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DYADS, TRIADS AND CONSUMER TREACHERY

When interpersonal connections guard against brand cheating

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Consumers develop committed and meaningful relationships with brands (Fournier 1998), yet still sometimes buy or use options that compete directly with these "relationship partners." Consistent with a relationship metaphorical view of consumer–brand relationships, this activity might be understood as a form of cheating or infidelity, a topic that has been reviewed at length in the interpersonal literature, but is emergent in marketing.

From psychological research, we know that cheating in a relationship where there exists an expectation of exclusivity can be a dramatic event that is typically regarded as a major transgression of norms (Baumeister *et al.* 1994; Whitty 2003). Indeed, interpersonal relationships that are highly committed, satisfying, and important are generally reasonably well protected from cheating behavior (Drigotas *et al.* 1999; Glass and Wright 1985; Buss and Shackelford 1997; Liu 2000).

Turning to brand relationships, what remains to be seen is if and how cheating operates. Do consumer–brand relationship partners adhere to rules of exclusivity? From a behavioral point of view, what does commitment to a particular cherished brand look like? In what ways might cheating manifest itself? Informed by social and consumer psychological research, we report the results of three studies that together examine this nascent area of brand cheating, which we define as the act of buying and/or using a different brand within the same category in which a consumer has a strongly committed relationship with another brand. Notably, this definition does not reflect switching to a new brand on a permanent basis. With brand cheating, the consumer has no intention of undermining or harming the focal brand relationship, but does occasionally "step out" on the favored brand.

Literature

Interpersonal infidelity

Research on human relationships defines infidelity as a "sexual and/or emotional act engaged in by one person within a committed relationship where such an act occurs outside of the primary relationship and constitutes a breach of trust and/or violation of agreed upon norms" (Blow and Hartnett 2005: 191–192). Reflected in this view, infidelity encompasses two components: behavioral (e.g., sexual infidelity) and emotional (e.g., flirting, temptation) (Allen *et al.* 2005; Glass and Wright 1992; Blow and Hartnett 2005; Whitty 2003). This research reflects a distinction between thoughts and actions, though it is fairly common for both to co-exist in the same extra-dyadic pursuit (Thompson 1983; DeSteno and Salovey 1996). The consequences of both types of cheating can be dire, and may include reduced relationship satisfaction and investment, increased divorce proneness, and actual divorce (Drigotas *et al.* 1999; Previti and Amato 2004). The major predictors of infidelity can be categorized into three groups: relational, individual, and situational/contextual.

Relationship factors

Relationship factors increase the risk of infidelity. For example, if relationship partners are dissatisfied, if there is stress and conflict, and if the dyad lacks love and affection, cheating is more likely (Atkins *et al.* 2001; Buss and Shackelford 1997; Previti and Amato 2004; Treas and Giesen 2000; Drigotas *et al.* 1999). However, relationships do not need to be highly unhappy or conflict-ridden for cheating to occur. For example, Atkins *et al.* (2001) shows that married adults who were "not too happy" were almost four times more likely to have extramarital sex than those ones who were "very happy," but those whose marriages were "pretty happy" were still twice as likely to report extramarital sex as "very happy" people. This finding suggests that even people in relatively happy relationships cheat.

Individual factors

Trait characteristics are also linked with infidelity. For example, individuals with low conscientiousness and agreeableness, high narcissism and psychoticism, depleted self-control, or insecure attachment styles are more likely to cheat (Buss and Shackelford 1997; Schmitt 2004; Gailliot and Baumeister 2007; Allen and Baucom 2004), as are previously divorced people and those who married young (Atkins *et al.* 2001; Wiederman 1997). At the other end of the spectrum, people holding non-permissive attitudes toward extramarital sex, those who attend religious services, and those who possess biblical beliefs are less likely to report infidelity and more likely to be sexually exclusive (Burdette *et al.* 2007; Treas and Giesen 2000; Wiederman 1997). There is mixed evidence as to whether and how

gender and age predict infidelity (Allen and Baucom 2004; Atkins *et al.* 2001; Treas and Giesen 2000; Wiederman 1997).

