

**Summaries of Selected Sessions from the
2008 AMA Winter Educators' Conference
(Austin, TX)**

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4.2 Consumer Psychology and Behavior (Special Session)

A Multinational Examination of Customer-Company Identification

Chair:

Michael Ahearne, University of Houston

Discussant:

Sankar Sen, Baruch College/CUNY

Participants:

Customers are Members of Organizations, too: Assessing Foci of Identification in a Brand Community

Richard P Bagozzi, University of Michigan

Massimo Bergami, University of Bologna

Gian Luca Marzocchi, University of Bologna

Gabriele Morandin, University of Bologna

The Service-Profit Chain: A Social Identity Theory Perspective

Christian Homburg, University of Mannheim

Jan Wieseke, University of Mannheim

Wayne Hoyer, University of Texas at Austin

The Role of Culture in Consumer-Brand Identification: A Multinational Examination

Michael Ahearne, University of Houston

C. B. Bhattacharya, Boston University

Son K Lam, University of Houston

Niels Schillewaert, Insites E-Research and Consulting

Session Summary Writer: Abdullah Al-Jafari, Oklahoma State University

Dr. Richard Bagozzi presented his research entitled “Customers are Members of Organizations, Too: Assessing Foci of Identification in a Brand Community”. Dr. Bagozzi focused on the notion of “self-concept” while investigating four different brand communities. He proposed four levels of identification: small, extended network, brand identity, and company identity. The research was conducted within the automotive industry. Owners of a specific brand of cars were surveyed to investigate the relationships between the four levels of identification. Structural Equation Modeling was used to reveal the nature of the relationships. Finally, the research concludes that identities are arranged in a hierarchal pattern.

The next paper in this session addressed the idea of identification chain. Christian Homburg showed that current research focuses on two different links: employee identification and customer identification. Mainly the focus of existing literature is to investigate the impact of each identification type on firm performance or profits. Generally, researchers found significant results for one link but small effect sizes for the other. With service – profit chain this research adds the employee identification to the model. The study was conducted in a travel agency context and the data were analyzed in Structural Equation Modeling. The results show that employee identification adds to the model. The findings indicated better model fit, thus providing support for the identification chain proposed in this research.

Finally, Son Lam addressed identification from a cultural perspective. He defined identification as “the level at which consumers define themselves in terms of psychological oneness with brand.” He showed that identification has three different bases: Affect (emotional attachment), Cognitive (self definitional), and Tripartite (affective + cognitive + evaluative). Individualism and collectivism are probably the most investigated cultural dimensions. In addition to these two dimensions this research focused on uncertainty avoidance (people who feel uncomfortable with unstructured situations) and long-term orientation (the extent to which customers are willing to accept delays). The results showed that collectivistic cultures expressed stronger identification relationships and willingness to pay more compared to individualistic cultures.

Sanker Sen provided insightful feedback on the three papers. He stated that the last paper addressed the identification from a customer brand perspective (C-B), the second paper addressed the identification from customer company perspective (C-C), and the first paper incorporated both perspectives at the same time. He also pointed out that the first paper addressed the antecedents of identification whereas the other two papers addressed the consequences of identification.