

G. CEREN (GERRY) AKSU

Curriculum Vitae – July 2020

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Marketing Rutgers Business School, Rutgers University	May 2021 (Expected)
MBA in Marketing Management Lubin School of Business, Pace University	May 2016
B.S. in Management (with Honors) Dual degree – Binghamton University, SUNY and Middle East Technical University, Turkey	June 2013

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Citizen: Turkey
Permanent Resident: United States (Green Card: Authorized to work in the United States)

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Consumer Behavior: Branding, Social Media, Advertising, and Culture

WORKING PAPERS (available upon request, see Appendix for abstracts)

1. **Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry)**, Alokparna (Sonia) Monga, and Carlos J. Torelli, “When an Old Dog Learns New Tricks: Engaging in Social Media Dilutes Tradition Brands,” job market paper and first essay of dissertation, *in preparation for submission to Journal of Marketing*.
2. **Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry)**, Yeni Zhou, and Alokparna (Sonia) Monga, “How Does the Pronunciation Difficulty of Brand Names Influence Consumer Responses? The Role of Self-Construal,” *in preparation for submission to Journal of Consumer Psychology*.
3. Monga, Alokparna (Sonia), Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, Vanitha Swaminathan, and **G. Ceren (Gerry) Aksu**, “Do Inconsistent CSR Communications Always Alter Brand Perceptions? The Effects of Dialectical Thinking,” *in preparation for submission to Marketing Letters*.

RESEARCH IN PROGRESS (see Appendix for abstracts)

4. **Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry)**, Gabriela N. Tonietto, and Alokparna (Sonia) Monga, “How Does Brand Warmth Influence Consumer Responses to Scarcity Appeals? The Role of Perceived Good Intentions,” second essay of dissertation, *three studies completed*.
5. **Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry)** and Sevincgul Ulu, “Consumer Responses to Brand Activism: The Role of Human Values,” *two studies completed*.

DISSERTATION

Consumer Responses to (In)Consistencies Between Brand Concepts and Marketing Activities

Co-chairs: Alokparna (Sonia) Monga and Gabriela N. Tonietto

Committee Members: Ashwani Monga and Carlos J. Torelli

Proposal Defended: April 28, 2020

My dissertation assesses the effect of different brand concepts, namely *tradition* (essay 1) and *warmth* (essay 2) on consumer responses to brands' social media and advertising activities. In doing so, I identify unique potential drawbacks and benefits of the perceived (in)consistency between brand concepts and marketing actions.

Essay 1: When an Old Dog Learns New Tricks: Engaging in Social Media Dilutes Tradition Brands.

While social media engagement has become nearly ubiquitous among brands, I propose that such activities can pose unique downsides for tradition brands, which are brands with history, heritage, and a commitment to preserving time-honored practices (e.g., Fentimans, Patek Philippe). Specifically, social media's innovative and dynamic nature conveys openness to change values, which are incompatible with the tradition values espoused by these brands. In seven studies, I demonstrate that this perceived inconsistency between the brand's image and social-media actions dilutes brand beliefs, purchase intentions, and willingness-to-pay for tradition brands. Moreover, this detrimental effect is unique to tradition brands such that non-tradition brands, whose values are not inconsistent with social media's representation of openness to change values, are not harmed by engaging in social media. The final two studies test different means of offsetting the negative effects of social media engagement for tradition brands. First, I demonstrate that using relatedness-focused (vs. autonomy-focused) social media campaigns mitigate the dilution effect of social media on tradition brands. This is because focusing on relatedness emphasizes connectedness and sense of belonging, which better aligns with tradition brands, thus diminishing the perceived inconsistency and subsequent detrimental effect of social media engagement. Second, I demonstrate that when tradition brands encourage dialecticism (defined as a tendency to tolerate inconsistencies) when engaging in social media, consumers are able to reconcile the inconsistency between tradition brands and social media, thus eliminating brand dilution. My research advances our understanding of the role of brand concepts in consumer responses to brands' social media use, while highlighting important managerial implications for how tradition brands can overcome inconsistencies in values, and effectively utilize social media.

