



Predicting high consumer-brand identification and high repurchase: Necessary and sufficient conditions



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this paper is to explore the necessary and sufficient conditions to obtain high consumer-brand identification (CBI) and high repurchase intentions (Rep). Different from most business research on CBI and Rep that is based on symmetric thinking, this paper uses asymmetric analytics and performs fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis. The findings show that (1) although it is possible to identify the necessary conditions for very high consumer-brand identification and very high repurchase intentions, no combination of conditions is sufficient to achieve these outcomes; (2) affective drivers have more importance than cognitive drivers for obtaining high CBI; (3) the configuration solutions for high CBI include at least two antecedents; (4) high CBI is a sufficient but not necessary condition for high Rep; (5) high Rep can also be achieved if brand-self similarity and brand identity occur; and (6) memorable brand experiences alone may be enough to obtain high Rep.

1. Introduction

Despite the recent attention that has been devoted to consumer-brand identification (CBI) and the important insights that have been provided by the past research, it is also recognized that the knowledge of this phenomenon is still limited (e.g., Elbedweihy, Jayawardhena, Elsharnouby, & Elsharnouby, 2016; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012). To advance the knowledge on CBI, this paper aims to identify the sufficient and necessary conditions that lead to high CBI and high repurchase intent (Rep), as well as the configurations that result in very high or low values of CBI and Rep. This configurational approach enables a better understanding of CBI and provides actionable insights, which leads to more efficient and effective marketing strategies.

CBI corresponds to “a consumer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand” (Lam, Ahearne, Mullins, Hayati, & Schillewaert, 2013, p. 235), and it is influenced by cognitive-based drivers and affective-based drivers. Cognitive-based drivers include brand-self similarity (BSS) and brand identity (BI), and affective-based drivers include brand social benefits (BSB) and memorable brand experiences (MBE). The relative importance of each of these categories is still controversial in the marketing literature. For example, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) suggest that affective drivers have a stronger role, while Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) indicate a major influence of cognitive drivers.

The previous research has suggested that the extent to which

consumers identify with a brand influences Rep (e.g., Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005) and brand loyalty (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013; Yeh, Wang, & Yieh, 2016). Thus, in this paper, we also analyze the conditions that lead to Rep that also reflect brand loyalty.

The present study is original and valuable both in theory and in methodology. The current research on CBI has been using symmetric methods, such as multiple regression analyses and structural equation modeling (e.g., Lam et al., 2013; Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012; Wolter, Brach, Cronin, & Bonn, 2016). These methods report the net effects of a set of independent variables on a dependent variable and focus on linear relationships (Woodside, 2013). In this paper, we resort to a different approach: we use fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA). This approach allows for the identification of the combinations of conditions that lead to a given outcome, and it also sheds light on the degree of sufficiency and the degree of necessity of those conditions. It takes into account the possible asymmetric effects of the variables, considering that, in some configurations, the presence of a given condition may contribute to reaching the outcome and, in other contexts, it may be its absence that leads to the outcome.

Conceptually, this research considers the cognitive-based and affective-based drivers of CBI, and it investigates the combinations of cognitive-based and affective-based drivers that may lead to the outcomes of interest. The conceptual models are presented in Fig. 1. First, the different configurations to achieve high CBI are assessed (step

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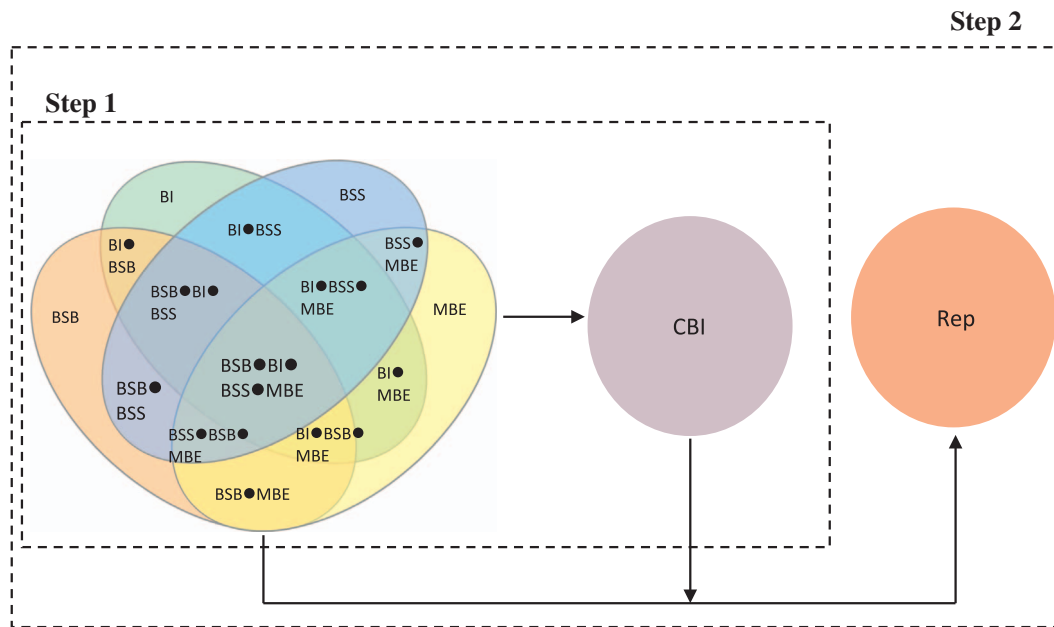


