brand connection.

Experiential brand value positively influences the ESBC, in other words the way the brand makes the employee feel influences the ESBC.

Although consumers 'experience' the brand differently to employees (consumers through consumption, employees through employment), my finding is nonetheless compatible with the theoretical and empirical propositions that brands evoke feelings and emotional responses (Brakus, Schmitt and Zhang 2008; Underwood, Bond and Baer 2001, Keller 2001). It is these feelings and responses which I propose positively influence the ESBC. Furthermore, my research supports the work of Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) and Whan Park et al.(2010) which suggests the role of emotional reactions to the brand are instrumental in forming consumer-brand connections.

The support of this hypothesis draws similarities between consumers and employees in the role of experiential brand value in self-brand connection.

6.2.4 Functional Brand Value and Employee-brand Identification

H₄: the greater the functional benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is not significant and therefore rejects the hypothesized relationship between functional brand value and employee-brand identification. In other words, the practical and instrumental benefits of the brand do not influence brand identification in employees.

As I suggested in section 6.2.1, since functional benefits satisfy the employee's practical needs they do not satisfy the self-definitional needs required for brand identification (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Although there is no direct evidence to suggest that FBV does not influence brand identification in consumers, I suggest that rejection of this hypothesis lends support to the existing theoretical underpinnings of the brand identification construct (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003, Lam et al. 2010; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2013).

6.2.5 Symbolic Brand Value and Employee-brand Identification

H₅: the greater the symbolic benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is not significant and therefore rejects the hypothesized relationship between symbolic brand value and employee-brand identification. Symbolic brand value does not significantly influence EBI. The rejection of this hypothesis refutes some of the findings in the consumer-brand identification literature. Since CBI is defined as a consumer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand, the sense of belonging may result from the symbolic dimension of the brand. For instance, the perceived prestige associated with the brand has been demonstrated as a driver of consumer brand identification since consumers enhance their self-esteem through prestige (Lam et al. 2010; Kuenzel and Halliday 2008). One would therefore expect SBV to directly influence EBI, however this is not the case in employees. Instead, the effect of SBV on EBI is mediated by ESBC which indicates that for employees the ESBC is necessary for symbolic brand value to have an effect on EBI. Therefore the process of

identifying with the brand is different for employees from consumers.

6.2.6 *Experiential Brand Value and Employee-brand Identification*

H₆: the greater the experiential benefits employees perceive their brand provides, the higher the levels of employee-brand identification

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is not significant and therefore rejects the hypothesized relationship between experiential brand value and employee-brand identification. Experiential brand value does not significantly influence EBI.

In the consumption domain the consumption experience is integral as to why consumers identify with some brands and not others (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005). For consumers, experiential value is more affect-laden than cognitive-laden thus contributing to the affective dimension of the identification construct (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen 2013). Thus it may be inferred from my finding that in the employee domain EBV effects EBI differently. The relationship is mediated by ESBC such that EBV has an indirect effect on EBI through ESBC.

6.2.7 *Employee Self-Brand Connection and Employee-brand Identification*

H₇: the formation of employee self-brand connection has a positive influence on employee-brand identification

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is significant and thus supports the hypothesized relationship between employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification.

In other words, the formation of the self-brand connection in employees has a direct and significant effect on brand identification. Despite a lack of evidence supporting SBC as an antecedent of BI my finding concurs with the theoretical basis of the two constructs. Since SBC is the end state of a cognitive self-categorization process where the consumer develops a sense of oneness with the brand, I would expect this to directly influence brand identification (Escalas 2004). It appears that BI has a cognitive, evaluative and affective component (Lam et al. 2010). If I subscribe to this view that EBI is a multi-category construct I may expect ESBC as a cognitive construct to influence

EBI, particularly the cognitive component which assesses the extent to which one's own personality overlaps with the brand's identity (Lam et al. 2010). However, my findings do depart from Tildesley and Coote's (2009) theorization since I argue that ESBC actually influences EBI thereby serving as an antecedent to the construct rather than as a component of it.

6.2.8 Employee-brand Identification and Brand-Specific Behaviour

H₈: The greater the level of employee-brand identification, the more likely employees are to demonstrate brand-specific behaviours

The standardized estimated path coefficient for the relationship is significant and thus supports the hypothesized relationship between employee-brand identification and brand-specific behaviour. In other words, employee-brand identification has a positive influence on brand-specific behaviour.

The result herein implies that the theoretical and empirical assertion extracted from the consumer-brand identification literature is valid in the employee context. The findings support the argument that BSBs are often cited as a consequence of BI. my findings are consistent with those of Hughes & Ahearne (2010) who argue that employees who identify with brands exhibit brand-supportive behaviour. my findings are also harmonious with the consumer-brand literature wherein CBI has been widely reported as positively influencing brand supportive behaviours such as positive word-of-mouth (Kim, Han & Park 2001), in-role and extra-role positive brand behaviour (Ahearne, Bhattacharya & Gruen 2005), brand loyalty and brand advocacy (Bhattacharya & Sen 2003).

It therefore appears that identification with the brand in employees is instrumental in the exhibition of BSB, this is analogous to the relationship between brand identification and brand-specific behaviour in consumers.

6.3 Revised Structural Model and Mediation Testing: Testing the role of EBV for Employees

After revising the structural model by removing the insignificant paths, I introduce the potential mediating role of experiential brand value (EBV) in accordance with arguments presented in Chapter 4.

Based on research on the concept of brand experience in consumers it is worth exploring an alternative model which places experiential brand value in a more central role for employees. Since in consumers the experiential value is primarily from the consumption process and/or product involvement, this is less evident in employees and therefore this model seeks to better understand what contributes to experiential value in employees. A mediating role for experiential value would suggest that functional brand value and symbolic brand value indirectly effect ESBC through experiential brand value. Therefore I test a model in which experiential brand value is the key mediating construct between the other forms of brand value and employee self-brand connection. Two constructs are therefore modeled as antecedents of experiential brand value in employees. I suggest therefore that functional brand value can directly affect experiential brand value. For example I suggest that the brand 'opens doors' for employees brings a feeling of fun, joy or excitement to the employee. Furthermore, I propose that symbolic brand value can directly effect EBV. For example, when the brand is perceived to act in similar ways to the employee this has a direct affect on the feeling of fun, joy or excitement.

