

Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship for Research on Human Decision Processes and Risk Management: 2011 Application

Construction and Expression of Core Beliefs

Amit Bhattacharjee

Doctoral Student
Wharton Marketing Department

Mailing Address:

Suite 700 Jon M. Huntsman Hall
3730 Walnut Street

Philadelphia, PA 19104

Office Phone: 215-573-7074

Email: ambhatta@wharton.upenn.edu

Faculty Advisor:



Americus Reed II, Marketing Department

Requested Support:



Descriptive Summary of Project

The separation of psychological space into self and object has laid the foundation for much theory and research (Lewin 1951; Heider 1958). While the traditional view of attitudes holds that the formation of attitudes towards objects is driven by the attributes of those objects, aspects of one's core values and beliefs can also serve as the basis for such attitudes (Reed, Cohen and Bhattacharjee 2009). However, little research has examined how core beliefs are defined and expressed, and how these processes are distinct from the definition and expression of less consequential beliefs.

My dissertation examines processes of core belief construction, maintenance, and expression. For instance, in constructing systems of core belief, people seek to maintain a sense of ownership over how a given identity is defined and what it means to them (Deci and Ryan 1985). Similarly, in communicating their beliefs to others, choices that are unconstrained are likely to be more meaningful as expressions of belief (Kivetz 2005).

An initial essay investigates the implications of this need for ownership in the context of valued identities. A large body of research has established the benefits for firms in targeting consumers on the basis of identities they hold (Forehand, Deshpande and Reed 2002; Reed 2004). However, I show in four studies that messages that merely reference consumer identity increase purchase likelihood, but messages that define the terms of identity expression actually reduce purchase likelihood (Bhattacharjee, Berger and Menon 2011). I document this effect across different identities and product domains, in both laboratory and field settings. Importantly, my results suggest that managers do not anticipate the role of ownership, and prefer identity-defining messages that are stronger and thus more intuitively appealing. These results highlight the importance of ownership of expressions of core belief.

A second essay builds on these findings to illustrate the need for ownership over maintenance of core beliefs. Specifically, three studies shed light on the effects of external identity definition on consumer belief systems. I find that as the centrality (i.e. importance to the overall self) of consumer identity increases, messages that reference consumer identity are increasingly effective, while messages that define consumer identity are increasingly ineffective. Furthermore, identity-defining messages also have implications for core belief systems themselves. I demonstrate that such messages temporarily reduce the expression of core beliefs in subsequent, unrelated contexts.

In addition to the role of ownership, I hope to explore the moderating impact of belief certainty. In particular, I propose that externally imposed belief definition is especially aversive at moderate levels of belief certainty. Those who are uncertain may appreciate greater definition of a belief from any source, while those who are highly certain are unlikely to have their beliefs threatened at all. Moreover, in a planned third dissertation essay, I plan to extend these findings to the social domain. I expect that people strive to maintain ownership of their core belief systems across both market and social contexts. Specifically, I hope to investigate the maintenance and expression of political ideologies and sexual orientation. Even when belief definition is imposed by a similar other or a member of the same ingroup, people may act in opposition to their core beliefs in order to reassert their sense of ownership.

Budget of Anticipated Expenses

As outlined in the table below, the financial support of \$3859.50 that I am seeking will be used for two purposes with regard to this research project: to fund data collection and to share the results of my research at two conferences. While I have already obtained ample laboratory evidence, I hope to find evidence of my proposed theory in the field. In particular, I hope to collect data using both Qualtrics panels and field studies. Because Qualtrics panels are composed of very specific populations (e.g. Democrats and Republicans), the data obtained are of higher quality, allowing for more appropriate and rigorous tests of hypotheses. However, these panels can be expensive to use. While cost per participant varies, \$5 seems to be a conservative estimate. Furthermore, I plan to examine actual postings on special interest websites to establish the external validity of my theorizing. In order to properly code these postings, I will need the help of research assistants who are blind to the objectives of this research. Undergraduate research assistants are typically paid \$10 per hour, and 20 hours of work represents a conservative estimate of the time required for this task.

In addition, I anticipate that this research might be of interest to the marketing community, and I hope to present my results at two relevant conferences: the American Marketing Association conference in San Francisco, and the Association for Consumer Research conference in St. Louis. The budget outlined below reflects estimated costs of lodging (at conference room rates) and travel to and from the conferences. While the Marketing Department allocates some funding for research and travel, it is sufficient to cover only a small portion of the research I intend to conduct over the course of my studies, and no more than two conferences over this period. Any incurred expenses that the Russell Ackoff Doctoral Student Fellowship does not cover will be paid out-of-pocket or by any funds remaining in my departmental research budget.

If you have any questions, or if there is any further information I can provide, please do not hesitate to call or email me. I greatly appreciate any support the Ackoff Fellowship can provide. Thank you for your consideration.

References

- Bhattacharjee, Amit, Jonah Berger, and Geeta Menon (2011), "Escaping the Crosshairs: Reactance to Identity Marketing," under revision for invited resubmission at *Journal of Consumer Research*.
- Deci, Edward L. and Richard M. Ryan (1985), *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, New York: Plenum.
- Forehand, Mark R., Rohit Deshpande, and Americus Reed II (2002), "Identity Salience and the Influence of Differential Activation of the Social Self-Schema on Advertising Response," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 87(6) 1086-1099.
- Heider, Fritz (1958). *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations*. New York: Wiley.
- Kivetz, Ran (2005), "Promotion Reactance: The Role of Effort-Reward Congruity," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31, 725-736.

Lepper, Mark R. (1981), "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation in Children: Detrimental Effects of Superfluous Social Controls," in *Aspects of the Development of Competence*, ed. W. A. Collins, Vol. 14 of *The Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology*, Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 155–214.

Lewin, Kurt (1951), *Field Theory in Social Science*, New York: Harper.

Reed, Americus (2004), "Activating the Self-Importance of Consumer Selves: Exploring Identity Salience Effects on Judgments," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31 (2), 286-295.

Reed, Americus, Joel B. Cohen, and Amit Bhattacharjee (2009), "When Brands are Built from Within: A Social Identity Pathway to Liking and Evaluation," *Handbook of Brand Relationships*, eds. Deborah J. MacInnis, C. Whan Park, and Joseph R. Priester. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 124-50.