
Original Article

Exploring social motivations for brand loyalty: Conformity versus escapism

Received (in revised form): 20th January 2011

Lauren I. Labrecque

is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at Northern Illinois University. She completed her PhD in Marketing at the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 2010 and holds a Master's degree in Digital Media Studies from the University of Denver (2003). Her research on branding and interactive marketing appears in leading journals including *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs* and *Marketing Letters*.

Anjala S. Krishen

is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas since 2007. She completed a BS in Electrical Engineering from Rice University in 1990, and an MBA, MS and PhD in Marketing from Virginia Tech by 2007. She worked for 13 years in several companies before completing her PhD. Her research has been accepted in journals including *Journal of Advertising Research*, *European Journal of Marketing* and *International Journal of Retail and Distribution Management*.

Stephan Grzeskowiak

is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Rouen Business School, as well as Visiting Professor at the University of Minnesota. Dr Grzeskowiak has co-authored multiple papers on conceptual and methodological issues in brand management related to retailing, wholesaling and consumer well-being. His research has been published in leading journals including *Journal of Business Research*, *Marketing Letters*, *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing*, *International Journal of Retailing and Distribution Management* and *Journal of Macromarketing*.

ABSTRACT We posit and show that some consumers may remain brand loyal because of their motivation to conform; in contrast, others may do so because of their motivation to break away. Furthermore, we identify two central moderating variables – product knowledge and self-image congruence – that determine how conformity or escapism motivation affects brand loyalty. We show that these common communication goals play an asymmetric role for each motive. In particular, self-image congruence is found to enhance brand loyalty for consumers who are motivated to conform, but not for those who are driven to escape. Alternatively, product knowledge is found to enhance brand loyalty for escapism-motivated consumers, but inhibits brand loyalty for consumers who are bound to conform. Given that both moderators are central to most brand-related marketing communication, the insights of this study will help brand managers better understand the impact of communication goals on brand loyalty and ultimately marketing performance.

Journal of Brand Management (2011) 18, 457–472. doi:10.1057/bm.2011.12;
published online 18 March 2011

Keywords: brand loyalty; escapism; conformity; self-image congruence; social motivation

Correspondence:
Lauren I. Labrecque
Department of Marketing,
College of Business, Northern
Illinois University, DeKalb,
IL 60115-2897, USA

INTRODUCTION

Brand loyalty has been central to marketing research because of its close relationship to marketing performance. Although scholars have identified many drivers of brand loyalty, they have only recently begun to explore the role of social ties among consumers for brand loyalty. For example, consumers may remain loyal to a brand to identify with a brand community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001), negotiate belonging to brand-defined in- and out-groups (Escalas and Bettman, 2005), and form reference group associations (Bearden and Etzel, 1982). Although existing scholarly research investigates consumers’ use of brands to define social ties, it does not address consumers’ underlying motivations for using brands to forge these social ties. We address this gap by identifying two related, but potentially conflicting motivations that determine the nature of the brand–consumer relationship.

Consumers may remain brand loyal because of their motivation to conform to a reference group. Conformity motivation in consumption purchases stems from a need to identify with others through the possession and use of products and brands. As such, people encompass a willingness to conform to the expectations of others, and thus their purchase decisions can be influenced by others (Bearden *et al*, 1989).

Alternatively, a consumer’s desire to break away from his or her present environment may motivate brand loyalty (Hirschman, 1983), where consumers experiencing high levels of stress and dissatisfaction with their social and physical environments may turn to a brand to create comfort or temporary refuge. The marketplace may shape social situations and many consumers find themselves in a tension that provokes a struggle between conforming and breaking away (Kozinets, 2002) in order to create personalized social identities (Holt, 1995). This escape

motivation can be conceptualized as a way of refocusing one’s attention as a means to create fantasies or constructed ‘unrealities’ (Hirschman, 1983) that may allow consumer emancipation and coping from the constraints of individual freedoms induced by a mass-market society (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Henry and Caldwell, 2006) and other life stresses.

Consumers can form attachments to a brand and construct communities based on both conformity and escapism motivations. This study shows that both motivations have a positive influence on brand loyalty. Building on the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and theories of functional versus symbolic advertising appeals (Park *et al*, 1986; Johar and Sirgy, 1991), we identify unique motivational processes for escapism and conformity.

Although both conformity and escapism motivation tie to brand loyalty, they may – depending on the circumstances – vary in their impact. Two moderating variables (that is, product knowledge and self-image congruence) influence how conformity or escapism affects brand loyalty. The present study shows how these moderators have an asymmetric effect on the impact of conformity versus escapism motivation on brand loyalty (see Figure 1).

The findings indicate that although self-image congruity amplifies the effect of conformity motivation on brand loyalty,

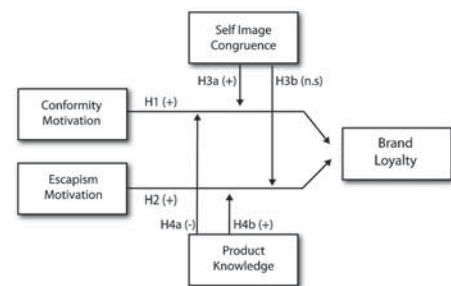


Figure 1: Research model.

it has no effect on the relationship between escapism motivation and brand loyalty. In addition, the results show that although product knowledge increases the strength of the relationship between escapism motivation and brand loyalty, it decreases the strength of the relationship between conformity motivation and brand loyalty. Given that both of these moderators are central to most brand-related marketing communication, the insights of this study may help brand managers better understand the impact of communication goals on brand loyalty and ultimately marketing performance.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Marketers seek to create bonds between consumers and brands in order to foster long-term relationships. Fournier (1998) introduces brand relationship quality as an extension to the traditional concept of brand loyalty. Brand community research has examined how brands can be used as symbols to define group associations (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander *et al.*, 2002) as members consume brands to acknowledge their membership in groups of other like-minded consumers.

