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# Conceptualizing the consumer-brand relationship as a truly dyadic process

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# CONCEPTUALIZING THE CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP AS A TRULY DYADIC PROCESS

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband and Memommie, for supporting me through the long and challenging process.

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Thank you to all my family, friends, and mentors for their help and support through this long process. Their kind words of encouragement were appreciated, and I couldn't have done it without them. I can now "look up." And to Georgia and David, a special thanks for letting me live with them in Baton Rouge for months on end!

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**DEDICATION** ..... ii

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS** ..... iii

**ABSTRACT** ..... vii

**INTRODUCTION** ..... 1

**ESSAY 1: CONCEPTUALIZING THE CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP** ..... 3

Introduction ..... 3
What is a Relationship? ..... 4
Truly Dyadic Relationships ..... 7
Parasocial Relationships ..... 10
Relationship Outcomes ..... 11
Is the Consumer-brand Relationship Really a Relationship? ..... 14
What is a Consumer-brand Relationship (CBR)? ..... 15
Current Conceptualization of the Consumer-brand Relationship ..... 16
The Need to Consider a Truly Dyadic CBR ..... 19
Examining the CBR as a Truly Dyadic Process ..... 21
The Creation of a Social Bond ..... 22
The Dyadic CBR Processes ..... 23
Summary ..... 33
Where Does Brand-loyalty Fit? ..... 34
Proposed Examination of the Truly Dyadic CBR Process ..... 36
Proposed Study 1 (Essay 2) ..... 37
Proposed Study 2 (Essay 3) ..... 38
Discussion and Conclusion ..... 39
Future Research ..... 40

**ESSAY 2: EXAMINING CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTION: A FOCUS ON SOCIAL INTERACTION** ..... 43

Introduction ..... 43
The Literature ..... 43
Appropriateness of the Qualitative Research Design ..... 43
Pretest: Exploratory Interviews ..... 44
Main Study: In-depth Interviews ..... 45
The Consumer-Brand Relationship ..... 45
Current Conceptualization ..... 45
Examining the Truly Dyadic Consumer-brand Relationship ..... 46
What is Social Interaction Between Consumers and Brands? ..... 47
Background Theory ..... 47
Summary ..... 53
Pretest: Exploratory Interviews ..... 54
Method ..... 54
Results ..... 59
Discussion ..... 65
Summary ..... 68
Main Study: In-depth Interviews ..... 68

Method ..... 69
Results and Discussion ..... 73
Summary ..... 88
General Discussion ..... 88
Theoretical Implications ..... 89
Managerial Implications ..... 89
Study Limitations ..... 90
Future Research and Conclusion ..... 91

**ESSAY 3: EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTION ..... 92**
Introduction ..... 92
The Consumer-Brand Relationship Context ..... 94
Current Conceptualization of the CBR ..... 95
Interaction in the Consumer-brand Relationship Context ..... 95
Developing a Scale of Consumer-Brand Interaction ..... 97
Construct Domain: The Consumer-brand Interaction ..... 98
Construct Domain: The Dimensions of the Consumer-brand Interaction ..... 99
Method ..... 103
Measure Purification ..... 114
Measurement Model ..... 116
Testing a Model of Consumer-brand Interaction ..... 122
Proposed Structural Model ..... 122
Results ..... 123
Discussion ..... 126
Moderation Analysis ..... 129
General Discussion ..... 135
Implications ..... 136
Study Limitations ..... 138
Future Research ..... 138

**FINAL CONCLUSION ..... 143**

**REFERENCES ..... 144**

**APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE DESCRIPTION FOR ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST ..... 159**

**APPENDIX 2: CODING TABLES USED TO DETERMINE PRESENSE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION (ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST) ..... 160**

**APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST ANALYSIS ..... 161**

**APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST) ..... 169**

**APPENDIX 5: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (ESSAY 2 MAIN STUDY) ..... 170**

**APPENDIX 6: SEMI-STRUCTURED GUIDE (ESSAY 2 MAIN STUDY MEMBER CHECK) ... 171**

**APPENDIX 7: QUESTIONNAIRE USED FOR ESSAY 3 ..... 174**

**VITA ..... 192**

# ABSTRACT

The consumer-brand relationship (CBR) has gained interest in recent years, but as currently conceptualized, it is limited to a parasocial relationship where the role of the brand is not acknowledged. In order to better understand the CBR, we have to ask several key questions: (1) What is the CBR? (2) What are consumer-brand interactions (CBIs)? And (3) How can we measure CBIs?

The objective in Essay 1 is to develop a better understanding of the conceptual foundation of the CBR. This was accomplished through extensive review of relevant literature, which highlighted the need to consider the CBR as a truly dyadic process (rather than a parasocial relationship). At the end of Essay 1, a conceptual definition of the CBR is presented, and the importance of two types of interactions (transactional and social) is stressed. Essay 2 focuses more on the level of interaction in the CBR context—the consumer-brand interaction (CBI). Through a qualitative research design, several interaction themes in the CBR context were discovered, and the result was a comprehensive description of the CBI—including a definition and identification of five relevant CBI dimensions. The CBI and these dimensions were empirically examined in Essay 3. Through the development of a measurement scale for CBI and dimensions, a structural model representing the relationships between these constructs could be tested. In addition, moderating effects of interaction type (transactional and social) were considered.

The essays provide a better understanding of the CBR by first focusing in on the individual interactions (CBIs) that actually create those relationships. And by considering the CBR as a truly dyadic process, the manager's role is considered—thereby providing managerial and theoretical implications.

# INTRODUCTION

The consumer-brand relationship (CBR) literature is based on the premise that consumers can and do view brands as relationship partners. Yet this conceptualization has as its foundation the parasocial relationship (i.e., no requirement of direct interaction between the consumer and brand as active relationship partners). While this type of relationship allows for the broadest perspective on the CBR, the rapidly changing marketplace is undergoing technological advances making it easier for dyadic relationships to form where consumers and brands communicate directly. Essay 1 finds that a distinction can be made when the consumer-brand relationship is truly a dyadic process. Doing so recognizes that there exists two active relationship partners engaged in transactional and social interactions resulting in the creation of a social bond in addition to any transactional activities. So, in order to understand the CBR, we must first examine the individual interactions that form those relationships. These consumer-brand interactions (CBIs) can be either transactional (i.e., exchange of money for goods/services) or social (exchange of information beyond/besides what is needed to complete the transaction).

As the transactional interaction is more clearly defined, social interaction must be explored further. A qualitative research design is used in Essay 2 to examine CBI (and social interaction especially) more closely. Preliminary interview data and relevant literature were used to aid in the development of a semi-structured interview guide for use in conducting ten focused in-depth interviews. The data collected was analyzed and used to develop a better understanding of social interaction in the CBR context, as well as to form a conceptual definition of CBI and five relevant dimensions (reciprocal communication, mutual effort, accepted boundaries, personalization, and emotion). Consumer-brand interaction and these dimensions are then empirically examined in Essay 3: (1) A scale development process is used to find measures for CBI and the relevant dimensions. (2) A structural model of CBI and

dimensions is tested, and (3) moderating effects of interaction type (transactional and social) are considered.

## ESSAY 1: CONCEPTUALIZING THE CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIP

### Introduction

Relationship marketing has become the dominant paradigm in marketing, replacing the traditional transactional focus on discrete purchase encounters and fostering the development of relationship theory within the marketing domain. The shift from transactional marketing to relationship marketing that has occurred over the past two decades (Gronroos, 1991, 1999; Kotler, 1991; Webster, 1992; Gundlach and Murphy, 1993; Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Parvatiyar and Sheth, 1999; Sheth, 2002; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) has provided an impetus to extend the concept of an interpersonal relationship to the relationship between a consumer and a brand (Fournier, 1998). Research in the area of relationship marketing is abundant, and since Fournier's (1998) seminal article, the concept of the consumer-brand relationship (CBR) has become a popular area of study (Blackston, 2000; Bengtsson, 2003; Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004; Aggarwal, 2004; Coupland, 2005; Hess and Story, 2005; Aggarwal and Zhang, 2006; Hayes, Alford, Süver, and York, 2006; Chung and Beverland, 2006; Chang and Chieng, 2006; Braun-LaTour, LaTour, and Zinkhan, 2007). However, much research to date has taken a very perceptual approach—examining the CBR as a parasocial relationship (i.e., the relationship is constructed in the mind of the consumer, and interactions between the consumer and the brand are not considered). This research has been invaluable in providing the theoretical and qualitative support for the ability of consumers to view brands as relationship partners. But it has yet to be determined as to whether or not brands and consumers can act as true, interactive relationship partners, since this traditional approach doesn't account for actual interaction between the two parties, or the brand's role is limited.

While the CBR is a specific type of marketing relationship, little research has been performed to define the requirements of the CBR. As a type of relationship, it is important to understand where the CBR fits within the broader relationship framework. Examination of the relationship literature suggests

that two distinct relationship types exist—one in which only a one-way attachment is present (parasocial relationship), and the other in which two-way interaction (reciprocal exchange between two parties) occurs (truly dyadic relationship). This suggests that both parasocial and truly dyadic CBRs likely exist.

The current conceptualization of the CBR seems to reflect only one type—parasocial. By examining the truly dyadic CBR as well, a more complete picture of the CBR process emerges. A review of the CBR literature suggests several directions for research. First, in previous conceptualizations of this type of relationship, typically only the consumer's perspective is considered. Without considering both parties, is the CBR really a relationship? Some relationship processes only emerge when both parties engage in active interaction and/or communication. Second, to be considered are two types of interaction are relevant for the CBR—transactional (based primarily on the exchange of money for goods/services) and social (based on the exchange of information beyond what is needed to complete the transaction). Therefore this research proposes that it is beneficial to examine the CBR as a truly dyadic process, where: (1) a social bond is created (2) through interactions between two active relationship partners (dyadic processes) on (3) both a transactional and social component (two-component approach). Considering the truly dyadic CBR addresses limitations of the current conceptualization of the CBR as a parasocial relationship. Not only does examining the truly dyadic CBR provide a more comprehensive understanding of the CBR, it gives both consumer AND brand an active role in the relationship process. It takes the concept out of the minds of the consumer and into the shared hands of two active relationship partners. In addition, the resulting social bond is expected to lead to consumer outcomes that cannot be obtained through a parasocial CBR or brand loyalty alone.

**What is a Relationship?**

The term relationship is considered synonymous with *connection* and *association*. Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary (2009) defines relationship as: "*(1) The state of being related or interrelated, (2) The relation connecting or binding participants in a relationship, and (3) A state of*

*affairs existing between those having relations or dealings, including a romantic or passionate attachment."* Researchers from many disciplines have proposed varying definitions of the term *relationship*. Many definitions that have developed are specific to relationship type (Berscheid, 1994, 1996); thus, a well-accepted, overarching definition has not been accepted in the general relationship literature. It seems evident by these definitions that at the most basic level, a relationship can be represented by a connection between two or more parties that results in a bond. In the broadest sense, a relationship doesn't require interaction, and a one-way attachment would suffice, as it would represent a type of emotional bond. Many of the definitions (Table 1.1), however, go further and reflect a truly dyadic relationship and include (1) repeated interactions (Kelley, et al., 1983; Hinde, 1979; Blumstein and Kollock, 1988; Fournier, 1998), (2) active partners (Morton and Douglas, 1981; Harvey, 1995; Clark and Reis, 1988; Blumstein and Kollock, 1988), and/or (3) the creation of a social bond (Morton and Douglas, 1981; Kelley, et al., 1983; Clark and Reis, 1988; Hughes, et al., 2001).

It is important to note that these definitions are not limited to only a positive bond, as negative bonds can also occur (as with dysfunctional relationships). Research in such areas as domestic violence, divorce, date rape, and stalking highlight the possible negative outcomes of relationships (Harvey and Pauwels, 1999). So, as we move through the discussion, it is important to keep in mind that although there is more focus on the positive side of relationships (as they are desirable), there is a negative side as well.

Therefore, examination of these various definitions leads to the emergence of two different types of relationships: One is the parasocial relationship in which only a one-way attachment is present, and the other is the truly dyadic relationship in which two-way interaction occurs. A parasocial relationship involves feelings and reactions directed *toward* another party, and is based on simulated interaction (Cohen, 2003). A truly dyadic relationship involves reciprocal interaction between two relationship

partners. Although they both fit the broadest definition of relationship, each of these relationship types has different characteristics and outcomes that make them distinct (Figure 1.1).

*Table 1.1: Definitions of Relationship from Various Disciplines*

| **Discipline** | **Researcher(s)** | **Definition** |
|---|---|---|
| Psychology | Morton & Douglas (1981) | A *personal relationship* is defined as "the construction of a shared and unique body of interpersonal norms, rules, and world views." |
| | Kelley, et al. (1983) | A *relationship* exists "if two people's behaviors, emotions, and thoughts are mutually and causally interconnected."<br>"A *close relationship* is one of strong, frequent, and diverse interdependence that lasts over a considerable period of time." |
| | Harvey (1995) | A *close relationship* is one "that has extended over some period of time and involves a mutual understanding of closeness and mutual behavior that is seen by the couple as indicative of closeness (p.7) |
| | Hinde (1979) | "Relationships…have properties that depend on the patterning of interactions…not present in the interactions themselves." (p.20) |
| | Clark & Reis (1988) | "A *relationship* is defined as *close* to the extent that it endures and involves strong, frequent, and diverse causal interconnections." (p.611)<br>"*Intimacy* is defined as a process in which one person expresses important self-relevant feelings and information to another, and as a result of the other's response comes to feel known, validated, and cared for." (p.628) |
| Sociology | Blumstein & Kollock (1988) | "In any *relationship* the two participants are interdependent, i.e. the behavior of each affects the outcomes of the other…and is comprised of a series of related interactions, each affected by past episodes, and in turn affecting future interactions." (p.468)<br>"*Close relationship* often connotes a warm, intimate bond, and….the presence of positive, intense emotions. As a close relationship develops into a *personal* one, a second level of interdependence is added: over the course of time the two people become interdependent at the level of personal dispositions and characteristics. In a personal relationship the participants interact with each other as unique individuals, rather than as interchangeable occupants of social positions." (p.469) |
| | Hughes, et al. (2001) | "An association that lasts long enough for two people to become linked together by a relatively stable set of expectations." |
| Marketing | Fournier (1998) | "*Relationships* are constituted of a series of repeated exchanges between two parties known to each other; they evolve in response to these interactions and fluctuations in the contextual environment." (p.346) |
| | Aggarwal (1994) | "*Relationships* are a sequence of interactions between parties where the probable course of future interactions between them is significantly different from that of strangers (Hinde, 1976)." (p.88) |

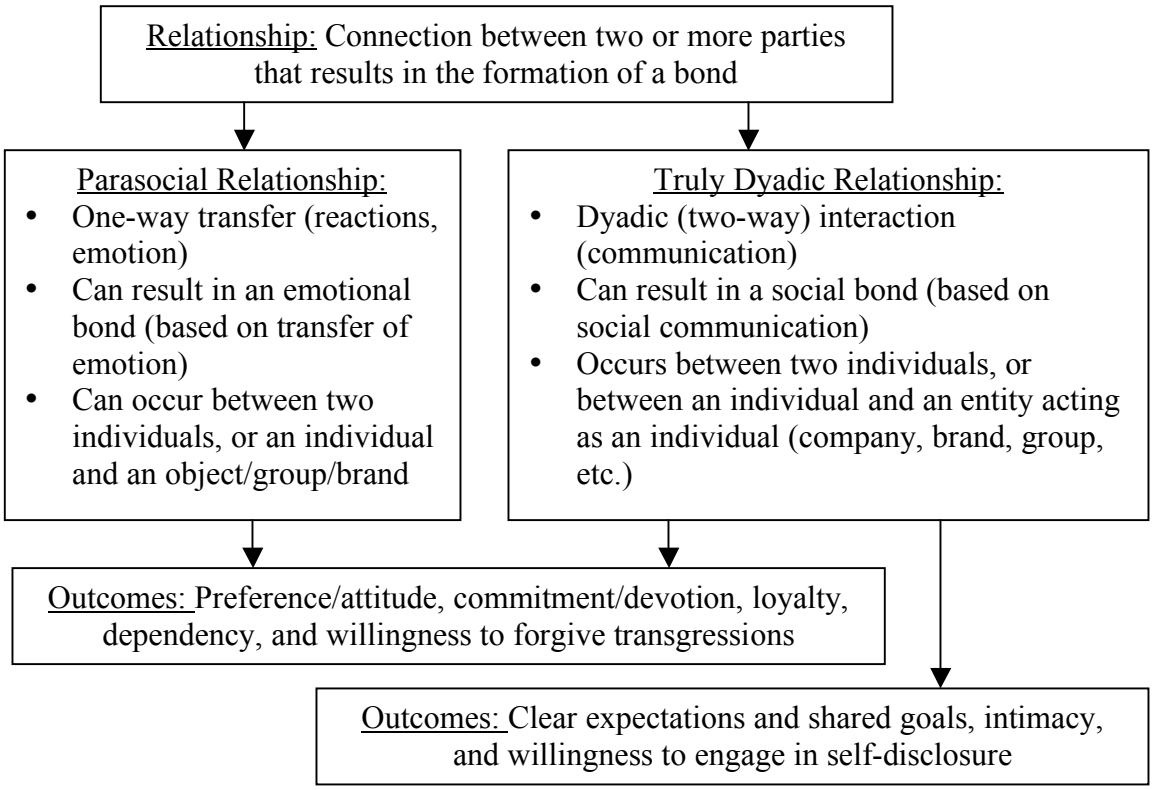


*Figure 1.1: Conceptual Overview of Relationships*

***Truly Dyadic Relationships***

A relationship is most often described as a dynamic process that grows and changes based on interaction between two parties (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987; Fournier, 2005; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2008). This highlights two important relationship elements: (1) dyadic interaction, and (2) two active relationship partners. Dyadic interaction is the basis of the relationship process, and includes reciprocity between two active relationship partners (Aggarwal, 2004). It has been defined as "the process of exchanging products, services, information, financial instruments, and socially valued experiences" that can result in increased levels of trust and mutual understanding (Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2008) based on the establishment of relationship norms. This process is dependent on both

partners taking an active role in the relationship. In distinguishing truly dyadic relationships, at least three fundamental elements emerge: reciprocity, social norms and social bonds.

*Reciprocity*

For a relationship to be truly dyadic, reciprocity is required. The norm of reciprocity is developed through repeated interactions between relationship partners. So, the focus here is on both parties taking an active role in the dynamic relationship process. Contract law theorist, Ian Macneil, stressed the need for reciprocity and defined exchange as "the giving up of something in return for receiving something else" (Macneil, 1986, p. 567). Reciprocity has also been defined as the process where a mutual exchange based on acceptable terms takes place (Houston and Gassenheimer, 1987). These definitions highlight two very distinct ways of viewing the concept of reciprocity.

The first way to view reciprocity is tied to social exchange theory and is more of a normative attitude reflected in Aggarwal's (2004) description of a communal relationship (Table 1.2), where there is a consideration of the other's needs. Social exchange theory explains that individuals expect to get as much out of the relationship as they put in (Li and Dant, 1997). The theory has been defined as an "interaction in which giving and receiving material or intangible resources is at least partially predicated on the expectation of return or reciprocity" (Uehara, 1990, p. 523). This extends the concept of reciprocity to include non-material elements of the exchange (such as personal information), thus acknowledging a social component (Uehara, 1990).

The second perspective is tied to equity theory, which states that people expect each relationship partner's inputs to be equivalent to their outcomes (Clark and Reis, 1988; Blumstein and Kollock, 1988). This describes the kind of "tit for tat" mentality that is represented by Aggarwal's (2004) exchange relationship norms—where one relationship partner gives benefits to the other in order to get something back in return. These exchange relationship norms (Table 1.2) would most likely be used to guide business or legal transactions. Although it can be argued that these types of transactions communicate

*something*, the norms guiding them don't account for more complex social communication—so they would not be used to guide social interactions.

*Social Norms*

Social norms are dependent on interaction and are only established in truly dyadic relationships. As mentioned above, interaction can occur in many ways (legal transactions, purchases, sharing personal information, etc.). Exchange norms are more clearly established for many types of interactions, such as with exchange of money for goods. But the development of social norms is very dependent on interpersonal communication between the relationship partners and is reflected in Aggarwal's (2004) description of communal relationship norms (Table 1.2). These norms would likely be used to guide personal relationships, such as friendships, and romantic and family relationships—where one partner is willing to help the other without expectation of immediate or direct "repayment," and each partner is more likely think about the other's needs before their own. Without communication, how can these social norms be established? This is the reason social communication is given a central role in much of the relationship literature.

*Social Bond*

The creation of a social bond is another key element of a dyadic relationship. It is typically understood that the dimension of closeness underlies most relationship phenomena of interest (Berscheid, 1996), and Kelley, et al. (1983) stressed that closeness is derived from the interaction infrastructure of the relationship, which is comprised of relationship interaction patterns that have developed over time (Berscheid, 1996). This indicates that a close relationship is represented by a warm, intimate bond (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988). During the relationship process, partners engage in constructing a private culture—a shared understanding of norms, rules, and world views (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988). As time passes and repeated interactions take place, the relationship changes and grows. This change and growth occurs by building onto the relationship through each encounter, thus

strengthening the bond (Smith, 1968). This research highlights possible outcomes of the creation of a social bond, such as levels of intimacy and shared goals/expectations.

*Table 1.2: Norms of Exchange and Communal Relationships**

| **Exchange relationship norms** | **Communal relationship norms** |
|---|---|
| Accepting help with money is preferred to no payment. | Accepting help with no monetary payment is preferred. |
| Desirable to give comparable benefits in return for benefits received. | Less desirable to give comparable benefits in return for benefits received. |
| Prompt repayment for specific benefits received is expected. | Prompt repayment for specific benefits received is not expected. |
| More likely to ask for repayments for benefits rendered. | Less likely to ask for repayments for benefits rendered. |
| More likely to keep track of inputs and outcomes in a joint task. | Less likely to keep track of individual inputs and outcomes in a joint task. |
| Divide rewards according to each person's inputs and contributions. | Divide rewards according to each person's needs and requirements. |
| Helping others is less likely. | Helping others is more likely. |
| Requesting help from others is less likely. | Requesting help from others is more likely. |
| Keeping track of others' needs is less likely. | Keeping track of others' needs is more likely. |
| Less responsive to others' emotional states. | More responsive to others' emotional states. |

*Aggarwal (2004), table 1, pl. 89

***Parasocial Relationships***

A parasocial relationship is one-sided, where one party knows a great deal about the other, but the relationship is not reciprocated (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Most often the parasocial relationship refers to an actor and viewer; it occurs when the viewer perceives an intimate connection with an actor (television, radio, play, or book character) (Ballantine and Martin, 2005; Horton and Wohl, 1956) without experiencing any actual contact with the actor. Similarly, people can develop these types of relationships with objects, which have no means of reciprocation. Early research on attachment theory concluded that infant monkeys were able to develop emotional attachments to soft objects in the absence of their mother (Van der Horst and Van der Veer, 2008). Research on humans' attachment to treasured objects ranges from studies examining children's attachment to transitional objects—such as a blanket (Sherman, Hertzig, Austrian, and Shapiro, 1981), to adult's attachment to mobile phones (Vincent,

2006) and their favorite products and brands (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). So, although these relationships don't involve dyadic interaction, we can see how they might provide benefits—such as trust and comfort.

Parasocial relationships not only occur when one party is unable or unwilling to interact, as with treasured objects and famous actors. But it can occur as a precursor to a truly dyadic relationship, where one party may have developed an emotional bond with another party, but has yet to interact with them. If the two parties do begin to interact, dyadic processes would then emerge. The creation of a social bond and the development of social norms are what essentially distinguish a truly dyadic relationship from a non-relationship or parasocial relationship. But if the ability to interact exists (as with a brand or an actor), there is no reason that a parasocial relationship could not become a truly dyadic relationship.

***Relationship Outcomes***

Relationship outcomes have been defined as consequences of the association between two or more parties that change the environment, and/or alter or solidify shared goals (Broom, Casey, and Ritchey, 1997). Many constructs from both the dyadic and parasocial relationship literatures have proven useful in assessing the strength of the resulting bond—from trust, satisfaction, commitment (Hess and Story, 2005), and loyalty (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987) to the more concrete—like willingness to forgive transgressions (DeShea, 2003). Table 1.3 highlights a few key outcomes, and arranges them around the cognitive-affective-behavioral framework; where cognitive outcomes are based on cognitive processes (such as belief formation), affective outcomes reflect emotional responses, and behavioral outcomes are based on actions (or intentions to act). Some outcomes depend on dyadic interaction and are, therefore, unique to truly dyadic relationships. Other outcomes can be derived from an emotional bond alone, as in a parasocial relationship.

*Table 1.3: Relationship Outcomes for Parasocial and Truly Dyadic Relationships*

| | ***Parasocial Relationship Outcomes*** | ***Outcomes unique to truly dyadic relationships*** |
|---|---|---|
| ***Cognitive*** | Preference, attitude, satisfaction, familiarity | Clear expectations and shared goals based on established norms. |
| ***Affective*** | Commitment, trust, comfort | Intimacy |
| ***Behavioral*** | Loyalty, dependency, and willingness to forgive transgressions | Willingness to engage in self-disclosure |

*Outcomes of a Truly Dyadic Relationship*

In a truly dyadic relationship, relevant outcomes require reciprocal interaction and can be attributed to the existence of a social bond. As mentioned previously, the creation of a social bond is often considered a key element of an interpersonal relationship (Table 1.1), and the focus here is on the cognitive, affective, and behavioral outcomes of that social bond. Existing research highlights possible outcomes of the creation of a social bond, such as the development of expectations and shared goals based on established norms (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988; Barlow, 2003; Berschied, 1985; Hill and Hansen, 1960; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2008), increased levels of intimacy (Rubin, 1973; Clark and Reis, 1988), and increased willingness to engage in self-disclosure (Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco, 1998; Moon, 2000). For example, a close friendship (social bond) is created through social interaction, where each friend develops clear expectations of the relationship partner (cognitive) as the dyadic relationship processes progress. As the bond strengthens, the friends are likely to become more intimate (affective) and more willing to share personal information (behavioral) with one another. As these outcomes are dependent on dyadic interaction, they would only occur in truly dyadic relationships.

*Outcomes of a Parasocial Relationship*

Not all outcomes require dyadic processes and are dependent on a social bond. Cognitive outcomes such as preference and satisfaction can be derived from beliefs based on information received

via one-way marketing communications (such as traditional advertising). Similarly, affective outcomes can be based on feelings projected from one party onto another. Even without two-way communication, certain behaviors and behavioral intentions can occur—which are typically based on the beliefs (cognitive) and feelings (affective) one party has for the other. Therefore, in a parasocial relationship, relevant outcomes are those that can be attributed to the presence of an emotional bond, but that don't require dyadic processes—although there may be consequences for both parties. For example, fans are often in a parasocial relationship with their object of affection—their favorite sports team. They will likely show a strong loyalty to "their" team, even in the absence of any actual direct interaction (dyadic processes) with the team, and will likely experience emotional benefits from the bond—such as being elated when the team wins. The consequences for the team organization might be an increase in sales of tickets or merchandise (direct), or positive word-of-mouth from the fan. So, it is apparent that some relationship outcomes can be derived from an emotional bond alone—although the presence of a social interaction might be expected to intensify them.

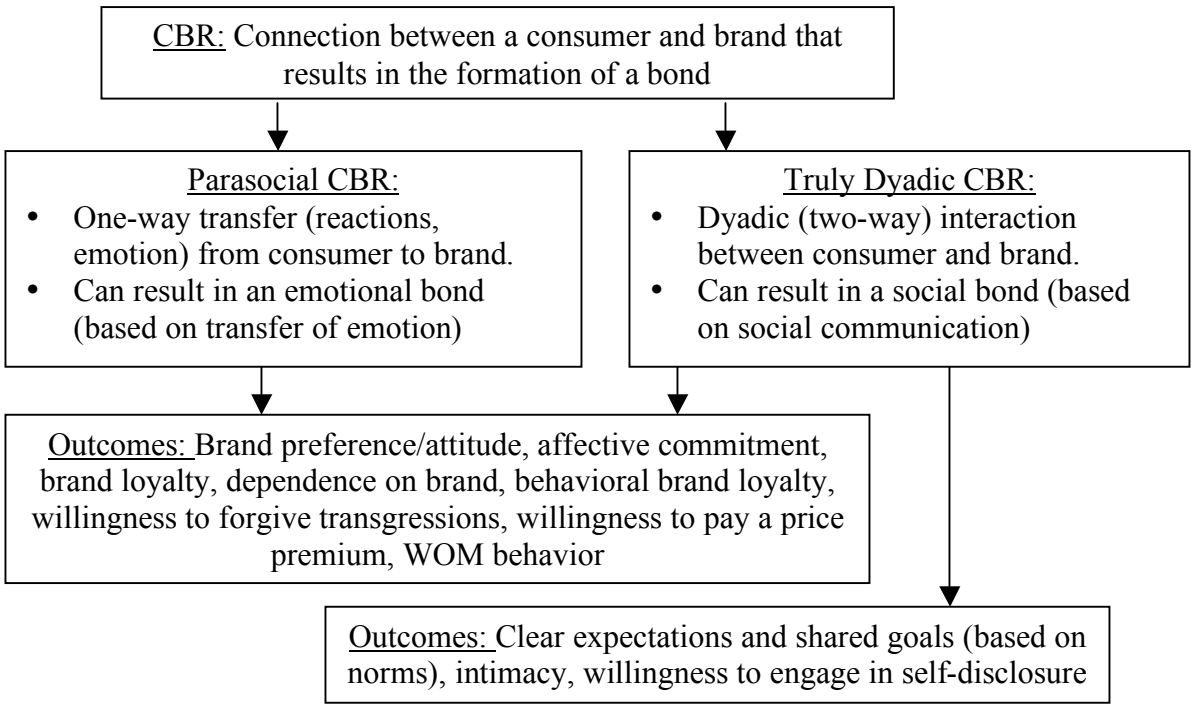


*Figure 1.2: Conceptual Overview of CBR*

**Is the Consumer-brand Relationship Really a Relationship?**

Based on the understanding of relationships presented earlier, it is clear that a CBR is a relationship. However, as currently conceptualized, the concept is limited to the domain of parasocial relationships. This leads to some limitations for marketers, such as a failure to consider the role of brand as relationship partner. Therefore there is a need to explore a different type of CBR, the truly dyadic CBR—which requires the presence of a social bond between two interactive relationship partners. Figure 1.2 identifies two types of CBRs and highlights differing characteristics and outcomes. This allows for a better understanding of how the CBR fits within the broader relationship framework.

Considering the different elements of the dyadic relationship processes that have been discussed, we can outline some differences between the parasocial and truly dyadic CBRs (Table 1.4). This table can be used as a guide for the following sections, where a clear distinction between the parasocial and truly dyadic CBRs is made.

*Table 1.4: Comparison of Parasocial and Truly Dyadic CBRs*

| | **Parasocial CBR** | **Truly Dyadic CBR** |
|---|---|---|
| **Consumer's role** | Active | Active |
| **Brand's role** | Not considered | Active |
| **Type of bond** | Emotional attachment | Social bond |
| **Interaction**<br>**-transactional**<br>**-social** | Usage encounters<br>-not considered<br>-not considered | <br>-Purchases<br>-Social communication |
| **Reciprocity** | Indirect and generalized | Direct (transactional and social)<br>-based on social exchange theory<br>-guided by communal norms |
| **Nature of Communication** | None considered | Social (exchange of personal information), transactions (purchases) |
| **Expected Outcomes** | Emotional connection leading to: Brand preference/attitude, affective commitment, brand loyalty, dependence on brand, behavioral brand loyalty, willingness to forgive transgressions, willingness to pay a price premium, WOM behavior | Creation of a social bond leading to: Clear expectations and shared goals (based on norms), intimacy, willingness to engage in self-disclosure |

**What is a Consumer-brand Relationship (CBR)?**

Extant research demonstrates that consumers are capable of viewing a brand in much the same way they do a person. Words that are usually reserved for describing relationships between people are used frequently to describe consumers' relationships with brands. People commonly use terms such as trust, listening, equality, recognition, vulnerability (MacLeod, 2000), and even love and hate to describe how they feel about brands (Blackston, 2000). This language used suggests that consumers can view a brand as a relationship partner even without the creation of a social bond, as with people's attachment to treasured objects or famous actors. In the CBR the consumer develops an attachment to the brand, and just as brand loyalty extends beyond one specific branded product/service, the CBR extends to the brand as a whole. Therefore, in simple terms, a CBR is a relationship where the consumer and the brand act as two relationship partners.

The term consumer-brand relationship was introduced by Fournier (1998), and her seminal article has served as the basis for much of the research in the area. The research was based on the apparent parallel between a person's traditional interpersonal relationships and the relationships he/she forms with brands (Fournier, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004). Fournier (1998) found that personal differences among her informants led to the formation of different types of relationships with brands. For example, a consumer who has a large circle of casual friends would likely exhibit brand variety seeking behavior (see Fournier's description of "fling"). Conversely, a consumer who has a small circle of very close friends would be more likely to exhibit strong loyalty to a few brands. Fournier found strong support that consumers do see themselves as engaged in interpersonal relationships with brands—suggesting that the consumers treated their relationship with brands in much the same way that they treat their traditional interpersonal relationships (with family members, friends, enemies, acquaintances, etc.). This observation served as the basis for applying relationship theory to the examination of CBRs, and is further supported by other researchers who have found that some consumers are more receptive to forming relationships than others, and that they often have preferences in the type of relationships that

they form (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997; Reynolds & Beatty, 1999a; Garbarino & Johnson, 1999, De Wulf et al, 2001, Odekerken-Schroder et al., 2003). Along similar lines, it has been argued that consumers also use the same norms of interpersonal relationships as a guide when forming relationships with brands (Aggarwal, 2004). So, the use of interpersonal relationship theory in the examination of the CBR has proved very useful.

In the 1970s, marketing researchers began to examine dyadic relationships between buyers and sellers, and shortly thereafter dyadic relationships between salesperson/service provider and customer became a focus (Möller and Halinen, 2000). The CBR research takes this concept further by eliminating the salesperson or firm representative from the investigated dyad and considers the overarching brand as the relationship partner of interest. This means that the "brand" can include many types of products (objects) or services. For example, if someone is engaged in a CBR with Community Coffee, he/she would view the Community Coffee *brand* as the potential (parasocial) or actual (truly dyadic) relationship partner, not the individual products or services (such as drip grind coffee, coffee house drinks, or tea bags). But as of yet, the actual interactions between the consumer and brand that are required in a truly dyadic relationship have not been specified within the context of the CBR.

**Current Conceptualization of the Consumer-brand Relationship**

A literature review reveals that in most cases when the CBR is mentioned, the term refers to a feeling *toward* the brand with little (if any) emphasis on interaction or communication. In fact, as currently conceptualized the CBR appears to be primarily reflective of affective loyalty, as the focus is on the feeling the consumer has toward the brand. An academic literature search on "consumer brand relationship" reveals very few articles that make mention of interaction or communication between the two parties—which are generally considered the building blocks of relationships. Since the current research has not considered any actual contact points between the consumer and the brand, then the concept is not likely to be viewed as very applicable for marketing managers.

In addition to showing strong support that consumers are capable of viewing brands as relationship partners, Fournier (1998) attempted to identify various CBR types by outlining CBR dimensions and forms. The framework included a list of dimensions posited to help classify relationship forms (voluntary—imposed, positive—negative, intense—casual, enduring—short-term, public—private, formal—informal, symmetric—asymmetric). Based on these dimensions, Fournier was able to develop fifteen relationship forms, varying from marriage and friendship types, to kinships, flings, and enslavements. These CBR forms help to further explain complex consumer-brand relationships in more traditional interpersonal relationship terms (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004). A few examples of CBR form descriptions (Fournier, 1998, p. 362):

> Arranged marriage: Nonvoluntary union imposed by preferences of third party. Intended for long-term, exclusive commitment, although at low levels of affective attachment.
>
> Casual friends/buddies: Friendship low in affect and intimacy, characterized by infrequent or sporadic engagement, and few expectations for reciprocity or reward.
>
> Enslavements: Nonvoluntary union governed entirely by desires of the relationship partner. Involves negative feelings but persists because of circumstances.

However, how can marketing managers identify what relationship form the consumer perceives? What implications does that have? For example, even if a marketing manager determines that a consumer is having a "fling" (as described in Fournier, 1998) with their brand, what does that really mean for them? What effect does it have on the brand? How should the brand treat the consumer? Therefore, as detailed as Fournier's CBR form descriptions are, they only represent a starting point for marketing managers.

Understandably, extensions on early CBR work have intersected with a second stream of research concerning brand personality. The construction of a brand personality is expected to make it even easier for the consumer to view the brand as an interpersonal relationship partner. The concept of the brand personality was introduced by Aaker (1997), who defined brand personality as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand," which often has symbolic meaning. The researcher outlined five dimensions of brand personality (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and

ruggedness) that are used to give the brand a human-like personality in which the consumer can interact. As a personification of the brand, the brand personality represents a more human form of the brand (Aaker, 1997)—representing "who" the brand is to the consumer (Aggarwal, 2004; Blackston, 2000). Spokes-characters, which are defined as nonhuman characters used to promote a brand (Callcott and Lee, 1994 and 1995; Phillips, 1996; Garretson and Niedrich, 2004), are great examples of personification of brand. Although a spokes-character is not needed to establish a reciprocal relationship with a brand, a spokes-character does seem to make it easier for consumers to identify specific brand personality characteristics. In whatever form it takes, it is expected that the personification of the brand better allows for communication to develop between customer and brand, which is the basis for CBRs (Blackston, 2000).