6.3.1 Testing for Mediation

H_{3a}: Experiential brand value mediates the effect of functional brand value and symbolic brand value on employee self-brand connection

By allowing direct paths from FBV and SBV to EBV I test the indirect effects of FBV and SBV on ESBC (See Figure 6.2). To establish whether EBV mediates the effect of FBV and/or SBV on ESBC four conditions must be met (Baron and Kenny 1986): 1) the predictor variable (FBV/SBV) should significantly influence the mediator variable (EBV); 2) the mediator (EBV) should significantly influence the dependent variable (ESBC); 3) the predictor variable (FBV/SBV) should significantly influence the dependent variable (ESBC) and 4) after controlling for the mediator variable EBV, the impact of the predictor (FBV/SBV) on the dependent variable (ESBC) should no longer be significant (for full

mediation) .

6.3.2 Results for the Mediating role of Experiential Brand Value

FBV→EBV→ESBC

Referring back to Table 5.7 which provided the correlations between constructs in the CFA model, I ascertain from that analysis FBV is significantly related to ESBC (.77) which ensures the unmediated relationship is significant. FBV is also significantly related to EBV (.82) establishing a relationship with the potential mediator. Finally, ESBC is positively related to EBV (.92) thus supporting a relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable.

If the effect of FBV on ESBC becomes insignificant or less significant after the mediator of EBV is included then the fourth condition outlined above holds. Table 6.2 shows that with the inclusion of EBV as a mediator, the effect of FBV on ESBC is insignificant, such that EBV fully mediates the effect of FBV on ESBC.

SBV→EBV→ESBC

Referring back to Table 5.7 which provided the correlations between constructs in the CFA model, I ascertain from that analysis SBV is significantly related to ESBC (.94) which ensures the unmediated relationship is significant. SBV is also significantly related to EBV (.89) establishing a relationship with the potential mediator. Finally, ESBC is positively related to EBV (.92) thus supporting a relationship between the mediator and the outcome variable. Table 6.2 shows that with the inclusion of EBV as a mediator the strength of the effect of SBV on ESBC remains the same.

It is apparent therefore that three out of the four steps are met but not step four which according to Baron and Kenny (1986) indicates that EBV partially mediates the effect of SBV on ESBC.

Experiential brand value fully mediates the relationship between functional brand value and employee self-brand connection. Thus, functional brand value has an indirect effect on employee self-brand connection. Experiential brand value partially mediates the relationship between symbolic brand value and employee self-brand connection. Thus symbolic brand value has a direct effect on employee self-brand connection and an indirect effect through experiential brand value. The relationship between functional brand value and employee self-brand connection is fully explained by experiential brand value. The effect of symbolic brand value on employee self-brand connection is partially explained by experiential brand value.

Table 6.2 SEM Results for Mediation Model

Relationship	
Functional Brand Value → Employee Self-Brand Connection	-.02
Functional Brand Value → Experiential Brand Value	.35
Symbolic Brand Value → Experiential Brand Value	.63
Symbolic Brand Value → Employee Self-Brand Connection	.53
Experiential Brand Value → Employee Self-Brand Connection	.46
Employee Self-Brand Connection → Employee-brand Identification	.87
Employee-brand Identification → Brand-Specific Behaviour	.73
R² EBV	.845
R² ESBC	.929
X² (d.f.)	551.12₍₇₀₎
RMSEA	.077
CFI	.96

Notes: GFI = 0.936; AGFI = 0.904; RMSEA = 0.077, p < 0.001

6.4 Rival Model

It is often agreed that researchers should compare rival models and not just test the performance of a proposed model (Bagozzi and Yi 1988). Following on from Bollen and Long (1992), I compare my mediation model with a rival model (Figure 6.3) which I label the 'non-mediation' model. My proposed mediation model is based on a relatively complex theory that hypothesizes a specific nomological network of constructs. For example my mediation model does not allow direct paths from FBV to ESBC and SBV to ESBC in the absence of a mediator. A parsimonious non-mediation rival model would hypothesize direct paths from these antecedent constructs directly to ESBC. The path

coefficients for this rival model are presented in Table 6.3. Although the rival model indicates a good fit, I next compared the rival non-mediation model with my hypothesized mediation model.

Table 6.3 Rival Model

Relationship	Coeff.	t-value	p	Support
FBV → ESBC	-.02	-5.13	.608	Not supported
SBV → ESBC	.53	8.58	***	Supported
EBV → ESBC	.48	6.03	***	Supported
ESBC → EBI	.87	23.50	***	Supported
EBI → BSB	.73	17.03	***	Supported

Notes: GFI = 0.936; AGFI = 0.902; RMSEA = 0.077, $p < 0.001$

6.4.1 Comparing the Mediation Model with the Rival Model

Following De Wulf et al. (2001) and Morgan and Hunt (1994) I compared my hypothesized model with the rival model on the following fit criteria: Overall fit of the model using the RMSEA, the CFI and the Aikake Information Criteria; and the percentage of the model's significant structural paths. The results for this analysis are shown in Table 6.4.

The hypothesized model's mean ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was slightly lower than that of the rival model (7.87 vs. 7.98). The RMSEA for the rival model is the same as for the hypothesized model 0.77 indicating the same fit. Similarly, the two models have the same CFI value (.958). Since CFI does not account for parsimony I compare the two models using PNFI. Since PNFI is informed by the goodness of fit of the model and its parsimony GOF indices of .90s convert to parsimonious fit indices of less than .60 (Mulaik et al. 1989). The hypothesized model PNFI .733 slightly exceeds the PNFI of the rival model .722. The hypothesized mediation model exhibits therefore a greater parsimonious fit than the rival model.