Situational factors

Finally, cheating on a relationship partner is predicted by various situational or contextual factors, such as employment status, workplace opportunities, income, and work-related travel (Atkins *et al.* 2001; Treas and Giesen 2000; Træen and Stigum 1998). Further, availability of alternatives (Saunders and Edwards 1984) and perceived reference group norms (Buunk and Bakker 1995) are also important influences.

Brand cheating

Prior research on services has marshaled evidence of a link between commitment and exclusivity as an indicator of "true" consumer loyalty (Aurier and N'Goala 2010; Walz *et al.* 2012). Specifically, these studies imply that commitment to a given service relationship is associated with enhanced odds of exclusive patronage behaviors and usage, and that such "monogamy" is possible in a service context.

With respect to consumer-brand relationships, it has been suggested that "monogamy" is possible in "committed partnerships" that are governed by rules of exclusivity (Fournier 1998). Similarly, exclusive brand purchasing may be associated with stronger brand attachments (Grisaffe and Nguyen 2011). However, even well-established and popular brands have a hard time protecting themselves against cheating. Consumers frequently exhibit only a weak sense of exclusivity with brands and often have transient or multi-brand loyalties (Fournier 1998; Sung and Choi 2010).

Various types of brand relationships have been proposed, one of which is a brand fling (Alvarez and Fournier 2012), an emotionally intense and identity-pertinent brand relationship of a relatively short-lived nature. Brand flings take on many forms and develop over a distinct cycle, starting with a strong attraction, peaking with substantial resource investment, and then ending. Several other relationship types might seem to be linked to brand cheating, such as secret affairs and one-night stands (Fournier 1998; Ji 2002), but they are nonetheless distinct from what we examine. We start from the position that a consumer has a strong and committed relationship with a focal brand within a certain category and his or her infidelity is not intended to harm that focal brand. Thus, a brand fling or secret affair represents the type of relationship that a cheating consumer might pursue in addition to the committed relationship that is our starting point.

Given the paucity of research on brand cheating, we examined what consumers thought of the issue. We started by exploring various online consumer forums and found mixed results. Importantly, there were starkly contrasting positions on whether brand cheating exists or "counts" as cheating. For example, some customers believed cheating is possible:

"I am in the early stages of cheating on one of the longest-standing relationships of my (consumer) life. I have betrayed Apple."

(Male, www.news.yahoo.com)

"I have a confession to make: I've been cheating on my toothpaste brand."

(Male, www.corebrand.com)

"I have cheated on my silicone free routine since going natural ... My partner in crime is Organix Renewing Moroccan Oil Weightless Healing Dry Oil Spray."

(Female, www.naturallycurly.com)

While the notion of brand cheating certainly resonated among these consumers, others were highly skeptical:

"I don't get the idea of 'cheating.' The primary goal is a product that meets our needs and is not priced over products of the same result and quality."

(Female, www.beautytech.com)

"One really can't 'cheat' on a dive shop."

(Male, www.scubaboard.com)

"The idea that you could even say 'cheating on Apple' is pathetic."

(Male, www.news.yahoo.com)

This suggests that for some customers, brand cheating exists but for others, it is a stretch. Next, we report the results of a study that examines the issue more systematically.

Study 1

Because there is little work on brand cheating, we carried out a study that would allow greater immersion into consumers' thoughts and feelings about the phenomenon. We expected to find mixed perspectives on brand cheating (similar to what we saw in online consumer discussions), as well as other themes.

Method

We carried out a series of phenomenological interviews (Thompson *et al.* 1989) with 20 non-student consumers recruited at a large university (55 percent female; $M_{age} = 34.2$ years). We recruited consumers who self-identified as having at least one brand to which they were strongly committed. Interviews averaged about 30 minutes each. Respondents received $10 for their participation. Respondents were asked at the start of each interview to list at least one or more brands to which they

felt deeply committed. These brands became the focus of our interview. Respondents were asked a series of questions that started broadly (e.g., "tell me the story of one or two very important experiences you had with this brand") and then narrowed (e.g., "would you say that you always try to buy only this brand?") to more closely align with the topic of infidelity.