Although belonging to a group is often seen as the main motive for consuming brands with social meaning, it is also conceivable that consumers use these brands to disassociate themselves from another social group. For example, immigrants often consume brands that signify their aspiration not only to belong to their new environment, but also to break with their past social ties. Situations in which brand ties relate to an indirect reference group amplify such behavior. Here, membership in a brand community does not require actual social interaction among its members; it can also be solely imagined and experienced (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). In this sense, consumers perceive a sense of community even though they do not directly engage in social interactions with others. In contrast, brand

consumption may also be motivated by a reduction of ties or even an escape from an imagined social group or environment.

Conformity

Belonging is one of five core social motives, the midpoint in Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Fiske, 2004), and essential for group survival. According to Maslow's scheme, the need for belonging is genetic and deep-rooted in our fear of isolation and loneliness; consequently, it appears that we are internally programmed to seek out the company of others. The need to belong can be satisfied by conformity, which can be seen as a product of social influence created from perceived disparity between individual and group views. Choosing to dress according to current fashion trends, following the latest fad diet craze, or using the latest and most popular technology products, are all ways in which a consumer can feel as if she is a part of a group that she aspires to belong to and that she is accepted by its members, thereby fulfilling her need to belong (Miniard and Cohen, 1983; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Conformity to social norms occurs when people lack the time, capacity, or inclination to conduct more effortful processing (Wood, 2000). Early work in the psychology literature focused on this heuristic type of conformity and has been demonstrated by phenomena such as agreeing to the consensus of others in polls (Darke *et al.*, 1998; Fiske, 2004) and matching the self-presentation of others (Vorauer and Miller, 1997). The false consensus effect (Ross *et al.*, 1977) and social projection theory (Krueger, 1998) also demonstrate heuristic biases that lead to thoughts of in-group agreement, thus reinforcing conformity to in-groups (Fiske, 2004).

Escapism

Despite the need to belong, consumers may be motivated to break away from concerns over what others may think of them, how others may act toward them as a function

of their product choices, or a number of other social situations. Products are consumable for experience contexts (Holt, 1995). These product consumption acts create experiences that serve as a means to allow a person to break away from unwanted social realities, even if only temporarily. Chaplin (1999) argues that the age of consumerization and ‘McDonaldization’ leads consumers to live into a cycle of aspiration and habituation, underlying the vicious circle of a work and spend mindset that has become an inescapable ‘nightmare of repetition’ (Cohen and Taylor, 1992, p. 66) for many. Furthermore, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) argue that consumers find themselves subjected to mass-market (conformist)-produced realities that constrain creative roles, identities and freedoms. The desire to emancipate oneself from such constraints can cultivate an escapist motivation. Kozinets (2002) discusses how dissatisfaction with the conformity-driven marketplace can inspire consumers to create new communities devoid of mass marketing’s influence; the need to escape is fulfilled by a temporary refuge, where new markets are created at the Burning Man Festival.

Contrary to literature on escapism in psychology that deals with addiction and substance abuse, there is very little harm in the occasional escape from reality via these routes of consumption and instead it may provide healthy relief for the mind. For example, escapism has been identified as a driving motivation for leisure travel (Rojek, 1993) and research on motivations for sports fandom has found a positive correlation between escapism and sports spectatorship (Wann *et al*, 2004). Further, Henry and Caldwell (2006) discuss escapism as a self-empowerment remedy, which consumers use to cope with powerlessness in the marketplace. The ‘nightmare of repetition’ and daily work stress found in everyday life provide many consumers with a motivation for escapism, which brings

about feelings of disassociation from reality and can provide feelings of both freedom and pleasure (Rojek, 1993).

Dual process models

This dual motivation (that is, conformity versus escapism) of socially meaningful brands may be cast in the tradition of dual process theories that explain decision-making conflicts between the heart and the mind (Shiv and Fedorikhin, 1999), feeling and thinking (Epstein, 1990; Pham *et al*, 2001), memory-based versus stimulus-based choice (Rottenstreich *et al*, 2007) and persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), among others. People’s motives to align with or differentiate from social groups can either yield superficial heuristic processing, or they can yield careful, systematic analysis of relevant information (Wood, 2000). The interplay between the escapism and conformity motives has roots theoretically and looks through the lens of the ELM as a framework for understanding these motivations.

The ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) posits that there are two routes to persuasion. The peripheral route suggests that information processing may occur via an automatic system based on heuristics and source cues. Alternatively, the central route involves a more rational or controlled system. Central route processing suggests that an audience is more involved, perhaps driven by a goal, thus causing increased processing of a message argument because of amplified cognitive elaboration.

On the basis of this discussion, we posit conformity as grounded in the automatic system and escapism as grounded in the rational system. In particular, we believe that escapism motivation is primarily grounded in a conscious, goal-driven decision to resolve existing social discomfort. Here, escapism motivation would require an understanding of brand attributes and how these attributes relate to the escapist goal. On the other hand, heuristic processing

more than cognitive reasoning may drive conformity motivation (Wood, 2000). Social influence theory states that normative influence involves conforming to the expectations of 'the other' by managing the self-concept and building and maintaining relationships (Cialdini and Trost, 1998). Such impression motives associate with superficial processing and temporary judgment shifts (for example, Cialdini *et al*, 1976).

In addition, research on the effectiveness of advertising appeals may shed light on moderating variables. For instance, research on value expressive (image) versus utilitarian (functional) advertising (Spivey *et al*, 1983; Park *et al*, 1986; Johar and Sirgy, 1991) lends support to this framework. Scholarly research has shown that individuals can be classified into groups based on their functional profiles, either utilitarian or value expressive and that the appeal of a brand through marketing communications can be increased when the profile is matched (Spivey *et al*, 1983). The strategy behind a value expressive appeal involves creating a brand personality or focusing on the image of a brand or product user, whereas a utilitarian appeal involves tapping into the functional attributes of consuming the brand or product. Thus, a consumer who is more goal driven (that is, escapism) would focus on the informational attributes that inform her of one or more key benefits of the brand that will help her achieve her goal, whereas a consumer who is more value expressive driven (that is, conformity) would focus on the images of brand users.

