Single-brand retailers: Building brand loyalty in the off-line environment

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ABSTRACT

This article examines retail branding in the single-brand retail environment. Single-brand retailers sell only private label brands, which are generally the name of the store. The foundation of this research is based on prior calls in the literature to examine private label and retail branding. This article examines the role of self- and social-identification and affiliation with a brand community and the effect of brand community on loyalty. The results indicate that self-identification positively impacts social-identification, which positively impacts brand community, which is found to have a positive impact on brand loyalty.

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1. Introduction

Retail in the past few decades has witnessed intensifying competition and experienced arguably as much change as any major industry in the world. This change first arose from the growth of warehouse clubs in the 1970s and "category killer" retailers in the 1980s, followed by the introduction of the internet in the 1990s, which has led to the continuous growth of e-commerce. These changes created increased pressure from both intra- and inter-format competitors (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Retailers responded with a variety of strategies to address these increased competitive pressures, some of which incorporated branding. Specifically, retail has seen an accelerated trend in two strategies: private label (Ailawadi et al., 2008) and single-brand retailing. Of these two, private label has received far more attention in the literature (e.g., Ailawadi and Harlam, 2004; Srinivasan et al., 2004). However, the uniqueness of the single-brand retailing, with its reliance on one brand, highlights a distinct gap in the branding and retailing literature.

Brands are assets and sources of competitive advantage for both manufacturers and retailers (Barney, 1991; Keller and Lehman, 2006; Runyan and Droge, 2008). Brands offer customers a tangible example of their brand statement through their products and/or experiences, which they provide to the marketplace for consumers. The branding elements help establish preference for particular products and/or retailers in the consumer's mind. The most common retail practice is to sell an assortment of manufacturers' brands within a single store, which is the major driver of sales revenue (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Competition between retailers increases when each carries the same brand names. Thus, multi-brand retailers (e.g., Macy's, Home Depot) build "own brands" by linking their name with unique service, product assortments, atmospherics, etc. as a differentiation strategy (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Retailers have engaged in private label differentiation strategies (e.g., Arizona Jeans at Penney's), as well as utilizing exclusive co-brand agreements with other national brands (e.g., Isaac Mizrahi at Target) in an attempt to reduce intra-format competition. The strategy in both cases is to increase profit through decreased competition caused by reduced ability of the customer to form comparisons.

Single-brand retailers extend private label to its ultimate expression. They utilize an "own brand" strategy for virtually all of the products sold in their stores and on their websites. Examples of these retailers in the marketplace include Gap®, American Eagle®, and Bath and Body Works®. These retailers utilize the single-brand strategy to effectively eliminate price and product comparisons, which are inherent in a multi-brand offering. This strategy, however, is not without risk. Single-brand retailers predicate success entirely based on the customers' loyalty to their brands.

Single-brand retailers, similar to any retail brand, differ slightly from branding as applied by manufacturers (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). Manufacturer brand perceptions are set in the customers' mind when manufacturers generate marketing messages (e.g., advertising, packaging, styling) tailored specifically to the product itself (Keller and Lehman, 2006). Single-brand retailers, however, must incorporate more than just the product in their brand messaging; they often introduce multiple brand cues beyond the advertising, styling, and packaging of the product, which may also include store atmospherics (lighting, music, color). Additionally, they may also include sales personnel to convey and reinforce the brand message. These brand messages help establish unique bonding points between brand and consumer, through which

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the single-brand retailer hopes to increase consumers' propensity to shop and spend (Turley and Milliman, 2000). Successful brands create tight bonds with their consumers insulating them from competition, encouraging growth even during periods of negative economic change (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004). While manufacturers are often in control of only the initial marketing message for the brand, single-brand retailers remain in control of the entire brand message.

Attention to brand message details can be maintained in-store; however, the external environment has become increasingly difficult to manage. Consumers' access to a variety of communication channels and community complicates single-brand retailers' ability to maintain consistency in their brand message. The inability to control consistency of the brand message puts single-brand retailers at high risk for weakening their overall brand image (Kwon and Lennon, 2009). As Elliott and Wattanasuwan (1998) note, brand message consistency adds comfort and value to consumers facing a rapidly changing social environment.

