

THE UNDERLYING DIMENSIONS OF BRANDS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO CUSTOMER VALUE: AN EXPLORATORY EXAMINATION

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Establishing and maintaining a strong brand identity is a primary goal for brand managers. However, little academic research has addressed the individual components of brands that form this overall identity. Here, the authors present qualitative research that reveals the individual dimensions that consumers associate with brands. A theoretical model is then proposed which links these brand dimensions to customer value, brand commitment, and referral behavior. Suggestions are provided as to how brand managers may empirically test this model to gain a better understanding of how brands and consumers may form relationships with each other.

INTRODUCTION

The American Marketing Association defines a brand as a name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers. The specific features and characteristics of a brand contribute to what is referred to as its "identity" (Upshaw 1995). While establishing and maintaining a strong brand identity is a primary goal for brand managers, little academic work has sought to address the specific individual components of brands that form this overall identity. The benefit of such an understanding would allow brand managers to consider the specific components of their brands and how they contribute to desirable outcomes such as customer value, commitment to the brand, and referral behavior.

Therefore, this paper seeks to address the following. First, a literature review outlines the importance of the strategic management of brands and the role that brands play in building relationships with customers. Next, a review of the more broad but commonly-agreed upon *general* dimensions of brands is provided. Qualitative research is then presented

which attempts to elicit the specific underlying dimensions of brands, including the method used, and detailed findings. This is followed by a discussion of the findings, along with a proposed model for utilizing the dimensions of brand identity to assess customer value, brand commitment, and referral behavior.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand-Consumer Relationships

A key component of a long-term brand strategy is the manner in which the brand is identified by consumers. Just as a person's identity serves to provide direction, purpose, and meaning for that person, a brand identity similarly provides direction, purpose, and meaning for the brand (Aaker 1996). Brand identity has been cited in the marketing literature as a key to establishing a relationship between the brand and customer (Grossman 1994; Chalcraft 1995; Aaker 1996). A brand's identity may be thought of as the total composition of words, symbols, ideas, and associations that form a consumer's overall perception of a brand. In other words, an identity is not what a marketer creates, but what *consumers perceive has been created* (Upshaw 1995). These sets of ideas, feelings, and attitudes are crucial for consumers in selecting and adhering

to identities that seem most appropriate (Gardner and Levy 1955).

Few attempts have been made to develop an operational definition or a system for identifying, measuring, and building brand relationships (Blackston 1993). The notion that consumers can carry on relationships with brands has been qualitatively explored by Fournier (1998). Similarly, Webster (1992) calls for further research on factors which lead consumers to seek out and value on-going relationships with brands, as well as how marketers can develop and manage them.

If a firm views the brand as a potential relational partner, the goal or strategy would be to build and maintain the brand-consumer relationship over time, so that the consumer develops a strong commitment to that brand. Brand commitment may be defined as an emotional or psychological attachment to a brand within a product class (Lastovicka and Gardner 1977). Note that this definition involves an attitudinal feeling rather than simply a behavioral intention to repurchase (Beatty and Kahle 1988). Since commitment refers to a long-term emotional bond, the question remains, "Can a consumer have an ongoing 'relationship' with an inanimate object, such as a brand?"

Fournier (1998) states that two basic conditions are needed for a relationship to exist: 1) The relationship must be dyadic, involving reciprocal exchange between partners, and 2) The relationship must add meaning to a person's life. With respect to consumer-brand relationships, the first condition may be satisfied in one of two ways. First, a brand can provide exchange in terms of the "personality" associated with it. The concept of "brand personality," those human characteristics assigned to a brand (Aaker 1997), exists in the literature as early as 1955 (Gardner and Levy). Second, the execution of marketing mix decisions by the firm can be construed as "behaviors" on the part of the brand. This is confirmed by Chalcraft (1995), who states that communication must exist to build the relationship between the brand and consumer. The second "relationship" condition is satisfied by realizing that consumers choose specific brands

based on the meanings that the brands provide (Fournier 1998).

