

**DEFINING POTENTIAL RESEARCH DIRECTIONS OF BRAND
ENGAGEMENT INTO SELF-CONCEPT: CONSUMERS' CULTURAL
DIMENSIONS PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

Cultural characteristics of brand engagement into self-concept (BESC) are still not widely understood. Our study suggests 11 research directions on BESC and consumers' cultural orientations selected with bibliometric analysis with the visualization of similarities and systematic literature review.

Introduction

Brand engagement in self-concept (BESC) is consumer's predisposition to include important brands as part of how they view themselves, a part of personality (Spratt, Czellar & Spangenberg, 2009). Spratt et al., (2009) suggested that consumers are to a certain extent predisposed to form or change their personalities by using brands as additional personal traits, e.g., "I am a Harley man" or "I'll be Gucci". The extent of this predisposition is measured with an eight-item scale. The higher the level is, the more likely consumers are to employ brands for self-identification. BESC levels vary among consumers from different cultures: Korean consumers are much less predisposed to express self-image through brands than American consumers (Flynn, Goldsmith & Kim, 2013). African American and Asian consumers have stronger feeling of identification with brands than Hispanics and Non-Hispanic Whites (F. Korzenny, B. A. Korzenny, McGavock, Inglessis, 2006). However, regular cultural properties of BESC are still not established and scholars express a need for such studies (R. E. Goldsmith & E. B. Goldsmith, 2012).

In consumer cross-cultural studies Hofstede's five-dimensional model is a dominant metric of culture (De Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). It includes dimension of individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity/femininity and long/short-term orientation (Hofstede, 1980). Applied to BESC, Hofstede's dimensions would help to establish a regular link between cultural dimensions and BESC and, thus, to understand cultural properties of BESC and to explain why consumers from different cultures get different scores on BESC. The purpose of the paper is to define new potential directions for the future research on the link between BESC and consumers' cultural dimensions.

Methodology

We performed the bibliometric analysis using the visualization of similarities (VOS) method (Van Eck & Waltman, 2007) due to its proven usefulness in studies on consumer culture (Arora & Chakraborty, 2021) and consumer-brand relationships (Fetscherin &

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Heinrich, 2015). To collect existing studies on BESC we used a command TS = [(*BESC* OR *brand engagement into self-concept*) & *cultur**]. Materialism and consuming for status are two phenomena closely related to BESC (Spratt et al., 2009), some scholars consider them “ancestors” of BESC (Rehman, Baharun, Sallehm & Sarwar, 2018). We included them in our research: TS = [(*materialism* OR *status consum** OR *luxury consum** OR *conspicuous consum**) & *Hofstede*]. The choice of keywords is justified by their unique meaning. Regarding BESC, the construct is represented by two names in the modern literature: “brand engagement into self-concept” and BESC. We mainly used Thomson Reuters Web of Science Core Collection database and made a cross-validation with Scopus, EBSCO and Google Scholar and included conference contributions not to limit our bibliometric study. There were 201 entries in our initial dataset. According to our inclusion criteria, the papers should focus on BESC and not on other concepts of consumer engagement in marketing or forms of self-brand interaction. As the result, we included 105 papers into our final dataset. Next, we defined clusters of similar research streams in VOS Viewer 1.6.16. We carried out a systematic literature review process (Tranfield, Denyer & Smart, 2003) manually examining each paper inside every cluster to develop the codes of main research stream(s).

Results and discussion

We have defined six directions of BESC studies: BESC as a driver of consumer’s patterns of loyalty display, BESC as a driver of consumers’ behavioral manifestation of brand approval online, BESC as a mediator and moderator of consumers’ market behavior, the influence of consumers’ psychological predispositions on BESC, BESC concept validation and testing and cross-country and cross-cultural BESC measurement.

Since materialism is considered an ascendant of BESC (Rasmus, Mazzoli, Acuti & Grabner-Kräuter, 2020) and status consumption is a missing link between materialism and BESC (Flynn, Goldsmith & Pollitte, 2016), we have examined the link between materialism, status consumption and culture to enlarge our literature review. We defined seven research streams: measurement of materialism and status consumption in countries with contrast cultural dimensions, consumers’ cultural motivations to be materialistic and consume for status, correlation of consumers’ cultural values and materialism/status consumption, the influence of consumers’ demographical characteristics on their level of materialism/status consumption, measurement of consumers’ cultural dimensions on the national vs. individual level, and, finally, the effect of materialism, status consumption and cultural characteristics on consumers’ market behavior.