*Limitations of the Current Conceptualization of the CBR*

Much of the research involving the CBR fails to consider that a relationship is a process involving interaction and two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Hess and Story, 2005), and not merely a "state of existence" (Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2008). In various disciplines (such as psychology, sociology, and communications), dyadic interaction and communication are considered inherent components of the relationship process (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2008). So can a CBR exist without interaction? Without communication? Past CBR research has considered emotional attachment (Fournier, 1998; Heath, Brandt, and Nairn, 2006; Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Restall and Gordon, 1993), but has not directly considered the dyadic processes used to create a social bond. In addition, since the CBR is at its core a type of marketing relationship, the traditional transactional marketing approach (Möller and Halinen, 2000) should not be completely overlooked—therefore the purchase is a fundamental element.

Fournier's (1998) descriptions of CBRs are rich and complex, but the purchase component was assumed, not explicitly addressed. This leads to three specific limitations in CBR research: (1) Current

CBR theory only considers one active relationship party—the consumer. (2) As usage situations are stressed, interaction is assumed (but should be a core component of the CBR). (3) The role of communication between consumer and brand is not considered. These limitations are primarily due to the "perceptual" nature of the current conceptualization of the CBR, which seems to reflect just one specific type of CBR—parasocial. Support that consumers can at least engage in a parasocial CBR is apparent, but in order to address these limitations, we must consider a CBR type that is truly dyadic in nature.

***The Need to Consider a Truly Dyadic CBR***

In order to address the limitation of the current conceptualization of the CBR, the role of both the consumer and the brand must be considered. Giving both an active role in the process is needed so that interaction can then be considered. The key advantage for marketers in considering a truly dyadic CBR is that it gives them more control in the relationship. A truly dyadic view of the CBR would stress the notion that both relationship partners (consumer and brand) should play an active role in the relationship process. Traditionally, however, both sides of this relationship have not been considered simultaneously. The classic relationship marketing literature focused on the actions of the firm, while CBR work has traditionally considered only the consumer's perspective. So, in order to examine transactional or social interaction between the consumer and brand, we must consider the roles of both partners—which requires considering both relationship marketing and interpersonal relationship theories in conjunction.

Although by and large considered an extension of relationship marketing, it is evident that research on the CBR has taken a much different approach from other areas of relationship marketing research. Early work focused on consumer's *perceptions* of the relational components (Fournier, 1998). The author's descriptions of CBRs were extremely detailed, but the relationships existed solely in the mind of the consumer. Since much of the recent work in the CBR area is grounded in Fournier's (1998) framework, the conceptualization of the CBR is very "perceptual" in nature—meaning that the

consumer perceives a relationship to exist, but the brand may not even be aware of the consumer. This approach is consistent with other researchers (De Wulf, Oderkerken-Schroeder, and Iacobucci, 2001), but fails to acknowledge the brand's role in the relationship.

Relationship marketing involves establishing long-term, customer-focused interactions (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997). This basic definition highlights the firm-side perspective that is most often taken in the relationship marketing literature. This area examines a broad spectrum of relationships between different marketing partners along the supply chain—including buyers, sellers, suppliers, distributors, competitors, customers, etc. (Parvatiyar and Sheth, 1999; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). Many diverse sub-disciplines within marketing have found the concept of relationship marketing valuable, and its influence has been wide-reaching: channels research, business-to-business marketing, sales management, services marketing, retail marketing, consumer marketing, strategic marketing, public policy, international marketing, database marketing, integrated marketing communications, logistics, and supply-chain integration (Berry, 1995; Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987; Gronroos, 1995; Gundlach and Murphy, 1993; Gwinner, Gremler, and Bitner, 1998; Möller and Halinen, 2000; Parvatiyar and Sheth, 1999; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999a, 1999b; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Simonin and Ruth, 1998; Varadarajan and Cunningham, 1995). But the focus tends to be on actions that the firm can take to assert control in the relationship, rather than treating the consumer as a reciprocal relationship partner (as is evidenced by many CRM programs).

While considered part of the general relationship marketing literature, CBR research relies heavily on interpersonal relationship theory and takes a consumer-side perspective. As discussed, the current conceptualization of the CBR as a parasocial relationship also severely limits marketers' control. Although marketers can maintain some level of control over how the consumer gains brand meaning (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry, 2003) in a parasocial CBR, they are essentially managing brand image, not a truly dyadic relationship (which requires interaction). Interaction in a parasocial relationship is

represented by viewing encounters, which are analogous to brand usage encounters in the current conceptualization of the CBR. These types of relationships are perceived by the viewer/consumer as interactive (reciprocal), but only exist in the mind of the viewer/consumer. No actual points of contact between viewer/consumer and actor/brand are considered. This means that, as currently conceptualized, we are unable to determine if the brand can view the consumer as a relationship partner, and whether or not the relationship can become truly dyadic. This indicates that there is room to expand the conceptualization to include CBRs that are truly dyadic in nature. Not only will theory benefit from taking a more comprehensive perspective, but marketing managers may find truly dyadic CBRs more manageable than a parasocial CBR, where they have little control beyond the management of some elements of brand image.

This focus on interpersonal relationship theory seems to be overlooked by many marketing managers employing customer relationship management (CRM). Many CRM programs seem to have devolved into focusing primarily on behavior outcomes (such as repeat purchase behavior) rather than on interpersonal/social interaction (Harker and Egan, 2007; Rapacz, Reilly, and Schultz, 2008). Truly dyadic CBRs account for both the role of the consumer and the brand. This means that both the marketer and the consumer have shared control over the relationship process. Therefore, the potential to help refocus CRM on truly dyadic CBRs is tremendous. Fournier's (1998) study provides a strong conceptual framework on which to build, and existing research has been valuable. But there still exists a need to examine the CBR as a truly dyadic process.

**Examining the CBR as a Truly Dyadic Process**

Based on the previous discussion, there appears to be a need to examine the CBR as a truly dyadic process—building on the existing framework and providing for a more comprehensive perspective with more direct managerial implications. Taking the relationship marketing and interpersonal relationship literatures together, we can obtain a more comprehensive view of the CBR as

a truly dyadic relationship (Figure 1.3), where: (1) a social bond is created (2) through interactions between two active relationship partners (dyadic processes) on (3) both a transactional and social component (two-component approach).

***The Creation of a Social Bond***

Researchers in the CBR area have discussed the idea of CBR strength (Fournier, 1995; 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997; De Wulf, et al., 2001), and the inclusion of such concepts as intimacy and relationship depth (Fournier, 1998) suggest that there may be a possibility that some consumers are able to form a social bond with a brand. The creation of a social bond, however, requires social interactions (Palmatier, et al., 2007), such as sharing of personal information. And that can only be accounted for if considering a truly dyadic relationship. In this way the presence of a social bond can be used to distinguish between consumers who are/have engaged in social interaction with the brand (truly dyadic CBR) and those who have not (parasocial CBR).

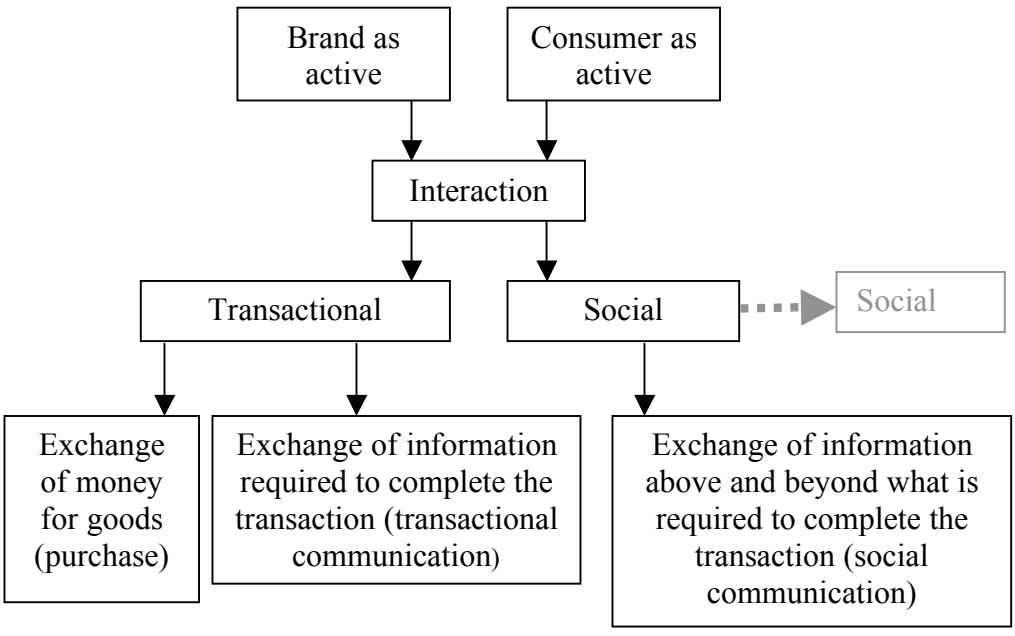


*Figure 1.3: The CBR as a Dyadic Process*

For the truly dyadic CBR, the creation of a social bond is necessary and is one of the factors that makes it unique from a parasocial CBR or other related marketing concepts (such as brand loyalty). The idea of a consumer forming a social bond with a brand goes beyond the concept of brand loyalty, where operationalizations tend to focus on behavioral loyalty and sometimes simple "effect" (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Fournier and Yao, 1997; Fournier, 1998). Although the parasocial CBR does account for the formation of an emotional connection with the brand (Fournier and Yao, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Heath, Brandt, and Nairn, 2006; Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Restall and Gordon, 1993); it doesn't account for social interaction—which is required for the creation of a social bond. Therefore, the creation of a social bond between consumer and brand is an element unique to the truly dyadic CBR.

Using existing CBR research, we are unable to determine when and if social bonds are present. So, examining whether or not consumers and brands can form social bonds has both theoretical and managerial implications. The dyadic processes represent the mechanisms for creating the social bond; therefore, there is support for the importance of going beyond parasocial CBRs to consider truly dyadic CBRs. Fournier (1998) established that consumers do form connections with various brands and view them much as they would friends, family, enemies, acquaintances, etc. However, without knowing whether or not the brand has engaged in social interaction, we are unable to determine whether or not that connection is more representative of a one-way emotional connection ("I love Coke") or a social bond based on social interaction ("Coke loves me back").

***The Dyadic CBR Processes***

Reciprocity, interaction, and the development of relationship norms are central in the dyadic process. The current conceptualization of the CBR uses a very broad definition of reciprocity (Fournier, 1998)—even considering non-direct or "general" reciprocity (such as positive feedback from friends on a purchase). Examining truly dyadic CBRs should allow for consideration of more direct reciprocity derived from both relationship (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987; Fournier, 1998; Blackston, 2000) and

exchange theories (Houston and Gassenheimer, 1987; Kaufmann and Dant, 1992)——both of which are key in the examination of the marketing relationships. Reciprocal processes require interaction between two relationship partners, and this interaction is best understood in the framework of relationship process stages—where movement through the stages requires interaction. Therefore, we will discuss these stages and how they can be used to better understand the truly dyadic CBR.

*Relationship Process Stages*

In the marketing literature, Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh's (1987) relationship process stages are most often used. The authors proposed a set of phases that exchange relationships flow through (Table 1.5): awareness, exploration, expansion, commitment, and dissolution. The first stage, awareness, is defined as one's recognition that another is a feasible exchange partner. The authors stress the importance of situational proximity in facilitating awareness. In the second stage, exploration, "potential exchange partners first consider obligations, benefits, and burdens, and the possibility of exchange" (p. 16). This stage could be brief, or the partners could engage in more extensive testing and evaluation. The third relationship stage, expansion, involves increased interdependence and benefits to both exchange partners. The authors went on to identify five subprocesses that operate at the exploration and expansion stages: attraction, communication and bargaining, development and exercise of power, norm development, and expectation of development. The fourth stage, commitment, "refers to an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners." This involves heightened levels of interdependence leading to loyalty (as an outcome of the relationship). The final stage, dissolution, includes withdrawal and detachment—but it exists only as a possibility (as with all stages), not as an inevitability.

As Table 1.5 illustrates, the relationship process stages (Dwyer, et al., 1987) can be applied to the CBR concept. However, without specifying dyadic interaction, our understanding of the CBR

process stages would be very limited. This is a limitation in the current conceptualization of the CBR, but the foundation has been laid to move the CBR literature in this direction.

*Table 1.5: Relationship Process Stages*

| Relationship process stages (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987) | Definitions | CBR example |
|---|---|---|
| Awareness | Party A's recognition that party B is a feasible exchange partner. Situational proximity between the parties facilitates awareness (p.15). | Brand awareness (no interaction) |
| Exploration and Expansion | Exploration is the search and trial phase in relational exchange (p. 16), and expansion refers to the continual increase in benefits obtained by exchange partners and to their increasing interdependence (p. 18). | With the initiation and continuation of communication, the relationship norms are established and the CBR dimensions crystallize. |
| a) Attraction | The initiating process of the exploration phase (p.16). | Information search and/or brand trial (no social interaction). |
| b) Communication and bargaining | The process whereby in the face of resistance parties rearrange their mutual distributions of obligations, benefits, and burdens (p.16). | Communication used to better understand what the relationship has to offer. |
| c) Power and Justice | "Conceived as the ability to achieve intended effects or goals" (Dahl, 1957). | Through additional communication, brand and consumer begin to better understand their relationship roles. |
| d) Norm development | Norms are "expected patterns of behavior" (Lipset 1975, p.173). Norms provide "guidelines for the initial probes that potential exchange partners may make towards each other" (Scanzoni 1979, p. 68). | Through continuing communication, the brand and consumer begin to better understand the relationship norms. |
| e) Expectations development | Relational expectations concern conflicts of interest and the prospects for unity and trouble. These expectations may either enhance or diminish contractual solidarity (p. 18). | Through continuing communication, the brand and consumer develop expectations of the other's actions. |
| Commitment | Commitment refers to an implicit or explicit pledge or relational continuity between exchange partners (p. 19). | Brand loyalty (behavioral and affective) and increased intimacy. |
| Dissolution | Termination through withdrawal or disengagement of personal relationships (p.19). | Brand switching, and exit behavior. |

*The Two Component Approach: Transactional and Social Interaction*

A relationship is a process (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987; Fournier, 2005; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2008), and examining the truly dyadic CBR allows us to focus on interactions between the consumer and brand. But more specifically the CBR is a type of *marketing* relationship; therefore, there is a need to consider both interpersonal relationship and exchange theories. The two-component approach to the CBR process is therefore proposed, which stresses the importance of two types of interaction: transactional and social. The transactional component is grounded in exchange theory, where reciprocity occurs in the form of a purchase (money for product). The social component is grounded in interpersonal relationship theory, where reciprocity occurs in the form of personal information exchange via social communication. Each interaction component involves communicating different types of information between the relationship partners, but social communication is emphasized here, as it is needed for the creation of a social bond. It is important to note that the focus in this research is on consumer goods brands (as opposed to service or retailing brands) where the consumer does not normally interact with a brand representative during the transaction; thus, it is easier to more clearly separate out the social and transactional components.

The approach of separating out these two means of interaction fits in with past research based on well-accepted theoretical foundations. Many researchers have examined relationship marketing by contrasting it with transactional (or discrete) marketing (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Heide, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Gronroos, one of the leading advocates of this approach, proposed a marketing strategy continuum wherein a relationship-oriented strategy is located at one end, and a transaction-oriented strategy on the opposite end (Gronroos, 1991, 1995). Gronroos differentiated the two by stating that "the goal of transaction marketing is to get customers, whereas the goal of relationship marketing is to get and *keep* customers" (p. 253). This has led to the development of two separate marketing strategies: transactional marketing (focuses on discrete purchases) and relationship marketing (focuses on ongoing interactions with the consumer). However, some have argued that marketers should

implement both of these strategies simultaneously (Anderson and Narus, 1991; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). This indicates a need to view the transactional and relational strategies as two separate components of the overall CBR exchange process.

The current conceptualization of the CBR assumes transactional interaction (purchase) and doesn't directly address social interaction (exchange of personal information)—which limits our ability to fully understand the CBR as a true relationship process. The truly dyadic CBR involves both transactional and social interactions as parts of two separate components of the overall CBR exchange process. Therefore it seems appropriate to separate out two specific types of resources that might be exchanged between consumer and brand: (1) the exchange of material resources (product for money) and (2) the exchange of intangible resources (personal information). The former representing a transactional component, and the latter representing a social component. Interaction on either component involves some form of communication between the two parties.

These two types of interaction could further be differentiated by considering the source of exchange for each. At the most basic level, a CBR involves an exchange. Exchange has been defined as "a transfer of something tangible or intangible, actual or symbolic, between two or more social actors" (Bagozzi, 1979, p. 434). In a marketing relationship, however, the exchange consists not only of product for money, but it includes social benefits as well. This was first highlighted in Bagozzi's work (1978) when he explained that exchange value was derived from two sources—the product itself and from the exchange act. This approach is also supported by Thaler (1985), who specified two types of utilities—acquisition and exchange. Acquisition utility is based on the product itself, while exchange utility is based on social interactions that take place during the exchange process. In addition to support from these firm-based perspectives, some consumer-based perspectives also identify two distinct components. In the shopping literature, the separation of motivations/values into hedonic and utilitarian categories has been a common approach (Babin, Darden, and Griffin, 1994; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). A similar

approach has also been taken in the brand loyalty research, where two types of brand loyalty have been described: purchase loyalty (repurchase intention) and attitudinal loyalty (commitment toward the brand) (Oliver, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Aggarwal (2004) describes two very different sets of norms which can act on a CBR: exchange relationship norms and communal relationship norms. More recently, Hess and Story (2005) discussed functional versus personal brand connections within a consumer-retail brand relationship. Table 1.6 summarizes the theoretical support for a two component model of exchange, which incorporates both transactional and social aspects across several related contexts.

*Table 1.6: Two-component Models in Similar Contexts*

| **Researcher(s)** | **Context** | **Transactional** | **Social** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Bagozzi (1978) | Sources of exchange | Product | Exchange act |
| Thaler (1985) | Types of utility | Acquisition | Exchange |
| Babin, et al. (1994); Arnold and Reynolds (2003) | Types of shopping motivations | Utilitarian | Hedonic |
| Oliver (1999) | Elements of loyalty | Behavioral | Affective |
| Garbarino and Johnson (1999) | Relationship orientation | Transactional | Relational |
| Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) | Types of brand loyalty | Purchase | Attitudinal |
| Arnett, German, Hunt (2003) | Exchange benefits | Economic | Noneconomic (social) |
| Aggarwal (2004) | Relationship norms | Exchange | Communal |
| Hess and Story (2005) | Retail brand connection | Functional | Personal |

The purchase is, of course, still the ultimate goal of marketing, so the transactional component of the CBR is relevant (Aggarwal, 2004). This two component approach allows us to consider this aspect of a truly dyadic CBR separate from any added social processes that emerge. Macneil (1980) defines transactional exchanges as "discrete buyer-seller exchanges of a commodity or performance for money with minimal personal relationships and no anticipation or obligation of future exchanges" (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999, p. 70), which is contrasted with relational exchanges that have a long-term focus. In

fact, the term "transactional" is often treated as synonymous with "discrete." However, for this conceptual framework the transactional component is comprised of the processes designed to meet the functional needs of the transaction—such as the processes that are required in order for a purchase to be made. The stress will, therefore, be on transactional interaction (the exchange of goods for money), rather than individual purchase encounters (discrete transactions).

The truly dyadic CBR goes beyond functional needs that are satisfied by the transactional component alone (Aggarwal, 2004). The transactional component is vital to the truly dyadic CBR process; however, the focus here will be on the more complex social component—which is used to create the social bond. These types of exchanges have been described as being characterized by "cooperative actions and mutual adjustment of both parties, a sharing of the benefits and burdens of the exchange, and planning for future exchange" (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999, p.70). The idea that the social component is comprised of intangible resources such as information coincides with a theory termed "minding the close relationship." This theory states that in order to maintain a close relationship, the relationship partners must have a "never-ending reciprocal pattern of behavior in which each person tries to know the other and to allow the other to know him or her" (Harvey and Pauwels, 1999, p. 94). Both this theory and the social exchange theory allude to ongoing social interaction leading to increasing levels of intimacy—again, stressing the importance of the social interaction in the creation of a social bond between the consumer and the brand.

Using Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh's (1987) relationship process stages (Table 1.5) as a framework we can outline how the transactional and social components represent two distinct means of engaging in dyadic interaction, each having differing roles in the truly dyadic CBR process (Table 1.7). For example, when considering the dissolution stage, the consumer may stop interacting on one component, while continuing to interact on the other. If a consumer was engaging in both transactional and social interaction with a brand, but moved out of the brand's distribution area, they could still maintain social

interaction with the brand—even in the absence of transactional interaction. Taking the exploration and expansion stages into account, a consumer may seek out social interaction with an aspirational brand that they cannot (perhaps yet) afford to purchase. These theories suggest that exchange of information, or communication, is the mechanism that allows for the dyadic relationship process to occur.

*Table 1.7: Transactional and Social Components of The Relationship Process Stages*

| **Relationship process stages (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987)** | **Transactional Component** | **Social Component** |
|---|---|---|
| Awareness (no interaction) | The consumer becomes aware that a brand might have the product benefits they are looking for. | The consumer becomes aware that a brand might have the social benefits they are looking for. |
| Exploration | The consumer tries the brand and starts to develop expectations of product performance, attributes, etc. | The consumer initiates (or responds to) social communication with (from) the brand and social norms develop. |
| Expansion | The consumer continues purchasing the brand and becomes more dependent on it. | The consumer continues social communication the CBR dimensions crystallize. |
| Commitment | Behavioral loyalty derived from increased benefits from purchasing the brand. | Affective loyalty derived from social communication. Defending and/or advocating for the brand. |
| Dissolution | The consumer purchases another brand (brand switching), or the brand discontinues product or limits distributions channels. | The consumer or brand break the social bond and end social communications. |

*The Role of Communication in the Truly Dyadic Process*

Interactions have been described more simply as a series of episodes that require two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). These episodes occur through the relationship process stages and can be generative in nature (having a strengthening effect), degenerative (having a negative effect), or neutral (no effect). Therefore, it isn't surprising that interpersonal relationship quality is often considered in terms of communication success and failure (Trommsdorff and John, 1992). Communication is vital to the CBR process, as consumers are able to establish meaning, and thus, relationships through communication (Blackston, 2000). Both types of CBR interaction (transactional

and social) require some sort of communication between the two parties. Communication is defined as exchange of information, or more specifically the (1) amount, (2) frequency, and (3) quality of the information exchanged (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin, 1996; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans, 2006, p. 138 and 140). One-way communication, like traditional forms of marketing communications (advertising, packaging, branding, etc.) where a marketing message is projected to actual or potential customers, is sufficient in a parasocial relationship. But two-way communication is needed in the truly dyadic CBR, as it is required for social interaction, and thus, the basis for the social bond. In addition, communication is a part of both components, but the information exchanged on each is distinct.

In the context of the CBR, this two-way communication is limited to information exchanged between the consumer and the brand. Although communications via third parties do affect consumer outcomes, they are not the focus here. Traditional word of mouth behavior and involvement with *non-marketer* controlled brand communities and online message boards (where there is no ability for the consumer and brand to interact directly) are representative of consumer-to-consumer communication. Also, communication with retailers or service providers who carry the brand are not considered representative of consumer-brand communication—unless the retailer is the brand of interest. Although these types of communications are not the focus here, it is acknowledged that even consumer-to-consumer interactions can facilitate (or hinder) consumer-to-brand communication.

The importance of two-way interactive communication in dyadic relationships is highlighted by the fact that they are grounded in purposeful social interaction (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). Shani and Chalasani (1992) allude to the importance of two-way communication in relationships by describing them as involving: “interactive, individualized and value-added contacts.” And Parvatiyar and Sheth (1999) make mention of, “engaging in cooperative and collaborative activities as being part of the relationship process.” So it is surprising that communication has not been given a

more central role in the academic examination of the CBR. Managers, on the other hand, may have a practical reason for downplaying two-way communication—It can be costly. But technology is now enabling brands to communicate with their customers online in new and exciting ways (Hoffmann & Novak, 1996). These developments in internet communication make it not only technically possible, but also economically advantageous for firms to cultivate long term, personal relationships with consumers on a large scale (Moon, 2000). One of the more recent and exciting forms of computer-mediated communication is the potentially influential idea of the brand avatar (Holzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann, 2006; Wang, Baker, Wagner, and Wakefield, 2007), which can be used to facilitate such communication.

For the CBR it is also important to distinguish between social communication and transactional communication. A consumer cannot make a transaction without some form of communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998)—the purchase of an item in and of itself communicates *something* to the brand. Therefore, transactional process communication is limited to information that must be exchanged in order to complete the transaction (purchase). For example, a consumer may have to provide some information before being able to make a purchase—such as size (for clothing), address (for internet purchases), etc. The social process communication differs and is of more importance here. This type of communication is the exchange of information above and beyond what is required to complete the transaction—it represents the social interactions. For example, a consumer may decide to contact the brand and provide them with feedback regarding a past purchase, possibly even making recommendations on how the brand could improve. And based on Aggarwal's (2004) framework they would not expect direct reciprocity (such as payment) as they would be following communal norms (Table 1.2). Therefore, to engage in the social process component, a consumer must engage in two-way communication with the brand, exchanging information beyond what is required to complete the transaction.

In the current marketplace there are many methods that a consumer and brand can use to communicate. Traditional methods include mail and telephone; however it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain a phone number for a brand—in fact most packaging now directs you to the brand Web site instead of including a 1-800 number. The most popular method is probably email; however, more and more brand Web sites are not making email addresses available and are instead moving to the use of "web contact forms." These forms don't allow the consumer to directly email the brand, and almost always require the consumer to provide personal information before being allowed to send. Marketer-controlled and marketer-involved brand communities, where the brand facilitates a social network and engages in communication directly with the members of the brand community, could also be viewed as providing a means of communication between consumer and brand. Emerging methods of communication include instant messaging and text messaging. Instant messaging can even include live voice chat, and some brands are humanizing the process by using brand avatars (Holzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann, 2006; Wang, Baker, Wagner, and Wakefield, 2007). Although the impacts of these various communication methods are not directly considered in the conceptual framework, there is likely great value in addressing this technological impact on communication between consumer and brand. The central focus here will be on the communication amount, frequency, and quality rather than method or medium.

***Summary***

A comprehensive view of the CBR as a truly dyadic relationship (Figure 1.3), has been presented, where: (1) a social bond is created (2) through interactions between two active relationship partners (dyadic processes) on (3) both a transactional and social component (two-component approach). A relationship is simply described as a series of two-way interactions between two parties that results in a bond (Smith, 1968; Aggarwal, 2004). To be considered a truly dyadic relationship, a CBR must involve a series of two-way interactions between the brand and consumer (as active relationship

partners) that result in the formation of a social bond. Therefore the current conceptualization of the CBR is not representative of all relationship types—as neither two-way interaction, nor the creation of a social bond is considered.

As the consumer and brand move through the relationship process, repeated interaction between partners in the dyad take place, and the relationship changes and grows (or deteriorates). This changing occurs by building onto the relationship through interaction, thus strengthening the bond (Smith, 1968). As a relationship develops, expectations of actions by each relationship partner are established. The effects of this process on the relationship are dependent on the relationship norms that are in place. Without social communication, the social bond cannot be created and the norms cannot be established (Palmatier, et al., 2007; Valentine and Evans, 1993). The CBR literature has presented ample support that consumers can and do view brands as relationship partners. This needed foundation now allows for us to more fully examine another type of CBR. Examining the truly dyadic CBR requires a focus on interaction between the consumer and brand on both the transactional and social component. much like Thaler's (1985) exchange utility, for this conceptual framework the social component is based on social communication and is comprised of processes designed to meet social needs and results in a social bond. The creation of the social bond is what distinguishes the truly dyadic CBR from the parasocial CBR and other related marketing concepts—such as brand loyalty.

**Where Does Brand-loyalty Fit?**

Although some of the more recent research has attempted to differentiate between brand loyalty and the CBR (Fournier, 1998; Hess and Story, 2005; Story and Hess, 2006), many researchers and practitioners still treat a CBR as simply a more positive form of brand loyalty. But, arguably, this is an oversimplification of the complex CBR process. In general, two types of brand loyalty are discussed in the literature: behavioral and affective. Behavioral loyalty is defined as repeat purchase behavior, while affective loyalty is generally considered to represent a type of emotional connection. As discussed

earlier, a parasocial relationship also results in an emotional bond. However, in the brand loyalty literature, only the positive types of emotional bonds are considered.

Definitions of brand loyalty are almost always focused on the behavioral component, and it is conceptualized as a *positive* consumer outcome (Oliver, 1999). Consumers, however, often report an emotional connection to the brand—indicating there is both a behavioral and affective component (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

> A deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior. (Oliver, 1999, p. 34)

However, even when the emotional component is considered, it is considered to flow only one-way (consumer to brand). Conversely, a truly dyadic relationship requires reciprocity and two-way communication—which are needed in order to create a social bond (Palmatier, et al., 2007). Therefore, a brand loyal consumer may say they "love Coke," for example, but will not go so far as to say that Coke loves them back. So, the distinction between brand loyalty and the truly dyadic CBR becomes clearer.

Just as the loyalty research grew out of the satisfaction literature, CBR work seems to spring from brand loyalty research. However, as we now know, satisfaction does not always lead to loyalty (Oliver, 1999), and the situation is similar for the CBR. The concept does not simply equate to more favorable brand loyalty, nor does it necessarily lead to a CBR. Brand loyalty is not even required in a CBR, and might be best considered a possible outcome of the emotional or social bond (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987) created in a CBR. Similarly, the CBR is often considered by marketing managers to be a positive outcome. However, as mentioned previously, a relationship can be either positive or negative in nature. A positive bond is reflected in Fournier's (1998) description of the "committed friendship" CBR form, where the consumer genuinely likes the brand and is committed to maintaining the relationship. A negative bond is reflected in the description of an "enslavement," where the consumer feels helpless and trapped by the brand. Although, because actual social interaction wasn't considered, we can't say as to

whether or not these bonds represent one-way emotional bonds or social bonds built on social interaction. These descriptions do reflect that a CBR can be either positive or negative in nature, and that although the concept is related to brand loyalty (Story and Hess, 2006), it is not simply a form of extreme loyalty.

Early assumptions by practitioners were likely focused on the idea that loyalty leads to a relationship. But upon further examination, we see that although they are related, loyalty is conceptually distinct from the CBR. As a type of relationship, the CBR involves the creation of a bond, which can be either positive or negative in nature—unlike brand loyalty. Unfortunately, much of customer relationship management (CRM) programs don't adequately acknowledge this distinction. Marketing managers have identified a wide variety of activities as representative of CRM: direct mail, loyalty cards, help desks, personalization of email, etc. (Payne and Frow, 2005). But these activities are really more indicative of loyalty programs rather than relationship management, and many brand loyalty programs designed under the CRM umbrella focus solely on repeat purchase behavior and do not attempt to manage the relationship processes at all. Inducing repeat purchases is not the same as having a relationship with the customer, as repeat purchases alone cannot create a bond.

**Proposed Examination of the Truly Dyadic CBR Process**

This section outlines two proposed studies that attempt to provide empirical support for the conceptual framework presented in this essay. This conceptual piece highlighted the need to examine the CBR as a truly dyadic relationship, which involves social and transactional interaction between two active relationship partners—the consumer and the brand. This research will extend the CBR literature by considering the individual interactions that comprise the relationship between consumer and brand—termed here consumer-brand interaction (CBI). The first study (Essay 2) aims to define CBI, as the individual interactions on which a relationship is based must be understood before the relationship can be considered. This study will focus primarily on social interaction, as transactional interaction is more

clearly understood. The second study (Essay 3) involves an empirical examination of CBI (transactional and social), so will involve scale development. Therefore, the proposed studies will answer the following two overarching research questions:

1. What is consumer-brand interaction? (Essay 2)
2. What is an empirical measure of consumer-brand interaction? (Essay 3)

***Proposed Study 1 (Essay 2)***

The CBR is comprised of individual consumer-brand interactions, which may be either transactional or social in nature. The overall objective is to use a qualitative research design to discover interaction themes in the CBR context and compare them with relevant literature. Therefore, the specific goals of this study include: (1) determine if consumers are able to engage in social interaction with the brand, (2) develop a conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction. This will be accomplished by the gathering of qualitative data through in-depth interviews. Initial themes of social interaction will be identified in the relevant literature. Then a pretest will be used to discover new themes that may be unique to the CBR context. Finally, the in-depth interviews will be used to more deeply explore these themes to discover which ones are relevant to CBI.

| | | Social interaction | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | NO | YES |
| Transactional interaction | YES | Transactional only | Truly dyadic c-b rel |
| | NO | No rel/ potential rel | Social only |

*Figure 1.4: Four CBR conditions*

If consumers were found to be able to interact socially with a brand, then the next step would involve attempting to identify various CBR types (truly dyadic, parasocial, or non-relationships) based on the two components (transactional and social interaction). In order to accomplish this, four different

conditions will need to be examined (Figure 1.4): (1) Truly dyadic CBR (transactional and social interaction), (2) transactional interaction only, (3) social interaction only, and (4) no actual interaction.

A relationship is comprised of a series of interactions (Table 1.1), so in order to consider these various CBR types, a better understanding of consumer-brand interaction (and social interaction especially) is still needed. Based on the literature reviewed in this essay, relationships based on these different types of interactions (transactional and social) are expected to have different characteristics (Figure 1.5). The review of relevant literature will provide a better understanding of themes representing interaction, and qualitative data will provide insight into which themes represent dimensions of interaction in the CBR context (consumer-brand interaction). The outcome of Essay 2—a more comprehensive description of interaction in the CBR context, will serve as the basis for the empirical study (Essay 3).

| | | Social interaction: NO | Social interaction: YES |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transactional interaction: YES | | • Exchange relationship norms<br>• Low arousal<br>• Dependency on branded product | • Communal norms<br>• Social bond<br>• High arousal<br>• Dependency on branded product |
| Transactional interaction: NO | | • No norms<br>• Low arousal | • Communal norms<br>• Social bond<br>• High arousal |

*Figure 1.5: Differentiating Between CBR Conditions*

***Proposed Study 2 (Essay 3)***

The overall objective will be to propose a conceptual model of consumer-brand interaction (CBI) based on literature and qualitative data. A scale development process will first be used to develop measurement scales for CBI and each of the relevant dimensions identified in Essay two. Then, the conceptual model outlining the relationship between CBI and the dimensions will be tested. Last, the impact of interaction type (social and transaction) on these relationships will be considered. This

empirical study will provide a means of measuring CBI and an understanding of related dimensions—thus allowing for further examination of the CBR, which is built on these interactions.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Although the CBR research has clearly established that consumers can and do view brands as relationship partners, the current conceptualization of the CBR does not explicitly consider interaction (the core relationship process)—suggesting that this conceptualization is more representative of a parasocial CBR rather than a truly dyadic one. The roles of both brand and consumer have yet to be considered simultaneously in the CBR context, and interactions have only been assumed. This indicates a need to consider another type of CBR—the truly dyadic CBR, where (1) a social bond is created (2) through interactions between two active relationship partners (dyadic processes) on (3) both a transactional and social component (two-component approach). Examining the truly dyadic CBR is a natural progression of the CBR literature and has both theoretical and managerial implications.

This conceptual piece contributes to the literature primarily by differentiating two CBR types and identifying the key elements of the truly dyadic CBR. The truly dyadic CBR requires that both the consumer and brand take an active role in the process, which involves two distinct process components: transactional and social interaction. The essay also addresses the role of communication within the social process component. This approach extends the current conceptualization and takes the CBR out of the "perceptual" realm of the consumer's mind—allowing marketing managers to better understand and have more control in the relationship process.

Consideration of actual communication between consumer and brand gives managers a role in the CBR processes. Communicating directly with consumers is expensive and challenging for brand firms, but is increasingly expected by consumers. In fact, one study found that 85% of Americans believe a company should interact with its consumers via social-based communication, and 56% feel a stronger connection with companies they interact with on a social level (Cone, 2008). Empirical testing

of the model presented here will tell managers whether or not engaging in a truly dyadic CBR adds value to the firm. Addressing these issues at this point in time is especially important, as technology is progressing rapidly and providing consumers with means to more easily engage in social communication with brands (Cone, 2008; Holtzwarth, Janiszewski, and Neumann, 2006). However, brands have yet to really understand the truly dyadic CBR process and its expected outcomes. As more and more firms move to integrating social aspects into their brand Web sites, this framework becomes an important step in determining how firms can best manage their communications with consumers.

***Future Research***

The opportunity for extensions of this research is tremendous. If it is determined that consumers can engage in social interaction (Essay 2), it would be advantageous to consider the outcomes of the consumer-brand interactions. After developing a means of measuring individual consumer-brand interactions (Essay 3), it would be possible to move on to empirical examination of the CBR (which is comprised of CBIs). Also worth examining is the consumer's and brand's motivation for interacting—both internal and external. There are also a number of potential moderators that may impact the relationship between CBI and the outcomes.

Engaging in two-way communications with consumers can be costly, and enhancing social value can be challenging, both of which are needed to create a social bond. Therefore, it would be interesting to find out if truly dyadic CBRs really have more positive outcomes than non-relationships (such as brand loyalty) and parasocial CBRs, which do not require social interaction. Are the outcomes for marketers any better when a social bond is formed? Or, is an emotional bond enough? For example, it is accepted that brand loyalty leads to positive consumer outcomes (willingness to pay a price premium, willingness to forgive transgressions, levels of trust, etc.). But would the presence of a social bond lead to additional consumer outcomes? If engaging in a truly dyadic CBR is found to provide additional positive outcomes, or at least strengthen existing positive outcomes for the brand, then the need for

additional research will be further supported. In order to examine the issue at the relationship level, we must first consider the interaction level (Essays 2 and 3).