The recent literature offers a variety of viewpoints regarding gaps in the brand literature and the need for additional research in particular as it relates to retailers. The call for new insight includes examining the retailer as a brand, brand experience, brand relationships with the consumer, brands and the internet, brand elements, and private label (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Keller and Lehman, 2006). Ailawadi et al. (2008) focus, in particular, on the goal of retailers to build loyalty through the use of private label. Additional calls for research on retail brands can be found in the literature; unfortunately these calls do not include the single-brand retailer (Grewal and Levy, 2009). The need for further research into both retail brands and private label are foundational to the study of single-brand retailers.

Further specific calls to fill gaps in the extant literature address brand community as it relates to brand identification (Keller and Lehman, 2006) and the integration of brand elements, community, and social networking (Keller and Lehman, 2006). All of these are crucial for the success of today's retailer. Each tool can enhance the brand when used correctly or dilute it when used poorly. The current focus is on brand identification and community as they relate to brand loyalty (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Keller and Lehman, 2006).

2. Single-brand retailers

The literature is virtually silent on single-brand retailers. Single-brand retailers hold a unique position in the retail marketplace as their "brand" is synonymous with their store. Single-brand retailers are the quintessential private label marketers, which creates a unique opportunity to examine private label performance in the extreme. Ailawadi et al. (2008) have noted that the consumer and her attachment to the brand apply at a heightened level when the setting is a single-brand retailer.

Single-brand retail as a targeted marketing strategy is relatively new. While there are examples of retailers going back decades, which grew into single-brand retailers (e.g., McDonald's®, Brooks Brothers®), these examples tended to be purveyors of limited products, and product was the driving component to the retail strategy. Today, single-brand retail is a market strategy designed to market to consumers through a highly specialized niche consisting of a common brand, which may have a broad number of categories.

Single-brand retailers almost uniformly exploit a dense composite of brand message cues in their stores. Single-brand retailers such as Abercrombie and Fitch®, Victoria Secret®, Banana Republic®, and Starbucks® use layers of defined brand message cues (e.g., task and ambient lighting, customized fixturing) to differentiate themselves from their competitors while simultaneously enhancing the definition of the brand for their consumers. The result is a stronger brand association and higher consumer interaction with the single-brand retailer (Turley and Milliman, 2000).

Successful brands incorporate messaging designed to connect consumers to the brand platform. The use of these brand elements helps to reinforce the consumers' self-perception as well as aspiration as they identify with the brand message (Levy, 1959). Single-brand retailers adopt brand images and messages, which are prototypical representations of their brands. When congruent with the consumers' self-concept or self-aspiration, these brand representations help to develop a relationship with consumers and reinforce the consumers' self-concept (Dolich, 1969). These brand representations through their connection with the consumers' self-concept are designed by the retailer to elicit an identification response and increase association with the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

3. Brand identification

3.1. Self-identification with the brand

A consumer's perception of a brand consists of the accumulation of her prior experiences with and messages received from the brand or retailer. The consumer's positive experiences with the brand increase her interaction with the brand, which over time leads to her "persistent expectation" of the brand (Oliver, 1980). The "persistent expectation" resulting from this brand interaction harkens back to Levy's (1959) discussion of products as psychological goods, which represent the individual's personal attributes, social status, and goals. As the persistence intensifies, the consumer adopts those symbols as an indication of self. Further, when the consumer develops a relationship with the brand with which she shares common characteristics, virtues, and even flaws, she builds an emotional connection with the brand (Mael and Tetrick, 1992).

Several other researchers also discussed self-identification in association with brands. According to Belk (1988), self-identification is defined by possessions, which are used to establish a sense of self in the environment as well as to distinguish individuals from others. These self-identified possessions can be united under a common representative factor, brand, serving as an external identifier of who the consumer believes she is (Belk, 1988). Brand messages and symbols have been shown to be essential in the establishment of brand identification by consumers and as a vehicle for consumers to represent themselves through the selection of particular brands (Bhat and Reddy, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Escalas and Bettman (2005) further argue that brands that support a consumer's aspirational-image as well as her self-image becomes the brands the consumer perceives as important to possess.

Self-identification in today's society has shifted from a stable platform model to a platform model that is constantly re-evaluating identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). This constant reassessment inserts uncertainty and instability into the self-concept, which can be, to some degree, mitigated by the stable platform inherent in the brand. Brands, in order to be enduring, must represent consistent values and messages. Through repeated interactions between the brand and the consumer, these messages can enhance the consumer's perception of the brand. These interactions must occur in various media as well as in stores in order to stabilize and reinforce the consumer's self- and social-identification with the single-brand retailer.

