



Honors Research Assistant Program

Title: Cultural Symbolism of Brands and Self-Brand Relationships

Description of the Research: Imbuing brands with unique meanings that resonate among consumers is the cornerstone of the brand building process (Keller 1993). Not surprisingly, marketing researchers have devoted special attention to measuring the multiple meanings symbolized by brands and to studying preferences for brands imbued with those symbolic meanings that match consumers' personal identities (e.g., Aaker 1999). The present research seeks to examine several unanswered questions related to the bonds that consumers establish with brands that symbolize a self-relevant social group. Specifically, would consumers high in identification with a group form stronger bonds with brands that symbolize the group compared to brands low in group symbolism? How resistant would these self-brand connections be to negative feedback from product failures? How do people update the image of a brand that symbolizes the group? How would highly identified consumers react to marketing actions aimed at associating symbolic brands with opposite groups? This research proposes that the answer to these questions can be found on the cultural symbolism of brands and on their potential for symbolizing a self-relevant group identity. Cultural symbolism is defined as the extent to which cultural group members agree on the match between the brand and an abstract group image. This research will study how the cultural symbolism of a brand can be used to further understand the nature of self-brand relationships. The model developed here will help global marketers to devise optimal brand positioning in different cultural/ethnic settings. This research will include conducting surveys in multiple countries/ethnic segments to uncover relationships among the variables of interest.

Responsibilities of the Student: Hands-on experience to conducting marketing research as they will:

1. Help in preparing the surveys: researching about consumer brands in different countries/ethnic segments.
2. Help in gathering archival data: building and analyzing a database of advertisements.
3. Support in data collection and data analysis. This will involve survey preparation, handling of questionnaires, data entry, and basic data analysis using statistical packages (e.g., SPSS).
4. Research the literature: searching for relevant articles in electronic journals.

Approximate Number of Hours/Schedule:

3 hours/ week

Qualifications: Business-related major (preferably marketing). Knowledge of SPSS (desirable).