By examining the antecedents leading to social interaction, the reasons why a consumer is motivated to communicate with a brand could be determined—or more specifically: (1) why some consumers initiate communication with the brand, and (2) why some consumers are more receptive to brand initiated communication. Based on Fournier's (1998) work, it is likely that some consumers will be moved to communicate with the brand through internal motivators. Feelings of nostalgia and inheritance of brand attachment were identified by her informants, and it would be expected that these types of situations might motivate a consumer to communicate with a brand. Other internal motivators might include personality characteristics and individual difference variables—such as propensity to establish relationships (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; De Wulf, et al., 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Odekerken-Schroder, et al., 2003; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999) and motivational orientation (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006).

In addition to internal motivators, specific external "triggers" could cause a consumer to initiate communication with a brand. A trigger is "a factor or an event that changes the basis of a relationship," (p. 211) and usually requires some action to be taken (Gustafsson, Johnson, and Roos, 2005)—this could mean the consumer engaging in exit or voice (Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow, 1986). Two types of triggers have been specified in the literature (Gustafsson, Johnson, and Roos, 2005; Roos, 1999, 2002): reactional and situational. Reactional triggers could be represented by an unexpected purchase experience (either good or bad), or possibly a change in the product (change in price, quality, characteristics, etc.) or purchase process (such as change of retailers carrying the product). Situational triggers tend to be tied to changes in the consumer's life—such as a change in job, becoming empty nesters, or moving to a new city.

It might also be interesting to consider possible moderators of the previously examined relationships—such as brand involvement and brand-self congruency. Practically speaking, it would be relevant to consider the: (1) availability/convenience of various methods of communication, (2) consumer preferences in specific communication methods, and (3) requirements for providing personal information in order to access lines of communication.

Therefore this conceptual Essay leads to a rich stream of future research. By considering the CBR as a truly dyadic process, many opportunities for research emerge. Finding support for the benefits of the truly dyadic CBR would provide validity for moving into these areas of study. But before we can consider any of these issues at the level of relationship, we must fully understand the individual interactions that combine to create the relationship. The following two essays will focus on the examination of CBI (using both qualitative and quantitative data) and developing a comprehensive understanding of these interactions.

## ESSAY 2: EXAMINING CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTION: A FOCUS ON SOCIAL INTERACTION

### Introduction

This research seeks to examine part of the conceptual framework presented in Essay 1 by exploring the issue of social interaction in the CBR, and to answer the questions: *(1) Do consumers and brand engage in social interaction? (2) What is consumer-brand interaction?* Based on the conceptual framework presented in Essay 1, social interaction is a key component of the truly dyadic CBR, and has been conceptualized as the exchange of personal information above and beyond what is necessary to complete a transaction. Although transactional interaction is more clearly understood, in order to more fully understand the truly dyadic CBR (as well as other types) a better understanding of social interaction is needed. Therefore, the objective of this study is to develop a better understanding of social interaction in the CBR context, as well as a conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction (CBI). Relevant literature will be reviewed, pretest results will be presented, and results from ten in-depth interviews will be discussed.

#### *The Literature*

A review of several research areas (communications, sociology, psychology, and marketing) highlighted several potential elements of social interaction in the CBR context. First, as a type of interaction, social interaction requires reciprocity. In addition, several specific elements have been identified in these literatures that tap into the social nature of certain interactions: reciprocal communication, mutual orientation, known roles, shared meanings/goals (known to each other), and nature of the interaction (Table 2.2).

#### *Appropriateness of the Qualitative Research Design*

This research design allows for a better understanding of social interaction from the consumer's point of view—through their own experiences (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989). The concept of

social interaction in the CBR context has not yet been examined in the literature. Therefore, it widely accepted in consumer behavior research to begin with qualitative data—where it can be organized, meaning can be extracted, conclusions can be drawn, and themes can be generated (Berent, 1966; Dey, 1993; Spiggle, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2005). These themes help provide a full and rich picture of a theory or construct, and are used to find patterns within the qualitative data, which can be used to help confirm, disconfirm, or add to existing theory. This study will therefore begin in an exploratory manner, with the use of individual brand experience examples gathered through consumer interviews that will serve as a pretest for the formulation of more structured depth interviews in the main study (as suggested by Sewell). As a starting point for determining *how* consumers view social interaction in the CBR context, pretest interviews were conducted to identify specific brand examples where consumers did appear to engage with brands on a social level. Gaining broader meaning through the informant's perspective is an important goal of qualitative research (Spiggle, 1994).

***Pretest: Exploratory Interviews***

The goals are to find out if consumers do engage in social interaction, and what might indicate the presence of social interaction—which can only be accomplished by first discussing brand interaction with consumers directly. Analysis will focus on identifying potential social elements that indicate the presence of social interaction, so the focus is on individual brand examples where social communication is present. Results support the existence of social interaction between consumer and brand and the conceptualization presented previously. They further indicate that certain activities likely represent "going above and beyond" transactional interaction better than others, suggesting that the focus should be on non-transactional activities and identifying what specific elements make it non-transactional. Based on the findings, a semi-structured interview guide was designed for use in the main study.

### *Main Study: In-depth Interviews*

After review of the preliminary interviews, a semi-structured interview guide was developed to use on ten in-depth interviews. These consumers were interviewed with the goal of determining how they define social interaction with brands and to more deeply probe the concept of social interaction between consumers and brands to better understand what possible elements constitute "social interaction." Each informant gave an initial interview, and after analysis, a member check was completed in order to verify interpretation. Results led to the identification of two dimensions of social interaction: (1) non-transactional interaction activity and (2) non-transactional brand motivation. Therefore, social interaction in the CBR context is defined as a non-transactional interaction activity in which the brand has non-transactional motivations for engaging.

## The Consumer-Brand Relationship

The consumer-brand relationship is a connection between a consumer and brand that results in the formation of a bond. CBR research considers the overarching brand as the relationship partner of interest. This means that the "brand" can include many types of products (objects) or services. For example, if someone is engaged in a CBR with Starbucks, he/she would view the Starbucks *brand* as the relationship partner, not the individual products, services, or brand representatives (such as drip grind coffee bags, coffee house drinks, or baristas).

### *Current Conceptualization*

Consumer-brand relationship research has shown ample support that consumers can and do view brands as relationship partners (Fournier, 1998; Blackston, 2000; MacLeod, 2000). But the current conceptualization of the CBR is limited to account for only parasocial CBRs, where actual interaction is not considered—simulated interaction that occurs in the mind of the consumer is sufficient (Cohen, 2003). Based on the definition of relationships presented in Essay 1 (as a connection between two or more parties that results in the formation of a bond), it is clear that a CBR meets the broad definition of a relationship. However, as currently conceptualized, the concept is limited to one CBR type, the

parasocial CBR—where marketing managers have a very limited (or nonexistent) role in the relationship. Although these types of CBRs do occur and are valuable to examine, there are other types that should be considered.

### *Examining the Truly Dyadic Consumer-brand Relationship*

A truly dyadic relationship involves reciprocal interaction between two relationship partners. The truly dyadic CBR requires the creation of a social bond between two interactive relationship partners—the consumer and the brand. This CBR type involves both transactional (purchase) and social interaction, and the argument for the importance of distinguishing between these two types of interaction was presented in Essay 1. As the transactional interaction is more clearly established (exchanging money for goods/services), the focus here is on understanding social interaction specifically—which might include activities such as "chit-chat" between a consumer and a brand representative or a birthday card received from a company.

#### *Transactional Interaction*

Transactional interaction includes (1) the exchange of money for goods (purchase) and (2) the exchange of information required to complete the transaction (transactional communication). Transactional communication includes cases where the customer has to supply some information in order to complete a purchase—such as being required to give your shoe size and home address in order to complete an online purchase. Or, when a salesperson is trained to ask the customer if they "found everything OK." These communications are inherently tied to the transaction.

#### *Social Interaction*

Social interaction between the consumer and brand is the focus of this essay. Before considering both components (social and transactional) of the truly dyadic CBR together, the concept of social interaction in the context of the CBR must be explored. Social interaction is conceptualized here as the exchange of information above and beyond what is required to complete a transaction (social

communication)—so the focus is on non-transactional interaction activities. For example, a brand inviting a customer to a social gathering, or a consumer and salesperson discussing their weekend plans may constitute social interaction; it might also include cases where a brand sends a social email ("you haven't been to our Web site lately, and we're just wondering how you're doing"). These communications occur in addition to, or instead of the transaction.

**What is Social Interaction Between Consumers and Brands?**

Social interaction in the CBR was initially defined broadly in Essay 1 as the exchange of personal information above and beyond what is required to complete a transaction. This initial definition highlighted two issues of social interaction that must be considered. First, interaction involves two-way reciprocal communication, so reciprocity is required. Second, social interaction must also be "social" in nature—meaning that it involves some activity or communications unrelated to the transaction. Research in the areas of communications, sociology, psychology, and marketing provides the foundation for considering several specific elements of social interaction (Table 2.2) that may represent key components of a conceptual definition of the construct.

***Background Theory***

In order to understand the concept of social interaction and to be able to examine it in the context of the CBR, it is important to consider how it relates to the relationship construct. First, the distinction between a relationship and an interaction will be made. As a social interaction is a type of interaction, an understanding and definition of a basic interaction is needed. Next, *social* interaction will be explored by looking at research from various social science disciplines (communications, sociology, psychology), including marketing. This literature review allows for the identification of specific social elements that make an interaction "social." Finally, the literature will be considered in the context of the CBR specifically.

*Distinction Between Relationships and Interactions*

Interaction is considered an inherent component of the relationship process (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), and is relevant for the CBR. It is important to first make the distinction between a relationship and social interaction. As illustrated in some examples of relationship definitions (Table 2.1), the concept is typically described as involving a "series" of interactions with the expectation of future interactions. Therefore a relationship is comprised of a series of individual transactions. In this essay, the focus is on better understanding those *individual* interactions that comprise a relationship—which could be represented by many types of reciprocal exchanges (money, information, emotion, etc.). In the CBR, both transactional and social interactions are relevant to the relationship between the consumer and the brand. As the transactional interactions (purchase, exchange of information required to make a purchase) are more clearly defined, it is important to gain a better understanding of social interactions in order to get a clearer picture of the CBR process.

*Table 2.1: Definitions of Relationships*

| **Discipline** | **Researcher(s)** | **Definition** |
|---|---|---|
| Psychology | Morton & Douglas (1981) | A *personal relationship* is defined as "the construction of a shared and unique body of interpersonal norms, rules, and world views." |
| Sociology | Blumstein & Kollock (1988) | "In any *relationship* the two participants are interdependent, i.e., the behavior of each affects the outcomes of the other…and is comprised of a series of related interactions, each affected by past episodes, and in turn affecting future interactions." (p. 468) |
| Marketing | Fournier (1998) | "*Relationships* are constituted of a series of repeated exchanges between two parties known to each other; they evolve in response to these interactions and fluctuations in the contextual environment." (p. 346) |

Interactions, whether social in nature or not, have been described as requiring two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). These interactions can either be generative (having a strengthening effect), degenerative (having a negative effect), or neutral (no effect) in nature, and can act to increase trust and "mutual understanding" (Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007)—which further supports the idea that interactions are really the building blocks of a relationship. They are at the core of

communications theory (Woodstock, 2007), where communication has been defined as exchange of information, or more specifically, the (1) amount (duration), (2) frequency, and (3) quality of the information exchanged (Crosby, Evans, and Cowles, 1990; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Mohr, Fisher, and Nevin, 1996; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, and Evans, 2006, p. 138, 140). So, the focus is on reciprocal exchange of information, but does not include any expectation of future encounters (unlike a relationship). Reciprocity is therefore a basic element of social interaction, as it is inherent in any type of interaction—indicating that reciprocal communication is the first required element of social interaction. But what other elements make *social* interaction truly social?

*Social Science and Marketing Literature*

In the broadest terms, social interactions represent the ways in which people respond to each other (Schaefer and Lamm, 2005)—those individual social experiences that can eventually form a relationship. In addition to being reciprocal, social interactions are also "social" in nature. This aspect has been examined in several disciplines. In the sociology literature, social interaction has been defined as "a situation where the behaviors of one actor are consciously reorganized by, and influence the behaviors of, another actor, and vice versa" (Turner, 1988, p. 13-14)—which suggests that inherent element of reciprocity. Turner (1988) considers three separate social interaction processes: motivational, interactional, and structuring. Motivational processes include individual's drive to engage in interaction, and could be viewed as antecedents to actual interaction activities. Structuring refers to the time and place where the interaction takes place. Therefore, the focus for this essay is the interactional process—what actions are taken by the actors to influence each other's behavior. Much of the relevant sociology research focuses on the interactional process specifically, and the social nature of specific types of interactions. This is consistent with the communications literature that frequently focuses on micro issues related to specific actions that take place among the actors—such as rhetoric, speaking, interpersonal and group relations (Ellis, 1999). Therefore, the examination of the actual interaction

activity, and determining the nature of that interaction, is key to understanding whether or not an interaction is social in nature. So, the presence of a non-transactional activity is likely another important element of social interaction.

The sociology literature highlights several specific elements of social interaction (Deflem, 1999; Rummel, 1976): (1) Known roles, (2) shared meanings/goals, and (3) mutual orientation. According to early sociologists Georg Simmel and George Herbert Mead, people play specific roles when interacting with others, and social interaction is dependent on the individual's ability to understand and take on the role of the other (Deflem, 1999). The theory of symbolic interactionism explains how social interaction enables people to develop shared meanings (Deflem, 1999) and expectations about the other's behavior (Rummel, 1976). This approach views each interacting individual as playing specific assigned roles guided by norms and role expectations (Hill and Hansen, 1960). Social interaction also involves mutual orientation, meaning behavior is directed toward, and is intended to impact the other (Rummel, 1976)—which also has a reciprocity component. Therefore, according to the sociology and social psychology literature, for an interaction between the consumer and brand to be considered "social," it must go beyond transactional communication to include these three social elements.

The research discussed thus far is also in line with early social psychology work, where four factors of social interaction were outlined (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). First, factors related to the nature of the interaction are considered (e.g., work, social, problem solving situation). This further suggests that a non-transactional activity must be present in social interaction in the CBR context. Second, the place where the interaction occurs is considered. Third, the relation of the actor to the previous sets of factors are considered (roles, status, familiarity, etc.)—providing further support that known roles are important. Last, the factors related to the actors, such as similarities/differences in individual variables are considered (age, gender, social class, ethnicity, etc.)—which essentially represent the extent to which the

actors know each other. This suggests an additional element that should be considered—whether or not the actors feel like they know each other.

*Table 2.2: Elements of Social Interaction found in the Literature*

| Element Identified | Description | Literature(s) | Selected Citations |
|---|---|---|---|
| *Interaction Reciprocity* | | | |
| Reciprocal communication | Information exchange (individual occurrence) | Communications Marketing | Duncan and Moriarty (1998), Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro (2007) |
| Mutual orientation | Actors take action to influence one another (reciprocal in nature) | Sociology Communications | Turner (1988), Ellis (1999), Smith (1968), Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen (1960) |
| *"Social" Nature of Interaction* | | | |
| Known roles | Ability to understand and take on the roles | Sociology Social Psychology | Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen, 1960, Sherif & Sherif |
| Shared meaning/goals | The actors have same/similar meanings and goals | Sociology Social Psychology Marketing | Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen (1960), Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro (2007), Blackston (2000) |
| Known to each other | Actors are known to one another | Social Psychology | Sherif & Sherif (1969) |
| Nature of the interaction | The type of activity involved (work related, social, problem solving) | Social Psychology | Sherif & Sherif (1969) |

Marketing considers interactions between many different marketing partners along the supply chain—including buyers, sellers, suppliers, distributors, competitors, customers, etc. (Parvatiyar and Sheth, 2000; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). In this context, interaction has been defined as "the process of exchanging products, services, information, financial instruments, and socially valued experiences." Although there is a focus on the "business" side of the exchange (purchase), it is apparent that interaction can go beyond strictly utilitarian benefits derived from transactional interaction; it can involve socially based interactions as well (Aggarwal, 2004). And it is likely that social interaction can occur without consideration of transactional (purchase related) issues. Blackston (2000) stressed the importance of communicating the correct attitudes and behaviors of brands by stating that

communication enables "meaning" to be created from the message—in line with the previously identified element of shared meanings/goals. Much of the research involving the CBR, however, fails to consider that a relationship is a process involving these types of interactions (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Hess and Story, 2005), so the focus is often on transactional interaction. Although Fournier (1998) did mention interaction, it was limited to the consideration of usage encounters alone and didn't consider the social elements. Therefore, a clearer understanding of how consumers view social interaction with brands is important in the progression of research on the CBR.

*Social Interaction in the CBR Context*

There is clearly overlap in how marketing and the social sciences view interaction (Table 2.2), but in the context of the CBR, transactional and social interactions need to be considered separately. In transactional interaction, exchange is typically in the form of a purchase (money for goods/services), and may include information exchange required to complete purchase (shoe size, address, etc.). In the context of social interaction, exchange is in the form of non-transactional communication—the exchange of information above/beyond that which is required to successfully complete a transaction. Figure 2.1 attempts to combine two key aspects of communication that are most relevant to the CBR communication process: communication reciprocity (represented by one-way and two-way communication), and the nature of the communication (represented by either transactional or social communication). One-way non-reciprocal communication is often the desired end goal for the marketer (i.e. advertising, packaging, branding, etc.), but of interest in the CBR is reciprocated two-way communication. Two-way communication is described as involving "interactive, individualized and value-added contacts" (Shani and Chalasani, 1992). This occurs on the transactional level (even a purchase communicates *something*) and is required in social interaction as well (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). Two-way communication is reciprocated, as in two active relationship partners exchanging information. But there could also be instances where there are

unreciprocated "attempts" at two-way communication—as when the brand sends out a personalized email that is ignored by the consumer (brand attempted), or the consumer completes a Web contact form that is ignored by the brand (consumer attempted). Therefore, for the CBR, it is important to consider reciprocity—is the communication one-way or two-way? The nature of the communication is also important—is it social or transactional? For the truly dyadic CBR, two-way reciprocated social communication is required.

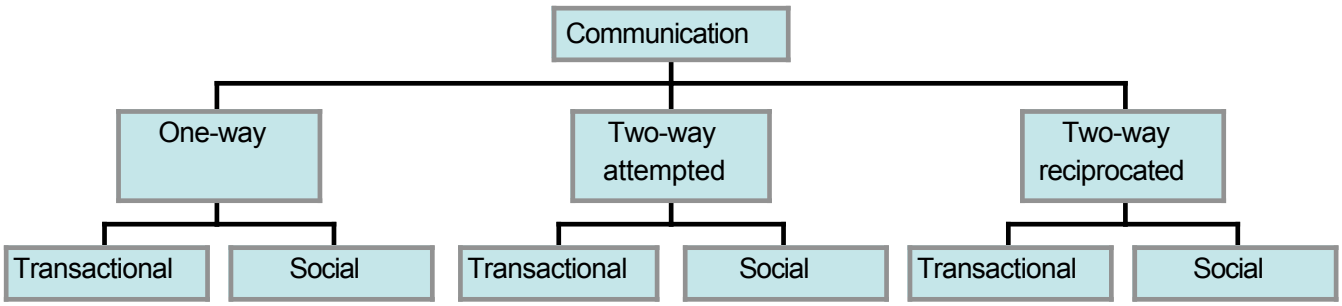


*Figure 2.1: The CBR Communication Process*

***Summary***

As mentioned previously, CBR research seems to suggest that consumers are willing to engage in social interaction, but it has not been directly addressed. It has been argued (in Essay 1) that social interaction plays a role in the CBR specifically, where social interaction is represented by communication exchanges between the consumer and the brand that goes beyond what is typically part of the transaction (transactional interaction). However, social interaction from the consumer's perspective is not yet understood and has not been considered separate from transactional interaction. Based on the literature presented, it is expected that both reciprocity and a certain number of social elements (Table 2.2) must be present in order for consumers to feel that an interaction with a brand is social. And although these elements would be expected to be present in both interaction types (transactional and social), the nature of some of these elements will vary. A pretest, comprised of interviews will be used to determine if the elements identified in the literature are included in consumers' personal brand examples of interactions, and if any are specific to social interaction. It is

also acknowledged that additional elements may be discovered as themes emerge during the analysis stage.

**Pretest: Exploratory Interviews**

The literature focused on several key elements of social interaction, and consumer interviews served as a pretest to determine if these elements were present in the CBR context and if additional themes emerged. An exploratory research design is appropriate when a concept is new and not clearly defined (Cooper and Schindler, 1998). Therefore, these interviews are exploratory in nature. There were two goals for the pretest: (1) determine if social interaction in the CBR context exists, and (2) discover possible elements that define consumer-brand interaction (CBI) from the consumer's perspective. This will provide a better understanding of social interaction between the consumer and brand and direction for a conceptual definition of CBI.

Results of this qualitative pretest (1) confirm that consumers do engage in social interaction and identify brand examples that have social interaction present, which are needed in order to further develop a conceptual definition of social interaction in the CBR context, supporting the idea that consumers and brands can interact on a social level. In addition, it seems apparent that (2) specific social elements (i.e., effort, emotion, etc.) are present in the social interaction brand examples. This pretest provides support for some of the social elements highlighted in the literature (Table 2.2), as well as the identification of themes (Table 2.3) representative of additional elements that might need to be included in the conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction.

***Method***

As mentioned previously, the pre-test interviews are exploratory in nature, and were designed to (1) identify specific examples of cases where consumers and brands interact and to (2) determine potential elements of CBI which may be unique to social interaction. Using this type of qualitative data allows for a better understanding of social interaction from the consumer's point of view (Thompson,

Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Spiggle, 1994; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Analysis will include identifying specific brand examples that have social interaction present, examining them for potential social elements. These emergent themes are then considered along with elements identified in the literature to guide the more directed in-depth interviews that follow (main study).

*Sample*

Twenty-eight interviews were completed, where the informants were asked to discuss brands in which they interacted with. As each informant discussed differing numbers of brands (ranging from 1-11 per informant), 152 total individual brand examples were obtained. The individual participants were selected by the interviewers (convenience sample), who were asked to try to get a wide range of participants based on demographics (such as age and gender). The sample was comprised of 14 males and 13 females, with an average informant age of 29, with a range of 18-80 (Appendix 1 provides additional details of the sample). Because the interviewers were students, they were allowed to interview other students, but were asked specifically to recruit non-student participants as well (family, neighbors, co-workers, etc.)—resulting in a sample almost equally split between students and non-students. Each informant discussed an average of just over five individual brand examples, with all but three discussing at least one social brand example.

*Procedures*

*Step 1: Conducting the interviews.* Five senior undergraduate students were recruited from marketing classes as interviewers. Each interviewer met with the primary researcher to go over the general research topic, the goal of the interviews, and specific interview technique—such as being flexible with the interview guide and asking probing questions when needed. In addition, the primary researcher conducted an initial interview with each interviewer as respondent to better illustrate procedure. The use of guided interviews allowed for each interviewer to follow a general list of questions, but allowed for them to adapt to the respondents discussion (Patton, 1990). As recommended

by Palan and Wilkes (1997), semi-structured interview scripts/guides were used, and each interview was digitally recorded for analysis (which resulted in an average of 12 minutes per interview). The initial interviews were designed to look at a number of issues related to consumer-brand relationships, but for this study the focus was on identifying brand examples where social interaction was present, and to use those examples as a basis for a second set of interviews (main study). So the interviewers were told to that the aim was to get consumers to talk about interactions with specific brands, and then to probe (as recommended by Dillon, Madden, & Firtle, 1994) for information regarding social interaction. The respondents were first simply asked to list brands they use. Then the interviewer was instructed to discuss each brand one at a time to determine what, if any, type of interaction was present. For each brand, questions about purchase behavior were included to account for transactional interaction, questions about communication were included to gauge reciprocity, and questions about satisfaction, emotion, mutual understanding, etc., were included to tap into potential social elements. The initial analysis included two key processes, categorization (initial coding) and abstraction (identification of emergent themes)—as outlined by Spiggle (1994).

*Step 2: Identifying brand examples with social interaction present.* This initial coding process follows Spiggle's categorization and abstraction stages (1994), where the interview data was labeled and then collapsed into emergent themes. The goal of this stage was to identify brand examples with social interaction present. A two phase coding approach was taken in order to better capture brand examples that represent the presence of social interaction. The first phase began with review of the interviews by two coders (who were originally interviewers) who were instructed to review each of the brand examples again, making note of any type of general label (words or phrases) that represents possible themes that might be present (as suggested by Foss & Waters, 2003), whether or not they were explicitly mentioned by the respondent. In fact, it was explained to the coders that consumers often have difficulty discussing brands in relational terms. This was to insure that the data was categorized based on its

coherent meaning, and not by any arbitrary grammar the respondent might be using (Spiggle, 1994). After these initial interviews, themes were identified. The researcher and coders met and discussed common themes, and the process of abstraction (Spiggle, 1994) was used to take the words and phrases and collapse them into higher order themes. The researcher then compiled a coding list with emergent themes and definitions. Although several themes emerged, the focus of this study is the brand examples with the theme of social interaction present. Each brand example was then coded as either having social interaction present or not by the coders.

In the second phase, two additional independent trained coders (not previously involved with the study) reviewed the interviews. Therefore, four coders were used to confirm the presence of social interaction in the brand examples. The explanation these coders were given for social interaction was very broad (i.e. interaction beyond/besides what is directly related to the actual sale), so as not to influence *their* perception of the concept. In the CBR context, the level of social interaction is not expected to be as high as with interpersonal relationships. As such, full agreement among all four coders was not required. Rather, to prevent limiting the study to only "highly" social examples, the brand examples with at least two coders identifying the presence of social interaction were examined further. These 45 individual brand examples (approximately 30% of the total examples) were then examined further to explore and identify emergent themes.

*Step 3: Identifying emerging themes* (comparison, Spiggle, 1994). Comparison includes the process of comparing similarities and differences across examples (Spiggle, 1994). This particular study involved examining the social interaction brand examples for reasons as to why they were classified as representative of social interaction—which essentially called for another round of categorization and abstraction. To this end, the transcriptions of each individual social brand example identified in step 2 (which ranged in length from ½ a page to 1 ½ pages of text per example) were independently reviewed by the primary researcher and a research assistant to determine possible reasons (social elements) as to

why they were identified as having social interaction present. Words and phrases representative of the potential social elements identified were recorded (as per Foss & Waters, 2003—see Appendix 3, last column for notes on social aspects identified). And a lengthy discussion of each example followed in order to help identify a set of higher order themes (Spiggle, 1994). Comparison of the various aspects identified led to the identification of seven emergent themes, which are discussed below.

*Table 2.3: Seven Themes Emerging from the Pretest*

| **Theme** | **Description** | Illustrative quote | **Related construct and citation** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Non-transactional activity | An interaction activity non directly tied to the sale. | "…they have a wine and cheese party, and it's an invitation only type thing." (MAC cosmetics) | Nature of the interaction: Sherif & Sherif (1969) |
| Reciprocal communication | Information exchange (including consumer feedback). | Did they always respond? "Oh, always. And it's always within the next one or two days." (Nintendo)<br><br>"if I have unusually good service, I'll call them. If I have unusually bad service, I'll call."<br><br>"Well, the basis for a good relationship is communication and I feel that we definitely have that." (Brine)<br><br>"I always do surveys just because it helps the company." (Disney) | Reciprocal communication: Duncan and Moriarty (1998), Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro (2007) |
| Mutual effort | One or both actors put forth effort (time, energy, mental/physical work) to impact the other. | "…incredibly quick…they did it within an afternoon" (Apple) | Mutual orientation: Turner (1988), Ellis (1999), Smith (1968), Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen (1960) |
| Mutual understanding | Consumer feels like the brand knows who they are. | They try to reach out to you? "They definitely do, yes." (Starbucks)<br><br>"They know that their customers love to shop, and they love their product, so they keep making a good product for them." (Gap) | Known to each other: Sherif & Sherif (1969) |
| Personalization | The brand individualizes the consumer. | "Whenever I call them…they know my name, they know who I am." "They made that personal connection." (LL Bean) | |
| Emotion | Emotional elements are present in the interaction activity. | "I love Bed Bath & Beyond." Do you think they care about you? "Yeah, I do. They make me feel like they do." | |
| Non-transactional brand motivation | The consumer feels like the brand genuinely cares about them, rather than just making an immediate sale. | "They were extremely helpful…they went above and beyond. Without a doubt." (Starkist Tuna) | |

***Results***

Analysis of the pretest data resulted in the identification of seven emergent themes which represent possible elements that consumers think are required in interaction between consumer and brand (see Table 2.3). Although the focus here was on social interaction, the elements can be considered in the context of transactional interaction as well. Four of these themes overlapped with elements identified in the literature: reciprocal communication, non-transactional activity (nature of the interaction), mutual effort (mutual orientation), and mutual understanding (known to each other). In addition, three themes emerged that represent possible additional elements: emotion, personalization, and transparent motives. Two themes (known roles and shared meanings/goals) were not found to be present in this pretest data. But because of their dominant presence in the relevant literature, they will be considered further in the main study. Table 2.3 highlights some quotes that illustrate the various emergent themes.

*Literature Supported Themes (Pretest)*

*Non-transactional activity (Nature of the interaction):* As explained in the background theory section, an interaction activity is defined as a contact point between consumer and brand, and could include number of specific activities—such as a purchase, entry into a brand contest, personalized emails, direct mail, etc. Considering the literature, it would be expected that some interaction activities would be more inherently social in nature than others (Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Ellis, 1999). A hand written thank you note, for example, would likely be viewed as more social than a non-personalized emailed coupon. That idea was supported by the pretest data, where several inherently social interaction activities were identified—such as one respondent receiving an invitation to a wine and cheese party by her favorite makeup brand, and another being taught a new use for the product by a member of the owner's family. Even with the lack of other types of communication and/or interaction, these examples were found to be representative of social interaction by the coders. This represents the element of "nature of the interaction" identified in the literature (Ellis, 1999)—And in the CBR context, it would

refer to a non-transactional activity. The consumer seems to view these activities as far removed from the purchase itself; and therefore view them as more "social" in and of themselves. In the context of transactional interaction, an activity is still present—but it needn't be *social* in nature. Transactional activities are tied to a specific transaction and might include the actual purchase, asking a brand representative a question before making a purchase, or providing a salesperson with your size in order to try on clothes/shoes. The non-transactional activities are the ones not tied directly to a sale.

*Reciprocal communication:* This concept involves information exchange between relationship partners. As discussed in the background theory section, reciprocity is inherent in any interaction, and in social interaction reciprocity occurs in the form of communication. And the pretest data seemed to support the literature, as most social brand examples involved reciprocal communication of some type. Many of the traditional means of communication were found to occur between the consumer and the brand (in-person, phone, email, etc.); the important issue is that it flowed both ways. This is in line with research that describes interactions as requiring two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). In addition, when the consumer reported giving feedback to the brand (most often in the form of a survey), the brand example was considered to have social interaction present. In fact, in review of the "non-social" brand examples, only one was found that mentioned completing a survey. Therefore, it seems likely that the process of the brand asking for feedback and the consumer providing that feedback goes beyond what is considered transactional. In order for an interaction to take place, it seems apparent that reciprocal communication is needed. The actual communication exchanged, however, is likely to vary depending on whether it is a social or transactional interaction.

*Mutual effort (mutual orientation):* According to the literature, each actor taking effortful action to impact the other seems to be an important component of consumer-brand interaction. Effort can include time, mental, and/or physical effort (Robben & Verhallen, 1994), and it seems as though when the consumer feels like the brand puts forth effort beyond what is required to successfully complete the

transaction, the interaction becomes more social in nature. The assumption being that if the brand puts forth this added non-transactional effort, then they must care about the consumer's well being rather than just making a sale. Unlike the concept of satisfaction, this element is not tied to transactions and does not seem to be tied to expectations. In fact, it's often when the consumer has no expectation of certain activities that social interaction is indicated. So much like with the theme of reciprocity—Effort is likely present in both transactional and social interaction, but it is the nature of the effort that varies. If the effort is tied directly to a purchase, transactional interaction is indicated. If the effort goes beyond just "making a sale," then social interaction is indicated.

However, brand effort alone is not indicative of social interaction—Effort from both actors is needed. This supports the literature (Turner, 1988), which emphasizes the importance of mutual orientation in social interaction—describing it as behavior directed toward, and intended to impact the other (Rummell, 1976). The role of the brand effort was discussed in approximately 1/3 of the brand examples. In some of these cases, the example did seem to reflect a two-way attempted social interaction—where the brand puts forth effort to engage in two-way social communication and the consumer isn't interested. Therefore, some examples had only brand effort reflected, such as when a cigarette company's apparent social attempts were rejected by a skeptical customer (example: JF3, Marlboro/Camel). Or, in the example where one respondent gave out an alternative email address to a brand in order to avoid lots of "junk mail." More detrimental to the brand appears to be cases where consumer effort occurs alone—the consumer may actually become angry and/or hurt when their social attempts are not reciprocated. Consumer effort was relevant for 10 brand examples—where some respondents seemed to desire a relationship with the brand, but felt their attempts were either useless or going ignored. For example, one respondent sought out information from a food company (reading the company history and locating the manufacturing plant on Google earth), but didn't feel there was a means to communicate. While another reached out to a brand in a social way (personalized letter), but

the brand's response was cursory and completely transactional—which had a huge negative effect on his perception of the brand. These findings, along with the literature, suggest that social interaction is likely to "live" where brand effort and consumer effort overlap. This was found in the pretest data, where one respondent initiated communication with her favorite bread company and exchanged several personal emails with the brand and felt that they went above and beyond in their actions.

*Mutual understanding (Known to each other):* This element represents that for social interaction, the consumer needs to know the brand and the brand needs to know the consumer. Consumers want to like to feel like they know what the brand represents, and that the brand understands their preferences and needs. Although the depth of knowledge in the CBR is expected to be much less than it would be in an interpersonal relationship, it is still an important element in any type of social interaction. In the interviews, it appeared to be a little difficult for consumers to directly say that they felt the brand "knew them"—however, the theme did emerge in several social brand examples and was manifested in various ways. In some cases, the consumer expressed that the brand at least knew who they were as a part of the brand's target market—with one respondent suggesting that as a local brand, Abita better understood him. In other cases, the consumer expressed the idea that the brand knew and understood their needs—"*…one of their employees (Publix) will just show up, all the time, and know you're looking for something and help you find it.*" The idea that the consumer knows "who" the brand is also seems relevant (Blackston, 2000)—and was illustrated in the data when one respondent shared how she took it upon herself to recommend that her favorite brand of Italian ice (Rita's) opened in a new location where she thought they would be successful. These findings are supported by the literature, where the similarities/differences in individual difference variables are considered (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). This concept is also included in the definition of the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 1998), so the idea that both actors need to be known to one another is especially relevant in this study.

*New Emergent Themes*

*Personalization:* As emphasis in marketing has shifted from a focus on reaching the mass market with a single message to focusing on developing relationships with individual consumers (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997), personalization of communications (adding personal identifying markers to communications with consumers) has become a focus and is especially relevant in today's technologically-mediated world (Song & Zinkhan, 2008). It is important to note, the focus here is on not only on the brand personalizing communications, but that it conveys to the consumer that they view them as an individual. This is in line with research findings that personalization tactics alone don't necessarily result in better consumer outcomes (Suprenant & Solomon, 1987). Therefore, simply because an email from a brand has the consumer's real name in it, doesn't mean that it will make the consumer feel like they view them as an individual. The theme emerged explicitly in seven social brand examples, where the respondent often referred to how it made them feel "*important*" or "*special*." This theme was also extended to cases where the consumer had a personal connection with the brand, as when they knew the brand owners personally or worked for the brand—as past personal communication led to the feeling that the brand viewed them as an individual.

*Emotion:* Emotion has been defined as the outcome of cognitive evaluations of perceived physiological stimulation (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988), and when dedication/loyalty is high, these emotions can drive decision making (Gilliland and Bello, 2002; Fournier, 1998). They are important in marketing research as they can effect consumer decision making. Research in the area of brand loyalty has identified affective loyalty and defined it as the emotional attachment to a relationship partner (Fullerton, 2003)—which has been examined in the CBR literature as well (Fournier, 1998; Heath, Brandt, and Nairn, 2006; Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Restall and Gordon, 1993). As emotion is typically considered a key component in interpersonal relationships (Kelley, et al., 1983), and interactions are considered the building blocks of a relationship (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), then interactions are expected to be emotion-laden—especially *social* interactions. This

was supported in the pre-test data. However, as expected, it was difficult for many respondents to directly discuss emotion as it related to a brand. But the expression of a type of connection with the brand occurred in 20 social brand examples for various reasons, including: (1) a feeling that they match with the target market or "fit" with the brand (a respondent reported feeling more "connected" to a beer brand because it was "local"), (2) that they share the brand with friends/work ("*I would say it is how people connect with each other. Through their interest or liking of Starbucks. And if you like Starbucks, then you automatically have these people as friends.*"), (3) that they feel they have an emotional bond with the brand (one respondent expressed emotional connection when talking about a brand she once worked for).