3.2. Social-identification with the brand

Researchers alternately discuss consumers' personal relationships with brands (Belk, 1988; Bhat and Reddy, 1998; Escalas and Bettman, 2005) and a social dimension of the relationship between consumers and brands (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg and Terry, 2000). Consumers want to bolster their self-esteem socially, by selecting brands representative of their personal attitudes and feelings. These brands symbolize similarities with others, establishing an "in-group" set of attributes. In the alternative, they are indicative of dissimilarity to others, representing an "out-group" set of attributes (Hogg and Terry, 2000). In this scenario, brand separates consumers into distinct groups; consumers with an affinity for the brand and consumers with little-to-no affinity or even antipathy for the brand. Social-identification extends identity to those who possess similar values, which helps distinguish them from others with differing values (Tajfel, 1974). Social-identity has also been described as relational (Brewer, 2001). Brewer (2001) describes the self-identity being exhibited through social interaction in the search for social attachment to groups through the use of external symbols (e.g., brand) as self-identifiers (Brewer, 2001). To summarize, social-identification drives self-enhancement and reduces uncertainty in a social environment by elevating the individual attributes to a social compact with others favoring similar attributes and clearly disassociating from those with dissimilar attributes (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Social-identification with a brand becomes strengthened through the visible display of the brand. Self- and social-identification with a brand directionally point to a further extension of brand-identification, which is brand community.

4. Brand community

Brand community is defined as "a structured set of social relationships among users of a brand" (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412), that is, brand community involves the relationships among the consumer, other consumers, and the brand, forming a triad model (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). While this model is helpful in explaining how the consumer can move beyond social-identification to a brand community member, it does not fully appreciate the consumer's interaction with different entities such as product, company, and other consumers (McAlexander et al., 2002). The literature on brand community focuses on the consumer's relationship to the product, brand, company, and other consumers as key factors in loyalty development (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Brand community in this study can be viewed as a community grounded in the shared experiences of the consumer with other consumers regarding the product, brand, and company. Meaningful brand consumption experiences reinforce the consumer's identification with the brand. Similarly, through community these brand experiences can be shared among brand-identified consumers and this reinforces the relationship among brand community members and strengthens the appreciation for the brand, its products, and the company (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Brand community differs from self- and social-identification with a brand in the form of action. Identification is a tacit acknowledgement and is passive in nature, where self is an internal connection to the brand and social-identification is a group connection to the brand. Brand community, however, moves consumers beyond the passive acknowledgement of self or others found in brand identification to a point where consumers engage in an active pursuit of others. Brand community is about joining with others in an extended community who likewise publicly identify with the same brand (Schau et al., 2009).

5. Brand loyalty

The attachment to a brand found in a brand community can be viewed as a means to increase consumer loyalty to the brand. As a behavioral construct rooted in the past performance and future intention of the consumer to patronize a brand (De Wulf et al., 2001), brand loyalty can be measured by patronage intention, word of mouth, and trust (Keller, 2003). Brand loyalty has also been described as having two main components: behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. These two types of loyalty are different in that behavioral or purchase loyalty consists of repeated purchases of the brand, whereas attitudinal brand loyalty is a consumer commitment to the brand through some unique value they associate with the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Since behavioral loyalty measures a consumer's continued selection and preference for a brand, it is widely accepted as a benchmark in marketing, demonstrating a brand's successful integration of its marketing strategy into a relationship with consumers (Sharp and Sharp, 1997; Yim and Kannan, 1999).

6. Research model development

The study will determine whether self-identification and social-identification with a single-brand retailer will function as antecedents of brand community. Further it will examine the effect of self-identification on social-identification with a brand. Finally, it will examine whether brand community impacts behavioral loyalty to the single-brand retailer. The model can be seen in Fig. 1.

6.1. Self-identification → social-identification

A consumer acquires a brand that signifies her self-concept as well as her belonging to a group with other consumers who likewise show an affinity for the same brand. The consumer, in the act of display of her self-identified branded possessions, will recognize and acknowledge other consumers who display their possessions of the same brand (Hogg and Terry, 2000). This joint recognition and acknowledgement, which may be implicit, moves the consumer from an internally focused self-identification with a brand to the externally oriented social-identification with the brand (Hogg and Terry, 2000). Since a single-brand retailer carries only its own brand in stores, social-identification can be a powerful representation of the retailer's connection to its consumers. As the consumer establishes self-identification with a single-brand retailer through an internal process, he can develop identification with others who possess the same brand. It is therefore hypothesized as below.

