

CONSUMERS' BRAND IDENTITY COMPLEXITY: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND INITIAL EVIDENCE

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have acknowledged that consumers maintain multiple brand relationships that express their identities. Although there has been some research on the effects of crosscutting brand user groups on ingroup bias, the majority of research on brand user identity and consumer-brand relations has been conducted in the context of a single brand. In other words, most researchers who study brand identification agree in principle that consumers have multiple brand user identities, but there has been relatively little research on the complexity and overlap among a particular person's numerous brand user identities or on the effects of holding multiple brand identities on brand attitudes or behavior in general.

Drawing from social identity and self-categorization theory, this research introduces the concept of brand identity complexity (BIC)—a new theoretical construct that refers to an individual's subjective representation of the interrelationships among his or her multiple brand user ingroups. BIC reflects the degree of overlap and similarity perceived to exist between brand user groups of which a person is simultaneously a member. Results from two initial studies, one qualitative and the other quantitative, support the notion that BIC is a distinct construct, including the prediction that BIC is related to but different from established individual differences. Implications are discussed for brand management and research.

References available upon request