

The Use of Cues Depends on Goals: Store Reputation Affects Product Judgments When Social Identity Goals Are Salient

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The role that a given cue plays in consumer judgments depends on the motive that is salient for the consumer. We focus on store reputation as a cue whose utilization can depend on salient goals. Research has suggested that store reputation does not influence product judgments when brand and price information are available. In 3 experiments, however, we show that when social identity goals are salient or are perceived as relevant to the product, store reputation (because it conveys image-relevant information) is used in evaluations of product quality. Specifically, store reputation has an impact on product judgments when either (a) consumers' social-image goals are directly heightened or (b) an interdependent self-construal, characterized by a greater concern with social identity, is salient. The role of product type in moderating these effects is also examined.

Federated Department Stores Inc. recently announced that hundreds of stores they acquired in their takeover of the May Company would soon have their names changed to Macy's. This move will affect many stores with venerated regional names, such as Marshall Field's, Lazarus, and Famous-Barr. No changes were announced in the merchandise to be sold at these stores.

How should consumers evaluate the quality of the products sold at a given store? Products are open to multiple interpretations of quality (Ha & Hoch, 1989; Hoch & Ha, 1986), perhaps because consumers use different cues in making judgments. Research has classified cues as being criterial (e.g., Hutchinson & Alba, 1991) or diagnostic (e.g., Dick, Chakravarti, & Biehal, 1990; Purohit & Srivastava, 2001), based on the extent to which the cues pertain to the central nature of a product. Generally, past studies converge on the notion that the utilization of cues that are not criterial or diagnostic results from low levels of

consumer expertise, involvement, or processing capacity and leads judgments of a product to be error-prone (e.g., Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). In this type of analysis, cues such as store name would represent irrelevant information to be ignored in product evaluation.

The classification of cues into criterial versus noncriterial categories is an important theoretical issue in the consumer research literature, somewhat paralleling the classification of message elements into peripheral versus central categories in persuasion research (see Shavitt, Swan, & Lowrey, 1994). However, a priori classifications may often be somewhat arbitrary. The role that a given variable plays in consumer judgments or evaluations can depend on the type of motive that is salient for the consumer (e.g., Chaiken, Liberman, & Eagly, 1989; Shavitt, 1990). Any cue or type of information can have an impact on consumers' judgments when it addresses their salient goals.

In this article, we focus on store reputation as a specific example of a variable whose impact increases when it addresses one's salient goals. We argue that when social identity goals are salient, image-relevant information (such as store reputation) will be used as input to evaluations of product quality. This proposal is examined by directly heightening social identity goals (Experiment 1), by indirectly acti-

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vating these goals via priming interdependent versus independent self-construals (Experiments 2 and 3), and by examining product differences in the tendency to spontaneously engage social identity goals (Experiment 2). We show that the salience of social identity goals only affects the use of store reputation in product evaluation and does not influence the use of information that has few implications for social identity.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Role of Store Reputation in the Evaluation of Product Quality

Our hypotheses run contrary to the findings of previous studies. Extensive research has indicated that store reputation has a minimal effect on perceived quality when it is presented with other information such as price and brand name (e.g., Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991; Rao & Monroe, 1989; Teas & Agarwal, 2000). This suggests that store reputation is unlikely to be utilized as “critical” information in evaluating the quality of a product. This view, however, assumes that consumers’ evaluations of a product’s quality are based primarily on utilitarian aspects of a product such as durability or workmanship (the attributes assessed in typical measures of perceived quality; see Teas & Agarwal, 2000). The cues that are less relevant to utilitarian aspects of a product (e.g., store reputation) have been considered as less critical.

However, recent research suggests that consumers perceive quality to vary over a broad set of dimensions. The extent to which consumers can manage their social identity through a product is one such dimension (i.e., the prestige dimension; Brucks, Zeithaml, & Naylor, 2000). Using qualitative and experimental methods, Brucks et al. (2000) established this consumer-based typology across multiple categories of durable goods (including microwaves, furniture, and consumer electronics). They demonstrated that consumers see certain product-related features (price and brand name) as more relevant to evaluating prestige than to evaluating other indexes of quality such as durability or performance. They noted that a prestigious product can fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego identification (i.e., symbolic or social identity needs; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Shavitt, 1990). Building on this broader, consumer-driven definition of quality, we propose that when consumers are motivated to manage and enhance their social identities, the image-related aspects of products will become the focus of consideration for quality judgments. Accordingly, cues that can address social identity goals, such as store reputation, will be used in making judgments of product quality.

Previous studies suggest that stores can carry social identity information. For example, consumers pursue symbolic

congruency between their self-concept and retail environments (Sirgy, Grewal, & Mangleburg, 2000) and are influenced by store design cues when making merchandise quality judgments (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002). In other words, consumers sometimes associate a store they patronize with the image or identity they present rather than simply viewing it as the place to purchase a product. When evaluating products, consumers may sometimes be concerned with their social identity, and therefore, with the image conveyed by the products. Under these conditions, they may be influenced by the favorability of a store’s reputation in evaluating the quality of products that are sold there.

To investigate this possibility, Experiment 1 directly examined the role of social identity goals in store reputation effects. If indeed consumers are influenced by store reputation because it addresses social identity concerns, then we hypothesize as follows:

- H1: Directly activating consumers’ social identity goals should increase the use of store reputation in evaluating product quality.

