

Social Identity Theory and Rebranding: The brand formerly known as Dunkin' Donuts

Meghan Lynne Gaskill

Thesis submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
In
Communication

Stephanie A. Smith
Beth M. Waggenspack
Nneka Logan

December 9, 2019
Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: Social Identity Theory, Dunkin' Donuts, brand equity, brand loyalty, visual
identification, Generation Z, Millennials

Social Identity Theory and Rebranding: The brand formerly known as Dunkin' Donuts

Meghan Lynne Gaskill

ACADEMIC ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact that the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' has on brand perception, specifically in Generation Z and Millennials through the lens of social identity theory. Factors studied include visual brand identification, brand loyalty, purchasing habits, and perception of brand equity. Forty-four (N=44) students participated in four focus groups looking at these variables. The findings showed that social identification with Dunkin' is formed through personal brand experience, although participants were resistant to self-categorization with Dunkin'. The findings also demonstrated that social identification decreased slightly through the visual rebranding, but did not create any reported impact on purchasing habits. It was also reported that the level of social identification was based off of perception of brand value and quality. Finally, participants demonstrated that there was an impact on social comparison through participants questioning Dunkin's values as an organization. Given that the sample was all Millennial and Generation Z consumers, this study also determined that company values are important to these cohorts. It also suggested that perceived modernization of a brand can positively impact brand equity, and that communication of rebranding changes to the public are an important step of a successful rebrand. Practical implications of this research are also discussed.

Social Identity Theory and Rebranding: The brand formerly known as Dunkin' Donuts

Meghan Lynne Gaskill

GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study examines the impact that the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' has on brand perceptions, specifically among Generation Z and Millennials through the lens of social identity theory. Social identity theory guides the understanding of how Generation Z and Millennials perceive Dunkin' through its rebranding. Factors studied include visual brand identification, brand loyalty, purchasing habits, and perception of brand equity. Forty-four (N=44) students participated in four focus groups looking at these variables. The findings showed that social identification with Dunkin' is formed through personal brand experience, although participants were resistant to self-categorization with Dunkin'. Given that the sample was all Millennial and Generation Z consumers, this study also determined that company values are important to these cohorts. It also suggested that perceived modernization of a brand can positively impact brand equity, and communication of rebranding changes to the public are an important step of a successful rebrand. Practical implications of this research are also discussed.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Dunkin' Overview | Pages 1-6

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Context and Rationale for Study | Pages 7-27

Chapter 3: Method and Data Analysis | Pages 28-36

Chapter 4: Findings | Pages 37-47

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Limitations/ Future Research | Pages 48-57

References: Pages 58-67

Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol | Pages 68-70

Appendix B: Research Subject Consent Form | Pages 71-74

Appendix C: IRB Approval Letter | Pages 75-76

Chapter 1: Introduction and Dunkin' Overview

Introduction

“America runs on Dunkin’ ” (Dunkin’, 2018). But now, “America is on a first-name basis with Dunkin’” (Dunkin’, 2018). Dunkin’ has joined the list of well-established companies that are embarking on a rebrand in an effort to stay relevant in a world overflowing with Starbucks and local coffee shops. Others include Weight Watchers, which announced in September 2018 that it was changing its name to “WW”; Kentucky Fried Chicken changed its name to KFC in 1991 (Weight Watchers, 2018 & “KFC Says Chicken,” 2016). On September 25, 2018, at the Global Franchisee Convention, Dunkin’ Donuts revealed that it was dropping the “Donuts” from its name (Dunkin’, 2018). To go along with its new name, Dunkin’ has executed a full rebranding, including store appearance, packaging, and logo.

During a rebrand, an organization must work to keep its current loyal customer base but also to expand its market share (Zhao, et. al, 2018). A significant part of that market includes the Millennial and Generation Z college populations. Brand loyalty ties consumers strongly to their brand of choice and can include both statements of loyalty, as well as repetitive purchasing behavior of the brand (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). This is also true for coffee consumers. Some are loyal to Starbucks, while others prefer Dunkin’ or even a local cafe. Consumers that are brand loyal are valuable to companies dedicated to developing and growing a strong customer base that continually purchases its brand over other options (Kapferer, 1997). A company can develop a loyal consumer base by providing quality products and service across all of its locations. The organization can also maintain consistency through its visual brand identity with communication both internally and externally through logos, slogans, advertising campaigns, and brand name to create legitimacy for itself in the market (Metzler, 2001).

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

For this study, the Dunkin' rebranding was researched through the lens of social identity theory. Data was gathered with a multiple focus group case study. Four focus groups were conducted to study the impact of Dunkin's rebranding on Millennial and Generation Z consumers' visual brand identification, brand loyalty in relation to purchasing habits, and brand equity, or the commercial value of something based on its brand rather than the product itself (Muzellac & Lambkin, 2005). Following the completion of the focus groups, the participants were divided into three groups based on their responses of reported frequency of visits to Dunkin', as well as their comments and opinions shared about Dunkin. The sorted groups included the first group of participants that identified with Dunkin, the second group had mid-level identification, which means that they did visit Dunkin' and were familiar with the brand, but had both positive and negative comments about it, and the third group did not identify with Dunkin.

The focus of this study is to examine the corporate rebranding of "Dunkin' Donuts" to "Dunkin'," and the impact of that rebranding on Millennials and Generation Z college student consumers. With over 75 United States college campuses "running on Dunkin'," college students are a sizable part of the market (Dunkin', 2018). Dunkin' is not the only company that has rebranded to increase its market share and better serve its stakeholders. Many highly successful Fortune 500 companies began with different brand names and identities ("15 Companies," 2017). Clorox was originally called "The Electro-Alkaline Company" before the use of the product caught on as a household item and the company renamed itself after its best-selling item; Nike was originally "Blue Ribbon Sports" ("15 Companies," 2017). Both companies have since each maintained high brand equity, visual brand identification, and loyalty following corporate rebranding.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

This study can provide companies with information on how a rebranding impacts Millennial and Generation Z consumers. Millennials and Generation Z are a valuable market to corporations (Fromm, et. al., 2015). This research provides insight about the reactions and perceptions consumers have during a rebranding and allows companies to strategize more effectively during a rebrand to capitalize on the valuable market share that Millennials and Generation Z consumers occupy.

Dunkin' Overview

History

Dunkin' began as a small coffee and donut shop founded by William Rosenberg in 1948 (Dunkin', 2018). It was founded on the idea that the brand would "make and serve the freshest, most delicious coffee and donuts quickly and courteously in modern, well merchandised stores" (Dunkin', 2018). The rebranding from "Dunkin' Donuts" to "Dunkin'" is not the first time the brand has changed; it was originally called "Open Kettle" (Dunkin', 2018). The first store opened in Quincy, Massachusetts, where the chain still has strong ties (Dunkin', 2018). The newest Dunkin' concept store also opened in Quincy, Massachusetts in January 2018, which was orchestrated as a tribute to the brand's heritage (Dunkin' Donuts, 2018). However, Dunkin' has officially left its small-town roots and grown into a coffee conglomerate. The chain serves 3 million customers daily and serves over 2 billion cups of hot and iced coffee a year (Dunkin', n.d. & Dunkin' Donuts History). Dunkin' has over 13,000 restaurants in 41 countries and has set a goal of growing its presence to 18,000 locations worldwide (Dunkin' Donuts History). The rebranding of Dunkin' is the brand's strategic step towards attaining this ambitious goal.

Rebrand

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

As Dunkin' has evolved, its coffee beverages have expanded to control a larger market share than donuts. Beverages account for 60% of Dunkin's sales, so rebranding may be an attempt to reflect this data in its business plan (Dan, 2018). Dunkin' announced its rebranding on September 25, 2018 at the Global Franchisee Convention, sharing that it was dropping the "Donuts" from its name (Dunkin', 2018). The name change and rebranding officially launched in January 2019 (Dunkin', 2018).

In the press release, the focus was on the company's goal to "modernize the Dunkin' experience" (Dunkin', 2018). Specifically, the CEO of Dunkin' Brands, David Hoffmann, stated that:

Our new branding is one of many things we are doing as part of our blueprint for growth... We believe our efforts to transform Dunkin', while still embracing our incredible heritage, will keep our brand relevant for generations to come. (Dunkin', 2018)

The company also laid out the following ways that it plans to improve the Dunkin' customer's experience: "next generation restaurants... menu innovation, on-the-go ordering and value offerings... with great beverages, delicious food and unparalleled convenience" (Dunkin', 2018).

These new features may appeal to the younger Millennial and Generation Z consumers.

However, the press release also noted the brand's continued commitment to its heritage (Dunkin', 2018). Dunkin' has gained the loyalty and trust of its consumers during its decades of business. Most noteworthy in the press release was Dunkin's emphasis that the core values of the company will not change, ensuring the continued loyalty of dedicated Dunkin' customers.

However, Dunkin's new strategic plan highlights the coffee sector of its business that is more successful (Dunkin', 2018). By doing so, the company may become more relevant to the

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Millennial and Generation Z consumers, and may become a bigger competitor for chains like Starbucks that focus mainly on beverages.