*Non-transactional brand motivation:* Transparent motives refer to the idea that the consumer feels like the brand is genuine in their actions—meaning that they think the brand views the interaction activities as not tied directly to the transaction. This seems to be reflected when the consumer feels like the brand cares about the consumer's interests and has no expectation of immediate and equal pay back—as in the brand did it because they want to, not because they expect me to buy. So, when the brand is noticeably "nice" to the consumer, they might be more apt to view the interaction as being social—possibly because "nice" goes beyond professional courtesy (which is probably expected) and suggests a non-transactional motivation. Consumers seem to perceive communication as social when they feel that the brand's primary motivation has shifted from "making money" to "caring about me." This finding is in line with research on the persuasion knowledge model (PKM), which postulates that consumers build "knowledge structures about marketing, including marketers' motives and tactics" (Campbell and Kirmani, 2000, p. 70). Based on the PKM, the motivation for the brand interacting with the consumer is likely a determinant of how effective CBR communications will be (Friestad and Wright, 1994; Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor, 2000; Ahluwalia and Burnkrant, 2004). When the consumer perceives the communication to be based on the individual self-interests of the relationship

partner (guided by exchange norms and equity theory), it seems to reflect transactional communication. When the consumer perceives the communication to be based on shared interests/goals, or the brand is considering the consumer's needs (guided by communal norms and social exchange theory), it seems to reflect social communication. In approximately half of the social brand examples, the respondent used phrases such as the brand *cared for* or *valued them*—supporting the idea that the brand's motivation for interacting is important.

It is important to note that some brand examples represented the presence of *negative* social interaction, such as lack of caring, rudeness, etc. In these cases, it almost seemed as if the brand went out of their way to be dismissive when a consumer did make an attempt at social interaction —as when a consumer went out of his way to include social elements in a letter to a brand, only to have his social attempt rejected (They [Capital One] *"said we are the company and we decide what we want"*). In addition, one respondent discussed examples of two brands (Russell and Gildan) that he had to purchase (through a contract with his employer). In both cases, he was very unsatisfied with the product—poor quality athletic wear. However, in the case of Russell, social interaction was present. It was apparent in his interview that this social interaction impacted his opinion of Russell in the positive direction, as compared with Gildan (Russell *"tried the best they could. I guess communication-wise they did pretty good"*).

***Discussion***

Initial findings support the notion that consumers do engage in social communication with brands. As mentioned in the literature review, interaction of any type requires reciprocity, but social interaction involves communication that is not considered a part of the transaction. The elements identified in these preliminary interviews seem to reflect both transactional and social interaction, but the "social nature" of some elements allow for the two types to be differentiated from one another. This pretest provided initial support for some of the a priori themes identified in the literature (reciprocal

communication, nature of the interaction, effortful action/mutual orientation, known to each other). In addition, it highlighted additional themes that add to existing literature. The results also raised issues that can be more directly addressed in the main study—such as whether or not known roles and shared meanings/goals will emerge with the use of probing questions.

*Literature Supported Themes (Main Study)*

The overlap of the pretest findings with what is known from the relevant literature suggests that many elements of interaction in the interpersonal context might be able to be applied in the context of the CBR (reciprocal communication, nature of the interaction, effortful action/mutual orientation, known to each other). Just as in the person-to-person context, consumers seem to feel that reciprocal communication is a key component of interaction with a brand. What still needs to be explored further is what activities the consumer considers representative of reciprocal communication (email, advertisements, Web sites, etc.). From the literature, it is clear that the nature of the interaction is important—such as work, social, and problem solving situations (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). In the social interaction context, the focus is on non-transactional interaction activities. The pretest data provided support that some interactions between consumers and brand are viewed as transactional, while others are viewed as social. What needs to be still be addressed in the main study is what consumers feel makes an interaction social rather than transactional. Mutual orientation is presented as an important characteristic of social interaction (Deflem, 1999; Rummel, 1976), which indicates that for individuals to engage in social interaction, they must take actions that affect one another. This was supported in the pretest data, where examples illuminated not only the importance of brand effort, but of consumer effort as well. In this case, both the literature and data stress the reciprocal nature of this effortful action. Unlike traditional person-to-person interactions, consumers may not view the balance as being equal. What has yet to be determined is whether the consumer feels that there should be an equal share of effort, or if they feel the brand carries more of the burden. Evidenced in the literature is the importance

for individuals engaging in social interaction to know one another (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). This is more difficult to conceptualize in the CBR context, as the brand is not an individual. However, the data did support this concept—suggesting that the consumer is able to view the brand as an individual. It wouldn't be expected that the level of knowledge between a consumer and brand would be as in depth as would be expected between two individuals, so how the consumer views this knowledge still needs to be explored further.

*New Themes*

In addition to the themes that overlapped with the literature, there were three new emergent themes: emotion, personalization, and transparent motives. The relationship literature stresses the importance of emotion (Kelley, et al., 1983)—however, it has not been addressed at the level of individual interactions. But again, as the building blocks of relationships, emotion is expected to be a component in individual interactions. Although the respondents seemed a bit censored in the pretest interviews, it was apparent that emotion was often present in the brand examples—even if at low levels. Respondents typically qualified emotion statements, but feelings toward each actor were still apparent. This adds to the literature by emphasizing the relevance of emotion during individual interactions rather than only considering them as an outcome of an ongoing relationship. Personalization is becoming increasingly important in marketing (Song & Zinkhan, 2008), and may aid in allowing the consumer to more easily view the brand as an individual. The data suggests that in order for social interaction to take place, the consumer must feel that the brand views them as an individual—which may allow the consumers to more easily view themselves as a true actor in the social interaction. Fournier's (1998) seminal study on the consumer-brand relationship found that consumers can view brands as traditional relationship partners, and these findings add to the literature by helping to explain how that might occur. What still needs to be asked is—can this be accomplished by more traditional consumer goods brands

where there is less opportunity to personalize communication? The main study will address this issue by exploring a wide variety of brands.

*Literature Identified Elements Not Supported in the Emergent Themes*

Two elements of consumer-brand interaction that were found in the literature did not emerge as themes in this pretest: known roles and shared meanings/goals. Known roles refer to the ability of each actor to understand and take on the role of the other (Deflem, 1999; Rummel, 1976; Hill & Hansen, 1960; Sherif & Sherif, 1969). Shared meanings/goals refer to both actors having same/similar meanings and goals (Deflem, 1999; Rummell, 1976; Blackston, 2000). It may not be that these themes are not important to the consumer, but for some reason they didn't emerge in this particular data. The data is comprised not of in-depth interviews, but of individual brand experience descriptions. So the way in which the data were gathered may have kept these more abstract elements from emerging. Additional probing might illuminate experiences where these themes do emerge, and so will be assessed more directly in the main study.

***Summary***

The pretest met its two goals by (1) confirming that consumers do engage in social interaction with brands, and (2) by identifying key elements that consumers use to define interaction in the CBR context (consumer-brand interaction). Based on the literature, several elements have been highlighted as key components in interaction (Table 2.3). The pretest results found support for some of these and discovered additional themes that represent potential elements of interaction in the CBR context (Table 2.3).

**Main Study: In-depth Interviews**

The purpose of the main study is to take a closer look at all of the elements identified in the literature, as well as the emergent themes from the pretest interviews to find out what exactly consumers believe are required elements of interaction—What must be present in order for consumers and brands

to interact? These in-depth guided interviews (Patton, 1990) will follow up on the exploratory data from the pretest with a more targeted focus to try to better understand what defines consumer-brand interaction (CBI) from the consumer's point of view—which is an important goal in a qualitative research design (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Therefore the goals are to: (1) determine if consumers see a distinction between social and transactional interaction with the brand, (2) determine which elements and themes are required in CBI, and (3) construct a conceptual definition that can be used in to provide direction for the development of a measurement scale.

***Method***

The interviews were completed by the primary researcher, and the analysis follows the fundamental operations advocated by Spiggle (1994)—which include the processes of categorization, abstraction, comparison, and integration. This method was employed because this study is descriptive in nature and seeks more thick description of the consumer's understanding of consumer-brand interaction. To this end, ten in-depth interviews were conducted using the semi-structured interview guide (Appendix 4) developed based on the initial interviews (pretest). As mentioned previously, using this type of qualitative data allows for a better understanding of social interaction from the consumer's point of view (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). Initial analysis will identify emergent themes, which will be further explored and verified via a member check. After a member check is performed, the emergent themes will then be used to propose a conceptual definition that will serve as the preliminary step for a scale development study (Essay 3).

*Sample*

The individual participants were selected by the primary researcher (convenience sample) with effort made to get a representative sample (with regards to gender, age, lifestyle)—as it is expected to increase generalizability (Kruskal and Mosteller, 1980). The sample was comprised of five men and five

women. The average age was 47, with a range of 19-82. Four held a college degree, while another three had at least some college (Table 2.4 provides additional details).

*Table 2.4: Main Study Sample Description*

| ID | Gender | Age | Marital status | Occupation | Education | Length of Interview | Pages of text |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | Male | 37 | Married | Service Manager | Some college | 48 min | 11 |
| B | Male | 21 | Single | Student/diesel work | Some college | 36 min | 9 |
| C | Female | 19 | Single | Student/social work | Some college | 39 min | 9 |
| D | Male | 29 | Married | Self-employed | Associate's degree | 81 min | 20 |
| E | Male | 69 | Married | Small town Mayor | High school | 70 min | 15 |
| F | Female | 70 | Married | Retired | High school | 49 min | 11 |
| G | Female | 82 | Widow | Hospitality | High school | 78 min | 17 |
| H | Female | 56 | Divorced | Cost analysis for AF | Master's degree | 47 min | 12 |
| I | Female | 29 | Married | Student | Associate's degree | 54 min | 12 |
| J | Male | 57 | Single | Director of Training MHP | Master's degree | 43 min | 10 |

*Procedures*

*Step 1: Conducting the interviews.* The primary researcher served as the sole interviewer. The use of guided interviews allowed for the interviewer to follow a general list of questions, while allowing for adjustments to be made when needed (Patton, 1990). As recommended by Palan and Wilkes (1997), semi-structured interview scripts/guides were used, and each interview was digitally recorded (which resulted in an average of 55 minutes per interview) and transcribed (average length of text: 12.5 pages) for analysis. The initial interviews were designed to gain a better understanding of how consumers define social interaction with a brand—as it not as understood as transactional interaction. The aim was, therefore, to get consumers to talk about social interactions with the brand, and then to probe (as

recommended by Dillon, Madden, & Firtle, 1994) for information regarding what specific elements they believe are core components of consumer-brand interaction (CBI). The respondents were first simply asked to discuss interactions with brands, and then, as brand experiences emerged, probing questions were used to try to gain an understanding of which interactions the consumers felt were more social (as opposed to transactional). Questions about communication were included to gauge reciprocity, and questions about motivations, emotion, mutual understanding, etc., were included to tap into potential interaction elements. Then the respondents were asked more direct questions related to the elements from the literature and the emergent themes from the pretest, to determine if they felt each element was a core to CBI, or social interaction specifically.

*Step 2: Identifying Emerging Themes.* The analysis included three key processes: categorization (initial coding), abstraction (identification of emergent themes), and comparison—as outlined by Spiggle (1994). The initial coding process follows Spiggle's categorization and abstraction stages (1994), where the individual interview data was first labeled, and then collapsed into emergent themes. This means that each interview was analyzed separately for individual emergent themes. The goal was to identify elements that each respondent felt was needed in order for CBI to be present. Segments of text that seemed representative of each theme were highlighted and labeled (as suggested by Foss & Waters, 2003). After these initial interview themes were coded, the goal was to collapse them into higher order themes and compare similarities and differences across examples (Spiggle, 1994). So, only after the interviews were examined one by one were patterns across all interviews considered. For this particular study, it involved examining the presence of the various themes among the different respondents to identify which (if any) themes appeared in all, which appeared in several, and which appeared only in a few. This required extensive multiple reviews of each interview transcript so that all themes were exhausted (Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Spiggle, 1994).

*Step 3: Integrating Themes and Constructing the Conceptual Definition*. Through careful and deliberate review of the data (integration and iteration: Spiggle, 1994) by the primary researcher and a co-chair, several themes were identified. These themes were used as the basis for a preliminary conceptual definition of CBI and social interaction specifically. These definitions were subjected to a member check, which involved going back to the respondents in order to assess interpretive validity (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Sewell).

In preparation for the member check, the preliminary results were summarized into a document that was divided into six sections. The researcher then met with each respondent to go over the interpretation and get feedback. The discussion focused on four issues. The *first section* presented the respondent with the definition of transactional interaction (activities and communication between the consumer and brand that are required to complete the transaction—including any type of exchange that is directly tied to the transaction) and the broad pre-interview definition of social interaction (activities and communication between the consumer and brand that are NOT required to complete the transaction—so any exchanges between the consumer and brand that are not directly tied to the transaction). The respondents were asked if they felt there was a distinction between the two types of interaction, and if the definitions fit with their understanding of the two. The *second section* presented the respondent with the finding that social interaction seemed to require (1) a non-transactional interaction activity along with a (2) non-transactional brand motivation. The respondents were asked if they agreed that these were the two core components of social interaction, and if social interaction could occur without both. The *third section* presented the respondent with examples of non-transactional interaction activities from the interviews, and they were asked if they felt these examples could represent non-transaction interaction in their mind. The *fourth section* presented the respondent with the six elements thought to make an interaction activity non-transactional, and they were asked: (1) if any of the six were more important, (2) if any were not needed, and (3) if any elements were missing. At this point,

the respondents were probed regarding the literature-identified elements that were not supported in the emergent themes (known roles and shared meanings/goals). The *fifth section* presented the respondent with explanations of non-transactional brand motivations, and they were asked if they fit with their understanding of the concept. The *sixth section* presented the respondent with elements thought to be required in order for the consumer to believe the brand had non-transactional motivations. The respondents were asked if they felt these elements were needed and if there were any additional elements that should be included.

***Results and Discussion***

The results first supported that consumers do see a distinction between transactional and social interaction. Some interactions were viewed as representing activities and communications between the consumer and brand that are required in order to successfully complete a transaction. This transactional interaction includes any type of exchange that is directly tied to the transaction. Social interactions represent all those "extra" activities and communications between the consumer and brand that are not required to complete the transaction—so the exchanges that are not tied directly to the purchase. Verifying this distinction allows for the more directed examination of social interaction specifically. But it is important to note that consumers do not necessarily expect every interaction with a particular brand to be social. For example, one respondent expects a social interaction when going into Starbucks, but is fine with a transactional interaction when going through the drive-through.

The analysis resulted in support for the emergent themes from the pretest (Table 2.3: non-transactional activity, reciprocal communication, mutual effort, mutual understanding, personalization, emotion, and non-transactional brand motivation), the elements from the literature not found in the pre-test data (Table 2.2: shared meanings/goals and known roles) and as well as three additional themes—comfort, firm size, and financial investment. Social interaction in the CBR context appears to represent a higher order construct with several themes/elements representing sub-themes of two distinct dimensions

(meta-themes). Many of the themes represented elements tied to the specific interaction activity (reciprocal communication, effortful action, personalization, accepted boundaries, and emotion)—indicating that a (1) non-transactional interaction activity is required. Some other themes represented elements related to the consumer's perception of the (2) brand's non-transactional motivation for engaging in that activity (mutual understanding and shared goals).

The results provide support that consumers view social interaction with the brand as a two-dimensional construct—requiring a non-transactional interaction activity where the brand has non-transactional motivations. This definition was subjected to a member check, which involved going back to the respondents in order to assess interpretive validity (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006; Sewell). To this end, the respondents were given the preliminary description of social interaction in the CBR context (along with explanations and examples), and asked to verify whether the interpretation fits with their idea of social interaction in the CBR context.

*Identification of Meta-themes*

Twelve themes emerged from the interview data and represent possible social elements that consumers think are required in social interaction between consumers and brands. Through integration (Spiggle, 1994), it was found that ten sub-themes organized around two meta-themes: (1) interaction activity and (2) Brand motivation (Figure 2.2). The member check process provided verification that the respondents felt that the presence of a non-transactional activity along with non-transactional brand motivation were needed in order to have *social* interaction between the consumer and the brand. The first meta-theme (interaction activity) initially had six representative sub-themes, while the second (non-transactional brand motivation) had four (and in Table 2.5). Next, each of the two meta-themes will be introduced, and the sub-themes that emerged will be explained and related to existing theory and research.

| Interaction activity | Brand motivation |
|---|---|
| • Reciprocal communication<br>• Mutual effort<br>• Accepted boundaries<br>• Personalization<br>• Emotion<br>• Comfort | • Mutual understanding<br>• Shared meanings<br>• Firm size<br>• Financial investment |

*Figure 2.2: Initial Meta-themes and Sub-themes*

*Interaction Activity*

The interaction activity can be tied specifically to a purchase (transactional activity), or not (non-transactional activity). A transactional activity might include an actual purchase, an email coupon, or a phone call from your cable service asking if you want to upgrade. The focus in this essay was on a better understanding of social interaction specifically, so the non-transactional interaction activity will be discussed in more depth.

A non-transactional interaction activity is one that is not tied directly to the transaction, and this type of activity was mentioned explicitly in nine interviews. Many examples did include face-to-face interaction, but it was apparent that a non-transactional activity does not require it:

> *"I read the newsletter that I get by email. It gives good recipes and will spotlight a product and tell you about it. Like one month it was Mississippi raised catfish. And it told about how it was a local product and how it was raised. [This newsletter] would be more social, because the recipes that I get, I don't have to go to Whole Foods to buy the ingredients. I could go anywhere. But I still use the recipes that they suggested, so I think it would be social."*

Of course, this also highlights that it isn't the activity alone that indicates social interaction. Non-transactional brand motivations are also important. But it does show how some types of activities can be viewed as being more separate from the actual transaction. And for the respondents, it was very important that these types of activities are kept as separate as possible from the transaction. For example, a brand sending you a birthday card would likely be considered a non-transactional activity. But if the brand includes information on an upcoming sale, or a coupon for a percentage off your next purchase

along with that birthday card—consumers are more likely to tie it to the transaction. Similarly, one respondent discussed a grocery store providing free coffee for customers—which she viewed as representative of a non-transactional activity. When discussing this example with other respondents during the member check, one specifically said that it was a good example of a non-transactional activity provided they were not trying to also sell the customer bags of coffee at the coffee kiosk. Member checks verified that a non-transactional activity was required in order to have social interaction between the consumer and the brand.

This meta-theme fits with the existing literature on social interaction, where it is described as representing specific actions taken by the actors to influence each other's behavior (Sherif & Sherif, 1969; Turner, 1988; Ellis, 1999). As highlighted previously, the marketing literature tends to focus on transactional exchange, but there is support that non-transactional activities can occur (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Aggarwal, 2004; Hess and Story, 2005). Therefore, in this context, the consumer and brand engage in an activity (requiring action on both parts), and this activity is a core component of social interaction in the CBR context.

Initial analysis of the interaction activity meta-theme indicated that it was comprised of six sub-themes, but after discussion (primary researcher and co-chair) and reexamination of the interview data and member checks, one was dropped—comfort. Seven respondents mentioned the term "comfort," but it was found that the term was used in three different ways. Some respondents expressed the idea of comfort more as brand familiarity, consistency, and reliability ("*I used the product for years and knew it was a good one…[it was] consistent*"). In this way, it is more representative of an antecedent to interaction, and therefore, outside the scope of this study. Some respondents used the term to indicate that it was important for the brand to follow role expectations: ("*There needs to be some level of comfort; a comfort zone. They don't need to leave the professional comfort zone*"), so would fit in with another theme—accepted boundaries. While a few seemed to express comfort as more of an emotion

("*When people do that it'll make you feel like you're at home. It's a friendly environment*"), so would fit with that sub-theme. The resulting five elements of the interaction activity include: (1) reciprocal communication, (2) mutual effort, (3) accepted boundaries, (4) personalization, and (5) emotion.

*Reciprocal Communication:* This theme represents a two-way exchange of information between the consumer and the brand and is a vital component of the interaction activity, which was explicitly discussed by nine respondents. Therefore, for an interaction activity to occur, the consumer and brand must engage in two-way communication. In a transactional interaction activity, it might include the salesperson asking a shoe size before bringing out a pair for the customer to try on. Based on the interviews, this theme is conceptualized in the social interaction context as a two-way exchange of information not directly related to the transaction (i.e., transactional communication). The interviews made it very clear that some sort of reciprocal communication is a core component ("*To me [interaction] has got to be both ways*.")—whether it is represented by a personal conversation or completing a survey. This social communication was much easier for the respondents to discuss when talking about person-to-person interaction—as one respondent found it easier to have social interaction when going inside a Starbucks (as opposed to going through the drive through): "*When you go inside, I guess you tend to get more conversation. Just more friendly conversation."* But reciprocal communication can occur in other ways (such as email, telephone, and mail), and even a single social exchange counts (no need for expectation of future interaction): "*Instead of just sending an email that says, 'Here's a sale, buy something.' Send an email saying, 'We appreciate your business. We want to ask you a couple of questions. Do this little survey.'"* So in this way, those emails sent out en masse are not viewed as reciprocal in nature. And if the brand doesn't express that they want you to respond back (other than to buy), then consumers don't seem to feel that even a social attempt is present.

*Table 2.5: Meta-themes and sub-themes Emerging from the Main Study*

| Element/Theme | Illustrative Quote | Citations |
|---|---|---|
| **Non-transactional interaction activity:** An activity between the consumer and brand that is not tied directly to a transaction. | H: "A handwritten note is more social in nature."<br>C: "I would say the coffee [stand at Piggly Wiggly] felt more social. Because you're getting to sit there, get your coffee, and normally someone will come up and say, 'Hey, how are you doing?' You can still walk around [without buying] and drink coffee and they'll be nice about it." | Nature of the interaction: Sherif & Sherif (1969) |
| Reciprocal communication: Two-way information exchange. | B: "I think the consumer has a lot to do with it, too. Because if the consumer isn't interacting with the brand, then the brand can't be as responsive. So. if you're not cooperative, they can't be cooperative. It's half and half."<br>D: "I think it takes both sides to really interact. You can attempt, but it takes both [consumer and brand] to interact." | Reciprocal communication: Duncan and Moriarty (1998), Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro (2007) |
| Mutual effort: Both actors put forth effort (time, energy, mental/physical work) beyond what is required for the successful completion of the transaction. | A: "It wouldn't be complete [without consumer effort, too], I'd say…The action is not complete. It's a give and take on both sides."<br>B: So you think it's more about not effort in finding the particular item you asked for, but putting forth effort to understand what you need? "Correct. I mean they understand what your wants are, not only what you want at the time..[they need to] put together the puzzle and find out what you want." | Mutual orientation: Turner (1988), Ellis (1999), Smith (1968), Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen (1960) |
| Accepted boundaries: Ability to understand the expected roles in an activity between consumer and brand. | C: "Oh yeah, there is a boundary there. There is a line. They know how far to go and you know, telling you 'I remember what you were wearing last time.' That's not freaky, but if it was like, 'I remember your phone number that you gave me last time.' That would be a little freaky."<br>B: "You don't normally start talking to somebody and then they start talking about something off the wall and you get weirded out and uncomfortable. There needs to be some level of comfort. A comfort zone. They don't need to leave the professional comfort zone….there is a professional limit." | Known roles: Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen, 1960, Sherif & Sherif |
| Personalization: The brand individualizes the consumer. | A: "You can see the distinction in them [genuine personalization versus automated personalization]."<br>B: "Well they sent me one [email] that said, 'hey we have received your payment. It's probably going to be Monday before we get to your order because UPS wasn't shipping Sunday,' and stuff like that. And I was like, wow…it wasn't like an automated thing where they just pushed a button." | |

Table 2.5 continued

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Emotion: Affective elements are present in the interaction activity. | H: "And it [handwritten note] gives you a warmer feeling towards the company."<br>B: "There's always going to be an emotional factor. Even if it's love or hate." | |
| **Non-transactional brand motivations:** The consumer believes that the brand is motivated by more than just an immediate sale. | H: "But when you feel like they value you as a person, too [as opposed to just a customer], it's just more personal. It's like they're a friend instead of someone you have something to do with just when you're buying something."<br>D: "I called and talked to a person and I was telling him about the [computer] problems that I had. And he seemed very concerned: '…there's no reason to pay someone to fix it, your computer is set up. This is all you have to do.' The guy cared. And he was trying to save me money." Like he was looking out for you? "That there is it." So if more of their reps were like that one guy? "I would be an HP customer for life, probably."<br>D: "If they're sincere. They need to be sincere. And you can pretty much tell if somebody is sincere." | |
| Mutual understanding: Consumer feels like the brand knows who they are, and they know who the brand is. | B: "If you order something for hunting online, they'll send you emails for hunting. They won't bother with the fishing. But I order everything for fishing, so they send me fishing emails."<br>B: "If the brand doesn't know who they are, then they can't really have a working relationship with you."<br>D: "I get to know people at different places, you know? There's one particular gas station…that I go to all the time by the house, they all know me. I get a lot more interaction with them because they know me." | Sherif & Sherif (1969) |
| Shared meaning: The consumer and brand have common goals and values. | H: "I called the manager back and told him that I hoped they would never change…because that's the only reason I shop there…I was willing to pay more to be treated nicely. And he said, 'Oh no. That's what the store's built on, customer service.' And they would never change that."<br>I: "Yes [we have common interests/goals]…I think they are more environmentally responsible and that's very important to me."<br>B: "If you don't have goal match up, it's like one person doesn't care about the other one. But like at Bass Pro, their goal is to find what you want other than what you tell them you want." | Deflem (1999), Rummel (1976), Hill & Hansen (1960), Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro (2007), Blackston (2000) |

As discussed previously, reciprocity is an inherent component of any type of interaction (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). And as a type of interaction, it is a core component of consumer-brand interaction (CBI). In CBI, reciprocal communication represents the reciprocal element in the interactions. Without reciprocity, there would be no interaction. The key here is that in the context of social interaction, the information exchanged is not directly related to the transaction; it is represented by social

communication (Figure 2.2). And as mentioned, there is support for this type of information exchange in the marketing literature (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006).

*Mutual Effort:* This theme stresses the importance that both actors put forth effort (time, energy, mental/physical work) during an interaction activity, and as present in all of the interviews. In the context of social interaction, this effort goes beyond what is required for the successful completion of the transaction. The "added" non-transactional effort on the part of both the consumer and brand is demonstrated during the non-transactional interaction activity. Although some feel like the burden lies with the brand, the respondents agree that both parties have to put forth effort above what is required to successfully complete the transaction alone. One respondent discusses what happens when only one party puts for the effort:

> *"Then the whole thing is null and void. If I go into a store and buy something and the owner, manager, worker, whoever, tries to strike up a conversation with me, and you can tell when somebody wants to talk to you, and I just keep my mouth shut and I just ask how much I owe them and walk out. Nothing's happened. Whereas if you turned it around and if I tried to strike up a conversation and he said, 'that'll be 25 cents.' Then he turns around and then I walk out and think that man wasn't very friendly. And turn around to see where I am to make sure I don't come back."*

Similarly, another respondent discussed having dinner with a very difficult customer, but the "*manager went over and beyond the call of duty*" and in response the respondent wanted to show them that he appreciated it and that it wasn't the restaurant's fault. The respondents again stressed the importance of keeping non-transactional activities separate from transactional activities, and suggested that if the brand expects a direct repayment of effort in the form of a sale, then the activity will not be viewed as social—indicating that there is a distinction between transactional and social effort:

> *"If [Krispy Kreme] said 'here's kids fun day' and you get there and you walk in and there's nothing different except they're giving out… 'hey kids, here's a free donut'. If they had something set up in the parking lot and had a customer appreciation day, or kids day, or whatever they actually put some effort behind it to have a fun day for the kids*."

This quote represents the idea that when the consumer views the "added effort" as tied directly to the product, or to making more sales, then it won't really be classified as a non-transactional activity.

As discussed previously, this theme is supported in the literature where social interaction is described as requiring mutual orientation, which is defined as actions by one party directed toward and intended to impact the other party (Rummel, 1976). This suggests that in the CBR context, the consumer and/or brand have to take effortful action in order for either social or transactional interaction to occur. And considering this along with the interview data, it is apparent that both the consumer and the brand are expected to put forth additional effort—meaning that mutual effort is required. This effort can be represented by time, energy, or mental/physical work (Robben & Verhallen, 1994)—but in social interaction, this effort is not related to the transaction.

*Accepted Boundaries:* This is defined as the ability of both parties to understand the expected roles in an activity between consumer and brand. When the boundaries are crossed, then the entire interaction activity falls apart. Although this theme did not arise very often (present in three interviews), it may have been due to the fact that the concept was challenging to discuss in this context. Based on interviews where this theme was present, it seems like the customer may view and interact with the brand like a friend in many ways—but the fact that it is, at its core, a marking relationship requires certain role expectations to be upheld:

> *"If you've [brand representative] got a problem at home, you should leave it at home. You shouldn't take it to your job. And you should show more courtesy to your customers and stuff like that….Some of them have a bad day. I've been there where some of them come back and apologize, 'Sorry, I've had a lot of stuff on my mind and I have been rude. And I apologize for cutting you off short, but me and my supervisor had a few words.' Well, if you and your supervisor had a few words, you need to leave it back there with your supervisor. Don't take it out in the public eye. You leave it there."*

The member checks supported the need for this element in interaction activity, especially in the non-transactional interaction activities, where all ten felt it was needed for social interaction. This suggests that if the social boundaries were crossed, it almost becomes "anti-social interaction."

This theme is grounded in the concept of "known roles," where actors have the ability to understand their roles, as well as others' roles (Hill & Hansen, 1960; Rummel, 1976; Deflem, 1999). In the CBR context, this is reflected by the consumer and brand understanding their roles and adhering to certain boundaries during the interaction activity. The boundaries will, of course, be expected to vary from person to person, or perhaps culture to culture (Muhlbacher et al., 2006)—but is ultimately set by the consumer (according to the respondents). So the idea that the consumer and brand must act within accepted boundaries during the interaction activity is very important. As the parameters or a transactional interaction (exchange of money for goods/services) is more clearly understood, this theme seems as if it would be of special relevance in the social interaction context.

*Personalization:* Through personalization in the interaction activity, the brand individualizes the consumer. The key here is not only that the communication is personalized, but also that the consumer feels like the brand views them as an individual. This was present in all ten interviews. Therefore, an interaction activity needs to have some level of personalization. One respondent compared two grocery stores, on that made her feel like an individual with one that did not:

> *"At Kroger, it seems like you're just a number in a computer. Every time I've been in [Piggly Wiggly], they normally remember me. They're like, 'hey, I remember you from last time.' They're always talkative and they're always smiling. And the people at Kroger are just kind of like, 'I've seen you, but I don't remember who you are. I can't remember what you bought last time.' The girl I went in and dealt with yesterday [at Piggly Wiggly], she remembered what I bought last time and what I was wearing and everything. She was like, 'you're in scrubs again."*

Based on the interview data, the level of personalization expected from various types of brands does vary. For example, an interaction activity involving face to face communication with an individual brand representative will be expected to be more personalized than, say, a personalized email from a large consumer goods brand. But if the consumer feels as if the brand is viewing them as an individual, then CBI can occur without it. One respondent discussed an online experience that left him feeling like the brand viewed him as an individual:

*"Normally when you order something offline from them [Bass Pro Shop], they'll send you, 'Hey, it's been shipped. Hey, we received your payment,' and that's all. Well they sent me one that said, 'Hey, we have received your payment. It's probably going to be Monday before we get to your order because UPS wasn't shipping Sunday,' and stuff like that. And I was like, wow. It wasn't like an automated thing where they pushed a button."*

This theme is consistent with research showing that personalization tactics alone don't always result in more positive outcomes (Suprenant & Solomon, 1987). It is key that the consumer feels like they are viewed as an individual by the brand. Personalization is more directly accomplished with one-to-one marketing (Peppers & Rogers, 1993), but is attempted by many CRM programs (Arnett and Badrinarayanan, 2005) using a one-to-many approach. For the CBR, it is the consumer's perception that is key and personalization can be accomplished through more focused target marketing—where the consumer feels "as if" the brand is trying to view them as more of an individual.

*Emotion:* Eight respondents mentioned affective elements as a core component in an interaction activity. When asked what they viewed as the key distinction between a social interaction and a transactional interaction, one respondent said, "*emotion. That's where the difference comes in."* Although it was present in many interviews, respondents did not seem comfortable talking explicitly about "emotions" with brands. This was expected given that the CBR context is examining relationships with brands, rather than interpersonal relationships. But for most, social interaction was described as requiring "feelings" in addition to "thoughts." The focus is not on emotions that the consumer may already have toward the brand, but on affective elements in the interaction activity itself—Feelings must be involved: "*Make [the customer] feel comfortable, make him want to be around you."* One respondent who was dining with a difficult customer mentioned that the situation "*embarrassed him and it embarrassed me*," and that he started to care about how the manager and waiter were feeling.

Emotion represents affective components of the interaction activity, and often the affective elements are related to "feeling" while cognitive elements are related to "thinking" (Zajonc & Markus, 1982). Essay 1 provided conceptual support that an emotional connection is required in the consumer-

brand relationship. As a relationship is built on interactions (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), then in order to form an emotional bond over time, emotion has to be present in the individual interaction activities. In this context, emotion needs to be present in the non-transactional interaction activity in order for a CBR to form.

*Brand motivation*

The brand's motivation (as perceived by the consumer) for interacting is an important determinant for which activities are considered transactional and which are considered social. A transactional brand motivation is present when the consumer believes the brand is primarily motivated by profits (i.e., to make a sale). A non-transactional brand motivation is present when the consumer believes that the brand is motivated by more than just an immediate sale. This is differentiated from an antecedent motivation in that it represents the consumer's perception of brand motivation during a *specific* interaction activity. This is in line with qualitative findings that suggest consumers may have both transactional and non-transactional interactions with a particular brand at different times—so the consumer may feel that in one case the brand has only transactional motivations, and in another they may feel that non-transactional brand motivations are also present. This theme was dominant in all of the interviews, indicating that it is a required component of social interaction between consumer and brand. For the respondents, it was represented by the idea that the brand is showing that they care about you (the customer) rather than just making a sale, and that the concern is genuine ("*I have a sense of whether it's sincere or not*"). Results did indicate that for many the presence of non-transactional motivations doesn't mean that transactional motivations ("making money") are not also present—but that at least some additional non-transactional motivations are needed in order to have social interaction. As highlighted in the Whole Foods example previously, when the interaction activity (emailed newsletter) is further removed from the transaction, it is easier for the consumer to feel like non-

transactional motivations are present. Member checks verified that the interaction activity alone does not indicate social interaction, and that non-transactional motivations are also needed.

As discussed in the pretest results section, this theme is grounded in the persuasion knowledge model (PKM), which suggests that consumers develop knowledge structures about the brand's marketing motivations to engage in an interaction (Turner, 1988; Campbell and Kirmani, 2000). Based on the PKM, the motivation for the brand interacting with the consumer is likely a determinant of how effective CBR communications will be (Friestad and Wright, 1994; Barone, Miyazaki, and Taylor, 2000; Ahluwalia and Burnkrant, 2004). Therefore, if the brand can successfully communicate that they care for the consumer beyond the sale, they are more likely to achieve social interaction.

Initial analysis of the brand motivation meta-theme indicated four sub-themes, but after discussion (primary researcher and co-chair) and reexamination of the interview data, two were dropped—firm size and financial investment. Firm size was mentioned in seven of the interviews, where respondents suggested that larger firms could not have social interaction with consumer *("The only way that they [larger firms] could do that [have social interaction], they would have to get down on the level of the consumer. And it's very, very hard to do that. To get down on the level with the consumer and communicate directly with them"*). But upon probing during the member checks, the respondents expressed that it wasn't the firm size itself that made them unwilling to view the brand as having non-transactional motivations, it was more about it being more difficult for the larger brands to make the consumer feel like they understand them (mutual understanding) and to show they have similar goals and values (shared meanings). It was similar for the financial investment theme. The respondents expressed during the member checks that it wasn't that the lower priced consumer goods brand could not have non-transactional motivations, but that they would be less likely to get to know the consumer or show that they have common goals and values—because it just wouldn't be "cost effective." Therefore, non-transactional brand motivation represents the idea that the consumer feels like the brand is engaging

in the activity because they care more about them than an immediate sale and is dependent on the consumer feeling like they and the brand have (1) mutual understanding and (2) shared meanings.

*Mutual Understanding:* It is important for the consumer to feel like the brand knows who they are, and that they know what the brand stands for, before they can view the brand as having non-transactional motivations. This theme was present in nine interviews. Simply put, in order for the consumer to feel the brand cares about them, they must feel like the brand has an understanding of them. Although it is easy to see how level of understanding would increase with more interactions (i.e., the actors get to know each other better over time), this theme is focused on identifying instances where it occurs during the interaction itself:

> *"They [brand] need to know who you are and what you are. A little bit more about you than your name and your credit card number. I don't think you have to talk to anyone very long to know something about them. You get an idea of what their personality is like. And you can sort of carry the conversation on a little bit more."*

This theme is also represented by the brand anticipating customer needs: *"I've never had to ask for [help]. They [Publix] notice if I'm not finding something and they show up and ask me if I need help."* When the consumer feels like that they and the brand understand each other, they will "*feel like they're [brand] more your friend than a salesperson*." By showing that the brand understands them, the consumer is more likely to believe they care about them and, therefore, has non-transactional motivations.

This theme is grounded in sociology literature, where social interaction is viewed as being dependent on the actors being known to each other (Sherif & Sherif, 1969). This theme was also represented in Fournier's (1998) definition of the consumer-brand relationship. However, in the CBR context it would be very difficult for many brands to truly "know" each and every customer. Mutual understanding better reflects how this concept is reflected in the CBR context, where the consumer feels like (1) they understand what the brand stands for and (2) the brand understands who they are to some extent. Similar to the discussion on emotion, the level of understanding is expected to change,

strengthen, or weaken over time (Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007) via repeated interactions. But the key here is that at the time of the social interaction activity, this theme must be present in order for social interaction to occur.