Interdependent Self-Construal and Social Identity Goals

Salient self-construals may be important in determining the degree to which consumers are concerned with their social identity when making their product judgments. When an independent self-construal is salient, people view themselves as distinct from others and are relatively concerned with pursuing their own goals. In contrast, when an interdependent self-construal is salient, people view themselves as interconnected with others and accordingly are relatively attentive to others’ preferences, strive to fit in, and are strongly influenced by others’ behaviors and thoughts (Mandel, 2003; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995; Triandis & Suh, 2002). Accordingly, we expect that when an interdependent compared to an independent self-construal is salient, consumers will be more concerned with the favorableness of their social identity. Therefore, they will be more interested in information that could reflect on their social identity than they are when an independent self-construal is salient (Ho, 1976; Triandis & Suh, 2002; Trilling, 1972).¹ In the context of considering a purchase, store reputation offers information relevant to one’s social identity (Schlosser, 1998; Sirgy et al., 2000), and thus should be more likely to influence product evaluation when social identity criteria are salient.

- H2: Store reputation will have a greater impact on product judgments when an interdependent self-construal is

¹It is important to note that such effects would not require the presence of an audience. Even imagined audiences can activate relevant personal goals and self-presentational scripts (Schlenker & Wowra, 2003; Shah, 2003).

salient than when an independent self-construal is salient.

Products differ in the goals they serve and thus in the criteria that are seen as relevant to evaluating them (Adaval, 2001; Shavitt, 1990). Indeed, Brucks et al. (2000) showed that consumers weight dimensions of quality differently, depending on product category. Thus, the nature of the product should moderate the extent to which consumers' salient goals or self-construals influence the impact of store reputation on product quality judgments. For relatively symbolic products (i.e., products that elicit relatively more concerns about self-other relationships and the expression of the self-concept, such as clothes or shoes), social identity criteria should spontaneously be viewed as relevant by all consumers. Therefore, even consumers whose independent self-construal is salient will use store reputation for evaluating such products, and thus the effect of self-construal on the use of store reputation may not emerge. In contrast, for products that are not especially symbolic (e.g., microwaves), social identity criteria are not spontaneously considered to be relevant for product evaluation. Therefore, social identity criteria will be considered relevant only when consumers are induced to be concerned about other people's views, for example, by a salient interdependent self-construal. In sum, the effect of self-construal on the use of store reputation will be larger for products that are less symbolic.

H3: Store reputation will have a greater influence on evaluations of a relatively nonsymbolic product when an interdependent self-construal is salient than when an independent self-construal is salient. However, store reputation will influence evaluations of a symbolic product regardless of the salience of self-construals.

This hypothesis has implications not only for when store reputation will have an effect but also for when it will not. That is, it will not have an effect if an independent self-construal is salient and consumers judge a less symbolic product. This can explain the null effects of store reputation reported in previous studies. That is, earlier studies were conducted mainly in the United States, where self-construals are likely to be chronically independent (Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1995). Moreover, these studies mainly employed less symbolic products such as small electronic appliances. These characteristics of the earlier studies may account for why store reputation did not appear to influence consumers' evaluations of product quality. Consistent with this account, the effect sizes of store reputation on product quality judgment reported by Dodds et al. (1991, p. 310, Table 1) are consistently greater for relatively symbolic products such as shirts, suits, and aftershave lotions than for more utilitarian products such as electric toothbrushes, tape recorders, or desk radios.

We have argued here that consumers use store reputation in product evaluation when social identity goals are salient because store reputation conveys image-relevant information. However, a salient interdependent self-construal should not influence the use of information that is irrelevant to consumers' social identity. That is, a salient interdependent self-construal should influence the use of store reputation information but not the use of image-irrelevant information in evaluation of a product. Such a result would add converging evidence for our account of the processes driving the predicted effects.

H4: A salient interdependent self-construal will affect the use of product information that is relevant to consumers' social identity goals, but not the use of product information that is irrelevant to those goals.

EXPERIMENT 1

This experiment evaluated Hypothesis 1. Specifically, we directly activated a focus on either (a) the impression one makes on important others or (b) utilitarian concerns regarding products' functional features, performance, or durability. Store reputation was expected to affect product evaluation only when social identity concerns were salient.

Method

Pretest. To select stores with relatively positive versus negative reputations, 67 participants were recruited for extra credit in introductory business courses. Participants rated the favorableness of the reputations of several stores along scales from -3 (*extremely unfavorable*) to 3 (*extremely favorable*). Based on the mean judgments as well as the fit between their merchandise lines and our stimulus product (microwaves), Kmart was selected as the store with a negative store reputation ($M = -1.06$) and Marshall Field's was selected as the store with a positive reputation ($M = 1.72$), $F(1, 66) = 210.83$, $p < .001$.

Participants and design. Eighty-eight undergraduate students participated in return for extra credit in introductory business courses. They were randomly assigned to conditions composing a 2 (goals: social identity vs. utilitarian) \times 2 (store reputation: Kmart vs. Marshall Field's) design.