Given that the two models are not nested in one another it is appropriate to rely on Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC: Aikake 1987) for model comparison (Rust, Lee & Valente, 1995). However, the rival model has a higher AIC value than that of the hypothesized model (650.85 vs. 621.11). Smaller values of AIC indicate a better fit. Therefore the AIC shows that the hypothesized model fits the data better than the rival

model. In the rival model, four of the five paths (80%) are supported at the $p < 0.001$ level. In contrast in the hypothesized model six out of seven of the structural paths (86%) are supported at the $p < 0.001$ level.

Therefore, by including the mediating role of the construct, I increase the parsimonious fit of the model and increase the number of significant path coefficients.

Table 6.4 Overall Model Fits

	Model 1 (Revised Structural Mediation Model)	Model 2 Rival Model
χ^2	511.12	550.85
$\chi^2/d.f.$	7.87	7.98
GFI	.936	.936
AGFI	.904	.902
RMSEA	.077	.077
SRMR	.039	.039
NNFI	.953	.953
CFI	.958	.958
PNFI	.733	.722
AIC	621.11	650.85
R² (ESBC)	.929	.931
R² (EBI)	.762	.761
R² (BSB)	.527	.527
% significant paths	86	80

6.5 Summary

In summary, the proposed revised mediation model is identified as the best model to fit the data (Table 6.4 and Figure 6.2). Thus I identify FBV and SBV as the antecedent conditions for EBV. EBV fully mediates the relationship between FBV and ESBC and partially mediates the relationship between SBV and ESBC, EBV therefore is a more central construct than originally hypothesized in the nomological network.

In addition, ESBC positively influences EBI and this mediates the effect of ESBC on

BSB. From these findings, I am able to draw some useful conclusions regarding the similarities and differences between the consumer-brand relationship and the employee-brand relationship. I discuss these implications in more detail in Chapter 7.

