BRAND-BASED COMMUNITY: THE ROLE OF

IDENTIFICATION IN DEVELOPING

A SENSE OF COMMUNITY

AMONG BRAND USERS

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NOMENCLATURE

AVE   Average Variance Extracted

CFA   Confirmatory Factor Analysis

c.f.   "Compare with"

EFA   Exploratory Factor Analysis

e.g.,   "For example"

i.e.,   "That is"

PSC   Psychological Sense of Community (also "sense of community")

SEM   Structural Equations Modeling

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

> Commodities appear in virtually every space twentieth-century American culture
> affords. They have materialized in the physical landscape and branded its built
> environment. They have entered into our rites of passage and rendered them
> inseparable from the more or less predictable passages of style. They have
> become associated with the themes of family, sexuality and individuality as
> vehicles for the fulfillment of each. Their presence has confused electoral
> politics with acts of purchase and has converted moments of communal
> affirmation into what an historian has called "festivals of consumption." In short,
> commodities have become – in life, in film, in literature – the givens of our
> existence, though it is of their essence that they are not free. That is, we take
> their collective presence for granted, though each commodity introduces itself as
> precisely that which cannot be assumed, as that which we do not as yet possess,
> as that which we must in fact acquire to remain full participants in our culture.
> (Agnew 1983, p. 67)

Managers have responded to a consumption-oriented market by continually

increasing the number of products, including new brands and brand-extensions, available

to consumers. More than 30,000 products are introduced every year (Curry 2003), and

the failure rate of new products has been estimated between 80 and 95 percent (Berggren

and Nacher 2000). Mostof these failures can be attributed to not fully understanding the

wants and needs of the consumer. In recent years, consumers have revealed an

unprecedented inclination to try new brands with a preference for brand-variety over

brand-loyalty. This should be of particular importance to brand managers, especially

considering that reducing customer defections by five percent can increase future profit

by as much as 30 to 90 percent (Pine, Peppers, and Rogers 1995). Thus, brand

commitment is crucial to the long-term success of any brand.

Although brand commitment has long been addressed in marketing literature (e.g., Fournier 1998; Lastovicka and Gardner 1978; Warrington and Shim 2000), much is yet to be known about building and maintaining commitment to the brand. The importance of brand commitment is greater today than it has ever been as new and existing products are subsumed in an era of brand proliferation. Successful brands of the future will likely be those that have effectively developed strong relationships with their customers. Creating and/or maintaining a sense of community among admirers of a brand is one means by which managers may be able to foster relationships with customers that ultimately enhance brand commitment thus leading to favorable behavioral outcomes (e.g., attending brand events and promoting the brand via word-of mouth communication). Brands such as Harley Davidson, Starbucks coffee, and Macintosh computers have been very successful due to the communities of brand users who are deeply committed to the brands. Although recent research has noted the positive benefits of brand-based communities (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), little is known about the processes and motivations that underlie a consumer's perceived membership in a brand-based community. An important gap in the brand community literature thus far is the lack of an appropriate measure for capturing the perceived sense of community among brand users. This dissertation addresses such issues by introducing the psychological sense of community (PSC) construct to the marketing literature, developing a measure of PSC, and examining various antecedents and favorable outcomes associated with the construct.

Research Questions

This dissertation applies social identity theory to existing knowledge on branding and relationship marketing to examine the social nature of brands. Previous research on brand community has examined the characteristics of brand community as well as the positive outcomes of brand community. However, little effort has been directed toward identifying the various conditions under which brand communities are likely to form, such as the underlying process or motivation for community formation. Understanding which factors will likely lead to a sense of community among brand users will allow managers to make better decisions in terms of various branding and promotional considerations. The literature on identification suggests that identifying with a brand should lead to commitment to the brand. Considering identification with the brand and its users and a sense of community among users concurrently should provide a more detailed understanding of how to build long-term, committed relationships between consumers and brands than currently exists.

This dissertation was designed to explore many of the issues discussed above. Based upon the theoretical model (see Figure 1), the following research questions are of primary concern:

> How do identification with the brand and identification with other users of the brand influence psychological sense of community?

> Under what conditions should sense of community be strongest among users of a brand?

> What is the impact of psychological sense of community on the following variables: brand commitment, brand preference, attending brand events, word-of-mouth promotion, celebrating brand history, and commitment to the community?

Under what conditions will the relationship between sense of community and brand commitment be strongest?

Theoretical Background

<u>Community</u>

Creating a customer base that is strongly committed to the brand may be the most important yet challenging task that marketers and managers must encounter. The primary challenge is that of the difficulty associated with fostering commitment to a brand when new competitors continually enter the market enticing consumers with highly competitive prices and increased convenience. However, tremendous opportunity lies in the fact that most people have a natural longing to be a part of some group, thereby fulfilling an objective set of human needs (Glynn 1981). Furthermore, consumers are becoming more reliant upon the consumption of various brands to serve as a means of self-expression. Brand-based community membership provides customers with an opportunity to be part of a psychological and/or social group that is relevant to and thereby supporting a desired self-image. A brand-based community may therefore also function as an aspirational group for current non-users of the brand as well as an information source for potential users. Such communities provide marketers with a customer base that is both highly involved with and highly committed to the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). This dissertation attempts to explain how consumers come to feel a sense of community with other users of the brand, primarily through identification with the brand and other users, which leads to deep levels of brand

commitment. In doing so, this research extends the existing bodies of knowledge on brand community, identification, and brand commitment.

Consumption has become such an integral facet of contemporary American society that its influence often goes unnoticed. Consumers have become increasingly desensitized to the influence that products and brands exert in everyday life, yet the consumption of products and brands has a powerful influence on attitudes, thoughts, and behaviors on a daily basis (Fournier 1998). Individuals who are members of a prestigious country club and drive a Lexus are generally perceived as being higher class and often more successful than individuals who frequent the local public golf course and drive a Chevrolet. The fact that an individual can be successful and hold a preference for the local public course and Chevrolet will rarely be considered when initial perceptions are formed about an individual. This is because most consumers have been socialized such that the consumption of branded products serves as an important means of ordering, understanding, and categorizing oneself and others in a social environment. In other words, consumption serves as a means of social identification.

Identification

Identification has received considerable attention in recent marketing literature. Cognitive identification (herein "identification") refers to the perceived overlap between an individual's self-image and the image of a group, an organization, or a brand (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000). The foundations of identification are rooted in social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that individuals make sense of the world by categorizing themselves and others into groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986). Acknowledging

membership in a group serves a self-definitional role (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). Literature on psychological sense of community is consistent with social identity theory. Psychological sense of community (PSC) is the degree to which an individual perceives membership in a collective group of individuals.

This research contends that identification with a brand and with other people who use the brand (i.e., perceived overlap) will lead to a self-categorization process of acknowledging membership in a community of brand users. Brand-based identification should influence sense of community because consumers frequently choose brands because of the symbolic meanings associated with the brand (Dolich 1969; Keller 1993; Sirgy 1982) and being a member of a community provides an additional channel of self-expression. Thus, successful brands that are well-established should have easily identifiable personalities that allow consumers to assess the perceived congruency between the brand and the self.

Branding

The importance of building a brand is anything but a new phenomenon exclusive to contemporary society. Archaeological findings in the Italian cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, reveal that the Roman Empire, from 753 B.C. to approximately 79 A.D., utilized branding in much the same way that it is used today (Rokicki 1987). Rokicki's research found that at least 200 brands of wine existed throughout the empire. Most of these vintages were branded with a name, brief description, origin, age, winery name and sometimes even a characterization, such as frenzy wine. Furthermore, Roman wine merchants began to stress the value of imports, informing customers that by paying more

money they could have better wines that were imported from better wineries. Such evidence demonstrates that branding has long been acknowledged as a necessary means of product differentiation and consumer preference building, yet marketers still strive to understand how to build long-term, committed relationships between customers and their brands.

When properly developed and managed, a distinctive brand is one of the most important assets a firm can possess. A brand can create an added value that helps to differentiate a product from its competitors, reduce consumer uncertainties about products and strengthen relationships between consumers and the product (Alcock et al. 2003; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Fournier 1998). The consumption of particular brands provides signals of an individual's actual self and ideal self. Drinking Absolut vodka proclaims the individual to be youthful, cool, hip, and contemporary, while a preference for Stoli vodka denotes an intellectual, conservative, more mature drinker (Aaker 1997). As the previous example suggests, "consumers do not choose *brands*, they choose *lives*," (Fournier 1998, p. 367). The consumption of particular brands serves as a means to attain a desired lifestyle. Thus, the importance of marketers and brand managers being able to create distinct identities for their brands cannot be overemphasized. When an organization is able to create a personality for its brand that symbolizes a desired lifestyle sought out by customers, purchasing and consuming the brand as well as communing with other users of the brand serve as important means of self-expression.

Relationship Marketing

Research in the field of marketing has increasingly begun to emphasize the importance of relationship marketing, or building and maintaining relationships with consumers (e.g., Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Ganesan 1994; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Morgan and Hunt (1994) describe relationship marketing as, "all marketing activities directed toward establishing, developing, and maintaining successful relational exchanges" (p. 22). Furthermore, relationship marketing and brand building appear to go hand in hand. Relationship marketing stresses the importance of knowing and understanding the target market, which is critical in building a brand to which consumers can and will be able to relate. Marketing managers recognize the importance of building brand-based relationships with consumers. Jed Mole, head of marketing and consulting for Axciom, contends, "the best brand building in the world can be undone by lousy customer relations, inappropriate targeting or even a misunderstanding in recruitment or staff training departments," (Mole 2003, p. 14).

Although marketers have widely acknowledged the importance of studying relationship marketing, most research has focused on business-to-business relationships rather than business-to-consumer relationships. Attempting to create a sense of community among product users is very common among marketers choosing to focus on relationship marketing (e.g., Harley Owners Group and Camp Jeep), yet not all brand-based communities are marketer-driven. For example, the Internet is filled with websites that are not affiliated with the focal brand, yet dedicated to providing a forum for brand users and enthusiasts to share information about the brand and participate in discussions with other users and enthusiasts (e.g., www.macsonly.com for Macintosh enthusiasts and

www.f150online.com for Ford F-150 enthusiasts). Brand-based community is an important topic of interest because brand community has been found to have a positive influence on brand loyalty and commitment, as well as brand commitment-related behaviors (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). However, the existing body of knowledge surrounding brand community is in its infancy and the psychological and social processes that lead to the formation of brand communities have been relatively ignored.

Research Design

Prior to hypothesis testing, a measure for the PSC construct was developed according to the procedure outlined by Churchill (1979). The research design for the hypothesis testing is the survey method and the setting is the theme park industry. Theme parks offer consumers both tangible and intangible benefits and many consumers become very involved with theme parks and the brands associated with theme parks, resulting in an industry that generates in excess of 10 billion dollars in annual revenue. Respondents were recruited from online Disney groups to fill out a self-administered online survey. In total, three-hundred fourteen cases were utilized in this study. Results from the analysis revealed that identification with the brand is of critical importance when attempting to understand the relationships between a consumer and a brand, which ultimately lead to brand commitment-related outcomes. Support was found for many of the hypothesized relationships. Furthermore, a number of additional relationships were found to exist between the variables in the study.

Contribution to the Literature

The contributions of this research can benefit both academicians and managers. The most important contribution of this research is the development of a scale to measure PSC. The PSC construct is introduced to the marketing literature and found to have a positive impact on commitment to the community, which in turn has a positive impact on brand commitment. The development of the PSC measure provides a first step in forming a strong nomological network for future hypothesis development. The literature on brand community will now have a foundation on which to develop theory via the first empirically derived conceptualization of perceived community among users of a brand. This is the first study to date to examine a consumer's identification with a brand and identification with group (i.e., other users of the brand). Identification with the brand has a significant positive impact on both brand commitment and identification with the group. Identification with the group has a significant positive impact on PSC and commitment to the community, which in turn has a positive impact on brand commitment. Thus the importance of identification with the brand is revealed. In sum, the research provides numerous insights and contributions to the marketing literature.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized in six chapters. A brief background regarding the nature of branding, relationship marketing, identification, and brand community was addressed in this chapter. The second chapter will provide a review of the relevant literature on social identity theory and identification, psychological sense of community, branding and brand community, and brand commitment. The hypothesis development

will be presented in Chapter III. Chapter IV will discuss the methodology and

measurements utilized, as well as the development of the PSC measure. The results will

be discussed in Chapter V. Finally, Chapter VI will provide a discussion of the

limitations of this study as well as future research opportunities in this area.

FIGURE 1

Theoretical Model
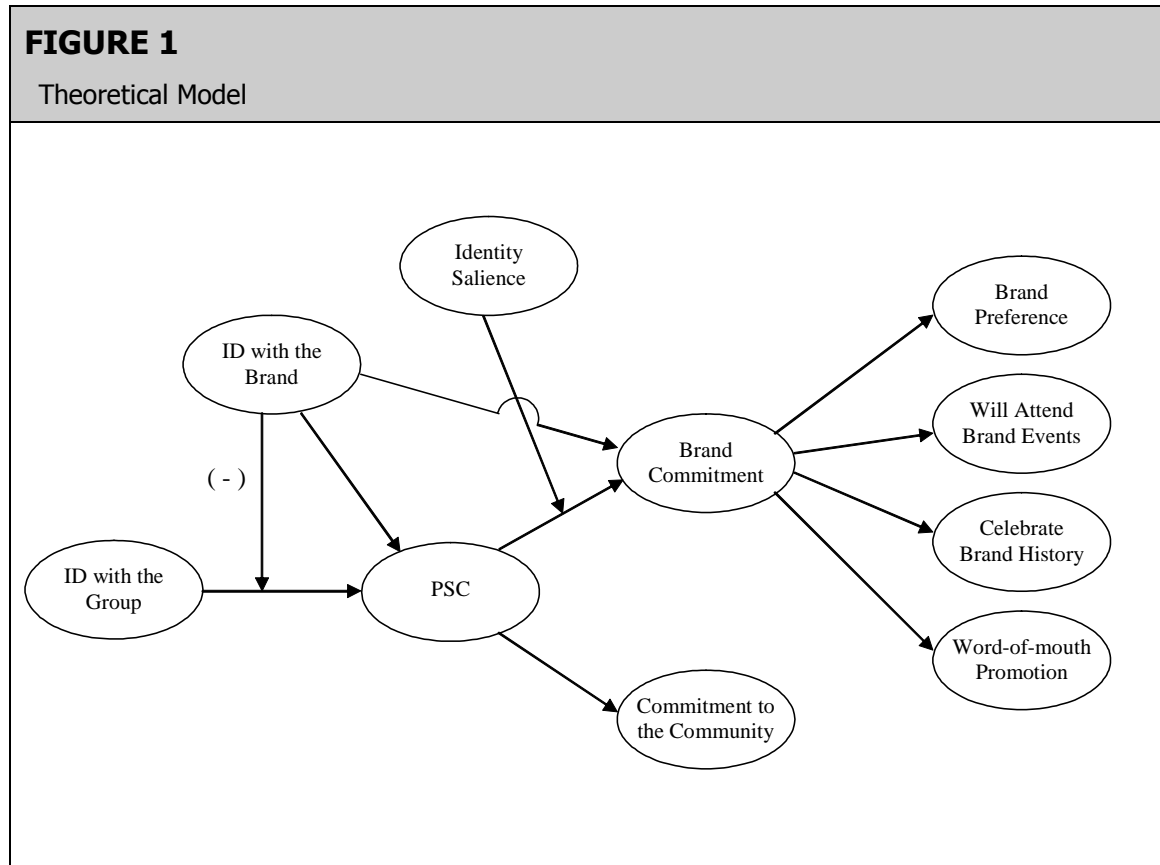
Note: The hypothesized moderating effect of identification with the brand on the
relationship between identification with the group and PSC is negative. All other
hypothesized relationships are positive.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research contributes to the study of brand community by expanding the conceptualizations of brand community proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002). Social identity theory is applied to gain further understanding of the elements that determine how and to what extent various brand communities may exist. Furthermore, researchers that have examined the concept of brand community (i.e., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) have relied primarily upon qualitative methods and sample-specific measures. The existing conceptualization of brand community does not easily lend itself to the establishment of generalizable, quantitative measures. One goal of this research is to delineate the concept of brand community in such a way that marketers and market researchers alike will be able to agree upon conversational terms when discussing long-term brand commitment and the existence of brand communities. Moreover, it will be argued that the idea of brand community is very much psychological rather than simply sociological in nature. Consequently, what market researchers should be concerned with are the manageable underlying psychological and social processes that lead to strong brand commitment. This contrasts the view of McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) that the existence and meaningfulness of the community lies in the customer experience rather than the brand around which that experience revolves. Furthermore, by

examining brand communities from this perspective, future research should be able to study the essence of brand communities in an empirical setting using quantitative measures.

The following discussion will begin by providing a review of the relevant literature on social identity theory and identification as it applies to brand-customer relationships. Next a discussion of psychological sense of community will be provided, followed by an overview of brand community. Then, branding and brand commitment and trust will be discussed.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory argues that an individual's self-concept is comprised of a personal identity which includes specific attributes, such as ability and interests, and a social identity which includes various social categories or groups, such as parent, female, and American (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1982). Social classifications allow an individual to locate and define others within the social environment as well as locate and define him- or herself within the social system. Therefore, social identification occurs when one perceives a sense of oneness or belongingness to a group, or organization, thereby defining him- or herself in terms of that group (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). Stets and Burke (2000) describe such a social group as a set of individuals who share a common social identification or view themselves as members of the same social category. Such group-based identities require no direct interaction between group members. Thus, the preference for and/or consumption of a given product brand may serve as a sort of common social identification or social category from which consumers

may classify themselves and other consumers as being group members (in-group) or non-group members (out-group).

Through a social comparison process, individuals who share a common social identification (e.g., Jeep owners) define themselves in relation to and in distinction from members of a contrasting social group (e.g., non-Jeep owners) (Deaux and Martin 2003; Stets and Burke 2000; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Puddifoot (1997) notes that, "A critical aspect of social identity theory is…individuals will characteristically categorize people in such a way as to favor members of the group which they themselves feel they belong…that effectively maximizes intragroup similarities and intergroup differences" (p. 344). In addition, once an individual becomes a member of a particular social group he or she will uniformly make positive evaluations of the group (Stets and Burke 2000). Furthermore, an individual's level of identification with a group is also influenced by the construed external image of the group, or beliefs about outsiders' viewpoints of the group to which one belongs (Fink, Trail, and Anderson 2002). One means by which an individual may accentuate distinctions between in-groups and out-groups is by identifying with a group boasting prestige and a history of success (Ashforth and Mael 1989).

Social identity theory is applicable to better understand brand community for numerous reasons. Membership in a brand community involves interpersonal and group relationships, it is often times socially observable, it often revolves around the distinctions that exist between opposing groups, and it is heavily impacted by the level of identification with a brand. An individual need not interact directly with other group members for identification to occur; he or she must only perceive oneness with the group

(Stets and Burke 2000). Therefore, a given social identity, or an individual's knowledge that he or she is a member of a particular social group, becomes appealing to an individual when identification with that group will lead to self-enhancement or positive-self identity (Puddifoot 1997).

Social identity theory suggests that an individual's self-concept consists of multiple social identities, categories or groups (Tajfel and Turner 1986; Turner 1982). Therefore, it is possible to be a member of a social group as a woman, while simultaneously being a member of other social groups such as parent, attorney, cyclist, cultural arts enthusiast, and SAAB owner. Stets and Burke (2000) discuss a hierarchy of inclusiveness involving three generic levels at which identities exist: superordinate (e.g., human, female, or sports fan), intermediate (e.g., American, car enthusiast, or major league baseball fan), and subordinate (e.g., southerner, SAAB owner, or Cubs fan). Each of these memberships contributes to the individual's self-definition and thus, self-concept. Additionally, each membership represents a social identity that not only defines the individual as a member of the group, but also guides the individual in terms of the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that are consistent with the boundaries and expectations of the group (Hogg, Terry, and White 1995). Thus, the social identity that would be most appropriate in a given situation will become the most salient.

The salience, or situational activation of a specific social identity at a particular level, depends largely on the given situation that is encountered (Stets and Burke 2000). As described by Oakes (1987), a salient social identity is, "one which is functioning psychologically to increase the influence of one's membership in that group on perception and behavior" (p. 118). It is influenced by the social requirements of the

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situation and thus results from an interaction between individual and situational characteristics. For example, when an individual is part of a discussion concerning possible school systems and educational opportunity for a child, the social identity of parent is likely to be most salient. However, if the situation involves a discussion on exercise and recreation the social identity of cyclist is likely to be most salient. Oakes (1987) identifies two factors that jointly influence salience: accessibility and fit. Accessibility, or the readiness of a given identity to become activated, is a function of, "the person's current tasks and goals, and of the likelihood that certain objects or events will occur in the situation" (Stets and Burke 2000, p. 230). Fit refers to the congruence between an individual's perceptions of a situation and the perceived constraints of a particular social identity. Therefore, the salience of a social identity serves as a framework of how to think and behave in a given situation.

The variable salience of social identities seems to be quite appropriate for understanding brand community. Clearly, the behaviors that are appropriate and acceptable at a Cubs baseball game as a Cubs fan may not be appropriate or acceptable in a law office as an attorney. However, it is not unlikely that an individual may be an attorney and a Cubs fan simultaneously. The accessibility and fit of a given social identity allows an individual to be a member of multiple social groups, thus brand communities, as well as think and behave in accordance with group expectations when it is most appropriate and acceptable. Individuals may choose to be part of a brand community when the characteristics of the community are consistent with their actual or ideal self-concepts. Therefore, consumers may feel a sense of community by being

associated with, or identifying with, not only the desirable characteristics of a particular

brand, but also the characteristics of other consumers who purchase the brand.

The image congruence hypothesis proposed by Grubb and Grathwol (1967)

provides further support for this argument. The basic propositions of this model are that

individual behaviors are directed toward the protection and enhancement of the self-

concept; that purchasing and consuming a product communicates symbolic meaning to

the individual and to others; and that the consumption behavior of individuals is geared

toward enhancing the self-concept through the consumption of products that provide

symbolic meanings. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) support this argument, suggesting that

strong relationships between consumers and brands often result from consumers'

identification with the brand, such that self-definitional needs are satisfied. However,

although identification with the brand is the first imperative condition for the

development of a brand community, it is not the only condition.