Results

We started with an idiographic analysis of transcripts (Mick and Buhl 1992; Thompson et al. 1990; Thompson et al. 1994). Recurrent themes were identified based on transcript interpretation, and information from individual brand stories was subsequently considered individually and collectively in light of these themes. Based on these efforts, we uncovered themes that parallel those in the interpersonal literature.

Respondents distinguished between the idea of cheating (e.g., feeling tempted or fantasizing) versus the act of cheating (e.g., actually buying a different brand), a result similar to the emotional and behavioral (physical) infidelity captured by interpersonal research. Another interesting pattern emerged such that even strong and committed brand relationships do not always protect consumers from pursuing alternative brands in the same category. For instance, one respondent who was committed to Blackberry said: "If HTC came out with another phone that was totally cool and innovative and different, then I would look at it ... The loyalty goes so far." This observation seems to parallel findings from the interpersonal literature that even people in happy relationships are susceptible to physical (behavioral) infidelity. Importantly, opportunity factors (e.g., the presence of attractive alternatives) in the branding context seemed to trigger cheating much like it does in interpersonal relationships. As an example, one respondent indicated "I think I'd be more likely to waive the Gap, where there's a market, I think, with more variety ... With the Gap, there are a lot of different alternatives. I can find much the same, probably, product at a lot of low retailers."

Four additional themes emerged:

Brand cheating does not exist

A number of respondents were of the opinion that it is not possible to cheat on a brand. For example, when asked to imagine buying a different brand from her cherished one (Zara), one respondent said "No, I don't think I would feel bad. I would feel OK with it. I don't feel like I would be cheating on Zara." Similarly, another respondent speaking about having bought a brand (Avanti) other than the one she claims to be committed to said "I don't feel like I'm being disloyal to Vichy..." Another respondent said: "I don't think it really counts as cheating, but I wouldn't feel bad if another brand like Adidas or Reebok, for example, if they had a shoe that was on sale or that was of equal good quality that was cheaper. I wouldn't feel bad."

For some, then, the concept of cheating on a brand was a stretch: "I don't feel unfaithful. No. I don't think an item deserves faithfulness."

Monogamous brand relationships

Conversely, many respondents did behave "exclusively" with a focal brand. A number of respondents said that they generally operated within a framework something akin to monogamy. For example, one respondent said "I am loyal and exclusive just to Michael Kors ... For purses and wallets and watches, I stayed just true to Michael Kors. I don't even look at other brands to be honest." Another talked about her general refusal to shop at different retailers: "If I'm looking for something specific and I don't find it there, I usually wait and come back and look again when a new collection comes in. I've steered away from going to other stores, I feel like because I know I'll usually find what I need there, I'll just wait and go back."

Similarly, one respondent explained her exclusive repurchase behavior with Lululemon, "With the yoga wear, there's a sense of exclusivity, because I know what they have, I know that I like it, I know what size I am, I know that I'm not going to be disappointed."

First chance to say no

A third theme we identified is somewhat contrasted to this exclusive view, namely that remaining committed to the brand could be achieved not by *being* exclusive, but by going through certain motions. That is, respondents also talked about their commitment to a particular brand being fulfilled not by buying *only* from that brand, but by essentially giving that brand the first chance to satisfy their needs.

For example, "Yes, definitely that would be my first choice that I would go in there and check for availability of things that I'm looking for. If it's not there, then I would try other places." Similarly, another said of her brand, Zara: "Yeah, that's what usually happens. Zara is the first place and everything else is the second option." Still another indicated that "if I had a choice, I would always choose [Starbucks]. I mean, if I were somewhere where they didn't have a Starbucks, then yeah, I would go someplace else." Finally, one expended "quite a bit of effort to start there [Sandro] if I am specifically looking for something," while another said, "I always look to Nike first before something else." Two other respondents said, "I'll always give them that courtesy. Go in and see what they [Honda] have to offer," and that "I would probably look at North Face first and exhaust those options before I would consider something else." This idea seems to capture some aspect of "a right of first refusal," whereby the committed consumer will go first to the focal brand and, then, will move on only after that attempt fails.