Aligning these ideas with the ELM provides evidence that a utilitarian appeal, which focuses on the functional congruity of the brand, can be associated with the central processing route, whereas a value expressive appeal, focusing on image congruity, can be associated with peripheral processing (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). In this case, escapism is a utilitarian attribute endowed by the consumer.

Previous work on escapism finds that dissatisfaction or discomfort with one's current surroundings often triggers this motivation (for example, Hirschman, 1992; Rojek, 1993; Kozinets, 2002). Whether the need to escape a social situation or the need to escape the stresses and anxiety of everyday life, the consumption activity consumers use to achieve the escape is viewable as a rational act (Hirschman, 1992) that helps one feel more in control of themselves and their situation. Hirschman (1992, p. 159) describes the act of consumption itself as 'an effective treatment (that is, medicine) for unhappiness'. This rationale points to escapism as being grounded in high elaboration in which a consumption activity is a means to achieve a desired goal.

Alternatively, consumers with high levels of comfort are more likely to be happy with their current situation and less likely to actively seek out change. Thus, the motivation to conform can largely be seen as a passive state, whereas the motivation to escape can be seen as a more active state.

HYPOTHESES

On the basis of the previous discussion, we propose that the use of a brand for conformity motivation can lead to increased loyalty. As conformity to a group helps fulfill the psychological need to belong (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), consumers who see themselves as part of a group or desire to belong to a group may use a brand associated with that group (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). This in turn will bring about positive association to the brand.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Conformity motivation has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Alternatively, consumers may use a brand to fulfill an escape motive. This escapism behavior can also lead to increased brand

loyalty. When a consumer uses a brand as a means of temporary escape from surrounding societal stresses, the consumer's experience with the brand itself creates feelings of freedom and pleasure (Rojek, 1993). These feelings, created by realizing an escape motivation, may create a psychologically immersive state that leads to full engagement of the individual. In this light, feelings of play and flow may be evoked, creating positive subjective experiences that may lead to positive brand association and purchase intentions (Hausman and Siekpe, 2009). In addition, prior consumer behavior research has linked escapism to increased fandom (Wann *et al*, 2004), museum gallery patronage (Slater, 2007) and motivations for website usage (Mathwick and Rigdon, 2004).

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Escape motivation has a positive effect on brand loyalty.

Moderators

As these two social motivations follow distinct paths that lead to brand loyalty, following arguments based on the ELM (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), we can hypothesize that two central moderating conditions of self-image congruence and product knowledge will affect the strength of these paths. These two moderating variables are central to marketing communications, and thus it is essential to understand their impact on these diverse social motivations.

Self-image congruence

It is one decision heuristic that consumers use to make consumption decisions. Self-image congruence refers to the degree to which consumers evaluate a product's brand image in relation to their actual and ideal self-image (Sirgy *et al*, 1997; Sirgy *et al*, 2008). Research indicates that consumers construct their self and group identity through brand choices based on the congruency between the brand-user group associations and self-

image identification (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Brands and products can be used as symbols to define both the individual self and group associations (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Bosnjak and Rudolph, 2008).

Reference group brand usage can provide meaning to consumers via the association to that group, and thus consumers can define themselves through brand choices based on the congruency between the brand and reference group (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Bearden *et al*, 1989; Escalas and Bettman, 2005). In essence, consumers can form associations between a reference group and its brand usage and transfer meaning from brand to group to self, fulfilling the psychological need to belong (Escalas and Bettman, 2005).

As previously outlined in terms of the ELM, conformity motivation can be aligned to the peripheral route, and thus heuristic cues such as self-image congruence between prototypical brand users and a conformity-motivated consumer will yield a positive effect on brand loyalty. Essentially, image-directed (value-expressive) processing utilizes symbolic cues of group belonging and will reinforce a conformity motivation. Therefore, we propose that self-image congruence will have a moderating effect on the relationship between conformity motivation and brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 3a (H3a): Self-image congruence reinforces the effect of conformity motivation on brand loyalty.

Escapism is a more analytical and rational motivation than conformity, driven by the need to cope with life's tensions and pressures. In fact, individuals may engage in more active processing of brand choices in order to realize this escapism goal and avoid conforming. The impact of self-image congruity on the relationship between escapism motivation and brand loyalty may therefore be weak because consumers are likely to

elaborate on brand attributes and functionality in means of achieving their escapism goal, while ignoring such heuristic-based cues. Thus, heuristic cues are unlikely to influence these escapism-motivated consumers while engaging in high elaboration (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Further, consumers who are motivated by escapism may not only perceive their values as different from those around them (Hirschman, 1983), but may also strive to be in environments that are different from their current surroundings or even their self-image. A brand that represents and matches the consumer's self-image would not achieve this goal.

Self-image congruence does not play a substantial role for the link between escapism motivation and brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 3b (H3b): Self-image congruence does not impact the effect of escapism motivation on brand loyalty.

Product Knowledge

It refers to a consumer's learning about the brand, as well as information regarding evaluative criteria (Lichtenstein *et al*, 1990). Gaining and utilizing knowledge of a brand or product involves increased cognitive elaboration, and thus product knowledge should produce different effects on these two motivations. As conformity motivation follows a peripheral processing route and escapism motivation follows a central processing route, product knowledge is hypothesized to bolster an escapism motivation and attenuate a conformity motivation.

As conformity is a core social motive and associates with peripheral route processing, bringing about heuristic-based, automatically driven choice is appropriate. This perspective means that decisions in this context are more rapid and action oriented, thus reducing the amount of time to make them and the amount of information

processed in so doing. Here, product knowledge is likely not to be accessed and elaborated extensively for brand choice. As a result, brand choices that are motivated by conformity are likely to be less driven by knowledge about the brand and more driven by heuristic cues (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). In fact, increased learning and more product knowledge may prompt added processing and possibly weaken the link between conformity motivation and brand loyalty (Winchester *et al*, 2008). Therefore, product knowledge has a moderating effect on the relationship between conformity motivation and brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 4a (H4a): Product knowledge attenuates the effect of conformity motivation on brand loyalty.