Identification with other users of the brand is the other important condition for the

development of brand community, which translates into deep levels of commitment to the

brand. By definition, a brand community cannot exist without consumer identification

with the brand. Of those consumers who identify with the brand, individuals who highly

identify with other users of the brand should be more likely to demonstrate attitudes and

behaviors that have been commonly associated with past conceptualizations of brand

community (e.g., brand commitment, positive word-of-mouth communication) than

individuals who do not highly identify with other users of the brand. However, it is likely

that brand commitment can and will exist when identification with the brand is high and

sense of community is low, as well as when sense of community is high and

identification with the brand is low. This poses some intriguing questions as to which condition will lead to higher levels of commitment, or will both conditions have the same effect on commitment, and thus, will one condition be more important than the other for marketers to focus on when attempting to create a feeling of loyalty, or commitment to the brand.

Identification

Previous research on identification has predominantly examined the relationships that exist between organizations and their employees (e.g., Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994) and between non-profit organizations, such as art museums and their members (e.g., Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995). An equally interesting, yet relatively unexplored, area of research involves the degree to which consumers identify with a particular company or brand and other users of the brand. This research is the first to examine an individual's identification with a brand and with other users of the brand.

Marketers have long realized the value of developing long-term, meaningful relationships with consumers, yet uncertainty remains as to the most effective method for the creation of such enduring, highly-profitable relationships. Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) provide one of the first conceptual frameworks for examining identification within consumer-company relationships. They assert that company-consumer identification is important because consumers who identify with a company should not only exhibit high levels of commitment and other positive consequences (e.g., Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Ashforth and Mael 1989), but these consumers will become champions of the companies with whom they identify. Despite the conceptual framework proposed by Bhattacharya

and Sen (2003) for studying consumer-company identification, the formative literature on identification stems from organizational research.

Identification with organizations has received a fair amount of attention in the recent literature (e.g., Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994; Hogg and Terry 2000; Scott and Lane 2000). It is becoming increasingly more apparent that individuals who identify with an organization, company, or brand may provide additional value to the consumer-company relationship that is unattainable from individuals who do not identify with the organization, company, or brand. Organizational identification has been described as a sense of belonging or perceived oneness with an organization (Ashforth and Mael 1989). Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) distinguish between three components of social identity, including cognitive, evaluative, and emotional aspects. Building upon this work, Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) found empirical support for the contention that the cognitive component of identification (i.e., self-categorization) is a cognitive state that is distinct from the affective (i.e., affective commitment) and evaluative (i.e., organization-based self-esteem) aspects of social identity that have been included in previous discussions of identification. This research adopts the conceptualization of identification proposed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) as the perceived overlap between an individual's self-definition and the identity of the focal object (group or brand), thus being unique from the evaluative and emotional components that typified previous conceptualizations of identification. Hereafter, this research utilizes the term 'identification' to refer to the cognitive component of identification as described by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000).

Conceptual and empirical work on identification within an organizational context signifies the importance of identification in creating successful relationships between an organization and its employees (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Bhattacharya and Elsbach 2002; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994) and its consumers (Ambler et al. 2002; Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). The consumption of branded products is the only experience many consumers may have with an organization or company. Therefore, identification with the brand should be equally important in creating successful relationships between consumers and the brands they use. While companies and organizations develop identities that convey to consumers what the company itself stands for, employees and other individuals affiliated with the organization play an important role in communicating the identity of the company to consumers. In contrast, brand identities and the personalities associated with various brands rarely encompass the employees of the company who produce the brand. Due to the socially symbolic nature of brand consumption (Belk 1988; Sirgy 1982; Solomon 1983), consumers may frequently identify with other consumers who use a brand, rather than the employees of the company behind the brand, because brand images are often closely related to the image of people who use the brand. This is why many companies choose to have highly-visible, well-known celebrities endorse their brands and products. By doing so, it is anticipated that the identity associated with the celebrity will be transferred to the brand, and ultimately transferred to the consumer after the purchase or consumption of the product (McCracken 1989). Such a process helps to achieve one of the primary goals of marketing, the social construction of brand identities with which consumers can and will easily identify.

Because identification is group-specific (Ashforth and Mael 1989), it is important that brands create a positive identity or image that attracts the recognition, support, and loyalty of its users. That is, due to the symbolic nature of branding, identifying with a brand that conveys a positive identity, that effectively differentiates the brand from its competitors, serves as an important means of self-expression. When consumers perceive an overlap between their self-identity and the cognitive image they construct of a brand, they identify with the brand. Thus, we define identification with the brand as the perceived overlap between one's own self-concept, or identity, and the identity of the brand. Similar to the self-expressiveness associated with identifying with a brand, identifying with others users of a brand provides an additional means of self-definition and self-categorization. Identification with other users of the brand occurs when an individual perceives an overlap between his/her own self-concept and the self concepts of other users of the brand.

Psychological Sense of Community

Sociologists, social psychologists, and more specifically, community psychologists have long highlighted the declining sense of community that has become a common theme in contemporary society (Glynn 1981). Careful consideration should reveal that such a statement may not be as valid as it appears on the surface. Many marketers and social psychologists would agree with Robert Eckert, Kraft foods CEO and president, who believes that, "Consumers are yearning to connect to people and things that will give meaning to their lives" (Stark 1999, p.8). It may be true that a common facet of contemporary society is a declining sense of community when we are referring to

a territorial or geographical notion of the word *community*. However, various researchers have stressed the important distinction between geographical and relational communities (e.g., Friedman, Abeele, and De Vos 1993; Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002). Geographical community refers to a sense of belonging to a particular area, such as a neighborhood, town, city, or region. Relational community refers to a sense of community that develops between individuals without reference to location. For example, Durkheim (1964) observed that modern society develops community around interests and skills more than locality. Thus, the statement that modern society is characterized by a declining sense of community may be true in regards to geographical community but not for relational community. In fact, many individuals have a strong desire for a sense of community and have turned toward communities of interest to replace the sense of community once satisfied solely by geographical communities.

The distinction between geographical and relational communities is an important consideration when examining the concept of brand community. The sense of community that is likely to exist among users of a particular branded product exemplifies the concept of relational community. It is neither bound by, nor does it require, geographical proximity between members. Furthermore, building upon the principles of social exchange theory, direct interaction between individuals need not be necessary for a sense of community to exist. For example, auto technicians who use Snap-On Tools often feel a sense of community with other auto technicians who use Snap-On Tools (Hill & Rifkin 1999). In most cases, the auto technicians who use Snap-On Tools never come into direct contact with the other loyal users of the brand, yet they readily acknowledge the existence of a group of Snap-On users, as well as their own membership in the group.

Thus, such a relational community is inherently psychological rather than sociological in nature. Community psychologists (e.g., Chavis, Hogge, McMillan, and Wandersman 1986; Glynn 1981; Sarason 1974) have dedicated much effort and research to understanding the psychological aspects of community referred to as psychological sense of community (PSC).

As described by Sarason (1974), sense of community is characterized by the "perception of similarity with others, an acknowledged interdependence with others, a willingness to maintain this interdependence by giving to or doing for others what one expects from them, the feeling that one is part of a larger dependable and stable structure" (p. 157). Although identification with a group is similar to sense of community, identification implies nothing more than a sense of perceived similarity with other group members, while sense of community not only implies similarity, but also elements of trust, commitment, and intentions to continue membership in the community. McMillan and Chavis (1986) describe sense of community as, "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to be together" (p. 9). They argue that the basic elements of PSC are present in both geographical and relational communities. However, research examining PSC has largely been applied in the context of actual (i.e., geographical) communities.

The conceptualization of PSC proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggests that four elements should be evident for sense of community to exist: *membership; influence; integration and fulfillment of needs; and shared emotional connection.* However, a closer examination of these elements reveals that these are four distinct

constructs, rather than various dimensions of a multidimensional construct. The first element, membership, refers to the feeling that one has of belonging to, or being part of a group. The existence of boundaries is a major part of membership, such that belonging to a particular community implies that there are others who do not (Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002). Furthermore, McMillan and Chavis (1986) assert that membership in a community also involves emotional safety, or security, that is derived from the boundaries of membership in the group, a sense of belonging and identification with the community of interest, personal investment in the community which leads to stronger bonds, and some kind of common symbol system, which unites the community. Thus, consistent with social identity theory (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989; Stets and Burke 2000), individuals make distinctions between community members and non-community members. The elements of community membership taken together suggest that an important component of sense of community, as conceptualized by McMillan and Chavis (1986), is an individual's level of identification with other members of the community. In the case of brand communities, things such as the brand itself, the logo of the brand, the colors associated with a brand, as well as other thoughts and behaviors associated with the consumption of the brand should serve as symbols that help to unite the community.

The second dimension of PSC, influence, is a bidirectional concept such that for an individual to be attracted to membership in a group they must have some influence over what the group does, whereas the cohesiveness of a group is contingent upon the degree to which it has influence over its members. McMillan and Chavis (1986) avowed that individuals possess an inherent need to believe that their own interpretations of

experiences are fairly congruent with other people's interpretations of the same experiences (i.e., consensual validation). In other words, people want to believe that what they see is real and that they are seeing it the same way that others see it. This implies that the pressure of conformity among group members stems from the needs of individuals for consensual validation (Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002). Thus, uniform and conforming behavior among members of a group serves to consensually validate the members of the group as well as to establish group norms. For example, Chicago Cubs fans routinely throw the homerun balls of opposing teams back onto the field at home games. This behavior has been established as a group norm for Cubs fans and by throwing the ball back onto the field an individual's membership into the Cubs fans group is validated.

The third dimension of PSC is integration and fulfillment of needs, which is equivalent to reinforcement. In essence, this refers to the idea that people are drawn toward people and groups when doing so will be rewarding. An individual's association with a group must be rewarding for the individual members if a community is to maintain a positive sense of togetherness (Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002). In many instances, consumers choose products that will provide a signal of who they are or would like to be. Associating oneself with a group of consumers who use a certain brand can serve to reinforce an individual's self-image. However, McMillan and Chavis (1986) contend that reinforcement alone is directionless, thus suggesting that shared values is an important concept for providing needed direction. In general, people who share values will also have similar needs, priorities, and goals. By associating with others who have needs and goals similar to one's own, it may be possible to better fulfill those needs and

thus obtain reinforcement. As a result, shared values are essential to the cohesiveness of a community (Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002). This parallels the conceptualization of brand community proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), that shared rituals and traditions are a core component of community and that these traditions help to instill certain values.

The last dimension is that of shared emotional connection, which is in part based on a sense of shared history and identification with the community. This is consistent with the shared rituals and traditions that Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) propose to be a fundamental marker of brand community. It is important to note that individuals need not directly participate in the history in order to share it; however, they must identify with it (McMillan and Chavis 1986). Advertising is one means by which consumers may become aware of and identify with the history of a brand or product without direct participation. McMillan and Chavis (1986) suggested that the more people interact, the more likely they are to form close relationships. The more positive the relationships and experiences, the stronger the bond will become (i.e., success facilitates cohesion). The strength of the bond will also increase as the valence and level of investment with the relationship increases. In other words, the more time and effort an individual devotes to a community, the more concerned they will be with seeing the positive effects of their efforts. These dimensions work together dynamically to create and maintain an overall sense of community.

The previous discussion reveals that psychological sense of community has often been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct. However, closer examination of the dimensions of the construct bring to light that such a conceptualization is actually

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discussing constructs that are separate from a sense of community. For example,

commitment to the group, identification with the group, and influence over the group are

constructs distinct from each other and from perceived membership in a group.

Therefore, sense of community is conceptualized here as the degree to which an

individual perceives membership in a collective group of individuals. It is an

acknowledgement of, or self-categorization as a member of the community.

The works of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and McAlexander, Schouten, and

Koenig (2002) provide vivid examples of a sense of community that exists among users

of a brand. In particular, their examples involve brands that have actively pursued the

benefits of creating a sense of community among users through the creation of various

group activities and events that promote traditional community behaviors. Therefore, it

would seem quite appropriate to apply traditional sociological community concepts to

help gain an understanding of such communities of users. However, such an approach to

brand community may well be overlooking the majority of situations and products for

which a sense of community can and will exist. The sense of community that is being

referred to when this research uses the term brand community is that of a relational

community. It involves a psychological sense of belonging to the group that is not based

on geography or personal interaction.

Sense of Community Versus Identification

Based upon various discussions of community in the marketing and social

psychology literature (Buckner 1988; Glynn 1981; MacMillan and Chavis 1986;

McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), being part of a

community is characterized by a feeling of belongingness to the group. This is distinct

from both identification with a brand and identification with other users of a brand.

Although early conceptualizations of identification described it as a perception of

oneness with or belongingness to a group (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989; Bhattacharya,

Rao, and Glynn 1995; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994), more recent work has

adopted a more cognitive conceptualization of identification as the perceived overlap

between one's own self-concept and the identity of the organization, company, or brand

(Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Bhatacharya and Sen 2003). The affective and evaluative

components of earlier conceptualizations have been found to be, in fact, unique from this

conceptualization of identification (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Ellemers, Kortekaas, and

Ouwerkerk 1999).

Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) and Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999)

found empirical support for the contention that identification, as conceptualized here (i.e.,

cognitive identification), is distinct from affective commitment to the organization (i.e.,

emotional attachment or involvement with the group) and organization-based self-esteem

(i.e., evaluations of self-worth derived from membership in the group). Although

Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) describe cognitive identification as "a cognitive awareness

of one's membership in a social group ─ self categorization" (p.556), the measures used

to assess cognitive identification inherently imply no sense of membership to a group.

The two items used to measure cognitive identification ask respondents to indicate the

extent to which their self- image overlaps with the image of the organization (i.e., "please

indicate which case best describes the level of overlap between your own and [the

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organization's] identities" and "please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with [the organization's] image").

Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) also describe self-categorization (i.e., cognitive identification) as awareness of group membership. However, in contrast to the measures employed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), the three-item measure of self-categorization utilized by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) does suggest perceived membership in the group ("I identify with other members of my group", "I am like other members of my group", "My group is an important reflection of who I am"). Further distinctions arise between these two studies in terms of the utilized measures for affective commitment.

Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) used the 8-item affective commitment scale developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) to measure affective commitment, which they describe as an emotional attachment to an organization. However, some of the items in this scale actually seem to be capturing elements of various antecedents and consequences of emotional commitment to the group (e.g., "I enjoy discussing my organization with people outside it" appears to capture promoting the brand, and "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning to me" appears to be capturing identity salience). Of the remaining items in this scale, only one item ("I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization") appears to be measuring commitment, or a desire to maintain the relationship in the future. Therefore, this operationalization of affective commitment differs from that of Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999).

Congruent with Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) describe affective commitment as emotional involvement with the group. However, Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) operationalize affective commitment as commitment to the group. They utilized a three-item scale to measure commitment to the group ("I would like to continue working with my group," "I dislike being a member of my group," "I would rather belong to the other group") that parallels Morgan and Hunt's (1994) conceptualization of relationship commitment, which is described as an enduring desire to maintain a relationship.

The preceding discussion shows that discrepancies exist in recent discussions of identification. However, integrating the work of Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) with that of Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) may prove to be very insightful in terms of understanding identification, especially its role in brand-based communities. To begin, it is important to consider the implications of identification (i.e., cognitive identification) as operationalized by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). The fact that an individual perceives an overlap between his/her self-image and the image of an organization does not imply that the individual feels a sense of belongingness to the organization. However, identification with an organization should increase the likelihood of feeling a sense of belongingness to the organization. Individuals who do not perceive an overlap between their self-image and an organization's image will likely not feel a strong sense of belongingness to the organization because a primary motivation for acknowledging membership in a group is the fulfillment of self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Tajfel and Turner 1986). If an individual has little in common with an

organization, feeling a sense of belongingness with the organization will do little in terms of self-definition or self-expression.

The same should be true for identification with a brand and with other users of a brand. Identification with the brand is the perceived overlap between an individual's self-concept and the image or identity of a brand. The perception that a brand's identity is congruent with one's own identity does not imply a sense of belongingness to the brand. Unlike an organization's identity, the perceived identity of a brand may not be associated with the employees of the company responsible for the brand (e.g., Sony Playstation, Heineken Beer), except when the brand and company identities are closely tied to each other and/or consumption of the brand entails a service element involving direct interaction with employees who exemplify the image of the brand (e.g., Abercrombie and Fitch, Harley Davidson). Identification with others users of the brand is similar in that perceived similarity between the identity of other users of a brand and one's self does not imply belongingness to, or membership in the group.

The sense of belongingness to a group that was described by early conceptualizations may actually be more appropriately captured by PSC. The measure utilized by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) to capture self-categorization appears to capture elements of perceived belongingness (e.g., "I am like other members of my group"). Similarly, the measure of affective commitment utilized by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) appears to be capturing certain elements of this perceived belongingness as well ("I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization"). Sense of community is defined here as the degree to which an individual perceives membership in a collective group of individuals. Membership is characterized by close psychological

ties and a perceived bond between members of the group. From a social identity theory perspective, the social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she is a member of a group (Hogg and Abrams 1988). Thus, psychological sense of community creates an individual's social identity as a member of the community. This conceptualization encapsulates the sense of oneness or belongingness to a group and acknowledgement of membership that early conceptualizations of identification described (c.f., Ashforth and Mael 1989), but more recent and precise operationalizations of identification have failed to adequately capture.

Including PSC in a model examining identification and community serves to assimilate the recent work of Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) with that of Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). Psychological sense of community maintains the group aspect of early conceptualizations of identification, and is quite relevant to the study of brand-based communities. The inclusion of PSC in the model also serves to resolve some of the discrepancies between the conceptualizations of Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) and Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). As discussed previously, both studies attempt to capture the belongingness aspect of previous identification conceptualizations. Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) demonstrate that cognitive identification is distinct from affective commitment, although their operationalization of affective commitment parallels the operationalization of self-categorization utilized by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) found that self-categorization is distinct from commitment to the group. Collectively, these findings suggest that cognitive identification is distinct from both acknowledged membership in the group (i.e., sense of

community or self-categorization) and commitment to the group as well as the evaluative component of identification (group self-esteem).

In sum, PSC captures much of the essence of affective commitment as operationalized by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) as well as that of self-categorization as operationalized by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). However, the inclusion of PSC in the model should actually add clarification to recent discussions of identification. This research uses the terms "identification" to represent cognitive identification, "sense of community" to represent perceived membership in the community (self-categorization), and "commitment to the community" to represent an individual's desire to maintain their membership in the community (affective commitment).

Branding

For the purchase of most products, multiple choices are available to consumers. Brand names are frequently one of the few distinguishing characteristics of a product that differentiate it from its competitors in the mind of consumers. A brand has been defined as being a "distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark or package design) intended to identify goods or services of either one seller or a group of sellers, and to distinguish those so identified from that of competitors," (Aaker 1991, p. 7). The brand is the sum of all available information in the mind of the consumer about a product, service or company. This information is conveyed to consumers through their direct experience with products and through the various communications drivers, such as advertising, public relations, name and logo, retail environment, and packaging that

companies use to shape perceptions about the brand (Hogan 1997). Direct experience with a brand will lead consumers to feel functional satisfaction (i.e., the product effectively performs its intended function) and emotional satisfaction. Emotional satisfaction is achieved when the brand goes beyond its intended function by fully understanding the needs and preferences of the target market and fulfilling those needs thereby creating a bonded relationship with consumers. Strong brands are those that have been able to successfully create a distinct brand personality that taps into consumers' emotions (Berry 2000). Starbucks' founder Howard Schultz asserts that, "The most powerful and enduring brands are built from the heart…they are built with the strength of the human spirit, not an ad campaign" (Berry 2000). Thus, brands that tap into the emotions of consumers are most likely to create strong relationships with consumers.

Assigning a brand name to a product provides a signal to consumers that the company is devoted to creating and maintaining high standards (Venable 2001). The brand name often becomes the only means of distinction and/or differentiation from other brands. If the brand personality is consistent with the actual or ideal self-concept of consumers who use the brand, staying loyal to the brand will be a worthy means of self-expression. Thus, creating a strong brand and building relationships around the brand should be one of the most important tasks of marketers and brand managers. The key to building a successful brand and loyalty to the brand is to genuinely understand the needs of consumers. In fact, as stated by Phil Dusenberry, vice chairman of the advertising firm BBDO, consumer loyalty "is a brand being true to itself. Consumers don't abandon brands; brands abandon consumers," (Hogan 1997).

Building a strong brand is the goal of many organizations due to the positive outcomes associated with brand equity. Brand equity has been identified as an important outcome of effective marketing. Most conceptualizations of brand equity agree that it represents some intangible asset or added value that a product possesses simply by being associated with a particular brand name. In other words, brand equity seems to result from the combination of all the various pieces of information about a brand that consumers carry in their minds. Aaker (1991) first defined brand equity as "a set of assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol, that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers" (p. 15). More recently, Keller (1993) described brand equity as "the differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing brand" (p. 8). It refers to the added value consumers' associations and perceptions of a particular brand contribute to a product (Chaudhuri 1999). Things such as brand loyalty, brand name awareness, perceived quality, additional brand associations, and various intellectual properties of the brand such as logos and trademarks are integrated in the mind of consumers to create brand equity.

Brand equity leads to various outcomes that would not occur if the product was not associated with a particular brand name (Keller 1993). To illustrate, let us consider the perceptions of consumers asked to make judgments about the quality of two brands of athletic shoes, one well-known and one generic. Assuming both pairs of shoes are identically constructed, with the exception of the logo of the brand name associated with the brand, consumers will predominantly come to the conclusion that a brand such as Nike offers higher quality products than a similar generic or less-popular brand. Nike's

entrance to the golf equipment category provides evidence of such an effect. When Tiger Woods began using the Nike Tour Accuracy golf ball exclusively in PGA events, customer awareness of Nike golf balls increased as did sales. Precept, a well-known brand of golf balls among golfers, offered a ball that was identical to the Nike Tour Accuracy ball in every way, except for the logo printed on the ball and the more affordable price tag. However, consumers preferred the Nike ball to the Precept ball and were willing to pay a substantially higher price for the Nike ball, even when informed by the retailer that no differences existed in the construction, feel, or play of the ball. Thus, the relevance of brand equity to the concept of brand community should be apparent. However, recent literature (e.g., Ambler et al. 2002) suggests that brand equity alone is not sufficient for establishing and maintaining the type of long-term, committed relationships that are essential for the existence of a brand community.