Fig. 6.2 Mediation Model

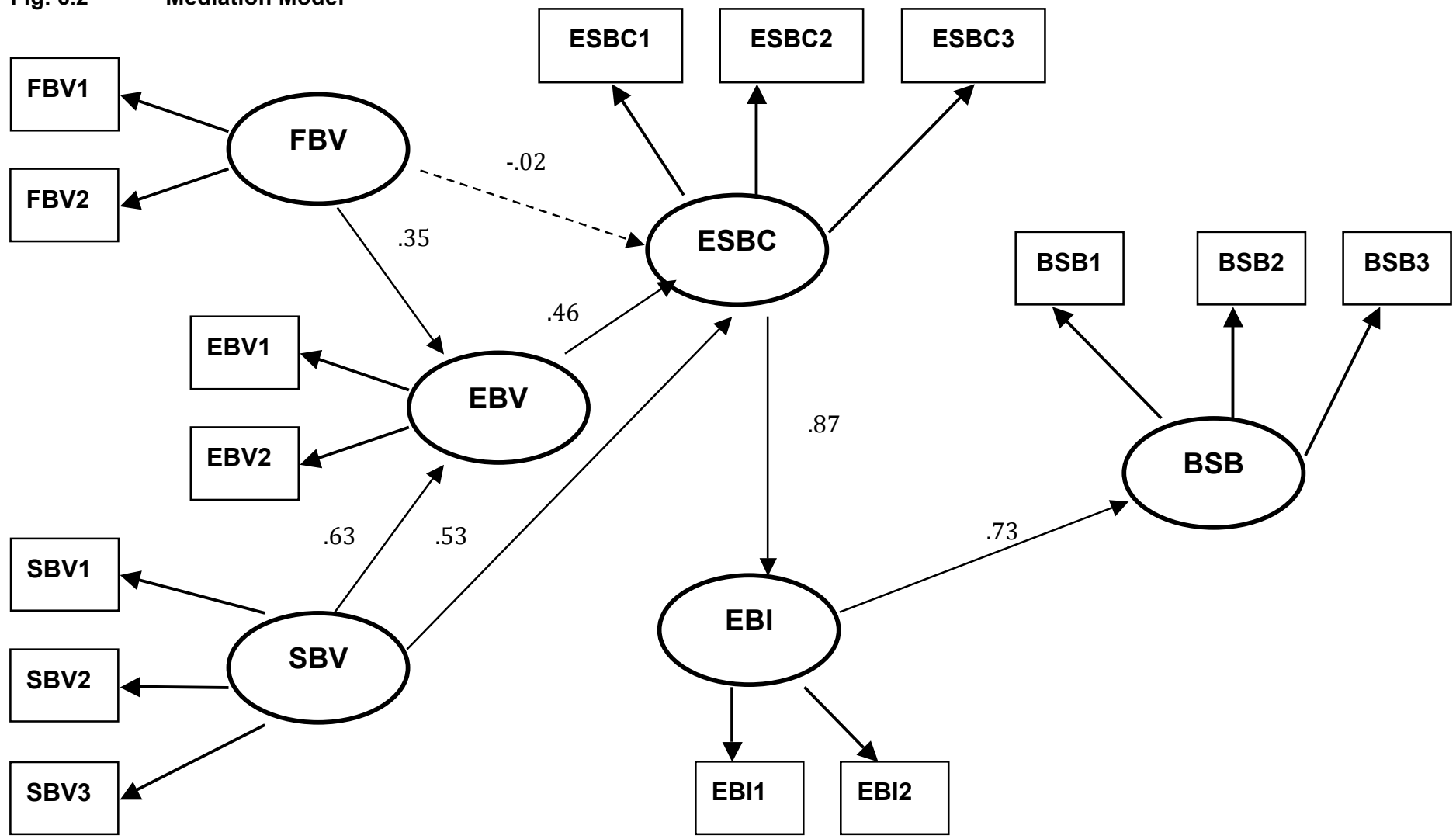
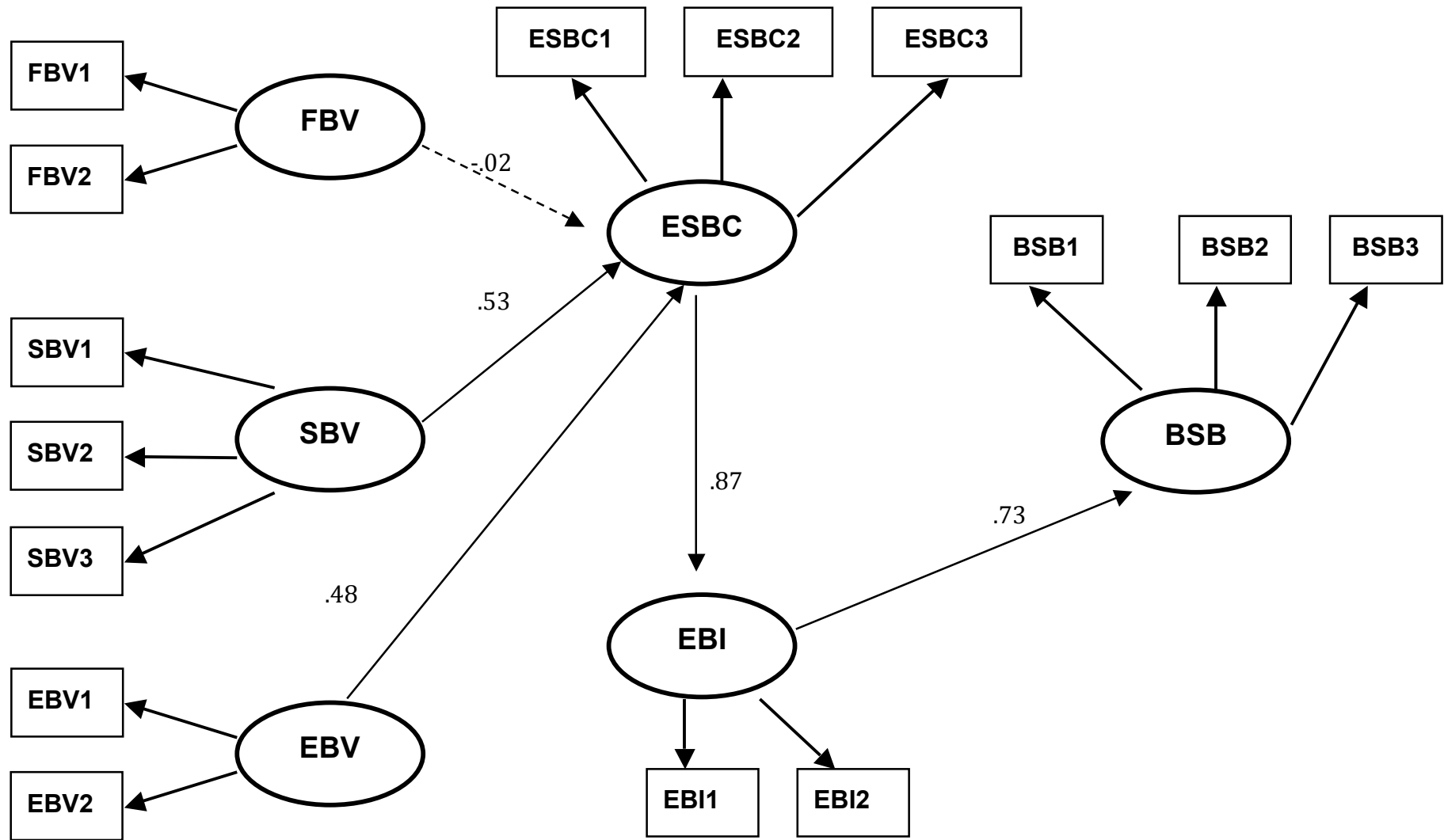


Fig. 6.3 Non-Mediation Model (Rival Model)



CHAPTER 7 GENERAL DISCUSSION

7.1 Introduction

What is the nature of the employee-brand relationship? How is this employee-brand relationship similar or dissimilar to the consumer-brand relationship? What are some of the factors contributing to brand-specific behaviour on the part of employees? My research attempts to answer these questions and furthermore points to theoretical and practical implications to enhance the understanding and management of the employee-brand relationship. The basic notion of employee-brand relationships is not entirely new (Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak 2009; Hughes and Ahearne 2010) but remains relatively unexplored, my findings contribute to the existing brand relationship theory literature from an internal perspective. As noted previously, the extant marketing literature has focused mainly on the consumer's relationship with brands. Hence, I believe that my inquiry helps broaden the scope of marketing research by bringing employees into the brand-relationship research domain.

Brand researchers have long acknowledged the relationships consumers have with their brands (Fournier 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001; Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2005). However, my study extends the notion of the brand relationship as applicable inside the organisation. Moreover, I underscore the importance of the employee in brand relationship theory and the significance of such relationships in the behaviour of employees towards the brand. My research findings contribute to the marketing literature in a number of ways. In the broad sense, this study complements existing theory on consumer-brand relationships with an examination of the brand relationship from an employee perspective (Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998). More specifically, my research contributes to brand association theory (Keller 1993; Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986), self-brand connection theory (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007), brand identification theory (Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen 2005; Hughes and Ahearne 2010; Lam et al. 2010) and the employee-brand behaviour literature (Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak 2009).

7.2 Summary of the Study

How can firms get their employees to live the brand? This is the overarching question explored in this study. I explored this question using a multi-method approach. The results across the study show that employees form relationships with their brands which are based on an exchange process between perceived benefits the brand offers and brand-specific behaviours on the part of the employee. The relationship appears to occur through the central constructs of employee self-brand connections and employee-brand identification.

