



Status Consumption in the Context of Co-branding

LaShaun M. Collins and Jin Su, the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA

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Background

When a consumer feels insecure about his/her social role and status, dress can be used to assuage the feeling (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). Status consumption is a way for consumers to elevate perceived social position and increase sense of self, reducing internal tension; allowing consumers to achieve a desired or ideal sense of self (Eastman, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 1999). According to Sirgy (1982), consumers develop a stronger sense of self when they feel brand congruency (strength of the customer-brand relationship). However co-branding, two brands working to create a new product or service for customers, is significant; particularly when evaluating brand congruency for low-income consumers. Low-income consumers may aspire to have congruency with high-end brands but, in reality, may be more congruent with lower-end brands. Since low-income individuals may seek status through consumption, it is vitally important to assess such factors as negative environment, race and gender in status consumption. Also, it is crucial to examine these factors and status consumption within the context of co-branding to comprehend how low-income consumers realize a desired self and social status. The purpose of this study is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding African American consumers' status consumption in the co-branding (mass-market and luxury) context.

Conceptual Model

According to the self-congruity theory, the more a consumer sees himself/herself in the brand the more brand congruency and identification the stronger the connection (i.e., the customer brand relationship) (Sirgy, 1982; Tuskej, 2013). Subsequently, luxury brands tend to target consumers with a congruent self-image to their brand due to the customer-brand relationship (Tuskej, 2013). In the case of low-income consumers they purchase status consumption products to create an ideal self (i.e., the self). Further, these consumers try to influence the opinions of others within his/her social group due to susceptibility of interpersonal influences (Riquelme et al., 2011), in an attempt to arrive at a complete self (i.e., impression management). Since status consumption brands are generally exclusive and unique to a specific group of individuals, outside consumers may find it difficult to truly obtain the self-congruent brand connection. The model proposed suggests that the customer-brand relationship (value congruity and consumer identification) within the context of co-branding is connected to the self (self-congruency) consumers develop with status consumption. This is further explained through the overall self that consumers utilize and create with status brands. The model uses self-completion (attaining self-symbolizing goods), self-enhancement (enhancement and protection) and situational self (specific situation) to address this component. Further, impression management addressing the influence of others that also lead to consumers willing to alter the self through consumption. External factors race and income help explain the situational self and the susceptibility of interpersonal influence that

influence the selected self. Therefore, the following propositions are made: (P1) The customer-brand relationship in the context of co-branding will allow the consumer to develop self-congruency with the status brand rather than consumption of the status brand alone (P2) With self-enhancement, the consumer will have a strong connection with the status brand due to the consumer's established match of self-concept with the mass-market brand, (P3) Self-completion and impression management explain consumer's status consumption behavior, and (P5) Due to external factors consumers will create a situational self by status consuming

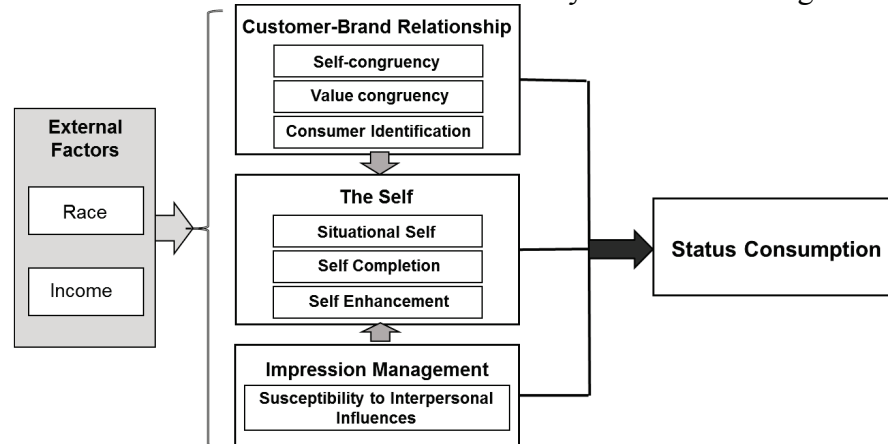


Figure 1. Theoretical Framework for Understanding Status Consumption

Discussion

The theoretical framework can be very useful in studies on low-income consumers as well as help retailers to increase their market share of low-income consumers. The model has both theoretical and managerial implications for the context of co-branding and status consumption. Limitations include the model assuming that the consumer already has a relationship with one the brands engaged in co branding. Future research can use this conceptual model in other contexts for example to further understand the implications of one's neighborhood influences on reasons for status consumption.

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