The increasing focus on customer relationship marketing has led many organizations to recognize the value of consumer equity. In fact, many organizations are beginning to replace the product-oriented concept of brand equity with the more customer-oriented concept of customer equity. A customer equity approach focuses on increasing the lifetime value of individual customers (i.e., customer assets) thereby increasing the customer's profitability (Ambler et al. 2002). Conversely, a brand equity approach focuses on enhancing and strengthening the positive associations that a consumer holds toward a brand or product. Despite the growing tendency of some organizations to supplant the brand equity perspective with a customer equity perspective, Ambler et al. (2002) contend that neither perspective alone will be most effective for developing and sustaining strong customer relationships. Rather, the

integration of both perspectives should produce a synergistic effect that will maximize profits by both strengthening the brand and building strong customer relationships.

Several factors, such as brand identity, image, and personality influence the success of a brand and thus brand equity. Brand identity refers to the way in which a brand defines itself to consumers in terms of its core, distinctive, and enduring characteristics. It has been conceptualized as the contribution of all brand elements to brand awareness and brand image (Underwood 2003). The brand identity represents what the brand aspires to be in the mind of the consumer (Venable 2001). Rather than simply being able to recall or recognize a brand, brand identity is exhibited when a consumer recognizes a brand and knows what the brand represents. Closely related, brand image differs from brand identity in that consumers assign personal meaning to the brand and its identity. Keller (1993, p. 3) describes brand image as "perceptions about a brand as reflected by the brand associations held in consumer memory." Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi (1996) contend that image is perhaps the most important asset of an organization. The image congruence hypothesis supports such a claim, proposing that individuals consume products that project an image that is congruent with their own self-image (Grubb and Grathwol 1967). While a positive brand image will likely attract consumers to a brand, a negative image has been found to discourage consumers from becoming involved with a brand (Webb, Green, Brashear 2000).

One way in which consumers attempt to identify and distinguish between competing brands is to assign a personality to the brand. Aaker (1997, p. 347) defined brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with the brand." By assigning human characteristics to a brand, consumption of that brand becomes symbolic

or self-expressive. Brand personality is often more descriptive and much richer, in terms

of contextual information, than brand image (Hoeffler and Keller 2002). For instance, on

a website for a BMW dealership, the author describes the BMW brand as follows:

"Instead of a collection of parts put together, a BMW drives with great integrity, with an

athletic prowess. This is how I can best describe the car's character… you no doubt are

opting for character and personality over content," (BMW 2004). Aaker (1999) found

that brand personality plays an important role in influencing consumer preferences.

Brand Commitment

One of the primary goals of marketers is not only to stimulate sales of products

but also to foster a long-term sense of loyalty, or commitment, toward a brand among

consumers. It has been argued that brand loyalty consists of both purchase loyalty and

attitudinal loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). However, the term brand loyalty

frequently refers to a behavioral concept (i.e., purchase loyalty) (e.g., Fournier 1998),

while the term brand commitment is used in reference to an attitudinal concept (i.e.,

attitudinal loyalty) (e.g., Lastovicka and Gardner 1978). Purchase loyalty refers to the

repeat purchase of a product. Clearly, repeat purchases of a product may result from a

variety of factors other than a perceived sense of loyalty to the brand, such as

convenience, price, and a lack of alternative choices. Therefore, purchase loyalty is not

necessarily a strong indicator of an individual's attachment to, liking for, or preference

for a brand. Brand commitment, on the other hand, has been described as a deep

emotional or psychological attachment to a brand that reflects the degree to which

individuals view a brand as the only acceptable choice within a product category

(Warrington and Shim 2000). Although brand commitment typically implies brand loyalty, the reverse is not true. Thus, brand commitment extends much deeper than simple repeat purchase behavior and is a better indicator of consumer satisfaction and attachment to a brand. Therefore, this research is interested in brand commitment rather than brand loyalty.

Commitment has received a considerable amount of attention in the relationship marketing literature and consistent with Fournier (1998) this research has adopted a relational view of the consumer product domain. The success of any long-term exchange relationship relies heavily upon the level of commitment to the relationship. Therefore, individuals who are committed to a particular brand or company are likely to exhibit behaviors that will enhance the perceived relationship with the brand. Commitment has been described as the extent to which an individual believes that a relationship is worth maximum effort to maintain indefinitely (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Moorman, Zaltman, and Desphandé (1992, p. 316) define commitment as, "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship." Consistent with social exchange theory, Morgan and Hunt (1994) contend that commitment will only exist when a given relationship is perceived as being important and potentially enduring. As explained by Fournier (1998), consumers frequently form relationships with the brands they know and use. Not only do such relationships add meaning to a person's life, they can also change or reinforce self-concepts. Thus, Fournier (1998) suggests that future research should examine brand relationship quality rather than brand loyalty. Although both concepts are similar in nature, the brand relationship quality construct implies that relationship strength and durability are influenced not only by positive feelings, but also by affective and

socioemotive attachments, behavioral ties, and supportive cognitive beliefs. Therefore, commitment should be an important construct in successful and enduring consumer-brand relationships (Fournier 1989; Moorman, Zaltman, and Desphandé 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994).

Brand Community

Brand community is a concept that has been referred to, yet only briefly discussed within the field of marketing for over half a century (c.f., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). In many instances, the idea of building a brand community has been mentioned in passing, as something that marketers should strive for in order to make their brand more successful. Although prior to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) no formal definitions of brand community were offered when the topic was included in marketing discussions, the term has been applied to a variety of contexts and product categories. Commonly, brand community had been assumed to refer to the uniting or coming together of a group of consumers on the basis of the common usage of a brand (e.g., Hill and Rifkin 1999; Steinberg 1999). The primary benefit associated with such a relationship among consumers is a heightened level of commitment to the brand. Thus, it has been common practice to urge marketers and brand managers alike to place an emphasis on developing a sense of community for consumers within the primary target markets of a brand. However, it is very difficult to assume that various authors have been referring to the same concept when no formal definition of a brand community had been proposed. With that in mind, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) made the first attempt to define and explain the idea of brand communities.

As defined by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p.412), a brand community is, "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand." Based on sociological premises, Muniz and O'Guinn argue that these brand communities exhibit three core components: 1) shared consciousness; 2) rituals and traditions; and 3) a sense of moral responsibility. In essence, *shared consciousness* is a shared sense of belonging that extends beyond simple shared attitudes or perceived similarities. It involves the intrinsic connection between members that ultimately results in a collective sense of distinction from others who are not part of the community. The second marker of community, *rituals and traditions* serve to disseminate the shared history, culture and consciousness of a community. Together, rituals and traditions help to instill behavioral norms and values, as well as develop social solidarity. The third indicator of community is a sense of moral responsibility, which Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p. 413) describe as, "a felt sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole, and to its individual members."

While this conceptualization of brand community may be fitting and appropriate for a limited number of consumer products (e.g., Harley Owners Group, Apple Macintosh owners), it appears to exclude a number of situations in which consumers may feel a sense of shared community revolving around a particular brand. For example, consumers who frequently purchase and wear clothing from Abercrombie & Fitch may likely feel a sense of community with other consumers who purchase Abercrombie & Fitch clothing without feeling a sense of moral responsibility to the brand and other users. Consumers who have a strong preference for Starbucks coffee may also feel a sense of community with other Starbucks customers without feeling a sense of moral responsibility. The three

core elements of a brand community proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) may also be quite difficult to assess using quantitative measures.

As conceptualized by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), the necessary existence of each of the three core components of brand communities may result in only tapping into a small fragment of the potential brand community spectrum. More specifically, the brand community proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn may actually be only one extreme type of brand community within a variety of potential brand communities. The first proposed indicator of brand community, shared consciousness, is likely to exist throughout all types of brand communities. A sense of belonging and a collective sense of distinction from those who are not in your group is consistent with the definition of sense of community. The second indicator of brand community, shared rituals and traditions, is likely to exist for most brand communities, but the extent may vary. For example, consumers who feel a sense of community for a particular brand of clothing may share the same rituals of shopping at various stores (by the very nature of examining/ purchasing the product), but these rituals are likely to be very informal and possibly even unnoticed by the consumer. On the other hand, many NFL fans always watch NFL games on Sunday afternoon and Monday night. Friends who share a common affiliation with a particular NFL team may likely gather each week in a ritualistic fashion to support their team. These rituals may range from very informal (when possible, watching the games on Sunday) to very formalized (every Sunday eating lunch at the same sports bar, wearing the same jersey, sitting at the same booth, with the same group of people).

The third indicator of brand community, a sense of moral responsibility, does not seem to apply to a large number of possible brand communities. More appropriately, this

is likely in indicator of a somewhat extreme brand community. Brand communities such

as the Harley Owners Group are excellent examples of successful brand communities.

However, they may be unique and likely represent a small proportion of the brands for

which consumers may feel a sense of community. Such examples of brand community

often involve individuals for whom their identity salience (e.g., Harley owner) as a

community member is very high. When the identity salience is lower, such as a

Starbucks customer, moral responsibility to the group and the brand will likely be less

important. For instance, most sports fans will likely feel a sense of community with other

sports fans. Fans of Collegiate athletics tend to be incredibly loyal and passionate about

their association with a given college team and thus feel a strong sense of community

with other fans, even complete strangers, who support the same team (Laverie and Arnett

2000). Consumers who frequently shop at a particular department store may likely feel a

sense of identification with other frequent shoppers. This sense of shared similarity

extends beyond simple brand loyalty, and encompasses a sense of social comparison and

distinction. However, a feeling of community may exist without a sense of moral

responsibility to the community or its individual members. A sense of moral

responsibility will likely be evident only when identity salience is high.

McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) extend the customer-customer-brand

triad model proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) to include relationships between the

focal customer and other customers, the brand, the product, and the marketer. This shift

in perspective results in a conceptualization of brand community that maintains an

emphasis on social relationships, but acknowledges the influence of other entities and

relationships. They assert that a brand community is, "customer-centric, that the

existence and meaningfulness of the community inhere in customer experience rather than in the brand around which that experience revolves" (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002, p. 39). Such a perspective suggests that brand communities are dynamic in nature. It is also suggested that several dimensions may be important to such communities, including the social context of communication, the temporal stability of the community, and the basis of identification with the community.

To summarize the previous discussion, past researchers have conceptualized brand community based upon literature in sociology that has examined the multiple characteristics of traditional communities. As a result, three markers of community have been identified as being fundamental to the existence of a brand community: 1) shared consciousness; 2) rituals and traditions; and 3) a sense of moral responsibility. While these components of brand community appear to be very representative of some groups of consumers (e.g., Harley Owners Group, Apple Macintosh owners, and SAAB owners) they may be less appropriate when examining other groups of consumers (e.g., NFL fans, Starbucks customers, and Elvis fans). Therefore, this research argues that the concept of brand community may be better understood through the application of social identity theory and the literature on psychological sense of community. For example, McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) found the traditional markers of community (i.e., consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility), as identified by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), were revealed among Camp Jeep participants. However, these characteristics of community did not manifest themselves among all users prior to participation in the brandfest events. Therefore, consistent with their conceptualization of brand community from a sociological

perspective, the authors concluded that brand community did not exist prior to direct interaction between users of the brand. In contrast, conceptualizing brand community from a social psychological perspective, this research argues that in the previous example a sense of community likely existed among consumers prior to participation in the brandfest activities and that it was this sense of community that influenced the consumer's desire to participate.

Building upon the conceptualization proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), the PSC construct can be applied in a branding context, thus defining brand community as a perceived social bond that exists among a collective group of users of a brand. Such a bond results from a congruency between the beliefs, attitudes, and values held by an individual, those held by other users of the brand as a collective group, and those projected by the brand, or company, itself. Thus, individuals who acknowledge membership in a brand community will share a common social identification with other users of a brand and a sense of differentiation from non-users, will openly acknowledge their membership in the community, and will define some aspect of their self-concept through membership in the community. Individuals are likely to voluntarily and willingly submit to the judgment and recommendations of the group collective in order to receive the rewards of membership and to experience the friendships and protectiveness of the group collective (Oliver 1999). The existence of a brand community may also prove to be beneficial for marketers in terms of attracting new customers. A brand community may function as an aspirational group for current non-users of the brand as well as a useful source of information about the brand for potential users.

This conceptualization of brand community presents the concept in a manner that is consistent with both a social identity and psychological sense of community framework. The term brand community is not being used here to identify a construct that is distinct from PSC. Rather, the term brand community is being used to refer to the PSC construct as it is applied in a branding context. Doing so allows for empirical investigation into the factors that serve as antecedents and consequences to sense of community. Such knowledge will empower marketers and managers to make superior decisions regarding branding and promotions when attempting to build lasting relationships with customers. Unlike previous research that has primarily examined the various social characteristics that are associated with an existing brand community, this research is interested in the social and psychological processes that ultimately lead to brand commitment through a sense of community.

CHAPTER III

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Identification and Psychological Sense of Community

In the marketing literature, previous research on identification has examined the extent to which individuals identify with a particular organization (e.g., Bhattacharya 1998; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000). However, even in studies that examined brand communities (e.g., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002, Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) the extent to which individuals identify with other group members has not been addressed. In consonance with the conceptualization of cognitive organizational identification (perceived overlap) proposed by Bergami and Bagozzi (2000), identification with other users refers to the perceived overlap between one's own self-concept and the identities (self-concepts) of other people who use the brand.

As the perception of overlap with the brand or other users of the brand increases (i.e., identification) individuals should be more likely to perceive PSC. In the geographical community setting, the neighborhood often serves as the rallying point around which a sense of community is created. Empirical work in such a neighborhood setting by Glynn (1996) found a strong linkage between neighborhood identification and sense of community. The use of the term neighborhood identification in the study referred to the cognitive self-categorization of membership in a given neighborhood that

is distinct from other neighborhoods. In a relational community such as a brand

community, the brand, rather than a neighborhood, serves as the rallying point around

which a sense of community is created. Thus, it is anticipated that identification with the

brand will have a positive influence on sense of community.

> H1: Identification with the brand will have a positive influence on psychological sense of community.

Psychological sense of community is the degree to which an individual perceives

membership in a collective group of individuals. These individuals often share and

acknowledge common interests, lifestyles, and/or consumption habits. It is important to

remember that the distinction between PSC and identification is that PSC not only tends

to imply similarity, but also membership in the community. Cognitive identification is an

unobservable psychological state of perceived similarity with no implications of interest

in the group or brand, emotional attachment to the group or brand, commitment to the

group or brand, or concern for the well-being of the group or brand. Psychological sense

of community implies some degree of communication between members, whether

indirect or direct (e.g., advertising messages via mass media and on-line communications

or personal interaction), and thus may provide an external signal of an individual's self-

concept. Consumers are more likely to seek out relationships, even those primarily

psychological in nature, with other consumers who are perceived to be similar to one's

self-image than with others who are perceived to be very different from one's self-image.

Therefore, identification with other users (i.e., the group) should be positively related to

psychological sense of community.

> H2: Identification with the group will have a positive influence on psychological sense of community.

Despite the increasing interest in identification between organizations and their employees, Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) provide one of the only frameworks for examining identification within consumer-company relationships. They argue that the organizational identities of certain companies offer attractive, meaningful social identities to consumers who identify with the company. Consistent with social identity theory, identifying with such a company allows consumers to adopt the projected social identity of the company and by doing so, satisfy various self-definitional needs. The authors also assert that consumer-company identification is distinct from consumers' identification with a company's brands. This results from the distinctions that often exist between the identities of a company (e.g., Phillip Morris) and the company's brands (e.g., Marlboro). However, despite the distinction between consumer-company identification and identification with the brand, the two constructs closely parallel each other. In other words, congruent with consumer-company identification, identifying with a particular brand allows a consumer to adopt the projected social identity of the brand and thus satisfy various self-definitional needs. Consistent with Bergami and Bagozzi's (2000) conceptualization of organizational identification and Bhattacharya and Sen's (2003) conceptualization of consumer-company identification, identification with the brand is defined as the perceived overlap between one's own self-concept, or identity, and the identity of the brand. Similar to the contention of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), it is notable that identification with the brand is distinct from identification with a single product. Many brands offer a variety of related products to consumers, rather than a single product choice. Accordingly, identification with the brand implies a sense of

identification with the overall brand including most, if not all, of the products offered by the brand.

Identification (i.e., perceived overlap) with the brand should be the most important construct for creating a sense of community among users of a brand. The central theme underlying all conceptualizations of brand community is that the relationships that exist among members of the community have formed and will continue to rally around the brand itself. In other words, if identification with the brand or other users of the brand is not present, then any sense of community perceived by an individual is not, in fact, a feeling of membership in a brand community. Such a feeling would be a feeling of membership in a consumption community based upon lifestyle, interests, or even product categories, but not a specific brand. For example, an individual may feel very similar to other consumers who purchase Abercrombie & Fitch clothing because of a shared sense of interest in fashion, quality, image, and prestige. However, if the individual is opposed to discrimination and believes that Abercrombie & Fitch discriminates "against Latinos, Asian Americans and African Americans in order to create the 'A&F' look," (AFjustice.com 2004), they may not identify with the brand despite identifying with the type of product offered by the brand and many of the consumers who consume the brand. This example illustrates that identities exist at different levels in a hierarchy of inclusiveness (Stets and Burke 2000), where identifying with the type of product represents an intermediate identity and identifying with brand and the group represent subordinate identities.

When an individual first begins to acknowledge membership in a brand-based community, identification with the brand and identification with other users should both

be important antecedents to experiencing a sense of community, such that a brand-based sense of community will likely not exist in their absence. An individual's perception of overlap between his/her self-concept and the identities of the brand and other users of the brand (i.e., identification) will lead to a desire to enter into some type of relationship with other users of the brand. This relationship will likely take the form of psychological membership in the community, or PSC. Considering that sense of community suggests some degree of perceived similarity between members of the collective group, in terms of sharing and acknowledging common interests, lifestyles, and/or consumption habits, it is essential that consumers identify with the brand or other users of the brand before they will feel any sense of community.

Identification with others users of a brand is a state of acknowledged similarity with a collective group of users, whereas identification with the brand does not involve such a group collective. However, being associated with, or perceiving oneself as being similar to, the image of a desirable brand may still lead to a perceived sense of community. The symbolic nature of the brand may motivate an individual not only to consume the brand, but also to seek out membership in a community of users built around the brand. Such membership in the community serves to express one's identification with the brand. Therefore, identifying with a brand, but not with other users of the brand, should still lead to a sense of community because the image of the brand itself may attract individuals who perceive the community to be an aspirational group.

The brand serves as the foundation for an individual's identification with the brand and identification with other users of the brand. Therefore, even in the absence of identification with the brand directly, a sense of community should likely result if an

individual identifies strongly with other users of the brand. However, an individual's

identity as a brand user and member of the community will likely be driven by either

identification with the brand or identification with other users of the brand, but the

influence of one should decrease as the influence of the other increases. When an

individual identifies with a brand so strongly that he/she wants to acknowledge

membership in the community, identification with other users will play less of a role

influencing psychological sense of community. Likewise, when an individual's

identification with other users of the brand is very strong, identification with the brand

will be less influential on psychological sense of community. The self-expressive

benefits associated with both identification with the brand and identification with other

users of the brand should be enough, independently, to drive perceived membership in

the community. Therefore, it is anticipated that identification with the brand will

moderate the influence of identification with the group on PSC, such that identification

with the group will have less of an influence on sense of community when identification

with the brand is high, and vice versa.

      H3:   The positive influence of identification with the group on psychological
               sense of community is greater when identification with the brand is low
               than when identification with the brand is high.

Identification with the Brand and Brand Commitment

The image congruence hypothesis proposed by Grubb and Grathwol (1967)

suggests that the consumption behavior of individuals is geared toward enhancing the

self-concept through the consumption of products that provide symbolic meanings.

Furthermore, strong relationships between consumers and brands often result from

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consumers' identification with the brand when self-definitional needs are satisfied (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003). Consumers who identify with the brand and with other users of the brand should be very likely to feel a sense of community and as a result, demonstrate the attitudes and behaviors that have typified past conceptualizations of brand community (e.g., brand commitment, positive word of mouth communication). However, it is likely that brand commitment can and will exist when identification with the brand is high, regardless of the influence of sense of community. Thus, it is anticipated that identification with the brand will have a positive influence on commitment to the brand.

> H4: Identification with the brand will have a positive influence on brand commitment.

Brand Commitment and Psychological Sense of Community

As marketing has ventured away from the transactional view of exchange toward a focus upon building and maintaining relationships, the importance of relational elements such as commitment has largely been acknowledged (e.g., Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995; Moorman, Zaltman, and Desphande 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Commitment has been identified as a key relational element that encourages individuals to maintain existing relationships (Morgan and Hunt 1994). Social exchange theory posits that exchange interactions resulting in positive outcomes over time increase firms' commitment to the exchange relationship (Lambe, Wittman, and Spekman 2001). Thus, when an individual purchases and consumes a product that satisfies its intended purpose, a sense of commitment is likely to develop toward the brand and/or company.

Drawing on research in relationship marketing, it is anticipated that brand commitment will be influenced by PSC. When an individual acknowledges membership in a group that is based upon the consumption of and preference for a brand, a lack of commitment to the brand would be going against the norms of thought and behavior that help to identify the boundaries of group membership. Individuals tend to feel a sense of PSC when membership in the group will provide some type of benefit, often psychological or social in nature, such as reinforcing or projecting one's self-image. In addition to anticipating the symbolic benefits (e.g., self-expression) of consuming a particular product, consumers may seek membership in a community of brand users because of the anticipated benefits of being associated with the brand as well as other people who use the brand. Morgan and Hunt (1994) found the correlation between relationship benefits and relationship commitment to be positive and significant between channel partners, although the direct influence of relationship benefits on commitment was non-significant. However, as noted by the authors, the measures utilized for relationship benefits were problematic and the use of more appropriate measures may likely yield different results. Furthermore, their findings revealed that relationship benefits had a positive influence on the level of cooperation between relationship parties, and a negative influence on the propensity to leave the relationship. Another characteristic of PSC, shared values among members, should also contribute to the influence of PSC on commitment. As discussed previously, shared values are essential to the cohesiveness of a community because they provide an opportunity for individuals to better fulfill various needs. Therefore, maintaining a relationship with other group members will be deemed important by individual members. Similarly, Dwyer, Schurr,

and Oh (1987) suggest that shared values lead to the development of commitment. When shared values characterize a group, or community, of consumers the individual members should be more likely to be committed to the brand. Due to the voluntary nature of membership in a community built around a brand, members of the community provide a signal of brand commitment that will likely be adopted by other members. In support of this argument, Morgan and Hunt (1994) found shared values to have a positive relationship with commitment. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> H5: Psychological sense of community will have a positive influence on brand commitment.