Dunkin's Values

Dunkin' is a completely franchised company; all 13,000 of its restaurants are franchises, which means each owner may have a slightly different goals and values (Dunkin' Donuts History). However, Dunkin's overarching company mission statement is:

“Everything we do is about you. From chefs who create exciting new flavors, to crew members who know exactly how you want your drink—we prioritize what you need to get you on your way. We strive to keep you at your best, and we remain loyal to you, your tastes and your time. That's what America runs on” (Dunkin', n.d.).

This is a very customer service-based mission statement, and it does not include any corporate responsibility statements or goals. Instead, it focuses on anticipating the customer's needs in a speedy manner and provided excellent service.

Dunkin' also has a corporate responsibility statement, which is “We strive to be recognized as a company that responsibly serves our guests, franchisees, employees, communities, business partners, and the interests of our planet” (Dunkin' Brands' Commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, n.d.). This statement includes a commitment to sustainable food, restaurants, communities, and to the employees of Dunkin' (Dunkin' Brands' Commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility, n.d.). An example of the company's commitment to sustainability is the announcement it made in February 2018; Dunkin' announced that it was replacing the unsustainable foam cups with more recyclable double-walled cardboard cups (“Dunkin' Donuts to Eliminate Foam Cups Worldwide in 2020”, 2018) Dunkin' plans to have all franchises using these new cups by 2020; this move will eliminate one billion foam cups from

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

landfills annually ("Dunkin' Donuts to Eliminate Foam Cups Worldwide in 2020", 2018). And now, these sustainable double-walled cups will feature Dunkin's new logo, which is described below.

Dunkin's Visual Brand Identity

The Dunkin' double-walled coffee cups have a new look as of January 2019 (Dunkin', 2018). Dunkin's former visual identity as Dunkin' Donuts consisted of its signature pink and orange bubble font, which was originally introduced in 1973 (Dunkin', 2018; see Figure 1, before). The previous logo also featured a graphic image of a steaming cup of Dunkin' Donuts coffee. The new logo and branding are very similar to the previous versions, highlighting the company's commitment to its heritage. The new logo features the new name, Dunkin', in the same iconic bubble font and pink and orange colors (see Figure 1, after). However, the "donuts" and the image of the cup of coffee were eliminated. The image below shows these changes. The new brand identity of Dunkin' is reflected across all of its packaging, storefronts, and merchandise across the franchises. Visual brand identity and the impact it has on consumers is described in the literature review below.



Figure 1. (Multimedia, 2019).

Chapter 2: Literature Review and Context and Rationale for Study

Literature Review

The literature review will include detailed information about social identity theory, rebranding, and provide insight into both demographics and consumer characteristics about Generation Z and Millennials. It will also provide insight into the three variables being researched which are visual brand identity, brand loyalty, and brand equity.

Social Identity Theory

This study utilizes social identity theory as a lens to better understand college-aged, Generation Z and Millennial consumers' social identification behavior. Social identity theory is a social-psychological founded theory developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel and Turner formulated this theory on the foundation that a person's group associations become a part of their social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory assumes that people have two identities: personal and social (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). People's personal identities consist of personal characteristics, traits, and abilities, while their social identities comprise of their group associations (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Humans naturally classify themselves based on the groups they are a part of, including age groups, gender, social groups, and religions (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). This idea also extends to organizations, workplaces, and brands. Relating with a group, category, or organization gives people a way to self-reference and define their place in society (Tajfel & Turner, 1982). Social identity is also an important factor for "perceptions, cognitions, evaluations, and attributions about issues and events, impacting emotions as well as behaviors" (Underwood, et. al., 2001, p. 3).

Social identification is based on four principles: self-identification, personal experience, internalization, and the idea that group identification only partially defines someone's identity

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

(Ashforth & Mael, 1989). A person's social identity can consist of multiple different organizations or groups. Organizational identifications provide different pieces for people to create a relational framework of their identity.

Social identity formation is a byproduct of self-categorization and social comparison (Stets & Burke, 2000, Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Self-categorization stems from the concept that a person is part of a social group consisting of individuals with the same social identifications (Stets & Burke, 2000). Through self-comparison, those that are similar to an individual become part of the in-group; those that are different become part of the out-group (Stets & Burke, 2000, Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). The positive evaluation of in-group members and negative evaluation of out-group members leads to a boost of self-esteem for the in-group member (Stets & Burke, 2000). A "positive social identity is based...on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups; the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant out-groups" (Tafjel & Turner, 1982 p. 284).

When a person becomes part of a social group, self-verification occurs (Stets & Burke, 2000). Self-verification is seeing one's self as part of a social group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Identifying with an organization allows for individual identification on social terms; identifying with a group means that the individual can be judged against other members of the same group, either positively or negatively (Tafjel & Turner, 1982). Tafjel and Turner (1982), note that it is natural for individuals to maintain their positive social group identification once it has been established. Alternatively, when being part of a group is no longer beneficial, an individual will leave that group and possibly attempt to join another group that creates a more positive association (Tafjel & Turner, 1982). Therefore, it is vital for a brand to help consumers maintain

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

a positive social identification with its organization in order to sustain and grow market share, in addition to developing stakeholder loyalty.

Establishing strong organizational identification impacts both the stakeholders and the organization itself. A strong social identity with a group provides more satisfaction for the individual, and more efficiency for the organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Socially identifying with a group allows a person to develop a more detailed definition of themselves. A person's social identification with a brand or organization has been shown to affect purchasing behaviors, which companies must remember while considering brand changes (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006, Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011). To create social identification among consumers, a brand must:

Foster group experiences, establish and/or build on their unique history and traditions, and initiate meaningful rituals involving the consumption process. Physical facilities should be designed to both communicate a unique brand identity and facilitate shared experience among consumers (Underwood, et. al., 2001, p. 10).

The cultivation of group experience, emphasis on tradition, rituals, and physical reminders leads to consumer social identification, and ultimately, customer-based brand equity according to Underwood, et. al. (2001). Social identification is a step on the path to customer-based brand equity; it leads to brand knowledge, awareness, and image (Underwood, et. al., 2001). Companies need brand equity because it demonstrates the value of its products to consumers.

Also, according to Ashforth and Mael (1989), social identification is cultivated through symbolic interactionism, which allows for the consumer to feel as though they are part of the organizational experience, and thus develop social identification. Symbolic interactionism is the idea that humans interact with physical objects, organizations, and situations based on the

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

personal meaning constructed by social interactions (Blumer, 1969). An example of symbolic interactionism is a person's perception of smoking; someone may have grown up in a home where there was smoking and think that is an acceptable behavior. Another person may grow up with a doctor as a parent and know the risks and dangers of tobacco and not participate in that behavior. Organizations are increasingly participating in symbolic management to encourage stakeholder social identification. According to Ashforth & Mael (1989, p. 28):

It is tacitly understood by managers that a positive and distinctive organizational identity attracts the recognition, support, and loyalty of not only organizational members but other key constituents (e.g., shareholders, customers, job seekers), and it is this search for a distinctive identity that induces organizations to focus so intensely on advertising, names and logos, jargon, leaders and mascots, and so forth.

Sometimes, symbolic management can be used to a company's detriment. One study looked at companies that were charged with organizational misconduct and determined where organizations were participating in symbolic management through company culture to make it seem as though the misdeeds committed by employees were commonplace (MacLean, 2008). However, brands tend to attempt to cultivate a positive social identity of all stakeholders through public relations efforts, as well as communicating ways in which its stakeholders can identify with its brand. The loyalty and support of its stakeholders is key to an organization's success. Another study looked at organic markets and how market strategies help to cultivate social identities of green consumerism in terms of brand knowledge, purchasing habits, and brand attitude (Bartels & Hoogendam, 2011).

It is important to make a distinction between organizational commitment and organizational identification. Social identity theory relates specifically to organizational

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

identification. Organizational commitment is a byproduct of organizational identification, and is defined as the level of identification a person has with the particular organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

To Millennials, making a purchase is more than just an exchange of money; it is a chance for self-expression (Bowen & McCain, 2015). Millennials communicate their social identity through their purchases, and buy from brands whose values are in line with their own (Bowen & McCain, 2015). Also, because communication via social media is so prevalent and Millennials are constantly sharing their lives and the products they own via social media, the brands they like and purchases they make must also resonate among their peers (Bowen & McCain, 2015).