Stimuli. Participants were asked to evaluate a microwave at a given price and brand name, with store reputation manipulated. Marshall Field's and Kmart represented positive and negative stores, respectively. Price and brand name information were held constant (\$80 and GE, respectively) to avoid conditions in which the valence of the brand name or price was sharply inconsistent with that of store reputation.

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Product Evaluations as a Function of Salient Goals and Store Reputation (Experiment 1)

| | <i>Social Identity Goal</i> (<i>N</i> = 44) | <i>Utilitarian Goal</i> (<i>N</i> = 44) |
|------------------|---|---|
| K-Mart | 4.28 (1.59) | 4.64 (.90) |
| Marshall Field's | 5.18 (1.26) | 4.55 (.91) |

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

Procedure. First, participants completed a questionnaire that was intended to heighten the salience of either social identity or utilitarian goals (Shavitt & Fazio, 1991). In the social-identity goal condition, participants considered 20 impression-relevant behaviors (e.g., buying a convertible sports car, gaining weight). For each item, they were asked to imagine themselves performing the behavior and to rate whether it would make a positive impression on their friends and classmates along a scale from 1 (*won't make a good impression at all*) to 5 (*will make a very good impression*). In the utilitarian goal condition, participants rated the importance of 20 product features (e.g., the accuracy of a thermometer, a pair of sunglasses' UV protection) along a scale from 1 (*not at all important to me*) to 5 (*very important to me*).

Participants began the ostensibly separate microwave shopping study with a short shopping scenario. They were asked to evaluate a GE microwave sold for \$80 that they found at Kmart (or Marshall Field's). They made this evaluation along a scale from 1 (*not at all good quality*) to 7 (*very good quality*).

Results

Product evaluations are shown in Table 1 as a function of goal (social identity vs. utilitarian) and store reputation (Kmart vs. Marshall Field's). The interaction of these variables was significant, $F(1, 84) = 3.16, p < .05$. Specifically, store reputation had a substantial effect on product evaluations when consumers' social identity goals were heightened (5.18 vs. 4.28, when the products were sold by Marshall Field's and Kmart, respectively), $F(1, 84) = 5.11, p < .05$. However, it had no effect at all when consumers' utilitarian goals were heightened (4.55 vs. 4.64, respectively), $F < 1$.

Discussion

This experiment indicated that the effect of store reputation is contingent on the salience of social identity goals. Although consumers used store reputation to evaluate the quality of a product when social-image concerns were directly activated, they did not do so when utilitarian concerns were activated. This finding supports our contention that store reputation can serve to convey information relevant to social identity and,

therefore, can influence product evaluations when consumers' motives to maintain their social identity are salient. This result is also consistent with our basic theoretical contention that consumers' salient goals determine the extent to which a given cue is used in the evaluation of product quality.

One might argue that consumers, knowing that GE makes a wide range of microwaves, simply inferred that the ones at Marshall Field's were higher quality models than the ones sold at Kmart. However, this account does not explain the contingency of the effect on self-construal priming. The issue at stake is whether consumers for whom social identity goals are salient are more likely to use store reputation for judging quality than are those for whom other goals are salient. The evidence suggests that they are.

The next two experiments provided a systematic analysis of the effect of store reputation and the conditions in which it occurs. Specifically, they examined whether two additional factors—salient interdependent versus independent self-construal and the type of product being considered—activate consumers' concern with social identity and, therefore, can influence the effect of store reputation. Self-construals are associated with distinct psychological goals (e.g., Lee, Aaker, & Gardner, 2000). For example, an independent self-construal is associated with the pursuit of independence and autonomy, whereas an interdependent self-construal is associated with the maintenance of sociable and harmonious relationships with others and making a positive impression. Thus, if social identity motives lead consumers to use store reputation as a basis for judging product quality, activating one's interdependent (compared to independent) self-construal should enhance the impact of store image on product evaluations.

The nature of the product may also influence the extent to which consumers' salient goals influence the impact of store reputation. For example, social identity criteria should spontaneously be viewed as relevant to judgments of the quality of symbolic products. Therefore, consumers are likely to use store reputation as a basis for evaluating such products regardless of the self-construal that happens to be salient to them. When products serve less symbolic functions, however, the influence of consumers' self-construals on the impact of store reputation should be more apparent. That is, store reputation should have a greater impact when an interdependent self-construal is salient than when an independent self-construal is salient, replicating Experiment 1.

EXPERIMENT 2

Contextual priming procedures can temporarily enhance the salience of either an independent or an interdependent self-construal (e.g., Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2000; Hong, Morris, Chiu, & Benet-Martinez, 2000; Lee et al., 2000; Mandel, 2003). Accordingly, we tested Hypotheses 2 and 3 by priming interdependent and independent self-

construal. In so doing, we examined whether (a) a salient interdependent self-construal increases the impact of store reputation on product evaluation and (b) product type moderates this effect.