A brand choice motivated highly by escapism requires effortful elaboration and is deliberate. Therefore, product knowledge is likely to facilitate a consumer's ability to realize an escapism motivation. In this manner, escapism motivation stimulates learning about available brand choices. A consumer is likely to have educated herself about the brand in order to understand whether its attributes allow the ability to achieve a desired goal. Accordingly, we propose that in the context of central route processing, an escapism motivation will cause increased elaboration. In short, product knowledge that reinforces the fact that the brand can be used to realize an escapism goal is analogous to strong quality arguments, which lead to increased persuasion in central route processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986).

Hypothesis 4b (H4b): Product knowledge reinforces the effect of escapism on brand loyalty.

EMPIRICAL STUDY

The present study uses the Apple brand to illustrate how conformity and escapism

motivations impact brand loyalty. Past research likens the intense loyalty of Apple to that of a cult, in which members form adoration and attach religious metaphors to the brand and its creators (Belk and Tumbat, 2005). As such, many Apple consumers create their identities around the brand and become motivated to conform to the expectations of the Apple community. At the same time, Apple is viewable as an icon symbolizing escape from corporate capitalism and mass-produced computing. Many Apple enthusiasts praise their 'Think Different' campaign, which positions the brand as unique and creative, thus allowing Apple consumers to separate themselves from what they perceive as a business-centered world (for example, Microsoft and IBM) and corporate-driven conformity. Apple actively cultivates this image through its marketing campaigns. For example, Apple's Lemmings commercial portrayed long lines of blindfolded businesspeople with briefcases in hand, symbolizing non-Apple users, blindly following each other off a cliff and Apple's 1984 Orwellian advertising campaign also illustrates this positioning of breaking away from mass conformity.

To test the research model, data from a convenience sample of 356 undergraduate students enrolled in a US university were collected using a web-based survey. The survey instructions asked respondents to report on their use of Apple iPod music players. Twenty-six respondents who indicated that they did not own such a player were excluded from the sample for a final sample size of 330 responses. The sample included predominately female participants (64 per cent), with a mean age of 21 years and an average length of iPod ownership of 15.5 months.

Undergraduate students are an ideal sample for this study as they most likely face many changing social situations as they transition to college life. The need to make new friends at college may bring about

conformity, whereas the need to break away from parents, home and unwanted social groups at school, along with daily stress, may bring about a longing for escape. Apple's iPod music player is also an ideal product as it can be used conspicuously and is affordable to this group.

Measures

On the basis of construct definitions, the study includes reviewing relevant literature for existing scales and developed new scale items where appropriate (Churchill, 1979) and pretested within the sampling context. The resulting survey instrument consisted of 27 items measuring brand loyalty, escapism motivation, conformity motivation, self-image congruence and product knowledge. A detailed list of scale items, reliability and discriminant validity coefficients are presented in the Appendix and Table 1.

Brand Loyalty: Following Oliver's (1999) conceptualization of brand loyalty, the measure of brand loyalty taps three dimensions: loyalty beliefs, loyalty behavior and action loyalty. The loyalty beliefs construct taps actual or imagined competitive features of the iPod (for example, 'The iPod is of high quality'). Loyalty behavior refers to actual behavior toward the brand (for example, 'I use the iPod very frequently'). Finally, action loyalty measures the respondent's initiative to overcome obstacles for consuming the brand (for example, 'I would go out of my way to use the iPod'). Taken together, these three facets of loyalty were conceptualized to reflect a higher-order factor of brand loyalty.

Escapism Motivation: It refers to the degree to which a person considers using a product to be exciting, allows one to escape from reality, and helps deal with loneliness or unwanted social situations (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999). We

Table 1: Correlation matrix, convergent and discriminant validity

ρ	LOYT	ESCP	CONF	KNOW	SELF	OPNL	SCMT	AVE	
LOYT	—	0.14	0.08	0.09	0.19	0.26	0.06	0.59/0.23/0.62	0.81/0.47/0.83
ESCP	0.37^a	—	0.07	0.02	0.09	0.20	0.09	0.64	0.90
CONF	0.28	0.27	—	0.00	0.23	0.06	0.13	0.49	0.73
KNOW	0.29	<i>0.14^b</i>	0.07	—	0.02	0.22	0.03	0.70	0.90
SELF	0.43	0.30	0.48	0.15	—	0.12	0.10	0.26/0.54	0.51/0.78
OPNL	0.51	0.45	0.25	0.47	0.34	—	0.17	—	—
SCMT	0.25	0.29	0.36	0.17	0.31	0.41	—	—	—
Mean	3.29	2.88	2.91	2.80	2.82	2.30	2.51	—	—
SD	0.74	0.98	0.88	0.96	0.75	0.84	0.85	—	—
No. of items	9	5	3	4	6	6	8	—	—

^aBold correlation coefficients are significant at $P < 0.01$.

^bItalicized correlation coefficients are significant at $P < 0.05$.

Numbers below the diagonal represent correlation coefficients; numbers above the diagonal represent squared correlations; goodness-of-fit indices: $\chi^2=609.53$, $df=308$, $P < 0.00$; CFI=0.95; TLI=0.94; NFI=0.90; RMSEA=0.055, $P(\text{Close Fit})=0.12$.

Abbreviations: AVE=Average Variance Extracted; CONF=Conformity; ESCP=Escapism; KNOW=Product Knowledge; LOYT=Loyalty (three facets); OPNL=Opinion Leadership; SCMT=Social Motivation for Consumption; SELF=Self Image Congruence (two facets).

ρ =Reliability Coefficient.

adapted the measure developed by Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) in the Web usage context slightly to fit our study context. Here, we replaced 'I use the web ...' with 'I use my iPod ...'.

