

MARKETING COLLOQUIA

SPRING 2017

Tiffany Barnett White

Associate Professor of Business Administration and
Bruce and Anne Strohm Faculty Fellow
University of Illinois at Urbana – Champaign

Date: Thursday, March 30, 2017

Where: 741 JMHH

When: 12:00 PM to 1:20 PM

SEEING BRANDS THROUGH “ME” COLORED GLASSES:

EFFECTS OF SELF-THREAT AND BRAND ATTACHMENT ON BRAND EVALUATIONS

It is well documented that consumers use brands and branded consumption experiences to shape and reflect who they are and want to be (e.g., Belk, 1988; Fournier 1998; Escalas and Bettman 2003). An important type of brand attachment can be referred to as a self-brand connection (SBC). A key premise of recent research on SBC is that, if it is possible that the brand concept (i.e., the way consumers think about the brand) can reflect consumers' self-concept, then it is also possible that the brand concept can affect consumers' self-concept (Cheng, White, Chaplin 2012). To the extent that this is true, consumers' sense of self-worth may be adversely influenced by exposure to negative brand information, which may stem from any number of sources, including competitive brands' marketing communications (e.g., Samsung's attack of iPhones), the news media (e.g., Volkswagen's recent emissions scandal), negative word of mouth or public outcries in social media (e.g., Abercrombie & Fitch's #fitchthehomeless crusade).

Indeed, research by Cheng, White and Chaplin (2012) confirms this possibility. Their research demonstrates that consumers with high SBC respond to negative brand information as they do to personal failure – they experience a threat to their positive self-view. After viewing negative brand information, high (vs. low) SBC consumers reported lower state self-esteem. The impact of these findings is far reaching and significant, as they not only provide additional support for the idea that consumers incorporate brands into their self-concept in meaningful ways, but they also highlight important, yet unintended outcomes of consumer brand attachments.

In this research, we further explore consequences of SBC. Specifically, we examine the notion that if the brand concept can indeed affect the self-concept of consumers with high SBC, then it is important to understand the extent to which opposite might also be true. Do consumers see themselves reflected in their highly connected brands? If so, is it possible that consumers' beliefs about themselves influence their beliefs about the brands to which they feel connected? More specifically, is it possible that the experience of self-threat, which can make consumers feel worse about themselves, can also make them feel worse about their high SBC brands? We examine these questions in the context of brand evaluations and, specifically, consumers' brand trust judgments. In a series of experiments, we demonstrate that self-threats, particularly those resulting from negative feedback, decrease high (vs. low) SBC consumers' self-trust and, therefore, their trust in highly connected brands. Moreover, these effects extend to other brand evaluations, including brand personality and competence.