Psychological Sense of Community, Identity Salience and Brand Commitment

As mentioned previously, individuals possess numerous social identities which are organized hierarchically based upon the self-relevance of each identity. Social identities that are salient are those identities that have the most meaning for the self and are most likely to affect behavior. Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003) contend that identity salience is an important characteristic of successful relationship marketing when (1) one party in an exchange is an individual and (2) the individual receives significant social benefits from the relationship. The authors found that identity salience mediated the relationships between relationship inducing factors (e.g., participation and prestige) and supportive behaviors (donating and promoting) in a non-profit sector. In the context of brand-based communities, self-definition and self-expression are two of the social benefits gained by individuals. When an individual's identity as a brand user is fundamental to his/her self-definition, maintaining that identity should be important.

Staying committed to the brand is one means by which individuals may try to maintain an identity as a brand user.

Perceived membership in a brand-based community should have a much stronger positive effect on an individual's commitment to the brand when his/her identity as a brand user is more salient versus less salient. Membership in a brand-based community provides an external signal to others of an association with and closeness to the brand that being a user of the brand alone does not imply. Thus, being a member of such a community reinforces an individual's identity as a brand user. As stated previously, it is anticipated that PSC will have a positive influence on brand commitment. However, this relationship will likely depend on the salience of the individual's identity as a brand user. If the individual's identity as a brand user is of little importance to his/her self-definition then a sense of community with other users of the brand will not necessarily translate into brand commitment.

In addition to the social benefits associated with community membership, individuals may seek out membership in a brand-based community because doing so will provide valuable insight to the product and/or enhance the consumption experience. An individual may feel a sense of community with other users of the brand, yet not place considerable importance on his/her identity as a brand user. In such a case, it is illogical to assume that an individual will be committed to a brand simply due to a sense of community with other users of the brand when being a user of the brand is of little significance to the individual. In contrast, perceiving a sense of community with other users of the brand will likely have a stronger positive influence on brand commitment when being a user of the brand is very important to the individual. Thus, it is anticipated

that identity salience will moderate the influence of PSC on brand commitment. This is anticipated because acknowledging membership in a community of brand users serves to reinforce an individual's social identity as a brand user and being committed to a brand is one means by which that social identity can be sustained.

As the brand user identity becomes more salient, the strength of the positive relationship between PSC and commitment to the brand should increase. In other words, an individual with a strong sense of community should exhibit deeper levels of brand commitment when his/her identity as a brand user is an important characteristic that defines his/her self-image, than when such an identity is not an important defining characteristic of his/her self-image. For example, an auto technician who perceives membership in a Snap-On Tool community will likely feel a stronger sense of commitment to the brand than a school teacher who enjoys fixing up cars on the weekend who also perceives membership in the same community. Membership in the brand community plays an important role in creating and enhancing the self-image of the first individual because "Snap-On Tool user" is a very salient identity for an auto technician. For the second individual, a weekend mechanic, "Snap-On Tool user" is a less salient identity so membership in the brand community plays less of a role in self-definition.

> H6: The positive influence of psychological sense of community on brand commitment is greater when an individual's identity as a brand user is more salient than when it is less salient.

Commitment to the Community and Psychological Sense of Community

Previous research suggests that commitment plays a critical role in relationship marketing (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh 1987; Gundlach, Achrol, and Mentzer 1995;

Moorman, Zaltman, and Desphande 1992; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Relationship

commitment to a community, herein commitment to the community, generally refers to a

desire to maintain a valued relationship (Moorman, Zaltman, and Desphandé 1992;

Morgan and Hunt 1994). Commitment to a relationship will only exist when an

individual perceives a given relationship to be important, such that a committed partner is

willing to work at maintaining what will hopefully be an indefinitely enduring

relationship (Morgan and Hunt 1994).

Customers value the relationships available to them as a result of brand ownership

(c.f. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Social

exchange theory suggests that the level of social and economic rewards received in a

relationship has a significant impact on the resulting level of commitment (Lambe,

Wittman, and Spekman 2001). Perceiving oneself as a member of a community will

likely be important to members of the community due to the social benefits associated

with membership in the community (e.g., self-expression and self-definition). For brand-

based community members who do not experience direct interaction or relationships with

other members, the psychological benefits of perceived membership alone will serve as

motivation to stay committed to the community.

> H7:   Psychological sense of community will have a positive influence on
>   commitment to the community.

Brand Commitment and Related Behavioral Outcomes

As discussed previously, remaining committed to the brand and demonstrating

such commitment serves to convey membership in a brand-based community. However,

in addition to being committed to the brand, individuals who feel a sense of community

with other group members are more likely to exhibit brand commitment-related behaviors that conform to group norms (Ellemers, Spears, and Doosje 2002). In the context of brand-based communities, members of the community often exhibit behaviors and intentions that are consistent with group norms such as having a preference for the brand, attending future brand events, sharing information about the brand history, and promoting the brand through word-of-mouth communication (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Each of the aforementioned outcomes should have a direct relationship with brand commitment. It is unlikely that an individual who has no commitment to the brand would have a preference for the brand (i.e., choose the brand over a competitor even if it costs more), would attend events designed to promote the brand, would share information about the brand history or promote the brand to others. Therefore, it is proposed that these outcomes will be directly influenced by brand commitment.

> H8: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on brand preference.
>
> H9: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on attending future brand events.
>
> H10: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on celebrating the brand history.
>
> H11: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on word-of-mouth promotion.

The preceding hypotheses are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Hypotheses

H1:	Identification with the brand will have a positive influence on psychological sense of community.
H2:	Identification with the group will have a positive influence on psychological sense of community.
H3:	The positive influence of identification with the group on psychological sense of community is greater when identification with the brand is low than when identification with the brand is high.
H4:	Identification with the brand will have a positive influence on brand commitment.
H5:	Psychological sense of community will have a positive influence on brand commitment.
H6:	The positive influence of psychological sense of community on brand commitment is greater when an individual's identity as a brand user is more salient than when it is less salient.
H7:	Psychological sense of community will have a positive influence on commitment to the community.
H8:	Brand commitment will have a positive influence on brand preference.
H9:	Brand commitment will have a positive influence on attending future brand events.
H10:	Brand commitment will have a positive influence on celebrating the brand history.
H11:	Brand commitment will have a positive influence on word-of-mouth promotion.

CHAPTER IV

EMPIRICAL METHOD

The purpose of the current chapter is to delineate the methodology of the study.

The chapter discusses the research designs utilized in the development of the PSC scale

(study one) and in testing the hypotheses proposed in Chapter III (study two). The

chapter begins by discussing the scale development and measurement validation

procedure and results for the PSC construct. It is shown that the PSC scale is

psychometrically sound. Next, the procedure for study two is discussed, beginning with

an overview of the industry chosen for study two, the theme park industry, and the

characteristics of the industry that made it appealing for this study. Finally, following a

discussion of the sample, the measures employed in study two are presented.

Study One – Measure Validation

<u>Study 1a: Initial Item Generation and Selection</u>

A scale was developed for the *psychological sense of community* construct by

using a multi-step iterative procedure for better measures (Churchill 1979). The first step

of the development process involved an assessment of past literature to define the

construct. Based upon previous work on PSC, brand communities, and identification,

PSC was defined as *the degree to which an individual perceives membership in*

a collective group of individuals. Past conceptualizations of PSC have defined and measured the construct as being multidimensional (e.g., Buckner 1988; Chavis et al. 1986; Glynn 1981; McMillan and Chavis 1986; Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002), but it is conceptualized herein as a unidimensional construct. The dimensions included in past conceptualizations and measurements of PSC (i.e., membership, influence, fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection) appear to be capturing distinct constructs rather than multiple dimensions of a single construct. For example, a recent study by Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith (2002) combined 59 items from various scales designed to assess a wide range of hypothesized dimensions of PSC. Consistent with a priori hypotheses, their results revealed four distinct factors. It is worth noting that these factors were not included in a higher-order factor analysis. A standard multiple regression was run to examine the influence of each factor on overall sense of community. Two questions were used to assess self-reported global feelings of PSC (e.g., "In general, I feel that [the group] has a strong sense of community"). Although the authors claim that the study found some quantitative evidence for McMillan and Chavis' dimensions of PSC, the dimensionality of the construct itself has not been assessed.

The first factor, membership or belonging, includes items that appear to tap into attachment to or commitment to the community, rather than perceived membership in the group (e.g., "In general I feel good when I think about being a part of [the community];" "I expect to be a part of [the community] for a long time"). Being attached to or committed to a community is a likely outcome of perceived membership in the community and thus, it is argued that this factor is related to yet distinct from PSC, rather than a dimension of PSC as defined here.

A second factor, fulfillment of needs or shared values, assessed the perceived similarity of members as well as their ability to work together and get things done (e.g., "I really fit in with my neighbors;" "If there is a problem in this [community] [members] can get it solved."). Both of these aspects help to gain a deeper understanding of the community itself, but not an individual's perceived membership in the community. Perceived similarity of members may influence the likelihood of an individual perceiving membership in a community. In contrast, the ability of the community to work together and get things done is likely a result of numerous individuals perceiving membership in the community. Thus, the shared values factor appears to be related to PSC, but it does not appear to be a dimension of PSC as defined here.

A third factor, influence, deals with the perception one has of having influence over the community (e.g., "I have almost no influence over what this [community] is like;" "I care about what my fellow [members] think about my actions."). Although this factor appears to be important for understanding an individual's involvement with a community and community-related behaviors it appears to have little relevance in terms of actual perceived membership in the community. As with the previous factors, it is argued that the influence factor is related to yet distinct from PSC and thus, is not a dimension of PSC as defined here.

The fourth and final factor, emotional connection and ties, appears to be the most relevant to the conceptualization of PSC proposed in this research. The items in this scale appear to measure the connection to or membership in the community (e.g., "I don't feel a sense of being connected with my fellow [community members];" "I feel strong ties to my fellow [community members]."). This factor appears to be at the heart of PSC

while the other three factors appear to be distinct from PSC. The descriptions and operationalizations of the previously identified dimensions of PSC should justify the conceptualization of PSC as a unidimensional construct, with the remaining dimensions being factors related to PSC.

Once the construct was defined, items from existing measures of PSC and similar constructs were compiled from published studies. A total of 26 items were compiled from various studies examining PSC and other community-related constructs. Most of the items were selected based upon their relevance to the PSC construct as conceptualized in this research, which is much more narrowly defined than in past research. However, some items were included due to their inclusion in past studies, although they were expected to be distinct from PSC. To supplement these items, 16 additional items were developed by the author independently. Careful consideration was given to each item to ensure that it was tapping the domain of the intended construct as closely as possible.

The second step involved subjecting the items developed in step one to a face validity test by academicians in the field of marketing. The panel of experts consisted of nine leading researchers in the areas of brand community, identification, and personality and motivation. They were asked to critically evaluate the items from the standpoint of being completely representative, somewhat representative, or not at all representative of the focal construct as defined by the author. Items evaluated as clearly representative by four judges and as no worse than somewhat representative by three more judges were retained. Based on this feedback, six items were removed and others were modified to improve specificity and precision. Although not expressed by all of the experts, some of

the panel members expressed a concern that multiple items appeared to be capturing

elements of both antecedents and consequences of PSC rather than the construct itself.

Items that did not clearly deviate from the focal construct were not removed at this point,

although it was anticipated that the remaining 35 items would reveal three to four factors.

Each item was formatted into a seven-point (strongly agree to strongly disagree) Likert-

type response scale. Table 2 contains a list of the final items and the source of each item

in its original form.

TABLE 2

Item Generation

PSC Item	Item Source
1. I really fit in with fellow Old Navy shoppers	CIT
2. I feel strong ties to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	CIT
3. I consider myself to have different interests than people who buy competing brands	New item
4. I find it very easy to form a bond with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	CIT
5. Other people who buy Old Navy clothing and I want the same things from this brand	SCI
6. I feel a sense of being connected to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	CIT
7. I feel like I belong to the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	NCI
8. People who buy Old Navy clothing have more in common than just purchasing the brand	New item
9. The friendships and associations I have with other people who buy Old Navy clothing mean a lot to me	NCI
10. I feel loyal to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	NCI
11. Because we have similar interests, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New item
12. A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New item
13. Besides buying the clothing, I have something in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New item
14. I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve Old Navy clothing	NCI
15. Because we have a common preference for the brand, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New item
16. There is a distinction between people who buy Old Navy clothing and people who buy competing brands	New item
17. Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing gives me a sense of community	NCI
18. I believe that I have a similar lifestyle to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New Item
19. Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing is like being part of a group of friends	PSCS
20. I have more in common with people who buy Old Navy clothing than with people who do not	New item
21. My own interests are very similar to the interests of other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New item

Note: CIT = Ingroup Ties Subscale (Cameron, 2000); SCI = Sense of Community Index (Chavis etal., 1986); PSCS = Psychological Sense of Community Scale (Glynn, 1981); NCI = Neighborhood Cohesion Instrument (Buckner, 1988); MMN = Multidimensional Measure of Neighboring (Skjaeveland et al., 1996).

TABLE 2 (continued)

Item Generation

PSC Item	Item Source
22. I take an interest in the activities of others who buy Old Navy clothing	New item
23. I have developed relationships with other people because I buy Old Navy clothing	New item
24. Because we have similar lifestyles, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	New item
25. The people I am most similar to buy Old Navy clothing	PSCS
26. I have met new friends because I buy Old Navy clothing	MMN
27. I think I agree with most people who buy Old Navy clothing about what is important in life	NCI
28. The feelings I have toward other people who buy Old Navy clothing could be described as a sense of community	New item
29. I like to think of myself as similar to the people who buy Old Navy clothing	NCI
30. I feel comfortable as a member the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	SCI
31. If other people who buy Old Navy clothing were planning something, I'd think of it as something we're doing rather than something they're doing	NCI
32. I have a lot in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	CIT
33. I try to interact with other people who buy Old Navy clothing when I can	New item
34. People who buy Old Navy clothing share the same values	SCI
35. I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing, despite having little else in common with them	New item

Note: CIT = Ingroup Ties Subscale (Cameron, 2000); SCI = Sense of Community Index (Chavis etal., 1986); PSCS = Psychological Sense of Community Scale (Glynn, 1981); NCI = Neighborhood Cohesion Instrument (Buckner, 1988); MMN = Multidimensional Measure of Neighboring (Skjaeveland et al., 1996).

Psychometric Analysis. The next step in the scale development involved an attempt to purify the PSC scale with exploratory factor analysis (EFA). One-hundred sixty-seven respondents completed the survey designed for this study. Items were included to measure commitment to the community, identification with the group, commitment to the brand, identification with the brand, and word-of-mouth communication. Three respondents were eliminated due to excessive missing responses leaving a sample of 164. The sample included students enrolled in upper-division business courses at a Midwestern university. Fifty-five percent were female and 88% of respondents were between 18-25 years old. Respondents were asked to respond to items related to Old Navy clothing, which was identified in a pretest as a relevant brand to the respondent pool. Respondents were assured anonymity and given unlimited time to complete the survey.

The 35 items intended to measure PSC were entered into a principal component factor analysis. Inspection of communalities and correlation matrices indicated that the data were suitable for this analysis. This was further supported by a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy of .940 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 =$ 5053.456, p = 0.000). Four factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1, accounting for 69% of the variance. The solution was then subjected to a direct oblimin rotation. The oblique rotation was used because it was believed *a priori* that the factors were related to each other. The pattern matrix revealed that Factor 3 consisted of only one item ("I consider myself to have different interests than people who buy competing brands") and therefore it was removed from further analysis. Factor loadings should exceed .45 to be considered significant when the sample size is 150 (Hair et al.1998).

Items that did not exhibit significant loadings on any single factor and items that had significant loadings on more than one factor were removed from further analysis. Removal of these items resulted in a four-factor model. However, only one item loaded on Factor 4 ("There is a distinction between people who buy Old Navy clothing and people who buy competing brands") and therefore it was removed from further analysis. After evaluating the two items responsible for single-item factors, it was apparent that those two items did in fact seem to be very distinct from the rest of the items. Therefore, it was decided to once again include all of the items that had been removed due to non-significant loadings or significant cross-loadings.

The remaining 33 items were entered into a principal component factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy of .940 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 5004.696$, p = 0.000) suggested the data were still suitable for factor analysis. Three factors emerged with eigenvalues greater than 1. Two items were dropped due to significant cross-loadings and one item was dropped due to non-significant loadings on all factors. The three factors accounted for 70% of the variance. Sixteen items loaded above .71 on Factor 1, which accounted for 57% of the variance. Table 3 contains the factor loadings for each item. Items loading on this factor were those relating to similarity of interests and lifestyles (e.g., "My own interests are very similar to the interests of other people who buy Old Navy clothing;" "I like to think of myself as similar to the people who buy Old Navy clothing."). Ten items loaded above .53 on Factor 2, which accounted for 8% of the variance. Factor two consisted of items relating to perceived membership in the community or connection to the group ("I feel strong ties to other people who buy Old

Navy clothing;" "A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who buy Old Navy clothing."). Three items loaded on Factor 3, accounting for 5% of the variance. Items loading on this factor were those relating to shared values and cooperative behavior ("I really fit in with fellow Old Navy shoppers;" "Other people who buy Old Navy clothing and I want the same things from this brand."). Factor 2 appeared to be consistent with the proposed definition of PSC, while Factors 1 and 3 appeared to be related yet distinct constructs from PSC (correlations between factors ranged from .26 to .64).

TABLE 3

Exploratory Factor Analysis (with Direct Oblimin Rotation)

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
PSC27	.932		
PSC35	.849		
PSC33	.847		
PSC34	.812		
PSC29	.772		
PSC26	.748		
PSC31	.743		
PSC28	.743		
PSC32	.737		
PSC23	.732		
PSC25	.712		
PSC24	.712		
PSC20	.710		
PSC21	.691		
PSC22	.690		
PSC18	.506		
PSC6		.909	
PSC4		.847	
PSC9		.816	
PSC10		.811	
PSC11		.746	
PSC12		.743	
PSC7		.688	
PSC8		.665	
PSC2		.638	
PSC15		.540	
PSC13		.484	
PSC1			.685
PSC30			.677
PSC5			.620

Note. * Loadings <.45 have been suppressed in this table.

Careful examination of the items that loaded on Factors 1 and 2 led to some interesting observations. For example, two items that theoretically should have loaded on Factor 1 ("Because we have similar interests, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing;" "Because we have a common preference for the brand, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing.") had significant loadings on Factor 2 but not Factor 1. Additionally, two items that seem to have little to do with similar interests and lifestyles ("Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing gives me a sense of community;" "Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing is like being part of a group of friends.") cross-loaded on both factors. After re-examining the survey instrument it became apparent that the location of items in the layout of the survey was having a potentially strong influence on the factor with which each item was loading. All of the items loading on Factor 1 were found on page three of the survey while all of the items loading on Factor 2 were found on page two of the survey. Therefore, it was determined that a second data collection would be necessary to minimize such effects.

Study 1b: Scale Reduction and Validation

Study 1a revealed that the items doing the best job of tapping into the PSC construct were distinct from items measuring both similar interests and lifestyles and shared values and cooperative behavior. However, it was also apparent that the physical layout of the survey had an impact on responses. Therefore, the original list of 35 items was re-examined one item at a time. All items that related to anything other than perceived membership in the community, including items that loaded on similar interests

and lifestyles or shared values and cooperative behavior, were removed. The remaining list consisted of fifteen items that appeared to adequately represent the PSC construct.

<u>Psychometric Analysis</u>. The next step in the scale reduction involved another attempt to purify the PSC scale with EFA. One-hundred forty-one respondents completed the survey designed for this study. Items were included to measure commitment to the community, identification with the group, commitment to the brand, identification with the brand, and word-of-mouth communication. Twenty-eight respondents were eliminated due to excessive missing data leaving a sample of 113. The sample included students enrolled in upper-division business courses at a Midwestern university. Fifty percent of respondents were female. As in Study 1a, respondents were asked to respond to items related to Old Navy clothing. Respondents were assured anonymity and given unlimited time to complete the survey.

The 15 items intended to measure PSC were entered into a principal component factor analysis. One item was removed due to a low communality and low correlations with multiple items. The communalities of the remaining items all exceeded .51 and the correlations exceeded .43. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) sampling adequacy of .941 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 2133.455$, p = 0.000) suggested the data were suitable for factor analysis. Only one factor emerged with an eigenvalue greater than 1, explaining 73% of the variance. All fourteen items had significant loadings that exceeded .715. Table 4 contains items, EFA factor loadings and item-to-total correlations.

TABLE 4

PSC Items: EFA Statistics

Items	Loadings	Item-to-Total Correlation
I feel strong ties to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.796	.77
I find it very easy to form a bond with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.790	.76
I feel a sense of being connected to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.849	.83
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.932	.91
Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing gives me a sense of community	.906	.88
I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.925	.90
I feel like I belong to the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	.763	.74
The friendships and associations I have with other people who buy Old Navy clothing mean a lot to me	.759	.72
Because we have similar interests, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.931	.92
I feel loyal to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.933	.91
Besides buying the clothing, I have something in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.855	.83
Because we have a common preference for the brand, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	.909	.89
The feelings I have toward other people who buy Old Navy clothing could be described as a sense of community	.880	.85
I feel comfortable as a member of the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	.715	.67

Note: Items in bold comprise the final PSC scale.

At this point, the scale for PSC consisted of fourteen items that had high loadings and item-to-total correlations. However, a scale consisting of fourteen items may be too cumbersome to include in many surveys. It has been suggested that measures that are short provide many advantages over measures that are longer (Hinkin 1998). Utilizing short measures is an effective means of reducing response biases caused by boredom or fatigue. Additional items demand more time for developing and administrating a measure. Furthermore, it is difficult to improve the reliability of five appropriate items by adding an additional item. Thus Hinkin (1998) suggests that four to six items be included in measures that adequately capture the intended construct while remaining parsimonious. With this in mind, an attempt was made to reduce the fourteen-item scale to a scale consisting of six items.

