

Aus dem Institut für Agrarökonomie
der Christian-Albrechts-Universität zu Kiel

**Essays on the Explanatory Power of Parallel Process Models:
Application to Online Services, Brand Heritage and Unethical
Corporate Behavior**

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SUMMARY

This cumulative dissertation seeks to understand consumer reactions towards various stimuli, such as online services (online service environments, virtual conversational agents [VCA]), brand heritage and corporate transgressions. A total of eight empirical research papers employ mixed methods to help both researchers and marketers improve their understanding of consumers' parallel process channels and boundary conditions of these effects. The two parallel process models that were examined are the *stereotype content model* (SCM) and the *moral decoupling framework*.

Chapter 1 introduces the thesis and summarizes the individual research papers and methods used. *Chapter 2* uses in-depth interviews and experimental and quasi-experimental research designs to show that warmth inferred from environmental cues in online service environments leads to higher perceived service provider warmth (dimension SCM) and, in turn, to desired service outcomes. Effects are stronger with object-care than people-care service environments. *Chapter 3* shifts the focus from online service environments to specific brand traits. By applying in-depth interviews, a content analysis of websites, a survey and an experiment, it was shown that managers use narrative elements such as founding date, people, technology, omni-temporality, struggle, and place of foundation to create perceptions of brand heritage, while consumers derive brand heritage from the brand's founding date, omni-temporality, and technology. *Chapter 4* reveals across two quasi-experiments that consumers identify with heritage brands and that this effect is mediated by warmth and competence (SCM). Effects on competence are weaker with increasing brand anthropomorphism and effects on warmth are weaker with stronger consumer loneliness. *Chapter 5* shows across two experiments that positive brand heritage effects on intention to book a night in a hotel and word-of-mouth are mediated by warmth and competence (SCM) and that effects of brand heritage on warmth and competence decrease with increasing future orientation of consumers. In *Chapter 6*, four real brands which decided to maintain business in Russia despite the Russian invasion of

Ukraine, were integrated in a quasi-experiment. The moral-decoupling framework was applied to understand consumer reactions here. Results show that negative effects of transgression relevance on purchase intention are mediated by judgment of morality but also judgment of social responsibility. Effects of transgression relevance on judgment of morality are more negative with stronger tendencies to decouple. Judgment of performance only mediates positive effect of transgression relevance on purchase intention when individuals decouple to a lesser extent. Political orientation moderates effects of judgment of social responsibility and morality on purchase intention and moral identity moderates the effect of judgment of morality on purchase intention. *Chapter 7* applies three quasi-experiments that indicate positive indirect effects of brand heritage on consumer-brand identification mediated by morality and sociability (subdimensions of warmth) but not by competence. Effects of morality on consumer-brand identification increase with higher importance of self-respect to consumers. Effects of brand heritage on sociability, morality and competence increase with stronger moral decoupling tendencies. *Chapter 8* examines almost 80,000 tweets by employing a dictionary-based and sentiment analysis and shows that high-heritage brands receive less positive user-generated content on warmth (divided in subdimensions sociability and morality) and competence (divided in subdimensions assertiveness and ability) and more negative sentiments. *Chapter 9* again changes the context and shows by two experiments that the female gender of VCAs can increase perceptions of social presence and that these effects are mediated by sociability but not by morality or competence. *Chapter 10* summarizes theoretical and practical implications as well as limitations of each chapter and concludes that there is not just one underlying process that explains consumers' reactions, but that parallel processes explain consumers' reactions. Individual and situational differences play a crucial role in determining when and to what extent the described effects occur

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die vorliegende kumulative Dissertation untersucht Konsumentenreaktionen¹ auf verschiedene Stimuli, wie Online-Services (Online-Serviceumgebungen, virtuelle Gesprächsagenten [VCAs], Traditionsmarken sowie unethisches Firmenverhalten. Acht empirische Forschungsarbeiten verwenden unterschiedliche Methoden und zielen darauf ab, sowohl Forschern als auch Marketern ein besseres Verständnis von parallelen Verarbeitungsmechanismen und Einflussgrößen, die diese Effekte verstärken oder abschwächen, zu ermöglichen. Als parallele Verarbeitungsmodelle werden das *Stereotype Content Modell* (SCM) und die *moralische Entkopplung* näher untersucht.