Using a grounded-theory approach, I uncovered six features of the employee-brand relationship: functional brand value (FBV), symbolic brand value (SBV), experiential brand value (EBV), employee self-brand connection (ESBC), employee-brand identification (EBI) and brand-specific behaviour (BSB). I then conceptualized these into antecedents (FBV, SBV, EBV), the core of the relationship ESBC and EBI and the consequence of the relationship BSB. Thus my framework investigates how these constructs come together to explain specifics of the employee-brand relationship. The conceptual framework was tested using a quantitative survey approach and proposed and competing models were tested using AMOS. The mediating role of EBV was also tested. The mediation proposed model was found to have the best fit with the data. In brief, the results of the modified proposed mediation model indicate that symbolic brand value and experiential brand value are the positive predictors of employee self-brand connection and that although no support was found for the proposed positive effect of functional brand value on employee self-brand connection, an indirect effect was shown mediated by experiential brand value. In addition, experiential brand partially mediates the effect of symbolic brand value on employee-self-brand connection. Furthermore, employee self-brand connection was found to have a positive and direct impact on employee-brand identification and employee-brand identification as found to have a positive impact on brand-specific behaviour.

Our study advances the understanding of the mechanisms through which employees exhibit brand-specific behaviour. I showed that employees draw on functional, symbolic and experiential brand value which they use to forge employee self-brand connections which have a positive impact on employee-brand identification which positively influences the demonstration of brand-specific behaviour. To the best of my knowledge, this is the first conceptualization of the employee-brand-relationship grounded in practice.

Our findings resonate to some extent with the consumer-brand relationship literature in that I underscore the role of brand benefits in self-brand connection and demonstrate that brand identification is a predictor of brand-specific behaviour. At the same time I highlight some remarkable differences between the employee-brand relationship from the consumer-brand relationship domain. I discuss each of these claims in more detail below.

7.3 Theoretical Contributions

The findings of this study make several theoretical contributions.

Our first contribution complements consumer-brand relationship theory in that I propose employees draw on brand associations, in my study revealed in the category of brand benefits, to evaluate the brand and to assess how the brand relates to their self-concept. my research underscores the importance of a holistic view of the brand value proposition for employees as proposed by Aaker (2009).

Our study shows that employees perceive their brands to offer them benefits which is the value they attach to the brand attributes and in turn consider what the brand 'can do for them' (Del Rio, Vazquez and Iglesias 2001). Employees perceive the brand to offer functional value as well as symbolic and experiential value. Authors have previously recognized that brands not only serve a functional purpose (generally product oriented) but also provide experiential and symbolic value to consumers. (e.g. Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986; Keller 1993; Aaker 2009). My findings show functional, symbolic and emotional value is perceived by employees in a number of forms, for example functional brand value is a source of practical solutions, symbolic brand value satisfies self-definitional needs and experiential brand value is a source of excitement, fun and feeling-good. This is consistent with consumer-brand theorists such as Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) and Fournier (1998) who imply brands are useful as a means for satisfying self-definitional needs of consumers. In a similar vein, my findings support to work of Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009) who describe experiential benefits of brands to consumers as sensory, affective, intellectual and behavioural, in other words how the brand makes them feel. Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986) propose brands encompass functional, symbolic and experiential meaning and a single brand may offer a mixture of benefits derived from such meaning. my study extends this research in that I find employees perceive brands to offer a mixture of benefits correspondingly of a functional, symbolic and experiential nature. Importantly, I identified a route through which brand associations are related to brand-specific behaviour in employees. I demonstrated a causal chain of ESBC to BI to BSB thus suggesting that the brand associations are instrumental

in employees' brand-specific behaviour. Since brand associations are considered as significant in their influence on consumer behaviour my findings support this view (Escalas 2004).

A second theoretical contribution of this research lies in highlighting specifically the role of perceived brand benefits in the formation of employee self-brand connections. Consumers form strong relationships with those brands which they perceive to have values and personality associations that are congruent with their self-concept (Sirgy 1982). Employees appear to use brand associations to assess congruence between their 'selves' and the brand. This finding extends the notion proposed by Chaplin and John (2005) who describe a similar evaluation process occurring amongst consumers. The authors suggest that consumers hold brand associations to elicit meaning of the brand which they subsequently use to assess congruency with their 'selves'.

In terms of antecedent conditions to employee self-brand connection, I found no support for functional brand value directly impacting the employee self-brand connection which is not surprising since the practical nature of the brand does not impact construction of self-identity. This resounds with consumer-brand relationship theory since for consumers the functional benefits of the brand serve a utilitarian purpose as opposed to one contributing to construction of the self. Furthermore, by positing that through the perceived symbolic brand value the brand fulfils the self-definitional needs of employees thus causing them to form employee self-brand connections supports the underlying theory of consumer self-brand connections which suggests that self-brand connections are formed if the consumer believes that the brand contribute to meeting his/her self-related needs (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Aaker 1997; Kleine III, Kleine and Kernan 1993). My study similarly lends support to theory which states that consumers value brand benefits which enable them to construct their self-identity (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Experiential brand value was also shown to directly influence the formation of the employee self-brand connection which complements the consumer-brand theory since for consumers how the consumer experiences the brand is instrumental in how they attain meaning and personality of the brand which provide the basis for the self-brand connection. The insight generated from my study is that the brand associations become linked to the mental representation of the self, for example the brand links the employee to his/her own culture and heritage, allowing them self-expression, such that the employee self-brand connection captures an important part of the employee's construction of self. This lends support to the consumer-brand relationship literature stream (see Krugman 1965).