Social identity theory is a behaviorally based theory, making it widely applicable to human based areas of research. Social identity theory has been applied across many fields of research in addition to its roots in psychology (Ferrucci & Tandoc, 2018), including business (Scott, 2007), social behavior (Barker & Rodriguez, 2019; Bond, et. al., 2018; Nicholls & Rice, 2017), marketing (Lam, et. al., 2010), and education (Drezner, 2018, Ewing & Allen, 2017). It is used to further explain and explore intergroup relationships and behavior, group identification, as well as social change strategies. The theory assumes that a person has both a social and personal identity (Tafjel & Turner, 1979). It is potentially problematic to assume this, as not all people may accept the idea of having both sets of identity. Also, social identity theory attempts to better explain intergroup relationships and behavior, but may not fully consider all necessary external variables. Despite these setbacks, social identity theory has been tested broadly in research, and has proved to be an excellent framework for organizational identification, specifically in terms of branding.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

One study drew from social identity theory while studying resistance to brand switching after a radically new brand was introduced into the marketplace (Lam, et. al, 2010). In this study, researchers looked at social identity as a way to define customer-brand relationships; Lam, et. al. (2010) studied the purchasing behavior of the Spain market when the Apple iPhone was introduced and how the launch of this completely new product affected consumers, and if they made the switch from their previously cell phone suppliers. The study determined that those who perceived the new brand as having a higher value or equity and identify with the new brand more than their current brand were more likely to switch cell phone carriers to get the iPhone (Lam, et. al., 2010). Another recent study used social identity theory to study political discussions and the impact those discussions had on intergroup perceptions (Bond, et. al., 2018). This study is filling the gap in literature looking at the impact that a rebranding has on Generation Z and Millennials from a communication viewpoint using a lens of social identity theory.

This study looks at how a person's pre-established perceptions are impacted with an organization when the organization itself makes brand changes. Social identity theory helps determine how one relates and identifies with a group or organization, making it an appropriate foundation for this study. Brand and organization affiliations have the ability to become part of a person's social identity (Tafjel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory allows for unique insights into how a rebranding affects one's identity as the "in-group" is essentially changing its visual identity (Stets & Burke, 2000, Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). This study attempts to assess the level of organizationally based social identification with a Millennial and Generation Z college-aged population following the rebranding of Dunkin'. The next section looks at the concept of rebranding and what it means when a brand embarks upon a rebranding effort.

Rebranding

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Corporate rebranding is the change from an original brand to a new concept; it requires communicating a change of the mindset of both internal and external stakeholders (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). It is a strategic change within a company to achieve a certain desired goal, which is generally increased revenue or market share. Rebranding can involve a new name or visual identity, including a new logo, advertisements, and tagline.

Merrilees and Miller (2008) established the following framework of six principles when considering implementation of corporate rebranding. The first principle is that any changes made must continue to stay inline with a brand's original ideology, yet make necessary changes to ensure continued relevancy (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). The second principle states that a rebranding may require maintaining of some of the brand's previous identifying factors to connect stakeholders from that previous brand to the new brand (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Principle three posits that rebranding may necessitate tapping into a new market segment and adjusting to that group of stakeholders, in addition to maintaining the current market share (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). An example of a company exhibiting principle three is determining that environmental responsibility is important to a newly emerging market segment. Anticipating this new market need and making this change during a rebrand can attract this new stakeholder group and increase the success of the campaign.

The next principle states that a high level of communication and training with internal stakeholders creates a more successful rebrand (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Providing employees with detailed information about rebranding allows for buy-in, as well as for these internal stakeholders to become positive ambassadors for the company during its transition period. The fifth principle holds that consistency and alignment during the integration of a rebranding is key (Merrilees & Miller, 2008).

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

The final principle set forth by Merrilees & Miller (2008) says that extensive effort should be given to communicate with external stakeholders that changes are being made to the brand. Communication could include marketing campaigns with television or print ads highlighting the changes being made from the rebranding to promote public understanding of these changes. These six guiding principles demonstrate the ways in which a corporation can effectively implement a rebrand with buy-in from both internal and external stakeholders.

Companies consider rebranding for many reasons, but the major goal of rebranding is to communicate to the public that there has been a change within the organization (Miller, et. al., 2014). Specific reasons for rebranding most often include mergers and acquisitions of other companies, but they can also include changes in the marketplace, economic or legal conditions, new competitors, or that a current brand is outdated and no longer fits with what the company provides (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Another reason for rebranding is a new vision of the company, which can stem from a new CEO or brand leadership (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). It is vital for a company to consider the implications of a rebranding campaign because they are a costly pursuit. Historically, there are more failures than successful rebrand attempts in the marketplace (Stuart & Muzellec, 2004). Corporate rebranding has been looked at from a financial perspective: a study researched at the impact that rebranding announcements had on a company's value (Zhao, et. al, 2018). It has also been studied from a marketing perspective (Kaikati, 2003, Merrilees and Miller, 2008 & Muzellac and Lambkin, 2006). There has been a study from the communication standpoint looking at the effects of a corporate rebranding on internal and external stakeholders, but additional research in this area is limited (Bolhuis, et. al., 2018). This study attempts to fill the gap in literature and add to the research on corporate rebranding from a communication viewpoint.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

In addition to the many factors that go into a decision to rebrand, companies should consider stakeholder interests when establishing a strategic plan. Specifically, the disruption of social identification in the form of brand loyalty, visual brand identification, and perceived brand equity should be considered. Rebranding has the potential to upset the established social identification held by its consumers. This study seeks to determine the potential impact on brand perceptions of Generation Z and Millennial college-aged consumers. The next section of the literature review outlines characteristics of these generations, as well as provides an overview of their known consumer habits.

Millennials / Generation Z Consumers

The research on Millennials and Generation Z is still evolving, given their timeline. However, some research that defines their psychographic characters and values has been conducted, which provides a rationale for their importance to corporate rebranding. Someone's generation can also become an integral part of his or her social identity, which is why the study is specifically considering Millennials and Generation Z in the sample.

Millennials are the generation born between 1982 and 2004, making them between 15 and 37 years old (Luttrell & McGrath, 2017). This nicknamed "entitled generation" has 80 million members in the United States (Luttrell & McGrath, 2017, p. 21). Millennials are characterized as "blunt, techno-savvy individuals who believe that education is key to success, technology is an engrained part of life, and diversity and social responsibility are paramount" (Luttrell & McGrath, 2017, p. 29). Also, Millennials have delayed getting married and having children until later in life than their parents who were Generation X, allowing for more of a focus on education and careers (Scardamalia, 2015). Technologically skilled Millennials were the first generation to grow up with the Internet and have been deemed "digital natives" (Luttrell &

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

McGrath, 2007, p. 69). Because Millennials are “digital natives,” they are comfortable communicating via various forms of technology, including social media, email, and smartphones (Luttrell & McGrath, 2017). Companies must remember this when creating marketing strategies in order to reach the Millennial demographic through the proper channels of communication.

Millennials are also described as being accepting, instead of tolerant of, diversity and inclusion, and are “change agents,” believing that they have the capability to make real progress in the world (Luttrell & McGrath, 2017). Honesty and directness are also valued in the Millennial generation; what was previously seen as too much information and impoliteness is now the norm (Twenge, 2006). These characteristics are unique to the Millennial population and should be considered by brands working to earn their purchases and brand loyalty.

The generation following the Millennials were born after 1995 and have been called the “Selfie Generation” and “iGen,” before settling on Generation Z (Miller, 2018). This generation is being studied in conjunction with Millennials because it is newer, resulting in less available research and data on the population. This generation is 57 million members strong, and will make up 36 percent of the workforce by 2020 (Miller, 2018). They are currently enrolled in college and graduating, which is why they are part of the focus of this study. Generation Z characteristics include competitiveness, skepticism, entrepreneurialism, connected, diverse, change-oriented, and financially aware (Miller, 2018). Like Millennials, Generation Z has grown up with unlimited technological access; they have likely never printed a map or owned an iPod because their smartphones were equipped with GPS and music capabilities (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Both generations are characterized as open-minded and responsible, as well (Seemiller & Grace, 2015, Luttrell & McGrath, 2017). Generation Z has witnessed the increase in the wage

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

gap and the diminishing middle class; consequently, they are predicted to be a generation with a propensity towards saving and fiscal responsibility similar to Millennials (Turner, 2015).

Generation Z members are less focused on themselves and are cognizant of the well-being of people around them (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). They are loyal to causes that affect people outside of their direct environment (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Generation Z is also characterized as the most diverse generation to date, as it has an increasing population of biracial and multiracial children (Turner, 2015). Also, more children are being raised in urban areas causing exposure to different cultural experiences (Turner, 2015). Another unique facet of Generation Z is that they have grown up during a time of war; the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 occurred when they were 7-8 years old, and the Iraq War began in 2003 (Turner, 2015). This environment of constant turmoil may lead to Generation Z as viewing the world as unsafe but has also generally promoted their global awareness (Turner, 2015). As Generation Z members continue to age, and additional research is conducted on them, more generational characteristics and values will emerge to create a more complete definition of a “Generation Z” member. This study will contribute to an understanding of Generation Z as consumers.

A person’s generation can be a central part of his or her social identity. The stakeholders’ generational values should be considered by brands during conceptualization of rebranding strategies (Rossem, 2018). It seems as though Dunkin’ has considered these two generations in its rebranding campaign. As members of the Millennial generation continue to move up the ranks of organizations, business is changing, and the way businesses communicate with external audiences, like consumers, is evolving as well. Millennials in management are understanding the value of cultivating relationships with younger generations, such as Generation Z, to create lifelong consumers. Lifelong consumers are important to corporations because of the massive

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

portion of market share they hold, which is why research on their consumer habits is particularly useful (Fromm, et. al., 2015).