Kapitel 1 führt in die Dissertation ein und fasst die einzelnen Forschungsarbeiten und genutzten Methoden zusammen. *Kapitel 2* zeigt mittels Tiefeninterviews, experimentellem und quasi-experimentellem Design, dass Wärme, die Konsumenten von Umgebungsreizen in Online-Serviceumgebungen ableiten, zu wahrgenommener Wärme des Dienstleisters (Dimension SCM) führt, was in positiven Konsumentenreaktionen resultiert. Diese Effekte sind stärker bei objekt-bezogenen und schwächer bei personen-bezogenen Dienstleistungen. *Kapitel 3* wechselt den Schwerpunkt und untersucht spezifische Markeneigenschaften. Anhand von Tiefeninterviews, Inhaltsanalysen von Websites, einer Befragung und einem Experiment wurde gezeigt, dass Manager narrative Elemente wie Gründungsdatum, Personen, Technologie, Omni-Temporalität, Konflikte und Gründungsort nutzen, um die Markentradition zu verstärken. Verbraucher leiten die Markentradition aus dem Gründungsdatum, der Omni-Temporalität und der Technologie ab. *Kapitel 4* zeigt in zwei Quasi-Experimenten, dass sich Verbraucher mit Traditionsmarken identifizieren. Dieser Effekt wird durch Wärme und Kompetenz (SCM) vermittelt. Effekte von Markentradition auf Kompetenz sind schwächer bei

¹ Das generische Maskulinum wird verwendet und gilt für beide Geschlechter – sofern nicht anders kenntlich gemacht.

stärkerer Vermenschlichung der Marke und stärkere Einsamkeit der Verbraucher schwächt den Effekt auf Wärme. *Kapitel 5* zeigt in zwei Experimenten, dass positive Effekte von Markentradition auf die Buchungsabsicht einer Übernachtung und Weiterempfehlungsabsicht durch Wärme und Kompetenz mediiert werden und bei zunehmender Zukunftsorientierung der Verbraucher abnehmen. *Kapitel 6* untersucht vier reale Marken, die trotz der russischen Invasion in die Ukraine weiterhin in Russland agieren, mittels eines Quasi-Experiments und nutzt zur Erklärung der Konsumentenreaktionen moralische Entkopplung. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass negative Effekte des Ausmaßes der Übertretung von Firmen auf die Kaufabsicht durch die Beurteilung der Moral und der sozialen Verantwortung vermittelt werden. Effekte der Übertretung auf die Beurteilung der Moral sind negativer, wenn Konsumenten stärker zur Entkopplung neigen. Die Beurteilung der Leistung vermittelt nur dann positive Effekte der Übertretung auf die Kaufabsicht, wenn Personen weniger stark entkoppeln. Die politische Orientierung moderiert die Effekte der Beurteilung der sozialen Verantwortung und Moral auf die Kaufabsicht und die moralische Identität moderiert den Effekt der Beurteilung der Moral auf die Kaufabsicht. *Kapitel 7* zeigt in drei Quasi-Experimenten, dass die Effekte der Markentradition auf die Identifizierung mit Marken durch Moral und Geselligkeit (als Subdimensionen von Wärme), aber nicht durch Kompetenz, vermittelt werden. Effekte von Moral auf die Identifizierung mit einer Marke sind stärker, wenn einer Person Selbstachtung wichtig ist. Effekte von Markentradition auf Geselligkeit, Moral und Kompetenz werden stärker mit steigender Tendenz zur moralischen Entkopplung. *Kapitel 8* untersucht fast 80.000 Tweets mittels diktionsbasierter Inhaltsanalyse und Sentiment-Analyse und zeigt, dass nutzergenerierte Inhalte, die sich an Marken mit ausgeprägter Tradition richten, weniger positiv in Bezug auf Wärme (Geselligkeit, Moral) und Kompetenz (Durchsetzungsfähigkeit, Können) sowie negativer in Bezug auf die Stimmung sind. *Kapitel 9* wechselt den Kontext und zeigt in zwei Experimenten, dass weibliche VCAs die Wahrnehmung der sozialen Präsenz erhöhen. Dieser Effekt wird mediiert durch Geselligkeit aber nicht durch Moral oder Kompetenz. *Kapitel*