Essay 2: How Does Brand Warmth Influence Consumer Responses to Scarcity Appeals? The Role of Perceived Good Intentions

Marketers commonly use scarcity appeals (e.g., "limited quantities available") to attract consumers. Although prior research has investigated the effect of scarcity appeals on consumer responses to the promoted *product*, it is unclear how consumers respond to the *brands*, themselves, which encompass more than the advertised product. I propose that behavioral intentions toward the brand will be higher for high-warmth (vs. low-warmth) brands when they use scarcity appeals for a particular product. This is because consumers ascribe good intentions to high-warmth brands using scarcity appeals, in contrast to low-warmth brands where such appeals may be seen as blatant persuasion tactics. Three studies demonstrate that intentions are uniquely higher for high-warmth brands. Specifically, consumers have higher behavioral intentions toward high-warmth (vs. low-warmth) brands following a scarcity appeal; however, there is no such difference when brands use a non-scarcity-based appeal. My research contributes to our understanding of the effectiveness of scarcity appeals by introducing the role of brand concepts in the behavioral outcomes of such appeals, while highlighting important managerial implications for how brand warmth helps brands benefit from such appeals. This benefit of high-warmth brands provides a novel perspective. Whereas prior research implies that warmth could potentially conflict with the competition associated with scarcity, I demonstrate that what drives consumers' response to brands is not perceived competition, but rather inferred good intentions.

CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS AND PRESENTATIONS (presenter in bold)

Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry), Gabriela N. Tonietto, and Alokparna (Sonia) Monga (2020), “How Do Scarcity Appeals Affect Consumer Intentions Toward the Brand? The Role of Brand Warmth,” Poster presented at the Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP) conference, Huntington Beach, California.

Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry), Alokparna (Sonia) Monga, and Carlos J. Torelli (2019), “Tradition Brand Concepts and Social Media: A Brand Dilution View,” Paper presented at the Journal of Consumer Research (JCR) Special Issue Conference on the Future of Brands, New York City, New York.

Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry), Alokparna (Sonia) Monga, and Carlos J. Torelli (2019), “Tradition Brand Concepts and Social Media: A Brand Dilution View,” Poster presented at the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) conference, Atlanta, Georgia.

Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry) and Sevincgul Ulu (2019), “Brand Activism: The Effect of Consumers’ Personal Values on Their Reactions to Brands’ Activism Behaviors,” Poster presented at the American Marketing Association (AMA) - Marketing and Public Policy conference, Washington, DC.

Aksu, G. Ceren (Gerry), Yeni Zhou, and Alokparna (Sonia) Monga (2018) “How Does the Pronunciation Difficulty of Brand Names Influence Consumer Responses? The Role of Self-Construal,” Poster presented at the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) conference, Dallas, Texas.

Alokparna (Sonia) Monga, Zeynep Gürhan-Canli, Vanitha Swaminathan, and **G. Ceren (Gerry) Aksu** (2018) “Do Inconsistent CSR Communications Always Alter Brand Perceptions? The Effects of Dialectical Thinking,” Poster presented at the Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP) conference, Dallas, Texas.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor, Rutgers Business School

- Consumer Behavior (undergraduate), teaching effectiveness: 4.86/5.00 Summer 2019

Teaching Assistant, Rutgers Business School

- Marketing Management (MBA) 2018 - 2019
- Marketing Research (undergraduate) Fall 2016

TEACHING INTERESTS

Brand Management

Social Media Marketing

Advertising

Consumer Behavior

Introduction to Marketing

HONORS AND AWARDS

Dean’s Summer Research Award (\$4,200), Rutgers Business School Summer 2020

AMA-Sheth Foundation Doctoral Consortium Fellow 2020

Dean’s Scholarship Award (\$1,000), Rutgers Graduate School Fall 2019

Dean’s Summer Research Award (\$4,200), Rutgers Business School Summer 2019

Merit Graduate Scholars Award (\$1,000), Rutgers Graduate School Fall 2018

Dean’s Summer Research Award (\$4,200), Rutgers Business School Summer 2018

Dean's Summer Research Award (\$4,200), Rutgers Business School	Summer 2017
Graduate Assistant Scholarship, Lubin School of Business	2014 – 2016
Merit Scholarship, Binghamton University	2010 – 2013

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Association for Consumer Research (ACR)
Society for Consumer Psychology (SCP)
American Marketing Association (AMA)

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Ad-Hoc Reviewer

Journal of the Association for Consumer Research	2020 – Present
Psychology & Marketing	2020 – Present
Journal of Consumer Research (trainee reviewer)	2019 – Present
Society for Consumer Psychology	2018 and 2020

Behavioral Lab Coordinator

Rutgers Business School (RBS) Behavioral Lab	2017 – 2020
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DOCTORAL COURSEWORK

Marketing

• Seminar in Consumer Behavior	Ashwani Monga
• Special Topics in Marketing: Strategy	Can Uslay
• Marketing Models	S. Chan Choi
• Independent Study	Alokparna (Sonia) Monga
• Early Research Seminar I	Alokparna (Sonia) Monga
• Early Research Seminar II	Alokparna (Sonia) Monga

Psychology

• Seminar in Human Memory and Learning	Elizabeth Tricomi
• Seminar in Social Psychology: Intergroup Relations	Lee Jussim
• Seminar in Social Cognition	Luis Rivera