H₁. Self-identification with a single-brand retailer will have a positive impact on social-identification with the single-brand retailer.

6.2. Self-identification → brand community

As noted by Hogg et al. (2004), personal-identification is for internal validation of beliefs, whereas self-identification is confirmation of internal beliefs through the interaction of self with others and brand identified objects. Therefore, an individual's self-identification with a single-brand retailer can be closely related to her self-esteem and is influenced by social interaction. The relationship that self-esteem or self-identification has with a brand has been described as possessing the power to influence others' evaluation of and behavior toward a brand (Reingen et al., 1984). Self-identification with the brand is based on congruent
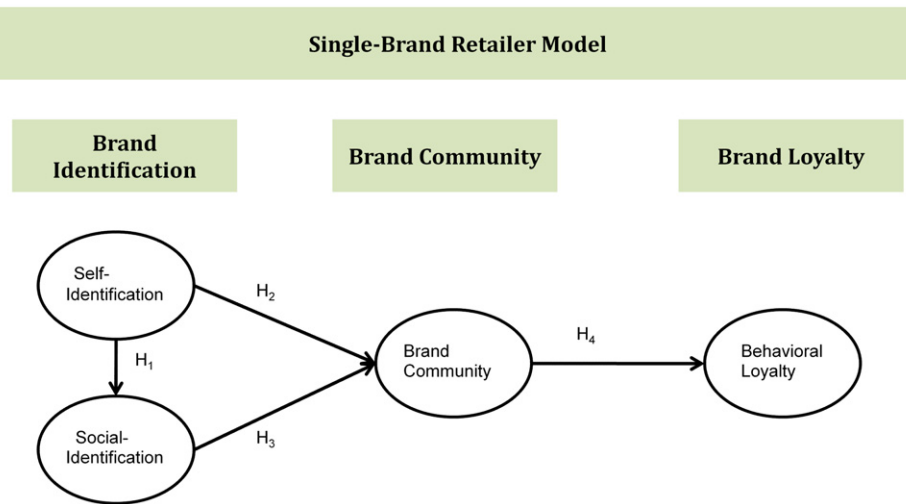
Fig. 1. Conceptual model with hypotheses noted.

meaning between consumers and the brand and is reflected in the social symbolism embodied in the brand, which is shared with the larger community (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). The community in this case need no longer be bound by physical factors such as geography, ethnicity, and time (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). When a consumer develops a strong identification with a brand, he develops a sense of community through her relationship to the products, the brand, the company, and other consumers who like the same brand (McAlexander et al., 2002). This boundless community is particularly important to the single-brand retailer because the availability of its products is constrained to locations of the single-brand retailer. This stands in stark contrast to brands sold through multi-brand retailers, which can continue to expand their product placement through additional store locations as well as new retailer outlets. The single-brand retailer community, therefore, becomes a viable avenue for expanding the brand message and furthering the consumer's identification with the brand. This would establish a positive relationship between self-identification with a brand and brand community. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows.

H₂. Self-identification with a single-brand retailer will positively impact brand community.

6.3. Social-identification → brand community

Individuals tend to view groups that share common qualities as intertwined with themselves. This becomes important as individuals try to achieve satisfaction and belong to the social group (Mael and Tetrick, 1992). An individual's need to identify with others who display similar attributes can become so strong that the social bond can be established even without a face-to-face interaction (Mael and Tetrick, 1992). Consumers who establish a social-identification with a single-brand retailer gain value from the social stability found in the shared understanding of the brand platform (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Therefore, consumers who socially identify with a single-brand retailer can enjoy the shared understandings among community members to connect to the brand, its company, and products as well as other consumers who all share an affinity towards the same brand. Based on this reasoning, it is hypothesized as below.

H₃. Social-identification with a single-brand retailer will positively impact brand community.