Method

Pretests. To validate the independent versus interdependent self-construal primes, 77 participants were recruited for extra credit in introductory business courses. Self-construals were made salient using a method designed by Trafimow, Triandis, and Goto (1991). In the independent self-construal condition, participants were asked to think for 2 min about how they differed from their family and friends and then to write down their thoughts. In the interdependent self-construal condition, they were asked to think for 2 min about their similarities to their family and friends and then to write down their thoughts. The effectiveness of this priming technique has been verified across numerous studies (e.g., Kühnen, Hannover, & Schubert, 2001; Trafimow, Silverman, Fan, & Law, 1997). Nevertheless, to check whether the primes activated respective self-construals, participants were asked to complete a sentence construction task (Briley & Wyer, 2002), in which they constructed four-word sentences from a given set of words (e.g., *to, go, work, we, I*). To do this, they had to choose either a singular (e.g., *I, me, my, he, him, his, she, her*) or plural pronoun (e.g., *we, us, our, they, them, their*). Participants should use more plural (vs. singular) first-person pronouns (e.g., *we, us, our*) to construct sentences when an interdependent self-construal is salient than when an independent self-construal is salient (Briley & Wyer, 2002).

The proportion of items in which each participant used a plural first-person pronoun was computed and arcsine transformed for analysis. As expected, participants used a greater proportion of plural first-person pronouns when interdependence was primed ($M = 0.30$) than when independence was primed ($M = 0.26$), $F(1, 75) = 2.70, p < .05$, but used a lower proportion singular first-person pronouns in the first case ($M = 0.54$) than in the second ($M = 0.60$), $F(1, 75) = 2.92, p < .05$.

Another pretest with 38 participants was conducted to select a relatively symbolic and a less symbolic stimulus product. Participants rated the symbolic aspects of three products on seven items that were developed based on work by Shavitt (1990) and Grewal, Mehta, and Kardes (2000; e.g., "People use a microwave as a way of expressing their personality.") Ratings were reported along a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*) and were averaged to form a single index of the social identity goals associated with each product ($\alpha = .83$). Based on the mean judgments, microwaves were selected as a less symbolic product ($M = 2.33$), and running shoes were selected as a more symbolic product ($M = 3.89$), $F(2, 35) = 6.20, p < .01$. These results are consistent with research showing that running shoes are a product

for which self-expressive and nonutilitarian criteria are seen as relevant (Adaval, 2001; Durgee & O'Connor, 1996). It should be noted that differences exist in the literature in the categories used to classify products: for example, utilitarian versus hedonic products (Yeung & Wyer, 2004), privately consumed versus publicly consumed products (Grewal, Mehta, & Kardes, 2004), and luxuries versus necessities (Grewal et al., 2004). In this article, we specifically focus on the extent to which a product is seen as relevant to managing one's social identities—that is, symbolic versus less symbolic categories—to test directly our account for the factors driving store reputation effects.

Participants and design. One hundred undergraduate students participated for course credit. They were assigned randomly to four combinations of self-construal (independent vs. interdependent) and product type (running shoes vs. microwave). Store reputation (positive vs. negative) was introduced as a third, within-subjects variable.

Stimuli. Half of the participants received information about running shoes and the rest received information about microwaves. Each participant was shown four sets of product information comprising price, brand name, and store. Each set of information appeared separately on a computer screen. For microwaves, Marshall Field's and Kmart were selected as the store names with positive and negative store reputation, respectively, based on the previously reported pretest. However, we faced a calibration issue in matching store reputation levels across different products. Specifically, whereas Marshall Field's is a top-of-the-line retail option for microwaves, results of an unreported study suggested that it is only a moderate retail option for running shoes. Thus, based on the ratings of the 67 pretest participants described earlier, Nordstrom and Sears were selected as the high- and low-reputation stores, respectively, for the running shoes conditions ($p < .001$).²

Prices (e.g., microwave: \$100 or \$120; running shoes: \$60 or \$62) and brand names (e.g., microwave: GE; running shoes: ASICS) were held roughly constant at a moderate level. Participants in the low symbolic product condition saw four GE microwaves in the following order: (a) \$120 at

²In that study, participants rated on a +3 to -3 scale the reputation of several stores, including the four focal stores used as stimuli in this study. There was an interaction between store reputation and stimulus set, $F(1, 66) = 14.77, p < .01$. This reflects the fact that the difference in store reputation ratings of Marshall Field's versus Kmart ($M = 1.72$ vs. -1.06) was greater than that for Nordstrom versus Sears ($M = 2.16$ vs. $.13$). Note that, because we predict that store reputation will have a more consistent impact in the running shoes condition, this difference in manipulation strength mitigates against our anticipated effect.

³There was also no difference in quality perception as a function of the presented prices in the full model ANOVA and in subsequent simple effects analyses (i.e., microwave: \$100 or \$120; running shoes: \$60 or \$62), as intended.