Conformity Motivation: This construct refers to the respondent's concern about adhering to group norms with special regard for what products/brands to buy. For parsimony, we selected three of Kahle's (1995) seven-item scale for our study.

Self-image Congruence: The study includes two dimensions of self-image congruity. The first dimension asked respondents 'Do the typical people who buy iPods match how you see yourself?' The second dimension asked the question 'Do the typical people who buy iPods match how you would like to see yourself?' Each dimension was operationalized in terms of three scale items. Both facets of self-image congruity were conceptualized to reflect an overall congruity between the brand group's self-image and the respondent's

self-image. Scale items were adapted from Sirgy *et al's* (1997) direct measures of self-congruity.

Product Knowledge: We adapted the measure used by Lichtenstein *et al* (1990) to our research context. For example, we changed 'I have a lot of knowledge about how to select the best brand within the product class' to 'I have a lot of knowledge about how to select the best brand of music player to suit my needs'. Four items, measured on a five-point 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree' scale, were used.

Control Variables: Although the research model captures the central mechanisms that drive brand loyalty, some additional constructs were included in the study to rule out alternative explanations and enhance the generalizability of the study findings. Opinion leadership and social motivation for consumption are control variables in the model. Opinion leadership captures the ability to influence others through

communication. Social motivation for consumption takes into account the variation in the importance of what others think. Each control variable was allowed to affect the dependent variable (that is, brand loyalty).

Measure purification and validation

Following the two-step procedure recommended by Gerbing and Anderson (1988), the analysis includes estimating the measurement model before testing the relationships among constructs in the research model. The measurement model consisted of 27 measurement items and seven factors. Overall, the model fits the data well ($\chi^2(308) = 609.5, P = 0.00$; GFI = 0.88, NFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.055, $P(\text{Close}) = 0.12$). All items loaded significantly on their respective constructs providing good support for the convergent validity of the measurement items. In addition, the internal consistency estimates (composite reliability) and the amount of variance extracted for each construct in relation to measurement error meet the acceptable threshold levels (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally, 1994). The composite reliability coefficients all exceed the usual 0.60 standard (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; averaged across sub-dimensions for multi-dimensional measures). Finally, the average variance extracted (AVE) for all of the construct measures exceeded Fornell and Larcker's (1981) 0.50 benchmark (averaged across sub-dimensions for multi-dimensional measures). The study applies the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion to assess discriminant validity.

Table 1 shows that the smallest AVE exceeds the squared correlation between any pair of study constructs, indicating a satisfactory level of discriminant validity. In order to proceed with hypothesis testing, we summed the scale items for each measure into indicators of the study constructs.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for the research variables. The variable means are all below 4 ($M = 2.79$) and the standard deviations for these variables range from 0.74 to 0.98 ($M = 0.86$), indicating a substantial amount of variance in the responses.

Analysis and results

Moderated regression analysis (Aiken and West, 1991) was used for testing the hypothesized relationships in the research model. To mitigate the problem of possible multicollinearity among interaction terms, each construct measure was mean centered before calculating interaction terms (Aiken and West, 1991).

As a result of this procedure, all variance inflation factors in the model were well below the suggested 10.0 cut-off (Mason and Perreault, 1991). Table 2 reports the parameter estimates of the ordinary least squares, moderated regression analysis used to test the hypotheses. The estimated equation explains 36 per cent of the variance in brand loyalty (adjusted $R^2 = 0.36$; $df = 10, 317$; $F = 19.44$; $P = 0.000$).

The results of Table 2 show that although our data do not support hypothesis (H1), that conformity motivation has a positive effect on brand loyalty ($\beta_3 = 0.07, t = 1.64, P = 0.10$), it does support the positive influence of escapism motivation on brand loyalty ($\beta_4 = 0.11, t = 2.87, P = 0.00$; H2).

The essence of H3a and H3b is that self-image congruence will moderate the main effects of conformity and escapism motivation on brand loyalty. The results of Table 2 show support for the theory that motivated both hypotheses. First, we find that self-image congruence moderates the effect of conformity motivation ($\beta_7 = 0.08, t = 2.36, P = 0.02$; H3a). Further, as predicted, we find that self-image congruence does not have a significant influence on the relationship between escapism motivation

Table 2: MLS regression estimates^a

Hypothesis	Independent variable	Regression coefficient ^b	t-value	P-value	Support
Constant	β_0	3.26^c	90.24	—	—
Control variables	β_1 OPNL	0.25	5.53	0.00	—
	β_2 SCMT	-0.04	-1.10	0.27	—
<i>Main effects</i>					
H1	β_3 CONF	0.07	1.64	0.10	—
H2	β_4 ESCP	0.11	2.87	0.00	✓
	β_5 KNOW	0.05	1.39	0.17	—
	β_6 SELF	0.19	4.74	0.00	—
<i>Interaction effects</i>					
H3a	β_7 CONF×SELF	0.08	2.36	0.02	✓
H3b	β_8 ESCP×SELF	-0.06	-1.85	0.07	✓
H4a	β_9 CONF×KNOW	-0.08	-2.57	0.01	✓
H4b	β_{10} ESCP×KNOW	0.07	2.03	0.04	✓
R^2		0.38 ^d	—	—	—

^aDependent variable is loyalty (LOYT).

^bUnstandardized coefficients.

^cBold coefficients are significant at $P < 0.05$; italicized coefficients are significant at $P < 0.10$.

^dAdj. $R^2 = 0.36$.

and brand loyalty ($\beta_8 = -0.06$, $t = -1.85$; $P = 0.07$; H3b). Plotting the interaction term shows that conformity motivation only increases brand loyalty under conditions of high self-image congruence (see Figure 2(a)).