Consumer Habits - Millennials / Generation Z

Because Millennials make up approximately 25% of the United States population and 21% of the consumer purchasing power, it is vital that organizations market to this influential group (Fromm, et. al., 2015). Millennial purchasing power encompasses an estimated \$200 billion annually and \$500 billion indirectly due to the influence they have on their parent's purchasing (Fromm & Garton, 2013). Companies cannot afford to ignore the Millennial and Generation Z consumer population in marketing and business strategy.

Luttrell and McGrath (2017) note that Millennials will have more loyalty towards a company if they feel personally connected to it. Also, Millennials truly engage in a "participation economy;" they want to "actively participate, cocreate, and most important, be included as partners in the brands they love" (Fromm & Garton, 2013, p. 19). An example of this is the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge; the fundraising effort was successful in raising over \$100 million (a 3,500% increase from the previous year) for the cause because it directly engaged the Millennial population (Fromm, et. al., 2015). Another reason for the campaign's success was that it appealed to the Millennial mindset of being a "change agent;" the campaign was an accessible way for people to make a significant change (Fromm, et. al., 2015 & Luttrell & McGrath, 2017, p. 151). Younger generation members have also turned their spending money towards social and ethical issues (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). An example of this is the founder of Chick-fil-A's same-sex marriage comments, which allowed Generation Z to put their dollar to work (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Those opposed to same-sex marriage supported the restaurant with their

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

purchases; those that disagreed with the founder's comments boycotted the chain (Seemiller & Grace, 2015).

Millennials are also heavily influenced by price and savings in their purchases (Fromm & Garton, 2013). With a smartphone at their fingertips, it is easy for Millennials to research a product online for reviews, as well as price (Castellini & Samoggia, 2018). A study showed that nearly half of the Millennials surveyed would be willing to interrupt their normal route to shop somewhere that offers a deals and rewards programs, and even more shocking, they are willing to completely change brands to save money (Fromm & Garton, 2013). This creates a challenge for brands when trying to build loyalty; a brand must incorporate an emphasis for value in product pricing and promotions, as well as marketing, to capture the Millennial sector (Fromm & Garton, 2013). One way that companies can accomplish this is through customer loyalty programs; according to a survey, Millennials rated loyalty rewards as the most likely item they would exchange for marketing information (Fromm & Garton, 2013). However, Generation Z is also proving to be a more loyal generation than the fickle Millennials (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). This means that companies may have an easier time establishing brand loyalty among this generation. There is limited research available on the consumer habits of Millennials and Generation Z. This study will add to the body of research available on Millennials and Generation Z as consumers.

Brands should consider the unique characteristics of Millennials and Generation Z consumers while crafting communication and marketing campaigns targeting them; rebranding is an excellent opportunity to pivot towards the large market share they occupy. Specifically, brands must account for visual brand identity, brand loyalty, and perceived brand equity among Generation Z and Millennial consumers when considering a rebrand. Research is limited on

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Generation Z and its consumer habits because they are just graduating from college and entering the marketplace; this study attempts to add to the research regarding Generation Z and its consumer habits. The next section of the literature review explains visual brand identity and links it with social identity theory as a lens.

Visual Brand Identity

The visual identity of a brand allows for consumers and stakeholders to identify and associate with that particular brand. Brand identity is “a unique set of brand associations that the brand strategist aspires to create or maintain” (Aaker, 1996, p. 68). Aaker (1996) claims that identity should establish a relationship between the brand and the consumer to help drive purchase decisions and identification with the brand. Key to brand identity are the visual representations of the brand. Visual brand identity communicates an association between a logo or any visual representations and the product or service the company provides to the consumer.

A brand’s visual identity includes anything that communicates the perception of the brand, any kind of unique visual characteristic of the brand, and the external image the brand projects (Esch, 2008). This can include packaging, brand advertisements, and physical locations (Esch, 2008). Visual identity of a brand is paramount in consumer identification. A visual cue that a product or service is part of a brand can tell consumers that they should purchase that item.

The visual identity of a brand is carefully curated by designers employed by that brand. A brand’s identity helps to cultivate a relationship with the consumer (Fournier, 1998). The goal is to create a cohesive, rational set of images to represent the brand, including advertisements, websites, store design, etcetera. The visual identity of the brand must be clear and adhered to in any printed or publicly facing materials. A company’s logo should look the same on its

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

letterhead as it does on the coffee cups being distributed to customers. A clear visual brand identity can also become a way for a person to communicate their social identity.

Dunkin' has many ways in which it visually promotes its brand to grow its base of loyal consumers and promote awareness. Using logos on merchandise allows consumers to showcase Dunkin' as part of their social identity. All of the products sold in the store for consumption display Dunkin's logo and name. Ideally, consumers who carry reusable Dunkin' mugs or buy Dunkin' merchandise are exhibiting that Dunkin' is part of their own social identity.

Dunkin' has pushed visual brand identity even further with its merchandise partnerships. Dunkin' partnered with Saucony to create the 2018 Boston Marathon shoe (Dawson, 2018). The shoe features the Dunkin' signature pink and orange color scheme, along with a pair of donuts on the back, sprinkles, and the brand's tagline, "America Runs on Dunkin'," (Dawson, 2018; see Figure 2 below). These shoes came in both men's and women's options and were \$110 (Saucony's, 2018). The shoes sold out in three days (Saucony's, 2018). Consumers with extremely high levels of social identification with Dunkin' would be proud to own and wear a pair of these tennis shoes.



Figure 2. (Dawson, 2018).

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Another interesting thing Dunkin' has done to promote its brand is to build a tiny house that literally runs on coffee (Houck, 2018). It features Dunkin's signature orange and pink throughout the design, and even comes with Dunkin' coffee and snacks (Houck, 2018). The house runs partially on fuel created from used coffee grinds, which is a play on the brand's tagline, "America Runs on Dunkin'" (Houck, 2018). Dunkin' is going above normal merchandising efforts to promote its new brand. It is unique marketing campaigns like donut branded shoes and coffee-run tiny-houses that stand out to Millennial and Generation Z consumers and truly promote brand based social identification.

Rebranding disrupts the previous conception of a brand's visual identity. Therefore, it is even more essential for a company going through a rebrand to be consistent with its new visual identity. Consistency allows for a reinforcement of a new brand identity and encourages buy-in to the change. Brand loyalty can also potentially be impacted by rebranding, which is discussed below.

Brand Loyalty

According to Kapferer (1997), a brand's strength lies in its number of loyal consumers. For this reason, engaging customers in brand loyalty should be a top priority for a company during strategic planning and rebranding. Brand loyalty is a consumer's beliefs and attitudes towards a brand that benefit it over another in the consumer's mind (Watson, et. al, 2015). A brand loyal customer is a valuable asset to a brand. Consumer brand loyalty results in reduced marketing costs, trade leverage, an increased amount of time to respond to threats of competitors, and a group advocating on behalf of the company to attract new customers (Aaker, 1991). Also, loyal customers are willing to pay a higher price for their preferred brand over another brand

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

offering similar quality products or services (Aaker, 1996). A loyal customer base is a vital part of a successful brand.

The process of forming brand loyalty was originally defined by Richard L. Oliver in 1999, and continues to be a seminal resource for those studying brand loyalty. Oliver states that brand loyalty occurs in phases; the first of which is cognitive loyalty, where consumers prefer a brand only based on belief (1999). The next phase is where a positive attitude toward a brand is developed based on repeated satisfying experiences with the brand, but there is no strong commitment (Oliver, 1999). In the third phase, the consumer has instilled an intention to return to the brand for repurchasing (Oliver, 1999). Finally, there is a “readiness to act” in the action loyalty stage where consumers have developed a deep level of commitment, have a positive attitude towards the brand, and exhibit repeat purchase behavior (Oliver, 1999, p. 36). It is also at this stage that a brand becomes a part of a person’s social identity; the stronger the brand loyalty, the more it becomes a part of a person’s social identity. Establishing consumer relationships in the fourth phase of brand loyalty is a brand’s goal; at that point, the consumer is willing to seek out and pay a premium price for that brand’s product. Oliver’s phases of brand loyalty formation have been applied extensively in marketing research (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Palmatier, et. al, 2006, & Lam, et. al., 2004). Oliver’s phases are important to this study because they explain the formation of brand loyalty among consumers; this study is researching the change that possibly happens in brand loyalty based on a rebranding (Oliver, 1999).

Brand identification also holds a pivotal role in establishing consumer brand loyalty (He, et., al, 2012). Possessions and purchases are regarded as part of a person’s identity, as well as a way for others to define someone (Stokburger-Sauer et. al., 2012 & Belk, 1988). Social identity offers a perspective that assists in defining the relationship between a company and its

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

consumers through “self-expression, self-enhancement, and self-esteem in developing meaningful relationships with companies and brands” (He, et. al, 2012, p. 648). Consumers who identify with a brand also tend to be more loyal to that brand (Tuškej, et. al, 2013). Being loyal to a brand cements that brand as a part of a person’s social identity. Millennials’ purchases are a form of self-expression and truly become part of their social identity; they purchase products from brands that align with their personal values and beliefs (Bowen & McCain, 2015). However, Gurău (2012) found that Millennials are less brand loyal than previous generations, potentially due to their constant exposure to new and exciting products, better deals, as well as the fact that they make purchases that match their personality and lifestyle without a focus on brand. Purchasing behavior ultimately varies based on the consumer, and deals over company values, or vice versa, may be the deciding factor in a purchasing decision. Despite this fact, a loyal Millennial consumer is a valuable asset to brands because of their extensive market share and purchasing power (Fromm & Garton, 2016).