Rather than choosing the six items with the highest factor loadings, each of the remaining items was thoroughly scrutinized from a theoretical standpoint to determine which items could be removed from the list due to overlap with other items, a departure from the core focus of the construct, or awkward wording. The first item removed appeared to be capturing loyalty to the community, rather than the perception of membership in the community (I feel loyal to other people who buy Old Navy clothing). Three items had item-to-total correlations less than .75. These three items also had the lowest loadings, and seemed to be the least effective at conceptually capturing the essence of PSC and were thus were removed (I feel like I belong to the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing; The friendships and associations I have with other people who buy Old Navy clothing mean a lot to me; I feel comfortable as a member of the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing).

Despite having high factor loadings (.86 to .93), three additional items were removed because they appeared to be capturing some elements of similarity between members of the group as well as perceived membership (Because we have similar interests, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing; Besides buying the clothing, I have something in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing; Because we have a common preference for the brand, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing). Although similarity may influence PSC, items that assess being similar to other group members may be capturing something conceptually distinct from perceiving membership in the group.

The last item to be removed from the scale (The feelings I have toward other people who buy Old Navy clothing could be described as a sense of community) appeared to be very similar to another item in the scale that was more concise and yielded a higher loading and item-to-total correlation (I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing). The final six-item scale consisted of items that conceptually seemed to capture slightly different elements of the core construct. The coefficient alpha for the remaining six items ($\alpha = .95$) exceeded the .70 cutoff recommended by Nunnally (1978, p. 245), providing initial evidence of the reliability of the scale.

In the next step, structural equations modeling (SEM) was used to test the measurement model. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model was tested in LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996). Items intended to measure psychological sense of community, commitment to the community, word-of-mouth communication, and identification with the group were included in the model. Exploratory factor analysis was

not completed for commitment to the community and identification with the group since the scales have been previously tested. The CFA indicated that the items loaded as predicted: $\chi^2 = 419.93$ (df = 164, p =.00), goodness of fit index (GFI) = .72, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.89, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = 0.92, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.93, and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA) = .12. Composite reliability (CR) is analogous to Cronbach's coefficient alpha and used to assess reliability in SEM. The composite reliability (CR = 0.95) exceeded standards recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), providing additional support for the reliability of the scale.

In addition to assessing the reliability of the scale, it is equally important to show that PSC is distinct from identification with the group, commitment to the community, and some of the outcomes commonly associated with perceived community in branding contexts. Multiple methods have been suggested for assessing discriminant validity. One means involves the calculation of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which measures the ratio of variance to measurement error in the scale. Fornell and Larcker (1981) suggest that adequate measures should contain less than 50% error variance (i.e., AVE should be .50 or above). The AVE estimates reported in Table 5 for each factor in the model exceeded the recommended .50 standard with a range of .69 to .77. At this point, the process suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) involves comparing the pairwise correlations between factors (phi coefficients) with the AVE for the constructs making up each possible pair. Evidence of discriminate validity occurs when the AVE estimates for each factor are greater than the squared correlation between the factors. The AVE estimates for each factor in the model exceeded the squared correlations between factors, suggesting discriminant validity between the scales.

TABLE 5

Study 1 Construct Measures and Validity

Construct	Items	Std. Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Psychological sense of community	• I feel strong ties to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	0.82	0.95	0.75
	• I find it very easy to form a bond with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	0.81		
	• I feel a sense of being connected to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	0.87		
	• A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who buy Old Navy clothing	0.91		
	• Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing gives me a sense of community	0.89		
	• I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	0.91		
Identification with the group	• Visual Scale	0.85	0.81	0.67
	• Self-report item	0.80		
Commitment to the community	• Membership in this community is something I am very committed to	0.93	0.93	0.75
	• Being a member of this community is very important to me	0.93		
	• Membership in this community is of very little significance to me	0.57		
	• Membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely	0.72		
	• Being a member of this community is very much like being family	0.81		
	• Membership in this community is something I really care about	0.92		
	• Membership in this community deserves my maximum effort to continue	0.81		

Note: In this table "Std. Loading" is "Standardized Loading" and "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted."

TABLE 5 (continued)

Study 1 Construct Measures and Validity

Construct	Items	Std. Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Word-of-mouth-communication	• I say positive things about Old Navy clothing to other people	.86	0.90	0.77
	• I do not speak favorably about Old Navy clothing to others	.58		
	• I encourage my friends and relatives to purchase Old Navy clothing	.87		
	• I recommend Old Navy clothing to those people who seek my advice	.89		
	• I do not suggest Old Navy clothing to others	.70		

Note: In this table "Std. Loading" is "Standardized Loading" and "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted."

The discriminant validity of the scale was further assessed through an iterative process of comparing a series of constrained models to an unconstrained model (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Bagozzi and Phillips 1982). An unconstrained model (i.e., the CFA) was compared to three separate constrained models. In each of the constrained models, the correlation parameter between the PSC factor and one other factor in the model was fixed to unity, while all other parameters between factors were allowed to correlate freely. Chi-squared difference tests were then conducted between the unconstrained model and each constrained model, as a means to test for discrimination between the models (Jöreskog 1971). All of the comparisons revealed a significant chi-square difference which provides additional support for discriminant validity.

A third and final test, recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), involves an examination of the confidence interval (+/- 2 std. errors) around the correlations between the factors. If discriminant validity is present, the confidence interval should fail to include the value of unity. The result of this test revealed that none of the confidence intervals included 1.0. Convergent validity was also assessed for the scale. Each item demonstrated a significant loading on its intended construct providing evidence of convergent validity. Furthermore, a composite reliability greater than .80 (CR = .95) and AVE greater than .50 (AVE = .75) provides additional evidence of convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Therefore, discriminant and convergent validity have been established for the scale.

Once convergent and discriminant validity were established, the scale was tested for nomological validity. Nomological validity refers to the relationship between measures of theoretically related constructs. The nomological validity of a measure is supported when a relationship between two constructs is established in theory and the measures of those constructs behave in accordance with *a priori* expectations. PSC was examined in relation to identification with the group, commitment to the community, and word-of-mouth communication. Theory suggests that PSC should be positively related to each of these constructs. As expected, all of the constructs are related significantly in the proper direction providing evidence of nomological validity. Together, the results suggest that the developed scale is a valid and reliable measure of PSC.

Study Two – Hypothesis Testing

Industry

The industry setting selected for the current study was the amusement/theme park industry (theme park industry hereafter). The theme park industry was chosen for multiple reasons. First, theme parks offer consumers both tangible and intangible benefits, including elements of both services and goods. The service elements of a theme park experience include such intangibles as the amount of time the consumers spends waiting in line, the ease with which consumers are able to locate rides, shops, and other facilities, and all of the interactions between park guests and employees. The tangible elements of a theme park experience include the prizes won while participating in various games and arcades, as well as the products purchased while inside the park, such as food, drinks and a variety of merchandise and memorabilia. Second, the industry generates in excess of 10 billion dollars in annual revenue (*Euromonitor 2004*). Consumers typically pay between $30 and $50 for single-day admission, a fee that is paid in anticipation of an enjoyable service experience. Most consumers also spend large sums of money on concessions and merchandise when attending theme parks, in addition to the money spent on traveling to and from the theme park, accommodations, and other miscellaneous expenses.

Disney parks and resorts are among the most popular travel destinations in the world. Eight of the top ten most-visited theme parks in the world and six of the top ten most-visited theme parks in the United States are Disney theme parks (Theme Parks 2004). The top five parks in both lists are Disney theme parks. The number-one most

attended theme park in the United States and worldwide, The Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, welcomed approximately 15.2 million guests during the 2004 season (Levine 2004). Moreover, the top vacation and tourist destinations in Europe, Asia, and the world are Disneyland Resort Paris, Tokyo Disney Resort, and The Walt Disney World Resort in Orlando, Florida, respectively (Disney 2004).

Sample

The research design utilized in this study was the online survey method. Survey research was chosen because the intent of this research is to explain how existing levels of brand commitment and related behaviors have been influenced by various predictor variables among users of an existing brand. On-line survey research has been noted as offering numerous advantages to the researcher (Sackmary 1998). For instance, in comparison to printed questionnaires, online surveys are highly flexible, allowing rapid, low-cost adjustments to the survey instrument. Online surveys also provide access to real-world populations that may otherwise be very difficult to contact. Additionally, the cost of online survey research is estimated to be about fifteen percent of that of surveys administered via postal mail (Comley 1996). A final advantage of online survey research relevant to this dissertation, web-site surveys can be programmed to require respondents to finish all items on the screen before proceeding to the next page, thus producing a higher completion rate (Pitkow and Recker 1994).

Three-hundred fourteen subjects completed the survey designed for this study. Subjects were recruited from online Disney theme park groups supported by yahoo.com.

Ninety-six percent of the respondents were American Citizens. Sixty-nine percent of respondents were female. Seventy-two percent of the respondents were between the ages of 32 and 51. Sixty-four percent of the respondents reported an annual income of more than $50,000.

Ten separate Disney theme park-related yahoo groups, each hosting a minimum of 200 members, were identified as potential respondent pools. The moderator of each group was contacted in an attempt to solicit permission to recruit respondents from their group. Follow-up emails were sent to each group moderator that did not respond. After the third and final solicitation email was sent to the group moderators, no responses were received from seven of the ten groups. The remaining three group moderators agreed to allow the researcher to post a message that included a link to an online version of the survey. In addition, each moderator agreed to post a message to their respective group members acknowledging their approval and support of the researcher's message posting. Together, these three groups had approximately 2,575 members. However, membership in the group does not guarantee exposure to the message posted by the researcher. The group settings allow members to choose a variety of message delivery options, ranging from receiving every message individually via email to receiving no messages via email.

Three-hundred sixty-nine respondents visited the webpage that hosted the survey. The initial response rate was approximately 14%. Fifty-five respondents were eliminated due to due to a lack of sufficient responses leaving a sample of 314. One considerable influence on low response rate involves the manner in which group members receive messages from the group. All members must choose one of the following message delivery options upon joining the group: (1) receive individual emails for each posted

message; (2) receive a daily digest including many posted messages; (3) receive only special notices and important messages from the group moderator; and (4) receive no emails from the group. The last choice means that any messages posted to the group will be read only by viewing the messages directly at the group website. While some group members remain fairly active in the group, in regards to reading, posting and replying to messages, many members of such online groups join for the purpose of information gathering. For such individuals it may often be the case that they only sporadically pay attention to messages posted to the group. A second, related consideration is that many members of online groups have separate email accounts that are set up specifically for the purpose of receiving online group communications. In some cases, these email accounts are not checked frequently. In addition, many individuals are skeptical about requests to complete online surveys. It is commonly believed that the intent of such online requests is to collect an extensive list of email addresses for the purpose of direct marketing.

The six-page survey instrument was posted online via www.surveyz.com. Although the survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete, respondents were given unlimited time to complete the survey. All responses were anonymous and voluntary. The first page of the survey was an informed consent page that provided an overview of the survey, its purpose, and the rules of eligibility for the drawing. Respondents were required to click "I Agree" before they could take the survey. Respondents who clicked "I Do Not Agree" were redirected to the www.surveyz.com homepage. The survey was formatted such that a response was required for every item before respondents were allowed to continue to the next page. Upon completion of the survey, respondents were given the option of submitting an email address to be entered into a drawing for one of

three prizes (2 - $100 prizes and 1 - $200 prize). This option was only given to respondents who provided a response for every item in the survey.

Measures

Cognitive Identification with the Brand

The Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) two-item measure of cognitive identification was used to measure identification with the brand. The two items assess the perceived overlap between one's own self-concept and the identity of the brand. The first item is a visual scale consisting of eight pairs of circles ranging from far apart to complete overlap. Respondents are asked to circle the response that best represents the perceived overlap between their own self-definition and the identity of the brand. The second item asks respondents to indicate to what degree their self-image overlaps with the image of the brand using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7= very much).

Cognitive Identification with Other Users

The Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) two-item measure of cognitive identification was also used to measure identification with other users of the brand. The first item asks respondents to circle a response to a visual scale of eight pairs of circles that best represents the perceived overlap between their own self-definition and the identity of other users of the brand. The second item asks respondents to indicate to what degree their self-image overlaps with the image of other users of the brand using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = not at all, 7= very much).

Psychological Sense of Community

One of the major contributions of this research is the development of the PSC scale. The development of the scale was discussed in detail in the beginning of this chapter. The six-item scale developed in study one was employed to measure PSC. All items were measured using 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Identity Salience

The salience of respondent's identity as a brand user was measured by means of a scale administered by Arnett, German, and Hunt (2003). The scale consists of four items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The items were adapted to reflect the context of the current study (e.g., I think about being a Disney World guest often; being a Disney World guest is an important part of who I am).

Brand Commitment.

This research adopts a relational view of brand commitment. Thus, Morgan and Hunt's (1994) relationship commitment scale was adapted to measure brand commitment. Seven items were used to measure brand commitment (e.g., Disney World is something I am very committed to; Disney World is very important to me). All items were measured using 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Commitment to the Community.

Morgan and Hunt's (1994) relationship commitment scale was adapted to measure commitment to the community (e.g., membership in this community is something I am very committed to; membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely). The scale consists of seven items measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The scale employed by Morgan and Hunt (1994) is consistent with the measures of commitment to the group administered by Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999). It is important to note that Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) used the terms "commitment to the group" and "affective commitment" when referring to an emotional commitment to the group. The Morgan and Hunt (1994) scale was chosen over the Ellemers, Kortekaas, and Ouwerkerk (1999) scale because of its comprehensiveness and proven usefulness in studies examining relationship marketing.

Brand Commitment-Related Outcome Variables

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) suggest that a variety of positive outcomes should be associated with perceived membership in a brand community. The following variables were included as important outcomes: celebrate the history of the brand; word-of-mouth promotion of the brand; attend brand events; and preference for the brand. A series of items were compiled and developed as necessary for each of the outcome variables included in this research (see Table 6). All of the outcome variables were measured using 7-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Hypothesis Knowledge Check

      One hypothesis knowledge check question was included at the end of the survey to determine whether responses were biased due to guessing the research hypotheses. The question was open-ended, asking the respondents to indicate in their own words what the study was about.

CHAPTER V

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of study two, including a series of multiple-indicator latent variable models that were assessed via LISREL 8.71. The theoretical structural model was used to test the hypotheses presented in Chapter III. The results from the analysis indicate that all of the hypothesized main effects were supported and the model exhibited adequate model fit. Of the two hypothesized interaction effects, one was not supported and the other was not analyzed due to a lack of discrimination between the moderating variable and the outcome variable. In addition to finding support for the hypothesized main effects, a number of additional relationships between constructs were identified, including the mediating roles of commitment to the community and brand commitment.

Procedure

Prior to analyzing the data, the data were examined to identify any influential cases that may have potentially impacted the results of the study. It is important to identify influential cases prior to data analysis because they can distort the results of any study (Hair et al. 1998). No cases were identified as being overly influential after examining Studentized Deleted Residual values, Centered Leverage points, and DFBETAs. Therefore, the analyses reported herein included all of the cases.

In the first step of the analysis, the items intended to measure identification with the brand, identification with the group, PSC, identity salience, brand commitment, and commitment to the community were entered into an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). A principle component factor analysis with a direct oblimin rotation was completed. An oblique rotation has been chosen because this solution is appropriate when the goal of the research is to obtain several theoretically meaningful factors or constructs (Hair et al. 1998). The rotated factor structure identified five factors accounting for 73% of the variance. However, the fifth factor was comprised entirely of negatively worded items from three of the scales (two from identity salience, one from brand commitment, and one from commitment to the community). Each of the scales containing negatively worded items included at least six items and the removal of the negatively worded items did not change the conceptual composition of the construct. At this point a decision was made to remove all negatively worded items from further analysis. In addition, to the four items previously mentioned, two items intended to measure word-of-mouth promotion were removed from further analysis. The new rotated factor structure identified four factors accounting for 73% of the variance. Although existing scales were utilized for both brand commitment and identity salience, the two scales did not discriminate.

Further attempts were made to discriminate between the brand commitment scale and the identity salience scale. Multiple EFAs were completed, including all possible combinations of only the items intended to measure brand commitment and identity salience. The first EFA identified two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0. However, the items making up the second factor consisted only of negatively worded

items. These items were removed from the EFA resulting in a single-factor solution.

One at a time items were removed and then replaced in the analysis. At no point did the

solution consist of more than one factor. An attempt was also made to force a two-factor

solution, minus the negatively worded items. The eigenvalue of the second factor

(identity salience) was .848, and one item intended to measure identity salience loaded

significantly on brand commitment (.743), with no significant loading on its intended

construct.

Further evaluation of the items of both scales revealed that the items appear to be

measuring a very similar theoretical construct. At this point, it was concluded that brand

commitment has much more theoretical importance to the proposed model than does

identity salience; therefore, identity salience was dropped from the model. It is worth

noting that no previous studies have employed both measures together. The original EFA

was run once again, minus the identity salience items. A four-factor solution was

identified, accounting for 79% of the variance. At this point, there were no cross-

loadings between factors.

Structural equations modeling was used to further assess the scales utilized in this

study. The two-step method recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was

implemented. A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) model was tested with LISREL 8.71

(Jöreskog and Sörbom 1996) including the five predictor variables and brand preference,

word-of-mouth promotion, will attend brand events, and celebrate brand history. One

outcome variable, will attend brand events, was measured with a single item. The factor

loading for this variable was fixed at 1.0 and the error variance was fixed at one minus

the reliability times the variance of the item (Bollen 1989), with the reliability estimated

at .85. Fixing the error variance this way allows the researcher to account for the

proportion of variance in the measures due to measurement error. The error variances of

the visual scales used to measure identification with the brand and identification with

other users were allowed to correlate. A total of eight items (i.e., one celebrate brand

history, one brand preference, three brand commitment, and three commitment to the

community) cross-loaded with other constructs and were removed from the model. A

second CFA revealed acceptable model fit: χ^2 = 429.32 (df = 254, p = 0.00), goodness of

fit index (GFI) = .90, normed fit index (NFI) = 0.98, non-normed fit index (NNFI) =

0.99, comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.99, and root mean square of approximation

(RMSEA) = 0.05. These fit indices indicate a good fitting model (Hu and Bentler 1999).

Composite reliability was used to test the reliability of the scales. All scales

exceeded standards recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), ranging from .79 to .97

(see Table 6 for factor loadings, composite reliabilities, and average variance extracted).

In addition to reliability, the discriminant validity of each measure was assessed by

calculating the AVE. To demonstrate discriminant validity the AVE for each construct

should be (1) greater than .50 and (2) greater than the correlation squared between the

two scales (Fornell and Larcker 1981). The AVE values for each variable in the model

met criteria number (1) ranging from .55 to .74, and all AVEs met criteria number (2)

suggesting discriminant validity between all scales.

TABLE 6

Study 2 Construct Measures and Validity

Construct	Items	Std. Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Psychological sense of community	· I feel strong ties to other Disney World guests	.88	.97	.84
	· I find it very easy to form a bond with other Disney World guests	.92		
	· I feel a sense of being connected to other Disney World guests	.95		
	· A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who visit Disney World	.92		
	· Visiting Disney World gives me a sense of community	.89		
	· I feel a sense of community with other people who visit Disney World	.89		
Identification with the group	· Visual Scale	.90	.86	.76
	• Self-report item	.84		
Commitment to the community	• Being a member of this community is very important to me	.97	.93	.82
	• Membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely	.85		
	• Membership in this community deserves my maximum effort to continue	.89		
Identification with the brand	· Visual Scale	.91	.86	.76
	• Self-report item	.83		
Brand Commitment	• I am very committed to Disney World	.93	.90	.76
	• Disney World is very important to me	.93		
	• Disney World is something I really care about	.74		

Note: In this table "Std. Loading" is "Standardized Loading" and "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted."

TABLE 6 (continued)

Study 2 Construct Measures and Validity

Construct	Items	Std. Loadings	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Preference	· I will continue to do business with Disney World even if its prices increase somewhat	.68	.79	.55
	• I will pay a higher price than competitors charge for the benefits I currently receive from Disney World	.70		
	• I will consider Disney World as my first choice	.84		
Will attend brand events*	• If given the opportunity, I would attend an event put on by Disney World	.85	-	-
Celebrate brand history	• I am familiar with the history of Disney World	.93	.87	.77
	• I enjoy sharing the history of Disney World with other people	.82		
Word-of-mouth promotion	· I say positive things about Disney World to other people	.71	.85	.65
	· I encourage my friends and relatives to visit Disney World	.85		
	• I recommend Disney World to those people who seek my advice	.85		

Note: In this table "Std. Loading" is "Standardized Loading" and "AVE" is "Average Variance Extracted."

* This variable was measured with a single item. Therefore, Composite Reliability and AVE were not estimated.

Discriminant validity can be further assessed by comparing a constrained model with an unconstrained model (Anderson and Gerbing 1988; Bagozzi and Phillips 1982). An unconstrained model (i.e., the CFA) was compared with 36 constrained models one at a time. The correlation parameter between two constructs was fixed to unity in each constrained model while allowing all other correlations to be estimated freely. As a means to test for discrimination between the models (Jöreskog 1971), chi-squared difference tests were then conducted between the unconstrained model and each constrained model. All of the model comparisons revealed a significant chi-square difference, providing additional support for discriminant validity. Anderson and Gerbing (1988) also suggest examining the confidence interval (+/- two std. errors) around the correlation between factors (see Table 7 for correlations and descriptives). The result of this test revealed that none of the confidence intervals included 1.0, thus establishing discriminant validity. Convergent validity was supported with all indicators significantly loading on their underlying construct (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). Once the reliability and validity of the measures were established, the structural model was tested for nomological validity.

