SELF-IMAGE/PRODUCT-IMAGE CONGRUITY AND ADVERTISING STRATEGY

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Abstract
This article discusses the state-of-the-art of self-concept literature in consumer market behavior, introduces an integrated self-concept model to the advertising practitioners, and shows how this model can enhance the formulation of advertising strategic effectiveness.

Introduction
Developing an effective advertisement does not only entail communicating the evaluative functional benefits of a product or service but also the evaluative symbolic benefits as well. Based on a tradition of attitude modeling, advertising researchers have neglected to systematically tap the rich source of symbolic attributes related to their advertised products. This is primarily due to the fact that advertising researchers focus their attention on the functional attributes of their product as traditionally established by a history of implementing the multiattribute attitude models in devising a creative copy. How symbolic attributes affect consumers' purchase motivation is a growing study related directly to the self-concept.

This paper reviews how the self-concept has been treated in the marketing/consumer behavior literature. It also introduces an integrated self-concept model to advertising practitioners and discusses research and policy applications.

Self-Concept
The self-concept in the pure social science disciplines (e.g., psychology, sociology) has been conceptualized differently by different self-concept investigators. However, most self-concept theoreticians seem to agree that the self-concept denotes the "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7).

The self-concept literature in consumer behavior is muddled with ambiguity and confusion in regards to the precise conceptualization of self-concept. A number of investigators have conceptualized self-concept as being a single construct and treated it to mean the actual self-concept defined as that image of oneself as he/she perceives himself/herself (Grubb & Hupp, 1968; Birdwell, 1968; Green, Maheshwari, & Rao, 1969; Grubb & Stern, 1971; Bellenger, Steinberg, & Stanton, 1976; Hughes & Naert, 1970; Martin, 1973; Jacobson & Rossoff, 1963). The actual self-concept in this vein has been labeled as "actual self", "real self", "basic self", "extant self", or simply "self".

Within the single self-construct tradition some investigators have restricted self-concept to merely sex-role self-concept, which has been defined as that image of oneself as he/she perceives his/her sex role (Gentry, Doering, & O'Brien, 1978; Vitz & Johnston, 1965; Gentry & Doering, 1977; Morris & Cundiff, 1971; and Golden, Allison, & Clee, 1979).

In the multiple self-constructs tradition, self-concept has been conceptualized as having two or more dimensions. Some investigators argued that self-concept has to be treated as having two components— that of the actual self-concept and the ideal self-concept (the ideal self-concept is defined as that image of oneself as he/she would like to be) (Ross, 1971; Delozier, 1971; Delozier & Tillman, 1972; Lamone, 1966; Stern, Bush, & Hair, 1977; Scheve & Hilton, 1978; Belch, 1978; Landon, 1974; Dolich, 1969; Munson, 1974; Gutman, 1973; Belch & Landon, 1978; Hamm & Cundiff, 1967; Landon, 1972; Greeno, Sommers, & Kernan, 1973). The ideal self-concept has been referred to as the "ideal self", "idealized image", and "desired self".

Other investigators have gone beyond the duality dimensions. These include Sirgy (1979, 1980) who referred to the actual self-image, ideal self-image, "social self-image", and "ideal social self-image". The social self-concept (sometimes referred to as "looking-glass self" or "presenting self") was defined as that image that one believes others have of him/her; and the ideal social self-concept (sometimes referred to as "desired social self") denotes that image that one would like others to have about him/her. (cf. Maheshwari, 1974). Kugler & Guerrero (1977) talked about the actual self-concept and the ideal social self-concept. French and Glaschner (1971) used the actual self-concept, the ideal self-concept, and the "perceived reference group image of self". This latter concept, although used in French and Glaschner's study, was never formally defined by the authors. Dornoff and Tatham (1972) used the actual self-concept, ideal self-concept, and the "expected self" (which refers to that image somewhere between the actual and the ideal self-concept). Furthermore, Munson and Spivey (1980) referred to the "expressive self" which pertains to either the ideal self-concept or social self-concept.

Based on the theory of symbolic interactionism, Schenk and Holman (1980) argued that distinction between or among different self-perspectives is not fruitful since the creation of a specific self-perspective is situation-specific. They argued for the consideration of the "situational self-image" which is the product of the individual's repertoire of self-images and the perception of others in the situation. Situational self-image has been referred to as the role which the individual undertakes to attain a specific goal or to avoid a specific aversion in a specific situation. This construct is labelled differently in the sociology and social psychology literatures - "presenting self," "role self," "social self," etc. In the case where situational self-image can be expressed through product consumption, the individual compares product or brand images to that of his/her situational self-image. The brand whose image matches the situational self-image influences the individual's decision making regarding his/her preference and purchase of that brand.

Product Image
Tucker (1957) argued that consumers personalities can be defined through product use.

"There has long been an implicit concept that consumers can be defined in terms of either the
products they acquire or use, or in terms of the meanings products have for them or their attitudes towards products." (p. 139).

Newman (1957) elaborated upon this concept.