6.4. Brand community → brand loyalty

The community's sharing of attributes related to a single-brand retailer provides a competitive advantage for the brand. This is important because the brand is available only at the single-brand retailer. While this sense of exclusivity may add cache to the brand thus increasing brand attractiveness, it can also raise barriers between the brand and the consumer. Chief among those barriers is the limitation of product availability to the single-brand retailer locations, which reduces the consumers' opportunity to interact with the retailer and bond with the brand. Community can lower this barrier through the enhanced opportunity for the consumer to interact with the brand, products, the company as well as other consumers. Further, brand community serves as a buffer between the brand and competing brands, which can over time lead to a reduced need to develop new and different products to maintain a competitive advantage (McAlexander et al., 2002). Additionally, the stronger a consumer's relationship is with the brand, the more insular the relationship becomes from a competitive standpoint (Fournier, 1998). The consumer relationship with a single-brand retailer formed through the four factors of brand community (consumer-to-consumer, consumer-to-brand, consumer-to-product, and consumer-to-company) constructs a strong tie to the brand, which exceeds simple loyalty (Fournier, 1998), that is, a relationship created through brand community will lead to a particularly potent form of loyalty, behavioral loyalty. Therefore, it is hypothesized as follows.

H₄. Brand community will positively impact behavioral loyalty to the single-brand retailer.

7. Methodology

7.1. Sampling and data collection

The sample was obtained from undergraduate students at two large southeastern US universities. The surveys were distributed at one university to students who completed the surveys during class time. Surveys were distributed at the second university through a sorority, during their weekly meeting. Student samples have been found to be a reliable and legitimate sample source especially when the topic of the research is applicable to the student population (Calder et al., 1981; Enis et al., 1972) as it is here. To broaden the scope of the sample in quantity, age, ethnicity, gender, and economic

Table 1
Demographic details.

Demographics			Age	Avg. 25	Std. dev 11.315
			Income	$40,000–49,999	5.688
Gender	Male 22%	Female 78%			
Marital	Single 79%	Relationship 21%			
Employ	Work 56%	Student 43%	Retired 1%		
Ethnicity	Caucasian 88%	African American 7%	Asian 2%	Hispanic 2%	Other 1%

background, snowball sampling was employed, which generated a total of 360 participants. Snowball sampling was designed and has been found to be a useful and acceptable a tool to enhance sample variation (Goodman, 1961; Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). This sample achieved a participant mix that was comparable to those targeted by the single-brand retailers used in this study. After discarding two incomplete surveys, a total of 358 surveys were used for data analyses. The demographic make-up of the sample can be seen in Table 1.

7.2. Measures

The respondents were asked to select one retailer from the list of 43 single-brand retailers provided. They were requested to respond to all survey questions based on their relationship to and experiences with the single-brand retailer they had selected. Since products from several large branded product manufacturers have widespread retail distribution in multi-brand retail stores as well as sold through proprietary brand stores, these brands and their stores (e.g., Nike, Fossil, Lucky Brand) were eliminated from the list to reduce confusion.

The measures consisted of consumer self-identification and social-identification with a single-brand retailer, brand community, and behavioral loyalty. Scale items for *self-identification with a brand* were derived from the self-brand connection scale (Escalas and Bettman, 2003); *social-identification with a brand*, from Mael and Tetrick's (1992) identification with a psychological group; *brand community*, from McAlexander et al. (2002); and *behavioral loyalty*, from De Wulf et al. (2001). All scales were adapted to fit the setting for this study and were refined through expert review and pretest ($n=8$). The brand community, self-identification, and social-identification scale items were rated on a 7-point Likert type scale. Behavioral loyalty was measured with ratio responses (i.e., 0–100% and 0–10) and a 7-point rating scale anchored by "very rarely" to "very frequently."

7.3. Preliminary analysis and measurement model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed using the maximum likelihood estimation in AMOS 18 to assess the measurement model fit to the data. The initial model fit was not satisfactory. One reverse coded item failed to load on its designated factor, social identification, and thus was eliminated. Using the modification indices, additional scale items were trimmed to enhance the fit and reduce collinearity within the model. First, the model was trimmed using the standardized residuals for the indicators of both self- and social-identification (Bagozzi and Youjae, 1988). Indicators with the highest standardized residuals were eliminated individually, reducing the indicators for social-identification from ten to three and self-identification from seven to four (Bentler and Bonett, 1980).

Brand community is a second-order reflective construct and was modeled first as a first-order construct to provide the highest estimated path weight for each construct. This was necessary to identify the path whose parameter value would be set to one in the process of modeling the second-order factors (Kline, 2010). Each of the indicators loaded significantly on its designated factor ($p < 0.001$) as can be seen in Table 2.