TABLE 2
Product Evaluations as a Function of Salient Self-Construal, Product, and Store Reputation (Experiment 2)

| | Microwaves | | Running Shoes | |
|---|------------|------------------|---------------|-----------|
| | K-Mart | Marshall Field's | Sears | Nordstrom |
| Percentage of Favorable Product Evaluations | | | | |
| Independent self-construal | 67% | 81% | 32% | 31% |
| Interdependent self-construal | 31% | 89% | 32% | 87% |
| Product Ratings | | | | |
| Independent self-construal | 4.81 | 5.05 | 4.10 | 4.56 |
| Interdependent self-construal | 4.47 | 4.37 | 4.32 | 4.84 |

Kmart, (b) \$100 at Marshall Field's, (c) \$100 at Kmart, and (d) \$120 at Marshall Field's. Similarly, those in the high symbolic product condition saw four ASICS running shoes in the following order: (a) \$62 at Sears, (b) \$60 at Nordstrom, (c) \$60 at Sears, and (d) \$62 at Nordstrom. A posttest using 12 participants showed no difference in the two perceived prices used for running shoes (i.e., \$60 and \$62; $t[11] = -1.00, ns$) and for microwaves (i.e., \$100 and \$120; $t[11] = -1.61, ns$) and in consumers' familiarity level for ASICS running shoes versus GE microwaves ($t[11] = -1.17, ns$).³

Procedure. Participants were told that they would participate in a series of short independent studies that aim to understand consumer responses to products. After independent versus interdependent self-construal was primed (Trafimow et al., 1991), participants were told that they would begin another study presented as a microwave [running shoes] shopping study. They were consecutively presented with four screens on a PC. Each screen conveyed a different configuration of brand name, price, and store. Participants evaluated each product by pressing one key to indicate a perception of poor quality and another key to indicate good quality. After a brief practice session (three trials), participants proceeded to the main dichotomous evaluation task. Immediately after finishing all the dichotomous evaluations, they rated each of the same stimuli along a scale from 1 (*not at all good quality*) to 7 (*very good quality*).

Results

Dichotomous product evaluation. The percentage of favorable product evaluations is shown in the top half of Table 2 as a function of self-construal, store, and product type. Because different stores were used for each product type, data were analyzed for each type separately.⁴

Analyses of data pertaining to microwaves yielded main effects of self-construal ($\chi^2[1, N = 40] = 7.61, p < .01$) and

store reputation ($\chi^2[1, N = 40] = 7.5, p < .01$) and a significant interaction of these variables ($\chi^2[1, N = 40] = 12.83, p < .001$). When an interdependent self-construal was salient, the proportion of favorable responses was substantially greater when the microwave was sold at Kmart (31%) than when it was sold at Marshall Field's (89%; $\chi^2[1, N = 40] = 17.14, p < .001$). When an independent self-construal was salient, however, the proportion was similar regardless of store reputation (67% vs. 81% when the products were sold at Kmart vs. Marshall Field's, respectively; $\chi^2[1, N = 40] < 1$).

In the case of running shoes, however, the proportion of favorable evaluations was greater when the store had a favorable reputation than when it did not (85% vs. 31% for products sold at Nordstrom vs. Sears, respectively; $\chi^2[1, N = 37] = 15.75, p < .001$), and this difference did not depend on self-construal ($\chi^2[1, N = 37] < 1$). Thus, participants used store reputation in evaluating the quality of running shoes (a more symbolic product) irrespective of their salient self-construal.

Evaluative ratings. Participants' ratings of the two products are shown in the bottom half of Table 2. The interactive effects of store reputation and self-construal salience on dichotomous evaluations of microwaves were not evident in these ratings. In fact, evaluations were unaffected by the store's reputation (4.29 vs. 4.05 for microwaves sold in Marshall Field's vs. Kmart, respectively, $F[1, 38] = 1.57, p > .21$), and this was true regardless of self-construal salience. However, store reputation had a significant effect on ratings of running shoes (4.66 vs. 4.17 for shoes sold in Nordstrom vs. Sears, respectively; $F[1, 35] = 13.98, p < .01$), and this was also true regardless of self-construal salience.⁵

Also, a difference emerged in the effect of price information for each product type. Given the same store reputation information, participants evaluated the microwave that was first presented (\$120) as having better quality than the one presented later (\$100; $M = 4.68$ vs. 4.05), $F(1, 38) = 27.26, p < .001$. In the case of running shoes, however, the small variations in price did not affect judgments of quality ($M = 4.43$ vs. 4.40), $F(1, 35) < 1, ns$. This could be due to the fact that

⁴In the full model ANOVA, the three-way interaction of salient self-construal \times product type \times store reputation emerged ($\chi^2[1, N = 77] = 8.73, p < .01$). However, the analysis was conducted separately within each product type because the strength of the store reputation manipulation was not equal across product types.

⁵In the full model ANOVA, the significant interaction of product type \times store reputation emerged ($F[1, 73] = 3.94, p = .05$).

the price difference presented for the microwaves was larger than for the running shoes.

Discussion

The results of this experiment generally confirmed the effect of store reputation on product evaluation obtained in Experiment 1. The store reputation effect was evident on the dichotomous measure in this experiment. That is, on this measure, store reputation was used for evaluating the quality of a product when an interdependent self-construal was primed. Thus, it appears that when the social identity goals associated with the interdependent self-construal were salient, store reputation was influential in product judgments.

Further support for this argument is the evidence that the effect of salient self-construals on the use of store reputation depended on the nature of the product being evaluated. Specifically, salient self-construals were more influential for a relatively nonsymbolic product (microwaves) than for a more symbolic one (running shoes). In the latter case, when social identity criteria may spontaneously have been viewed as relevant, consumers used store reputation to evaluate the product irrespective of their salient self-construal. For a less symbolic product, however, they used store reputation only when an interdependent self-construal was made salient, presumably because this heightened concerns with one's social identity.