"Among other things, a product is a symbol by virtue of its form, size, color, and functions. Its significance as a symbol varies according to how much it is associated with individual needs and social interaction. A product, then, is the sum of the meanings it communicated, often unconsciously, to others when they look at it or use it." (p. 100).

Products, suppliers, and services are assumed to have a personality or image, just like people. This image is not determined by the physical characteristics of a product alone, but by a host of other factors such as packaging, advertising, price, and channels of distribution. Images of products, suppliers, or services are also formed by other associations such as stereotyped image of the generalized or typical user and other related factors (cf. Levy, 1959; Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Britt, 1966).

It should be noted that product images can be classified as being functional or symbolic (Sirgy, 1981b, 1982c). Symbolic product images refer to the stereotypic personality images consumers have of a specific product. Examples of stereotypic personality images people may have of a particular store include traditional versus modern, classy versus folksy, sexy versus plain, friendly versus formal, high status versus low status, etc. These symbolic images are differentiated from their functional counterparts in that the latter involve attributes that are related to the physical benefits of the product and not the stereotypic personality characteristics associated with it.

Self-Image/Product-Image Congruity

The discussion of self-concept and product-image congruity was initiated by Gardner and Levy (1955) and Levy (1959). The main attention was focused upon the image projected by various products. Consumers were thought to prefer products with images which are congruent with their self-concepts. Grubb and Grathwohl (1967) formally proposed that

"... the consuming behavior of an individual will be directed toward furthering and enhancing his self-concept through the consumption of goods as symbols" (p. 26).

Self-image/product-image congruity specifically refers to the match or mismatch of one or more actual self-image, or ideal self-image, social self-image, or ideal social self-image with the corresponding personality images of the designated product. The match between actual self-image and product image has been referred to as "self-congruity"; between ideal self-image and product image "ideal congruity"; between social self-image and product image as "social congruity"; and between ideal social self-image and product image as "ideal social congruity" (Sirgy, 1979, 1980, 1981a; Samli and Sirgy, 1981). The congruence between these two sets of constructs (product image and self-concept) has been modeled using a variety of distance measures such as, the Euclidean distance, absolute difference, simple difference, and difference squared indices (Birdwell, 1968; Dolich, 1969; Ross 1971; Scheue and Dillon, 1978; Sirgy, 1979, 1980).

Single Congruity Versus Multiple Congruities

The issue whether product image interact with one or more self-perspectives such as, the actual self-image, the ideal self-image, the social self-image, and the ideal social self-image has been addressed by Sirgy (1981b, d). Many studies have treated self-image/product-image congruity as if whole and exclusively in terms of a single congruity effect, namely self-congruity (i.e., involving only the actual self-image) (e.g., Grubb & Stern, 1971; Birdwell, 1968; Bellenger, Steinberg, & Stanton, 1976; Hughes & Guerrero, 1971; Green, Maheshwari & Roa, 1969). Most of these studies provided support for the relationship between self-congruity and consumer choice.

Many other studies have been found to assess the independent effects of ideal self-image versus actual self-image (or ideal congruity versus self-congruity) on consumer choice (e.g., Dolich, 1969; Ross, 1971; Sirgy, 1979, 1980; Munson, 1974; Belch, 1978; Darnoff and Tatham, 1972). The overall pattern of findings in regards to the differential effects of multiple congruities seems at best equivocal (Sirgy, 1980a).

An Integrated Self-Concept Model

An integrated self-concept theory was developed by this author (Sirgy, 1981b, d) to explain self-concept effects on consumer behavior. The theory advances the notion that every self-image has a value association which determines the degree of positive or negative affect felt when that self-image is activated. This value component associated with a particular self-image replaces the traditional constructs of ideal self-image, ideal social self-image, etc. Correspondingly, every product image also has a value component reflective of the affective intensity associated with that attribute. A specific value-laden self-image interacts with a corresponding value-laden product image and the result occurs in the form of positive self-congruity (match between a positive product image and a positive self-image), positive self-incongruity (match between a positive product image and negative self-image), negative self-incongruity (match between a negative product image and a positive self-image), or negative self-congruity (match between a negative product image and negative self-image).

Based on self-esteem need dynamics, the theory predicts that an individual would experience more approach motivation towards a particular product given a positive self-incongruity than a positive self-incongruity condition. In contrast, more avoidance motivation would be felt towards the product under negative self-incongruity than negative self-congruity conditions (see Figure 1).

However, these predictions are based on only the psychological dynamics of self-esteem needs. Other self-concept motives such as the need for self-consistency are known to play a significant role in goal-directed behavior (see Sirgy, 1981b, d). Self-consistency motivation is said to drive the individual to behave in ways consistent with his/her perception of himself/herself, since behaviors which are realized to be inconsistent with his/her self-image threaten self-organization of his/her self-theory. Therefore, people guard themselves from the threat of conceptual disorganization by attempting to behave consistently with their self-perceptions. As a result, self-consistency motivation counteracts self-esteem motivation under incongruity conditions. The resultant motivational tendency is shown in Figure 2.