*Shared Meanings:* In order for the consumer to feel the brand can have non-transactional motivations, they need to feel like they have common goals and values. Although this is a rather abstract concept, six interviews had this theme present. Simply put, a consumer cannot feel like the brand cares about them if they don't feel like the brand shares the same overarching goals and values as they do ("*If you don't have goal match-up, it's like one person doesn't care about the other").* Essentially this theme represents a match-up of goals/meanings between the consumer and brand and is needed for the consumer to believe that the brand has non-transactional motivations. This was most clearly represented by a respondent who discussed how her values match up with Whole Foods' values: "*I think of the grocery store chains, I think they are more environmentally responsible and that's very important to me."* This respondent had a similar feeling for Gap—who sponsors "give and get" promotions, where the customer gets to decide what charity they want Gap to donate to. Another respondent described the goal match-up between her and her grocery store (Publix):

> *"I've talked to the manager several times, because I thank him for people treating you so nice in there. [After a bad experience at Winn Dixie] I called the [Publix] manager back and told him that I hoped they would never change that aspect of the store, because that's the only reason I shop there. And I knew I paid more. And I was willing to pay more to be treated nicely. And he said, 'Oh now. That's what the store's built on, customer service,' and they would never change that.*

So, shared meanings can be more concretely connected to the idea that the brand's goal is "making the customer happy" rather than "making a sale." Or it can be viewed more abstractly as the brand and consumer sharing core values.

This theme is stressed in the literature as an important component of social interaction—as it is through interactions that the brand and consumer develop meaning (Blackston, 2000). In the sociology literature, the element of shared meanings/goals is considered integral to social interaction (Deflem,

1999; Rummel, 1976). And in the CBR context, it is best reflected by a match-up of goals and values between the consumer and brand. When the consumer feels this match-up exists, they are more likely to consider that the brand may have non-transactional motivations. Similar to other themes (emotion and mutual understanding), this theme focuses on how the consumer views the match up at the specific time of the individual interaction. This may change from interaction to interaction, but for a particular interaction to be considered social, the consumer must feel like the match-up is there during the specific non-transactional interaction activity—allowing for them to feel like the brand can care about them (non-transactional motivation).

***Summary***

Based on these findings, a conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction is also proposed: CBI is comprised of activity(s) involving reciprocal exchanges between the consumer and brand that can be either transactional or social. An interaction activity is an emotion-laden personalized reciprocal exchange between the consumer and brand where both put forth effort and act within accepted boundaries for a consumer-brand interaction. Social interaction in the CBR context is defined as requiring a non-transactional interaction activity along with non-transactional brand motivations. In a non-transactional interaction activity, the information exchanged (reciprocal communication) and effort put forth (mutual effort) go beyond what is necessary to complete a transaction. Non-transactional brand motivation occurs when the consumer feels like the brand cares for them beyond the transaction, and requires the consumer to feel like they and the brand understand one another and have similar goals and values. This study is necessary in the progression of research in the area of consumer-brand relationships, as consumer-brand interactions are the foundation of the CBR.

**General Discussion**

This study was designed to meet the objective of developing a conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction based on qualitative data. As supported in Essay 1, social interaction is an

important concept in the study of the truly dyadic CBR. In this context social interaction is represented by social communication—initially defined as the exchange of personal information above and beyond what is necessary to complete a transaction. This indicates the importance of the nature of the communication (transactional and social) as well as reciprocity (one-way and two-way communication), which was further supported by the literature. The literature identified six key elements of CBI, and pretest data suggested the importance of additional themes. The main study results suggested a two-dimensional conceptualization of consumer-brand interaction (interaction activities and brand motivation). In addition, elements of each dimension were identified, and will be used to develop items in a scale development project (essay 3).

***Theoretical Implications***

In order to fully understand the consumer-brand relationship, a better understanding of the individual interactions that create the relationship is needed. As presented in Essay 1, two types of interactions are relevant in the CBR context: transactional and social. The transactional interaction is more clearly understood, so the emphasis here was on gaining a better understanding of social interaction. In addition, the conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction provides necessary guidance for an operational definition, which allows for a measurement scale and conceptual model to be developed based on the themes representing interaction activities. With measures for CBI, quantitative examination of various consumer-brand relationship types and their relevant outcomes will be possible. Therefore, the conceptual foundation presented, along with this initial study, are a necessary step in the progression of CBR research.

***Managerial Implications***

Not only does this research have theoretical implications, but by focusing on actual interaction between the consumer and brand, managerial control is stressed. Previous conceptualizations of the CBR as a parasocial relationship considered usage encounters rather than purchases, and simulated

interaction rather than actual two-way communication. This view would make it difficult for managers to understand their role in the CBR. As these relationships are built on individual interactions, it is important to isolate the social interactions to determine if they are effective in building CBRs, and if the positive outcomes outweigh the added costs and effort. Historically, managers may have had a practical reason for downplaying two-way communication in the past—It can be costly. But technology is now enabling brands to communicate with their customers online in new and exciting ways (Hoffmann & Novak, 1996). These developments in internet communication make it not only technically possible, but also economically advantageous for firms to cultivate long-term, personal relationships with consumers on a large scale (Moon, 2000).

Based on this study, it is recommended that if a brand desires to interact with the consumer they need to: (1) facilitate reciprocal communication (creating and maintaining open lines of communication), (2) put forth effort, (3) maintain the customer's accepted boundaries, (4) personalize communications to individualize the customer's experience, and (5) display emotions. In order to create social interaction, the brand needs to not only make sure that information exchanged and effort are not tied directly to a transaction, but the brand must also communicate to the consumer that they (1) genuinely care about their well-being, (2) understand them, and (3) share similar goals and values. Some of these non-transactional motivations can be expressed through branding and advertising, but must be reinforced during interactions as well.

### *Study Limitations*

The sample size is relatively small for the main study. However, with the use of in-depth interviews, smaller sample sizes are accepted as each provides a rich description of the phenomena of interest (Fournier, 1998; Riley, 1996). The use of a larger number of preliminary interviews allowed for the main study interviews to be more focused, thus helping to minimize this limitation. And with a diverse sample, the limitation is further minimized.

***Future Research and Conclusion***

These interview results support the existence of social interaction between the consumer and brand and provide support for the conceptual definition of consumer-brand interaction (CBI). The next logical step in this research stream is the development of an operational definition of CBI. Essay 3 proposes a scale development, which would then allow for empirical study of various CBR types. With an operational definition of CBI, CBR types can be more easily differentiated based on interaction type (social and transactional) and outcomes can be examined. As the truly dyadic CBR requires both transactional and social interaction, it cannot be empirically examined without a measureable CBI and a means of differentiating between the two interaction types. Therefore, this study is necessary for the progression of CBR research.

## ESSAY 3: EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTION

### Introduction

The focus of this Essay is the consumer-brand interaction (CBI), which is interaction in the consumer-brand relationship context. This level of analysis is appropriate, as you have to understand the individual building blocks of the relationship (the interactions) before you can fully understand the relationship itself (a series of interactions). The CBI construct was conceptualized in Essay 1, and is defined here as an individual exchange between consumer and brand—or more specifically: *any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time.* The dimensions of this construct were identified in Essay 2 (reciprocal communication, mutual effort, accepted boundaries, personalization, and emotion). The purposes of this study are to (1) develop a measurement scale for consumer-brand interaction, (2) identify the primary dimensions of the CBI and how they relate, and (3) examine differences in these dimensions between social and transactional interactions. As outlined in Table 3.1, completing a scale development process, testing a structural model, and testing for moderation will accomplish this. A general overview of each of these three goals is provided below.

*Table 3.1: Purpose and Plan for Essay 3*

| **Purpose/Goal** | **Method** | **Outcome** |
|---|---|---|
| Develop a measurement scale for the CBI. | Scale development: Specify a measurement model for CBI and all the primary dimensions. | Measurement model to be used for next step. |
| Identify the relationship between the primary dimensions of the CBI. | Test of theoretical model: Specify a structural model showing relationships between dimensions, including relevant outcomes. | An overall theoretical model of the CBI. |
| Examine differences in these dimensions for social and transactional interactions. | Moderation test: Complete a multiple-group analysis of the CBI model by comparing cases with high levels of social interaction with those with low levels. | Identification of differences in the CBI model for social and transactional interaction. |

Following the basic approach developed by Churchill (1979) and expanded by others (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003), a measurement scale was constructed and validated. The purpose of developing the scale was to allow for testing of a theoretical model of the CBI. The scale development process began with the generation of a set of items (based on literature and data collected in Essay 2) to measure the CBI and each dimension identified in Essay 2. Through a process of expert review, this initial set of items (184) was reduced to 54 (15 for the CBI, 8 for reciprocal communication, 11 for mutual effort, 9 for accepted boundaries, 6 for personalization, and 5 for emotion)—which were included in an online questionnaire. The items were then submitted to exploratory factor analyses using a sample of 382. This process led to the breakdown of two dimensions: (1) mutual effort (effort by both, brand effort, and consumer effort) and (2) accepted boundaries (brand and consumer). The resulting measurement model (CFA), therefore, included 9 constructs and 31 items (5 measures of the CBI, 5 for reciprocal communication, 2 for effort by both, 4 for brand effort, 2 for consumer effort, 4 for brand's accepted boundaries, 3 for consumer's accepted boundaries, 3 for personalization, and 3 for emotion).

After the relevant dimensions are identified and the measures are developed, a structural model of the CBI will be tested. The conceptual model below (Figure 3.1) outlines the expected relationships between the CBI construct and its dimensions. The basic model hypothesized that the effort dimensions (effort by both, brand effort, consumer effort) had a positive impact on the relational dimensions (emotion, personalization, reciprocal communication), and that those relationship dimensions, along with accepted boundaries, had a positive effect on the CBI. This is based on the interview data from Essay 2, where informants thought that effort was needed in order for reciprocal communication, personalization, and emotion to occur. Therefore, the theory that emerged from the qualitative data is tested here, and this grounded theory will be examined by specifying a structural model in AMOS. Results support the overall theory, and further suggest that brand effort is the main driver of the relational dimensions, and that reciprocal communication is the main driver of the CBI.

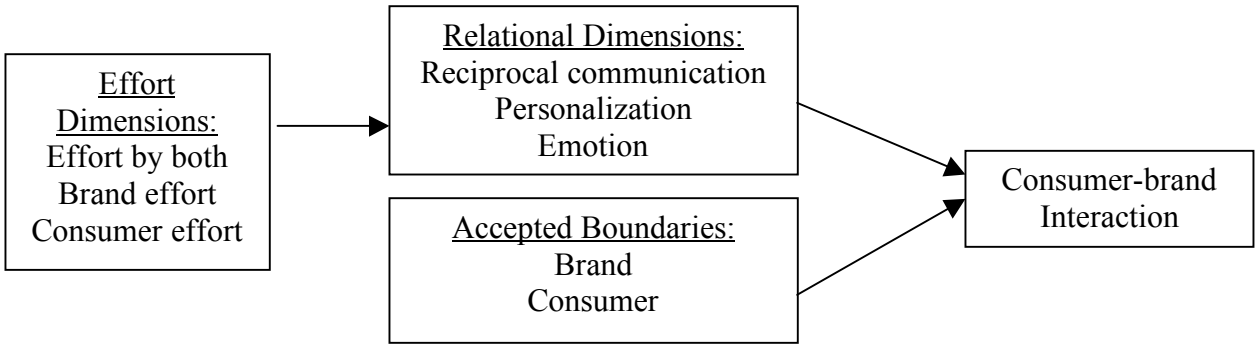


*Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model of the Consumer-brand Interaction*

To help develop a more comprehensive conceptualization of the consumer-brand interaction, differences between social and transactional interaction will be considered. A preliminary ANOVA test supported the idea that there are significant differences in CBI and dimension scores based on the type of interaction (social and transactional). Then a moderation test was run by conducting a multiple-group analysis in AMOS. The two groups compared were those with high levels of social interaction and those with low levels. Results did show differences in the main drivers of CBI for the two groups. For those with high levels of social interaction, the main drivers are reciprocal communication and the brand's accepted boundaries, while for those with low levels of social interaction, reciprocal communication and personalization are key.

**The Consumer-Brand Relationship Context**

This Essay focuses on examining interaction in the consumer-brand relationship (CBR) context. The CBR is a connection between a consumer and brand that results in the formation of a bond, and research in the area considers the overarching brand as the relationship partner of interest. This means that the "brand" can include many types of products (objects) or services. For example, if someone is in a relationship with Starbucks, he/she would view the Starbucks *brand* as the relationship partner, not the individual products, services, or brand representatives (such as drip grind coffee bags, coffee house

drinks, or baristas). As with any relationship, the CBR is built on individual interactions (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007)—in this case between the consumer and the brand. In this context, we can see that both transactional (i.e. purchases) and social interactions (i.e. communication that goes beyond the purchase) are important to consider.

***Current Conceptualization of the CBR***

Consumer-brand relationship research has shown ample support that consumers can and do view brands as relationship partners (Fournier, 1998; Blackston, 2000; MacLeod, 2000). But the current conceptualization of the CBR is limited to account for only parasocial CBRs, where actual interaction is not considered—simulated interaction that occurs in the mind of the consumer is sufficient (Cohen, 2003) and is often based on brand usage (Fournier, 1998). Based on the definition of relationships presented in Essay 1 (as a connection between two or more parties that results in the formation of a bond), it is clear that a CBR meets the broad definition of a relationship. However, as currently conceptualized, the concept is limited to one CBR type, the parasocial CBR—where marketing managers have a very limited (or nonexistent) role in the *relationship*. Although these types of CBRs do occur and are valuable to examine, there are other types that should be considered. This study aims to consider CBRs that involve actual interaction between the consumer and brand. The focus is on individual interaction experiences that serve as the basis for the creation of the CBR.

***Interaction in the Consumer-brand Relationship Context***

Interactions are considered an inherent component of the relationship process (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), and so are relevant for the CBR. It is important to first make the distinction between a relationship and interaction. Relationships are typically described as involving a "series" of interactions with the expectation of future interactions (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988; Fournier, 1998). In this Essay, the focus is on better understanding those *individual* interaction encounters that comprise a relationship—which could be represented by many types of activities

involving reciprocal exchanges (money, information, emotion, etc.). Interactions have been described as requiring two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998), and can either be generative (having a strengthening effect), degenerative (having a negative effect), or neutral (no effect) in nature and can act to increase trust and 'mutual understanding' (Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007)—which further supports the idea that interactions are really the building blocks of a relationship. Therefore, a measure of interaction in this context is needed—which is the first goal of this study.

In the CBR, two types of interactions are relevant: transactional and social interactions. In addition to a measure of interaction, it is valuable to determine if there are differences between these two distinct types of interactions. Interactions of any type require two-way communication (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998). In the case of transactional interaction, communication occurs in the form of (1) the exchange of money for goods (purchase) and (2) the exchange of information required to complete the transaction. Transactional communication includes cases where the customer has to supply some information in order to complete a purchase—such as being required to give your shoe size and home address in order to complete an online purchase. Or, when a salesperson is trained to ask every customer if they "found everything OK." These communications are inherently tied to the transaction. Social interaction includes communications that go above and beyond what is required to complete a transaction. For example, a brand inviting a customer to a social gathering, or a consumer and salesperson discussing their weekend plans may constitute social interaction; it might also include cases where a brand sends a social email ("you haven't been to our Web site lately, and we're just wondering how you're doing"). So it would be expected that levels of social interaction might moderate the theoretical model of the CBI—which is examined in this study.

*Examining the Consumer-brand Relationship*

As argued in Essay 1, the CBR involves reciprocal interaction between two relationship partners. The CBR requires the creation of a social bond between two interactive relationship partners—the

consumer and the brand. The truly dyadic CBR type involves both transactional and social interaction, and the argument for the importance of distinguishing between these two types of interaction was presented in Essay 1. As the transactional interaction is more clearly established (exchanging money for goods/services), Essay 2 focused on gaining an understanding of social interaction specifically.

One of the purposes of this study is to develop a scale of consumer-brand interactions, so the measurement and structural model account for both types of interactions (social and transactional). However, differences in the theoretical model based on interaction type are expected—and are tested for in the moderation analysis. This process will allow for further study of various CBR types—including the truly dyadic CBR, as well as other types. Interview data has highlighted the fact that in truly dyadic CBRs, transactional and social interaction may or may not occur simultaneously. Some consumer-brand interactions were described as having both transactional and social elements present simultaneously in various activities (chatting with the Starbucks barista while waiting for your drink to be made), while others described alternating social and transactional interactions with a particular brand (using the Starbucks drive through on occasion to avoid the social elements). So again, it is important to first examine the individual interactions that combine to create a relationship over time. Once the individual interactions are understood, the series of interactions that make up a relationship can be considered.

**Developing a Scale of Consumer-Brand Interaction**

The goal of the scale development process is to find a set of items that can be used to measure consumer-brand interaction. Based on previous qualitative studies (Essay 2), five dimensions of interaction that can apply to both transactional and social interaction have been identified: (1) reciprocal communication, (2) mutual effort, (3) accepted boundaries, (4) personalization, and (5) emotion. Therefore, a measurement model is specified, which includes measures for CBI and all five dimensions. First, the construct domains are specified. Second, measurement items for each of these six constructs

are generated and purified (through expert review and exploratory factor analyses). Last, the measurement model is tested in AMOS using a confirmatory factor analysis.

***Construct Domain: The Consumer-brand Interaction***

Before the scale process can begin, the construct domain must be specified (Churchill, 1979). A consumer-brand interaction is defined here as an individual exchange between consumer and brand, and more specifically as "*any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time.*" Therefore, actual contact between consumer and brand is stressed, allowing for the consideration of marketer control in the CBR process. The type of contact in the consumer-brand interaction can include many types of activities, and can range from a face-to-face conversation with a brand representative, to an email exchange, to a simple purchase. It may consist of a single activity or several activities occurring at one time or over time, the activity(s) may be online or offline, and may be social or transactional. In any case, what ties the activities together is that the consumer and brand are communicating with each other directly about a single consumer issue (i.e. browsing new season merchandise, seeking product information, making a purchase, repairing an item, scheduling a service, etc.). This is different from previous research (Fournier, 1998) in that brand usage is not considered to be representative of consumer-brand interaction.

Initial findings from Essay 2 supports the notion that consumers do view brands as interactive exchange partners. The brand as interaction partner can include any type of brand—such as branded products, retail brands, service brands, non-profit brands, online brands, etc. In the CBR context, the brand is considered "as a whole." For example, the Starbucks brand includes not only the primary products/service (espresso based drinks), but also added elements, such as other products (packaged coffee beans, baked goods, chocolates), additional services (Internet access), Web site (downloadable

coupons, product information), and brand representatives (baristas, customer service). Previous findings (Essay 2) suggest consumers are able to consider brands at this abstract level.

The interaction between the consumer and brand could represent a range of specific activities, such as a particular communication exchange (e.g., email or conversation with a salesperson), a specific purchase, a visit to the Web site, entry into a brand contest, etc. The key is that the focus is on *individual* interactions and not a series of interactions (which comprise a relationship), as illustrated in Figure 3.2. Therefore, in this study respondents are asked to focus on a single interaction with a brand—regardless of whether or not the particular interaction is indicative of past interactions or future expectations. This allows for examination of the CBR at the most basic level as establishes it at the building blocks for consumer-brand relationships.

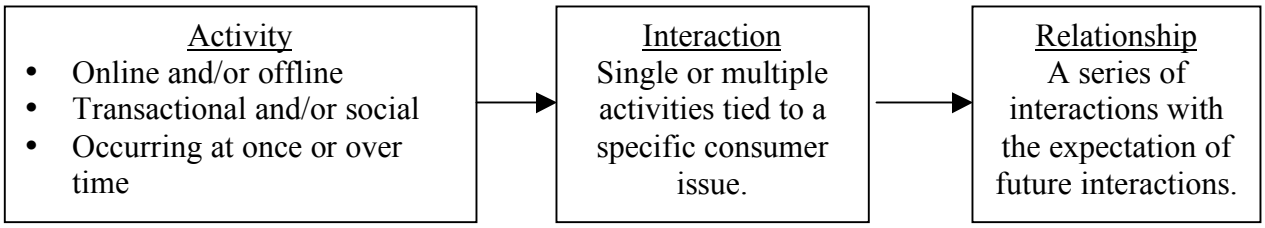


*Figure 3.2: Interaction in the CBR Context*

***Construct Domain: The Dimensions of the Consumer-brand Interaction***

The interview data (Essay 2) suggest that several dimensions of consumer-brand interaction are present. Based on these dimensions, a consumer-brand interaction is expected to have reciprocal communication exchange, effort from consumer and brand, knowledge and adherence to interaction boundaries, as well as personalization and emotion. Table 3.2 outlines the definition of each of the dimensions, which are discussed in more detail below.

*Table 3.2: Consumer-brand Interaction Dimensions*

| **Dimension** | **Definition** |
|---|---|
| Reciprocal communication: | Two-way exchange of information between the consumer and brand. |
| Mutual effort: | Both consumer and brand put forth effort (time, energy, mental/physical work). |
| Accepted boundaries: | The consumer and brand understand and adhere to the parameters of the interaction activity. |
| Personalization: | The brand individualizes the consumer. |
| Emotion: | Affective elements are present. |

*Reciprocal Communication*

This dimension accounts for two-way exchange of information between the consumer and brand. Therefore, there must first be an opportunity for reciprocal communication—meaning, lines of communication between the consumer and brand must be open and available. In the CBR context, this is most often reflected by the consumer's perception of how easily they can reach the brand. Second, messages should flow back and forth—with interaction partners being responsive and respectful of each other's communications.

This dimension is in line with research that describes interactions as requiring two-way communication, where reciprocity is considered an inherent component of an interaction (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998). Therefore, reciprocal communication is expected to occur in all consumer-brand interactions, although the "nature" of the information exchanged may vary. The information exchanged in a transactional interaction is expected to be tied directly to the purchase, while information exchanged in a social interaction is expected to go "above and beyond" the purchase at hand. It is easy to understand that a purchase communicates something in the transactional interaction, as the CBR is a marketing relationship. But there is support for this more social information exchange in the marketing literature (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Ballantyne & Varey, 2006). Differentiating measurement items will therefore be included to distinguish between the "nature" of the information exchanged.

*Mutual Effort*

In a consumer-brand interaction, both actors (consumer and brand) are expected to put forth effort. This need for mutual effort was highlighted in the previous study (Essay 2), where interview data suggested that without consumer AND brand effort, the interaction is not complete. Effort exerted from only one actor indicates an interaction attempt rather than a completed interaction. This is supported by the literature where each actor taking effortful action to impact the other is considered an important element of interaction. The literature (Turner, 1988) further emphasizes the importance of mutual orientation—describing it as behavior directed toward and intended to impact the other (Rummell, 1976).

Therefore, mutual effort is expected to occur in all consumer-brand interactions, but the nature of the effort varies between transactional and social interaction. Both the consumer and brand are expected to put forth effort during the interaction—which can include time, mental, and/or physical effort (Robben & Verhallen, 1994) and can be directed entirely toward the successful completion of a transaction, or can be more social in nature. When the consumer feels like the brand puts forth effort beyond what is required to successfully complete the transaction, social interaction is present. Differentiating measurement items will therefore be included to distinguish between the "nature" of the effort.

*Accepted Boundaries*

This dimension represents the idea that in a consumer-brand interaction, both the consumer and brand must understand and adhere to the parameters of the interaction activity. The interaction is between a consumer and a brand; therefore, there does seem to be an expectation that the brand will stay within "professional" boundaries (Essay 2). The boundaries will, of course, be expected to vary from person to person, situation to situation, and even culture to culture (Muhlbacher, et al., 2006)—but are ultimately set by the consumer (according to the interview data). Informants (Essay 2) stressing the importance that brands stay within their "comfort zone" and don't get "too personal" illustrate this

dimension. So it is not relevant here what the parameters are exactly, only that they are (1) known and (2) followed. Although the actual boundaries may be somewhat different in transactional versus social interaction, the consumer and brand must be aware of and adhere to the parameters in any consumer-brand interaction. This dimension is expected to be consistent across interaction types (social and transactional).

*Personalization*

In the consumer-brand interaction the brand must individualize the consumer, allowing them to feel as though they are true interaction partners. Through personalization in the interaction activity, the consumer feels like the brand views them as an individual. The brand can personalize communications by using the customer's name when addressing them, making use of past purchase/communication history, sending out birthday cards/gifts, etc. It is important to note, even if an interaction includes personalized communications, it may not make the consumer feel like the brand views them as an individual. Therefore, just because a brand sends an email out to a customer using their name doesn't mean the customer will feel like the brand sees them as an individual—which is supported by research that shows that personalization tactics alone don't always result in more positive outcomes (Suprenant & Solomon, 1987). Based on the interview data, the level of personalization expected from various types of brands does vary. For example, an interaction activity involving face-to-face communication with an individual brand representative will be expected to be more personalized than say a personalized email from a large consumer goods brand.

At first thought, it might seem like this dimension would be limited to social interaction. Often personalized communications are thought not to be transaction related, such as casual chit-chat with a brand representative. However, a brand can personalize the experience in a completely transactional interaction as well, such as a brand representative remembering the customer's name as they share

product information. Therefore, if the consumer feels as if the brand is viewing them as an individual, this dimension is present.

*Emotion*

As emotion is typically considered a key component in interpersonal relationships (Kelley et al., 1983), and interactions are considered the building blocks of a relationship (Duncan and Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), then consumer-brand interaction is expected to be emotion-laden. However, it was found (Essay 2) to be difficult for many consumers to directly discuss emotion as it related to a brand. Consumers do not seem comfortable talking explicitly about "emotions" with brands, and instead describe interactions as involving "feelings" in addition to "thoughts." Emotion represents affective components of the interaction activity, and often the affective elements are related to "feeling" while cognitive elements are related to "thinking" (Zajonc & Markus, 1982). Essay one provided conceptual support that an emotional connection is required in the CBR. As a relationship is built on interactions (Duncan & Moriarty, 1998; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), then in order to form an emotional bond over time, emotion has to be present in the individual interaction activities. In this context, emotion needs to be present in interactions in order for a CBR to form. Therefore, in the consumer-brand interaction, affective elements are present. This doesn't necessarily mean that specific emotions must be present, but the interaction does go beyond cognitive elements.

***Method***

As mentioned earlier, the measurement scale will be constructed and validated following the basic approach developed by Churchill (1979) and expanded by others (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). The purpose of developing the scale was to allow for testing of a theoretical model of the CBI. To begin the process of specifying a measurement model for CBI and all the primary dimensions, an initial set of items were generated (based on literature and data collected in Essay 2). These items represented potential measures for the CBI and each of the five dimensions identified in

Essay 2. Through expert review, this initial set of items (184) was reduced to 54 (15 for the CBI, 8 for reciprocal communication, 11 for mutual effort, 9 for accepted boundaries, 6 for personalization, and 5 for emotion)—which were included in an online questionnaire (n=382). The items were then submitted to exploratory factor analyses, which led to the breakdown of two dimensions: (1) mutual effort (effort by both, brand effort, and consumer effort) and (2) accepted boundaries (brand and consumer). The resulting measurement model (CFA) therefore included 9 constructs and 31 items (5 measures of the CBI, 5 for reciprocal communication, 2 for effort by both, 4 for brand effort, 2 for consumer effort, 4 for brand's accepted boundaries, 3 for consumer's accepted boundaries, 3 for personalization, and 3 for emotion).

*Generation of Items*

This process began with the generation of an initial pool of items, which was refined by a panel of expert judges who assessed the items for content and face validity (Churchill, 1979; Arnold & Reynolds, 2003; Hardesty & Bearden, 2004). Therefore, consistent with accepted procedures (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003; Voss, Spangenberg, and Grohmann, 2003), the process involved two stages: (1) generation of the initial pool of items, and (2) item reduction. The initial items were generated based on theory, qualitative data (Essay 2), and existing measures. These items were then judged by experts to reduce the set, and evaluate face and content validity. Further review by the researchers led to additional changes, and the resulting collection of items representing the dimensions of consumer-brand interaction were tested. More detail about each stage is provided in the following sections.

*(1) Generation of initial pool of items:* In this stage, items that captured the full domain of the concepts were generated (Churchill, 1979). The goal was to develop a set of items that tap into each of the initial six constructs (CBI, reciprocal communication, mutual effort, accepted boundaries, personalization, and emotion). Theory and review of existing measures (Table 3.3) were used to begin

the item generation process, and extensive review of interview data (Essay 2) by the primary researcher led to the generation of additional items. This yielded a pool of items that not only covered the full domain of consumer-brand interaction and its dimensions, but also included items grounded in the consumer's own experiences and terminology. This initial item-generation process yielded 184 items: 46 items for CBI, 43 items for reciprocal communication, 31 for mutual effort, 22 for accepted boundaries, 15 for personalization, and 27 for emotion (Table 3.4).

*Table 3.3: Measures used to Generate Initial Items for CBI, Dimensions, and Outcomes*

| **Researcher(s)** | **Scale** |
|---|---|
| Wells (1964) | Emotional quotient |
| Rose, et al., | Reciprocal communication |
| Oliver (1980) | Attitude toward the act |
| Uger & Kernan (1983) | Satisfaction (Intrinsic) |
| Zaichkowsky (1985) | Involvement |
| Westbrook (1987) | Interest |
| Oliver & Swan (1989) | Exchange inputs |
| Feltham (1994) | Pathos |
| Mittal (1995) | Consumer involvement |
| Reynolds & Beatty (1999) | Satisfaction with interaction |
| Lages et al. (2005) | Relationship quality |
| Hennig-thurau et al. (2006) | Positive effect, customer satisfaction, customer.-employee rapport |
| Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) | Brand love, WOM |
| Reynolds, Mothersbaugh, Beatty (2007) | Positive & negative emotions, Repurchase intentions |

*(2) Reduction of Items:* To reduce the number of items, an expert questionnaire was first used to assess items for face and content validity. Each expert judge was given the conceptual definition for each dimension of the consumer-brand interaction, as well as a definition of transactional and social interaction. The initial items representing each dimension of consumer-brand interaction were included. Several marketing faculty members were asked to assess the applicability of each item to (1) transactional interactions only, (2) social interactions only, (3) both (transactional and social), or (4) none. The experts also assessed understandability of the items (word choice, sentence structure, vagueness, and comprehensibility). Items considered for deletion were those that were thought not to be

representative of the domain, or considered unclear and/or open for misinterpretation (Babin, et al., 1994). In this case, candidates for deletion were items that had fewer than three in agreement regarding applicability. Items with only understandability issues were revised when possible. Some highly redundant items were also eliminated (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003) at this point. The revised list included a total 155 items: 27 for CBI, 33 for reciprocal communication, 25 for mutual effort, 27 for accepted boundaries, 17 for personalization, and 26 for emotion (Table 3.4 shows breakdown of specific and general items). Some items were increased, as the process led to the separation of items which were worded to focus on the specific consumer interaction elicited in the questionnaire (i.e., *During the interaction I described: The brand personalized our interaction*) and those which were worded to represent consumer-brand interaction in a general way (i.e., *In an interaction between a consumer and brand: The brand must personalize the interactions*).

The reduced list of items was reviewed in depth, and further deletions and changes were made after careful evaluation of each item by the primary researchers (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). The researchers went through an iterative process of discussion and deletion of items so that a manageable number of theoretically necessary items would appear on the final questionnaire. The final list of items included a total of 54 (Table 3.4): 15 for CBI, 8 for reciprocal communication, 11 for mutual effort, 9 for accepted boundaries, 6 for personalization, and 5 for emotion. All the items kept were worded specifically to relate to the interaction experience elicited rather than to consumer-brand interactions in general. In addition to the CBI and dimensions items, 11 outcome measures were included (for satisfaction with the interaction, word-of-mouth behavior, and intent to interact).

*The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was comprised of five sections: (1) explanations of concepts, (2) description and evaluation of respondent's individual interaction experience, (3) items related to respondent's personal example (CBI measures, dimension measures, satisfaction measures), (4) future intentions, and

*Table 3.4: Number of Items per Construct*

| | **Initial** | **Revised** | **Final** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Consumer-brand Interaction | 46 | 27 | 15 |
| Reciprocal communication | 43 | 33 | 8 |
| Mutual effort | 31 | 25 | 11 |
| Accepted boundaries | 22 | 27 | 9 |
| Personalization | 15 | 17 | 6 |
| Emotion | 27 | 26 | 5 |
| Satisfaction | 7 | 4 | 3 |
| Intent to interact | 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Intent to spread WOM | 5 | 4 | 4 |
| **Total** | **204** | **167** | **65** |

(5) demographics. In addition, some items were included for use in examining future research questions. It included 12 pages and a total of 112 items/questions. The questionnaire was administered online through Survey Monkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and is included in the appendices (Appendix 7). Data collection methods utilizing new electronic technology have been encouraged (Craig and Douglas, 2001), and survey sites have become effective means of collecting data. Although there is still some concern as to whether it is truly representative, as some consumers do not yet have access to the Internet, this method is becoming increasingly popular (Ilieva, Baron, and Healey, 2002). As quickly as Internet access and usage is increasing throughout the population, the concern regarding representativeness of sample for online surveys is decreasing.

*Section 1 (Introduction):* Following the informed consent page, this first section of the questionnaire provided the respondent with explanation of the key concept—the consumer-brand interaction. Since section two is designed to elicit a description of a personal consumer-brand interaction example from the respondent, the goal for this section is to be sure that the respondent understands that: (1) they can consider any type of brand (branded product, service/retail brands, online brands, etc.), (2) they need to view the brand "as a whole," (3) they can consider any interaction experience. Input for these informational pages were garnered from both the expert panel and from six "real consumers." The

expert panel was given a draft of this information and asked for input, specifically regarding clarity of concepts. A revised draft was then reviewed by six non-academics to determine whether the concepts were explained in a way that the average consumer would be able to understand. At this point, the section went through several reviews by the primary researchers to create a concise explanation of the complicated concepts. The final version was example driven, as both the experts and real consumers felt that was important in clarifying the information for the average consumer.

The first page in this section clarified what was meant by "brand." In order to prime the respondent to consider any type of brand, they were first told that the "*brand can be any type of product or service brand"* and given a list including: branded products (Tide detergent), retail brands (Gap), service brands (Bell South), restaurant brands (Olive Garden), online brands (eBay), and other types of brands (The Humane Society, Louisiana State University, New Orleans Saints, Disney, etc.). They were then asked to "*focus on the brand, not the product class*," and "*think about a specific branded product/service (Nike shoes) instead of a general product class (running shoes)*." Finally, in order to prime the respondent to view the brand "as a whole," they were told, "*the 'whole' brand may include multiple products, services, and brand representatives*." Examples were used to clarify this idea, one included: "*The 'Starbucks' brand includes products (packaged coffee beans, café drinks, chocolates), services (Internet access), and brand representatives (baristas)."*

In order to prime the respondent to consider an individual interaction experience with the brand (rather than typical or usage experiences), the concept of the consumer-brand interaction had to be explained. The second page opened with the definition: "*any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time.*" Each element was then broken down and examples were used to clarify. A summary of the questionnaire is included (more details can be found in Appendix 7):

(1) An activity is any form of communication or exchange between the brand and the consumer.

a. Therefore these activities may occur online (via Web site or email), offline (in-store or over the phone), or both.
b. The activities may be specific to a purchase (transactional) or may be more social/personal in nature.

(2) The interaction can be a single activity or a set of activities.

(3) The activities that make up an interaction can occur at a single point in time or over time.

(4) The interaction activities are related to dealing with an individual consumer issue, and not what "typically" happens when the customer deals with the brand.

The third page consisted of four in-depth examples that provided an illustration to the respondent of what type of brand examples they could share in the next section. The examples included a varied combination of the elements of the consumer-brand interaction described on the previous pages (type of brand, combination of activities—online/offline, one time/over time, transactional/social). The fourth page provided a brief summary of the information presented along with a statement of appreciation for the respondent's effort. Therefore, the goal of this section was to be sure that the respondents would be able to think of an actual interaction with a brand, so that the questions in the following sections would be answered with that experience in mind.

*Section 2 (Your Experience):* The second section began with an elicitation of a personal consumer-brand interaction example. The respondent was asked to name a brand with which they have had an interaction with (as explained in the first section) and to provide a description of a single interaction with this brand. The prompt for the description read:

> *Please describe a memorable INTERACTION with this brand. Tell us about the activities that occurred during the interaction.*
>
> *We are looking for a description similar to the examples discussed previously (Best Buy, Nike, and Starbucks) based on how you actually interacted with the brand (by email, in-store, phone, website, etc.), NOT how you USED the products/services.*
>
> *Remember that an interaction can be any combination of activity(s) focused on a SINGLE consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time. So it may or may NOT include a purchase.*

*It is NOT important if this particular interaction is representative of other interactions you may have had with this brand.*

These instructions were intended to help ensure that the respondent focused on an actual interaction, rather than a usage situation or what "typically" happens when dealing with this brand. Follow up questions were used to make sure that a determination could be made as to whether or not the example really represents a consumer-brand interaction or not: (1) What specifically did you do during this interaction? (2) What specifically did the brand do during this interaction? (3) What was the reason the interaction took place (the activities were related to what issue)? To further clarify and understand the interaction the respondent described, additional questions were included to determine if the interaction was comprised of: (1) a single activity or multiple activities; (2) activity(s) that occurred at one time or over time; (3) activity(s) that occurred online, offline, or both; (4) primarily transactional or social activities. In addition, the respondent was asked to rate the degree to which they thought the interaction was transactional and social. These scores were used as a means of determining the two groups for the moderation test—social and transactional interaction.

*Section 3 (Reflecting on your interaction experience):* The third section focused on items related to the respondent's personal CBI example that they described in section 2. All the items were worded to focus on the specific CBI elicited in the questionnaire (i.e. *During the interaction I described: The brand personalized our interaction*). Items in this section included measures for (1) overall CBI, (2) CBI dimensions (reciprocal communication, mutual orientation, accepted boundaries, personalization, and emotion), and (3) satisfaction. Some additional items to be used for future studies were also included. Therefore, instructions prompted the respondent to answer the questions with their specific interaction example in mind, and the items were organized based on ease of flow for the respondent. For example, items related to evaluations of own behavior were clustered together, while evaluations of brand behavior were clustered together.