Brand Equity / Perceived Value

Brand equity is a key factor in the establishment of brand loyalty (Molinillo, et. al., 2018). Brand equity is the commercial value of a company specifically derived from the name or brand, rather than the actual product or service rendered (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2005). It can be measured by price premium, satisfaction and loyalty, perceived quality and leadership, perceived value, brand personality, differentiation from other brands, brand awareness, market share, and product price and distribution (Aaker, 1996). Consumers must have a high level of perceived value of the product and brand in order to develop loyalty and identification (Lazarevic, 2012). The more brand equity a brand has, the higher its commercial value. Brand equity should be considered by companies when rebranding, especially because of the unpredictability and

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

general lack of brand loyalty that characterize Millennial and Generation Z consumers (Lazarevic, 2012). A higher level of brand equity among these consumers encourages higher social identification and loyalty with that brand.

Social identity and brand equity are closely intertwined. Research with sports teams and loyal fans shows that a sense of increased social identity results in a higher level of perceived equity with that team (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). High brand equity is valuable to a brand because it allows the brand to charge premium pricing (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). It is also valuable to the consumer when faced with a product choice; holding high brand equity allows the consumer to easily choose between products when offered many options (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007). Holding a brand with higher brand equity allows consumers to purchase the item from the brand they identify with and trust (Boyle & Magnusson, 2007).

A previous study analyzed 166 companies to determine the reasoning companies rebrand, as well as the effects rebranding had on the companies' brand equity (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). The study found that during a rebrand, name recognition was key (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). According to their research, a brand should maintain name awareness and communication throughout a rebranding transition (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). This would nullify any possible negative effects of no longer being able to rely on previous company name recognition (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006). Essentially, the new company name should be at the forefront of any advertising or informative efforts so a new brand name recognition relationship can form. This will allow any previous held brand equity to be transferred to the new company name. As demonstrated in this study, communication is vital in continuity of brand equity during a rebranding. There is limited research determining if this is also true when looking at the Generation Z and Millennial population, so this study attempts to add to that gap in literature.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Context and Rationale for Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Generation Z and Millennial college students' perceptions of Dunkin's re-branding. Conducting this study provides organizations with information on how a rebranding affects this group of consumers. With this information, companies can better formulate strategic plans for marketing and communicating a rebrand for Generation Z and Millennial college students. Generation Z and Millennials are a significant group to study because of the massive market share and purchasing power they hold in the United States (Fromm & Garton, 2016). Because they range in age from approximately 15-40 years old, earning the loyalty of a Millennial or Generation Z member ensures a lifetime of purchases and business (Fromm & Garton, 2016). Also, Millennials tend to be less brand loyal, so determining what factors affect a Millennial's social identification would be valuable for an organization (Fromm & Garton, 2016). Investing in capturing this market and its loyalty will pay dividends in the long term for companies.

As previously mentioned, organizational and brand loyalties can become part of a person's social identity. Because of this, social identity theory was selected as a framework for this study. The concept that visual identification, brand loyalty, and a high perceived value and brand equity becomes a part of a person's social identity is also used as a basis for this research. It is vital for organizations to consider all stakeholders when making business decisions and formulating strategic plans, especially when undergoing a rebranding. It expands research for Generation Z and Millennials, which are a huge part of the market share of consumers. Additionally, this research adds to the field of corporate rebranding literature. Corporate rebranding is becoming more prevalent in the market where established brands are increasingly

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

considering a change in their strategic plans to grow and adapt to the marketplace (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). The following research questions drive this study:

RQ1: What are Millennial and Generation Z college consumers pre-existing thoughts about the Dunkin' brand?

RQ2: To what extent does the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' impact the Millennial and Generation Z college consumer's social identity with the brand when considering visual identification with the brand?

RQ3: To what extent does the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' impact the Millennial and Generation Z college student consumer's social identity with the brand when considering brand loyalty, specifically purchasing habits?

RQ4: To what extent does the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' impact the Millennial and Generation Z college student consumer's social identity with the brand when considering consumer perceived value and equity with the brand?

Chapter 3: Method and Data Analysis

Method

Participants

This study was conducted using focus groups following university Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (see Appendix C). Forty-four (30 females, 14 males) students participated in the focus groups. Participants were all full-time, college-aged (18-30 years old) students at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) enrolled in the Fall 2019 semester. Majors varied and are detailed in Table 1. The most represented majors were public relations with nine participants and communication studies with eight. The participants had also visited a Dunkin' location in the past. This sample is a typical case of college students in the Generation Z and Millennial group in the United States (Patton, 2002). Virginia Tech students can be expected to have an average college experience. Selecting this group demonstrates purposeful sampling and highlights the thoughts and opinions of the typical college student in the United States (Patton, 2002).

Each participant engaged in one of the four focus group sessions. Sessions consisted of 10-13 participants each, with an average of 11 participants. The focus groups were scheduled after online recruitment through Sona Experiment Management System (SONA). Students received one credit point through the Sona Experiment Management System for their participation. This credit can be applied to course work at Virginia Tech, and it may have been assigned by professors or used as extra credit in class. Virginia Tech students are an appropriate target group of this study because there is a Dunkin' location on the Blacksburg campus. Therefore, students that have a meal plan at Virginia Tech have had an opportunity to use their meal plan credit at Dunkin' and should at least be familiar with the establishment. Students with

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

a meal plan do not have to use cash to purchase items from Dunkin', but they can use their pre-purchased meal plan credit for purchasing.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Table 1. *Participants' Majors*

Major	Number of Participants
Public Relations	9
Communication Studies	8
Multimedia Journalism	3
Business IT	2
Computer Science	2
Biology	1
Business	1
Childhood Pre-Education	1
Comm Sci/ Soc Inq	1
Criminology	1
English	1
Environmental Resource Management	1
Explore Science	1
Exploring Life Science	1
Exploring Natural Resources	1
General Engineering	1
Human Development	1
Human Nutrition Food & Exercise	1
Industrial Design	1
International Public Policy	1
Management	1
Marketing Management	1
Real Estate	1
Theatre Arts	1
University Studies	1

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Benefits of Focus Groups

Focus groups offer a unique opportunity for researchers, as they encourage participants to interact with one another to further establish and clarify their opinions. Focus groups may produce different and intriguing responses due to discourse among participants. Focus groups are more than a series of individual interviews, but instead are able to produce innovative ideas through group engagement (Rakow, 2011).

Also, employing focus groups allowed participants to explain their experiences and perspectives in a more detailed manner (Morgan, 1997). Another unique benefit of focus groups is the group interaction that is a natural byproduct. Participants are able to interact and provide personal examples, as well as agree or disagree with others, ultimately leading to a comparative discussion (Morgan, 1997). Essentially, this interaction and process of exploring shared connections and perceptions is what researchers attempt to do when analyzing collected data (Agar, 1986).

Focus Group Interviews

Each of the four focus group sessions was scheduled for 30 minutes. The sessions ranged from 23.29 to 31.26 minutes, and the average length of the focus groups was 28.93 minutes. All four focus groups were held in the same classroom to maintain uniformity in seating and location. Each session was audio recorded for transcription and to facilitate analysis following the study. At each session, participants were asked to verbally confirm their eligibility prior to the beginning of the focus group. They also reviewed and signed the consent form (See Appendix B). This confirmed age, enrollment at Virginia Tech, and that participants had been to a Dunkin' Donuts location before. In an effort to maintain fairness in the study, participants were debriefed prior to each focus group session based on a pre-determined script by the moderator

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

(See Appendix A for script). There was one moderator for all four focus groups. The debriefing included that the session was going to be recorded and the moderator requested that all participants speak loudly and clearly in order to be heard later on in the recording. The debriefing also provided a brief introduction that the discussion would be focused on Dunkin' Donuts and that the moderator would contribute minimally to this discussion except for questions. The debriefing summarized the goals of the study and verbally confirmed that all students were between the ages of 18-30, full-time students at Virginia Tech, and that they have been to a Dunkin' Donuts. The moderator also guaranteed participants confidentiality in regards to the study.

Once the debriefing had been completed and there were no questions from the participants, the discussion began by gauging the group's knowledge of Dunkin' Donuts. It is important to note that the brand name Dunkin' Donuts was used by the moderator until the topic of the rebranding was mentioned. It is a key part of the study to measure the participants' knowledge of the brand change, and mentioning the new name before it was specifically discussed may have caused bias and inaccurate data. In addition to the group's knowledge of Dunkin' Donuts, participants were asked how often and why (convenience, price, products offered) they do or do not visit Dunkin' Donuts. The participants were also questioned about their knowledge of the Dunkin' rebrand and the extent of its impact on them. First, the old Dunkin' Donuts logo was shown to each group via PowerPoint (See Appendix A). Then, a side by side image of the new and old logos were presented, along with photos of the new Dunkin' packaging (See Appendix A) to determine the participants' feelings on the changes. The discussion ended by asking if there were any further comments from participants. The moderator

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

thanked all participants for their time and contribution to the study. A copy of the focus group protocol and interview guide is provided in Appendix A.