The measurement model was then examined for fit using the several indices: χ^2 (172)=444.029, $p < 0.000$; χ^2/df ratio=2.582; CFI=0.916; and RMSEA=0.066. The normal chi-square is within the acceptable range between 2:1 and 3:1 (Kline, 2010). The CFI is in the acceptable range of 0.90 and above (Bentler and Bonett, 1980) and the RMSEA is in the acceptable range of 0.05–0.08 (Browne and Cudeck, 1992). Factor loadings were all above 0.50, which establishes adequate loadings on their designated factor (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). The composite reliabilities ranged 0.86–0.99, indicating adequate internal consistency (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Each factor had an average variance extracted (AVE) greater than 0.50 (see Table 3), exceeding the level necessary to explain that the variance is greater than measurement error (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). These indices suggest the convergent validities of the scales. The average variances extracted (AVE) also were larger than the shared variances (i.e., squared correlation coefficients) between all possible pairs of constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Thus, the analyses confirm high construct validities of all latent constructs, see Table 3.

7.4. Structural model and hypotheses testing

A structural model was used to test hypothesized relationships among constructs. Goodness-of-fit statistics indicated the overall acceptability of the structural model: χ^2 (175)=471.405, $p < 0.000$; χ^2/df ratio=2.694; CFI=0.908; and RMSEA=0.069. The model illustrating the results of hypotheses testing can be found in Fig. 2.

Hypothesis 1 was accepted, indicating a significant relationship between self-identification and social-identification with a single-brand retailer (H_1, $\gamma=0.861$, $p < 0.001$). Hypothesis 2 was not supported with a non-significant path from self-identification to brand community (H_2, $\gamma=0.088$, $p=0.524$). Hypothesis 3 was supported, indicating a significant relationship between social-identification and brand community (H_3, $\gamma=0.893$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, Hypothesis 4 was accepted with a significant relationship between brand community and behavioral loyalty (H_4, $\gamma=0.124$, $p=0.05$).

8. Discussion and managerial implications

This study examined brand from the retail perspective in response to calls by several researchers (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Grewal and Levy, 2009; Keller and Lehman, 2006). The relationship consumers have with single-brand retailers is unique in retail and is in need of further examination. Since the store and the products are united under a single brand, the consumer is provided with only a single point of brand reference. Additionally, single-brand retailers represent the pinnacle for private label and therefore provide an excellent

Table 2
Variables and their measures (confirmatory factor analysis).

Scale	Composite reliability		Standard estimate	*t*-Value
Self-identification	**0.97**	THIS STORE BRAND reflects who I am	0.795	17.295***
		I use THIS STORE BRAND to communicate who I am to other people	0.724	15.151***
		I think THIS STORE BRAND (could) help(s) me become the type of person I want to be	0.684	14.048***
		I consider THIS STORE BRAND to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others)	0.810	17.750***
Social-identification	**0.83**	When someone criticizes THIS STORE BRAND, it feels like a personal insult	0.821	17.961***
		I'm very interested in what others think about THIS STORE BRAND	0.676	13.816***
		THIS STORE BRAND's successes are my successes	0.720	15.013***
Brand community	**0.70**	Products from THIS STORE BRAND are some of my favorite possessions	0.628	9.794***
		I am proud of my products from THIS STORE BRAND	0.738	10.993***
		I love my products from THIS STORE BRAND	0.661	11.323***
		If I were to buy product that THIS STORE BRAND sells, I would buy it from THIS STORE BRAND	0.721	11.228***
		Product from THIS STORE BRAND is of the highest quality.	0.596	9.637***
		I would recommend THIS STORE BRAND to my friends	0.694	11.323***
		THIS STORE BRAND cares about my opinions	0.612	8.785***
		THIS STORE BRAND understands my needs	0.668	9.552***
		I have met wonderful people because of THIS STORE BRAND	0.632	9.563***
		I feel a sense of kinship with other people who own products of THIS STORE BRAND	0.718	8.620***
		I have an interest in a club or social network for people who own product of THIS STORE BRAND	0.485	9.162***
Behavioral loyalty	**0.77**	How often do you purchase THIS PRODUCT from THIS STORE BRAND compared to brands at other stores?	0.797	14.566***
		Of the 10 times you select a store to buy THIS PRODUCT at, how many times do you select THIS STORE BRAND?	0.797	14.564***
		What percentage of your total expenditures for THIS PRODUCT do you spend in THIS STORE BRAND?	0.573	10.588***

*** $p < 0.0001$.

Table 3
Construct validities of the measurement model (AVE).