Fig. 1. Conceptual models.

Note: Rep = repurchase intent, CBI = consumer-brand identification, BSS = brand-self similarity, BI = brand identity, BSB = brand social benefits, MBE = memorable brand experiences.

1). Second, considering both high CBI and its antecedents, the solutions that lead to high Rep are analyzed (step 2). An analysis of the high, very high and low values of CBI and Rep is also performed.

The rest of this paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, the background on CBI and Rep is reviewed. In Section 3, the sample, data collection and measures are described, some aspects of the application of the method are introduced, and preliminary analyses are presented. The main analysis is based on a survey that was administered to a student sample with questions regarding a beer brand. The preliminary analysis includes contrarian case analysis, calibration, definition of consistency and frequency thresholds, and an analysis of necessary conditions. In Section 4, the results are presented, the predictive validity of the configurations is assessed and an analysis of the generalizability of the results is performed. To test the predictive validity, the sample was split into two random subsamples, and the models were estimated in a subsample and applied to the other. The models were also applied to a subset of older students and to a sample of airline customers to obtain some indications about their generalizability. In all of the analyses, the models show good performance in data sets that are different from the ones that were used to estimate them. The results are discussed in Section 5. Finally, in Section 6, the main conclusions are presented: the importance of affective drivers for CBI is acknowledged; in addition to the causal effect of CBI on Rep, the findings suggest that the presence of two cognitive drivers (BSS and BI) or of MBE could also lead to high Rep. The Appendices present the scale items and Cronbach's alpha coefficients and a robustness analysis to the calibration, consistency and frequency thresholds.

2. Background

Brands can be the facilitators of social identity creation and expression (Stokburger-Sauer et al., 2012), and consumers can identify with a brand that they perceive to match their self-concept (Wolter et al., 2016). Through this process, consumers satisfy their self-verification needs, which in turn enhances their attitudes and behavior toward the brand (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). In fact, CBI is considered to be an antecedent of brand loyalty (e.g., Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Tuškej et al., 2013; Yeh et al., 2016), which contributes to positive brand equity (Torres, Augusto, & Lisboa, 2015), creates competitive

barriers (Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000) and influences consumer preferences and purchase intentions (Cobb-Walgren, Ruble, & Donthu, 1995).

Based on social identity theory, which includes cognitive, affective, and evaluative aspects, Lam et al. (2013) consider three key CBI antecedents: perceived quality (which is generally under the control of brand managers); self-brand congruity (which could be somehow managed by brand managers through positioning); and consumer innate innovativeness (which corresponds to an individual trait, beyond the control of brand managers). In fact, consumers look for a brand whose identity matches their own to fulfill consistency needs; however, they can also achieve the fulfillment of their self-esteem needs if the consumption of the brand helps them to form their ideal self-image (He, Li, & Harris, 2012). Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) include the social benefits of a brand as an antecedent of CBI, and the construct is seen primarily as a cognitive representation with an abundance of emotional associations. Therefore, positive brand attitudes, which correspond to an individual's judgment of the goodness of brand (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010), are considered to be conceptually different than CBI.

Taking into account the key needs that are likely to drive identification in the marketing context, i.e., self-continuity, self-distinctiveness, and self-enhancement, Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) suggest that identification with a brand results from both cognitive and affective-based drivers. On the one hand, cognitive drivers result from the extent to which a person perceives a brand: i) to have a personality that is similar to their own, ii) to be unique or distinctive, and iii) to be prestigious. On the other hand, affective-based drivers include factors that are related to the consumption experience itself and address how CBI can be influenced by the extent to which consumers: i) feel that their interactions with a brand help them connect socially, i.e., result in social benefits, ii) perceive a brand to be warm, and iii) have memorable positive brand experiences. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) noted that the influence of the affective antecedents of CBI could be stronger than the influence of cognitive antecedents.

2.1. Drivers of CBI

Lam et al.'s (2013) conceptual framework includes an instrumental driver (perceived quality) and a symbolic driver (self-brand congruity).

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