H4a states that conformity motivation couples with product knowledge to have a negative effect on brand loyalty and that conformity motivation may elevate brand loyalty if product knowledge is low. The results include a significant interaction term for conformity motivation and product knowledge ($\beta_9 = -0.08$, $t = -2.57$, $P = 0.01$; H4a). Plotting the interaction term shows that when product knowledge is low, conformity motivation increases brand loyalty (Figure 3(a)). In contrast, if product knowledge is high, conformity motivation does not significantly impact brand loyalty. Our data also support H4b that product knowledge will reinforce the effect of escapism motivation on brand loyalty ($\beta_{10} = 0.07$, $t = 2.03$, $P = 0.04$; H4b). Figure 3(b) shows that the positive effect

of escapism motivation on brand loyalty increases as product knowledge increases. Taken together, H4a and H4b suggest that product knowledge seems to have an asymmetric impact on brand loyalty depending on the motivation underlying product knowledge.

DISCUSSION

Owing to its impact on marketing performance, continuing the study of brand loyalty is essential. Although past research identifies many drivers of brand loyalty, a myriad of other motivations may exist that remain unknown. Although the role of social ties among consumers is a key driver (for example, Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Escalas and Bettman, 2005), other motives such as the desire to counter conformity or to escape current social realities have not been adequately addressed. For instance, although the psychology literature explores escapism motivation, these studies mainly view escapism motivation as a negative defensive mechanism

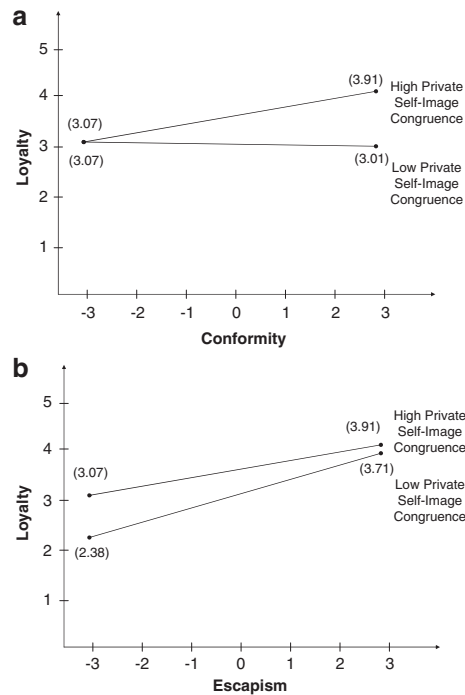


Figure 2: The effects of private self-image congruence on the relationship between escapism motivation, conformity motivation and brand loyalty.

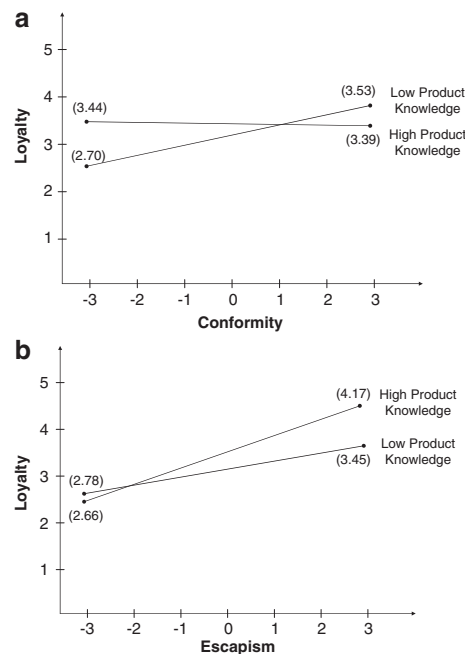


Figure 3: The effects of product knowledge on the relationship between escapism motivation, conformity motivation and brand loyalty.

(for example, in the realm of substance use) and do not examine the motivation in a positive light.

The marketing literature is investigating the role of escapism such as in recent research on website usage (Mathwick and Rigdon, 2004), sports fandom (Wann *et al*, 2004), and community building (Kozinets, 2002). This research paints the motivation as a more common and constructive one exercised by consumers to benefit mental health (for example, stress release). Additional research is necessary to focus on better understanding this motive, as well as other potential social motives and their impact on brand loyalty.

Understanding social motives for brand loyalty is central to building successful brand–user relationships and marketing communications. Prior research largely focuses on cohesion within brand communities as a source for brand loyalty, yet it has neglected the human motivation to break away. The present study shows that marketers need to take both motives into account when designing brand relationship–focused marketing programs. In line with this idea, Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) discuss the importance of consumer heterogeneity in brand communities and suggest that a brand or product can be used by different segments of consumers to fulfill potentially opposing goals.

The present study shows that common communication goals play an asymmetric role for each motive. In particular, self-image congruity is found to enhance brand loyalty for consumers who are motivated to conform, but not for those who are driven by escapism motives. Although Kressmann *et al* (2006) link self-image congruity to brand loyalty, the findings in this study show this relationship is absent for those with an escapism motivation. Alternatively, product knowledge enhances brand loyalty for escapism-motivated consumers, but

inhibits brand loyalty for consumers who are bound to conform to others.

The findings in this study support five of six hypotheses. Although the study's findings fail to support H1, the results are in the right direction (positive). Social desirability bias is a potential reason for the lack of support for this hypothesis.

Implications

The study here focuses on conforming versus escaping motivations in brand–user relationships. However, numerous other social consumer motives exist that are likely to enrich our understanding of the dynamics within brand communities. Further, future research needs to explore additional boundary conditions of the current brand community paradigm. This seems especially important in the context of a potentially conflicting impact on brand–user motives within brand communities as documented in this study.

The main managerial implication of this research is that marketers must be mindful of potentially adverse consequences of advertising messages within brand communities. Understanding the diverse motivations of a brand community is essential to maintaining brand loyalty. Product knowledge has a detrimental effect to those with a conformity motivation, yet product knowledge increased loyalty for those with an escapism motivation.

A marketer may benefit from understanding the motivations that drive different consumers and use this information to match various community motivations, and being cognizant of how various types of communications impact motivations of brand loyalty is essential. This perspective is especially important in the early life cycle stages of a brand community. As brand communities evolve, a shift in communication content is necessary to support and nurture the changing motives within the group and its relationship to the brand.