TABLE 7

Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 - Word-of-Mouth	1.00								
2 - Brand Preference	.64	1.00							
3 - Will Attend Events*	.38	.53	1.00						
4 - Celebrate Brand History	.29	.45	.47	1.00					
5 - Brand Commitment	.45	.73	.48	.55	1.00				
6 - ID w/Brand	.23	.49	.39	.45	.54	1.00			
7 - ID w/Group	.09	.32	.32	.40	.42	.73	1.00		
8 - PSC	.30	.44	.34	.55	.52	.49	.64	1.00	
9 - Commitment to the Community	.23	.47	.37	.58	.61	.50	.63	.82	1.00
Mean	6.69	5.92	6.10	5.71	5.77	4.06	3.50	4.68	4.27
s.d.	.62	1.11	1.27	1.32	1.29	1.47	1.54	1.54	1.75
C.R.	.85	.79	-	.84	.90	.86	.86	.97	.96
A.V.E.	.65	.56	-	.73	.75	.75	.76	.84	.90

* This variable was measured with a single item. Therefore, C.R. and A.V.E. were not estimated.

Results

Prior to testing the theoretical model, the proposed interaction effect of identification with the brand and identification with the group on PSC was tested in a separate structural model using the two-step approach recommended by Ping (1995). The process involved running an additive model in LISREL with only main effects included. The second step involved summing the indicators of each latent indicator and standardizing (centering) these composites. The product of these sums was then introduced into a multiplicative model as a third predictor variable with a single indicator. The loading and error variance for this variable were fixed using calculations that utilized values from the results of the additive model. This approach reduced the amount of information lost as well as the nonlinear, nonrandom error that accompanies multiple-groups analysis, which requires the researcher to artificially categorize continuous variables as dichotomous variables. However, the path coefficient between the product variable (i.e., interaction term) and PSC was non-significant and H3 was not supported. The product variable was not included in later models.

To test the remaining hypotheses, a structural model was built as follows: paths from identification with the brand and identification with the group (i.e., exogenous variables) to PSC, from identification with the brand to brand commitment, from PSC to brand commitment and commitment to the community, as well as paths from brand commitment to brand preference, will attend brand events, word-of-mouth promotion, and celebrate brand history. Figure 1 provides a theoretical model. The fit indices for the structural model indicate an adequate fitting model: $\chi^2 = 589.78$ (df = 257, p = 0.00),

NNFI = 0.98, CFI = 0.98, and RMSEA = 0.06. The results of the structural model are

given in Table 8.

TABLE 8

Theoretical Model Results from Structural Equations Analysis

Structural Model Statistics	Theoretical Model	
χ^2	500.05	
df	257	
NNFI	.98	
CFI	.98	
RMSEA	.06	

Path		Path Estimate	t-value
ID with the brand → PSC	(H1)	.07	0.95
ID with the group → PSC	(H2)	.59	7.14*
ID with the brand → Brand commitment	(H4)	.36	5.90*
PSC → Brand commitment	(H5)	.37	6.30*
PSC → Commitment to the community	(H7)	.83	18.93*
Brand commitment → Brand preference	(H8)	.74	10.27*
Brand commitment → Will attend events	(H9)	.49	8.40*
Brand commitment → Celebrate brand history	(H10)	.57	9.33*
Brand commitment → Word-of-mouth promotion	(H11)	.45	7.03*

* $p < .001$
Note: Standardized path estimates shown.

Hypothesis one suggested that identification with the brand would have a positive influence on PSC. This relationship was not supported (H1: Standardized Path Coefficient [SPC] = 0.07, t = 0.95). The hypothesized positive influence of identification with the group on PSC was supported (H2: SPC = 0.59, t = 7.14). Identification with the group is positively related to PSC; however, identification with the brand is not. This finding is interesting because it suggests that to develop a sense of community with users of a brand, individuals need to identify with the other users of the brand but not with the brand itself. Hypothesis three suggested that the relationship between identification with the group and PSC would be moderated by identification with the brand. Because this hypothesis was not supported in a previous analysis, only the underlying main effects were tested in this model.

Hypotheses four and five proposed that identification with the brand and PSC, respectively, would have a positive influence on brand commitment. The results supported both of these relationships (H4: SPC = .36, t = 5.90; H5: SPC = .37, t = 6.30). Hypothesis six suggested that the effect of PSC on brand commitment would be moderated by identity salience. This relationship could not be evaluated because the scales for these constructs did not discriminate. Although the moderation effect between identity salience and PSC could not be tested, both identifying with a brand and feeling a sense of community with other users of the brand are positively related to brand commitment.

The hypothesized positive influence of PSC on commitment to the community was supported (H7: SPC = .83, t = 18.93). Hypotheses eight through eleven suggested that brand commitment would have a positive influence on various positive behavioral

and psychological outcomes. Hypothesis eight proposed that brand commitment would

have a positive influence on brand preference and the evidence supported this

relationship (H8: SPC = .74, t = 10.27). The influence of brand commitment on attending

future events was positive and significant, supporting hypothesis nine (H9: SPC = .49, t =

8.40). Hypotheses ten and eleven proposed that brand commitment would have a

positive influence on celebrating brand history and word-of-mouth promotion,

respectively. Both of these relationships were supported (H10: SPC = .57, t = 9.33; H11:

SPC = .45, t = 7.03). Together, these findings suggest that sense of community indeed

leads to favorable psychological and behavioral outcomes both directly and indirectly,

supporting the discussions of brand communities proposed by McAlexander, Schouten,

and Koenig (2002) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). A summary table for these

hypotheses is given in Table 9.

TABLE 9	
Results from Hypothesis Testing	
H1: Identification with the brand will have a positive influence on psychological sense of community.	NS
H2: Identification with the group will have a positive influence on psychological sense of community.	S
H3: The positive influence of identification with the group on psychological sense of community is greater when identification with the brand is low than when identification with the brand is high.	NS
H4: Identification with the brand will have a positive influence on brand commitment.	S
H5: Psychological sense of community will have a positive influence on brand commitment.	S
H6: The positive influence of psychological sense of community on brand commitment is greater when an individual's identity as a brand user is more salient than when it is less salient.	NA
H7: Psychological sense of community will have a positive influence on commitment to the community.	S
H8: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on brand preference.	S
H9: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on attending future brand events.	S
H10: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on celebrating the brand history.	S
H11: Brand commitment will have a positive influence on word-of-mouth promotion.	S

(S = Hypothesis is supported; NS = Hypothesis is not supported; NA = not applicable - hypothesis could not be tested)

Modification Indices

Although the fit statistics of the model were adequate, the modification indices suggested that numerous paths could be added to produce a better fitting model. Those paths that made theoretical sense were added. A series of models was tested because multiple mediated relationships were discovered. First and foremost, identification with the brand was found to play an important role, exerting a direct influence on identification with the group. Thus identification with the group mediates the effects of identification with the brand on PSC and commitment to the community. Additional mediated relationships were also revealed. In general terms, brand commitment and commitment to the community were found to play important mediating roles for effects on the other outcome variables. A model with direct paths from PSC to brand preference, will attend brand events, word-of-mouth promotion, and celebrate brand history was compared to the proposed model with these effects moderated through brand commitment. The paths from PSC to brand preference and will attend brand events were significant in the alternative model, but non-significant in the proposed model, providing evidence of fully-mediated relationships (Baron and Kenny 1986). The estimates for the paths from PSC to word-of-mouth promotion and celebrate brand history decreased but remained significant, providing evidence of partially-mediated relationships.

In addition, paths were added from commitment to the community to brand commitment and word-of-mouth promotion. With the inclusion of these paths, the path from PSC to brand commitment became non-significant. The path from PSC to word-of-mouth promotion decreased, but remained significant. Commitment to the community fully mediates the influence of PSC on brand commitment and partially mediates the

influence of PSC on word-of-mouth promotion. In all, five paths were added to the

original theoretical model and three non-significant paths were removed (see Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
Augmented Model
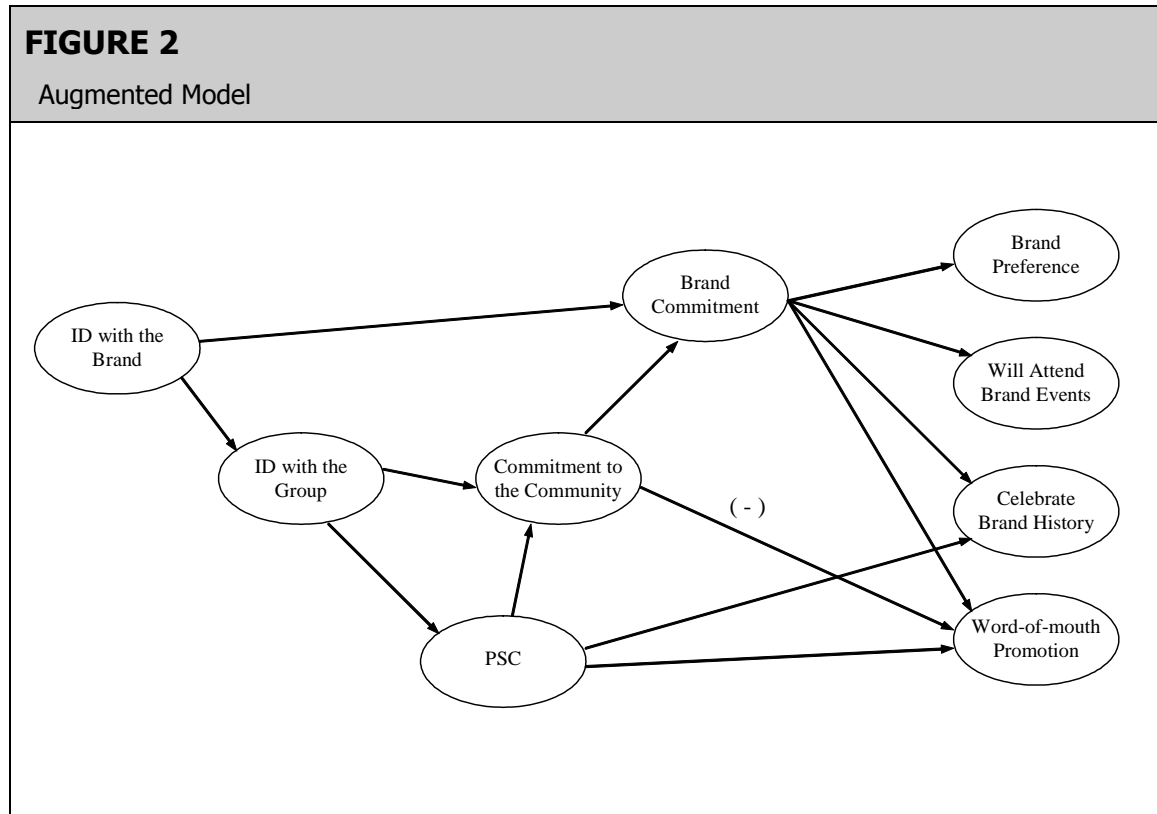
Note: The path from commitment to the community to word-of-mouth promotion is
        negative. All other paths are positive.

The addition of the aforementioned paths resulted in a better fitting model (results

are given in Table 10). The difference in fit between the two models was significant ($\Delta\chi^2$

= 62.34, Δd.f. = 3, p<.001). The additional paths revealed identification with the brand

has a direct positive influence on identification with the group (SPC = .73, t = 12.49). In

addition to influencing PSC, identification with the group has a positive influence on

commitment to the community (SPC = .17, t = 3.39). Commitment to the community has

a direct influence on brand commitment (SPC = .46, t = 8.38) and a negative influence on

word-of-mouth promotion (SPC = -.31, t = -2.81). This relationship was further examined using multiple regression to determine whether multicollinearity may be causing this negative relationship.

When the addition or subtraction of an independent variable (IV) results in the sign of a path estimate changing from positive to negative or vice versa, multicollinearity may be an issue. To assess such a possibility, the relationships between word-of-mouth promotion and PSC, brand commitment, identification with the brand, and identification with the group were analyzed using multiple regression with word-of-mouth promotion as the dependent variable. One at a time independent variables were removed and then replaced in the model. When brand commitment was not included as an IV, the effect of commitment to the community on word-of-mouth communication was significant and positive. Once brand commitment was added as an IV the effect of commitment to the community on word-of-mouth communication became non-significant and negative. The addition and subtraction of additional IVs had no further impact on the significance or sign of the relationship. One indicator of multicollinearity is high values (greater than .90) in the correlation matrix of the independent variables. No correlations exceeded .90 between variables. Additional signs of multicollinearity are high VIF (Variance Inflation factor > 10) or low tolerance (< 0.1) values. The analysis revealed that multicollinearity did not appear to be impacting the relationship (all Variance Inflation Factors fell well below the recommended criterion of 10 and all tolerances exceeded the recommended criterion of .10). A possible explanation for this relationship will be discussed in the next chapter.

Finally, the impact of PSC on various favorable outcomes is mediated through commitment to the community and brand commitment. Brand commitment has a direct positive influence on brand preference (SPC = .73, t = 10.22), attending future brand events (SPC = .49, t = 8.38), word-of-mouth promotion (SPC = .50, t = 6.38), and celebrating the brand history (SPC = .38, t = 6.16). The augmented model provides a deeper understanding of the relationships between PSC and various favorable outcomes. Furthermore, the augmented model explains more of the variance in brand commitment, commitment to the community, word-of-mouth promotion, and celebrating the brand history than does the original theoretical model (see Table 11).

TABLE 10

Augmented Model Results from Structural Equations Analysis

Structural Model Statistics	Augmented Model
χ^2	437.71
df	254
NNFI	.99
CFI	.99
RMSEA	.05

Path		Path Estimate	t-value
ID with the brand → ID with the group		.73	12.49[c]
ID with the group → PSC	(H2)	.64	11.37[c]
ID with the group → CComm		.17	3.39[c]
ID with the brand → BComm	(H4)	.31	5.45[c]
PSC → CComm	(H7)	.71	13.38[c]
CComm → BComm		.46	8.38[c]
CComm → Word-of-mouth promotion		-.31	-2.81[b]
PSC → Celebrate brand history		.34	5.58[c]
PSC → Word-of-mouth promotion		.26	2.59[a]
BComm → Brand preference	(H8)	.73	10.22[c]
BComm → Will attend events	(H9)	.49	8.38[c]
BComm → Celebrate brand history	(H10)	.50	6.38[c]
BComm → Word-of-mouth promotion	(H11)	.38	6.16[c]

Note: [a] $p < .05$; [b] $p < .01$; [c] $p < .001$
Standardized path estimates shown. CComm = commitment to the community;
BComm = brand commitment.

TABLE 11

Model Comparison

Construct	Variance Accounted for	
	Theoretical Model	**Augmented model**
Word-of-mouth promotion	.20 (t = 6.80)	.23 (t = 6.74)
Brand preference	.54 (t = 5.42)	.54 (t = 5.42)
Will attend brand events	.24 (t = 9.98)	.24 (t = 9.98)
Celebrate brand history	.32 (t = 7.82)	.40 (t = 7.95)
Brand commitment	.40 (t = 9.85)	.44 (t = 9.79)
Identification with the brand	-	-
Identification with the group	-	.53 (t = 7.86)
PSC	.42 (t = 9.18)	.41 (t = 9.17)
Commitment to the community	.69 (t = 9.45)	.70 (t = 9.56)

Note: All t-values are significant at p < .001. Identification with the brand is exogenous in both models; identification with the group is exogenous in the theoretical model

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a summary and synthesis of the findings of this dissertation, organized around three major sections. The first section reviews the purpose of the research, provides an overview of the research, and provides a discussion of the research findings. The second section addresses the academic and managerial implications of the research results. The third section notes the limitations of this research and identifies potential directions for future research.

Overview of Dissertation

The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the following research questions:

1. How do identification with the brand and identification with other users of the brand influence psychological sense of community?

2. Under what conditions should sense of community be strongest among users of a brand?

3. What is the impact of psychological sense of community on the following variables: brand commitment, brand preference, attending brand events, word-of-mouth promotion, celebrating brand history, and commitment to the community?

4. Under what conditions will the relationship between sense of community and brand commitment-related outcomes be strongest?

To answer these questions, the first important contribution of this research is the integration of the identification literature to examine consumer-brand relationships. To the author's knowledge, no previous research has examined an individual's cognitive identification with a brand or with the group (i.e., with other users). Identification with the brand was shown to have a positive impact on brand commitment and identification with the group. Identification with the group was shown to positively impact PSC.

A second important contribution of this research is the development of a scale to measure psychological sense of community. The PSC scale was shown to exhibit acceptable levels of reliability and convergent and discriminant validity. The construct was shown to have an indirect positive impact on brand commitment, supporting the arguments of previous researchers (e.g., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002, Muniz and O'Guinn 2001), who stressed the advantages of creating a sense of community among brand users. However, previous researchers have only been able to observe brand-based community characteristics among brand users who directly interact with other users of the brand. In many cases, consumers may feel a sense of community with other brand users despite having no direct interaction with the other users. The PSC scale will allow researchers to examine brand-based community characteristics among more expansive and diverse groups of brands than has been possible in the past. The inclusion of the PSC construct in future research will allow a more thorough assessment of the benefits of creating a sense of brand community among brand users in relation to various personality and branding-related constructs.

Antecedents of Psychological Sense of Community

Previous research on brand communities has primarily been concerned with examining the characteristics of the community itself, rather than the characteristics of the individuals within the community. To a large extent, such an approach required the observation of a known community of brand users. In other words, the brand communities that were investigated in past studies were communities that were known to the researchers as having a significant level of interaction between members, often with members being in close proximity to each other, even if only for a short period of time. As such, one of the concerns of past research has not been how individuals begin to perceive membership in the community. This research begins to examine the cognitive aspects of perceived community at an individual level, including a look at possible antecedents of PSC.

The study outlined in this research has shown that identification with the group is an important determinant of PSC. Approximately 42% of the variance in PSC is accounted for, with only identification with the group directly predicting PSC. This suggests that it is very important for consumers to identify with other brand users before they will perceive membership in a brand-based community. This makes sense considering that McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith (2002) argued that shared values are essential to the cohesiveness of a community. Although shared values and identification are not exactly the same, potential bases for perceiving an overlap between one's own self-image and the image of others likely involve the perception of overlap in values, needs, priorities, and goals. Consumers who perceive an overlap between their own self-image and the image of other people who use the brand

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should be more likely to perceive a sense of membership in the community than consumers who perceive their own self-image to be very different from the image of other brand users.

A somewhat surprising finding is the lack of support for the hypothesized positive direct influence of identification with the brand on PSC. A priori reasoning suggested that identifying with the brand would be an important determinant of PSC. Because the perceived community had the brand as a common denominator, the assumption that perceiving an overlap between the image of the brand and one's own self-identity seems logical. However, it is also worth noting that a negative interaction between identification with the brand and identification with the group on PSC was hypothesized. It was anticipated that as the influence of identification with the group on PSC became stronger, the effect of identification with the brand on PSC would become weaker. The logic behind the proposed interaction effect was that the self-expressive benefits associated with both identification with the brand and identification with other users of the brand should be enough, independently, to drive perceived membership in the community. It appears, in the current study, that identification with the brand does not have a direct impact on PSC.

Although identification with the brand was not found to have a direct influence on PSC, the augmented model revealed two interesting relationships. First, identification with the brand has a direct positive influence on identification with the group. Fifty-three percent of the variance in identification with the group is accounted for when identification with the brand is included as a predictor variable. This suggests that identifying with the group will likely result from identifying with the brand. This

provides an additional explanation for the lack of support for the moderation effect. Second, identification with the group has a direct positive influence on commitment to the community. It is interesting to note that identifying with other brand users directly influences commitment to the community, which in turn, influences brand commitment, while identifying with the brand directly influences brand commitment. This suggests that identifying with a brand, an organization, or a company may be an important determinant of commitment to that entity.

Of utmost significance to marketers is the finding that identification with the brand plays an important role in consumer-brand relationships. The direct influence of identification with the brand on brand commitment suggests that a key step in creating a customer base that is committed to the brand involves creating an image for the brand that consumers will want to identify with. The direct influence of identification with the brand on identification with the group suggests that identifying with the brand plays a significant role not only in fostering brand commitment but also in developing a sense of community with other brand users. These findings provide support, in a branding context, for the contention of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) that consumers who identify with a company should exhibit high levels of commitment and other related outcomes. These findings also contrast the perspective of McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002), which suggests that "the existence and meaningfulness of the community inhere in customer experience rather than in the brand around which that experience revolves," (p.39). It appears that identifying with the brand itself is perhaps the most critical determinant in the formation and perpetuation of a brand community. Thus the importance of the brand itself should not be underemphasized.

The Impact of Psychological Sense of Community

The study outlined in this dissertation has shown that PSC is an important construct to consider when examining consumer-brand relationships. The construct was shown to be a significant predictor of both brand-related and community-related favorable outcomes. Perhaps the most important finding in this research is that PSC does have a significant positive influence on brand commitment, but the effect is mediated through commitment to the community. This finding provides evidence that consumers who are committed to a brand may expect more from a product than the functional benefits of the product. It also suggests that striving to create a sense of community among brand users, whether involving direct interaction between members or no interaction between members, will help create a consumer base that is committed to the brand. Individuals who perceive a sense of community with other brand users will tend to be committed to the community because they hope to maintain the social benefits that accompany community membership (e.g., camaraderie, a feeling of belonging, self-expression). Being committed to the community, in turn, influences brand commitment. Maintaining a level of commitment to the brand serves as an exit barrier for community membership. In other words, when a community is formulated around a brand, choosing to discontinue use of the brand provides a signal of group abandonment, thus removing oneself from the community.

Interestingly, the influence of commitment to the community on word-of-mouth promotion was significant, but negative. It may be that as commitment to the community increases, the privilege of being associated with the group is held in such esteem that community members feel more inclined to withhold knowledge of their satisfaction with

the brand from the non-community members, thus maintaining exclusivity for community members. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) discuss the process of legitimacy, whereby members of the community differentiate between community members who "really know" the brand as opposed to using the brand for the "wrong reasons." This suggests that a status hierarchy exists in brand-based communities. Therefore, higher-status community members, likely those who are very committed to the community, may avoid word-of-mouth promotion as a means of maintaining the exclusivity of community membership, as if trying to keep a secret. Lower-status community members, likely those who are less committed to the community, will want to "share the good news" with non-community members, as if letting them in on a secret.