Factor	Composite reliability	1	2	3	4
Self-identification	0.97	**0.76**			
Social identification	0.95	0.86	**0.64**		
Brand community	0.98	0.88	0.98	**0.90**	
Behavioral loyalty	0.72	0.05	0.06	0.20	**0.68**

environment for examining both branding of private label and branding of the retailer. The literature also demanded for further study into the brand relationship especially in regard to consumers and community, which this study has shown to have a significant effect on loyalty.

The results of this study add insight into the consumers' identification with the brand. Self-identification with a brand had a positive effect on social-identification with the brand. Self-identification was positively related to brand community; yet in opposition to the literature, this study found that the relationship is not significant. The relationships between both self- and social-identification with the brand and brand community are more complex than the literature might suggest. This study indicates that it is important for the single-brand retailer to continue to communicate brand-reinforcing messages to the consumer to reinforce self-identification while simultaneously messaging with social brand cues, which help the consumer extend her self-identification to a social-identification with the brand. Single-brand retailers can accomplish this goal with products, which feature highly brand-associated elements (e.g., logo, image, color, verbiage). These items would encourage brand-identified consumers to display more prominently their association and identification with the brand and enhance the feeling of connection to other consumers furthering

the development of a social-identification with the brand. Increasing consumption of highly brand-identified items enhances the visibility of brand through consumer display, which also serves to expand the brand beyond its proprietary locations. Single-brand retailers need to maintain their focus solely on brand enhancement when seeking to increase the visibility of the brand; otherwise, they would risk confusing the brand in the consumers' mind, which may result in diminishing the brand, brand identification, community, and loyalty.

In contrast to the above measures, a single-brand retailer may need to be vigilant against constant negative messaging to the consumer in-store and beyond about brand community related functions, benefits, and activities, which may be of no benefit to the self-identified consumer and may over time only serve to diminish the relationship.

The study demonstrates that self-identification with the brand helps further develop social-identification, which was shown to have a positive effect on brand community. As another major finding, both self- and social-identification with a brand lead to positive relationships with brand community. These positive relationships should encourage single-brand retailers to further pursue and support brand communities as a way to enhance the bond with their consumers. This support can be accomplished by leveraging existing brand communities by providing them with interesting proprietary brand content, contests and events as well as supporting additional new media channels (e.g., Facebook®, YouTube®, Four Square®, Twitter®, LinkedIn®, etc.). If a single-brand retailer does not have an existing community base, hosting one on their retail website, expanding email bases, and linking to other social media can facilitate the process of initiating and supporting brand community. It should be noted that community can still be facilitated and supported through traditional conventions (e.g., in-store events, clubs, celebrations of brand-related events, contests and loyalty cards). Examining the consumer's behavior for signs of community-related behavior (e.g., product reviews, blog entries, event entries,

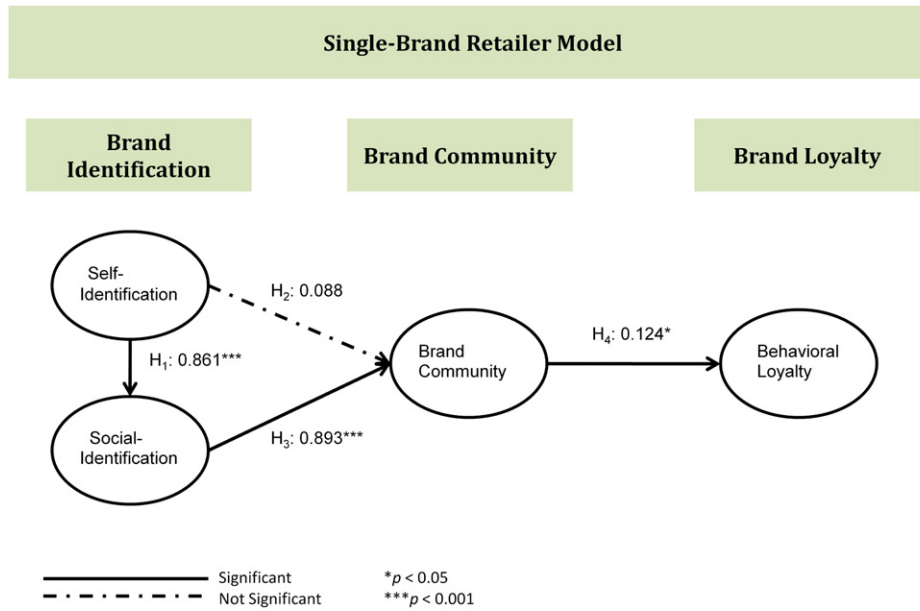**Single-Brand Retailer Model**

Fig. 2. Structural model results.

loyalty card use) serves as an indicator that the consumer has moved beyond her social-identification with the brand and may be more receptive to community communication.