Limitations and future research

The study here has limitations. Although a student sample is appropriate, additional work using samples of other groups is necessary. Perhaps conformity motivation is higher in younger individuals, but dwindles as one defines herself over time. In addition, differences between collectivist and individualistic cultures should also be investigated. Research may find that individualistic cultures may be less inclined to conform and have a greater motivation to escape; whereas collectivist cultures may encompass a greater need to conform and less of a desire to escape.

This article represents an initial step in the study of the role of escapism and conformity on brand loyalty, and there are many opportunities for future research. For example, this study only examined consumer brand loyalty toward Apple's iPod music players. The Apple brand may be an ideal brand for such a study. Apple is unique in that it both motivations are deeply rooted in the brand. Future research using less iconic brands and different product categories could yield interesting results.

The findings that escapism and conformity lead to brand loyalty have interesting implications for brand community research. This conclusion may allow for a reinvestigation of the present research on brand communities. Learning whether different motivations are inherent in different brands would be interesting. For example, the motivation to be a part of a more active brand, such as the Harley Davidson brand community, may be based on the desire to escape, whereas the motivation to be a part of a more passive brand community may be driven by conformity. Members of the Harley Davidson brand community stress the need to be fully invested into the ethos of the brand, integrating the brand into multiple facets of their lives, participating in community events and not just simply owning a t-shirt, thus making it a very

high-involvement brand relationship. Indeed, Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 50) find that many consume the brand as 'sanctuary in which to experience temporary self-transformation' and use riding as a form of escapism or 'a transcendental departure from the mundane'.

Similar to the riders of Harley Davidson motorcycles, other consumers may use and become connected to brands and their communities for motivations not yet explored in the academic literature. The study here contributes to extant literature by shedding light on other underlying motivations, such as escapism, that drive brand loyalty. Other scholars might consider investigating other motivations to expand understanding of the diverse drivers of brand loyalty.

REFERENCES

- Aiken, L.S. and West, S.G. (1991) *Multiple Regression: Testing and Interpreting Interactions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Bagozzi, R.P. and Yi, Y. (1988) On the evaluation of structural equation models. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 16(1): 74–94.
- Bearden, W.O. and Etzel, M.J. (1982) Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research* 9(2): 183–194.
- Bearden, W.O., Netemeyer, R.G. and Teel, J.E. (1989) Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. *Journal of Consumer Research* 15(4): 473–481.
- Belk, R.W. and Tumbat, G. (2005) The cult of the Macintosh. *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 8(3): 205–217.
- Bosnjak, M. and Rudolph, N. (2008) Undesired self-image congruence in a low-involvement product context. *European Journal of Marketing* 42(5/6): 702–712.
- Chaplin, D. (1999) Consuming work/productive leisure: The consumption patterns of second home environments. *Leisure Studies* 18(1): 41–55.
- Churchill Jr, G.A. (1979) A paradigm for developing better measures of marketing constructs. *Journal of Marketing Research* 16: 64–73.
- Cialdini, R.B., Levy, A., Herman, C.P., Kozlowski, L.T. and Petty, R.E. (1976) Elastic shifts of opinion: Determinants of direction and durability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 34: 663–672.
- Cialdini, R.B. and Trost, M.R. (1998) Social influence: Social norms, conformity, and compliance. In: D.T. Gilbert, S.T. Fiske and G. Lindzey (eds.) *The Handbook of Social Psychology*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, pp. 151–192.
- Cohen, S. and Taylor, L. (1992) *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*. London: Routledge.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000) The costs and benefits of consuming. *Journal of Consumer Research* 27(2): 267–272.
- Darke, P.R., Chaiken, S., Bohner, G., Einwiller, S., Erb, H.P. and Hazelwood, J.D. (1998) Accuracy motivation, consensus information, and the law of large numbers: Effects on attitude judgment in the absence of argumentation. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 24: 1205–1215.
- Epstein, S. (1990) Cognitive-experiential self-theory. In: L.A. Pervin (ed.) *Handbook of Personality Theory and Research*. New York: Guilford Press, pp. 165–192.
- Escalas, J.E. and Bettman, J.R. (2005) Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research* 32(3): 378–389.
- Firat, A.F. and Venkatesh, A. (1995) Libratory post-modernism and the reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research* 22(3): 239–267.
- Fiske, S.T. (2004) *Social Beings: Core Motives Approach to Social Psychology*. New York: Wiley.
- Fornell, C. and Larcker, D.F. (1981) Structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error: Algebra and statistics. *Journal of Marketing Research* 18(3): 382–388.
- Fournier, S. (1998) Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research* 24(4): 343–373.
- Gerbing, D.W. and Anderson, J.C. (1988) An updated paradigm for scale development incorporating unidimensionality and its assessment. *Journal of Marketing Research* 25(2): 186–192.
- Hausman, A.V. and Siekpe, J.S. (2009) The effect of web interface features on consumer online purchase intentions. *Journal of Business Research* 62(1): 5–13.
- Henry, P.C. and Caldwell, M. (2006) Self-empowerment and consumption. *European Journal of Marketing* 40(9/10): 1031–1048.
- Hirschman, E.C. (1983) Predictors of self-projection, fantasy fulfillment, and escapism. *The Journal of Social Psychology* 120: 63–76.
- Hirschman, E.C. (1992) The consciousness of addiction: Toward a general theory of compulsive consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research* 19(2): 155–179.
- Holt, D.B. (1995) How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices. *Journal of Consumer Research* 22(1): 1–16.
- Johar, J.S. and Sirgy, M.J. (1991) Value-expressive versus utilitarian advertising appeals: When and why to use which appeal. *Journal of Advertising* 20(3): 23–33.
- Kahle, L.R. (1995) Observations: Role-relaxed consumers: A trend of the nineties. *Journal of Advertising Research* 35(2): 66–71.
- Korgaonkar, P.K. and Wolin, L.D. (1999) A multivariate analysis of web usage. *Journal of Advertising Research* 39(2): 53–68.