Interpersonal connections

We also detected a pattern that emerged from looking across the findings on cheating, exclusivity, and a right of first refusal: more of the respondents who seemed to believe both that cheating was possible and that rules of exclusivity might apply to consumer-brand relationships also talked about the brand relationship facilitating an interpersonal relationship. For example, one brand seemed to be a relationship "enabler" for a particular respondent and her sister:

> "For Michael Kors, it's actually a little thing I have with my sister. It started a few years ago. We just went to the States, and we went into one of his stores and just fell in love with their product and have been loyal ever since … It's something I share with my sister. We usually go shopping at the same time. It's a special time that we always share together like a sister time. We enjoy it. We go through their websites together. We go on special trips to the States together. Our purpose is specifically for Michael Kors. It's just something that I enjoy to do with my sister. It's a special bonding time we have … I am loyal and exclusive just to Michael Kors. Something in my head is set to that level with Michael Kors. It's just like exclusive to me."

Our interpretation is that the brand helps to strengthen the respondent's relationship with her sister and thus that the relationship with the brand is a means to that interpersonal end. Another example involved a mother talking about her exclusive relationship with a particular food brand because of her child:

> "The Jif peanut butter started out because my son likes peanut butter and he only likes this one brand … He would only eat that peanut butter, and then we started eating it because we were buying it and we actually got to like it better … It's attached to my son … We're only eating Jif. Now, if I'm at a restaurant, if they didn't have Jif, which they don't tend to, I would just not eat peanut butter … If Jif peanut butter wasn't available, I wouldn't eat peanut butter. I just would eat something else."

In this case, the respondent's commitment to the brand has a lot to do with her son. The fact that the brand is associated with an important person means a lot to her. This theme of exclusivity is further reflected in the narrative of another respondent talking about a sports brand: "Growing up I was an athlete. I played competitive basketball and that sort of thing … My family was all Nike wearers … I always felt like I was betraying Nike when I was younger wearing an Adidas shirt or something like that." The respondent juxtaposes Nike as the "family" brand and feelings of betrayal that would arise from using a competing brand.

Conversely, respondents spoke about brands where there was no third party involvement and reflected an attitude that it would be fine to buy competing brands. They would not feel "remorse or anything at all" or "like I was betraying

anyone." One such example was "If your family is working in Ford, you stay with Ford. I'm not like that. I have no relations to Honda. The only thing they've done good to me is give me a good product, a reliable product over the years, which I wanted and they owned up to it."

These results suggest that some consumers feel like cheating on a brand is possible and that rules of consumer-brand exclusivity may exist and be linked to involvement of a third party. We take this as preliminary evidence that "triadic" brand relationships might buffer against brand infidelity due to the social capital associated with that interpersonal relationship, while "dyadic" brand relationships are less constrained and preclude exclusivity expectations. A triadic brand relationship is one that implicates an interpersonal third party (i.e., some form of interpersonal bond) whereas a dyadic brand relationship implicates only the consumer and the brand.

Dyadic vs. triadic brand relationships

Relationship theorists have pointed out that brands may be either ends unto themselves, or a means to maintaining interpersonal bonds (e.g., Fournier 2009). That is, consumers form relationships both directly and solely with brands, and also with other people who are fans of the brand (Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Thomson et al. 2005). The distinction seems to parallel our qualitative result concerning triadic versus dyadic consumer-brand relationships.

We theorize that in the branding context, the interpersonal relationship facilitated by the brand relationship may help to protect against cheating. In buying or using a competing brand in the same category, a person involved in a "triadic" brand relationship may feel as if she is betraying a person who is important to them. Conversely, when a brand relationship is dyadic, consumers may not think interaction with the brand is governed by norms of exclusivity, making emotional or behavioral "cheating" more likely.

Study 2

We conducted a survey of consumers to investigate the possibility that the involvement of a third party – an interpersonal link associated with the consumer and the brand – might help protect that committed brand relationship from infidelity.