Methodology

• Behavioral Science Research Design	Kent Harber
• Experimental Methods	Kristina Durante
• Multivariate Methods	Ellen Halpern
• Research Methods in Social Sciences	Sengun (Shen) Yenyurt
• Introduction to Statistical Linear Models	Mert Gurbuzbalaban

REFERENCES

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“How Does the Pronunciation Difficulty of Brand Names Influence Consumer Responses? The Role of Self-Construal”

Brand names are a powerful means of communication for firms. While prior research suggests that easy-to-pronounce brand names elicit more favorable responses from consumers, in the present research, we propose that consumer responses to the pronunciation difficulty of brand names differ depending on the consumers' self-construal – namely, whether they are relatively independent or interdependent. In particular, while easy-to-pronounce brand names are evaluated more favorably by consumers with an interdependent self-construal, who focus on being similar to others, difficult-to-pronounce brand names are evaluated more favorably by those with an independent self-construal, who strive toward being unique. This is because difficult-to-pronounce brand names are perceived to be more unique than more easily pronounced brand names. Three studies demonstrate that for easy-to-pronounce brand names, consumers with an interdependent (vs. independent) self-construal have more favorable brand attitudes, whereas for difficult-to-pronounce brand names, consumers with independent (vs. interdependent) self-construal have more favorable brand attitudes. In line with the proposed uniqueness mechanism, we show that reducing the perceived uniqueness of the difficult-to-pronounce brand name (by emphasizing its commonality and similarity to other brand names) eliminates the observed effect, such that consumers respond similarly irrespective of their self-construal. This research contributes to the branding literature by showing that responses to pronunciation difficulty of brand names differ for consumers with different perceptions of self. Implications also arise for marketing practice. Our results suggest that brands can manage their names to effectively communicate with consumer segments that vary in self-construal, a variation that arises across cultures, ethnicities, and regions of the US.

“Do Inconsistent CSR Communications Always Alter Brand Perceptions? The Effects of Dialectical Thinking”

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) has become increasingly important for companies. However, many firms struggle to exude a consistently favorable image in terms of CSR, often behaving both responsibly and irresponsibly (e.g., an oil company that makes green-energy investments, while simultaneously producing enormous amounts of greenhouse gas emissions). This research examines how dialectical thinking – a dimension capturing one's tendency to tolerate inconsistencies – influences consumer responses to such inconsistencies in CSR communications. When exposed to inconsistent CSR information, we propose that dialectical thinkers perceive lower hypocrisy compared to non-dialectical thinkers, leading them to respond more favorably. This is because dialectical thinkers tend to be more accepting of contradictions and are better able to reconcile conflicting statements. Examining dialectical thinking via culture as well as using an experimental prime, three studies demonstrate that when faced with inconsistencies in CSR communications, dialectical (vs. non-dialectical) thinkers perceive lower hypocrisy and, as a result, have more favorable evaluations and behavioral intentions toward the brand. Supporting the proposed role of perceived hypocrisy, we find that this effect reverses when the company makes a very clear and detailed statement about its CSR activities prior to engaging in a negative behavior. That is, if the CSR statement made by the company is unambiguous (vs. ambiguous), and thus, the inconsistency between the firm's message and the firm's behavior is unambiguous (vs. ambiguous), dialectical thinkers are no longer able to resolve the contradiction. This can lead to a backfire effect whereby dialectical thinkers have less favorable evaluations and behavioral intentions toward the brand than non-dialectical thinkers. This research contributes to a better understanding of the role of dialectical thinking in resolving inconsistencies in CSR communications, while providing implications for how brands can manage their CSR activities.

“Consumer Responses to Brand Activism: The Role of Human Values”

Brands are increasingly becoming activists by taking a public stance on social issues. For example, PUMA launched a platform encouraging conversations about criminal justice and equality to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Olympian Tommie Smith’s “Silent Gesture” in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics that generated a global civil rights debate. In this research we examine how consumers respond to such brand activism, defined as a brand’s efforts to promote and direct improvements in society that are seen as stemming from a desire to improve society’s well-being rather than for commercial or profit interests. We propose that consumer responses to brand activism are driven by whether they tend to endorse conservation values (i.e., tendency to preserve the status quo and follow social norms) as opposed to openness to change values (i.e., tendency to challenge the status quo and seek autonomy of actions and thoughts). Providing preliminary support for the idea, two studies – using both hypothetical and real brands – demonstrate that consumers who endorse conservation values have less favorable brand attitudes than those who endorse openness to change values when a brand engages in social activism. This is because consumers who endorse conservation values are less likely to support and engage in activist behaviors due to their commitment to following social norms and preference for stability. This research contributes to the literature by demonstrating that brand activism is not universally beneficial. Rather, brands’ engagement in such behaviors may lead to less favorable reactions for consumers who endorse conservation (vs. openness to change) values.