

The concept of self

Psychology, Behaviorism



Changing ideas, beliefs and values impacts an individual's self-schemas and may lead to a changing of consumer behavior or the removal of behavioral constraints (Blakeley, 1996). Self-concept can be described as multi-faceted (Arnold, et al, 2004), and includes a collection of images, activities, goals, feelings, roles, traits and values. These play a part in different aspects of an individual's perception of self. The Me-self (Mead, 1913) can be considered the socialized aspect of the individual and represents a constructed self-image from learned behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of others and society.

The Me-self has been developed by the knowledge of society and social interactions and is considered a phase of self that is in the past (Mead, 1913). The I-self however, plays the role of the active observer, the knower, or the information processor (Arnold, et al, 2004). The 'I' therefore, can be considered the present and future phase of self and represents an individual's identity based on the response to the "I" aspect (Mead, 1913). For example, the 'I' understands how society says an individual should behave and socially interact and they align with the perceived set standards, and that notion becomes self.

The 'Me' and 'I' have a didactic relationship, almost like system of checks and balances. In essence, the Me-self prevents an individual for example, from breaking the rules or boundaries of societal expectations, while the I-self allows the individual to still express creativity and individualism (Mead, 1913). The I-self and me-self further interlink and enables an individual to understand when to possibly push boundaries that govern social interactions (Mead, 1913).

Charles Cooley's (1988) concept of the looking glass self, states that an individual's self grows out of social interactions. The view that an individual has of themselves comes from the interpolation of personal qualities and impressions of the perceptions of others (Isakson, 2013). Cooley's (1988) concept on the looking glass self describes that how we see ourselves does not come from who we really are, but rather from how we perceive how others see us.

This can influence the monitoring self of consumer where a high self-monitor individual may be more highly concerned about how they are perceived by others and may change their behavior to be viewed in a more positive manner rather than a low self-monitor individual, who may have stronger self beliefs and may tend to behavior more consistently (Arnold, et al, 2004). The extended self, as theorized by Russell Bell (1988), comprises of external objects, in which the emotional attachment to those objects become perceived as being a part of ourselves.

Our possessions are a major contributor and reflection of our identities and this construct of the extended self involves consumer behavior rather than buyer behavior (Bell, 1988). Marketers are interested in the concept of the extended self as consumers regard possessions as a part of themselves and this would enable understanding of consumer behavior and consumption patterns. The most direct form of evidence by Bell (1988) supporting his theory on the extended self is found in the nature of self-perceptions.

Firstly, Bell (1988) found that the extended self was not limited to external objects and personal possessions, but also included persons, places as well

as body parts and vital organs. This thinking is used especially when marketing goods with connotations of patriotism in most of the world. For example, the slogan used by the famous soft drink company L&P "rural famous in New Zealand", appeals to and makes potential nonusers highly involved if they consider New Zealand part of their extended selves (Watson, 2001).

Bell (1988) further argues that perceived characteristics of an object may not always correspond with the perceived characteristics of self. To demonstrate, he proposed that an individual can consider an object like the Statue of Liberty to be a part of themselves, but not actually holding a self-concept composed of characteristics attributed to the statue. Marketers are interested in the concept of self because it is much more than just brand or brand image. Non-brand images, such as example a cigarette smoker or a person with a Ferreira can contribute strongly to self.

Post-acquisition object bonding, which may happen after buying a dog can be identified by marketers as a possible strong influence to the sense of self (Bell, 1988). Marketers are interested in the role possessions play in influencing and shaping an individual. For example, after buying a dog, advertisements about dogfood, which have never appealed to the individual before, now do. Marketers can play a persuasive role in stimulating need recognition to the individual brought about by their purchases.

Besides intro over objects, control by objects, as Bell (1988) theorized may also contribute to an item being viewed as a part of self. We may impose our identities on objects but possessions may also impose their identities on us

(Furry, 1978). The longer we possess or get possessed by the object, the more a part of self it becomes (Furry, 1978). Marketers use this knowledge of the extended self in the form of samples, test drive with cars, 10 day free trials with products.

Understanding self-concept helps marketers realize that time spent with the product or object is time that an individual may feel more notionally attached to it and have a harder time parting from it. The concept of extended self is of high interest to marketers as the digital age is a relatively new phenomenon. In the digital world, there are a number of differences with concept of the extended self, mainly due to the destruction by the advancement of technology (Bell, 2013). This means that the numerous objects that were marketed to individuals can now be accessed and compiled into one platform.

Furthermore, it creates different ways that individuals interact with and project themselves onto others (Bell, 2013). However, Bell (2013) proposes that an individual may have a different online persona as compared to offline. A marketer's interest lies in the understanding of an individual's online sense of self, for example, a consumer purchasing from an online website to accurately interpret the individual's online attitudes and beliefs. Self-concept consists of two dynamic processes, intrapersonal and interpersonal.

Within the facets of self, these two processes play an influential role. The intrapersonal process is an individual's cognitive processing, affect and motivation (Archer, Gurney and Moan, 2013). The interpersonal process

makes up the I-self and has socially-developed self- knowledge involving goals, strengths, limitations and moods. This process interacts with the external interpersonal self, which includes social perception, choice of situation, interaction strategy and reaction to feedback (Arnold, et al, 2004) and vice-versa.