*Sections 4 (Future intentions) and 5 (About you):* Since outcomes are to be included in the structural model (second objective), section four included measures for future intentions to interact with the brand and spread word-of-mouth about the brand. Satisfaction measures were included in the previous section of the questionnaire. The final section (five) collected general demographic data for sample description, including age, gender, marital status, employment status, educational level, and income. The entire questionnaire took approximately 20-30 minutes to complete.

*The Sample*

The sample was comprised primarily (82%) of university undergraduate and graduate students from Mississippi, Louisiana, and Missouri. The student sample is appropriate for this study because most of the students have grown up in the technological environment in which much of the new forms of consumer-brand interaction are taking place, and will therefore be expected to discuss a broad variety of interaction activities that are becoming increasingly important in the current marketing environment (Facebook, instant chat, Twitter, etc.). In addition, the use of student samples in the marketing literature have shown that their thoughts and behaviors do reflect basic human nature, and therefore true consumer behavior (Petty and Cacioppo, 1984; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003). However, a portion (18%) of the sample was comprised of non-student respondents in order to increase generalizability. The primary researcher recruited the non-student respondents by sending out a survey link in a personal email request and posting it on Facebook.

A review of the demographic variables revealed that there were more female (59%) than male (41%) respondents. The vast majority of the respondents are young (88% were between 18-30 years of age), have never been married (72.5%), are full-time students (54%), many of whom have completed at least two years of college (47%). However, 27.5% already have their bachelor's degree and 8.5% have a graduate degree. Nearly a quarter of the respondents have a household income of $60,000 or more (with

over 12% earning $100,000 or more). Although the majority of respondents were students (54% full-time, 28% part-time), there was quite a bit of variability within the sample.

*The Consumer-brand Interaction Descriptions*

A total of 486 surveys were completed where respondents were asked to describe an individual CBI. As explained earlier, in section two of the questionnaire each interaction was explained over a series of open-ended questions: (1) What was the brand? (2) Describe the interaction? (3) What specifically did you do during this interaction? (4) What specifically did the brand do during this interaction? (5) What was the reason the interaction took place? These questions were used to make sure that a determination could be made as to whether or not the example really represents a consumer-brand interaction. The screening process will be described first, followed by a description of the resulting CBI descriptions.

*Screening the data:* Even with the specific explanations included in section one of the questionnaire, some respondents did not describe a CBI in section two—and so the data tied to those descriptions were considered invalid for this study. Therefore, the primary researcher went through each respondent's collection of open-ended responses to ensure that the respondent was in fact thinking of an actual consumer-brand interaction as they completed the questionnaire. During this screening process, only the open-ended responses were reviewed, and no other data was considered.

This process led to the removal of 103 individual brand interactions from the data set. There were four main causes for elimination: (1) incomplete response, (2) description was of "typical" interactions, (3) description was of brand usage, (4) description was bogus (random words/letters) or provided insufficient information to determine if it was an interaction. First, a few responses (14) were found to be incomplete due to technical problems and were therefore eliminated. Second, even though the respondents were told to discuss a specific interaction in the introduction section, 29 responses described "typical" interactions instead ("*whether driving through or walking in, it was always a*

*memorable experience*"). As these "typical" interactions are more reflective of a relationship (series of ongoing interactions), these responses were removed. Third, respondents were also instructed not to consider usage of the brand as an actual interaction. However 33 did discuss brand usage rather than interaction in their description ("*I spilled red wine on a white coat, and my Tide white-out pen got it out*"), and were therefore removed from the data set. Last, 29 responses were removed because it could not be verified that the respondent's description was of a consumer-brand interaction. A handful of these seemed to be bogus responses—i.e., the respondent entered random words or letters into the open-ended response sections. The majority were removed because the descriptions did not provide enough information to enable a determination as to whether or not the respondent was in fact thinking of a consumer-brand interaction. After deletion of these unusable responses, 382 individual consumer-brand interactions were analyzed.

*Resulting CBI Descriptions:* The remaining set of responses was representative of a broad range of interactions, brands, and dimensions. The brands discussed by the respondents included a wide variety—from online brands (eBay, Zappos), to consumer goods brands (Apple, Coffee Mate), retail brands (Best Buy, Gap), service brands (Comcast, Verizon), restaurants (Quiznos, Olive Garden), and even sports team brands (Arsenal Football Club, Mississippi State Football). Interaction descriptions ran the gamut as well—with all combinations of possible activities (online/offline, one time/over time, social/transactional) represented in the descriptions. Some interactions were made up of a single activity (46%), while some were made up of multiple activities (54%). Slightly more of the interaction activity(s) occurred at one time (57%) than over time (43%). Over half of the interaction activity(s) occurred completely offline (52%), while just a few occurred completely online (11%), and over 1/3 occurred both online and offline (37%).

Nearly half of the interactions were described by the respondent as representing a balance of both transactional and social activities (48%), while over 1/3 reported the interaction to be primarily

transactional (38%), and the remaining said their interaction was primarily social (14%). When asked about the degree in which the interaction was transactional or social, respondents reported that the interaction was more transactional (mean=3.67 on a 5-point scale) than social (mean=2.88 on a 5-point scale). However, this wasn't a surprise, as qualitative results from Essay 2 highlighted the difficulty consumers have in separating out the transactional component of an interaction with a brand.

***Measure Purification***

This process involved item reduction, exploratory factor analyses, confirmatory factor analyses, and an initial assessment of scale reliability, unidimensionality, and convergent and discriminant validity (Churchill, 1979; Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). The original model included the five CBI dimensions (exogenous constructs) and the overall consumer-brand interaction construct (endogenous). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was first be used to eliminate superfluous items, then a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted in AMOS using the maximum likelihood method to test the measurement model.

*Item Reduction and Construct Specification*

The goal of this process is to reduce items needed for measuring each construct. Therefore, a separate exploratory factor analysis was run for each exogenous and endogenous construct. For these analyses, principle components extraction method and varimax rotation were used, since data reduction was the primary goal (Costello and Osborne, 2005). Items with low factor loadings (<.4), high cross-loadings (>.4), or low communalities (<.3) were considered for deletion (Hair, et al.). Table 3.4 shows the breakdown of items for each construct.

First, CBI and each of the dimensions were run using separate exploratory factor analyses in order to reduce the set of items for each. For CBI, nine items explained 59.2% of variance (MSA=.887, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level), with all communalities over .4 on a single factor. For reciprocal communication, six items explained 72.8% of variance, with all communalities over .5 on a single factor

(MSA=.866, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level). For mutual effort, ten items explained 76.4% of variance (MSA=.809, Bartlett's test significant >.001 level), with all loadings over .55 on three factors: (1) two items representing effort by both, (2) four items representing effort by the consumer, and (3) four items representing effort by the brand. For accepted boundaries, seven items explained 52.6% of variance (MSA=.757, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level), with all loadings over .55 on two factors: (1) three items representing brand's knowledge of and adherence to the boundaries, and (2) four items representing the consumer's knowledge of and adherence to the boundaries. For personalization, four items explained 77.5% of variance, with all communalities over .6 on a single factor (MSA=.825, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level). For emotion, four items explained 72.2% of variance, with all communalities over .65 on a single factor (MSA=.751, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level). Therefore, after the exploratory factor analysis process, eight exogenous constructs emerged as dimensions of the consumer-brand interaction.

*Table 3.5: Items per Construct after EFA*

| **Construct** | | **# of items** | **Variance explained** |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Scale dimensions (exogenous):*** | | | |
| Reciprocal communication | | 6 (3-8) | 72.8% |
| Mutual effort | | 10 | 76.4% |
| | Effort by both | 2 (2,3) | |
| | Brand effort | 4 (1-4) | |
| | Consumer effort | 4 (1-4) | |
| Accepted boundaries | | 7 | 65.6% |
| | Brand's knowledge & adherence | 3 (1,3,4) | |
| | Consumer's knowledge & adherence | 4 (1,2,3,4) | |
| Personalization | | 4 (3-6) | 77.5% |
| Emotion | | 4 (1,2,4,5) | 72.2% |
| ***Construct measurement (endogenous):*** | | | |
| Consumer-brand interaction | | 9 (2,6-8,10,11,13-15) | 59.2% |
| ***Outcomes:*** | | | |
| Satisfaction | | 3 (1-3) | 89.9% |
| Future Intentions | | | 83.5% |
| | Intent to interact with brand in future | 3 (1,2,4) | |
| | Intent to spread word-of-mouth | 3 (1,3,4) | |

Then, the outcome measures were submitted to exploratory factor analysis to support their reliability. For satisfaction, three items explained 89.9% of variance (MSA=.770, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level), with all communalities over .8 on a single factor. For future intentions, six items explained 83.5% of variance (MSA=.806, Bartlett's test significant <.001 level), with all factor loadings over .8 on two factors: (1) intent to interact with brand, and (2) intent to spread WOM.

***Measurement Model***

This measure purification process relies on "iteration of confirmatory factor analyses, where the goal is to improve the congeneric measurement properties of the scale" (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003, p. 83). A 40 item, nine-construct confirmatory factor (CFA) solution was estimated in AMOS. Fit indices did not meet acceptable levels, so relevant results (standardized loadings, presence of negative error terms, unacceptable standardized residuals, and high modification indices) were examined, problematic items were removed, and additional CFA were run. The final model, with 31 items representing nine constructs had acceptable fit indices and showed improvement over the initial CFA. Table 3.6 reports the fit indices for the initial and final CFA. The final CFA indicated acceptable model fit with the data ($x^2$=1298.206 (p=.000), CFI=0.898, RMSEA=0.077, RMR=0.160). The chi-square was significant—which is common with very large sample sizes (Bollen,1989). The ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom is in the acceptable range (2-5) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was below the 0.08 threshold—indicated good overall model fit.

*Table3.6: CFA Fit Indices*

| | **$x^2$** | **df** | **$x^2$/df** | **CFI** | **RMSEA** | **RMR** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Initial CFA | 2625.179 | 704 | 3.729 | .839 | .085 | .206 |
| Final CFA | 1298.206 | 398 | 3.262 | .898 | .077 | .160 |

*Unidimensionality, Reliability, and Validity*

Each item should reflect one and only one underlying construct, and loadings and item-to-total correlations should meet acceptable levels (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Unidimensionality and convergent validity of each construct was supported by acceptable loadings (all above .60) (Table 3.7)

and significant paths of all items to their hypothesized construct (p<.000). In addition, the modification indices did not suggest any substantial cross-loadings between constructs. Reliability was assessed by computing the average variance extracted (AVE) and composite reliability for each construct—all constructs passed the thresholds (AVE >= 0.50; composite reliability >= 0.70) (Table 3.8). Discriminant validity is assessed by comparing the AVE of each construct to that pair's squared correlation, where the variance extracted estimates should exceed squared phi correlations between the constructs (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003) (see Appendix 8 for the correlation matrix). This shows that each construct explains a greater amount of variance than the variance between constructs (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). All construct pairs passed this test, showing strong evidence of discriminant validity.

*Table 3.7: Measurement Model Properties and Standardized Loadings*

| **Construct and Final Items** | **Standardized loadings** | **AVE** | **C.R.** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Reciprocal communication | | .654 | .904 |
| *I responded to the brand's communications* | .686 | | |
| *I respected the brand's communications* | .805 | | |
| *I believe the brand freely shared information with me* | .795 | | |
| *I believe the brand responded to my communications* | .854 | | |
| *I believe the brand respected my communications* | .891 | | |
| Effort by both | | .677 | .806 |
| *We both had to work at it.* | .753 | | |
| *It took more energy on both our parts.* | .887 | | |
| Brand effort | | .740 | .919 |
| *The brand went the "extra step".* | .899 | | |
| *The brand put forth a lot of effort to interact with me.* | .942 | | |
| *The brand paid a lot of attention to what I said.* | .861 | | |
| *The brand went to a great deal of trouble to interact with me.* | .723 | | |
| Consumer effort | | .640 | .774 |
| *I went the "extra step".* | .932 | | |
| *I went to a great deal of trouble to interact with the brand.* | .641 | | |
| Brand's accepted boundaries | | .558 | .831 |
| *The brand did not overstep its bounds with me.* | .843 | | |
| *The brand behaved professionally.* | .861 | | |
| *I believe that the brand's actions did not make me feel uncomfortable.* | .628 | | |
| *The brand knew that certain topics and questions were off limits.* | .618 | | |

Table 3.7 continued

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Consumer's accepted boundaries | | .505 | .743 |
| *I did not pressure the brand.* | .836 | | |
| *I did not overstep my bounds.* | .785 | | |
| *I understood that certain boundaries couldn't be crossed.* | .448 | | |
| Personalization | | .794 | .920 |
| *The brand tailored the interaction specifically for me.* | .865 | | |
| *The brand treated me like an individual.* | .924 | | |
| *The brand saw me as a person, and not just a faceless customer.* | .883 | | |
| Emotion | | .629 | .833 |
| *This particular interaction touched me emotionally.* | .645 | | |
| *This particular interaction involved thoughts and feelings.* | .937 | | |
| *This particular interaction made me feel a certain way.* | .771 | | |
| Consumer-brand interaction | | .653 | .904 |
| *In this interaction, I felt fully engaged with the brand.* | .751 | | |
| *In this interaction, I felt connected with the brand.* | .833 | | |
| *In this interaction, I felt we touched on all aspects of the issue.* | .842 | | |
| *In this interaction, I felt we worked together.* | .838 | | |
| *In this interaction, I felt we continuously interacted.* | .773 | | |
| Satisfaction | | .847 | .943 |
| *I felt satisfied with this specific interaction experience.* | .941 | | |
| *I felt that this interaction experience really helped me.* | .912 | | |
| *I felt delighted by this interaction experience.* | .908 | | |
| Intent to interact | | .675 | .861 |
| *What is the likelihood that you will purchase from this brand in the future?* | .899 | | |
| *What is the likelihood that you will have more interactions like this one with the brand in the future?* | .817 | | |
| *How probable is it that you will interact with this brand in the future?* | .741 | | |
| Intent to spread WOM | | .730 | .889 |
| *What is the likelihood that you will talk to others about this interaction?* | .506 | | |
| *What is the likelihood that you will spread the word about this brand?* | .835 | | |
| *What is the likelihood that you will talk about this brand to lots of people?* | .850 | | |

*Discussion*

This measurement purification process began with a total of 184 items. Through expert review (expert panel questionnaire and researcher discussion), the exploratory factor analyses, and the confirmatory factor analysis, the items were refined to consist of a final set of 31 items. In addition, the measures for the outcomes consisted of a final set of 9 (three each for: satisfaction, intent to interact, and

intent to spread word-of-mouth). Table 3.8 illustrates the progression of item purification through each step.

*Reciprocal Communication:* This dimension was conceptually defined as two-way communication between the consumer and the brand. Initial items generated covered all aspects of reciprocal communication: availability of lines of communication, initiation of communication, responsiveness, sequence of replies, etc. Through expert review, it was determined that the focus would be on (1) availability of lines of communication and (2) the responsiveness of the consumer and brand to each other's communications. After the EFA process, two items measuring the availability of lines of communication were retained, along with four items measuring the responsiveness of the communication partners. After the CFA, one item was dropped, and the items retained are included in Table 3.8.

*Mutual Effort:* This dimension was conceptually defined as effort (time, energy, mental/physical work) put forth by both the consumer and the brand. In order to account for the true "mutual" nature of this dimension, initial items generated included some focused on both partners putting forth effort, some focused on the consumer putting forth effort, and some focused on the brand putting forth effort. This was in line with Essay 2 data in which informants suggested that both partners had to put in effort for the interaction to be "complete." Item reduction occurred through expert review. Through the EFA process, the number of items was further reduced, but the structure remained the same: two items focused on both partners putting forth effort, four items focused on the consumer putting forth effort, and four items focused on the brand putting forth effort. Therefore, mutual effort was divided into three distinct constructs: (1) effort by both, (2) brand effort, and (3) consumer effort. In the CFA process, two consumer effort items were dropped, and the final set of items retained in the measurement model are included in Table 3.8.

*Table 3.8: Overview of the Measurement Purification Process*

| **Construct** | **Initial Items** | **Items retained after expert review** | **Items retained after EFA** | **Items in CFA** | **Notes** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ***Scale dimensions (exogenous)*** | | | | | |
| Reciprocal communication | 43 | 8 | 6 | 5 | • Open lines of communication (1)<br>• Responsiveness of consumer (2)<br>• Responsiveness of brand (2) |
| Mutual effort | 31 | 11 | 10 | 8 | • Represented by three distinct constructs. |
| Effort by both | | 3 | 2 | 2 | |
| Brand effort | | 4 | 4 | 4 | |
| Consumer effort | | 4 | 4 | 2 | |
| Accepted boundaries | 22 | 9 | 7 | 7 | • Represented by two distinct constructs. |
| Brand's knowledge and adherence | | 5 | 3 | 4 | • Brand's knowledge of parameters (2)<br>• Brand's adherence to parameters (2) |
| Consumer's knowledge and adherence | | 4 | 4 | 3 | • Consumer's knowledge of parameters (1)<br>• Consumer's adherence to parameters (2) |
| Personalization | 15 | 6 | 4 | 3 | • Personalization by the brand (1)<br>• Brand making consumer feel like an individual (2) |
| Emotion | 27 | 6 | 4 | 3 | |
| ***Construct measurement (endogenous)*** | | | | | |
| Consumer-brand interaction | 46 | 15 | 9 | 5 | |
| ***Outcome measures (endogenous)*** | | | | | |
| Satisfaction with the interaction | 7 | 3 | 3 | 3 | |
| Intentions to interact | 8 | 4 | 3 | 3 | |
| Intentions to spread WOM | 5 | 4 | 3 | 3 | |

specific parameters that were the focus, but whether or not the interaction partners (1) understand AND (2) adhere to the parameters. Therefore, initial item generation tapped into both the brand's and the consumer's understanding and adherence to the parameters of the interaction. Through expert review

and the EFA process, items were reduced. The EFA process also supported a distinction between the accepted boundaries of the brand versus the consumer. Therefore, accepted boundaries was divided into two distinct constructs: (1) Brand-accepted boundaries and (2) consumer-accepted boundaries. In the CFA process some adjustments were made, and the final set of items retained are included in Table 3.8.

*Personalization:* Personalization was conceptually defined as the brand individualizing the consumer. The initial set of items generated include items tapping into the brand's actions of personalizing (addressing the consumer by name, for example) as well as measuring the consumer's feeling that the brand views them as an individual. The set of items was reduced through expert review, leaving two items focusing on the brand personalizing the interaction, and four items measuring the consumer's feeling that the brand individualized them during the interaction. The EFA process resulted in a set of four items—Two focused on personalization by the brand, and two focused on the consumer feeling as if the brand sees them as an individual. In the CFA process, one personalization item was dropped, as it had high correlations with brand effort. The final set of three items are included in Table 3.8.

*Emotion:* This dimension was conceptually defined as the presence of affective elements. Initial items generated included measures for the presence of general affect as well as specific emotions. Through the expert review process, it was determined that the presence of general affect was most appropriate (and in line with the Essay 2 interview data). In the EFA process, one superfluous item was eliminated. And in the CFA process, an additional item was removed, resulting in the set of items included in Table 3.8.

*Consumer-brand Interaction:* The initial items generated, as measures for presence of the consumer-brand interaction, tapped into the dimensions of value, extent of interaction, interest, engagingness, and connectedness. The number of items for each dimension were reduced through the

expert review, and after the EFA process, nine items remained. Four items were eliminated in the CFA process, leaving five items remaining—which are included in Table 3.8.

*Outcomes:* Satisfaction of the interaction, and two behavioral intention constructs were included as outcomes of the CBI. These were pulled from existing measures, and after the EFA and CFA process, three items for each remained—which are included in Table 3.8.

*Summary*

Several new things have been learned through the scale purification and measurement model testing process. First, for accepted boundaries, it is important to distinguish between the brand's and the consumer's knowledge of and adherence to the parameters of the interaction. This issue was first raised when a two-factor EFA for the construct emerged, and division of these two distinct constructs were further supported during the CFA process. Second, similarly to accepted boundaries, the importance of distinguishing between three types of mutual effort (effort by both, brand effort, and consumer effort) was discovered. Last, examination of correlations between mutual effort and three other constructs in the measurement model (emotion, personalization, and reciprocal communication) when considered in light of the interview data from Essay 2 suggest that it is the mutual effort that drives these relational dimensions of the CBI.

## Testing a Model of Consumer-brand Interaction

### *Proposed Structural Model*

The structural model includes all the proposed dimensions of the consumer-brand interaction (CBI): Mutual effort (represented by three constructs: effort by both, brand effort, and consumer effort), accepted boundaries (represented by both brand's accepted boundaries and consumer's accepted boundaries), emotion, personalization, and reciprocal communication. Based on the interview data from Essay 2, accepted boundaries are necessary in order for a consumer to feel they can have an interaction with the brand. The consumer wants to be sure that the brand understands that certain lines cannot be

crossed. Therefore, accepted boundaries (brand and consumer) are expected to be a direct positive driver of CBI (H1a-b). It was discovered in Essay 2 that for the consumer to feel like they are having an interaction with the brand, they must feel like the brand views them as an individual (personalization), there must be reciprocal communication, and there must be emotion. Therefore, these three constructs are expected to have a direct positive effect on the CBI (H5-7)—however, these dimensions are actually dependent on mutual effort. As suggested by the interview data from Essay 2, the interaction partners, and the brand especially, has to put forth effort in order for emotion (H2a-c), personalization (H3a-c), and reciprocal communication (H4a-c) to take place. Therefore, the effects of effort on the consumer-brand interaction flow through these more relational dimensions to positively impact the CBI. The outcomes of the CBI that are considered here are satisfaction with the interaction (H8a), future intentions to interact with the brand (H8b), and intentions to spread word-of-mouth (H8c). So, all the hypothesized paths are expected to be positive. The structural model is illustrated in Figure 3.3.

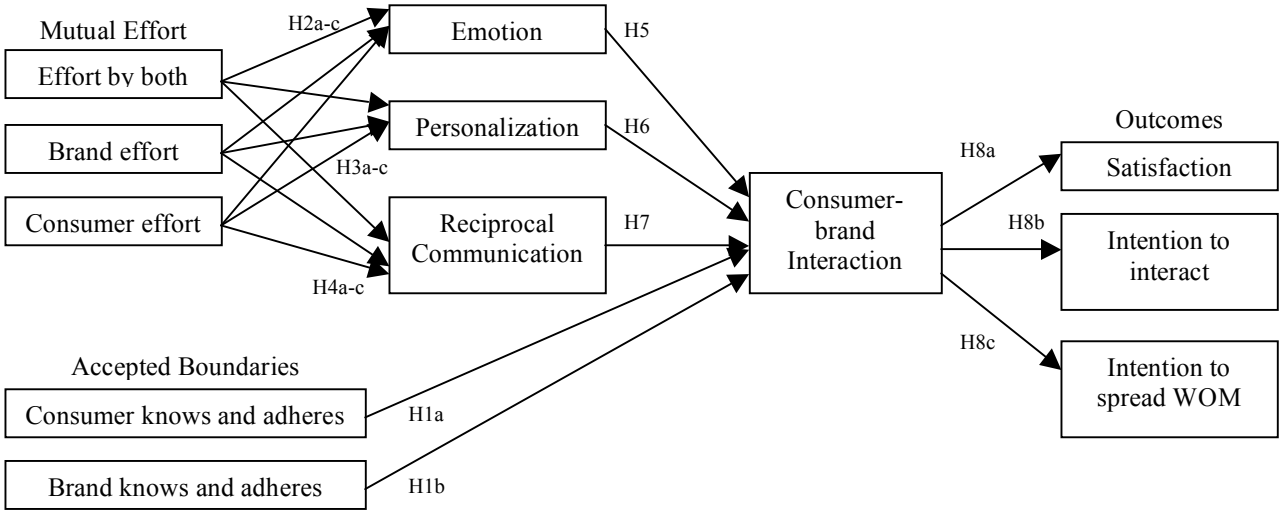


*Figure 3.3: Consumer-brand Interaction Model*

***Results***

A twelve-construct structural equation model (SEM) was estimated in AMOS. Overall model fit was acceptable ($x^2$=2422.345 (p=.000), CFI=0.864, RMSEA=0.079, RMR=0.196). The chi-square was significant—which is common with very large sample sizes (Bollen, 1989). The ratio of chi-square to

degrees of freedom is in the acceptable range (2-5), and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was below the 0.08 threshold—indicating good overall model fit (Table 3.11). Although the comparative fit index (CFI) did fall below the traditional .90 cut-off point, with more complex models the acceptable level does drop (Hair, Black, Babin, and Anderson, 2010). All hypothesized paths were significant ($p<0.005$) with the exception of two: the path from effort by both to emotion (H2a), and the path from consumer's accepted boundaries to CBI (H1a). And two paths were significant, but in the opposite direction as hypothesized—consumer effort negatively impacts reciprocal communication (H4c) and personalization (H3a). Tables 3.10-3.12 shows standardized structural path loadings, and hypotheses support

*Table 3.9: Structural Model Fit Indices*

| | $x^2$ | df | $x^2$/df | CFI | RMSEA | RMR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Hypothesized Model | 2422.345 | 713 | 3.397 | .864 | .079 | .196 |

*Effects of Effort on the Relational Dimensions*

As discussed previously, mutual effort (effort by both, brand effort, consumer effort) was expected to have a positive impact on the relational dimensions (emotion, personalization, reciprocal communication). This is based on the interview data from Essay 2, where informants thought that effort was needed in order for emotion (H2a-c), personalization (H3a-c), and reciprocal communication (H4a-c) to occur. Both brand and consumer effort significantly predicted emotion (supporting H2b-c), but the path from effort from both to emotion (H2a) was insignificant. Therefore, only brand and consumer effort are drivers of emotion, and H2a was not supported.

All three mutual effort constructs had a significant impact on personalization, however, the effects were varied. The strongest driver was clearly brand effort with a standardized loading of .859, while effort by both had a smaller impact (support for H3a-b). The interesting finding was that consumer effort had a significant *negative* impact on personalization, thus H3c was not supported.

*Table 3.10: Effects of Effort on Relational Dimensions*

| Hyp. | Antecedent | Outcome | Loading | Signif. | Hyp. Supported? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H2a | Mutual Effort (Both) | Emotion | -.069 | .291 | |
| H2b | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Emotion | .455 | .000 | Yes |
| H2c | Mutual Effort (Consumer) | Emotion | .327 | .000 | Yes |
| H3a | Mutual Effort (Both) | Personalization | .129 | .003 | Yes |
| H3b | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Personalization | .859 | .000 | Yes |
| H3c | Mutual Effort (Consumer) | Personalization | -.153 | .000 | *No-opp** |
| H4a | Mutual Effort (Both) | Reciprocal Communication | .187 | .000 | Yes |
| H4b | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Reciprocal Communication | .835 | .000 | Yes |
| H4c | Mutual Effort (Consumer) | Reciprocal Communication | -.312 | .000 | *No-opp** |

* These paths were significant, but in the opposite direction as hypothesized.

All paths from the mutual effort constructs to reciprocal communication were significant, however, the effects were varied. Clearly the main driver of reciprocal communication was brand effort with a standardized loading of .835, with effort by both having some positive effect (support for H4a-b). But as with personalization, the effects of consumer effort were significant—but in the *negative* direction. This indicates, once again, that the burden lies with the brand to create that reciprocal communication, and H4c was not supported.

*Direct Effects on CBI*

While H1b was supported, H1a was not—as the path was insignificant (see table 3.11 for standardized path loadings). This indicates that in a consumer-brand interaction, it is important that the consumer feels that the brand understands and follows the parameters of the interaction activity. Although accepted boundaries are important, as highlighted in the interview data from Essay two, it is the brand that has the burden of knowing and following those boundaries. The impact of emotion on the CBI was significant—thus supporting H5. Therefore, some positive effects of brand and consumer effort on the CBI do flow through emotion. Personalization also had a significant impact on the CBI,

indicating that it is an important component, and supporting H6. And reciprocal communication was found to be a significant driver of the CBI (supporting H7).

*Table 3.11: Direct Effects on Consumer-brand Interaction*

| Hyp. | Antecedent | Outcome | Loading | Signif. | Hyp. Supported? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H1a | Accepted Boundaries (Consumer) | CBI | -.025 | .590 | |
| H1b | Accepted Boundaries (Brand) | CBI | .314 | .000 | Yes |
| H5 | Emotion | CBI | .110 | .001 | Yes |
| H6 | Personalization | CBI | .259 | .000 | Yes |
| H7 | Reciprocal Communication | CBI | .367 | .000 | Yes |

*The Outcomes of Consumer-brand Interaction*

All paths from the consumer-brand interaction to the outcome variables were significant, thus support for H8 was found. The consumer-brand interaction has a significant impact on the consumer's evaluations of satisfaction with the brand (H8a), their intention to interact with the brand (H8b), and their intention to spread word-of-mouth about the brand (H8c). The purpose of including the outcomes at this stage was to show support that the CBI does lead to positive consumer outcomes.

*Table 3.12: Effects of CBI on the Outcome Variables*

| Hyp. | Antecedent | Outcome | Loading | Signif. | Hyp. Supported? |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H8a | Consumer-brand Interaction | Satisfaction | .823 | .000 | Yes |
| H8b | Consumer-brand Interaction | Intention to Interact | .791 | .000 | Yes |
| H8c | Consumer-brand Interaction | Intention to Spread WOM | .623 | .000 | Yes |

***Discussion***

The test of the hypothesized structural model found support that the identified dimensions of the consumer-brand interaction are important. Results show that mutual effort affects the CBI through the relational dimensions (emotion, personalization, and reciprocal communication). And as expected, reciprocal communication, accepted boundaries (brand), personalization, and emotion have significant

positive impacts on CBI. However, we have learned more about how these dimensions are related to one another. The relationships between these dimensions will now be discussed in more detail.

*Effects of Effort on Relational Dimensions*

Mutual effort is comprised of brand effort, consumer effort, and effort by both. The effort type with the strongest and most consistent impact on these dimensions is brand effort. This is in line with prior research, where many informants (Essay 2) did stress that an interaction takes effort on both parts ("*It's a give and take on both sides*."), but suggested that it was the brand that carries more of the burden ([The brand needs to] "*put together the puzzle and find out what you want*."). Results did confirm that brand effort is integral in consumer-brand interaction, but the role of consumer effort appears to have differing impacts on the relational dimensions.

In addition to brand effort, emotion was driven by consumer effort as well. This suggests that in order for the consumer to feel that emotion is present, both the brand and consumer have to put forth effort. Emotion has been defined as the outcome of cognitive evaluations of perceived physiological stimulation (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988), and it represents affective components of the interaction activity—so is comprised of the "feelings" (Zajonc & Markus, 1982) present in the CBI. And results stress that both the brand and consumer need to put forth effort to create that emotion.

In addition to brand effort, personalization was driven by effort by both—but consumer effort had a negative impact. This finding fits with the conceptual definition of personalization (the brand individualizes the consumer), which stresses the importance of brand effort. This suggests that the consumer perceives that the brand puts in a lot of effort in order to make them feel like an individual. Since it is likely the brand that is expected to initiate the personalizing, more consumer effort may indicate less opportunity for the brand to take that initiative—and thus less likely the consumer will feel the brand made the effort to individualize them. In addition, when the consumer has to put forth effort, they might feel that the brand isn't putting in enough effort to make the consumer feel like an individual.

In addition to brand effort, reciprocal communication was driven by effort by both—but consumer effort had a negative impact, which was an unexpected result. Reciprocal communication is defined as two-way exchange of information between the consumer and brand. Results suggest that effort by both consumer and brand are needed, but that consumer effort has a negative relationship. It is important to remember that the data is based on examples of interactions that include both positive and negative. In line with the interview data from Essay 2, in negative interactions the consumer may feel they have to put forth more effort in order to resolve an issue—so some consumers may have felt they were dealing with an unresponsive brand. So this may explain why consumer effort had a negative impact on reciprocal communication, as well as personalization. Therefore, future studies should consider whether or not the interaction was perceived by the consumer to be positive and examine differences in effects of consumer effort in those two conditions.

*Direct Effects on Consumer-brand Interaction*

The significant drivers of CBI are (a) reciprocal communication (.327), (b) brand's accepted boundaries (.314), (c) personalization (.259), and (d) emotion (.110). Reciprocal communication had the greatest positive impact—which is primarily driven by brand effort. This suggests that for a consumer-brand interaction, brand initiated communication is key. In addition, the brand needs to understand and adhere to the boundaries of the interaction—even though it appears that it is not important for the consumer to know and follow boundaries. This is in line with anecdotal evidence and interview data (Essay 2) where the consumer feels that they have more freedom to act as they want, but the brand must "behave professionally." Beyond that, the brand needs to put forth effort to personalize the interaction making the consumer feel like an individual (personalization), and show that they care about them (emotion).

*Summary*

The results of the test of the structural model show that brand effort is essential in a consumer-brand interaction. It is the primary driver of all the relational dimensions—emotion, reciprocal communication, personalization. These dimensions, along with the brand's accepted boundaries are what drive consumer-brand interaction. Therefore, for a consumer-brand interaction to occur, the brand has to demonstrate to the consumer that they put forth effort to (1) communicate with them, (2) personalize their interaction, and (3) bring emotion. In addition, the brand has to show that they understand and adhere to the parameters of the interaction—which are typically set by the consumer.

***Moderation Analysis***

To help develop a more comprehensive conceptualization of the consumer-brand interaction, differences between social and transactional interaction will be considered. First, a preliminary analysis of variance (ANOVA) test is used to support the presence of significant differences in the CBI and dimension scores based on the type of interaction (social and transactional). Next, the groups are

*Table 3.13: Means of Construct Scores by Self-categorized Interaction Type*

| **Construct** | **Primarily Transactional** | **Primarily Social** | **Balance of Both** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Consumer-brand Interaction | 5.27 | 5.72 | 5.77 |
| *Mutual Effort:* | | | |
| Effort by both | 4.18 | 4.76 | 4.76 |
| Brand effort | 4.39 | 5.04 | 5.14 |
| Consumer effort | 4.11 | 4.93 | 4.94 |
| Reciprocal communication | 5.32 | 5.63 | 5.78 |
| Personalization | 4.98 | 5.26 | 5.52 |
| Emotion | 4.06 | 4.52 | 4.43 |
| *Accepted Boundaries:* | | | |
| Brand's accepted boundaries | 5.44 | 5.59 | 5.77 |
| Consumer's accepted boundaries | 5.45 | 5.68 | 5.62 |
| *Outcomes:* | | | |
| Satisfaction with the interaction | 5.12 | 5.35 | 5.54 |
| Intentions to interact | 5.77 | 5.99 | 6.32 |
| Intentions to spread WOM | 5.57 | 5.94 | 5.93 |

specified for the moderation analysis based on level of social interaction. Finally, the multiple-group analysis is conducted in AMOS focusing on the relationships between the CBI dimensions. As shown in Table 3.13, the means across CBI type are different, and the following analyses will determine if there are significant differences.

*Preliminary Analysis*

The survey included three questions that could be used to determine groups based on interaction type. The first question asked respondents to specify whether they thought the CBI they described was more (1) transactional, (2) social, or (3) a balance of both. The next two survey questions asked respondents to rate on a 5-point scale: (1) how transactional was the interaction? and (2) how social was the interaction? Cross-tabs were used to check the consistency among the responses for these three questions, and asked if they did match up—Primarily social responses had higher scores for social interaction (and lower scores for transactional), and primarily transactional responses had higher scores for transactional interaction (and lower scores for social). The means are consistent as well (Table 3.14).

*Table 3.14: Mean ratings of degree of Transactional and Social by Self-categorized Interaction Type*

| **Degree of:** | **Primarily Transactional** | **Primarily Social** | **Balance of Both** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transactional | 4.39 | 2.26 | 3.51 |
| Social | 1.83 | 4.21 | 3.32 |

Fifty-three respondents reported that the CBI they described was primarily social, 144 reported that it was primarily transactional, and 185 reported that it was a balance of the two. Based on this question, an ANOVA test was used to first establish that there are actually differences based on interaction type (high social versus low social). Results found significant ($p<.01$) differences for the overall CBI scores, as well as several dimensions (Table 3.15). These results help establish that there are differences among the dimensions based on interaction type. Initially, this first question was going to be used to create the two groups—(1) primarily social, and (2) primarily transactional. However, the group

size for primarily social was too small (53) to analyze with SEM. Therefore the other two related survey questions were used to determine analysis groups.

Additional post hoc test revealed that for CBI and mutual effort (both, brand, and consumer), the primarily social and balance of both categories had insignificant differences between each other, but significant differences ($p<.05$) with primarily transactional. For reciprocal communication, personalization, emotion, brand's accepted boundaries, and the outcomes (satisfaction, intent to interact, intent to spread WOM), only primarily transactional and balance of both categories were significantly different ($p>.05$). There were no significant differences among the categories for consumer's accepted boundaries. These post hoc results suggest that additional examination might reveal more similarities between primarily social and balanced interactions—meaning that the key distinction in CBI might be whether or not social interaction is present.