Following on from this, the third contribution of my study expands the generalisability of extant literature on self-brand connections and brand identification to apply to employees (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Escalas 2004; Hughes and Ahearne 2010; Lam et al 2010). By proposing employee-brand relationships are formed on the basis of employee self-brand connections and employee-brand identification, I advance the understanding of the role of the two constructs in eliciting brand-specific behaviours. My findings suggest the employee-brand relationship is characterized by self-brand connection and subsequently brand identification. Thus developing self-brand connections and brand identification in organisations may be perceived not only a consumer-based strategy but also an employee-based strategy. A key, theoretical contribution is my implication that the employee self-brand connection is an antecedent to employee-brand identification this research adds a new dimension to the brand identification literature (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Lam et al. 2010). What I present here, goes further than the existing literature in that I identify the relationship between the self-brand connection and brand identification constructs. I explain the positive effect of employee self-brand connection on employee-brand identification by proposing direct impact on the cognitive component of the three-dimensional brand identification construct. The cognitive component comprises the self-categorization aspect of a sense and awareness and acceptance of being a member of a social group (i.e. belonging to the brand). Understanding of this explicit link may be particularly important for consumer-brand theorists since it expands the existing research stream from Lam et al. (2010) and Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar and Sen (2013) and further suggests that ESBC has strong potential for generating brand identification. Furthermore, by identifying ESBC as an antecedent of BI I answer the calls from researchers to better understand the brand identification construct (e.g. Hughes and Ahearne 2010).

A fourth contribution is that my findings depart from the consumer-brand relationship research in that I found no support for my hypotheses for brand associations having a direct impact on brand identification thereby highlighting how, in this respect, employee-brand relationships differ from consumer-brand relationships. Traditionally, the consumer-brand identification literature devotes particular attention to some of the antecedent conditions for brand identification. For example, Kressman et al. (2006) argue that functional brand congruity leads to high brand identification in consumers. My findings counter this in the employee context. Similarly symbolic brand value was found to have no direct effect on employee-brand identification whereas in consumers symbolic and experiential value is perceived to directly influence brand identification. My findings present a different picture illustrating that

brand identification is context dependent. With employees perceived brand value is not deemed sufficient to elicit brand identification, instead, this relationship is mediated by employee self-brand connection. One reason as to why my findings depart from the findings in the consumer-brand identification literature is the actual consumption process and experience itself over time and repeatedly is integral as to why consumers identify with some brands and not others (Escalas 2004; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Fournier 1998; Thompson, Rindfleisch and Aresl 2006; Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005). My findings present useful insight into how the employee-brand experience differs from the consumer brand experience.

A fifth contribution is the clarification of some of the conditions necessary for certain brand-specific behaviours in employees thus adding a new dimension to the relatively sparse brand behaviour literature. My study suggests that employees are more likely to exhibit positive behaviours towards the brand if they form self-brand connections and if they identify with the brand. This is in line with the previous work of Ahearne, Bhattacharya and Gruen (2005) and Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) who suggest outcomes of brand connection and brand identification manifest in the form of positive brand-specific behaviours. Similarly, brand advocacy as an outcome of brand identification has already been suggested amongst retail sales personnel (Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2011). Thus, given that consumers who identify with the brand and form self-brand connections exhibit positive behaviours towards the brand, I may intuitively expect employees who form self-brand connections and identify with the brand to exhibit positive behaviours towards the brand, this is confirmed in my study since my results suggest that ESBC (indirectly) and EBI (directly) lead to the demonstration of brand-specific behaviours. In the broad sense, the brand-specific behaviours described in my study confirm behaviours already identified by Hughes and Ahearne (2010) and Morhart, Herzog and Tomczak (2010). Although my research highlights some aspects of the brand relationship which differ in employees from consumers, nonetheless, in many respects, employees may be perceived from a theoretical stand point as internal consumers of the brand thus lending support to the work of those theorists who have positioned employees as internal brand consumers (Berry 2000, Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998; Schneider and Bowen 1985; Merz, Yi and Vargo 2009). Overall, my findings transcend the theoretical distinction between consumers and employees, bridging the gap between consumer brand relationship theory and employee-brand relationship theory. Although the first to examine the employee-brand relationship my study by no means exhausts all aspects of the relationship and further elicits other research avenues which I discuss in section 7.5.

7.4 Managerial Implications

In June 2012, I attended 'The Extending Your Brand to Employees Conference' in New York. This conference provided a forum to hear from thought leaders and to learn from peers and colleagues about employee-brand relationship issues that every company faces. It was attended by over 200 delegates from companies such as Walmart, McDonald's, Verizon, P&G, Bloomberg, Boeing, Kaiser Permanente, and 3M to name but a few.

When discussing my work with fellow delegates, all expressed great interest in my work and its applicability to the every day problems they encountered in employee-brand relationship building. Such challenges they cited included lack of a common mindset, engagement fatigue, cynicism, lack of clarity of vision and communication issues. My work goes some way to enabling practitioners to address their challenges in highlighting some of the key working mechanisms of the employee-brand relationship. More specifically, it points to the key to employee-brand relationship building which depends upon self-brand connection and brand identification and in the importance of emphasising to employees the value that the brand offers. Further implications to managers are described below.

The key managerial question is how to turn employees into brand champions? My model can assist managers in showing how specific sub-components of the brand relationship can be targeted to influence the higher-order constructs that shape and influence brand-specific behaviour in the employee context. My model can aid managers in showing how to target the influential components of the employee's relationship with the brand to enable brand-specific behaviours. The path coefficients are higher for some of the relationships than others thus indicating for instance, that experiential brand value has a greater effect on employee self-brand connection than functional value. However, overall, all of the elements of my model represent pathways to brand-specific behaviour.

Our study has several practical implications for understanding how to elicit brand-specific behaviour. The most direct implication is that the more employees connect and identify with the brand, the more likely they are to engage in brand-supportive behaviour. my findings direct attention to both the employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification and the tactics which may be adopted for building these connections. Managers therefore need to think strategically about managing these pathways towards brand-specific behaviours. They may do so in the following ways:

1: Communicate the value of the brand.