Fostering commitment to the brand has become increasingly important for firms, given the overall decline in consumer loyalty across all types of brands (Crimmins 1992). Instead of focusing on specific brand attributes, which are weak bases for loyalty because they are relatively easy to copy, strong brands focus on an overall brand identity based upon a brand personality and a relationship with customers (Aaker 1994). Certainly then, brand identity has the potential (when properly implemented and maintained) to create customer value and ultimately long-term commitment to the brand.

Customer Value

Many consumers see value as benefits received for costs incurred. Value is typically signaled through such cues as price, product quality, innovation, service quality, and image, which may lead to customer loyalty (Fredericks and Salter 1995). Customer value may be defined as a customer's perceived preference for and evaluation of those product attributes, attribute performances, and consequences arising from use that facilitate (or block) achieving the customer's goals and purposes in use situations (Woodruff 1997). Perceptions of received value lead to overall satisfaction, which is the customer's feeling in response to evaluations of one or more use experiences with a brand (Woodruff 1997).

Multiple value dimensions explain customer choice better than price or quality alone. For example, emotional and social values are just as important to the consumer. Emotional value may be defined as the utility derived from feelings or affective states that a brand generates, while social value may be defined as the utility derived from the product's ability to enhance one's social self-concept (Sweeney and Soutar 2001). Combining all four aspects (quality, price, emotional value and social value) leads to perceived overall value and customer satisfaction (Sweeney and Soutar 2001). By linking the brand dimensions to specific dimensions of customer value, researchers and brand managers

may better understand the extent to which specific brand qualities contribute to overall value for the consumer.

Dimensions of Brand Identity

Table 1 presents different researchers' categorizations of brands at various levels of abstraction, ranging from simple product attributes to more complex symbolic meanings. As can be seen, there is a lack of agreement concerning the general dimensions of a brand. This confusion makes it even more difficult to link brand identity, which is the totality of these dimensions, to other concepts such as customer value and commitment. Brand managers would benefit from a better understanding of the components of brand identity so they can more readily see just how these components work together to add value for the customer and evoke a sense of commitment to the brand.

If brand identity is the key to achieving customer commitment, then brand managers must fully understand all of the underlying dimensions that combine to form this identity. At least three general dimensions of a brand have been identified: a functional dimension, in which the brand serves to solve some type of consumption-related problem; a symbolic dimension, in which the brand is used to associate the user with a desired group, role, or self-image; and an experiential dimension, in which the brand fulfills the individual's sensory pleasure, variety, and/or cognition stimulation (Park, Jaworski and MacInnis 1986; Keller 1993). In fact, a study by Bhat and Reddy (1998) confirmed that brand functionality and symbolism are indeed distinct concepts in consumers' minds. These three general brand dimensions are discussed below in greater detail.

Functional attributes of a brand are the physical characteristics related to the purchase or use of a product (Aaker 1996). Product-related attributes tend to serve a utilitarian function for consumers (Aaker 1997). In other words, they act as a signal of product performance. The physical characteristics of a brand can also serve as signals of quality and/or value (Zeithaml 1988; Dawar and Parker 1994). Intrinsic attributes, such as color, size, and texture, involve the

physical composition of the product (Herzog 1963). Product performance is also considered to be an intrinsic quality or a consequence of usage, because performance is judged only after consumption of the brand has occurred. Selnes (1993) concludes that performance quality as a functional brand dimension is positively related to both reputation and satisfaction, which in turn produces increased customer loyalty. Extrinsic cues are product-related but are not part of the physical product itself; brand name, packaging, country of origin, and price are all examples of extrinsic cues to quality (Zeithaml 1988).

Another example of an extrinsic cue is the organization behind the brand name. The "brand as organization" perspective focuses on the attributes of the organization rather than those of the product or service (Aaker 1996). Organizational characteristics of the brand include firm attributes such as innovation, commitment to quality, concern for the environment, organizational culture, and ethics and values. For example, Saturn is viewed as an organization that is committed to delivering world-class quality. This perception is qualitatively different from the view that the Saturn automobile is a superior product; it instead reflects the organization's values, programs, assets, and skills (Aaker 1996). Other forms of organizational characteristics include the culture and values of the parent company of a specific brand and the particular country in which the organization is headquartered. These organizational characteristics can serve as one means of differentiating the brand from competitors.