Method

We conducted an online survey with 175 adult respondents using a private research panel (55 percent female; M_{age} = 52.2 years). After collecting covariates (age, gender, materialism), we next asked respondents to name a brand "that is very important to you and that you are committed to buying and using in the future." After listing the self-selected brand, respondents completed three measures of

relationship strength: one measure of commitment (Fletcher *et al.* 2000), and two measures of attachment (Thomson *et al.* 2005; Park *et al.* 2010).

Respondents then answered six questions intended to assess interpersonal connection, the degree to which a third party was involved with their brand relationship (e.g., "Using this brand provides me a sense of contact with people who care for me and whom I care for"; see Appendix 15.1), followed by measures of brand substitutability (e.g., "It would be relatively easy for me to replace this brand with a new one"), monogamy (e.g., "Using a brand within the same product or service category as [brand] would be wrong"), a right of first refusal (e.g., "I always start with looking at [brand] first before I look at any other brand in the same product or service category"), emotional cheating (e.g., "How often do you fantasize about using or buying other brands...") and behavioral cheating (e.g., "Other than [brand], how many different brands in the same product or service category have you *actually used or bought* in the past 12 months?"). Based on respondent feedback, we also coded for whether the brand represented a product or service. The analysis included three other covariates (age, gender, and materialism). Using Structural Equation Modeling, we constructed a model using latent measures in AMOS (all associated Cronbach alphas > 0.84) with missing values imputed and ML bootstrapping (1,000 iterations). We started with a saturated model, with a right of first refusal, emotional cheating, and behavioral cheating as the outcomes, and retained paths if $p < 0.10$. The results below reflect the final model (*Chi-sq.* = 1147.94; *DF* = 486; *CMIN/DF* = 2.36; *CFI* = 0.86; *RMSEA* = 0.09).

Results and discussion

Respondents reported having generally strong relationships with their selected brands. For example, the average commitment score was 5.47 (on a 7-point scale) and the average attachment score ranged from 4.59 to 5.09 (depending on which metric is used). These results suggest that consumers were cheating on a strong and committed relationship as opposed to contemplating exiting permanently to a different brand.

Relationships that had higher scores on interpersonal connection were stronger ($\gamma = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$) and more closely linked with monogamous expectations ($\gamma = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$), which in turn influenced perceptions of the brand as lacking substitutes ($\gamma = -0.33$, $p = 0.05$). Thus, it seems that triadic relationships simultaneously bolster brand relationships and provide a protective perception of rarity or irreplaceability. This perception that the focal brand is less substitutable itself impacts a right of first refusal ($\gamma = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$). Those who gave a particular brand this right of first refusal were much less likely to engage in emotional cheating ($\gamma = -0.44$, $p < 0.01$), while more materialistic people were more likely to engage in emotional cheating ($\gamma = 0.17$, $p < 0.01$). Behavioral cheating was predicted only by emotional cheating ($\gamma = 0.63$, $p < 0.01$) and whether the brand was product- (=0) or service- (=1) oriented ($\gamma = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$).

TABLE 15.1 Study 2 summary statistics and correlations

Construct	Summary Statistics			Correlation Matrix									
	M	SD	alpha	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) Commitment	5.47	1.19	0.96										
(2) Attachment (Thomson et al.)	5.09	1.24	0.93	**0.76**									
(3) Attachment (Park et al.)	4.59	1.39	0.90	**0.62**	**0.75**								
(4) Monogamy	3.76	1.39	0.94	**0.26**	**0.32**	**0.40**							
(5) Materialism	3.53	1.21	0.90	0.11	**0.20**	**0.24**	0.06						
(6) Interpersonal	3.51	1.63	0.92	**0.41**	**0.58**	**0.66**	**0.47**	**0.16**					
(7) Difficulty Replacing	4.25	1.42	0.86	**0.26**	**0.34**	**0.41**	**0.44**	0.13	**0.45**				
(8) Emotional Cheating	2.83	1.53	0.91	-0.04	0.12	0.10	0.10	**0.19**	**0.25**	-0.10			
(9) Behavioral Cheating	2.84	1.91	0.95	0.02	0.04	0.00	-0.11	0.14	0.11	-0.17	**0.63**		
(10) Right of First Refusal	4.87	1.26	0.80	**0.20**	**0.19**	0.12	0.03	**-0.22**	0.05	**0.20**	-0.13	-0.02	