It was apparent from my study that the brand not only satisfies employees' functional needs but indeed higher order needs such as self-definitional needs. The practical implication is therefore for managers to leverage the entire brand value proposition by reinforcing the symbolic and experiential value of the brand such that employees develop strong brand connections. Specifically this raises the question 'what do managers need to do in terms of articulating and communicating the value of the brand to employees'? Functional benefits such as career enhancement, opportunities are easy to replicate across brands, however it is the intangible facets of the brand such as those satisfying social approval and self-expression needs which should be promoted such that they resonate at a higher level with employees.

With the implementation of internal branding programs aimed at managing perceptions of the brand's value, managers can generate affect-based connections with the brand which reach deeper than feel-good factors and which ultimately instill a sense of connecting and belonging. Such initiatives should promote the brand in the context of its history, its values and its culture thus enabling employees to 'see' the value the brand offers.

2: Actively manage the brand experience

It was apparent from my study that how the employees experience the brand was important to employees in forming self-brand connections, thus managers should seek ways to manage the brand experience for employees and to actively promote brand experiences.

In accordance with Escalas (2004), brands become more meaningful for consumers through the construction of narratives or stories to create a link between a brand and a consumer's self-concept. This would imply it may be in the interest of managers to adopt a brand storytelling approach in communications with employees. Storytelling helps to inspire belief in and subsequent connections to the brand particularly if the story is driven by mission and anchored in a shared purpose. For example, Southwest Airlines' story is about freedom, Walmart's brand story moved from 'low prices everyday' to the bigger picture of 'helping make the most of every day'. Samsung's story is a celebration of the powerful and real moments in the company's history such as an employee-led project which finished the construction of a road in South Korea to get a factory up and running. These are the emotional touchstones for employees which may be revealed through storytelling.

Managers need to instill belief in the brand and to reinforce this with tools which create tangible and unique actions which generate excitement and energy. Top-down leadership, although necessary in building the brand experience, alone is not

enough. Today's breakthrough brands no longer send a message from the top 'this is what a brand is about', instead there has been a shift from the 'what' to the 'how' and the 'why'. Employees at all levels should be engaged in the development of the brand such that the external brand promise conveyed to customers is one that emerges from a shared purpose. Such brand experience energizes all employees and evokes positive feelings.

Other ways to manage brand experience require embedding the brand in daily moments, these are critical in how employees experience the brand. Consider for example Patagonia's environmentally oriented brand approach to employee experiences. The company pays employees not to drive to work and providing facilities to encourage exercise and incentives for participation in environmental social programs. Brand experience training is also vital to employee community. Olive Garden send employees on training trip to Tuscany. Tesco sends all employees at all levels to work on shop floor every year.

3: Build the brand internally such that ESBCs are readily forged

It was apparent from my informants that they sought and thrived on connections to the brand at the level of values, culture and behaviours, there is clear evidence herein for managers to help employees to construct their self-identities through the brand.

Besides communicating brand benefits to employees, managers should encourage connections at a deeper level. For instance employees may be encouraged to engage in corporate sponsored activities and brand co-creation activities such that they feel they participate in a meaningful social group thus enhancing a sense of belonging and connection to the brand. By applying many of the principles of consumer advertising to internal brand communications, managers can help employees make a powerful emotional connection to the firm's brands (Mitchell 2002). Marketers should provide the messaging tools, brand guidelines and other mechanisms and materials delivered to engage, motivate and connect. Managers should communicate the brand in such a way to facilitate self-brand integration including highlighting the brand's ability to express his/her identity, to connect the individual to his/her past, to build his/her self-esteem and the brand's ability to connect with deeper levels of importance. Thus employees can make connections between the brand and his/her self and create his/her self-identity.

Other ways to forge connection are through brand immersion programs such as launch events, training programs, brand ambassadors, emotional videos, all of which play a role in creating broad-based participation and excitement. These are often one off events but they need to last and have on-going impact with brand-engagement

forums, brand champion, recognition and training programs. Companies can also imbue a sense of spirit and dialogue on a daily basis, for example Walmart redesigned the employee environment with new colors and motivational brand messages and images on walls thus enabling connection to the brand. Similarly, 3M for instance launched its brand book which brings the brand to life through rich examples such that employees can resonate with the brand and relate to the brand. Finally, there are also management implications for hiring strategies; my study suggests that those employees who perceive their own values to match those of the brand are more likely to form self-brand connections than those who perceive there to be no match. Therefore when hiring employees, managers should look to those whose own values appear to match those of the brand. Broadly speaking, my findings imply that companies whose employees connect with the brand will be the most successful in brand delivery.

4: Seek ways to increase brand identification

The results of this study suggest that managers can promote positive behaviour towards the brand by engendering brand identification in employees. This requires a strong bond between the employee and the brand such that the employee incorporates the brand's defining attributes into his/her own self-concept. Such a bond is cognitive, evaluative and affective.

The social media revolution which has opened up organisations to customers to engage and to be involved with their brands may also be applied inside the company. Social media can be used to build brand relationships through internal brand communities. Such forums allow employees to participate in the brand community which engenders the sense of belonging and security. Toyota for instance encourages employees to participate in sharing ideas for change via its online community. DELL uses its Employee Storm social network to source best practice ideas.

Additionally, by linking internal and external marketing i.e. create external advertising that targets both audiences helps employees to identify with the brand (Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998). Furthermore, since leaders are able to instill in followers a sense of oneness with the organisation (Wieseke et al. 2009), the managerial implication herein is to ensure leaders adopt leadership tactics which instill a sense of oneness with the brand thus enhancing brand identification. Walmart's leaders participate in the daily cheer which is an important touchstone for the employees. When leadership participates and celebrates these moments, they become relevant and take on a deeper meaning.

7.5 Limitations and Future Research

Although this research makes several important contributions, these must be considered in the context of its limitations.

We conducted this study using a US-based firm with multiple subsidiaries across multiple countries and though I believe that the results, supported by a strong theoretical foundation, should generalize to other settings, additional studies should be conducted to confirm this. Such studies would confirm that the same results would apply to brands from different industry sectors and in non-US based brands.