The theoretical model results showed that PSC was also positively related to brand preference and attending future brand events, although its effects were mediated through commitment to the community and brand commitment. Consumers who demonstrate brand preference will consider a particular brand before a competitor even with somewhat higher prices. Much like the relationship between brand commitment and PSC, one way that consumers who feel a sense of membership with other brand users can provide an external signal of their membership in the community is to maintain a preference for the brand even when the brand is priced higher than the competition. Perceiving a sense of membership with other brand users will also influence the likelihood of attending an event that promotes or supports the brand. Much of the experience associated with brand events involves some degree of interaction between brand users. Therefore, it is logical that feeling a sense of membership with other brand users will increase the likelihood of choosing to attend such an event.

Word-of-mouth promotion and celebrating the brand history are both positively influenced by PSC. Both of these outcomes involve the sharing of information about the brand. It was discussed in an earlier section that belonging to a community provides many benefits to an individual, such as a means of self-definition and self-expression. Members of a brand-based community can outwardly display their membership in the community to others by "talking up" the brand. Such communication is an attempt to convey, "This is a great brand and I should know because I use it." As alluded to earlier, this may apply more to individuals who "rank" lower in the community hierarchy. Thus, promoting the brand serves to make the individual look better by associating oneself with the promoted brand. Celebrating the history of the brand further explains this reasoning. Rather than simply promoting the brand, celebrating the brand's history conveys that an individual not only uses the product, but is also knowledgeable about the brand and its history. Thus, both behaviors tend to enhance the desired self-image of the individual while simultaneously promoting the brand. Both of these relationships were partially mediated through brand commitment and commitment to the community.

Two of the four research questions were answered in the analysis. Regarding research question one, it appears that identification with the group directly influences PSC while identification with the brand neither directly influences PSC nor moderates the relationship between identification with the group and PSC. However, identification with the brand does have a direct influence on identification with the group. Thus, identification with the brand plays a critical role in the formation of a psychological sense of community among brand users. Regarding research question two, the proposed interaction effect between identification with the brand and identification with the group

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on PSC was not supported. Therefore, no boundary conditions in which PSC should be strongest were successfully identified. Regarding research question three, PSC has a significant positive influence on brand commitment, brand preference, attending brand events, word-of-mouth promotion, celebrating brand history, and commitment to the community. Regarding research question four, it was anticipated that identity salience would moderate the relationships between PSC and brand commitment. This relationship could not be tested because the existing measures of identity salience and brand commitment did not discriminate, despite the success of both scales in previous research (e.g., Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003; Morgan and Hunt 1994). Due to the conceptual similarities between these two constructs, it may prove to be more appropriate to examine constructs such as involvement or attachment rather than identity salience when brand commitment is in the model.

In sum, to the author's knowledge, this is the first study to empirically test the effects of perceived community on brand-related consumer outcomes. Psychological sense of community was shown to have a positive influence on brand commitment and brand commitment-related behaviors. Additionally, commitment to the community serves to mediate the effects of PSC on brand commitment and other related outcomes. The support for these relationships serves to reinforce previous discussions of brand-based communities, providing evidence that favorable outcomes are associated with such communities.

The Mediating Role of Brand Commitment

As the previous discussion has revealed, brand commitment mediates the influence of PSC and commitment to the community on each of the outcome variables. These results offer two important contributions to the marketing literature. First, it may be possible to increase the occurrence of favorable brand-related behaviors (e.g., word-of-mouth promotion, repurchasing the brand, attending brand events) by strengthening an individual's commitment to the brand. Second, an individual's level of brand commitment can be strengthened by creating an opportunity for the individual to identify with the brand and other users of the brand, as well as to develop a sense of community with and commitment to other users of the brand.

Implications

The findings of this research have implications for both academicians and marketing managers. The implications for academicians will be discussed first, followed by the implications for marketing managers. To this point, few studies have examined brand-based communities utilizing a quantitative approach. A key finding in this research is that PSC has a positive indirect influence on brand commitment and other related outcomes. Furthermore, identification with the brand has a direct influence on identification with the group, which has a direct influence on PSC. This is the first study to examine identification with a brand and identification with a group of brand users. The findings provide important contributions to research on branding, relationship marketing, and identification.

Academic Implications

Research on branding has acknowledged that consumers often assign human characteristics to brands and even form relationships with brands (e.g., Aaker 1997; Fournier 1998). Positive consumer-brand relationships tend to result in elevated levels of commitment to the brand. In some cases, it may be very easy for consumers to assign a personality to a brand, thus providing a basis for a consumer-brand relationship. However, this may not be the case for all consumers and all brands. Although humans have an inherent desire to be a part of something greater than then one's self, a perceived relationship with a brand may not be of interest to some individuals. In other words, some individuals may have a difficult time feeling any sense of loyalty or commitment to a brand, when it represents to them nothing more than the name of a product marketed by a profit-oriented organization. Perceiving a relationship with other people who use the brand may serve to satisfy the inherent need to be a part of something greater than one's self, while keeping consumers closely tied to the brand.

Unlike previous research on brand-based communities, this study has focused less on the characteristics of the community itself, and more on the relationships that exist between individuals who perceive a sense of community and the brands around which the communities have been formed. The quantitative focus of this study both complements and supports the conceptual and qualitative conclusions of previous research on brand-based communities. It appears that brand commitment and related behaviors can be influenced by not only brand-related constructs (e.g., identification with the brand), but also constructs that are primarily social in nature (e.g., PSC). In fact, the social benefits may serve to attract people to the brand. If the social benefits are perceived to be great

enough, the brand-based community may serve as an aspirational group for non-brand users. Thus, consumers may adopt the brand and even become committed to the brand as a means of obtaining the desired social benefits associated with being a member of the brand-based community. The findings provide some support for the assertion of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) that consumers who identify with a company (in this case a brand) will often become "champions" of the company, not only remaining committed to the company but also enthusiastically promoting the company and its products to others. It is also noteworthy that the brand used in this study, Disney World, is a global leader with dominant market presence. This provides one instance that disputes the supposition of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) that the formation a brand community likely requires a brand with threatening competition.

These findings extend the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in another way as well. Two of the markers of community proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (i.e., shared consciousness; rituals and traditions) were examined in this research. As discussed in Chapter II, *shared consciousness* is a shared sense of belonging beyond that of shared attitudes or perceived similarities. It involves a sense of "we-ness" that distinguishes between the in-group and out-groups. The measure of PSC developed in this research seems to measure this shared consciousness, providing support for assertion of Muniz and O'Guinn that shared consciousness is an essential marker of community. However, they also discuss a component of shared consciousness they refer to as legitimacy. Legitimacy is the process of community members differentiating between true members of the community and those who use the brand for the "wrong reasons." As discussed in a previous section, commitment to the community may serve as a basis for this

distinction between true members of the community and those who are not. This

research found that PSC influences commitment to the community, which suggests that

shared consciousness leads to legitimacy. This contrasts the contention of Muniz and

O'Guinn (2001) that shared consciousness and legitimacy are both components of a

community. Legitimacy appears to be an outcome of community rather than a

component.

The second marker of community identified by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001),

rituals and traditions serve to disseminate the shared history, culture and consciousness

of a community. In addition to celebrating the history of the brand, attending events that

promote the brand is an example of rituals and traditions. Much like sports fans

ritualistically attend their favorite team's sporting events, attending brand events

represents a ritualistic behavior in which users of a brand can come together and share

experiences and stories about the brand. This results of this research revealed that

celebrating the history of the brand and attending brand events are both outcomes

associated with PSC. In other words, rituals and traditions appear to be outcomes of

brand community, rather than components of the community. This finding conflicts with

the contention of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) that rituals and traditions is a component of

community.

Support is provided for one of the general premises of SIT (Social Identity

Theory). SIT posits that social identification occurs when one perceives a sense of

belongingness to a group, thereby defining him- or herself in terms of that group (Hogg,

Terry, and White 1995). The group is comprised of a set of individuals who share a

common social identification, thus such group-based identities can exist in the absence of

direct interaction between group members (Stets and Burke 2000). Based on the findings

of this research, it appears that the preference for and/or consumption of a particular

product brand does serve as a sort of common social identification or social category

from which consumers may classify themselves and other consumers as being group

members or non-group members. Furthermore, and having broader implications for

research on SIT, it appears that the PSC measure developed in this dissertation

adequately measures an individual's sense of belongingness to a group (i.e., social

identification). In other words, the PSC construct can be applied in multiple contexts

(e.g., consumer-brand relationships, inter- and intra-organizational relationships) and

utilized to represent an individual's relevant social identity (e.g., brand user, employee).

The findings from this study also make an important contribution to the

identification literature. Recent studies have concluded that the concept of identification,

as discussed by Ashforth and Mael (1989), consists of multiple components. The two

most relevant components of identification to this research are cognitive identification

and affective commitment. Although Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) describe cognitive

identification as "a cognitive awareness of one's membership in a social group ─ self

categorization" (p.556), their operationalization of the construct implies no self-

categorization or acknowledgement of group membership. The PSC construct appears to

capture the sense of belongingness that early conceptualizations of identification

discussed. The measures of cognitive identification (i.e., identification with the group),

PSC, and commitment to the community (i.e., affective commitment) were found to

discriminate with each other. Thus, the PSC construct appears to be an important

construct in the discussion of identification. This should likely apply outside of a

branding context as well, such as in an organizational context.

<u>Managerial Implications</u>

1. <u>Create opportunities for brand users to interact with each other.</u>

    As conveyed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), developing a perceived

    community among users of a brand could be a critical step in actualizing

    the concept of relationship marketing. When an individual begins to feel a

    sense of community with other users of a brand, the benefits of the brand

    to the consumer extend beyond those of utility and satisfaction and begin

    to encompass symbolic and social benefits as well. When this is the case,

    consumers are more likely to be committed to the brand. By creating

    brand fests, events designed to provide consumers an opportunity to share

    in experiencing the brand with other users, marketers may be able to

    actively foster relationships between users of the brand, thus creating and

    strengthening consumer-brand relationships.

2. <u>Utilize marketing skills to promote the image of brand users.</u>

    Identification with the brand did have a direct influence on brand

    commitment, but it did not have a significant direct impact on PSC. This

    suggests that branding decisions that focus on the product alone may not

    be sufficient for creating long-term committed relationships with

    consumers. In some circumstances, it may be beneficial for marketers to

    promote the image of the consumers who use the brand as well as the

brand itself. If marketers can make consumers not only feel a sense of community with other brand users, but feel committed to the community, they may be able to strengthen the commitment of those individuals to the brand.

3. <u>Acknowledge and support the community by developing promotional ideas targeting community members.</u>

   Consumers who perceive a sense of community with other brand users are likely to promote the brand and share information about the brand with other consumers. Thus, by creating a sense of community among brand users, marketers may be able to produce a group of "brand champions" whose commitment to and promotion of the brand to others may support, and perhaps in some cases even outweigh, the influence of paid advertising and promotions. Marketers should strive to create a consumer base of such devoted individuals. These individuals provide continual financial support for companies through repurchasing the brand and recruiting new brand users. Furthermore, such consumers are willing to pay higher prices for the product and are likely to be more resilient to negative information about the brand and even instances of brand failure.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present research has a number of limitations. Perhaps the most important limitation of this study is manner in which data was collected. Due to the data collection procedure it was not possible to ascertain the differences between responses and non-responses. It may be that those individuals who chose to respond were the most identified with the brand or the community. Membership in online groups developed around a particular brand may be comprised primarily of consumers who seek out the group because they already identify with the brand. Additionally, as discussed in the methodology section, the online groups that comprised the respondent pool allowed members to choose a means of group message delivery, ranging from receiving no emails to receiving individual emails for each message posted to the group. It may be that only members who strongly identify with the brand would frequently receive messages from the group. However, the responses for identification with the brand, identification with the group, and PSC showed an acceptable degree of variance. Therefore, it remains uncertain as to whether the sample was indeed representative of the populations. Furthermore, because the study utilized a self-administered survey format, various response biases and common-method variance could inflate the relationships reported. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to minimize the effects of various biases.

The web platform may pose additional concerns for the findings of this research. Respondents may have been unclear as to whether questions assessing identification with the group and commitment to the community were referring to other members of the online group or all other users of the brand. Therefore it is difficult to ascertain whether

respondents were likely indicating commitment to the online community or commitment to a more broad community of brand users. Future research should examine these relationships using a respondent pool that is not recruited from existing online communities.

One important contribution of this research is the development of a unidimensional PSC scale that can be utilized in marketing research. The original conceptualizations of the PSC construct suggested a multidimensional construct. However, many of the elements that comprise these dimensions appear to be captured as unique constructs (e.g. identification, commitment to the community) in various marketing literature. While the scale development procedure revealed a unidimensional scale, it may be that some facets of the original conceptualization have not been fully accounted for in this research. Future research should examine additional constructs that will capture the many facets of the multiple dimensions that comprised early conceptualizations of PSC.

Another limitation of this study is the limited focus on various antecedents of PSC. Because this was the first study attempting to measure PSC among users of a brand, the primary objective of the research involved verifying the relationships between PSC and favorable brand-related outcomes that have been proposed in previous literature (i.e., McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig 2002, Muniz and O'Guinn 2001). Identification with the brand and identification with the group were examined as antecedents of PSC, but additional variables should be investigated as possible antecedents of PSC. For instance, an individual's level of involvement with the brand will likely have an influence on PSC. It would be anticipated that enduring involvement

with the brand will have a strong positive influence on PSC, while situational involvement will have less of an impact. The benefits sought from consumption of the brand may have a direct influence on PSC. Consumers seeking symbolic and social benefits (e.g., self-expression, status indicator) may be more likely to experience PSC than consumers simply seeking utilitarian and hedonic benefits. Attitudes toward the brand, brand personality, the prestige of the brand, and the distinctiveness of the brand may also impact PSC directly. These constructs should be included in future research on PSC and brand-based communities.

The outcomes investigated in this study were all favorable outcomes. Much knowledge could be gained by examining potentially negative outcomes associated with PSC. There may be a point when a strong sense of community among a very large consumer base begins to overpower the brand and the marketing efforts of brand managers. The finding that commitment to the community had a negative influence on word-of-mouth promotion may indicate that elite members of brand-based communities may want to keep the brand to themselves. It is possible that such commitment to the community could actually lead to some individuals discouraging others from using the brand, if they believed others to be using the brand for the "wrong reasons." Thus, membership status (i.e., high versus low) within the community hierarchy should be examined for its potential moderating effect between both commitment to the community and brand commitment with other outcome variables. Future research should also try to identify potentially negative outcomes of PSC.

This study examined the theme park industry. Due to the nature of the industry, both service and product-related experiences may have influenced consumer responses.

It is unclear whether these results are generalizable to product-oriented brands, service-oriented brands, or both. It may be that for some products, the relationships between PSC and identification with group and identification with the brand will be different. For example, products that are difficult to operate, such as high tech products, may lead to higher levels of identification with the group, due to individuals seeking help from other users of the brand, and lower levels of identification with the brand, due the difficulty associated using the brand. The degree of interaction between members should also be examined as an additional explanatory variable. Future research should attempt to reproduce these results in various contexts, examining the differences between industries and product categories.

The hypothesized moderating effect of identity salience on the relationship between PSC and brand commitment was not tested because two of the constructs did not discriminate with each other. Both of the scales utilized were existing scales that have been employed in numerous studies. However, no previous studies have included both measures. It is possible that these two constructs are too closely related conceptually to be included in the same analysis. Conversely, it may be that one or both of the measures do not adequately capture the intended construct. Future research should attempt to identify more appropriate measures for both brand commitment and identity salience. Moreover, additional variables such as involvement with the brand and attachment to the brand may be examined in place of identity salience.

A final limitation of this study involves the lack of focus on the influence of the community on other individuals. For instance, it is worthwhile to know if information received from other brand users is perceived to be more useful, accurate, and persuasive

than information received from the company, either directly or via advertising. It may also be beneficial to examine whether the perceived image of a brand-based community has any effects on the perceived image of the brand. Additionally, is it possible for marketers to manipulate the image of a community of brand users, thus enhancing brand image? These concerns should be addressed in future studies.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study detailed above was to develop a measure of PSC and examine the influence of the construct on various brand-related outcomes. The results suggest that PSC is an important construct for consideration when attempting to develop a deeper understanding of brand commitment. At the individual level, PSC with other brand users, an individual's perception of membership in the group, has a positive influence on brand commitment and other related outcomes. Managing the image of the brand and the image of the community of brand users will likely be a challenging task for brand managers. However, it is important that brand managers attempt to manage both.

The research of McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) was extended, and additional support for the importance of studying brand-based communities was provided. Results revealed that some of the markers of community identified by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) are, in fact, outcomes of community rather than components of it. The importance of the brand has also been highlighted, contrasting the perspective of McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) that the existence and meaningfulness of brand communities arise from customer experiences rather than the brand. The results also reveal that consumers may perceive a sense of

community with other brand users without direct personal interaction. Supporting

previous research, the results revealed that perceived community among users of a brand

leads to positive psychological and behavioral outcomes.

The PSC construct was shown to be an important construct in the discussion of

identification, capturing the sense of belongingness that early conceptualizations of

identification had included, but recent operationalizations had inadequately captured.

The findings also provide support for the basic premise of Social Identity Theory,

suggesting that brands may serve as a basis for social identification. In sum, the findings

of this dissertation add contributions to both academic and managerial discussions of

brand commitment, brand based communities, and identification with the brand and other

users of the brand.

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APPENDIXES

Measures

Cognitive Identification with the Brand (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000)

- Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of Disney World.

- Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents Disney World. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and Disney World's identities.

	My Identity	Disney World's Identity	
A	○	○	Far Apart
B	○○		Close Together but Separate
C	◐◑		Very Small Overlap
D	◐◑		Small Overlap
E	◑		Moderate Overlap
F	◑		Large Overlap
G	◉		Very Large Overlap
H	○		Complete Overlap
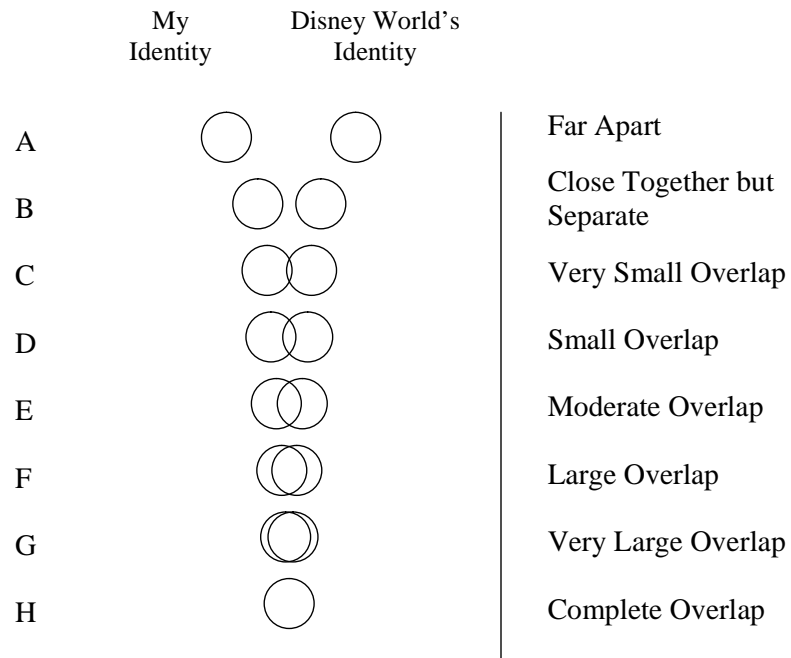
Cognitive Identification with Other Users (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000)

- Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of other Disney World guests.

- Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents other Disney World guests. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and other guests' identities.

Psychological Sense of Community

- I feel strong ties to other Disney World guests
- I find it very easy to form a bond with other Disney World guests
- I feel a sense of being connected to other Disney World guests
- A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who visit Disney World
- Visiting Disney World gives me a sense of community
- I feel a sense of community with other people who visit Disney World

Identity Salience (Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003)

- I really don't have any clear feelings about being a Disney World guest
- Being a Disney World guest is something I rarely even think about
- For me, being a Disney World guest means more than just visiting the park
- Being a Disney World guest is an important part of who I am

Commitment to the Community (adapted from Morgan and Hunt 1994)

- Membership in this community is something I am very committed to
- Being a member of this community is very important to me
- Membership in this community is of very little significance to me
- Membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely
- Being a member of this community is very much like being family
- Membership in this community is something I really care about
- Membership in this community deserves my maximum effort to continue

Will Attend Brand Events

- If given the opportunity, I would attend an event put on by Disney World

Brand Commitment (adapted from Morgan and Hunt 1994)

- This brand is something I am very committed to
- This brand is very important to me
- This brand is of very little significance to me
- This brand is something I intend to use indefinitely
- Using this brand is very much like being family
- This brand is something I really care about
- This brand deserves my maximum effort to continue using

Brand Preference

- I will continue to do business with Disney World even if its prices increase somewhat
- I will pay a higher price than competitors charge for the benefits I currently receive from Disney World
- I will consider Disney World as my first choice for theme parks
- I will visit Disney World even if other parks are lower priced

Celebrate Brand History

- I enjoy sharing the history of Disney World with other people
- I find the history of Disney World to be very interesting
- I am familiar with the history of Disney World

Word-of-Mouth Promotion

- I say positive things about Disney World to other people
- I do not speak favorably about Disney World
- I encourage my friends and relatives to visit Disney World
- I recommend Disney World to those people who seek my advice
- I do not suggest Disney World to others

Fashion Merchandise Study

The following questionnaire is intended to help understand the role that fashion plays in various consumer activities. Your responses are confidential!

Are you an American citizen?   Yes   _____   No _____

Please circle your gender.   Female   Male

Instructions

For each item, circle the response or fill in the blank that best describes how you frequently feel or act. There are no right or wrong answers. Just select the response that most accurately describes how you actually feel or act in your daily life, <u>not</u> how you wish you would act.

Please answer all questions!!!

Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of other people who purchase and/or wear Old Navy clothing.