Note: **Bold** = $p < 0.05$
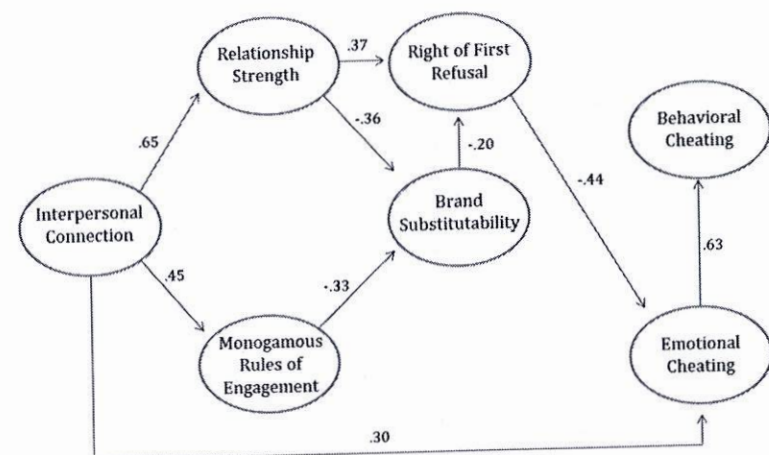
Results of ML Bootstrapping (iterations = 1,000) analysis; *Chi-sq.*= 1147.94; *DF*= 486; *CMIN/DF*= 2.36; *CFI*= .86, *RMSEA*= .09; all paths *p* < .05; Materialism (covariate) impacts Emotional Cheating (γ = .17, p< .02); Brand Type dummy (0 = product; 1 = service) impacts Behavioral Cheating (γ = .24, p< .01); all other covariates (age, gender) are not significant.

FIGURE 15.1 Study 2 SEM results

While all of these results broadly confirm that triadic consumer–brand relationships help to prevent cheating and reinforce a right of first refusal by virtue of monogamous expectations, we also found an unexpected positive effect. Namely, increasing scores on interpersonal connection were linked directly to increased emotional cheating (γ = 0.30, p< 0.01). This result was unexpected and seems to suggest that there is something about a consumer–brand relationship involving a third–party that encourages flirting with other brands. It is fairly clear that there is some form of unmeasured moderator that would help to explain why this interpersonal connection variable sometimes protects against cheating and, at other times, seems to facilitate emotional cheating.

Study 3

We undertook Study 3 to probe the unexpected main effect from Study 2 that increasing interpersonal connection predicted increased emotional cheating. We carried out an experiment on MTurk (n = 292) in which we manipulated whether the focal brand that respondents self-selected was connected to other people:

Now, we want you to think about a specific brand that you are committed to buying and using in the future and that you generally use alone [with other people in mind]. That is, when you think about or use this brand, it does not link you in any way to other people (e.g., family, friends) – it's just

yours [it links you in some way to other people (e.g., family, friends) – it's something you share].

In addition to measuring all the same constructs as we did in Study 2 (in much the same manner), we made two changes: first, based on an examination of Study 2 results, we noted that the people associated the chosen brands also varied on another dimension: time. Specifically, we noted that the interpersonal relationships varied in their time orientation (i.e., with some occurring in a person's past while others were contemporary and ongoing). So, we speculated that the time-orientation of the associated relationship might matter. We assessed this idea using multi–item measures of the past (e.g., "Reminds me of an important friend from my past"; α = 0.81), present (e.g., "Reminds me of a person who is important to me now; α = 0.82) and future (e.g., "Will help me carry on a tradition"; α = 0.75) relationship orientation. Second, we included a measure of need for belonging (e.g., "I do not like being alone"; α = 0.89) to see if this might add explanatory power. In most other respects, Study 3 paralleled Study 2. See Appendix 15.1 for details about the measures.