Additionally, the context of my study was in a well-known 'brand-driven' company and culture. To fully explore the boundary conditions and the robustness of my findings an analysis is needed that compares my findings with findings from lesser known brands and ones which are less brand-driven. My results may only be applicable to employees of particularly well-known brands, where the brand and what it stands for are particularly salient. To increase generalisability to other brands it would be helpful to conduct similar studies in less well-known brands. In the meantime, care must be taken when extrapolating my findings to other types of brands.

Additionally, given the restrictions imposed by InnoCo. it was slightly difficult to capture the constructs in their entirety with my measurement items. Specifically, experiential brand value was measured from the sensory dimension as opposed to the stimulatory and intellectual dimensions and employee-brand identification from cognitive and evaluative perspective and not the affective perspective. Therefore, some caution should be exercised before adopting the measures I used. Further studies should attempt to capture the constructs in their entirety.

Another limitation is non-response bias was not assessed since I had restricted access to employees. I was therefore not able to determine the difference between non-respondents and respondents. My fear remains that respondents were more brand-driven than non-respondents thus lending possible bias to my findings.

This study represents an important beginning in employee-brand relationship research but I have only begun to scratch the surface of the mechanisms underpinning the employee-brand relationship. The results of this study pave the way for many additional avenues of research.

Although I have identified some of the variables that influence brand-specific behaviour I have by no means exhausted the possibilities. Additional research is necessary to identify potential moderators, mediators and consequences beyond those tested herein such as the impact of cultural issues, management style and personality traits.

The consumer brand literature highlights the brand personality as key in the assessment of their own affiliation with the brand, this would make for interesting inquiry in the employee domain. Given the determinant role of brand personality in establishing consumer brand relationships (Aaker, Fournier and Brasel 2004), this would be an area ripe for future investigation.

To examine employee-brand identification as a second order construct and to examine the three components of cognitive identification, evaluative identification and affective identification separately at the dimension level would be useful to further identify which components of brand identification have the greatest impact on brand-specific behaviour. Other underlying factors in the relationship such as brand attitudes are worthy of further research. From my work, it was apparent that different employees hold different attitudes towards the brand and how this affects employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification would make for interesting research inquiry.

Given this study's demonstrated positive impact of employee self-brand connection on employee-brand identification and consequently brand-specific behaviour. An important issue is determining what the antecedents of employee self-brand connection in the employee setting are. In other words how may companies forge the development of employee self-brand connections besides through the brand's value? Additionally, future studies could consider moderator variables that might modify the impact of brand value on employee self-brand connections. For example a sense of internal brand community on the part of employees may affect the way brand value impacts the employee self-brand connection.

Moreover, although my model examined the impact of the different brand value types on employee self-brand connection and employee-brand identification other potential antecedents of each construct did not come under investigation. Thus I open a wide field for future studies and valuable contributions to research and management.

In sum, more work is required to further conceptualize the employee-brand relationship. Although I have identified some of the key constructs in the employee-brand relationship I have by no means uncovered all of the contributory factors. In particular, more conceptual and empirical work is needed to establish other factors involved in the relationship exchange between employees and brands. Given that research into the employee-brand relationship is just in its infancy stage I have opened the door further, but much work remains to be done.

8 APPENDIX

Appendix 5.1

Hi Lucy – thanks for your note. We're going to need to decline the request – while it's a fascinating study, we are in the midst of our annual employee engagement survey and we try and be very careful with how much surveying we do with our employees – lots of external surveys are mandated in healthcare. Do appreciate the offer, though, and can't wait to see your finish product!

Thanks a lot for reaching out to us! Amy (Mayo Clinic).

We would love to participate in the study – thanks for sending me a corresponding link/questionnaire and either I will participate or will forward to one of my team members who is best situated to provide you with feedback.

Kind regards,

Gabriele

Dear Lucy,

I must have misunderstood that – but indeed, reaching out to 600 employees is currently not feasible! Sorry for that, but then we have to step-out.

Kind regards,

Gabriele (Philips Electronics)

Hi Lucy,

We discussed this opportunity further and believe the timing is not optimal for us. We are embarking on a brand education campaign that will help employees understand the meaning and relevancy of the brand to their work experiences, but that will not be completed until next year – that would be better timing for us as we already have evidence employees do not have a good understanding of what a brand is – or what our brand stands for. A more difficult barrier at this time is the significant security issues with sharing employee emails with a 3rd party.

Thank you for the invitation – please keep us apprised of your progress and outcomes.

---Thanks, Mike (Cisco Systems)

Lucy,

Sorry for the delayed response.

I'm afraid we have no access directly to Virgin staff, we work for Virgin Management and have no access directly into the staff bases of the individual Virgin companies, who are autonomous entities. I think when we met we described our devolved structure. I am not sure how I can help you further as from my position we wouldn't be able to survey the operating companies employees directly.

I do hope that this doesn't damage your project too much, I don't think we would have promised such access as it's not in our gift to do so.

Mark (Virgin Management)

Dear Lucy

Further to our previous emails, I just wanted to make you aware that the planned Local UK R&D Leadership team meeting that was scheduled for tomorrow has been postponed. As a result, I have connected with all the leadership team members to discuss the possibility of supporting your survey, as it was on our agenda and I know you have tight time pressures.

As a result of my discussions, I am sorry to have to confirm that there was not full support to endorse your survey being sent out to employees in R&D in the UK. As a leadership team, they are fully supportive that your research and acknowledge that it would be very interesting for us, as a business, to know how we are perceived as a 'brand', however there is concern and sensitivity (based on some previous experiences) about supporting a non-J&J sponsored survey of this type. It is for this reason, that we are unable to support and authorise the distribution of your survey to our J&J employees the UK.

I am really sorry that we cannot support you in your research, but I would like to wish you success with the rest of your research project.

Kind regards

Sue (Johnson and Johnson, UK)

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