*Table 3.15: Differences in construct means (ANOVA) by Self-categorized Interaction Type*

| **Construct** | **F** | **Sig.** |
|---|---|---|
| Consumer-brand Interaction | 6.801 | .001 |
| *Mutual Effort:* | | |
| Effort by both | 6.919 | .001 |
| Brand effort | 10.102 | .000 |
| Consumer effort | 11.588 | .000 |
| Reciprocal communication | 5.715 | .004 |
| Personalization | 4.835 | .008 |
| Emotion | 3.064 | .048 |
| *Accepted Boundaries:* | | |
| Brand's accepted boundaries | 3.015 | .050 |
| Consumer's accepted boundaries | 1.253 | .287 |
| *Outcomes:* | | |
| Satisfaction | 2.837 | .060 |
| Intent to interact | 5.537 | .004 |
| Intent to spread WOM | 3.723 | .025 |

*Specifying Groups*

Based on the rating questions, variables were created in the data set to represent (a) social and (b) transactional—where 0=low (scores of 1-2), 2=high (scores of 4-5). The intention was to specify group one as transactional CBI (high transactional, low social) and one as social CBI (high social, low

transactional). But again, there were not sufficient numbers for social CBI (46) to analyze with SEM, so an alternative approach was used. The two groups used in the moderation analysis are high social (126 with scores of 4-5), and low social (146 with scores of 1-2). Although not ideal, this approach can be justified in context. As we are talking about interaction in the CBR, it is difficult for the consumer to completely remove the transactional elements of the interaction—which was highlighted in Essay 2. Therefore, focusing on the social interaction and its moderating effects on the CBI has merit, and ANOVA results (Table 3.16) show significant differences among these two groups.

*Table 3.16: Differences in construct means (ANOVA) by Level of Social Interaction*

| **Construct** | **Low social means** | **High social means** | **F** | **Sig.** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Consumer-brand Interaction | 5.15 | 5.97 | 12.430 | .000 |
| *Mutual Effort:* | | | | |
| Effort by both | 4.18 | 4.94 | 9.044 | .000 |
| Brand effort | 4.42 | 5.28 | 10.612 | .000 |
| Consumer effort | 4.13 | 5.08 | 11.935 | .000 |
| Reciprocal communication | 5.41 | 5.90 | 6.109 | .002 |
| Personalization | 4.98 | 5.64 | 6.141 | .002 |
| Emotion | 3.91 | 4.62 | 8.572 | .000 |
| *Accepted Boundaries:* | | | | |
| Brand's accepted boundaries | 5.45 | 5.88 | 4.665 | .010 |
| Consumer's accepted boundaries | 5.51 | 5.75 | 2.875 | .058 |
| *Outcomes:* | | | | |
| Satisfaction | 5.12 | 5.75 | 5.939 | .003 |
| Intent to interact | 5.92 | 6.27 | 1.852 | .158 |
| Intent to spread WOM | 5.53 | 6.08 | 6.869 | .001 |

*Multiple-group Analysis*

To determine whether there are differences in the relationships between the CBI dimensions when the interaction is more social, we must test the moderating effect of levels of social interaction by conducting a multiple-group analysis (Hair, et al., 2010). This moderation test was done in AMOS, and involves comparing chi-squares of an unconstrained model with a constrained model. In the constrained model, the structural path estimates are set to be equal across groups. In the unconstrained model, all the structural estimates are freely estimated where difference among groups are permitted. Moderation of the model is determined by using the chi-square difference test—Moderation is supported when the chi-

square in the constrained model is significantly higher than in the unconstrained model (Hair, et al., 2010).

The results did support an overall significant difference based on social interaction levels. The unconstrained model ($x^2$(820)=1895.853, p<.000; RMSEA=.070, CFI=.831) did show better fit than the constrained model ($x^2$(833)=1924.154, p<.000; RMSEA=.070, CFI=.829) based on the chi-square difference test ($\Delta x^2$(13)=28.301, p<.01). And there were some key differences in the significant paths for the high social versus the low social group. In the high social group, the paths from brand effort to all the relational dimensions (emotion, personalization, and reciprocal communication) were significant at the p<.05 level, as were the paths from reciprocal communication and brand's accepted boundaries to the CBI. In the low social group, more paths were significant—paths from consumer effort, to emotion and reciprocal communication, paths from brand effort to all the relational dimensions (emotion, personalization, and reciprocal communication), as well as the paths from personalization to reciprocal communication. Table 3.17 shows the significant paths for both groups. Next, 14 specific moderation

*Table 3.17: Significant Standardized Structural Path Loadings for High and Low Social Groups*

| Social | Antecedent | Outcome | Loading | Path signif. | Signif.diff. between groups |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| High | Reciprocal Communication | CBI | .697 | .011 | *No* |
| High | Accepted Boundaries (Brand) | CBI | .382 | .028 | p<0.10 |
| High | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Emotion | .439 | .000 | *No* |
| High | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Personalization | .928 | .000 | p<0.10 |
| High | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Reciprocal Communication | .884 | .000 | *No* |
| Low | Reciprocal Communication | CBI | .516 | .000 | *No* |
| Low | Personalization | CBI | .418 | .000 | p<0.02 |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Personalization | .767 | .000 | p<0.10 |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Reciprocal Communication | .775 | .000 | *No* |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Brand) | Emotion | .478 | .000 | *No* |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Both) | Reciprocal Communication | .247 | .006 | *No* |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Both) | Emotion | -.240 | .030 | p<0.05 |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Consumer) | Reciprocal Communication | -.529 | .000 | p<0.002 |
| Low | Mutual Effort (Consumer) | Emotion | .412 | .000 | *No* |

tests were conducted to determine which structural paths were significantly different between the two high and low social groups. These results show that effects of personalization and the brand's accepted boundaries are significantly different for the two groups. The effects of brand effort on personalization, consumer effort on reciprocal communication, and effort by both on emotion were significantly different for low versus high social groups.

*Discussion*

What was learned from the moderation analysis is that there are different drivers of the CBI when social levels are high versus when they are low. For both groups, reciprocal communication has the most positive effect. However, when the CBI has high levels of social interaction, the other main driver of the CBI is the brand's accepted boundaries. Whereas, when levels of social interaction are low, the other main driver is personalization.

When social levels are high it becomes important for the brand to know and adhere to the parameters of the interaction—which in this case would involve social elements. The brand's accepted boundaries are not only a main driver of CBI in the high social group, but the impact is significantly higher than in the low social groups. This is in line with Essays 1 and 2, which argued that transactional interaction is more clearly defined, but social interaction involves dealing with less defined relational/social elements. The brand knowing how to behave when engaging with the consumer in a more social way is important. It is interesting that it isn't important that the consumer understands and adheres to the parameters of the interaction. However, upon reflection of the in-depth interviews from Essay 2, it seems as if the consumer feels like they set the boundaries, and it is the brand's job to determine them and follow them. In addition the effect of brand effort on personalization was significantly higher than with the low social group, suggesting that in social interactions brand effort is more important in creating personalization.

With the lower levels of social interaction, it appears that it is personalization that becomes key and has a significantly greater impact in the low social group. So, in a more transactional CBI (lower levels of social interaction), it becomes important for the brand to individualize the customer—as kind of a surrogate to the more social elements present in the CBI. But as mentioned previously, simply using the consumer's name in an email may not be enough. Personalization was defined here as making the consumer feel like an individual, so any efforts need to be focused in making the consumer feel like they are more than just another faceless customer, and that they truly are directly interacting with the brand. In addition, the two significant effects only occurred in the low social group, and the effects were significantly different from the high social group. First, Consumer effort had a negative impact on reciprocal communication. As discussed earlier, this may be due to the fact that negative interactions might be perceived as requiring more consumer effort (in order to resolve an issue). Second, effort by both had a negative impact on emotion. This may be explained by the fact that emotion is perceived as an individual experience, and so effort by both is counter intuitive to the creation of emotion.

**General Discussion**

The goal of this study was to develop a measurement scale for consumer-brand interaction, test a model of consumer-brand interaction, and determine if interaction type (social and transactional) moderates the model. The construct was conceptualized in Essay 1 and dimensions of the construct were identified in Essay 2. Following the basic approach developed by Churchill (1979) and expanded by others (Zaichkowsky, 1985; Arnold and Reynolds, 2003), a measurement scale was constructed and validated. The purpose of developing the scale was to determine the dimensions of consumer-brand interaction. This process began with the generation of a set of items (based on literature and Essay 2 results) reflecting how consumers view consumer-brand interaction. This initial set of items (184) was reduced through expert review. The reduced set of items (54) was tested using a sample of 382. After factor analyses and confirmatory analysis were run, items were evaluated for reliability and validity. The

model of consumer-brand interaction was then tested using SEM—which included the overall CBI construct as well as the seven dimensions (effort by both, brand effort, consumer effort, accepted boundaries, emotion, personalization, and reciprocal communication) and three outcomes (satisfaction, intentions to interaction, intentions to spread WOM). The model had good overall fit. A moderation analysis found support that there are differences in the key drivers of CBI. For the social CBI, reciprocal communication and brand's accepted boundaries have the most positive effect on CBI. For the transactional CBI, reciprocal communication and personalization are key. The results of this study allow for measurement of CBI and show support for a comprehensive model.

### *Implications*

These results have several implications, both for the consumer-brand relationship literature as well as marketing managers. Breaking down the examination of the CBR by focusing on the individual interactions that make up the relationship allow for a better understanding of the underlying components of the CBR. This focus on the individual interactions also stresses the role of the brand as a true interaction partner.

#### *Theoretical Implications*

The relationship between a consumer and a brand cannot be understood without first examining the individual interactions that are used to create that relationship over time. This research focused on examining an individual consumer-brand interaction. Data gathered included a wide variety of interactions with a wide variety of brands—but the focus was on a single interaction with the brand firm. This approach is different from other researchers who have considered interaction as brand usage (Fournier, 1998). And a better understanding of consumer-brand interaction is necessary in order to better understand the CBR—which is built on a series of individual interactions.

This study was the first to examine the consumer-brand interaction, and with an operational definition of interaction in the CBR context, further investigation of the truly dyadic CBR and the

relevant outcomes would also be possible. The conceptual foundation presented, along with this initial study, are a necessary step in the progression of CBR research. In addition, the ability to distinguish between social and transactional interaction will allow for further analysis of various CBR types, which will provide for a more comprehensive view of the CBR concept as a whole.

*Managerial Implications*

Not only does this research have theoretical implications, but by focusing on actual interaction between the consumer and brand, managerial control is stressed. Previous conceptualizations of the CBR as a parasocial relationship considered usage encounters rather than purchases, and simulated interaction rather than actual two-way communication. This view would make it difficult for managers to understand their role in the CBR. In addition, managers may have a practical reason for downplaying two-way communication in the past—It can be costly. But technology is now enabling brands to communicate with their customers online in new and exciting ways (Hoffmann & Novak, 1996). These developments in internet communication make it not only technically possible, but also economically advantageous for firms to cultivate long term, personal relationships with consumers on a large scale (Moon, 2000). Therefore, this study, along with Essays 1 and 2, extend the current conceptualization and takes the CBR out of the "perceptual" realm of the consumers mind—allowing marketing managers to better understand and have more control in the relationship process.

These results suggest that the burden in creating a consumer-brand interaction does lie more with the brand. And as communication is the foundation of any relationship (Blackston, 2000; Duncan and Moriarty, 1998), it becomes increasingly important for brand firms to put forth the effort to interact with their consumers. Unfortunately, many brand firms have lines of communication open to their customers without any real direction on how to manage them. Understanding the individual interactions that the relationship is built on will better enable the brand firms to manage and cultivate these relationships

efficiently and effectively. And continuation of this research stream is likely to provide managers with more tangible recommendations on how to manage communication with customers.

### *Study Limitations*

There are several limitations to this study. First, this sample will be comprised primarily of University business students. Although generally accepted as valid (Locke, 1986), there are drawbacks when a sample is not representative of the population at large. Second, the questionnaire-based survey relies on the respondent to answer all questions honestly. Collecting data via online questionnaires is more accepted today (Craig and Douglas, 2001; Ilieva, Baron, and Healey, 2002), but it does limit your sample to those with Internet access and experience. Third, the time commitment required by the lengthy questionnaire likely deterred many potential respondents. This means that only those highly motivated were likely to complete the survey. Last, the researchers interpretation of the respondent's interaction description was used to eliminate some examples that didn't seem to fit the requirement. This indicates that some found the instructional pages confusing or too lengthy to read. And without the ability to contact the anonymous respondents, the primary research had to make the determination (based on the open-ended responses to the first five questions) of whether or not these responses fit the criteria or not.

### *Future Research*

#### *Positive Versus Negative Interactions*

As discussed in the results section, some explanation of unsupported hypotheses might be found in the unconsidered differences between positive and negative interactions. Purposefully this study was designed to account for both conditions so that the CBI scale could be used to measure all types of interactions between consumer and brand. However, it would be valuable to consider the possible differences in the conceptual model for these two conditions. Therefore, the next research question that

should be considered: *What is the impact of negative and positive interaction on the conceptual model of CBI?*

Addressing this question requires conducting a multiple group analysis of the structural model. This would be accomplished by first specifying two groups: (1) those with positive interaction examples, and (2) those with negative interaction examples. Then a multiple group analysis could be used to test for moderation of the structural model based on these two groups. Results of the moderation test might help explain some of the findings in this study as well as illuminate some new and interesting interactions in the CBR context.

*Outcomes of Consumer-brand Relationship Types*

The next logical stage in this research stream involves examining the truly dyadic CBR more closely—the most basic extension of this study. With a measure of consumer-brand interaction and a support for differences in transactional and social interaction, various CBR types can and should be examined. The truly dyadic CBR involves both social and transactional interaction. But some consumers and brands may not engage in either type (no/potential CBR), while others may engage in only one type (transactional or social only). It would be useful to identify consumers who fall in all four quadrants below, and examine outcomes for each CBR type.

For example, the truly dyadic CBR has been theorized to result in the formation of a bond (Essay 1). And many constructs from the relationship literature have proven useful in assessing the strength of a relationship bond—including trust, commitment (Hess and Story, 2005), loyalty (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh, 1987), willingness to forgive transgressions (DeShea, 2003), expectations and shared goals (Blumstein and Kollock, 1988; Barlow, 2003; Berschied, 1985; Hill and Hansen, 1960; Schurr, Hedaa, and Geersbro, 2007), increased levels of intimacy (Rubin, 1973; Clark and Reis, 1988), and increased willingness to engage in self-disclosure (Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco, 1998; Moon, 2000).

Therefore the following research question should be considered: *What type of consumer-brand relationship has the most positive outcomes?*

Addressing this question requires going beyond the current study by considering the multiple interactions that form the relationship bond between the consumer and the brand. As each interaction, and even specific activities within that interaction can be social or transactional, the overall "socialness" of the relationship will have to be considered. So rather than "yes" or "no" for social or transactional interaction, "high" or "low" will need to be considered (as with the current essay). Based on the four basic types (Figure 3.4), effects on these relationship outcomes can be considered.

| | | Social interaction: Low | Social interaction: High |
|---|---|---|---|
| Transactional interaction: High | | Transactional CBR | Truly dyadic CBR |
| Transactional interaction: Low | | No CBR/ potential CBR | Social CBR |

*Figure 3.4: CBR Types*

*Potential Moderators*

There are also a number of potential moderators that may impact the relationship between the CBR interaction and the outcomes—such as brand involvement and brand-self congruency. As more and more brands are providing the means to communicate (opening up channels of communication) it would be relevant to consider the: (1) availability/convenience of various methods of communication, (2) consumer preferences in specific communication methods, and (3) requirements for providing personal information in order to access lines of communications. Therefore, the following question could be examined: *What moderators impact the relationship between the CBR type and the outcomes?*

Addressing this question requires a focus on lines of communication—more specifically: what types of lines of communication the brand has available, what barriers are there for consumers trying to access those lines of communications, and what are the consumer preferences for various types of lines

communications. Considering the basic communications model (source encode a message sent via a medium that is decoded by the receiver), having a means for the consumer to communicate with the brand is the most basic requirement. However, many brands make it difficult for a consumer to send a message to them by severely limiting the ways in which the consumer can communicate with them. As technology has increased the availability of contact information (such as customer service numbers, email addresses, and physical addresses), many brands have put up what is often perceived as barriers for the customer trying to communicate with them. Some Web sites don't allow direct email, and instead require the consumer to fill out a Web request form. Others go further by requiring the consumer to "log in" before contacting them—meaning the consumer has to give the brand personal information before contacting them. As suggested in the interview data (Essay 2), this would likely be viewed as a violation of the accepted boundaries of the interaction, as the brand is requiring the consumer to give personal information without reciprocating the action and could moderate the relationship between interaction and outcomes. Finally, consumers will have preferences for various means of communicating with the brand. Some prefer talking to a real person on the phone, while others prefer to correspond via email. These preferences are likely to vary from person to person, but some might be able to be generalized to the target market. So, if a brand determines that their target market has a preference for using email, they can focus their customer service efforts to that form of communication and make it as effective and efficient as possible.

*Antecedents to Interaction*

This study addressed the activities within the interaction itself. But as indicated not only in the interviews (Essay 2), but also in the descriptions of interaction examples in Essay 3—There are motivators driving a consumer to interact with a brand. These antecedents to interaction would be valuable to examine. Initial analysis of the interview data (Essays 1 and 2) indicates that further examination of "triggers" is needed, as well as examination of other consumer motivations for engaging

in (initiating or responding to) social interaction with the brand. Therefore the following research question could be examined: *What motivates a consumer to interact with a brand?*

In order to address this research question, the consideration of external motivators is important. Previous research (Essays 1 and 2) highlighted the need to consider the "trigger," or external motivator driving a consumer to communicate with a brand. A trigger is "a factor or an event that changes the basis of a relationship," (p. 211) and usually requires some action to be taken (Gustafsson, Johnson, and Roos, 2005)—This could mean the consumer engaging in exit or voice (Rusbult, Johnson, and Morrow, 1986). This research stresses the desire of *voice*, which provides feedback to the brand, over *exit*. Referring back to the previous future research question, lines of communication would first need to be open and viewed as accessible in order for consumers to *voice*.

In addition to considering external motivators, this research question requires the examination of internal motivators. Based on Fournier's (1998) work, it is likely that some consumers will be moved to communicate with the brand through internal motivators such as feelings of nostalgia and inheritance of brand attachment. Other internal motivators might include personality characteristics and individual difference variables, such as propensity to establish relationships (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; De Wulf et al, 2001; Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Odekerken-Schroder et al, 2003; Reynolds and Beatty, 1999) and motivational orientation (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Kaltcheva and Weitz, 2006).

## FINAL CONCLUSION

Although the CBR research has clearly established that consumers can and do view brands as relationship partners (Fournier, 1998), there are limitations in understanding the specific components of these types of relationships. The current conceptualization of the CBR does not explicitly consider interaction, which is the core process that relationships are built on. The conceptual framework presented in Essay 1 supported the role of both transactional and social interaction in the CBR. And a better understanding of the consumer-brand interaction, and social interaction in particular, was presented in Essay 2. Qualitative data (Essay 2) further supports that consumers can interact with a brand, and that some interactions are more transactional, while others are more social. But in order to measure these two components of the consumer-brand interaction, we must first develop a measurement scale for the consumer-brand interaction in general.

Therefore this empirical research contributes to the literature by developing a measurement scale for the consumer-brand interaction, enabling extensions in the CBR research. The consumer-brand interaction is comprised of one or more activities that are social and/or transactional occur online and/or offline, occur at one time or over time, and are tied to a specific consumer issue. These findings support a five-dimensional model of the CBI that requires (1) reciprocal communication, (2) effort from the brand, (3) an understanding and adherence by the brand to interaction boundaries, (4) the consumer to feel like the brand views them as an individual (personalization), and (5) the presence of affective components (emotion). In addition, the model differs for those with higher levels of social interaction. This suggests a difference between social and transactional consumer-brand interactions, thus allowing for the examination of various types of consumer-brand relationships. Now that individual interactions can be measured, the CBR can be empirically examined—as the relationship is built on individual consumer-brand interactions.

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## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE DESCRIPTION FOR ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST

| | Gender | Age | Marital status | Occupation | Education | # of brand examples | # of social interaction | % of social interaction |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AP1 | Male | 27 | Single | Software engineer | B.A. | 6 | 2 | 33% |
| AP2 | Male | 19 | Single | Student | Some college | 8 | 2 | 25% |
| AP3 | Female | 26 | Single | Pharmaceutical sales | Some college | 9 | 3 | 33% |
| AP4 | Female | 23 | Single | Student | Some college | 9 | 3 | 33% |
| BT1 | Male | 21 | | Student | Some college | 6 | 1 | 17% |
| BT2 | Female | 20 | Single | Student | Some college | 6 | 2 | 33% |
| BT3 | Male | 21 | N/A | Student Worker | Some college | 5 | 2 | 40% |
| BT4 | Male | 23 | Single | Self Employed | Some college | 5 | 2 | 40% |
| BT5 | Male | 26 | Single | Student | Some college | 6 | 1 | 17% |
| BT6 | Male | 18 | | Student | | 7 | 2 | 29% |
| JF1 | Female | 54 | Divorced | Accountant | College | 10 | 4 | 40% |
| JF2 | Female | 80 | Widowed | Hospitality | High school | 4 | 0 | 0% |
| JF3 | Male | 27 | Married | Draftsman | College | 11 | 1 | 9% |
| JF4 | Male | 54 | Single | Lawyer | Grad school | 4 | 1 | 25% |
| JF5 | Female | 26 | Married | Receptionist | High school | 4 | 0 | 0% |
| JF6 | Male | 20 | Single | Student | High school | 6 | 0 | 0% |
| JV1 | Female | 23 | Married | Registered Nurse | BSN | 4 | 3 | 75% |
| JV2 | Male | 19 | Single | Student | Some college | 3 | 2 | 67% |
| JV3 | Male | 25 | Married | Pharmacist | Pharmacy degree | 3 | 2 | 67% |
| JV4 | Male | 25 | Married | Student | B.A. | 4 | 1 | 25% |
| JV5 | Female | 25 | Married | Teacher | B.A. | 4 | 1 | 25% |
| JV6 | Female | 21 | | Student | Some college | 6 | 2 | 33% |
| JV7 | Female | 49 | Married | Research Nurse | College | 7 | 1 | 14% |
| JV8 | Female | 51 | Widowed | Physical Therapist | Masters Degree | 2 | 1 | 50% |
| JV9 | Female | 21 | Single | Student | Some college | 6 | 1 | 17% |
| MC1 | Male | 21 | Single | Student | Some college | 2 | 1 | 50% |
| MC2 | Female | 20 | | Student | Some college | 4 | 3 | 75% |
| MC3 | Female | 20 | Single | Student | Some college | 1 | 1 | 100% |

## APPENDIX 2: CODING TABLES USED TO DETERMINE PRESENSE OF SOCIAL INTERACTION (ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST)

| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| AP1 | Jeep | Y | N | N | N |
| | M&Ms | N | Y | Y | Y |
| | Volkswagen | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| AP2 | Nintendo | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Apple | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Busted | N | Y | N | N |
| | Radiohead | Y | N | N | N |
| | Toyota | Y | ? | N | N |
| AP3 | MAC | ? | Y | Y | Y |
| | Starkist | N | N | Y | Y |
| | Welches | N | N | N | Y |
| AP4 | Cox | N | Y | Y | N |
| | Nature's Best | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Disney | N | ? | Y | Y |
| | Southwest | N | N | N | Y |
| BT1 | Abita | Y | Y | N | N |
| | American Eagle | N | N | N | Y |
| | Daddario Guitar | N | N | N | Y |
| BT2 | AT&T | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Polo | Y | N | Y | Y |
| BT3 | Brand Jordan | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Nike | Y | N | ? | Y |
| BT4 | Express for Men | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Gilden | ? | Y | Y | Y |
| | New Era | N | N | N | Y |
| | Russell | N | N | N | Y |
| BT5 | Sony | N | N | N | Y |
| | Yamaha | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| BT6 | Capital One | ? | Y | N | Y |
| | Tabasco | Y | N | Y | Y |
| JF1 | Clinique | Y | N | Y | Y |
| | Hilton | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Publix | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | USAA | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Coldwater Creek | N | N | N | Y |
| | Cox | N | N | N | Y |
| | Dell | N | N | N | Y |
| | Rotel | N | N | N | Y |
| JF2 | AT&T | N | N | N | Y |
| JF3 | Camel | Y | N | Y | Y |
| | Coke | N | N | N | Y |
| | HP | N | N | N | Y |
| | Marlboro | N | Y | Y | Y |
| | Heineken | Y | N | N | N |
| | Mountain Dew | N | N | N | Y |
| | Nautica | N | N | N | Y |
| | Sansa | N | N | N | Y |
| | Lousiana Hot Sauce | Y | N | N | N |
| JF4 | Tabasco | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| JF5 | NY&Co. | N | N | N | Y |
| JF6 | Auto Zone | N | N | N | Y |
| | Cabellas | N | N | N | Y |
| | Checkers | N | N | N | Y |
| | Chevrolet | N | N | N | Y |
| | Sprint | N | N | N | Y |
| JV1 | Bed Bath & Beyond | N | Y | Y | Y |
| | Best Buy | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Dodge | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| JV2 | Apple | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Brine | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| JV3 | Apple | N | Y | N | N |
| | Express for Men | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Palm | Y | N | Y | Y |
| JV4 | New Balance | Y | Y | N | N |
| | Ems | N | N | N | Y |
| JV5 | Similac | N | Y | N | N |
| | Starbucks | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| JV6 | Fossil | N | N | N | Y |
| | J. Crew | N | N | N | Y |
| | Starbucks | Y | Y | N | N |
| | Gap | Y | Y | N | N |
| | Dove | Y | N | N | N |
| JV7 | Bed Bath & Beyond | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| | Dell | N | N | N | Y |
| JV8 | Panera Bread | Y | N | N | N |
| | Starbucks | Y | Y | Y | N |
| JV9 | Clinique | Y | N | N | N |
| | Rita's | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| MC1 | eBay | Y | N | Y | Y |
| MC2 | Banana Republic | Y | Y | N | N |
| | LL Bean | Y | N | Y | Y |
| | Victoria's Secret | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| MC3 | LL Bean | Y | Y | N | N |

## APPENDIX 3: OVERVIEW OF ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST ANALYSIS

| | Brand | Overview | Quote(s) | Interaction Activities | Social aspects |
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| AP1 | Volkswagen | The respondent had to contact Volkswagen (phone) regarding parts for their Jetta. They reported that they were nice and followed up after the issue was resolved. It seemed like the brand did put forth more effort by following up when they didn't have to, and by being "nice" in their communications. | I: After the transaction, did they follow up?<br>R: "Oh yeah….they followed up several times" | Telephone | Niceness, brand effort ("follow up") |
| | M&M's | As a child, he got a bad bag of candy. He wrote the company (mail) and they sent him a new bag. Although he buys other types of candy, he exhibits behavioral and affective loyalty to M&M's. In this case, it was primarily the consumer that made the effort. | I: "So you think they really cared about you?"<br>R: "Oh, they did!" | Letter by mail | Caring, consumer effort |
| AP2 | Nintendo | The respondent has purchased many products, and has contacted them (email) before. They respond quickly and are "usually very nice". It seems that the brand makes an effort to maintain a relationship with the customer through the use of repeated and "nice" communications. | I: "So you think they value you as a customer?"<br>R: "Oh yeah, I'm sure!" | Email/web contact form | Brand effort, Niceness, valued, quantity of interaction |
| | Apple | The customer had to de-authorize some iTunes accounts, so they contacted the company via email. Apple took care of it within a few hours. | R: "…incredibly quick…they did it within an afternoon." | Email/web contact form | Brand effort |
| AP3 | MAC | The customer only buys MAC makeup, and communicates with the brand via email. She mentioned that the brand invites select customers to exclusive events. | R: "…they have a wine and cheese party, and it's an invitation only type thing…" | Email, events (wine and cheese party) | Personal |
| | Starkist | The respondent has a strong preference for one specific type of starkest tuna. When her Wal-Mart stopped carrying it, she called the company to find out where to find it. They told her, and were really friendly and helpful about it. | I: When "you spoke to them on the phone, were they gracious?<br>R: "Yes. They were very helpful. Very nice. So much so, that I felt kind of dorky asking for it. They were extremely helpful and I started to think how many freaks in the world call them up looking for a specific Starkist tuna. But, they were extremely helpful. More than, I would say, someone I would deal with on a daily basis."<br>I: "So they really value you?"<br>R: "They went above and beyond. Without a doubt." | Telephone, website | Niceness, valued |
| | Cox | The respondent feels like they have to use | R: "…they have miscommunication within the company, they | Telephone | Impersonal, |

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| | | this service brand because they have no other options. They don't feel valued as a customer. This example seems to reflect negative social interaction. | don't know what the heck is going on. They don't make good enough notes from one call to another, so they don't know why you're calling a second…[or] third time. And you keep calling back with the same thing so things don't get fixed. And they are annoying and they are rude sometimes and they keep transferring you and nobody really helps you." | | brand effort (lack of), caring (lack of) |
| AP4 | Nature's Best | Her grocery store stopped carrying her favorite brand of bread, so she contacted (email) the company to find out where she could buy it. The respondent switched grocery stores in order to visit a store that carried this brand of bread. Everyone now knows she loves this bread, and even her family has switched to this bread. | R: "It didn't seem like a mass email, like personal…"<br>R: I felt "like I was important to them and the company." | Email/web contact form | Personal, brand effort, valued, consumer effort, brand connection |
| | Cox | The respondent deals with both Cox cable and Cox internet. She is very displeased with the cable customer service, but very pleased with the internet customer service. Recently when she was canceling her cable, she had to deal with a customer service agent that seemed to be just going through the motions and not offering any real solutions (trying to keep her hooked, rather than help). | R: (reference to cable) "I had to call to cut it off and they asked, 'why are you cutting it off'? I'm not really pleased with the channels I guess, and…we don't really watch it that much, so it was kind of a waste. So they said we can give you three months for free…I said let's just save us some time right now and cut it off. This is why I called, I want to cut it off...then she questioned, 'will you be okay without cable? Are you sure you want to do this?' I said that I was positive. She said like 'I have seven TVs in my house,' and I was like, okay. I don't want it, thank you."<br>I: (reference to internet) "They want to give you help?"<br>R: "Yeah, they always say sorry so much for holding, even if it was for a minute. They really do all they can to make sure you don't have to stay on the line for a longer period of time. They really try to fix it… I actually have written down one of their names…she was just so nice. I wrote a thank you card for her." | Telephone, mail (thank you card) | Valued (and lack of), brand effort (and lack of), consumer effort |
| | Disney | The respondent used to work at Disney, and developed a personal connection with the brand. She displays both affective and behavioral loyalty, and has done many surveys for the brand. | R: "I always do surveys just because it helps the company. I have definitely done many for the Disney brand." | In-person, surveys | Helpful (consumer feeling), connection (via friends & used to work there) |
| BT1 | Abita Beer | He chooses Abita primarily because it is a local brand, and feels that they understand him (as part of their target market). The brand does sponsor local social events (pub crawls). | R: "…it's a local brand. That's one of the reasons I buy it."<br>I: "you feel more connected…?"<br>R: "yes, I would say so" | Local promotions (pub crawls) | Connection (local brand) |
| BT2 | AT&T | The respondent recently switched to AT&T and is satisfied and has communicated with AT&T wireless. His friends also use this | R: "they were really nice and tried to help me a lot." | Website, in-store | Niceness (and honesty), connection (via |

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| | | brand, and he gets free mobile to mobile. | | | friends) |
| | Polo | The customer has a preference for the clothes, and feels like he is part of Polo's target market and that they understand him. But he doesn't feel like they really care about him. | I: "…they understand you?"<br>R: "Yeah."<br>I: "Do you feel like they really care about you?"<br>R: "Probably not, because they have so many customers." | Email | Caring (lack of), Connection (brand fit) |
| BT3 | Nike | The respondent prefers the product, and expresses a desire for a relationship with the brand. But they don't feel as if Nike wants a relationship with them. | I: "Do you feel like they understand you?"<br>R: "Yes, well sometimes."<br>I: "Do you feel that they really want to communicate with you…?"<br>R: "No, I think they just want sales." | Email, website, forums | Connection (lack of), consumer effort |
| | Brand Jordans | The customer interacts with the brand regularly and is very satisfied with the brand relationship. | R: "They have a special site called Flight Club…"<br>R: "They usually send out monthly and quarterly emails just to say what's new" and important. | Website, email | Brand effort, quantity of interaction |
| BT4 | Express for Men | The respondent shops here regularly. He likes the salespeople ("a lot nicer than most") and relies on the products (clothes)—they fit and "adapt" to his attitude. | R: "because I give them a lot of money, I guess my relationship with them is pretty good." | In-store, survey | Niceness, connection (brand fit) |
| | Russell | He unsatisfied, but has to use the brand because he works at a high school. The respondent reported not being satisfied with the product, but satisfied with the brand communication. | R: "The head coach sent in a complaint…"<br>I: "How did they respond?"<br>R: "They comped us a few jerseys. They tried the best they could. I guess communication wise they did pretty good. A lot better than what I thought they would."<br>I: "do you feel as though they desire a relationship…?"<br>R: "Yeah, they do. They want our business."<br>I: "…how does that change your perception of the brand...?"<br>R: "I'm still going to wear them, so therefore I'm going to trust them to try to fix the problem." | Not clear (likely via telephone) | Brand effort, consumer effort, connection (via school) |
| | Gildan (included for comparing with Russell) | He unsatisfied, but has to use the brand because he works at a high school. Although he has yet to contact them, he feels like they don't want a relationship with him anyway. | I: "do you want a relationship with them?"<br>R: "Yeah, I would like one."<br>I: "you don't feel as though they want one?"<br>R: "No, not at all." | None yet (imposed relationship) | Connection (via school) |
| BT5 | Yamaha | The customer had a problem with his four-wheeler, so contacted the company. They fixed the issue, and made him feel like they cared. | I: "Do you feel that they really cared about you?"<br>R: "Yeah, they're good."<br>I: "Do you desire a relationship…?"<br>R: "Yes, I do." | In-store | Caring |
| BT6 | Tabasco | The respondent purchases Tabasco sauce frequently. Although he hasn't engaged in two-way communication with the brand, he has watched videos on the website and looked up the factory on Google Earth. | I: "I've looked at some of the videos that they have about how they make the sauce and some of the history and all that….I've used Google earth to see where that little piece of the city was." | Search on Google earth, website | Consumer effort (indirect) |
| | Capital | The respondent opened a new credit card | R: "I wrote them a nice letter and I used some of their slogans | Mail, telephone | Caring (lack of), |

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| | One | account, and was notified that they would have to sign a binding arbitration- but that you would have 30 days to change your mind. After getting the card, he contacted (mail) them asking if he could remove the arbitration from his contract. Basically he was told that it was up to them and they weren't going to do it. | and catch phrases like, I hope there won't be any problems as I was assured there would be 'no hassles'. So I sent it to them and it took 2-3 months time. They gave me a simple letter saying 'no'." | | brand effort (lack of), impersonal, consumer effort |
| JF1 | Clinique/ Coldwater creek | The respondent talks about a couple of brands with which she has given feedback (surveys). She said she would give anyone feedback if they ask, because she's completely honest. She also provides feedback whenever an experience is "exceptionally good or exceptionally bad." | I: "Why do you bother…?"<br>R: "I bother because I'm going to be 100% honest and I don't know if everyone that gives feedback is." | Survey (in-store, online) | Helpful (consumer feeling) |
| | USAA | She is highly satisfied with her insurance company, and called them when one of their agents "was not up to their standards." | R: "…they had one of their higher up supervisors call me back and thank me for the information. Both times. When it was negative and when it was positive." | Telephone | Helpful (consumer feeling), caring, consumer effort |
| | Hilton | A regular in the Hilton Honors program, and calls herself "brand loyal." | R: "They keep a record of my preferences on the types of rooms I like, whether I like water, or whether I want chocolate or something else. Whether I want a king size bed or two doubles and that kind of thing. They have all my preferences on record. And they do ask for feedback and I've given it." | In-person, Telephone, exclusive program (Hilton Honors) | Helpful (consumer feeling), personal |
| | Publix | Has a strong preference for this grocery store, and enjoys shopping there. She feels that they have good customer service, and gives feedback often- both positive and negative. | R: "…if you're just walking down the aisle having trouble finding something, one of their employees will just show up, all the time, and know you're looking for something and help you find it." | In-person, Telephone | Helpful (consumer feeling), caring, consumer effort |
| JF3 | Marlboro/ Camel | He smokes Marlboro regularly, but will smoke Camel if there is a good deal. Both brands send him coupons and free stuff. | R: "I got some good coupons that Camel sent me a couple of weeks ago."<br>I: "How did you get those?<br>R: "I don't know how I got those. That was the first time I got anything from them. They sent me a Zippo lighter."<br>I: "Does that make you like them more?"<br>R: "No. Marlboro sends me stuff all the time. But when I got those coupons, I smoked Camels for a couple of weeks while using those coupons. "<br>I: "…what would you imagine [Marlboro] thinks about you? Anything more than just a customer?"<br>R: "Probably not, they just want to figure out a better way to, you know…"<br>I: "So you don't think that it's because they care about you, it's that they just want to get more money." | Website, coupons | Caring (lack of), brand motivation, brand effort |