Results and discussion

All measures showed reasonable reliability (α > 0.75). We analyzed the results using Process macro (Hayes 2012; model 8, moderated–mediation). Since our focus is on understanding the direct effect of interpersonal connection on emotional cheating, we included all the other variables contemplated in Study 2 (e.g., relationship strength, monogamy) as covariates in order to account for their variance. Figure 15.2 shows the specific approach.
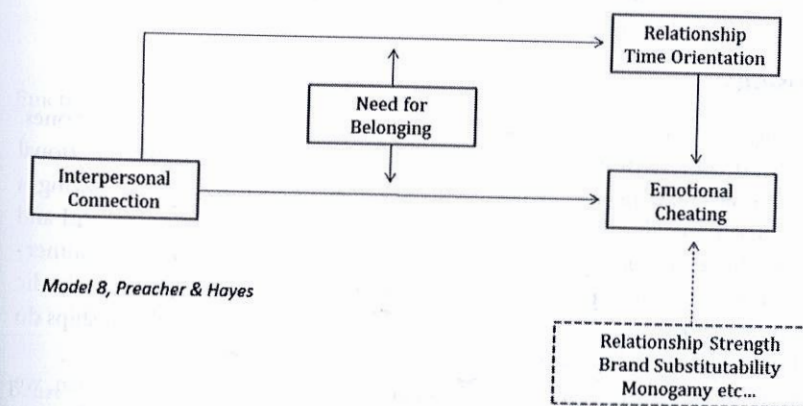

Model 8, Preacher & Hayes

FIGURE 15.2 Study 3 model

Our initial analysis revealed that the past and present orientation of the associated relationships had no impact on emotional cheating. Future orientation, however, did have an effect, but in a manner that insinuated a need for belonging (NFB). The results are as follows:

(a) Among respondents with low levels of need for belonging, increased interpersonal connection significantly reduced emotional cheating (i.e., the conditional direct effect was only significantly negative when NFB was low).

(b) Among those with high NFB, the indirect path from interpersonal connection to emotional cheating through future orientation was significantly positive (i.e., the conditional indirect effect was positive and the confidence interval did not contain zero only when NFB was high).

These results confirm that the relationship between interpersonal connections and emotional brand cheating may operate differently as a function of differences in levels of need for belonging. The fact that increased interpersonal connection significantly reduced emotional cheating only among respondents with low levels of need for belonging seems to suggest that, for this group of consumers, brands that are able to become facilitators of important interpersonal relationships may qualify for a kind of "special status." If people who generally do not experience high levels of need for belonging experience strong bonds with other people – with brands playing the role of facilitators of such bonds – the brands that they use may be somewhat insulated from emotional cheating. Conversely, the fact that increased interpersonal connection increases emotional cheating among respondents with high levels of need for belonging (through future orientation) suggests that brands used by this group of consumers do not enjoy similar levels of protection from emotional cheating. Indeed, it suggests that a consumer may use other people as a conduit for experimenting with new brands, perhaps based on their potential meanings or other related aspirations.

Conclusions

Our findings suggest that triadic brand relationships are different from dyadic ones. The involvement of a third party can, to some extent, protect against emotional and behavioral cheating, and reinforce a focal brand's special status as having a "right of first refusal". For certain consumers, brands are a means to an end and help to facilitate important interpersonal relationships. Such triadic consumer-brand relationships are guided by expectations of monogamy, while dyadic relationships are ends to themselves. Consumers involved in dyadic relationships do not feel it is "wrong" to fantasize about or buy competing brands.

There is, to date, little work on brand cheating. Through our investigation, we have introduced a framework and empirical results that will hopefully inspire additional research. Our findings offer insight to marketers who wish to position their brands within an existing interpersonal relationship.

