Chapter 3
Issues With the Importance of Branding, Brand Personality and Symbolic Meaning of Brands in the Smartphone Industry

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ABSTRACT

The extent to which a brand expresses and enhances one's identity is determined by the level of brand identification and this has a positive effect on word-of-mouth reports. Identification is often linked to the causes and aims of the organization; in instances where the organization is known to stand for a particular cause, consumers are likely to identify with the mission of the company and furthermore to demonstrate loyalty to its products. Drawing on the identity theory perspective, this chapter aims to examine the resistance to brand switching in the smartphone industry. The findings suggest that brand identifiers sometimes proactively generate negative word-of-mouth about brands that they do not identify with, especially after they are exposed to comparative advertising. Several insights regarding the literature on resistance to brand switching in the smartphones industry were identified, including conceptualizing social creativity. Suggestions are offered for future researchers, and implications for managerial practices on the study findings are provided.

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INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Marketing research based on identity theory focuses on how individual consumers behave in agreement with the most salient identity (i.e. the highest in the hierarchy), because it provides the most meaning for the self (Arnett, German & Hunt, 2003; Reed, 2002; Farhana, 2014). This stream of research also frames the customer–brand relationship in the light of what is 'me' and what is 'not me' (Kleine, Kleine & Allen, 1995). Drawing on Bhattacharya, Rao and Glynn's (1995) research, this study posits that customers who identify with a brand are likely to be loyal to the brand, but all brand-loyal customers need not identify with the brand. This view necessitates a detailed analysis of two main aspects of brand loyalty literature to ascertain which perspective is preferred in a competitive market in order to establish and consolidate consumer loyalty.

The chapter examines two major limitations in brand loyalty. The first is that the sustainability of brand loyalty predictors refers to resisting both time and market disruptions (Lam, Arheane & Schillewaert, 2010). However, the brand loyalty literature has mainly focused on how brands perform under normal market conditions (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Ozuem, Thomas, & Lancaster, 2016). Yet as the business environment grows more complex, globalised and innovative, market disruptions become more prevalent. The second limitation in brand loyalty is that the perceived value of a brand is conceptualised and operationalised as a functional utilitarian value. As is prevalent in the brand loyalty literature, this does not capture other non-utilitarian factors, such as socio-psychological benefits, that might motivate customers to continue buying what they buy (e.g. Bagozzi, 1975; Gardner & Levy, 1955; Holbrook & Corfman, 1985; Richins, 1994; Sheth, Newman & Gross, 1991; Solomon, 1983; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Hsu & Liou, 2017). Taking a cognition-based approach, this study proposes that customers identify with brands to satisfy one or more self-definitional needs (Lam et al., 2013; Ahearne, Bhattacharya & Gruen, 2005; Bagozzi & Utpal, 2006; Bhattacharya & Sanker, 2003).

This chapter seeks to examine consumer identification with brands in the Smartphone industry. Specifically, the Smartphone industry was chosen as the product category for this study because it represents a context in which brand switching is most likely to occur due to multiple alternatives and short inter-purchase frequencies (Campo, Gijsbrechts & Nisol, 2000; Goldsmith, 2000). Notably, the market for Smartphones is probably the most dynamic of any in the world, considering the degree and rate of change in technology (Azize, Hakan & Cemal, 2013; Cecere, Corroche & Battaglia, 2015).

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