Overall, the results on the dichotomous evaluation task are consistent with the contention that store reputation can influence product judgments when social identity goals are salient or are perceived to be relevant to evaluating the product. Although the scaled evaluative ratings did not confirm our contention, this might be because the priming effect had dissipated by the time this second measure was completed. In contrast, the role of product type in moderating store reputation effects was robust across measures.

As noted earlier, the dependence of these effects on the symbolic nature of the product may help to explain some inconsistencies in previous research. For example, Teas and Agarwal (2000) found that the effect of store reputation on product quality judgments was not significant for calculators, replicating Dodds et al. (1991). Inconsistent with their expectations, however, the effect of store reputation on product quality judgments appeared to be substantial for a wristwatch even when presented with other cues such as price, brand name, and country of origin. This could reflect the fact that calculators are a less symbolic product, for which social identity goals are not spontaneously viewed as relevant. Also, the studies were conducted in the United States, where an independent self-construal is more likely to be chronically salient (Singelis, 1994; Triandis, 1995). Therefore, store reputation might not be considered as criterial information in judging of the quality of a less symbolic product. However, a wristwatch has more symbolic connotations. Consequently, store reputation is likely to be spontaneously considered rele-

vant to product quality evaluation, as Teas and Agarwal (2000) found.

We have argued here that consumers use store reputation in product evaluation when social identity goals are salient because store reputation conveys image-relevant information. That is, a salient interdependent self-construal should not influence the use of information that is irrelevant to social identity in evaluating a product. However, an interdependent self-construal appears to evoke a holistic or context-dependent thinking style (Kühnen et al., 2001). It is therefore possible that when an interdependent self-construal is salient, consumers use store reputation simply because they have a tendency to consider more information in general.

Choi, Dalal, Kim-Prieto, and Park (2003) found this tendency in a cross-cultural context among Koreans compared to Americans. They argued that East Asians, who have chronically salient interdependent self-construals, have a more holistic (vs. analytic) understanding of causality that is associated with the integration of more information. Consequently, they consider more information than Westerners, who have chronically salient independent self-construals.

Another consideration is that consumers who are concerned about their social identity may be less confident of their own opinion than those who are concerned about the utilitarian aspects of the product. Therefore, they might be more likely to rely on others' opinions for this reason.

To address these possibilities, some participants in Experiment 3 received information that was irrelevant to social identity criteria but nevertheless was related to others' opinions. According to Hypothesis 4, a salient interdependent self-construal should increase the use of store reputation information but should not influence the use of image-irrelevant information (the control information) in evaluation of a product. This pattern of results would provide converging evidence for the role of social identity goals in store reputation effects.

EXPERIMENT 3

In this experiment, participants rated a relatively nonsymbolic product (i.e., a microwave) when either an independent or an interdependent self-construal was salient. The product was paired with either store image information or with an opinion ostensibly obtained from a review by a consumer rating service. Each type of information varied in favorableness. Alongside a given price and brand name, participants received either (a) positive or negative store reputation information or (b) positive or negative opinions of a consumer rating service. We expected that impact of store reputation would be greater when an interdependent versus independent self-construal was salient. However, because it did not relate to one's social identity, the impact of rating-service information was not expected to vary as a function of salient self-construal.

TABLE 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Product Evaluations as a Function of Salient Self-Construal, Information Type, and Information Valence (Experiment 3)

| | <i>Independent Self-Construal</i> (<i>N</i> = 20) | <i>Interdependent Self-Construal</i> (<i>N</i> = 20) |
|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| Store Reputation Condition | | |
| K-Mart | 4.95 (1.15) | 4.15 (1.57) |
| Marshall Field's | 4.85 (1.35) | 5.50 (1.05) |
| Difference | -.10 | 1.35 |
| Rating-Service Information Condition | | |
| 3 stars | 3.85 (.88) | 3.85 (1.14) |
| 4.5 stars | 5.80 (.77) | 5.80 (.62) |
| Difference | 1.95 | 1.95 |

Note. Standard deviations are given in parentheses.

Method

Participants and design. One hundred sixty undergraduate students participated in return for extra credit in introductory business courses. They were randomly assigned to eight conditions of a 2 (self-construal: independent vs. interdependent) \times 2 (information type: store reputation vs. rating-service information) \times 2 (information valence: positive vs. negative) design.

Stimuli. Participants were asked to evaluate a microwave of a given price and brand name presented alongside either store reputation information or rating-service information that varied in valence. In the rating-service information conditions, the microwave was described as having earned a quality rating of either 3 stars (negative) or 4.5 stars (positive) out of 5 stars. In the store reputation conditions, Marshall Field's and Kmart represented positive and negative stores, respectively. Price and brand name information were held constant at \$80 and GE.

Procedure. Self-construals were primed as in Experiment 2 (Trafimow et al., 1991). Then, participants began the ostensibly separate microwave shopping study with a brief shopping scenario. They were asked to evaluate a GE microwave sold for \$80. Participants in the store-reputation information conditions were told that they found the microwave at Kmart [or Marshall Field's.] Participants in the *rating-service* information conditions were told that when they checked product review Web sites, they found that the microwave was rated 3 stars [or 4.5 stars] out of 5.