Symbolic attributes of brands usually correspond to non-product related attributes and relate to underlying needs for social approval or personal expression and outer-directed self-esteem (Keller 1993). This symbolic component consists of anything that represents the brand in order to meet these needs. This includes visual imagery (i.e., the Nike "swoosh" or McDonald's golden arches), metaphors (i.e., the Prudential rock as a metaphor for strength), and brand heritage (Aaker 1996). The symbol of the brand, as communicated through an appropriate promotional strategy, is part of the long-term investment in the brand's reputation (Gardner

TABLE 1
Dimensions Identified In Various Classificational Structures

Authors	Objective Components	Subjective Components
Gardner and Levy (1955)	Product qualities	Symbolic qualities
Herzog (1963)	Product qualities	Brand personality
Park, Jaworski and MacInnis (1986); Keller (1993)	Functional attributes	Symbolic and experiential attributes
Plummer (1985)	Physical attributes and functional characteristics	Characterizational aspects
Aaker (1997)	Utilitarian functions	Symbolic or self-expressive functions
Aaker (1996)	Brand-as-product, brand-as-organization	Brand-as-person, brand-as-symbol

and Levy 1955). A brand may create customer value by augmenting the core functionality of its offering by creating status and prestige for owners of the product or service (Maklan and Knox 1997). Thus, symbolic attributes of a brand aim to satisfy consumers' psychological needs.

Experiential attributes relate to what it feels like to use the brand. The concept of "brand personality" is a type of association that seems to arise most often as a result of inferences about the underlying user or usage situation (Keller 1993). Brand personality is the association of human personality traits or characteristics to a brand in order to help communicate to consumers its physical elements or attributes (Plummer 1985). Brands often develop a personality of their own that has an effect on whether users decide the image is consistent with their needs (Herbig and Milewicz 1995). In effect, the brand personality serves to suggest to the consumer whether the brand is "appropriate" or "not

appropriate" for his or her particular situation. It can also be the facilitator of communication between consumer and brand, the link through which a relationship evolves (Upshaw 1995).

METHOD

Given the important role of brand identity in creating value and establishing a long-term commitment by customers, it appears that this concept must be more fully understood. While the three above-mentioned broad categories provide a starting point in understanding the underlying dimensions of brands, they do not appear to form a collectively exhaustive model of brand identity which can then be used to relate identity to other concepts such as customer value or commitment. In this light, this qualitative study provides an exploration of the underlying dimensions of brands. Specifically, depth interviews were conducted to determine respondents' opinions and attitudes of why they buy particular brands.

These discussions attempted to elicit from respondents the qualities that lead them to choose one particular brand over another.

In order to generate discussions about specific brands, three general categories of products were presented to respondents: 1) symbolic products, representing such categories as clothing, cosmetics, and fragrances, 2) utilitarian products, representing such categories as computers, electronics, and appliances, and 3) both symbolic and utilitarian products, representing categories such as automobiles, beverages, and athletic shoes. These classifications, used by Aaker (1997) in the development of her brand personality scale, were used here in an attempt to elicit both tangible and non-tangible attributes of brands by respondents.

In order to develop a list of brands which might be used to prompt in-depth discussions, a convenience sample of 20 (50 percent female, mean age of 39) completed a survey which rated whether 40 brands representing twelve product categories were more symbolic or utilitarian in nature. This survey was used simply to assure that a variety of both symbolic and utilitarian brands would be presented to respondents in order to prompt discussions about specific brands. During the subsequent depth interviews, respondents were not limited to discussions of just the specific brands that appeared in the survey.

At the beginning of each interview, a list of these three categories, along with representative brands under each category, was provided to respondents in order to give examples of the types of brands they might want to discuss. Again, this list was meant to be used as a starting point from which respondents could begin to think about the relationships they may have with their own favorite brands.

Several techniques were employed to uncover respondents' assessments of specific brands, including: free association tasks in which respondents were asked to write down the traits or characteristics that first come to mind when thinking about specific brands, sorting techniques in which respondents were asked to make distinctions

between two brands in the same product category, and open-ended questions in which respondents were asked to articulate why they are loyal to certain brands and what is it about the brands that give them added value.