Marketers are interested in understanding interpersonal and interpersonal processes as individuals' perceptions are generally different from One other. This is due to an interpersonal self shaped around each individuals own personal experiences. Individuals act based on what dynamic self process they are feeling at that time (Arnold, et alarm 2004). Therefore, marketers would better understand their target market by having apt knowledge of these two processes. Possessions are not only considered a part of self, but also are important in the development of self (Bell, 1988).

This contributes to the self-narrative of an individual which comprise of coherent stories and personal experiences that provide a sense of continuity in time and space (Arnold, et al, 2004). Marketers are Interested in the self-narrative of individuals as they can arrest goods to support this, for example, photos albums. Photoalbums provide an individual with the means to document highlights of their lives which can be viewed at any time they so desire. These possessions seem to contribute to the maintenance of the self-concept and narrative as such objects act as reminders or conformers of our identities (McCracken, 1987).

With age, an individual's boundary of self develops as it goes through multiple role transitions (Rosenberg-Walton1984, p. 352). Transitions are of

interest to marketers as an individual's self-concept is changeable and is especially yeoman during certain transitions (Arnold, et al, 2004). A consumer's role transitions are marked by changes in consumption patterns (Arnold, et al, 2004). For example, buying a home, graduating from University, or having a baby can be key role transitions in an individual's life. Role transitions can also be linked with a consumer's levels of self-esteem.

The positivist of a person's attitude towards him/herself plays an influential role in their behavior and consumption choice (Arnold, et al, 2004). Low self-esteem can be related to concerns over the looking glass self which in turn influence impulsive purchasing (Arnold, et al, 2004). Marketers can play a key role in increasing the level of involvement and marketing goods which reflect the individual's' self traits to support the transitions. Marketers can use the concept of the changeable self to add or strengthen beliefs in an individual.

This can influence an interpersonal process that consumers go through, self-gifting. Self-gifting frequently carries messages about an individual's self-distinctiveness, for example, brand slogans which have the phrase 'Like no other' (Arnold, et al, 2004). Individuals increasingly seek pleasure in objects that they buy for themselves as gifts (Kara, 2008). This may be attributed to a positive feeling of accomplishment (Kara, 2008) and consumers may appeal to brand slogans with the phrases 'reward yourself or 'you deserve it'.

In conjunction with this, self-gifting can also occur as a response to a negative attitude brought about by, for example, feelings of stress. Grub and Growth (1967) state that goods are symbols which communicate a message

between an individual and society or their significant others. Consumption communicates socially shared meanings about identity (Arnold, et al, 2004). If a product is to serve as a symbol as a communication device, it must be first gain societal recognition (Grub & Growth, 1967). This process is essentially a classification system which places these products to others in society.

These classification systems are society's way of piecing and organizing their activities in a sensible manner (Grub & Growth, 1967). Fashion as an example, illustrates the link of symbolic classification and consumer behavior. When a particular style of fashion becomes popular, a segment of society may direct their behavior towards the archiving and consuming of items manifesting this style (Grub & Growth, 1967). Therefore, an act of classification not only directs self action, but also a set of expectations may be aroused towards the object classified (Grub & Growth, 1967).

Marketers need to understand the essence of the object resides not in the object itself but in the direct relation between the object and the individuals classifying the object (Grub & Growth, 1967). Self-enhancement can be brought about by the purchase and consumption of goods in two ways. Firstly, an individuals' self-concept will be maintained if they believe the good is societal accepted and classified in a manner that matches their self-concept. A product as a symbol contributes to one's looking glass self as the products' conveyed meaning creates symmetry matching the image an individual has of themselves.

Secondly, an individual may receive either positive or negative reinforcement from significant others and this strengthens their self-concept

with growth and change based on desired reactions from society (Sequester, Pettier, Spanish, Raw Hill, 2014). Marketers are interested in this area of self as it plays image congruence where self-concept is enhanced through the transfer of socially accepted meanings of the product or brand (Arnold, et al, 2004). An individual's self schemas can be used by marketers to market goods which align with an individual's beliefs (Peter & Olson, 2010).

This concept of self-enhancement directs consumer behavior to use goods to close the gap between actual and possible selves. These possible selves can be past, present or future. Consumer nostalgia as a past possible self is a powerful and rich tool that marketers can use to tap into an individual's self. Nostalgia stems from a consumer's yearning for the past, often dissatisfied with the present state and coming future and to compensate, an individual may purchase vintage or retro looking goods to 'bring them back to their perception of the golden ages (Shah, Lie, Teen & Lu, 2014).

The similar concept may be applied to a future desired self in the form of anti-gambling advertisements. An individual may begin to increase their involvement towards their desired gambling-free self and may start to pay for counseling services to achieve this. In conclusion, the concept of self is multi-faceted and interrelates with one another, influencing behavior. The sense of self, socially created, is dynamic with consumers' motives playing a part in their consumption choices to develop or maintain their concept of self. Our possessions are a reflection of our identities and an expression of our beliefs.