Following the focus groups, the audio recordings were transcribed with Sonix. Once the transcripts were received, the researcher reviewed each to make corrections and confirm their accuracy. Focus group participants were assigned an alphanumeric code to ensure confidentiality. Each participant was assigned a 4-part code. The first pair of digits specifies the focus group they participated in, and the second part of the code was the participant number. For example, G2P10 was participant number 10 in the second focus group. Focus groups were assigned chronologically as follows: September 20, 2019: G1; September 21, 2019: G2, September 23, 2019: G3, and September 24, 2019: G4.

Data Analysis

Open and axial coding were used to analyze the data collected during this study. Prior to coding, audio recordings of all four focus group sessions were transcribed verbatim via Sonix and confirmed for accuracy manually by the researcher. Then, the data analysis process began with open coding to establish a comprehensive list of codes throughout the transcripts. Open coding is the initial process of reviewing transcripts to identify concepts and data points without connecting or analyzing them for patterns (Given, 2008). Review of each transcript was done three times. Words and short phrases (two to five words) that occurred in each separate transcript were circled. This process produced 44 total open codes, or original concepts, which are listed below in the first column of Table 3. Each open code was then grouped by research question and labeled and sorted into thematic groupings during the axial coding stage, or codes discovered in the stage where open codes are looked at specifically and analyzed based on recurrence throughout all four focus groups. The 24 axial codes found were those that occurred the most in

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

the focus groups and had the most support among participants. They were also selected and highlighted because they represented concepts that were potentially related to the study and research questions. These are listed in the second column of Table 3. A few examples include making a varying number of trips to Dunkin' and food/products the store offers. Also, opinions varied among participants, so it was important to consider all participant responses during the coding process. This was insured by doing a full review of all four focus group transcripts from start to finish. Coding was done with repetitive words and sentence fragments. Coding was complete after the fourth review of the codes when no new categories emerged from the axial codes. No additional patterns or consistencies emerged after the fourth review of the codes, thus determining theoretical saturation. All words and fragments that remained were not related to the research questions. After thematic groupings were completed, each was analyzed in depth for validity throughout the focus groups by ensuring that they appeared multiple times. Axial coding was conducted until thematic saturation was achieved, which means that no new themes or patterns were uncovered after review of the transcripts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This resulted in a total of six themes that are listed below in column 3 of Table 2. They are also reviewed in more depth in the Findings section, found on page 35 below.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Table 2. *Codes*

Phase 1: Open Codes	Phase 2: Axial Codes (Sorted by Research Question)	Themes
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Familiar 2. Regularly visit 3. Rarely visit 4. Social visits 5. Munchkins, Donuts, Coffee, Breakfast Sandwiches 6. Slogan 7. Lines / Crowded 8. Logo 9. Brand colors 10. Campus location 11. Convenient 12. Cheap / included with meal plan 13. Promotions 14. Lower quality than Starbucks 15. Bright; unclean 16. Inconsistent based on employee/ location 17. Not environmentally friendly 18. Low level of identification with Dunkin' 19. Mid level of identification with Dunkin' 20. Mid to high level of identification with Dunkin' 21. Nostalgic /brings back good memories growing up 22. Happy/energetic colors 23. Logo colors unique to Dunkin' 24. Coffee icon 25. Something missing from new branding 26. Confusion about new branding 27. New branding makes sense 28. Dislike of new branding 29. New branding does not change the likelihood of purchasing merchandise 30. No change on number of trips to Dunkin' 31. No change with consumers' order at Dunkin' 32. No change for the likelihood of consumers going out of their way to visit a Dunkin' 33. Still prefers other coffee shops 34. Company is established 35. Product offerings have not changed 36. Packaging is more appealing 37. Negative affect on company perception 38. Should have revamped donut quality 39. Less focus on donuts 40. Unchanged view of product quality 41. May increase pricing 42. New branding looks more expensive 43. New branding looks more hip, modern 44. Confusion of new branding motives 	<p>R1: 1. Familiar 2. Varying number of visits to Dunkin' 3. Food products offered / Caffeine 4. Dunkin' branding 5. Campus location (convenient and crowded) 6. Low prices 7. Lower quality than competing coffee shops 8. Uninviting atmosphere 9. Inconsistent 10. Company values (environmentalism) 11. Varying levels of identification with Dunkin'</p> <p>R2: 1. Nostalgic towards original Dunkin' Donut branding 2. Dunkin' Donuts' old logo conveys happiness, energy, is unique 3. New Dunkin' branding confusing, not unique, missing something 4. New Dunkin' branding makes sense to those that previously called it Dunkin' 5. Lower level of visual identification overall with new Dunkin' logo and branding</p> <p>R3: 1. New branding does not change number of trips to Dunkin' 2. New branding does not change consumers' order at Dunkin' 3. New branding does not change the likelihood of consumers going out of their way to visit a Dunkin' 4. No product change = no change of purchasing habits</p> <p>R4: 1. Unchanged product value because products have not changed 2. New branding conveys higher quality to some 3. Confusion of motives for rebranding</p>	<p>R1. 1. Social identification through personal brand experience 2. Resistance to self-categorization</p> <p>R2. 1. Social identification decreased through visual rebranding</p> <p>R3. 1. Social identification unchanged based on purchasing habits</p> <p>R4. 1. Social identification level based on perception of brand value/quality 2. Social comparison impacted through questioning of Dunkin's values</p>

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Throughout the coding process, trustworthiness was established through the criteria of credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability based on Table 3 below (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This process resulted in a comprehensive list of themes related to both social identity theory and the research questions posed.

Table 3. *Trustworthiness Criteria*

Trustworthiness Criteria	Description of Criteria	Methods to Meet Criteria
Credibility	Truth value is established	Use of extensively tested methods including open coding, axial coding, and thematic analysis
Transferability	Findings are transferable to other, similar cases	Transcribing focus group interviews verbatim, connecting collected data to previous research relating to Social Identity Theory
Confirmability	Collected data observable to others outside of research area	Findings are traceable back to raw data (audio recordings)
Dependability	Consistency of processes	Audit trail; retained focus group transcripts with coding notes.

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Chapter 4: Findings

Preconceived Brand Ideas

The purpose of this study was to answer four research questions determining the impact of Dunkin's rebranding on college students' social identity with the brand. Social identity theory was used as a basis for the focus group analysis. The first research question was: What are Millennial and Generation Z college consumers pre-existing thoughts about the Dunkin' brand? This was important to determine the level of social identity that existed towards Dunkin' Donuts before the rebranding to Dunkin' was presented to the participants. Social identity theory states that group associations become part of a person's identity (Turner & Tajfel, 1982). The two themes detailed below present the focus group participants' level of social identity with Dunkin' Donuts as a brand.

1.1 Social identification through personal brand experience

A requirement of the study was that participants had to have previously visited a Dunkin' Donuts location, which means they at least had superficial awareness of the brand. In each focus group, all participants confirmed familiarity with the Dunkin' Donuts brand. The level of familiarity was dependent on the participant. Ten out of the 44 participants indicated that they were "very familiar" with Dunkin' Donuts, communicated their positive experiences with the brand, and regularly went to Dunkin, which demonstrated social identity with the brand. Demonstration of social identity reflects an opportunity for more impact from a company rebranding. There were 13 participants that were identified as not having social identification with Dunkin' because of their negative comments towards the brand or that they did not drink coffee or like donuts. The remaining 21 participants were classified as having mid-level of social

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

identification because they had a mix of negative and positive experiences and comments about Dunkin'.

One of the first questions that participants were asked was what came to mind when they heard Dunkin' Donuts (See Appendix A for focus group transcript). Their responses varied. However, patterns emerged, and included specific Dunkin' Donuts products like coffee, donuts, Munchkins®, and breakfast sandwiches, determining that participants were familiar with the product offerings of the store. A few participants also said that they thought of lines, specifically the lines that regularly form at the campus Dunkin' Donuts location. A student noted, "I think of the really long line that we have on campus" (G4P10). Another student recalled a previous negative experience with lines: "You know, last year I walked by the place and the Dunkin' Donuts line went all the way down to the bottom of the stairs outside (G1P4)." This affected perceptions negatively regarding the chain; a few students chimed in agreement after this comment.

Students also communicated their negative personal experiences with the products at Dunkin', indicating a lack of social identification. One commented, "Their donuts aren't freshly baked. They're like straight out of the freezer. I just don't like that taste" (G3P4). Another participant said, "I think their coffee is too sweet" (G3P4). One participant mentioned the chain's hot chocolate, "I don't like the hot chocolate because it is so oily" (G3P10). Another added, "I agree, I'm not a fan of the hot chocolate and I love hot chocolate, so that says something" (G3P2). Some did not like Dunkin's offerings altogether. One participant said, "It's just, I don't like the coffee. I don't really eat donuts, and they're way too sweet anyways. I just feel like I can make whatever they're serving for breakfast myself for cheaper" (G1P7). Four participants also reported that they did not drink coffee. Six reported that they did not eat donuts. Because

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Dunkin's offerings do not appeal to these participants, the level of social identity with Dunkin' does not exist.