Participants evaluated the microwave in the scenario on a single scale from 1 (*not at all good quality*) to 7 (*very good quality*). As a manipulation check on the rating-service information, participants in the rating-service information condition indicated their interpretation of both a 3 star-rating and a 4.5 star-rating along a scale from 1 (*very poor*) to 7 (*very good*).

Results

Manipulation check. The manipulation of ratings service information appeared effective. Participants rated products with 4.5 stars as having better quality than those with 3 stars ($F[1, 79] = 158.09, p < .001; M = 3.83$ vs. 6.03).

Product evaluation. Participants' evaluations of the microwaves are shown in Table 3 as a function of self-construal, information valence, and information type (store reputation vs. rating). The effects of store reputation conditions were consistent with expectations. That is, although evaluations were higher when the store had a high reputation than when it did not (5.17 vs. 4.55, respectively), $F(1, 76) = 4.67, p < .04$, this difference was evident only when an interdependent self-construal was salient (5.50 vs. 4.15, respectively), $F(1, 76) = 10.90, p < .01$. When an independent self-construal was salient, store reputation had no effect at all (4.85 vs. 4.95), $F < 1$. The interaction of self-construal salience and store reputation was quite significant, $F(1, 76) = 6.29, p < .015$.

In the rating-service information condition, however, microwaves were evaluated more favorably when they received 4.5 stars ($M = 5.80$) than when they received 3 stars ($M = 3.85$), $F(1, 76) = 100.52, p < .001$, and this was true regardless of salient self-construal ($F < 1$). Thus, self-construal did not affect the use of rating-service information in product evaluation.

Discussion

As in Experiment 2, the results of this study indicated that, when an interdependent compared to an independent self-construal is salient, consumers are influenced by store reputation in their evaluation of products sold at the store. This is consistent with our argument that when consumers are concerned with their social identity, store reputation will affect product evaluation because it provides image-relevant information.

Experiment 3 provided further support for this contention. Consistent with Hypothesis 4, we found that the effect of a salient interdependent self-construal on how products were evaluated was limited to the use of store reputation information. The impact of information that was less relevant to one's social identity (specifically, ratings-service information) did not depend on whether self-construals were salient. Thus, the impact of store reputation on product evaluations when the interdependent self-construal is salient does not appear to be due to consumers' generally incorporating more information of any type into their product judgments. Nor does it appear to be due to consumers' being more likely to rely on others' views when an interdependent self-construal is salient. Instead, consumers use store reputation because it addresses their social identity goals.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

We proposed that the role a given cue plays in consumer judgments depends on the type of motive that is salient for the consumer. Cues that are often assumed to have only a minimal effect on consumer judgments may have greater impact when relevant goals are salient. Specifically, we proposed that consumers will use store reputation to evaluate product quality when social identity goals are salient or are perceived to be relevant to product evaluation. Across three experiments, this proposal was supported by showing that (a) directly activating social identity goals (but not other goals) yields an effect of store reputation on product evaluations (Experiment 1), (b) store reputation effects emerge when an interdependent (but not an independent) self-construal is activated (Experiments 2 and 3), (c) this effect only emerges for store reputation information and not for information irrelevant to social identity goals (Experiment 3), and (d) store reputation is more likely to be used to judge products that are typically evaluated on the basis of social identity criteria (Experiment 2). In sum, the influence of store reputation appears to reflect the motive to maintain a favorable social identity.

These findings facilitate a more inclusive theoretical understanding of the effect of consumers' salient goals on cue utilization in product evaluation. First, they support the contention that a piece of information can become criterial when it addresses one's salient goals. That is, when social identity goals were salient, image relevant information (store reputation) was used as an input to one's product evaluations. These results are also consistent with persuasion research suggesting that the role of message variables depends on the types of motives driving message processing. For example, the endorser attractiveness cue had generally been found to serve as a peripheral cue and therefore to influence attitudes primarily under low involvement (e.g., Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). However, Shavitt et al. (1994) showed that when social identity goals were made salient, endorser attractiveness

influenced attitudes under high involvement because it was relevant to consumers' image concerns.

Our findings also suggest boundary conditions for the existing literature on the role of store reputation on the product quality evaluation, stipulating when consumers will be influenced by a store's reputation when evaluating a product. Research has indicated that store reputation has a minimal effect on judgments of product quality when price and brand name are available (e.g., Rao & Monroe, 1989). Indeed, the minimal effect of store reputation compared to that of price and brand name has been labeled as a "marketing universal" (Dawar & Parker, 1994). Two explanations might be offered for these earlier findings. First, because products differ in the nature of criteria used in evaluating them (Adaval, 2001; Grewal et al., 2004; Han & Shavitt, 1994), it is important to consider the products used in the extant research (i.e., by Dawar & Parker, 1994; Teas & Agarwal, 2000). As noted earlier, those products (e.g., calculators or cassette recorders) do not serve a social identity or symbolic function reflecting concerns about social identity criteria (Shavitt, 1990). Instead, they are more likely to be evaluated in terms of their utilitarian features and performance. Our findings suggest that such products will not spontaneously be evaluated based on store reputation.