- Kozinets, R.V. (2002) Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man. *Journal of Consumer Research* 29(1): 20–38.
- Kressmann, F., Sirgy, M.J., Herrmann, A., Huber, F., Huber, S. and Lee, D.J. (2006) Direct and indirect effects of self-image congruence on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research* 59(9): 955–964.
- Krueger, J. (1998) On the perception of social consensus. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* 30: 163–240.
- Lichtenstein, D.R., Netemeyer, R.G. and Burton, S. (1990) Distinguishing coupon proneness from value consciousness: An acquisition–transaction utility theory perspective. *Journal of Marketing* 54(3): 54–67.
- Mason, C.H. and Perreault Jr, W.D. (1991) Collinearity, power, and interpretation of multiple regression analysis. *Journal of Marketing Research* 28(3): 268–280.
- Mathwick, C. and Rigdon, E. (2004) Play, flow, and the online search experience. *Journal of Consumer Research* 31(2): 324–332.
- McAlexander, J.H., Schouten, J.W. and Koenig, H.F. (2002) Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing* 66(1): 38–54.
- Miniard, P.W. and Cohen, J.B. (1983) Modeling personal and normative influences on behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research* 10(2): 169–180.
- Muniz Jr, A.M. and O’Guinn, T.C. (2001) Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research* 27(4): 412–432.
- Nunnally, J.C. (1994) *Psychometric Theory*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Oliver, R.L. (1999) Whence consumer loyalty? *Journal of Marketing* 63: 33–44.
- Ouwersloot, H. and Odekerken-Schröder, G. (2008) Who’s who in brand communities – And why? *European Journal of Marketing* 42(5/6): 571–585.
- Park, C.W., Jaworski, B.J. and MacInnis, D.J. (1986) Strategic brand concept–image management. *Journal of Marketing* 50(4): 135–145.
- Petty, R.E. and Cacioppo, J.T. (1986) *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Pham, M.T., Cohen, J.B., Pracejus, J.W. and Hughes, G.D. (2001) Affect monitoring and the primacy of feelings in judgment. *Journal of Consumer Research* 28(2): 167–188.
- Rojek, C. (1993) *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel*. London: Macmillan Press.
- Ross, L., Greene, D. and House, P. (1977) The ‘false consensus effect’: An egocentric bias in social perception and attribution processes. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 13: 279–301.
- Rottenstreich, Y., Sood, S. and Brenner, L. (2007) Feeling and thinking in memory-based versus stimulus-based choices. *Journal of Consumer Research* 33(4): 461–469.
- Schouten, J.W. and McAlexander, J.H. (1995) Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research* 22(1): 43–61.
- Shiv, B. and Fedorikhin, A. (1999) Heart and mind in conflict: The interplay of affect and cognition in consumer decision making. *Journal of Consumer Research* 26(3): 278–292.
- Sirgy, M.J. (1997) Assessing the predictive validity of two methods of measuring self-image congruence. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 25(3): 229–242.
- Sirgy, M.J., Lee, D., Johar, J.S. and Tidwell, J. (2008) Effect of self-congruity with sponsorship on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research* 61(10): 1091–1097.
- Slater, A. (2007) Escaping to the gallery: Understanding the motivations of visitors to galleries. *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 12(2): 149–162.
- Spivey, W.A., Munson, J.M. and Locander, W.B. (1983) Improving the effectiveness of persuasive communications: Matching message with functional profile. *Journal of Business Research* 11(2): 257–269.
- Vorauer, J.D. and Miller, D.T. (1997) Failure to recognize the effect of implicit social influence on the presentation of self. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 73: 281–295.
- Wann, D.L., Allen, B. and Rochelle, A.R. (2004) Using sports fandom as an escape: Searching for relief from under-stimulation and over-stimulation. *International Sports Journal* 8(1): 104–113.
- Winchester, M., Romaniuk, J. and Bogomolova, S. (2008) Positive and negative brand beliefs and brand defection/uptake. *European Journal of Marketing* 42(5/6): 553–570.
- Wood, W. (2000) Attitude change: Persuasion and social influence. *Annual Review of Psychology* 51(1): 539–570.

APPENDIX

Scale items and reliability (Cronbach's α)

All items measured on five-point Likert scales anchored strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Loyalty $\alpha=0.87$

How often do you use your iPod?

1. I am a 'regular' iPod user.
2. I use the iPod very frequently.
3. I always use my iPod.

Do you believe the iPod offers value?

1. My iPod is the best.
2. The iPod is of high quality.
3. Buying the iPod will always satisfy my needs.

Would you go out of your way to use your iPod?

1. I would not switch music players even if it was more convenient.
2. I would pay more for an iPod than for other music players.
3. I would go out of my way to use the iPod.

Escapism motivation $\alpha=0.91$

1. I use my iPod so I can escape from reality.
2. I use my iPod because it stirs me up.
3. I use my iPod because it arouses my emotions and feelings.
4. I use my iPod because it makes me feel less lonely.
5. I use my iPod because it takes me into another world.

Conformity motivation $\alpha=0.74$

1. It is important that others think well of how I dress and look.
2. When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I try to do what others are doing.
3. My friends and I tend to buy the same brands.

Self-image congruity $\alpha=0.91$

Do the typical people who buy iPods match how you see yourself?

1. I can identify myself with the people who own iPods.
2. The typical person who owns an iPod matches how I see myself.
3. The image of the iPod brand is consistent with my self-image.

Do the typical people who buy iPod match how you like to see yourself?

1. People who own iPods are like the person that I like to be.
2. I aspire to be like those who use iPods.
3. The typical person who uses iPods matches how I like to see myself.

Product knowledge $\alpha=0.90$

1. I feel very knowledgeable about the iPod.
2. If friends asked me about MP3 players, I could give them advice about different brands.
3. I feel very confident about my ability to tell the difference in quality among different MP3 players.
4. I have a lot of knowledge about how to select the best brand of MP3 players to suit my needs.

Copyright of Journal of Brand Management is the property of Palgrave Macmillan Ltd. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.