10 fasst die theoretischen und praktischen Implikationen sowie die Limitationen jedes Kapitels zusammen und kommt zu dem Schluss, dass parallele Prozesse die Reaktionen der Verbraucher erklären. Individuelle und situative Unterschiede spielen eine entscheidende Rolle bei der Bestimmung, wann und in welchem Ausmaß Effekte auftreten.

CHAPTER 2

Ambient Temperature in Online Service Environments

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AMBIENT TEMPERATURE IN ONLINE SERVICE ENVIRONMENTS

Ambient Temperature in Online Service environments (ATOS), is a sensory cue which is not directly accessible in the current state of online servicescape technology, but must be inferred from secondary cues, particularly visual ones. This study integrates research on cross-modal inferences with a situated cognitions framework and the stereotype content model to show that ATOS enhances judgment of service provider warmth, in turn influencing important service outcomes. A pilot study explores the linkages between consumer online and offline experiences and provides initial evidence for online service environments' capacity (especially ATOS) to shape customer judgment and behavior. Study 1 focuses on a tropical island holiday resort to show that online representations of the environment evoke situated cognitions and preferences consistent with high ambient temperature. Study 2 uses virtual tours of two cafés to demonstrate that ATOS, through judgment of service provider warmth, positively influences purchase intention and other managerially important service outcomes. Study 3 employs a diverse set of twelve service contexts to replicate ATOS effects, mediated through warmth, and to additionally show that effects are stronger in contexts where service provision is directed more at objects (vs. people). Given that ambient temperature is ubiquitous in all types of service settings and can be easily adjusted by practitioners, managerial implications outline how service marketers can more effectively employ ATOS.

Keywords: Ambient temperature, online environment, situated cognition, virtual tour

CHAPTER 3

Brand Narratives: Content and Consequences among Heritage Brands

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BRAND NARRATIVES: CONTENT AND CONSEQUENCES AMONG HERITAGE BRANDS

This study bridges the gap between the managerial view and the consumer view by integrating research on storytelling with consumer perceptions of brand heritage. It identifies key elements of the stories told by managers of heritage product brands and consumer responses to these elements. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, four empirical studies (in-depth interviews with managers, content analysis of brand websites, a survey, and an experiment) provide evidence for relevant story elements, their use by heritage brand managers and their effects on consumers' responses. With several variables included as controls (consumer age, anxiety state, biological sex, brand familiarity, category involvement, category knowledge and verbal processing style), the findings indicate that brand managers' assumptions about the effectiveness of specific narrative elements do not entirely reflect consumer' responses to these elements. Managers (Studies 1 and 2) commonly employ the story elements of the date of foundation, people, technology, omni-temporality, struggle, and the place of foundation. While consumers (Studies 3 and 4) infer heritage from the brand's date of foundation, omni-temporality, and technology, the results are less unanimous for the story elements of people, struggle, and place of foundation.

Keywords: Brand heritage, mixed methods, narrative, storytelling

CHAPTER 4

Relationship Qualities of Brand Heritage: Warmth, Competence and the Moderating Roles of Anthropomorphic Factors

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RELATIONSHIP QUALITIES OF BRAND HERITAGE: WARMTH, COMPETENCE AND THE MODERATING ROLES OF ANTHROPOMORPHIC FACTORS

Purpose. Research has begun exploring how brand heritage perceptions affect people. However, little attention has been paid to the underlying mechanisms, and the link between brand heritage and relational outcomes. This study integrates research on brand heritage with the stereotype-content model (SCM) to offer a novel relationship explanation of why and when consumers identify with heritage brands.