For relatively symbolic products, however, store reputation may spontaneously be used in product evaluation. Indeed, in the earlier research, although those results were not interpreted accordingly, stronger effects of store reputation appear to have emerged when products that could be classified as symbolic were examined, such as a wristwatch or clothing (Dodds et al., 1991; Teas & Agarwal, 2000). Consistent with this pattern, Experiment 2 reported here indicated that for a relatively symbolic product, store reputation spontaneously influenced product evaluations. In sum, it appears that the minimal effect of store reputation may not be a marketing universal at all.

The extant research has tended to focus on utilitarian aspects of product quality evaluation, such as product performance or durability, and on how "extrinsic cues" can communicate those aspects of product quality (Jacoby, Olson, & Haddock, 1971). This perspective does not address the social identity goals that may be involved in product evaluation and the goal-relevant meaning that store reputation can convey. Our data suggest that when consumers are motivated to cultivate their social identities, store reputation does affect product evaluation.

Our results also extend recent findings regarding the prestige dimension of product quality (Brucks et al., 2000). Brucks and colleagues developed and validated a broad, consumer-driven typology of perceived quality and showed that different dimensions of product quality (i.e., prestige vs. more utilitarian dimensions) are evaluated on the basis of different types of product information. We build on this by demonstrating in multiple ways that when consumers' symbolic needs for cultivation of their social identities are salient, con-

sumers are more likely to use prestige-relevant information to assess product quality. Specifically, they use store reputation information, a type of cue that has not previously been conceptualized as relevant or critical to product quality judgments.

Although we provided price and brand information along with store information, price and brand were held relatively constant at a moderate level. This may have inflated the impact of store reputation on product judgments. The type of role played by store reputation may also differ when price and brand vary widely. For instance, it may affect the interpretation of large price differences: At a discount store such as Kmart versus at a department store, a very low price may be interpreted as a special sale (of a reasonable-quality product) rather than as an indicator of product quality. Thus, at some price levels, the role of store reputation in quality judgments could be reversed. Although it was not our goal in this research to assess the interplay between store reputation and other factors in evaluating products, this remains an interesting issue for future research.

In summary, our goal was to show that the presence of store reputation effects could be anticipated by manipulating the salience or relevance of social identity concerns. It is possible that these effects would be attenuated or changed in contexts in which price or brand occupy more extreme values or are in conflict with the valence of store information. Nevertheless, our results converge on the conclusion that store reputation effects will be underestimated in contexts in which social identity concerns are not salient or are not seen as relevant to evaluating a product.

The Role of Thinking Style in the Use of Store Reputation in Product Evaluation

One might argue that when an interdependent self-construal is salient, people tend to use contextual cues (Kühnen et al., 2001) and therefore that contextual thinking style, rather than salient social identity concerns, led to the use of store reputation in product evaluation. In line with this, some researchers regard store reputation as linked only indirectly to the product (Purohit & Srivastava, 2001) and as applying to broad product lines rather than to a small number of products (Dawar & Parker, 1994). In this sense, store reputation could be viewed as a cue representing the general context in which products reside. If so, then context-dependency could be a key factor leading to the use of store reputation in product evaluation.

To address this possibility, in a number of unreported experiments we included the Embedded Figures Test (Witkin, Oltman, Raskin, & Karp, 1971) and a picture memory task (Kühnen & Oyserman, 2002) to capture context-dependent thinking styles that may be elicited by a salient interdependent self-construal (Kühnen et al., 2001). However, we obtained no evidence of differences in context-dependent thinking as a function of salient self-construal. Moreover, the

results of Experiment 1, in which social identity versus utilitarian goals were directly activated, would be difficult to account for in terms of thinking style or context dependency. Thus, shifts in context-dependent thinking cannot easily explain the impact of store reputation in our data. Future research could further investigate the conditions under which context-dependent thinking may influence the use of store reputation in product evaluation.

The Role of Individual Differences

We also explored whether a chronic concern with social identity goals would predict the impact of store reputation on product evaluation. For instance, consumers who are high self-monitors are generally more concerned about their social identity (Snyder, 1974) and more sensitive to the social cues that convey such information (Mill, 1984). Therefore, high self-monitors may generally be more influenced by store reputation in evaluating products than low self-monitors are. Similarly, consumers who have a relatively collectivistic cultural orientation, characterized by a chronically salient interdependent self-construal, may be likely to use store reputation information in product evaluation. To explore these possibilities, individual differences were assessed that may predict the chronic salience of social identity concerns. In a number of the experiments reported here, we measured level of self-monitoring (Snyder, 1974) and individualism–collectivism as a cultural orientation (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995). There was no consistent evidence that cultural orientation moderated store reputation effects. There was some indication in an unreported study that self-monitoring moderated the effects observed, such that high self-monitors were influenced by store reputation irrespective of salient self-construals, but low self-monitors were only influenced when an interdependent self-construal was made salient. However, this finding was not consistent across studies.

This research was not designed to examine the role of individual differences in the effect of store reputation. Rather, the contextual salience of self-construal or social identity concerns was the focus. Research has indicated that the situational activation of self-construal can eliminate effects of chronic differences in self-construal (Lee et al., 2000). Consistent with this, our findings suggest that regardless of their personality traits, consumers are likely to be influenced by store reputation information as long as social identity goals are salient or relevant in the situation. Future research could isolate the effects of these chronic factors to examine more specifically whether individual differences predict store reputation effects.

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