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| | | | R: "I know they don't care about me, they're trying to keep me hooked on cigarettes." | | |
| JF4 | Tabasco | The respondent always has Tabasco on hand, and even knows the family. | R: "I always buy Tabasco. I mean, I may have another pepper just because I wanted to try it, but I will always have Tabasco.<br>I: "Have you ever communicated with Tabasco?"<br>R: "Yeah, I'm the godfather of one of the grandchildren. My friend's godmother was a McIlhenney."<br>I: "Do you tell them that you love their product?"<br>R: "Oh yeah, he knows it."<br>I: "Do you ever give him suggestions or…"<br>R: "No. He taught me to eat it on fried eggs." | In-person | Connection (emotional ties) |
| JV1 | Best Buy | The customer loves the store and feels valued. They have filled out a feedback form and received coupons and emails. | I: "Do you feel the brand wants to communicate with you?<br>R: "Yes…I think they enjoy it because they send me coupons and then I buy stuff.<br>I: "Do you think the brand cares about you?<br>R: "Yes, because I'm a customer and I add to their company."<br>I: "Do you think the brand values your feedback and input?"<br>R: "Yes, because a satisfied customer spreads the word."<br>I: "OK, do you feel like the brand knows who you are?"<br>R: "Uh, probably not." | In-person, email, survey, coupons | Consumer effort, valued, brand motivation |
| | Bed, Bath, and Beyond | The customer shops frequently at this store, and receives coupons regularly. | I: "Do you communicate with the brand?"<br>R: "I tell the cashier."<br>I: "…have they communicated with you?"<br>R: "They just send me coupons every couple of weeks."<br>I: "…the brand cares about you?"<br>R: "Yes"<br>I: "Do you think they value your input?"<br>R: "Yes. I think they sent me a feedback (form) for my bridal registry."<br>I: "So you would say that both you and the brand desire a relationship?"<br>R: "Certainly." | In-person, survey, coupons | Caring (valued), connection (bridal registry) |
| | Dodge | The respondent purchased a Dodge car, and the brand/dealership sends them "stuff" all the time. | ?? Depends on what "stuff" ?? | Mail, survey | |
| JV2 | Brine | He is extremely satisfied with the brand and has interacted in various ways. He feels like the brand cares and knows who he is, and that his feedback is valued. | I: "So you'd say that both you and the brand want to communicate with each other?<br>R: "Well, the basis for a good relationship is communication and I feel that we definitely have that." | Website, contests, mail, coupons | Brand effort, connection, valued, caring ("know him") |
| | Apple | Customer has interacted with Apple on several occasions, and is pleased with their communications. | I: "What is it about Apple that you like?"<br>R: "They're user friendly. They value what I want."<br>I: "…how did you communicate with Apple?"<br>R: **"I called them they told me which computer to get for** | Telephone, email | Connection, caring, valued |

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| | | | **college."**<br>I: "Have they contacted you after that?"<br>R: "Yes, via email."<br>I: "Did they send you any promotions?"<br>R: "Yeah, all that stuff." | | |
| JV3 | Express for Men | Respondent prefers this retailer and buys his work clothes there. He said he doesn't communicate much with them, but they do send him coupons, which he occasionally uses to save money. | I: "Do you think that Express cares about you?"<br>R: "Yes, I think they care. Honestly, I think they care about my money. But, yeah, I think they take care of me as a customer."<br>I: "Do you think they value your feedback or input?"<br>R: "They haven't really asked me…but I imagine that because I'm a continuous customer that they would."<br>I: "Do you think they know who you are?"<br>R: "Yeah, in a way." | In-store, email, coupons | Caring ("understands him") |
| | Palm | The customer likes the quality and design of the products, and was very pleased with the way the company handled a broken Palm. | R: "Usually if I buy a PDA or cell phone, I lean toward buying a Palm phone. The palm products. I think they have an easier product to use. I think they have a higher line of products than other PDAs. And whenever the PDAs first came out, that's what I started with. And there have been other things too. I actually had a Palm break once and I sent it out to them and they replaced it completely free of charge. And it was pretty easy to do too." | Unclear (I assume by telephone and mail). | Brand effort, connection (first brand used), cares? Valued? |
| JV4 | New Balance | The respondent only ever buys this brand of sneakers (for the last 8 years) because they are "very comfortable and stylish." But he hasn't contacted them, and doesn't seem to desire that type of relationship. New Balance accidentally sent him a pair of shoes that he didn't order, and had to have him send them back. | I: "Do you think they desire a relationship with you?"<br>R: "No. I will say they were very nice. They probably wanted to be customer friendly and keep my business. But that's about it."<br>I: "So do you think the brand overall cares about you as a customer?"<br>R: "Yes, as a customer. Without a doubt. It was their mistake and they were very understanding and nice about it." | Unclear (either by telephone or email). | Niceness |
| JV5 | Starbucks | The Starbucks brand is central to her social circle at work, and she feels Starbucks really cares about her (and her coworkers/school). | R: "At work, I would say that it is how people connect with each other. Through their interest or liking of Starbucks. And if you like Starbucks, then you automatically have these people as friends."<br>I: "Everyone goes to Starbucks together?"<br>R: "As a group."<br>I: "Do you have a Starbucks card or coupons?"<br>R: "All of the above. I have Starbucks gift cards that we actually share as a group, that we all put money on and whoever goes for a Starbucks run will use the card. And we just take turns filling up the card every month or two. And we get coupons through that because we go so often. And I guess because we go so often, Starbucks every year to our school since we're teachers, sends stacks of Starbucks cups and we get | In-person, gift/store cards, coupons, promotions | Connection, brand effort, consumer effort, caring |

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| | | | to take them for free. And we take them to Starbucks every so often for teacher appreciation. And we get free Starbucks.<br>I: "So they definitely try to reach out to you?<br>R: "They definitely do, yes." | | |
| JV6 | Starbucks | She goes to Starbucks regularly (5 days a week) and says the service is wonderful, but hasn't contacted the company (although she says she might if they had a suggestion box or something similar). | R: "Have you communicated…?"<br>I: "No. I have gift cards. People know that I love Starbucks."<br>R: "Have they communicated with you?"<br>I: "The people know me in Starbucks, so sometimes they'll give me a free drink."<br>R: "Do you think Starbucks cares about their customers and you?"<br>I: "Yeah, because I feel like they make your drink however you want it, it's individualism." | In-person, gift cards | Connection, caring ("knows me") |
| | Gap | She works at Gap and feels like they really know their customers. | R: "They know that their customers love to shop and they love their product so they keep making a good product for them." | In-person, coupons (mail), gap card | Connection |
| JV7 | Bed, Bath, & Beyond | The customer tells the employees how much she likes them and she believes they care about her. But she doesn't feel like they know her as an individual. | R: "I get coupons and I love their customer service policies. It's just really nice. I like it better than Linens N' Things. That's their competitor." | In-person, mail (coupons) | Caring (service policies) |
| JV8 | Starbucks | The respondent expresses an emotional connection, but seems to direct it more toward the product itself (coffee) rather than the brand as a whole. | R: "…I actually keep [a Starbucks card] in my car and I refill it. That way I always have money to go to Starbucks even when I'm broke."<br>I: "How satisfied are you with Starbucks?"<br>R: "I love them. I like their coffee. It's different. You can't get that flavor anywhere else. It's distinctive. It's like a burnt, like a rich strong coffee."<br>I: "Do you think Starbucks cares about you? About its customers?"<br>R: "I don't think any company cares about you. They care about your money." | In-person, gift/store card | Connection (emotional- to the product) |
| JV9 | Rita's Italian Ice | This favorite brand of Italian ice was not available in her current location, so the respondent contacted the company to let them know that they would do well opening a location in Baton Rouge (because of the climate). She did this, even though she knew she would be gone before they would ever be able to open a location there. The respondent received a personal email, and feels like her opinion is valued. | I: "How did that [personal email] make you feel about the brand itself?"<br>R: "I love it." | Email | Connection, personal, valued, helpful (consumer feeling) |
| MC 1 | eBay | After selling on eBay, the respondent feels that they do a good job of staying in contact | R: "…I feel like eBay has done a great job at sending emails saying a discounted listing, or something like that. " | Email, website | Brand effort |

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| | | with him. | | | |
| MC 2 | Banana Republic | A frequent and satisfied customer (quality of products) of BR, but has never contacted them (no catalog or online purchases, no problems). She doesn't seem to care to have a relationship. | I: "Do you think BR really cares about you?"<br>R: "The one bad thing about BR is that they feel like when I first started shopping there, they weren't as excited to help me. But once I started buying there and once I went in and they could tell that I was about to buy something, they were very helpful and very generous. I just think that they don't want to waste their time with customers who are just browsing. Which may not be a great way to get people to buy their things." | In-store, email | Caring (and lack of) |
| | LL Bean | The respondent likes the products, but doesn't consider herself a frequent buyer. | R: "I thought they were very helpful, but the product I was ordering got misplaced. But they were very helpful in helping me find it." | Unclear (I assume via telephone) | Caring |
| | Victoria's Secret | The customer is always asked for their email to be on the Angel list, but prefers to be contacted by traditional mail. The mailed coupons always get her in the store, and she ends up buying more. | R: "VS always asks me for an email address…so they try."<br>I: "But…you're not interested in the contact?"<br>R: "No. I actually give them an alternative email address instead of my main one, cause I don't want all that junk mail in my mailbox." | Email, coupons (mail and email), mail (catalog) | Brand effort |
| MC 3 | LL Bean | The respondent purchases from this retailer frequently and is very satisfied with their product and service. He is very impressed with their "outstanding policy of returns." → they encourage the customer to be honest with the reason for return, and give them the "benefit of the doubt." | R: "…I think that it's impeccable quality and the customer service is outstanding. So they kind of make the customer feel like they're being rewarded for using their brand."<br>I: "…would you say LL Bean's customer service is so good that they really like having a relationship [with you]?"<br>R: "Yes. And by doing that, they have the ultimate satisfaction. If you don't like something, even if you've had it for a few months, you can send it back. And whenever you call them…they know my name, and know who I am…They made that personal connection." | Telephone, email, mail | Brand effort, personal, caring, connection (consistent products….like one thing, like them all) |

## APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (ESSAY 2 PRE-TEST)

We want to discuss consumer interaction with brands (such as Coke, Tide, Gap, Nike). This could include talking with a brand representative, purchasing a product, visiting a website, calling a customer service line, etc.

- What are some various ways consumers interact with brands? (*Probe for a long list*)
- What do you think is the primary motivation for consumers interacting with brands?
- What do you think is the primary motivation for brands interacting with consumers?

We've talked about general interactions, but some interactions between consumers and brands might be considered to be more social in nature. Social interaction is related to communication above and beyond the actual transaction or "business" side of things….so, cases where the purchase is not necessarily central. [Provide example if needed: discussing weekend plans with a customer service representative, or sending/receiving a thank you note]

- What are some various ways consumers interact with brands on a more social level? (*Probe for a long list*)
    - What makes these interactions social in your mind? (*Probe with social elements identified in preliminary interviews*)
    - What do you think the motivation for these types of communications might be? From the consumer's perspective? From the brand's perspective?
- Can you think of a brand where you have interacted in a more social way? (*Go through series of probe questions for each example*)
    - Do you purchase this brand repeatedly? (*Probe for purchase behavior*)
    - How have you and the brand communicated? (*Probe- email, phone, etc.*)
        - Who initiated?
            - Why did you communicate? (*Probe for motivation and/or trigger*)
            - Why did the brand communicate? (*Probe for motivation—sales? Or something more?*)
        - Do you like communicating with this brand? Or do you feel like you have to?
        - Do you think the brand likes communicating with you? Or do you feel like they do it out of obligation?
    - How do you feel about the brand?
        - Are you satisfied? What do you like/dislike?
        - Do they care about you? How? (*Probe for motivation*)
            - Do they value you? How? (*Probe- surveys, feedback, etc.*)
            - Do they know you? How?

Sometimes the brand will push social interaction on a consumer who is not interested in communicating with them on that level.

- Can you think of any examples of brands that keep contacting you, even when you ignore them? (Deleting unread emails, not answering calls, etc.)
    - How does that make you feel? (In general, and toward the brand)

Sometimes the consumer will try to reach out to the brand in a social way, but the brand either ignores them, or responds in a very non-social way.

- Can you think of any examples of times where you have tried to communicate with a brand in a social way, and they didn't respond as you had hoped/expected?
    - How does that make you feel? (In general, and toward the brand)

## APPENDIX 5: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE (ESSAY 2 MAIN STUDY)

We want to discuss consumer interaction with brands (such as coke, tide, Gap, Nike). This could include talking with a brand representative, purchasing a product, visiting a website, calling a customer service line, etc.

- What are some various ways consumers interact with brands? (*Probe for a long list*)

We've talked about general interactions, but some interactions between consumers and brands might be considered to be more social in nature. Social interaction is related to communication above and beyond the actual transaction or "business" side of things….so, cases where the purchase is not necessarily central. [Provide example if needed: discussing weekend plans with a customer service representative, or sending/receiving a thank you note]

- What are some various ways consumers interact with brands on a more social level? (*Probe for a long list*)
    - What makes these interactions social in your mind? (*Probe with social elements identified in preliminary interviews*)
    - What do you think the motivation for these types of communications might be? From the consumer's perspective? From the brand's perspective?
- Can you think of a brand where you have interacted in a more social way? (*Go through series of probe questions for each example*)
    - Do you purchase this brand repeatedly? (*Probe for purchase behavior*)
    - How have you and the brand communicated? (*Probe- email, phone, etc.*)
        - Who initiated?
            - Why did you communicate? (*Probe for motivation and/or trigger*)
            - Why did the brand communicate? (*Probe for motivation—sales? Or something more?*)
        - Do you like communicating with this brand? Or do you feel like you have to?
        - Do you think the brand likes communicating with you? Or do you feel like they do it out of obligation?
        - What do you think is the primary motivation for consumers interacting with brands?
    - How do you feel about the brand?
        - Are you satisfied? What do you like/dislike?
        - Do they care about you? How? (*Probe for motivation*)
            - Do they value you? How? (*Probe- surveys, feedback, etc.*)
            - Do they know you? How?
        - What do you think is the primary motivation for brands interacting with consumers?

Sometimes the brand will push social interaction on a consumer who is not interested in communicating with them on that level.

- Can you think of any examples of brands that keep contacting you, even when you ignore them? (Deleting unread emails, not answering calls, etc.)
    - How does that make you feel? (In general, and toward the brand)

Sometimes the consumer will try to reach out to the brand in a social way, but the brand either ignores them, or responds in a very non-social way.

- Can you think of any examples of times where you have tried to communicate with a brand in a social way, and they didn't respond as you had hoped/expected?
    - How does that make you feel? (In general, and toward the brand)

## APPENDIX 6: SEMI-STRUCTURED GUIDE (ESSAY 2 MAIN STUDY MEMBER CHECK)

Thank you again for helping me to figure out how consumers define social interaction with brands. As you recall, the basic idea of social interaction is that it *goes beyond* and/or is *something different* from transactional interaction. Basically, all interactions between consumers and brands can be classified as either *transactional* or *social*. Prior to the interviews, the definition of transactional interaction was more clearly understood, while the definition for social interaction was very broad:

Transactional interaction: Activities and communication between the consumer and brand that are required to complete the transaction. So this includes any type of exchange that is *directly* tied to the transaction:

- Ex] Buying a product (the transaction itself)
- Ex] Providing information required to complete transaction (such as shoe/clothing size, or an address for an online purchase)

Social interaction: Activities and communication between the consumer and brand that are NOT required to complete the transaction. So this includes all the "other stuff"—any exchanges between the consumer and brand that are *not directly* tied to the transaction.

***QUESTIONS:***

1. ***Do the definitions above fit with YOUR idea of transactional and social interaction?***

***YOUR THOUGHTS:***

---

When we're talking about "brands" we want to consider all types: consumer goods (such as Tide, Blue Bell, Coke), retail brands (such as Gap, Kroger's, Lowe's) and service brands (such Bell South, Pep Boys, Regis hair salon). The goal of the interviews was to determine how you (the consumer), define social interaction with the brand. So, to answer the question—what makes an interaction between the consumer and the brand ***social***?

In order to better understand how exactly consumers define social interaction with the brand, I looked through all the interviews to identify common elements. Based on the interviews, it seems like TWO components are needed in order for consumers to feel like an interaction with a brand is *social*: There must be (1) a non-transactional interaction activity, and (2) the brand's motivation for engaging in that activity must be non-transactional.

For example, if Krispy Kreme hosted a "kid's fun day" and provided free donuts, prizes, and activities, it would likely be considered to be a *non-transactional interaction activity*—because it is not directly tied to selling donuts. But for the consumer to consider it to be social interaction, they must also feel that Krispy Kreme is doing it because they want families to have fun, not just because they want to try to push more donut sales on that day (indicating a *non-transactional motivation*). So in this case, if the consumer viewed the brand's motivation as being "trying to sell kids more donuts," then social interaction would NOT be present.

***QUESTIONS:***

2. ***Does the above example fit with your view of social interaction with a brand?***

***YOUR THOUGHTS:***

---

**(1) Non-transactional interaction activity**

It seems that consumers feel like a non-transactional interaction activity must be present in order for social interaction to take place. These types of activities might include:

1. The brand sends you free samples
2. The brand provides you with an added service (free coffee at the grocery store)
3. The brand requests feedback
4. The brand engages in non-transactional conversation (chit-chat with a brand representative)
5. The brand sends you a birthday card

***QUESTIONS:***

3. ***Do you think that there needs to be a "non-transactional interaction activity" for social interaction to occur?***
4. ***Do you think the examples above represent a "non-transactional interaction activity"?***

***YOUR THOUGHTS:***

---

It is also important to determine what exactly makes an interaction activity "non-transactional." Based on the interviews, several elements seemed to indicate that an interaction activity was non-transactional:

1. The consumer AND brand have to put forth additional effort (above what is required to complete the transaction).
    a. Ex] Harley Davidson organized a "family fun day" with free food, demonstrations, and activities. And the consumer set aside time to be there.
2. The brand needs to personalize the interaction activity, so that the consumer feels like they are viewed as an individual.
    a. Ex] A Harley Davidson employee greeted everyone and guided them to the activities or demonstrations that would be best for them (based on who was in their group—kids, young adults, etc.)
3. The interaction must be reciprocal—meaning one (either brand or consumer) acts, and the other must respond.
    a. Ex] The Harley Davidson employees (or consumer) initiate friendly conversation during demonstrations/activities, and the consumer (or brand) respond in kind.
4. The brand keeps activities within accepted "boundaries" for a consumer-brand interaction.
    a. Ex] Harley Davidson employees (or consumers) do not engage consumers (or the brand) in inappropriate ways (such as making rude or lewd comments)
5. Some level of emotion was present in the interaction
    a. Ex] Harley Davidson created a level of fun and excitement to show they care about making their customers happy.
6. The brand made the consumer feel comfortable
    a. Ex] Much of Harley Davidson's regular customers are men, but they expected many female consumers that were unfamiliar with the brand to show up for the special event. So they made sure to have female employees on hand to make them feel comfortable and welcomed.

***QUESTIONS:***

5. ***Which of the 6 elements above do you think are MOST needed in order for an activity to be considered "non-transactional?"***

6. ***Which elements do you think are NOT needed in order for an activity to be considered "non-transactional?"***

***YOUR THOUGHTS:***

---

**(2) Non-transactional motivations**

For an interaction to be considered social, it seems like consumers need to feel like the brand has non-transactional motivations for interacting. Non-transactional motivations might include:

1. The brand is interacting because they care about more than just the immediate sale
2. The brand is showing genuine concern for the consumer
3. The brand is interacting because the consumer is important to them

***QUESTIONS:***

7. ***Do you think that the consumer needs to feel like the brand has "non-transactional motivations" for social interaction to occur?***
8. ***Do you think the examples above represent "non-transactional motivation"?***

***YOUR THOUGHTS:***

---

It is also important to determine what exactly makes the brand's motivation "non-transactional." Based on the interviews, several elements seemed to represent "non-transactional" brand motivations.

1. The consumer felt that the brand understood them
2. The brand and consumer share similar goals/values
3. Larger firms are less likely to have non-transactional motivations
    a. Producers of smaller ticket items

***QUESTIONS:***

9. ***Do you think that the consumer needs to feel that the brand understands them in order to feel like the brand cares about them (rather than just making money)?***
10. ***Do you think the brand and consumer need to have similar goals in order for the consumer to feel like the brand cares about them (rather than just making money)?***
11. ***Do you think larger firms can care about the consumer (rather than just making money)?***

***YOUR THOUGHTS:***

# APPENDIX 7: QUESTIONNAIRE USED FOR ESSAY 3

## 1. Informed Consent

The Examination of Consumer-brand Relationships
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The purpose of this research project is to determine whether or not various hypothesized consumer-brand relationships exist based on interaction between the consumer and the brand. This study will involve an online questionnaire. Participation is completely voluntary and the respondents can quit the interview at any time.

Information gathered will be kept private and safely stored when not in use by the researcher. Results of the study may be published, but no identifying information will be included in the publication. Subject identity will remain confidential unless disclosure is required by law.

You must be at least 18 years old to participate.

Your participation is greatly appreciated!

*** 1. The study has been explained to me (above) and all my questions have been answered. I may direct additional questions regarding study specifics to the researcher. If I have questions about subjects' rights or other concerns, I can contact Robert C. Mathews, Institutional Review Board, (225) 578-8692.**

**I am at least 18 years old, and I agree to participate in the study described above. I acknowledge the researcher's obligation to provide me with a copy of this consent form if requested.**

- ○ YES, I am at least 18 AND I agree to participate in this survey.
- ○ NO, I am not yet 18 and/or I do NOT agree to participate in this survey.

## 2. SECTION 1: Introduction (1 of 4 pages)

The objective of this research is to gain a better understanding of the types of interactions between consumers and brands, which we will term CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTIONS.

Before asking you to share a personal example of your own we need to (1) first clarify what we mean by "brand," and (2) then explain what we mean by consumer-brand interaction. That way it will be easy to think of an example that fits with the definition of the CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTION.

A. THE BRAND

(1) The brand can be any type of product or service:

- Branded products (*Tide, Nike, Apple iPod*)
- Retail brands (*Gap, Target, Best Buy*)
- Service brands (*Bell South, Netflix DVD service*)
- Restaurant brands (*Olive Garden, Taco Bell, Marble Slab Creamery*)
- Online brands (*eBay, Zappos, Apple iTunes*)
- Other types of brands like charities (*United Way*), universities (*Louisiana State*), entertainment (*Disney*), and sports teams (*New Orleans Saints*).

(2) Our focus is on the brand, not the product class.

- Always think about a specific branded product/service (*Nike shoes*) instead of a general product class (*running shoes*).

(3) Always consider the "whole" brand, which may include multiple products, services, and brand representatives.

- The "Starbucks" brand includes products (*packaged coffee beans, café drinks, chocolates*), services (*internet access*), and brand representatives (*baristas*).
- The "Best Buy" brand includes products (*Insignia televisions, Rocketfish video cables*), services (*installation/repair, merchandise selection, credit*), and brand representatives (*salespeople, Geek Squad members*).
- The "Nike" brand includes products (*shoes, clothing*), website (*downloadable coupons, shoe design*), and brand representatives (*customer service line, instant chat help*).
- The "Amazon.com" brand includes products (*Pinzon kitchen tools, Amazon Kindle wireless reading devices*), services (*book recommendations, downloadable books*), brand representatives (*customer service line, email*).

## 3. SECTION 1: Introduction (page 2 of 4)

B. THE CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTION

A consumer-brand interaction is based on any form of contact between the brand and the consumer, and can be represented by ***any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time***.

Let's now look at some examples which will help define what an activity is and which ones define a single interaction:

**(1)First, an activity is any form of communication or exchange between the brand and the consumer.**
Among the most common activities are:

- *Browsing a store or website.*
- *Having a conversation with a brand representative.*
- *Purchasing the branded product or service.*
- *Sending an email or calling the brand.*

Activities may occur offline, online, or both online and offline.

- Offline: *While browsing in the store, the customer chats with the salesperson, who suggests a new product--which the customer purchases. After getting home, the customer has a question and calls the customer service line.*
- Online: *While checking a brand's website, the customer uses the live chat option to ask questions.*
- Both: *While looking at the website, the customer sees some new products. When visiting the store to look at the new products, the customer notices a sign that says that more styles are available online. So when returning home, the customer visits the website to browse some more.*

Activities may be specific to a purchase (transactional) or may be more social/personal in nature.

- Transactional activities are tied specifically to making a purchase *(buying the product, providing information required to complete the sale--such as shoe/clothing size).*
- Social activities are NOT related directly to making a purchase *(chatting with a salesperson about your weekend plans, playing a free game on a brand website).*

**(2) The interaction can be a single activity or a set of activities.**

- The complete interaction may occur within a single activity *(one call to the customer service line, one visit to a store, OR one visit to the website)*
- The interaction may include several activities *(a visit to a store, website, AND email exchanges)*

**(3)The activities that make up an interaction can occur at a single point in time or over time.**

Single activity at one point in time

- *A customer has a conversation with a brand representative, but does not purchase.*
- *A customer goes to the brand website and makes a purchase.*

Several activities at one point in time

- *While browsing, the customer chats with the salesperson, who suggests a new product—which the customer purchases.*

One activity over a period of time

- *Multiple visits to a website to gather product information.*
- *Repeated visits to a store in making the purchase.*

*Several activities that occur over time*

- *A customer goes by a store to look at a particular item that they usually carry. However, the store is out. When they get home, they call the brand's customer service line to find out where else to find the product. The next week, they go by the recommended store to have a closer look at the item. They even come back later and make the purchase.*

**(4) The interaction activities are related to dealing with an individual consumer issue**, and not what "typically" happens when the customer deals with that brand. So the activities are occurring for some reason, which ties them together. Those related activities form the complete interaction.

- The process of purchasing a particular item (*browsing before buying*).
- The activities that occur while browsing a store during one particular store visit (*looking through the sales flyer and chatting to a salesperson*).
- Communication exchanges between you and the brand when trying to resolve a product/service failure (*calling the customer service line or exchanging emails regarding a refund issue*).

***Thus, an interaction can be any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time.***

## 4. SECTION 1: Introduction (page 3 of 4)

C. EXAMPLES OF CONSUMER-BRAND INTERACTIONS

Based on the previous discussion, an interaction can be any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time. These examples help illustrate the wide range of possible consumer-brand interactions that can be discussed in this research.

(1) *"When my laptop crashed I took it to Best Buy to see if someone from the Geek Squad could save all my data. There wasn't a line when I got there, so I walked right up. The guy said that if I had a few minutes, he could check to see if he could transfer the files to another hard drive. So I browsed through the DVDs and games for a few minutes, and chatted with a salesperson about a new game we are both currently addicted to. Then I went back over to the Geek Squad counter. The guy said he thought the data could be saved, but he would have to mail my laptop off to a repair center. I didn't really want to have to deal with all that, so I left and decided to take it somewhere else."*

- This description includes activities related to one issue—getting a laptop fixed.
- This interaction includes multiple activities (talking to the Geek Squad member, browsing the DVDs) that occurred at one time (a single visit to the store) and offline (in-person).
- Some activities were transactional (explaining the problem to the Geek Squad member), while others were social (chatting to a salesperson about a game they both loved).

(2)*"After purchasing a television from Best Buy, I realized that the cables that were supposed to come in the box were missing. I looked up the customer service number and called the 1-800 number to figure out what to do. The representative told me that I would have to return to the store to pick them up. I went back the next day only to find that I was supposed to have brought the box with me, but the guy on the phone hadn't mentioned that. After a chat with the manager, they gave me the cables without making me return with the box."*

- This description includes activities related to one issue—cables missing from the TV box.
- This interaction includes multiple activities (making the purchase, calling, talking to the manager), which occurred over several days.
- All of the activities occurred offline, most were in person (in-store activities) but one was over the phone.
- This description is primarily transactional, where the activities are all centered around a specific purchase.

(3) *"I had seen a Nike commercial that said you could design your own Nike shoe on their website. Even though I didn't really need a pair, I thought it sounded like fun. So I went to the website and played around with designing my own shoe. After coming up with a really cool pair, I was trying to figure out how to save it—because I wanted to show my friend. They have a live chat option on the website, so I clicked on it. A chat window popped right up, and the Nike person told me how to save my design. Then she asked me about my design. She thought it was cool. She said she had seen some other customer designs before, but she hadn't seen one quite like mine. That made me feel pretty good! Then she told me I should add Nike to my Facebook friend list and put a picture of my shoe design on my Facebook page. I didn't even know that Nike was on Facebook, but I thought that it was a good idea, because then it would be easier to show my friends my design."*

- This description includes activities related to one issue—designing a Nike shoe.
- This interaction includes multiple activities (designing the shoe, chatting with the brand representative) that occurred all at once (one visit to the website).
- All of the activities occurred online.
- This description is primarily social, where the focus of the activities was not related to a purchase (the consumer designed the shoe just for fun, conversation with the Nike representative was not tied to making a sale).

## 5. SECTION 1: Introduction (page 4 of 4)

D. SUMMARY

Shortly you will be asked to describe one of your own personal consumer-brand interaction examples. So please keep the following in mind.

When selecting a brand, please remember:
- That any type of brand will work.
- To focus on the actual brand, not the product class.
- To consider the brand "as a whole."

When describing the consumer-brand interaction, please remember that the interaction:
- … may include a single activity or several activities
- … can occur all at once, or over time.
- … could be activities online, offline, or both.
- … includes all activities tied to a specific issue.
- … may have transactional activities, social activities, or both.

E. APPRECIATION

Before you begin the questionnaire, we want to THANK YOU very much for your participation in this study! The researchers greatly appreciate the significant time and effort you are putting into completing the questionnaire. Your input is invaluable to this research, and will hopefully lead to improved brand experiences for consumer like you.

## 6. SECTION 2: Your Experience (1 of 1 page)

YOUR PERSONAL INTERACTION EXAMPLE

Now, based on how we defined (1) the brand and (2) the consumer-brand interaction (any combination of activity(s) focused on a single consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time), we would like to hear about one of your own personal examples of an interaction you have had with a brand.

So you'll be talking about ONE brand and ONE interaction with that brand (which may involve several individual activities).

*** 1. Please think of a brand in which you have had a memorable interaction with. Remember, you can consider any type of brand (product, service, retail, etc.).**

**What is the brand?**

*** 2. Please describe a memorable INTERACTION with this brand. Tell us about the activities that occurred during the interaction.**

**We are looking for a description similar to the examples discussed previously (Best Buy, Nike, and Starbucks) based on how you actually interacted with the brand (by email, in-store, phone, website, etc.), NOT how you USED the product/service.**

**Remember that an interaction can be any combination of activity(s) focused on a SINGLE consumer issue that are transactional or social and can occur at one time or over time. So it may or may NOT include a purchase.**

**It is NOT important if this particular interaction is representative of other interactions you may have had with this brand.**

The following questions will ask you to briefly expand on the consumer-brand interaction you just described.

*** 3. What specifically did you do during this interaction?**

*** 4. What specifically did the brand do during this interaction?**

*** 10. When you think of your interaction experience:**

| | Not at all | Slightly | Somewhat | Mostly | Completely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| How transactional was it? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| How social was it? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

IMPORTANT NOTE: ALL the rest of the questions in this survey are about the specific interaction you just described. They are NOT about the brand in general.

## 7. SECTION 3: Reflecting on your interaction experience (1 of 4 pages)

Please specify how much you agree or disagree with the following statements about your evaluations of the INTERACTION you described.

*** 1. I believe this interaction was...**

| | Completely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Completely agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| worth my time. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| relevant. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| rewarding. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| fulfilling. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| meaningful. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| extensive. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| complete. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| interesting. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 2. In this interaction, I felt...**

| | Completely disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Completely agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| caught up in the activities. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| fully engaged with the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| connected with the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| the brand understood me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| we touched on all aspects of the issue. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| we worked together. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| we continuously interacted. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 3. During this particular consumer-brand interaction, I believe that:**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The brand and I had the opportunity to exchange information. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| Several messages flowed back and forth between the brand and me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The messages were not standardized. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The brand's actions did not make me feel uncomfortable. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The brand's communications with me were personal. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## 8. SECTION 3: Reflecting on your interaction experience (2 of 4 pages)

For these questions, we want to know about the type of information you and the brand shared and the type of effort that you each but into the interaction. So please keep the consumer-brand interaction that you described in mind.

*** 1. Think about the information exchanged between you and the brand. What was the extent to which each of these happened during this particular interaction?**

| | Not at all | | | Somewhat | | | A great deal |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The brand and I shared information only about the transaction. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The information we shared was strictly business related. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| We discussed purchase related issues. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| We shared information beyond what was required to complete a sale. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| We talked about personal matters, not just products/services. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 2. Think about the effort you and the brand put into the interaction. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the interaction?**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The brand and I both put forth effort. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| It took more energy on both our parts. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| We both had to work at it. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| We spent extra time on things not even needed for the sale. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| We did everything needed to make the sale. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The brand concentrated solely on making the sale, nothing else. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The brand went out of their way to be social with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The brand put forth added effort, but didn't expect me to buy in return. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| The brand's efforts were only focused on making a profit. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I put forth effort that was unrelated to the actual purchase. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I went out of my way to be social with the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## 9. SECTION 3: Reflecting on your interaction experience (3 of 4 pages)

For these questions, we would like you to evaluate the BRAND's attitudes and behaviors during the particular consumer-brand interaction you described. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*** 1. During this particular consumer-brand interaction, I found the BRAND to be VERY...**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| biased. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| pushy. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| manipulative. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| convincing. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| believable. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| honest. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| sincere. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| pleasant. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 2. During this particular interaction, I believe that the BRAND...**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| genuinely enjoyed helping me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| was easy to talk to. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| was cooperative. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| tried to establish a personal connection. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| seemed interested in me not only as a customer, but as a person. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| respected my communications. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| responded to my communications. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| freely shared information with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| had open lines of communication with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| made sure it got something out of the interaction. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| tried to come out on top. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| viewed the interaction as only about the sale. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| felt that the sale took second place to the interaction between us. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## 10. SECTION 3: Reflecting on your interaction experience (4 of 4 pages)

For these questions, we are interested in your evaluations of your own and the brand's effort, attitudes, and feelings during the particular interaction you described.

*** 1. Please evaluate YOUR OWN thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during this particular consumer-brand interaction. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I respected the brand's communications. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I knew how the brand should behave. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I understood that certain boundaries couldn't be crossed. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I did not feel pressured by the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I felt the brand was interacting directly with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I felt delighted by this interaction experience. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I felt that this interaction experience really helped me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I felt satisfied with this specific interaction experience. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I responded to the brand's communications. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I went to a great deal of trouble to interact with the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I paid a lot of attention to what the brand did. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I put forth a lot of effort to interact with this brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I went the "extra step." | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I did not overstep my bounds. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I did not pressure the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 2. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**This particular consumer-brand interaction...**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| touched me emotionally. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| created an emotional connection between me and the brand. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| gave me a feeling of comfort. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| involved thoughts and feelings. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| made me feel a certain way. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 3. Please evaluate the BRAND's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors during this particular consumer-interaction. How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?**

**The brand...**

| | Strongly disagree | Somewhat disagree | Slightly disagree | Neutral | Slightly agree | Somewhat agree | Strongly agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| went to a great deal of trouble to interact with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| paid a lot of attention to what I said. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| put forth a lot of effort to interact with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| went the "extra step." | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| behaved professionally. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| did not overstep its bounds with me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| tailored the interaction specifically for me. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| treated me like an individual. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| saw me as a person, and not just a faceless customer. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| knew that certain topics and questions were off-limits. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## 11. SECTION 4: Your Future Intentions (1 of 1 page)

Consider your future intentions with the brand you interacted with.

*** 1. How probable is it that you will interact with this brand in the future?**

| | Highly improbable | Somewhat improbable | Slightly improbable | Neutral | Slightly probable | Somewhat probable | Highly probable |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| It is: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 2. How certain are you that you will interact with this brand again?**

| | Very uncertain | Somewhat uncertain | Slightly uncertain | Neutral | Slightly certain | Somewhat certain | Very certain |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| It is: | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

*** 3. What is the likelihood that you will...**

| | Not at all | Very unlikely | Somewhat unlikely | Not sure | Somewhat likely | Very likely | Absolutely |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| talk to others about this interaction? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| have more interactions like this one with the brand in the future? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| recommend the brand to others? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| spread the word about this brand? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| purchase from the brand in the future? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| talk about this brand to lots of people? | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

## 12. SECTION 5: About you (1 of 1 page)

Please answer the following questions. Responses will not be tied to you, but used to create an overall description of the sample. So anonymity is assured.

### * 1. Age

- 18-30
- 31-45
- 46-60
- 61-75
- over 75

### * 2. Gender

- Male
- Female

### * 3. Marital Status, select one:

- Married
- Divorced
- Widowed
- Separated
- Never been married
- A member of an unmarried couple

### * 4. Employment Status. How would you currently describe yourself?

- Employed full time
- Employed part time
- Employed and attending school
- Self-employed
- Out of work
- A homemaker
- A full-time student
- A part-time student
- Retired
- Unable to work

*** 5. Approximate Household Income (yearly, before taxes)**

- Less than $20,000 per year
- $20-39,999
- $40-59,999
- $60-79,999
- $80-99,999
- $100-119,999
- $120,000 or over

*** 6. Highest educational level completed**

- Some high school completed.
- Completed high school diploma/ GED
- Some college completed (less then 2 years)
- Associates degree completed (or at least 2 years of college)
- Completed college, bachelor degree
- Completed graduate school, masters degree
- Completed professional degree: MD, JD, etc.
- Completed doctoral degree

# VITA

Jamye Foster was born in Aberdeen, Mississippi and grew up primarily in Kailua, Hawaii and San Antonio, Texas. After high school, she moved in with her grandparents (Sarah Kathryn and Ferrell Wilemon) in Mississippi to attend Itawamba Community College. Jamye earned her Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in psychology from Mississippi State University, and then moved to Hattiesburg, Mississippi to complete her Master in Business Administration degree from the University of Southern Mississippi. In August of 2001, Jamye moved to Baton Rouge, Louisiana to begin the doctoral program in marketing at Louisiana State University where she taught consumer behavior for several semesters and principles of marketing through the correspondence program.

Jamye moved to Christchurch, New Zealand and joined the faculty of the University of Canterbury at the end of 2005, where she taught retail marketing and consumer behavior at the undergraduate and graduate level. In January of 2009, she moved back to Hattiesburg, Mississippi to join the faculty of the marketing and fashion merchandising department at the University of Southern Mississippi. She completed the Doctor of Philosophy degree in business administration (marketing) in the Fall of 2009. Her research interests lie in the consumer behavior area, including branding and relationship marketing. She is particularly interested in the consumer-brand relationship.