Pretest

A pretest interview was performed to determine the appropriate structure for the remaining interviews. The participant selected for this interview (Louise, age 53) was chosen due to her self-professed commitment to specific brands across a variety of product categories; therefore, it was presumed that she would be able to readily share her experiences and reasons for being loyal to her favorite brands. The provision of a list of sample brands at the beginning of the interview proved helpful during the pretest. To begin the discussion, Louise read the list aloud, indicating if she used a specific brand. This provided a good starting point for Louise in indicating what she liked about particular brands. She was also able to "branch out" and suggest brands she was loyal to which were not included on the list. The main purpose of supplying the list at the beginning of the interview was to make Louise more comfortable by immediately giving her something to say or contribute to the conversation.

Interviews

Following the pretest, six depth interviews were conducted. All of the participants were women who ranged in age from 23 to 75. A general interview format was used to monitor the flow and order of the questions asked. Of course, certain questions about specific brands were tailored to each individual interview. The goal for each respondent was to discuss many different brands over various product categories, so that a general model of the underlying dimensions of brands might emerge.

Each interview lasted approximately one hour and was audio-tape recorded with the respondent's permission. The actual data analysis involved a content analysis and interpretation of the verbatim transcripts of all of the interviews. The purpose of the research was not to psychologically analyze the

respondents' brand choices; rather, the researcher was looking for *commonalities* across brands in order to create a model of brand identity. The goal was to determine what dimensions of a brand emerge as a result of the attributes named by respondents. Therefore, the results focus on the brand attributes and dimensions themselves, rather than on the individual respondents. For ease of following the results, a list of respondents along with demographic information is presented in Table 2.

RESULTS

A collaborative examination of the interviews revealed four distinct dimensions of brands: physical product attributes or characteristics, quality, the company or manufacturer behind the brand, and experiential aspects associated with the brand. Additionally, some of the dimensions could be further sub-divided. A detailed discussion of each of these dimensions follows.

Physical Product Attributes

Physical characteristics of the products themselves were consistent across all brands and all respondents. While many characteristics specific to individual brands were offered as reasons that those brands were chosen over competing brands, three overriding themes were uncovered: taste, packaging, and variety. These can be considered sub-dimensions of this category.

With respect to food brands, taste emerged as a dominant sub-dimension:

"I like Fountainhead water. I know its just water, but it tastes better to me. I don't like Evian; Evian is very salty to me. If you ever try them together, you'll notice the difference. Fountainhead tastes purer and cleaner to me, so I like it better." (Kristen)

"There is a difference between the Campbell's soups and the store brands. Some is texture. A lot of it is taste. They are a lot saltier than Campbell's.... Del Monte has always been the ketchup. Now, I prefer the Contadina in the

tomato paste because I think it is thicker, and there again, you go back to taste." (Gail)

"Oh, hot dog wieners...I'm a big fan of Ball Park Franks all beef wieners. I have to have them. I'm just real picky because they're made with all beef and therefore they taste better. If I'm out somewhere and have to eat a hot dog that I'm not sure about, it always seems to taste funny to me - I guess that's just a psychological thing!" (Sarah)

Along with taste, another sub-dimension of the "physical product" which emerged during the interviews was packaging of the product. Packaging often serves to distinguish one brand from another in an otherwise undifferentiated product category (Schmitt and Simonson 1997). The packaging of particular brands serves as a signal for customers to choose them over competitors:

"I go by packaging, which I think is a big reason why a lot of people buy certain brands too. You go in the grocery sometimes and you see things that are packaged so well that you almost can't not reach for it. Like Boboli for example. I like the way they are packaged. They're big, they're visible, it makes me want to reach for them. Like Dentyne Ice - it's a new packaging for gum. Have you seen it? Its different, it catches your eye, it makes you want to pick it up." (Kristen)

In fact, packaging was so strong a consideration that some respondents who claimed to be extremely loyal to a specific brand could not even remember their brand by its name, but could only identify it by its package and labeling. Consider the following:

"I get the Hunt's ketchup. Or wait...is it Heinz? Whichever has the white label. I don't know which it is, I just look for that label on the bottle. I'm thinking its Heinz..." (Sarah)

"I use Tide laundry detergent of course. But I use another one just for the stains. I can't think of its name. You know, its the blue one with the red stripe..it comes in that bottle... Shoot, I can picture it!" (Joan)

TABLE 2
Respondents and Their Characteristics

Name*	Age	Occupation	Marital Status
Sarah	23	receptionist	recently married
Noreen	37	paralegal	married
Carol	39	secretary	married
Kristen	42	secretary	single
Louise	54	homemaker	married
Joan	71	retired	widowed
Gail	75	retired	married

* Names were changed to ensure anonymity.