Appendix

APPENDIX 15.1 Key Measures

Monogamy	Using a brand within the same product or service category as XYZ would be wrong.
	When I think about other brands in the same product or service category that XYZ is in, it is important to me that I only use or buy XYZ.
	If I bought a brand apart from XYZ in the same product or service category, I would feel guilty.
	If I bought a brand apart from XYZ in the same product or service category, I would feel uncomfortable.
	If I bought a brand apart from XYZ in the same product or service category, I would feel embarrassed.
	If I bought a brand apart from XYZ in the same product or service category, it would be a betrayal.
Interpersonal Connection	XYZ helps me feel closer to my friends and family.
	Using XYZ provides me a sense of contact with people who care for me and whom I care for.
	XYZ will always remind me of a particular important person in my life.
	When I use or think about XYZ, it really reminds me of the people I care about.
	XYZ helps me get love and affection from people I care for.
	Using XYZ is a good way to reinforce the relationships I have with certain people.
Difficulty Replacing	It would be relatively easy for me to replace XYZ with a new one.
	The kinds of qualities XYZ has are ones that I can easily find in another brand.
	XYZ does things for me that would be hard to replace.
	I doubt I could ever find another similar brand to XYZ.
	XYZ is truly unlike any other.
	XYZ has no substitute.
Emotional Cheating	In the past year, how often have you imagined using or buying other brands in the same product or service category as XYZ?
	In the past year, how often have you fantasized about using or buying other brands in the same product or service category as XYZ?
	In the past year, how often have you become excited about using or buying other brands in the same product or service category as XYZ?
	In the past year, how often have you been tempted to use or buy other brands in the same product or service category as XYZ?
Behavioral Cheating	Other than XYZ, how many different brands in the same product or service category have you actually used or bought in the past 12 months?
	Other than XYZ, how many different brands in the same

product or service category do your foresee using or buying during the next 12 months?

Other than XYZ, how many different brands in the same product or service category do you foresee using or buying on one and only one occasion during the next 12 months?

Right of First Refusal   I would try another brand in the same product or service category only when I made sure that XYZ is not able to offer me what I need.

I always start looking at XYZ first before I look at any other brand in the same product or service category.

I always consider XYZ first, and only after that I may consider other brands in the same product or service category.

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16

THIS BRAND IS JUST NOT THAT INTO YOU

Exploring the role of firm integrity in how consumers react to customer firing

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Building consumer-brand relationships has been a central marketing paradigm for decades (Fournier 1998; Palmatier *et al.* 2006). The sophistication of customer relationship management (CRM) provides numerous organizational benefits, but its increasing analytical power also prompts novel ethical challenges. Firms analyze customer profitability more than ever and might *actively dissolve* relationships with consumers who fall short of profit metrics or require disproportionate resources (Mittal *et al.* 2008). For instance, in 2007, Sprint-Nextel terminated more than 1,000 customers who called its customer service too frequently. Internet-bank ING Direct closes 3 to 4 percent of accounts a month, finding it cost-prohibitive to maintain customers requiring high levels of attention (Pasha 2005). Even in medical services, provider-initiated relationship dissolution is increasing, as some doctors stop treating unprofitable Medicaid patients (Bishop *et al.* 2011).

In parallel, business publications also suggest that firms terminate relationships with undesirable customers; for instance, *Harvard Business Review* featured "It's Time to Fire Some of Your Customers" (Tjan 2011), and *Businessweek-Bloomberg* featured "Save Your Company by Firing Your Customers" (Schmitt 2011). Although initial work supports abandoning unprofitable customers (Hänlein *et al.* 2006), little research has examined *Firm-Initiated Relationship Ending* (FIRE) – the steps taken by a firm to dissolve a relationship – and its impact on consumers (except Johnson *et al.* 2011, Study 3). Whether FIRE should become managerial practice depends, partly, on how consumers react to it. Most firms profess to be customer-oriented, because customer-orientation is usually profitable. However, firms that fire customers may violate ethical principles of CRM, which "is inherently an ethical activity," because relationships cannot be "sustained without a solid moral foundation" (Murphy *et al.* 2007: 38). Indeed, Mittal *et al.* (2008: 99) emphasize that "ethical and legal issues can arise when companies decide to divest customers"