Not at all _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Very much

           1   2   3   4   5   6   7

For each item below, please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward the group of consumers who purchase and/or wear Old Navy clothing.

|	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I really fit in with fellow Old Navy shoppers	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel strong ties to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I consider myself to have different interests than people who buy competing brands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I find it very easy to form a bond with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other people who buy Old Navy clothing and I want the same things from this brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel a sense of being connected to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel like I belong to the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who buy Old Navy clothing have more in common than just purchasing the brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The friendships and associations I have with other people who buy Old Navy clothing mean a lot to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel loyal to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Because we have similar interests, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Besides buying the clothing, I have something in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would be willing to work together with others on something to improve Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Because we have a common preference for the brand, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
There is a distinction between people who buy Old Navy clothing and people who buy competing brands	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing gives me a sense of community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I believe that I have a similar lifestyle to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing is like being part of a group of friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have more in common with people who buy Old Navy clothing than with people who do not	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
My own interests are very similar to the interests of other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I take an interest in the activities of others who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have developed relationships with other people because I buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Because we have similar lifestyles, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The people I am most similar to buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have met new friends because I buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think I agree with most people who buy Old Navy clothing about what is important in life	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The feelings I have toward other people who buy Old Navy clothing could be described as a sense of community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I like to think of myself as similar to the people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel comfortable as a member the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
If other people who buy Old Navy clothing were planning something, I'd think of it as something we're doing rather than something they're doing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have a lot in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I try to interact with other people who buy Old Navy clothing when I can	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who buy Old Navy clothing share the same values	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing, despite having little else in common with them	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is something I am very committed to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being a member of this community is very important to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is of very little significance to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being a member of this community is very much like being family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is something I really care about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community deserves my maximum effort to continue	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents other people who purchase and/or wear Old Navy clothing. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and other users' identities.
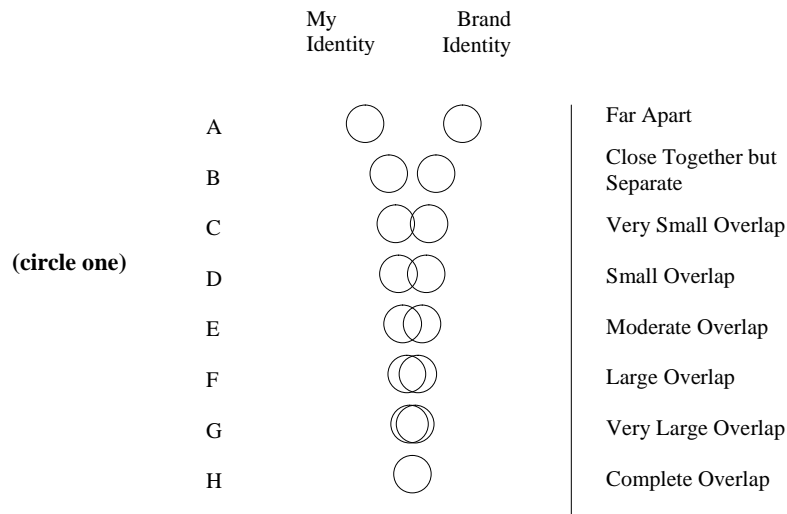
	My Identity	Brand User Identity	
A	◯	◯	Far Apart
B	◯◯		Close Together but Separate
C	◯◯		Very Small Overlap
D	◯◯		Small Overlap
E	◯◯		Moderate Overlap
F	◯◯		Large Overlap
G	◯◯		Very Large Overlap
H	◯		Complete Overlap

(circle one)

In general, would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with Old Navy clothing?

Very familiar	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	Very unfamiliar
	7 6 5 4 3 2 1	

Would you consider yourself informed or uninformed about Old Navy clothing?

Highly informed	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	Not at all informed
	7 6 5 4 3 2 1	

Would you consider yourself knowledgeable about Old Navy clothing?

Know a great deal	_____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____	Know nothing at all
	7 6 5 4 3 2 1	

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I say positive things about Old Navy clothing to other people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not speak favorably about Old Navy clothing to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I encourage my friends and relatives to purchase Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I recommend Old Navy clothing to those people who seek my advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not suggest Old Navy clothing to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Other people think highly of Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
It is considered prestigious to buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing has an outstanding reputation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is a first class, high-quality brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing has a distinctive identity	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing stands out from its competitors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is unique	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I think about being an Old Navy shopper often	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I would feel a loss if I were forced to quit buying Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I really don't have any clear feelings about buying Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being an Old Navy shopper is an important part of who I am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
For me, being an Old Navy shopper means more than just buying the product	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being an Old Navy shopper is something I rarely even think about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Buying Old Navy clothing communicates who I am to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who buy Old Navy clothing share similar interests	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Buying Old Navy clothing makes me feel good about myself	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Buying Old Navy clothing says something about who I am	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who buy Old Navy clothing share similar values	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is something I am very committed to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is very important to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is of very little significance to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is something I intend to purchase indefinitely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Wearing Old Navy clothing is very much like being family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is something I really care about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing deserves my maximum effort to continue buying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of Old Navy clothing.

Not at all _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Very much
            1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Based on your existing knowledge of and/or experience with Old Navy clothing, please indicate your opinions regarding the brand:

Favorable   ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____   Unfavorable
                 7   6   5   4   3   2   1

Pleasant   ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____   Unpleasant
                 7   6   5   4   3   2   1

Good   ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____ : ____   Bad
                 7   6   5   4   3   2   1

Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents Old Navy clothing. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and Old Navy's identities.

	My Identity Brand Identity	
A	○ ○	Far Apart
B	○○	Close Together but Separate
C	⬭⬭	Very Small Overlap
D	⬭⬭	Small Overlap
E	⬭⬭	Moderate Overlap
F	⬭⬭	Large Overlap
G	⬭⬭	Very Large Overlap
H	○	Complete Overlap

(circle one)

Please circle the appropriate response to the following questions for classification purposes.

Approximately how long have you purchased and/or worn Old Navy clothing?

| Never | 1-2 years | 2-3 years | 3-4 years | 4 or more years |

How frequently do you interact with other people who buy Old Navy clothing?

| Never | Very Seldom | Seldom | Sometimes | Often | Very Often | Frequently |

Approximately how long have you felt a sense of membership with other people who buy Old Navy clothing?

| Never | 0-1 years | 1-2 years | 2-3 years | 3-4 years | 4 or more years |

Age: <18   18-21   22-25   26-30   30-35   >35

Thank you for your contribution to this project.

Fashion Merchandise Study

The following questionnaire is intended to help understand the role that fashion plays in various consumer activities. Your responses are confidential!

Are you an American citizen?   Yes   _____   No   _____

Please circle your gender.   Female   Male

Instructions

For each item, circle the response or fill in the blank that best describes how you frequently feel or act. There are no right or wrong answers. Just select the response that most accurately describes how you actually feel or act in your daily life, not how you wish you would act.

Please answer all questions!!!

Thank you for your contribution to this project.

For each item below, please circle the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward the group of consumers who purchase and/or wear Old Navy clothing.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I feel strong ties to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I find it very easy to form a bond with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel a sense of being connected to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel like I belong to the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
People who buy Old Navy clothing have more in common than just purchasing the brand	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The friendships and associations I have with other people who buy Old Navy clothing mean a lot to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Because we have similar interests, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel loyal to other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Besides buying the clothing, I have something in common with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing gives me a sense of community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Because we have a common preference for the brand, I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
The feelings I have toward other people who buy Old Navy clothing could be described as a sense of community	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Purchasing/wearing Old Navy clothing is like being part of a group of friends	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel comfortable as a member of the group of consumers who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I feel a sense of community with other people who buy Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

In general, would you consider yourself familiar or unfamiliar with Old Navy clothing?

Very familiar   _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____   Very unfamiliar
         7   6   5   4   3   2   1

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Membership in this community is something I am very committed to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being a member of this community is very important to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is of very little significance to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Being a member of this community is very much like being family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community is something I really care about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Membership in this community deserves my maximum effort to continue	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents **other people** who purchase and/or wear Old Navy clothing. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and other users' identities.

My Identity   Brand User Identity

(circle one)

A   ◯ ◯   Far Apart

B   ◯◯   Close Together but Separate

C   ◯◯   Very Small Overlap

D   ◯◯   Small Overlap

E   ◯◯   Moderate Overlap

F   ◯◯   Large Overlap

G   ◯◯   Very Large Overlap

H   ◯   Complete Overlap

Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of **other people** who purchase and/or wear Old Navy clothing.

Not at all _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Very much
           1   2   3   4   5   6   7

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I say positive things about Old Navy clothing to other people	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not speak favorably about Old Navy clothing to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I encourage my friends and relatives to purchase Old Navy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I recommend Old Navy clothing to those people who seek my advice	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I do not suggest Old Navy clothing to others	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is something I am very committed to	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is very important to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is of very little significance to me	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is something I intend to purchase indefinitely	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Wearing Old Navy clothing is very much like being family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing is something I really care about	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Old Navy clothing deserves my maximum effort to continue buying	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents **Old Navy clothing**. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and Old Navy's identities.

My Identity   Brand Identity

(circle one)

A — Far Apart

B — Close Together but Separate

C — Very Small Overlap

D — Small Overlap

E — Moderate Overlap

F — Large Overlap

G — Very Large Overlap

H — Complete Overlap

Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of **Old Navy clothing**.

Not at all _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ : _____ Very much
           1   2   3   4   5   6   7

Appendix D

Study 2 Survey Instrument

Items Marked with * are required.

Welcome Disney World Group Members

Thank you for your willingness to help out. Before you agree to take part in my survey, please note that you must be over 18 years old to participate. Please read the following information which is your voluntary and informed consent to participate in this research study.

The survey on the following pages is part of a research project being conducted by Doctoral Candidate Brad Carlson (Oklahoma State University). The researcher is not affiliated with or being compensated by Disney World or any other organizations. Once you click on "I Agree" below, you will be presented with a survey that will ask you various questions about Disney World, your feelings toward Disney World, and your feelings toward other Disney World guests. Some basic demographic data will also be collected. The questionnaire should take approximately 10-15 minutes.

For your participation with the survey you will be given the opportunity to enter a drawing to win one of three prizes (one $200 PayPal credit and two $100 PayPal credits). You must complete the entire survey to be eligible for the cash prize. Once you have completed the survey you will be given the opportunity to submit your email address to be entered into the drawing. Your email address will not be given to other parties for any reason and will be deleted from our records once the drawing has been completed. Your IP address will not be viewed or given to other parties. All entry submissions for the drawing will be kept separate from your responses, thus guaranteeing your anonymity.

1. All of your responses are anonymous. No information is being collected other than the responses you submit so it will not be possible to associate any responses with any participant. The data will be stored for up to ten years in secure electronic files to which only the researchers have access.
2. There are no risks associated with your participation in the study.
3. Your participation is voluntary and you are free to stop participating at any time. However, if you do not complete the survey you will not have the opportunity to enter the drawing.
4. The researcher will visit the data gathered in this study for academic publication purposes.
5. Should you have any questions you can contact: Brad Carlson (405) 744-5418 or Dr. Tom Brown (405) 744-5113; a Department Head – Oklahoma State University (405) 744-5192; or the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board (chaired by Carol Olson 405-744-5700).

Having read the above and having no further questions about my participation, by clicking on the "I Agree" button below, I am giving my voluntary and informed consent to participate in this survey.

*

○ I Agree

For each item below, please circle the appropriate response that best describes your knowledge of Disney World. *

Very unfamiliar						Very familiar
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Not at all informed						Highly informed
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Know nothing at all						Know a great deal
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Please take a moment to think of how you perceive Disney World and indicate to what extent each of the following words describes Disney World.

|	Not at all Descriptive						Very Descriptive
Down to earth *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Honest *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Wholesome *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Cheerful *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Daring *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Spirited *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Imaginative *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Up-to-date *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Reliable *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Intelligent *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Successful *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Upper class *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Charming *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Feminine *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Outdoorsy *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Masculine *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Tough *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

For each item below, please click the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward Disney World.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I say positive things about Disney World to other people *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I do not speak favorably about Disney World to others *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I encourage my friends and relatives to visit Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I recommend Disney World to those people who seek my advice *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I do not suggest Disney World to others *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Other people think highly of Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
It is considered prestigious to visit Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World has an outstanding reputation *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is a first class, high-quality theme park *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Disney World has a distinctive identity *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World stands out from its competitors *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is unique *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

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	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I think about being a Disney World guest often *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I would feel a loss if I were forced to quit visiting Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I really don't have any clear feelings about being a Disney World guest *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being a Disney World guest is an important part of who I am *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
For me, being a Disney World guest means more than just visiting the park *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being a Disney World guest is something I rarely even think about *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Visiting Disney World communicates who I am to others *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People who visit Disney World share similar interests *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visiting Disney World makes me feel good about myself *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visiting Disney World says something about who I am *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
People who visit Disney World share similar values *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Disney World is something I am very committed to *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is very important to me *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is of very little significance to me *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is a place I intend to visit indefinitely *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Visiting Disney World is very much like being family *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is something I really care about *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World deserves my maximum effort to continue visiting *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Disney World can be trusted completely *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World is a place that I have great confidence in *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Disney World has high integrity *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

For each item below, please click the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward Disney World.

	Not at all						Very much
Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of Disney World. *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents Disney World. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and Disney World's identities.

	My Identity Brand Identity	
A	○ ○	Far Apart
B	○○	Close Together but Separate
C	○○	Very Small Overlap
D	◯◯	Small Overlap
E	◯◯	Moderate Overlap
F	◯◯	Large Overlap
G	◯	Very Large Overlap
H	◯	Complete Overlap

*

○ A
○ B
○ C
○ D
○ E
○ F
○ G
○ H

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	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
When someone criticizes Disney World, it feels like a personal insult *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am very interested in what others think about Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When I talk about Disney World I usually say 'we' rather than 'they' *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Disney World's successes are my successes *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
When someone praises Disney World, it feels like a personal compliment *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If a story in the media criticized Disney World, I would feel embarrassed *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I will continue to do business with Disney World if its prices increase somewhat *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will pay a higher price than competitors charge for the benefits I currently receive from Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will consider Disney World as my first choice *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I will visit Disney World if other alternatives are somewhat lower priced *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

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	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I will not visit Disney World again *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I will prefer to visit Disney World again *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I will do more business with Disney World in the future *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I often share stories about my experience with Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I often interact with other people who visit Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I am willing to help others learn about visiting Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I exchange favors with fellow guests of Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I often help other Disney World guests with small things or they help me *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I have attended events that support Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
I have attended events that promote Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
If given the opportunity, I would attend an event put on by Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O
If given the opportunity, I would attend an event put on by other people who visit Disney World *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Whenever possible, I try to convince people to visit Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
If someone I knew was going to quit visiting Disney World, I would try to convince them otherwise *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I am familiar with the history of Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I enjoy sharing the history of Disney World with other people *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I find the history of Disney World to be very interesting *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Based on your existing knowledge of and/or experience with Disney World, please indicate your opinions regarding Disney World: *

Unfavorable						Favorable
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Unpleasant						Pleasant
○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Bad						Good
○	○	○	○	○	○	○

*

Ineffective						Effective
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Unhelpful						Helpful
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Not Functional						Functional
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Unnecessary						Necessary
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Impractical						Practical
O	O	O	O	O	O	O

*

Not Fun						Fun
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Dull						Exciting
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Not Delightful						Delightful
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Not Thrilling						Thrilling
O	O	O	O	O	O	O
Un-enjoyable						Enjoyable
O	O	O	O	O	O	O

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In the previous sections you were asked to respond to items based upon your attitudes toward Disney World.

For the following items, please click the appropriate response that best describes your attitudes toward the other guests of Disney World.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
I feel strong ties to other Disney World guests *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I find it very easy to form a bond with other Disney World guests *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel a sense of being connected to other Disney World guests *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
A strong feeling of camaraderie exists between me and other people who visit Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visiting Disney World gives me a sense of community *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I feel a sense of community with other people who visit Disney World *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
Membership in this community is something I am very committed to *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being a member of this community is very important to me *	○	○	○	○	○	○·	○
Membership in this community is of very little significance to me *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Membership in this community is something I intend to maintain indefinitely *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Being a member of this community is very much like being family *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Membership in this community is something I really care about *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Membership in this community deserves my maximum effort to continue *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Not at all						Very much
Please indicate to what degree your self-image overlaps with the image of other Disney World guests. *	O	O	O	O	O	O	O

Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own self-definition or identity and the other circle at the right represents other Disney World guests. Please indicate which case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G, or H) best describes the level of overlap between your own and other guests' identities.

	My Identity Brand User Identity	
A	◯ ◯	Far Apart
B	◯◯	Close Together but Separate
C	◯◯	Very Small Overlap
D	◯◯	Small Overlap
E	◯◯	Moderate Overlap
F	◯◯	Large Overlap
G	◯�)	Very Large Overlap
H	◯	Complete Overlap

○ A
○ B
○ C
○ D
○ E
○ F
○ G
○ H

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	Less than 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 or more years
Approximately how long have you visited Disney World? *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Never	Very Seldom	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Frequently
How frequently do you interact with other people who visit Disney World? *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Less than 1 year	1 year	2 years	3 years	4 years	5 years	6 or more years
Approximately how long can you remember feeling a sense of membership with other people who visit Disney World? *	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

What is your gender? *

○ Male
○ Female

Are you an American citizen? *

○ Yes
○ No

	18-24	25-31	32-38	39-44	45-51	52-58	59 or older
What is your age?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

What is your annual income?

- ○ $10,000 or less
- ○ $10,001 - $20,000
- ○ $20,001 - $30,000
- ○ $30,001 - $40,000
- ○ $40,001 - $50,000
- ○ More than $50,000

Please tell in your own words what you believe this study is about:

Please contact **brad.carlson@okstate.edu** if you have any questions regarding this survey.

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Appendix E

IRB Approval Forms

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, November 11, 2004

IRB Application No   BU0514

Proposal Title: Brand-Based Community: The Role of Identification in Developing a Sense of Community Among Brand Users

Reviewed and   Exempt
Processed as:

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved   Protocol Expires: 11/10/2005

Principal
Investigator(s

Brad Carlson   Tom Brown
405D Business   343 CBA
Stillwater, OK 74078   Stillwater, OK 74078

The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

[X] The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact me in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-1676, colson@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Carol Olson, Chair
Institutional Review Board

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date	Tuesday, January 25, 2005	Protocol Expires:	11/10/2005
IRB Application	BU0514		

Proposal Title: Brand-Based Community: The Role of Identification in Developing a Sense of Community Among Brand Users

Reviewed and
Processed as: Exempt

Modification

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s) **Approved**

Principal
Investigator(s) :

Brad Carlson
405D Business
Stillwater, OK 74078

Tom Brown
343 CBA
Stillwater, OK 74078

The requested modification to this IRB protocol has been approved. Please note that the original expiration date of the protocol has not changed. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. All approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

Signature : *Sue C Jacobs*

Sue C. Jacobs, Chair, OSU Institutional Review Board

Tuesday, January 25, 2005
Date

Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board

Date: Thursday, March 31, 2005   Protocol Expires: 11/10/2005

IRB Application No: BU0514

Proposal Title: Brand-Based Community: The Role of Identification in Developing a Sense of Community Among Brand Users

Reviewed and
Processed as: **Modification/Continuation**

Status Recommended by Reviewer(s   **Approved**

Principal
Investigator(s) :

Brad Carlson   Tom Brown
405D Business   343 CBA
Stillwater, OK 74078   Stillwater, OK 74078

Approvals are valid for one calendar year, after which time a request for continuation must be submitted. Any modifications to the research project approved by the IRB must be submitted for approval with the advisor's signature. The IRB office MUST be notified in writing when a project is complete. Approved projects are subject to monitoring by the IRB.

☑ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

Signature :

Sue C. Jacobs, Chair, Institutional Review Board

Thursday, March 31, 2005

Date

VITA

Bradley Dean Carlson

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: BRAND-BASED COMMUNITY: THE ROLE OF IDENTIFICATION
             IN DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG BRAND
             USERS

Major Field: Business Administration

Biographical:

   Personal Data: Born in Dodge City, Kansas, on October 20, 1977, the son of
        Gary and Niki Carlson.

   Education: Graduated from Union High School, Union, Missouri in June, 1996;
        received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and a Master of Arts
        degree in Media Communication from Webster University, St. Louis,
        Missouri in May 2000 and May 2001 respectively. Completed the
        requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree with a major in
        Business Administration from Oklahoma State University in May, 2005.

   Experience: Department of Marketing Graduate Teaching Associate, 2001-2005.

   Professional Memberships: American Marketing Association

   Academic Honor Societies: Omicron Delta Kappa, Psi Chi

Name: Bradley Dean Carlson   Date of Degree: May, 2005

Institution: Oklahoma State University   Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: BRAND-BASED COMMUNITY: THE ROLE OF IDENTIFICATION
                  IN DEVELOPING A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG BRAND
                  USERS

Pages in Study: 171   Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: Business Administration

Scope and Method of Study: Previous research on brand community (i.e. McAlexander,
    Schouten, and Koenig 2002; Muniz and O'Guinn 2001) has established a rich
    qualitative foundation for understanding brand-based communities. The current
    research offers conceptual and empirical triangulation of sorts to existing research by
    specifying and operationalizing relevant constructs for quantitative analysis.

    This research applies the dominant social psychological framework of community (e.g.
    Glynn 1981; Sarason 1974) to existing knowledge on branding, brand community, and
    relationship marketing to examine the social nature of brands. Study One of the
    dissertation offers the conceptualization of psychological sense of community (PSC) as
    applied to the relationships among consumers, other users, and brands as well as the
    development of a psychometrically sound measure of the construct. The
    operationalization of PSC begins by adapting existing measures from the social
    psychology literature (Buckner 1988; Obst, Zinkiewicz, and Smith 2002) and
    augmenting them with new items developed for this study. Appropriate techniques are
    employed to assess the construct validity of the resulting measure.

    Study Two involves an empirical test of a conceptual model of antecedents and
    consequences of PSC. Drawing from recent discussions of organizational identification
    (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000) and consumer-company identification (Bhattacharya and
    Sen 2003), the results reveal that identification with the brand positively influences
    identification with other users of the brand, which positively influences PSC. The
    results support the positive influence of PSC on brand commitment and commitment to
    the community, which in turn moderate the influence of PSC on brand preference,
    positive word-of-mouth about the brand, attending brand events, and sharing the brand
    history.

Findings and Conclusions: The results of this research offer a psychometrically sound
    measure of the PSC construct along with a new perspective on consumer-brand
    relationships to add to the existing brand community literature. The results should
    allow managers an enhanced understanding of drivers of the relationships between
    consumers, other users, and their brands.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Tom J. Brown