Participants that clearly enjoyed Dunkin' Donuts and regularly visited stores noted their positive experiences and what they enjoyed about the brand, indicating social identification with the brand. For example, one participant noted that, "I've also never had a bad experience with Dunkin' and I've gotten the coffee and donuts and breakfast sandwiches." (G4P10). That participant likely had a higher level of social identity with Dunkin' Donuts because all of his or her experiences were positive. Social identity is formed through personal experiences, and social identification with a brand is maintained when the association continues to be positive; therefore, it is deduced that since there were no negative experiences, the social identification with the brand is continued (Ashforth & Mael, 1986 & Tajfel & Turner, 1982). Another described brand identification as: "So as a college student, I would probably say I closely identify. There's always a need for like caffeine. It almost becomes like a social thing. It's like how long can you stay up. Like how much caffeine can you have" (G3P13).

Participants also largely agreed that Dunkin' was a low-cost option, and they found this to be a favorable quality of the brand. "I think it's cheaper compared to a lot of other coffee," a participant said (G4P6). "They do deals and stuff and it's pretty cheap to go in and get coffee for a couple of bucks," said G1P6.

Participants reported their inconsistent experiences with Dunkin'. "Sometimes it's really good. And sometimes it's terrible. I get a wake-up wrap because it's not like too much food. But then like the egg isn't good sometimes," a student commented (G1P8). Another student said, "I think that they're super inconsistent... The amounts of sugar that they put in their iced lattes... You either get zero or you get way too much and a complete mouthful, so don't get that if you're

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

curious. Or like their donuts seem really, really stale. Like really stale” (G4P3). Because of the negative language used to describe the participants’ inconsistent experiences with Dunkin’, it is deduced that these participants may or may not have identification with the brand.

Several students also noted that their regularity of trips to Dunkin’ fluctuated based on where they lived. “Last year as a freshman, it was convenient so I probably got the coffee there more than anywhere else. But now that I’m off campus, I don’t really like go there anymore,” said G4P6. This does not demonstrate social identity because this participant was not visiting when living on campus because of loyalty or affinity for the products, but simply for convenience. Since visiting Dunkin’ was no longer convenient, students stopped going to the chain. Another participant from a different focus group also said, “I lived like behind the Starbucks. I’m sorry. Dunkin Donuts. I’d go all the time, especially when it was so cold because I didn’t want to go like anywhere else. And it was right there. It was convenient, but now living off campus (and) I travel, like the Starbucks’ are easier to get to than the Dunkin’ Donuts is” (G3P5). These regular visits do represent ritual and tradition, however, which has the capacity to lead to social identification. If the regular visits to Dunkin’ were to continue despite convenience, social identification would be established (Underwood, et. al., 2001).

The store atmosphere is another element that participants indicated as an influence of brand experience. Four different students made a total of eight statements about the appearance and ambiance in the stores. One student described it as, “bright, and sometimes it’s not as clean and well-kept. It’s just not as inviting” (G2P7). Dunkin’ was also compared to Starbucks in terms of atmosphere. A participant commented, “When you go to Starbucks, it feels like you can stay there. You can have a really cute date in Starbucks. You can’t do that in a Dunkin’ Donuts” (G2P4). Another commented on Dunkin’s facilities in comparison to Starbucks; “...you never

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

walked into (a) Starbucks that's not modern. But you walk into Dunkin' Donuts, some still like have the subway tiles and just bright fluorescent lights and just things don't look nice" (G2P9).

And although these experiences are negative, they are shared among the participants, thus demonstrating a shared experience of Dunkin's physical facilities (Underwood, et. al., 2001).

These experiences contributed to an overall lower social identity with Dunkin'.

1.2 Resistance to self-categorization

Conversation was largely negative towards Dunkin' throughout all focus groups indicating a lack of social identification among the participants; only 10 out of 44 were coded to have a social identification with Dunkin'. Negative comments varied in topic, but they included quality of products, store atmosphere, as well as company values, specifically a lack of environmentalism. The negative tone of discussion towards Dunkin' indicated a reluctance to self-categorize with the brand. One participant commented in regards to Dunkin's products, "But I guess I don't really eat donuts, but if you're letting them sit out for a while, it's not high quality" (G4P6). Another student said, "I think their breakfast sandwiches are really good, they have a lot of options. But their donuts are trash. I'm just not a fan" (G1P5).

Three participants also discussed Dunkin's apparent lack of environmental values. G2P7 commented, "I would go to Starbucks for tea. Also, it seems like they are dedicated to a more sustainable business more than Dunkin' Donuts. I can use a reusable cup when I get my tea at Starbucks." Another participant said, "I also don't like that they're not jumping on the environmental train like Starbucks is. I think they could do that and they would be better" (G2P9).

Because participants spoke negatively about Dunkin', the data suggests that participants were hesitant to self-categorize with the brand. Only 10 out of 44, or 22.7% of the group was

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

coded as socially identifying with Dunkin'. This small percentage further suggests this resistance to self-categorization with Dunkin'.

Social Identity and Visual Identification

The second research question was: To what extent does the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' impact the Millennial and Generation Z college consumer's social identity with the brand when considering visual identification with the brand? This research question helped determine if a shift in visual identification impacted social identification with Dunkin'. Visual identification includes store fronts, employee uniforms, logos, websites, item packaging, and any visual representation of a brand (Esch, 2008). Through the focus groups, one theme emerged when considering visual identification and social identity, which is detailed below.

2.1 Social identification decreased through visual rebranding

Approximately halfway through each focus group session, images of the old Dunkin' Donuts and the new Dunkin' logo were presented to the group via PowerPoint, along with the fact that Dunkin' rebranded in January 2019 (Dunkin', 2018; See Appendix A for Focus Group Transcript and visual aids). Out of the 44 participants, 17 were aware that the company had rebranded. Most participants indicated that they preferred the old Dunkin' Donuts logo and branding. One participant said, "I also know people used to call it DD for Dunkin' Donuts, and the door handles were DD, and now I feel like they're losing that" (G2P6). This specific comment regarding a visual aspect of the brand lost demonstrates a slight decrease in identification. Another commented about the coffee image in old Dunkin' Donuts logo. G1P5 said, "I like the picture. Even though the new logo makes sense, the picture gives me something to hold onto. Chick Fil A has the chicken, McDonalds has the golden arches, Dunkin' has the apostrophe."

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Several participants mentioned a feeling of nostalgia they had towards the previous Dunkin' Donuts brand. "Ok, the first one is something that we're all familiar with. Maybe it's, I mean, everyone knows that, no one really knows just Dunkin'," a participant commented (G2P8). Another agreed, and said about the old Dunkin' Donuts logo, "I think how we are all saying it's just kind of nostalgic. When we were kids, seeing it on stores seeing it on donut boxes. It is something that we can remember and that we used to go to and brings happy feelings and is why we go to it" (G2P5).

One participant that previously noted an identification with Dunkin' Donuts described a distinct change of feelings after learning about the new name and logo. "I didn't even know, and now I'm kind of like, dang. When you hear it, you're like, okay, yea, because I call it Dunkin' not Dunkin Donuts. It's just different, I can't really put a word on it. It just feels different," the participant said (G2P5). Another said about the rebranding, "...when you change something that I expected to stay the same forever...it's uncomfortable" (G2P6). These participants experienced a slight negative shift in brand perception based on Dunkin' Donuts' rebranding to Dunkin', suggesting that the rebranding had a negative impact on social identification with the brand.

Social Identification and Brand Loyalty / Purchasing Habits

The third research question was: To what extent does the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' impact the Millennial and Generation Z college student consumer's social identity with the brand when considering brand loyalty, specifically purchasing habits? Repeat purchases are one way in which brand loyalty is established (Oliver, 1999). This research question determined if the rebranding of Dunkin' had any impact on perceptions of brand loyalty, and if any purchasing habits were affected due to the rebranding, which is explained in the theme below.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

3.1 Social identification unchanged based on purchasing habits

During the focus groups, participants were asked multiple questions about their purchasing habits following the rebrand of Dunkin', including if their regular orders changed, if the frequency of visits change, and if the likelihood of them travelling out of their way to visit the store changed. All 44 participants reported that there was no change in purchasing habits based on the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin'. G1P7 summarized this idea when stating, "It doesn't have no effect. In fact, if I'm feeling like Dunkin', I'm going to go to Dunkin', like regardless of what it looks like or not."

Participants also discussed that because there was no change in the product offerings of the brand that they were aware of, their purchasing behavior did not change. One student said, "If I'm on a road trip, I'll still find a Dunkin' Donuts. It's still the same product they're selling" (G2P9). G2P9 also added, "I'm definitely not going to increase how much I go." Because there was no reported change in purchasing habits and brand loyalty, social identification was not impacted in this manner based on Dunkin's rebranding. A participant noted that, "I don't think the logo change is going to make the customer base change at all" (G4P11).