Packaging may also serve to provide some function, in addition to the product itself. Thus, the functional purpose of the package itself becomes a reason that customers are loyal to particular brands:

“I always buy Tide. One of the reasons that I buy it is the package that it comes in - it comes in the refillable. It is one of the few that do. In fact, I don’t think any of the others come in a refillable bottle. I use Tide refillable because it is better for the environment. I’m an environmentalist. Not a big one, but I try to do what I can.” (Kristen)

A final sub-dimension of physical product attributes would be the physical variety of products that name brands offer. Respondents professed commitment to the “bigger name” brands in particular product categories because they offered more types, flavors, sizes, etc. For example:

“With the soups, I have tried a store brand, but I didn’t like it. Campbell’s has the largest variety of stuff. And anytime you can find the largest variety, then you will select that.” (Gail)

“When I have a long list with a lot of things to get, then I go to Dillards because they have everything. I usually stick with the department stores instead of the specialty stores - mainly because of the variety. Dillards has a huge selection.” (Sarah)

Quality

Two distinct sub-dimensions of quality emerged across all brands and all respondents: consistency and durability. Consistency was viewed as the ability of the respondents’ favorite brands to perform reliably time after time; in other words, the brand could be counted on to perform the same consistently. Some examples of the “consistency” sub-dimension are as follows:

“I cannot stand the non-brand cokes. For some reason, I can count on (Coca-Cola Classic) to taste the same. But Pepsi sometimes... if I get a two-liter, it tastes different than if I get it in a can. So Coke to me always tastes the same.” (Sarah)

“At the grocery store, I always go for the quality over just getting something on sale. I’m sure that a lot of the non-branded products are just as good, but I’d rather pay more money and get the brand - the same ones that have done well for me and consistently performed.” (Kristen)

“I love Liz Claiborne clothes. I can always find my size. And I can always count on them fitting the same. Like a pair of pants. If I go to the same department in a different store, and the pants look just alike, then I can count on them being the same.” (Sarah)

Whereas respondents defined consistency as performing the same over time, durability was seen as “holding up” or “lasting a long time” to respondents:

“I like L.L. Bean jeans because they fit me well. And I’ve had some for four years now and they are still wearing well.” (Louise)

“I’ll always buy Kenmore appliances, because every Kenmore I have had has lasted a minimum of twenty years. And longer. I have a dryer that’s a Kenmore right now, and its 23 years old. I have a Kenmore refrigerator that is 31 years old. And I just believe in their appliances, because they last. And the fact that they really do not have to be serviced very frequently.” (Louise)

Company/Manufacturer

In addition to physical product attributes and the quality of the product, the manufacturer of the brand also surfaced as a reason that respondents claimed commitment to specific brands. Whereas the former dimensions were tangible and could easily be described, respondents had a more difficult time saying what exactly it was about the company that attracted them to their brands. Across respondents, a general sense of trust in the bigger, more established companies was present:

“I buy Kraft products because of the company. It is a good company, plus I think the taste is

better too. In my head, it is a four star company. It could be full of crooks and thieves, and I would never know (laughs), but I think that it is a good, wholesome company.” (Kristen)

“I always think that anything made by Sony is good. I trust Sony, and I think that they wouldn’t let me down. It’s another one of those ‘Kraft’ companies! I just trust Sony.” (Kristen)

“I trust Clinique because I think it is a clean company. Their products are hypoallergenic. I feel good about Clinique.” (Sarah)