Design/Methodology/Approach. Two quasi-experimental studies with consumers in Germany (N = 312 und N = 300) focus on multiple real brands to test the mediating roles of warmth and competence. Given the central role of anthropomorphism in brand applications of the stereotype-content model, two corresponding variables are examined as moderators, one relating to the brand (brand anthropomorphism) and the other relating to the individual (a person's feeling of loneliness). Category involvement, state anxiety, brand familiarity, past orientation and consumer age are included as controls.

Findings. The findings indicate that warmth and competence mediate the brand heritage consumer-brand identification relationship. In addition, they highlight the moderating role of brand anthropomorphism and loneliness.

Research Limitations/Implications. Our study offers a novel process explanation for how brand heritage perceptions influence consumer-brand relationships, contingent upon loneliness and anthropomorphism.

Practical Implications. Our findings help marketers to better understand how and when warmth and competence transmit positive brand heritage effects, resulting in more favorable responses.

Originality/Value. This work is among the first to adopt a stereotype-content and anthropomorphic perspective on consumer response to brand heritage perceptions.

Keywords: Brand anthropomorphism, brand heritage, consumer-brand identification, competence, loneliness, warmth

CHAPTER 5

Time Matters – the Role of Future Orientation in Consumer Judgment of Brand Heritage: A Stereotype Content Model Perspective

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TIME MATTERS – THE ROLE OF FUTURE ORIENTATION IN CONSUMER JUDGMENT OF BRAND HERITAGE: A STEREOTYPE CONTENT MODEL PERSPECTIVE

This paper examines the mediating roles of warmth and competence in brand heritage effects on consumer responses including the moderating effect of people's orientation towards the future. To test the research model, two online experiments were seated in divergent contexts (Study 1 wine brand; Study 2 hotel brand). The results of both studies indicate that 1) brand heritage positively influences consumer intentions of voice and action, 2) the positive effect of brand heritage on consumer intentions of voice and action is mediated by warmth and competence and 3) a consumer's future orientation has a negative moderating effect on the brand heritage – warmth and brand heritage – competence relationship. Consequently, the results show that indirect effects of brand heritage through warmth and competence on positive consumer behavioral intention are weaker with increasing orientation towards the future.

Keywords: Brand heritage, stereotype content model, temporal orientation

CHAPTER 6

When Firms Continue Doing Business in Aggressor Nations: A Refined Moral Decoupling Perspective on Consumer Response

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WHEN FIRMS CONTINUE DOING BUSINESS IN AGGRESSOR NATIONS: A REFINED MORAL DECOUPLING PERSPECTIVE ON CONSUMER RESPONSE

Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted many Western companies to pull out of the aggressor country. This study examines why and when consumers purchase from companies that choose to sustain operations in Russia. This study advances a refined moral decoupling model where effects of transgression relevance on purchase intention are channeled not only through judgments of performance and morality, but additionally through judgment of social responsibility. Results of an empirical study with four German companies and a sample of German consumers indicate that the relevance of a company's transgression influences consumer purchase intention through judgments of social responsibility and morality. This remains stable regardless of individual differences in moral decoupling. However, judgments of performance mediate a transgression's effects on purchase intention only with individuals who are less prone to decoupling. Effects of a company's perceived social responsibility on purchase intention are weaker with the politically more liberal than with the more conservative, whereas effects of morality are enhanced by a more liberal political orientation and the strength of a person's moral identity. These findings aid researchers and practitioners by advancing a refined moral decoupling framework that has greater relevance in the context of political conflict and war.

Keywords: Corporate social responsibility; moral decoupling

CHAPTER 7

Identification with Brands Having Heritage: Is Morality more Important than Sociability and Competence?