Then we have built connections between the selected studies and BESC to shape possible future directions for the investigation on BESC in relation with cultural dimensions. The research can be started by establishing direct connection between each of the cultural dimensions and consumer’s high/low BESC score. For example, do consumers with high level of individualism (vs. collectivism) have stronger or weaker tendency to incorporate brands as a part of their personality?

Patterns of loyalty display towards a brand. The results of research on how BESC predicts consumers’ loyalty display should be replicated or advanced in various cultural contexts (Nyadzayo, Johnson & Rossi, 2020). Some of the cultural dimensions might have a negative correlation with brand loyalty, advocacy, or attachment. Thus, future

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research might investigate if positive correlation between BESC and consumers' patterns of loyalty expression remains under the effect of cultural dimensions.

Consumers' digital behaviour. The influence of BESC level on consumers' online interaction with brands should be cross-culturally tested. For example, the role of power distance in BESC-online influencers interplay or the role of uncertainty avoidance in BESC-high consumers' willingness to try novel branded apps (Hill & Carrillat, 2020).

Consumers' market behaviour patterns. Further research might examine the mediating and moderating role of cultural dimensions between BESC and consumers' predispositions to certain kinds of market behavior, e.g., readiness to accept premium prices or consumer innovativeness (Kassim, Bogari, Salamah & Zain, 2016).

Consumers' psychological predispositions. Cultural dimensions may add up to the topic by moderating or mediating the relationships between BESC and other psychological constructs: fixed mindsets, feeling of loneliness/fear/happiness, congruence of brand personality with consumers' self, etc. (Mazzoli, Acuti, Donvito & Ko, 2019).

Demographic characteristics. Although BESC level does not vary under the influence of the demographics (Spratt et al., 2009), individual cultural orientations show such variation. We may view cultural dimensions as moderators between consumers' demographic traits and BESC.

Motivations. In this cluster we offer to investigate factors which stand behind the influence of cultural dimensions on BESC. For example, people with long-term orientation value prefer to be moderate in consumption and to put off money for future needs (Hofstede, 1980). Does it explain their high or low score on BESC?

Values. In this research direction we offer to advance understanding on how various value theories predict high or low levels of BESC and compare the results across countries with different cultural characteristics. Among possible values are external vs. internal self-worth values, religious values, family and community values, or traditional vs. global values to mention a few.

Cognitive outcomes. In this cluster we suggest focusing on the outcomes of high or low score on BESC on cognitive level. Among such outcomes consumer may experience changes in their life satisfaction level, well-being, formation of opinion towards certain brands or reactions to self-expressive brand display by other people (Yoo, Miyamoto, Evers, Lee & Wong, 2020).

Measurement in contrast dimensions. Some scholars suggest individualistic and masculine cultures are more materialistic (Sung, Calantone & Huddleston, 2020) while others believe that collectivistic and feminine societies have the same or tendency for status consumption and materialistic values (Semaan, Lindsay, Ashill & Williams, 2019). In this light, it is interesting to check the controversy measuring the level of BESC in contrast dimensions and compare the results.

National vs. individual level. There are two approaches to measuring marketing constructs in the context of cultural dimensions: on the national level (consumers as a

nation are supposed to have the same characteristics) and on the individual level (each consumer owns a set of individual traits). Scholars warn not to confuse the two approaches (Hofstede, 2011; Yoo et al., 2011) as the results obtained on the national and on the individual consumer level will differ. Thus, the relationships between cultural dimensions and BESC should be examined on both levels.

Conclusions and limitations

The paper aims to complete the gap in the current literature on BESC and culture by offering future research directions on relationships between cultural dimensions and BESC. We recognize some limitations of our research. Our suggestions are based only on the articles and databases which we examined in the paper. Aiming to unite the articles into logical clusters, we had to leave out some details and simplify the complexity of several studies.

Keywords: BESC, brand engagement, self, hofstede, culture, consumer behavior.

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2021 Korean Scholars of Marketing Science International Conference**

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