Experiential Aspects

A final dimension of brands lies not so much in the brands themselves as with the customers who use them. An overall attitude of “I’ve always used it, it’s never let me down, so why switch?” was observed across respondents. This dimension is potentially the most dangerous for brand managers, as customers must possess strong emotional sentiment and commitment toward their favorite brand in order to resist pressures by competitors (free samples, coupons) as brand managers try to overcome the “Why switch?” mentality. Some comments support this type of attitude:

“I’m a big one on loyalty. It means having a good reason to switch. That is how I feel about Tide. It has never gone wrong, so why change? I’m loyal to it. Like I should buy it. My mom used it, and I started using what she used. I just know it works, so I don’t want to change. Because I know it works good.” (Sarah)

“We use AT&T phone service, because we have never had a problem with them. They have never messed up our bill, and their rates are reasonable. And it is reliable service. We have never been without service. So why should I switch?” (Louise)

“I like Toshiba televisions. And I only like Toshiba televisions because I’ve had one, and its been an excellent television. So recently when I went looking for a television, I tried to look

only at Toshibas. I ended up not having to buy one, but if I had, it would have been another Toshiba. Its just been a good TV for me. Now, I may have bought a Zenith the first time and it would have been a good one, but I happened to buy a Toshiba. So I'd stick with that one." (Kristen)

DISCUSSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Now that underlying dimensions of brands have been identified, the next step is to determine exactly how each dimension contributes to customer value, and ultimately to brand commitment. The theoretical model of brand-consumer relationships presented in Figure 1 proposes how these linkages might occur. This model incorporates the brand dimensions revealed by the depth interviews and links them to the customer value dimensions found by Sweeney and Soutar (2001) – price, quality, emotional value, and social value. The curved arrows linking the brand dimensions to each other in Figure 1 indicate that these dimensions are interrelated. In other words, consumers may perceive the brand from an overall perspective first, then consider the various dimensions, such as physical attributes, secondary (Vázquez, del Río and Iglesias 2002). Thus, it is feasible that the consumer perceives the physical product attributes as integrally associated with other dimensions of the brand (Vázquez, del Río and Iglesias 2002). As another example, Sarah stated that she thought of Clinique as a clean company, then immediately referenced the fact that Clinique's products are hypoallergenic. Clearly, she is associating an attribute of the product with the company itself.

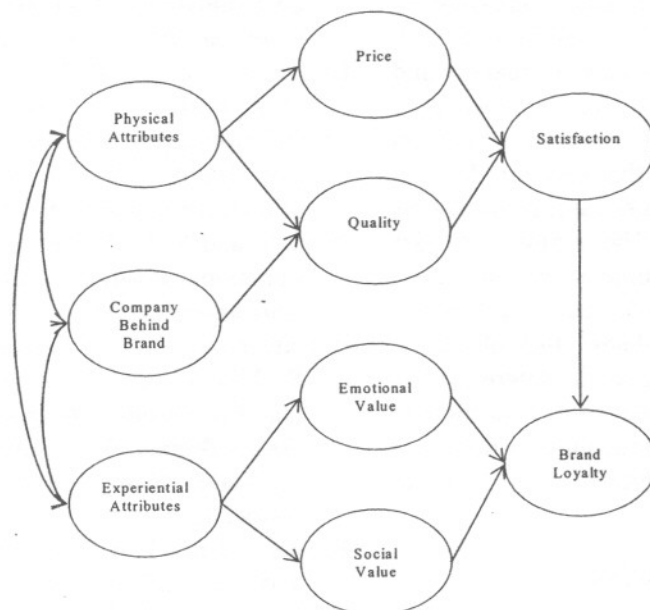
The constructs that appear on the left-hand side of the model (the dimensions of brand identity) may be thought of as the brand's contribution to the brand-consumer relationship. The constructs in the middle of the model (the dimensions of customer value) are the consumer's evaluations of what he or she receives from the brand. Note that while quality was a definite outcome in the depth interviews, it is viewed by the authors as more of an *evaluation* of the brand's offering. As it is included in the

dimensions of customer value found by Sweeney and Soutar (2001), quality is included here as a value dimension rather than a brand dimension. The constructs on the right-hand side of the model are considered the consumer's contribution to the brand-consumer relationship. If the consumer evaluates the brand positively, then he or she gives back to the "relationship" by spreading positive word of mouth (or referral behavior) about the brand, and remaining emotionally committed to the brand. The specific construct linkages are described below.