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IDENTIFICATION WITH BRANDS HAVING HERITAGE: IS MORALITY MORE IMPORTANT THAN SOCIABILITY AND COMPETENCE?

Previous research has established the importance of competence and warmth in consumer brand evaluation. Integrating an extended three-dimensional stereotype content model (SCM) with brand heritage research, it is suggested that morality and sociability represent subdimensions of warmth. Three studies employ actual brands in divergent product categories and consumer samples within distinct cultural settings to show that morality and sociability mediate positive effects of brand heritage on consumer-brand identification: self-respect moderates the morality – consumer-brand identification relationship and moral decoupling moderates the paths between brand heritage, sociability, morality, and competence, respectively. Effects are robust when accounting for a number of controls. The findings aid managers in more effectively using their brand's heritage as a social value to stimulate consumer-brand identification.

Keywords: Brand heritage, morality, sociability, competence, self-respect, moral decoupling

CHAPTER 8

Brand Heritage on Twitter: A Text-mining Stereotype Content Perspective

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BRAND HERITAGE ON TWITTER²: A TEXT-MINING STEREOTYPE CONTENT PERSPECTIVE

Purpose. Consumers commonly post opinions and accounts of their experiences with brands on social media. Such consumer-generated content may or may not overlap with content desired by brand managers. Drawing from “The medium is the message” paradigm, this study text-mines user narratives on Twitter¹ to shed light on the role of social media in shaping public images of brands with heritage through the lens of the stereotype content model.

Methodology. The study utilizes a data set of almost 80,000 unique tweets on twelve brands across six categories, compares brands high versus low in heritage, and combines dictionary-based content analysis with sentiment analysis.

Findings. The results indicate that both user-generated content and sentiment are significantly more positive for brands low rather than high in heritage. Regarding warmth, consumers use significantly more positive words on sociability and fewer negative words on morality for brands low rather than high in heritage. Regarding competence, tweets include more positive words on assertiveness and ability for low-heritage brands. Finally, overall sentiment is more positive for brands low rather than high in heritage.

Originality. This research is among the first to examine user-generated content in a brand heritage context. It demonstrates that heritage brands, with their longevity and strong links to the past, need to be aware of how contemporary social media can detract from their image.

Practical Implications- Important from co-creation and Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) perspectives, the findings provide brand managers with actionable insights on how to more effectively utilize social media.

Keywords: Big data; co-creation; content analysis; data mining; sentiment analysis; stereotype content; Twitter; user-generated content

² While Twitter was recently rebranded “X”, this article continues referring to it as “Twitter” as the medium was known under this name at the time the study was conducted.

CHAPTER 9

Why Female Virtual Conversational Agents Exhibit Greater Social Presence: Insights from the Stereotype Content Model

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Caroline Meyer

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WHY FEMALE VIRTUAL CONVERSATIONAL AGENTS EXHIBIT GREATER SOCIAL PRESENCE: INSIGHTS FROM THE STEREOTYPE CONTENT MODEL

In recent years, companies have increasingly adopted virtual conversational agents (VCAs) to interact with their consumers. A significant number of these agents is assigned to a specific gender, typically female, thereby reinforcing gender-related stereotypes. This work employs the stereotype content model (SCM) to investigate how the VCA's gender impacts social presence through warmth (sociability and morality) and competence in two studies (Study 1: avatars; Study 2: chatbots). Both studies show an indirect effect of the VCA's gender (female) on social presence through sociability, but not through morality and competence. Contrary to expectations, the indirect effect through sociability is significant for both male and female consumers. The findings show that the indirect effect is robust across different product categories (i.e., finance, fashion, travel, and toothbrush) and types of VCAs (i.e., visual and verbal). This research demonstrates how established stereotype theories (i.e., SCM) can serve as a valuable framework for exploring human-machine communication. Moreover, the results provide a fundamental basis for addressing and reducing the persistence of gender stereotypes, initiating a more extensive discussion about the ethical considerations related to interactions between humans and technology.

Keywords: Virtual conversational agents, gender, stereotype content model, social presence