As anticipated, brand community had a positive effect on behavioral loyalty. Based on the conceptualization of brand community, the consumer's loyalty is based on her relationship with the brand, company, products, and other consumers. Undoubtedly, it is the clarity and stability of the brand's message that creates positive relationship between the consumer and elements of brand community. Single-brand retailers need to be cognizant of the brand platform messages that serve to attract consumers and foster the community. Communicating how the brand has put those elements into action, how the brand supports the consumer, along with brand-related initiatives, can all serve as positive reinforcements of brand community relationships.

This study also serves to further validate brand community as a reliable predictor of loyalty as proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). The positive and significant relationship between brand community and loyalty should encourage single-brand retailers to find positive methods to enhance the consumer experience through community. These findings demonstrate that brand message reinforcement between the single-brand retailer and the consumer, which forms the foundation for both self and social forms of identification, can further consumers interest in a brand community. This study re-confirms the positive relationship between membership and the consumer's loyalty to the brand.

9. Contribution

This study adds to the understanding of consumer behavior in a little studied but important area of retail, single-brand retailers. Single-brand retailers, unlike other retailers, combine the processes of brand development, product development, procurement, and wholesaling with retailing. Much of the brand literature has focused on the owner or the seller and how the seller establishes her relationship to the consumer. Limited research has dealt with single-brand retailers and their unique position as both owner and seller of their brand.

The findings demonstrate the impact of self-identification on social-identification with a brand, and the effect these brand identifications have on brand community. While brand community has been studied mainly as an antecedent to loyalty or satisfaction (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Keller, 1998; McAlexander et al., 2002), self- and social-identification with a brand have not been used as antecedents of brand community. The significant path from social-identification to brand community provides implications on appropriate methods marketers need to employ to best speak to, satisfy, and ultimately retain the consumers for their brand.

The result on the effect of brand community on behavioral loyalty confirms McAlexander et al.'s (2002) finding that brand community is a strong indicator of loyalty. Specifically, their conclusion that the behavioral nature of community strengthens consumers' behavioral loyalty to the brand is in line with the finding of this study. Retailers charged with the maintenance and development of their brand, particularly single-brand retailers, would do well if they keep this new finding at the forefront of their marketing decisions.

However, caution should be given to single-brand retailers when dealing with community. Outside influential factors that may not be under the control of the single-brand retailer may negatively impact the relationship with the consumer and the community, which may ultimately damage the relationship with the brand and loyalty. Negative publicity or economic conditions may result in negative associations that could damage the brand. Current economic conditions, in particular, may play a part in some of the relationships within the brand community. Downward pressure on income may move certain branded products out of reach for some consumers. This negative economic association may also be shared among consumers, leading to a further negative relationship between brand community and behavioral loyalty. Therefore, the single-brand retailer must insure that the brand platform message is consistently reinforced with the consumer, which is of utmost importance in maintaining brand loyalty. Discussions about success often revolve around the product, the company's social effort, speed to market, efficiency, and environment, as the keys to a brand's success (Berry et al., 1997). The findings of this study suggest that maintaining the integrity and consistent messages to consumers is the key to

engaging, developing relationship with, and enhancing brand loyalty with consumers.

10. Limitations and future research

This study is limited through its use of a college student and snowball sample. Although both have been found to be reliable in the literature, a broader sample may be required in further studies. The median age of 25 may further limit generalizing the results to a broader population. The study also pre-selected the stores as well as eliminated manufacturer brand stores, which may have impacted the results.

The modeling of the data, especially as it related to brand, required special attention to model trimming to accommodate the high collinearity in brand relationships inherent between the constructs included in the model. Future research may look at using alternate measures that may reduce the high collinearity found in this model. This study was conducted using the off-line environment; examining the relationships of the constructs in the on-line environment would be an area for future research.

11. Conclusion

This study set out to, in part, respond to a call for retail brand and private label research by several authors (Ailawadi and Keller, 2004; Ailawadi et al., 2008; Keller and Lehman, 2006). The setting of single-brand retailers contributes to the gaps in the literature for both private label and retail branding. The identity constructs highlight the critical role brand message management has in moving the consumer to a deeper level of attachment found in community. This study further confirms the role of brand community as a predictor of loyalty to the brand.

Acknowledgments

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