First, it is proposed that physical product attributes contribute positively to the value dimensions of price and quality. If a brand possesses the physical features or attributes that best serve the consumer's needs, then that consumer is likely to think the price is fair and the brand is of high quality. It makes sense that the functional brand dimension (physical attributes) relates to the functional dimensions of value (price and quality).

It is also proposed that the company or manufacturer behind the brand acts as a signal to product quality. Results from the depth interviews reveal that consumers may think of the company as a high-quality company due to the fact that the company appears honest and trustworthy, is environmentally friendly, and is socially responsible. Similarly, Willmont (2003) calls for companies to strive to become better corporate citizens, which entails companies taking an active interest in local and wider communities and society at large. Brown and Dacin (1997) empirically examined the relationship between corporate evaluation and product evaluation by consumers. Results were mixed; there was a statistically significant positive relationship between corporate evaluation and product evaluation when fictitious companies were used, but the relationship became nonsignificant when actual companies were used in the questionnaire. Further research is necessary to empirically establish that consumer attitudes towards the company have an impact on consumer evaluations of the product's quality.

FIGURE 1
Theoretical Model of Brand-Consumer Relationships



emotional value and social value are likely to result. Unlike physical attributes and the company behind the brand which lead to perceptions of price and quality, from those positive experiences the customer has felt with the brand. Emotion theory states that emotions occur only when an event is appraised by the individual as being relevant to his or her concerns (Krampf, Ueltschy and d'Amico 2003). For example, Adaval (2003) states that personal experiences with a brand might elicit positive affect and might trigger the retrieval of prior positive experiences or associations with that brand. Abu-Shalback Zid (2004) found that for business-to-business relationships, 87 percent of small and mid-sized businesses are likely to develop a long-term relationship with a brand if they have a positive experience with it. Internally, positive brand experiences would cause the consumer to enjoy the product and feel good about using it (emotional value). Externally, as others see the consumer's experience with the brand, they may develop a more favorable perception of that consumer and may make the consumer feel more accepted (social value).

The value dimensions of price and quality in turn have a positive impact on positive word of mouth, or

referral behavior. Defined as a willingness to recommend the brand to others, referral behavior is positively related to consumers' evaluations of the brand. For example, if the brand's physical attributes perform as expected, and the consumer evaluates the price as fair and the quality as high, then the consumer is likely to share his or her positive experiences with other consumers.

The emotional and social-based value dimensions are proposed to contribute positively to brand commitment. As described earlier, brand commitment is an emotional or psychological attachment to a brand. This attachment is likely to occur if the consumer receives emotional and social value as a result of direct experiences with the brand. Likewise, it is proposed that brand commitment contributes positively to referral behavior. Those consumers who do possess a psychological bond or attachment to the relationship should want to share their positive experiences with others.

If such a model were empirically tested, then brand managers would be able to determine exactly how each dimension contributes to customer value. Future research possibilities include the development of valid scales which measure each of the three

proposed "brand identity" dimensions. Vázquez, del Río and Iglesias (2002) provide some guidance for this task; they developed a scale to measure the functional and symbolic utility associated with brands. Perhaps these items may be adapted and expanded upon to fit with the three dimensions of brands uncovered in this study. Existing scales from Sweeney and Soutar (2001) that measure the four specific dimensions of customer value could also be utilized. Factor analysis could be employed in order to ensure that these seven dimensions are indeed separate/distinct concepts in the customer's mind. Once this is done, a statistical analysis tool such as structural equation modeling could determine the extent to which the brand dimensions contribute to the various dimensions of customer value, and indirectly to brand commitment and referral behavior.

CONCLUSION

Understanding needs and expectations of customers is of utmost importance to brand managers. Personal experiences with brands and emotions elicited from these experiences undoubtedly have an effect on levels of brand commitment and referral behavior. By testing the model proposed here, brand managers will have a better understanding of how each brand dimension contributes to important outcomes such as customer value, commitment, and referral behavior. By developing a strong and positive identity, brands can indeed maintain long-term relationships with consumers.

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