Social Identification and Perceived Value/Equity

The final research question was: to what extent does the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' impact the Millennial and Generation Z college student consumer's social identity with the brand when considering consumer perceived value and equity with the brand? Brand equity is the value of a brand based on a logo or name, not the product or services themselves (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2005). These ideas are explored through the two themes described below.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

4.1 Social identification level based on perception of brand value/quality

In the focus groups, participants were first asked to describe their feelings about the quality of Dunkin' and their overall satisfaction with it. (G3P10). A participant commented, "For a place that is called Dunkin' Donuts, I feel like their donuts are low quality" (G2P6). Another said, "I feel like there, they market themselves like, it's supposed to be kind of, like, cheap and quick, but they're starting to be, like, charge Starbucks prices. But I don't think they're the same quality" (G2P7).

The quality of Dunkin' products being dependent upon the preparation was brought up during discussion. In participants opinion, quality of the Dunkin' products were linked to the employee making the food and the location. When asked about Dunkin's level of quality, a participant gave a specific example of inconsistent product quality being dependent upon location. G3P10 said, "I think it depends on the location. Because the one I have at home, the donuts are always really good, but I've been to some where they're stale, so just like depends on the business. Like the region." Another commented about Dunkin's quality, "I'm pretty satisfied with the coffee if it is made right. So, when it is made correctly, I am very satisfied, but when it's not, I'm not. So, it depends on the location" (G2P5).

Students that had an apparent association with the brand had a more positive outlook on the quality of Dunkin'. Later on in the interview, after the rebranding to Dunkin' was presented, these questions were asked again to determine if the rebranding impacted perceived brand value and quality. All 44 participants reported that there was no change in the quality and satisfaction based on the rebranding, but some expressed a slight increase in equity. One participant said, "I feel like this new branding almost looks more expensive. With the old cups kind of looks like something you got a gas station, kind of. But the new stuff is colorful" (G3P6). Another

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

participant agreed, “To piggy back off of that the new logo does look really sleek and modern compared to the old logo and so their products seem more expensive because of that more modern and sleek look they created” (G3P9). Another commented, “Well the actual product didn’t change but I guess the bag that it comes in is cuter.” (G4P6). These comments about Dunkin’ products appearing more modern and appealing demonstrate that the brand equity was impacted positively by the rebranding of Dunkin’ for some.

4.2 Social comparison impacted through questioning of Dunkin’s values

Social comparison is a pillar of social identity theory (Stets & Burke, 2000, Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Discussion and opinions of Dunkin’ were remarkably negative across all four focus groups; the uniformity of this across all groups is notable. A particular negative thought that emerged was an uncertainty of the company’s motivation for rebranding from Dunkin’ Donuts to Dunkin’. A conversational excerpt from focus group two details these feelings.

G2P5: I think if they have enough money to rebrand and rebrand like that, then they should have enough money to up the value of like, the donuts. Because if enough people are expressing disinterest in them, they should have enough money to fix that problem, especially if they have enough money to rebrand especially to that.

G2P9: It doesn’t really affect my view of the products but it kind of just affects my view of the company as a whole because I just kind of can’t understand why. Why? Why spend millions of dollars on doing this? It makes me uncomfortable, but I can’t understand why you would put millions of dollars into this.

G2P10: Yea, I agree. I feel like nothing’s changed except for the name. So why waste all that money?

G2P9: It’s like I’ve got brains. I’m trying to figure it out. I’m like, I can’t. You know, when you could have invested the money and fix like so many other things.

G2P6: Yea, it kind of does make me question the company itself and like where your dollar is going to.

The specific comment that G2P9 was “uncomfortable” demonstrates a fear of negative social comparison among focus group participants. This participant likely did not want to be negatively socially compared with Dunkin’ by peers due to the brand’s lack of environmentalism. Also,

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

spending dollars at the chain could be equated to supporting a brand that is not environmentally friendly.

As previously mentioned, discussion around Dunkin' was predominantly negative. A preference for Starbucks was regularly voiced. G2P4 said, "If you put Starbucks and Dunkin' Donuts together, you best believe I would drop that extra dollar at Starbucks." Because Starbucks was so regularly mentioned (60 times) throughout the focus groups despite not having any direct questions about the chain, it is deduced that participants were reluctant to openly discuss Dunkin' in a positive way. At the end of each focus group, the moderator asked if there were any additional questions that should have been asked but were not, and if anyone wanted to add anything additional to the discussion. The exchange below that occurred at the end of focus group one demonstrates that participants were possibly less likely to provide positive feedback for Dunkin' based on the overall negative perception of the brand.

G1P7: I kind of like their donuts.

Moderator: You like their donuts?

G1P7: Yea, chocolate with sprinkles.

G1P4: Oh, yeah, I like the glazed ones. Glazed donut. Those are great.

G1P5: Their donut holes are great. I just don't know what happened to their regular ones.

G1P7 waited until the very end of the discussion to make this point, despite the specific conversations that occurred earlier about the brand's donuts. This showsuggests a fear of negative social comparison among peers in the focus group, which results in a lower demonstration of social identification.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusion and Limitations/ Future Research

Discussion

The goal of this study was to determine the impact of the rebranding from Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' in terms of social identity among college-aged students. As Millennials and Generation Z members continue to age and therefore increase their share of purchasing power in the United States, it is important to determine the impact a rebranding may have for companies that want to capture their market share. The focus groups provided open forums for discussion surrounding the rebranding, where participants were able to freely discuss the feelings they had in regards to Dunkin' Donuts becoming Dunkin'. Overall, the findings demonstrate that among participants, the impact the rebranding had on social identification with the brand was minimal, including through visual identification, perceived brand equity, purchasing habits and brand loyalty. Additionally, the study emphasized the importance of a brand's values to its consumers, that the perceived modernization of a brand does positively impact brand equity, and that communication of a rebrand is key to ensuring a successful rebrand.

Visual identification with a brand is established through a consistent appearance presented by a brand (Aaker, 1996). The findings supported that the new Dunkin' logo and name violates previous visual association with the brand. However, because the brand maintained one word of its original name and its colors, there was no discernable impact on social identification. The rebranding also represents a change in symbolic interactionism, or shift in organizational framework in order to determine one's association with a group, which occurs when forming social identification (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). A rebranding forces consumers to adjust their framework to replace previously established connections to include a new logo or brand name. A replacement of symbols will have to occur for a consumer to accept the new branding of a

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

company that consumers have developed a social identity with. Despite the shift in symbolic interactionism that must occur because of the rebranding, there was no notable impact on social identification with Dunkin'.

Due to the lack of product changes at Dunkin', the participants reported that purchasing habits were unchanged. This shows that purely superficial, visual changes of a brand do not impact Generation Z and Millennial consumer habits. Because participants did not view the rebranding as a complete change in the company, including products offered and pricing, they reported that their orders at Dunkin' would not change. This demonstrates that something larger would have to shift within an organization in order to create an impact on this group of consumers' purchasing habits; perhaps discontinuing a popular offering or raising prices would have more of a negative lasting impact on Generation Z consumers. Rebranding to create a positive impact on Generation Z and Millennial consumers could include lower product prices, more modern and sleek branding as well as facilities, or enacting brand-wide environmental policies. In either circumstance, consumers reception of brand changes can truly vary.

The fact that participants would not change their orders also confirms the idea that Generation Z members are brand loyal in this instance, possibly more so than their Millennial counterparts would be (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). The participants reported that their orders would not change because there had not been a tangible change with the products or prices that they were aware of, just a change in the appearance of the brand. Also, repeat purchases help consumers establish loyalty with a brand, which means that because purchasing habits were unchanged, loyalty towards Dunkin' was not impacted through the rebranding based on this sample of consumers (Oliver, 1999). This piece of information is important for companies that

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

are considering a rebranding and the impact it may have on the Generation Z consumer base; visual changes seem to have minimal impact on this group.

Importance of Brand's Values to Consumers

As evidenced in the findings in themes 1.2 (P. 41) and 4.2 (P. 46-47), participants questioned Dunkin's environmentalism and values. This suggests the importance of a company's values to the Millennial and Generation Z consumers. Millennials and Generation Z are characterized as "change agents" (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Based on this classification, these generations may not want to support an organization that they do not perceive as environmentally friendly, or that wastes money on efforts they deem unworthy. Also, Millennials view making purchases as a form of self-expression and a way to demonstrate personal values (Bowen & McCain, 2015). Millennials and Generation Z are more in touch with the impact they have on the environment than previous generations (Seemiller & Grace, 2015) Therefore, making purchases at a chain that is not environmentally friendly and may be using its dollars on a way that does not align with their values is potentially a statement of self-expression they would not want to make. This shows that when drafting a strategic plan, vision or mission statement, or even making a potentially ethical decision, values are an important consideration because it could impact sales from Generation Z and Millennial consumers.

Also, Generation Z and Millennials highly value peer perceptions (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Millennials and Generation Z communicate with social media much more than previous generations (Bowen & McCain, 2015); patronizing Dunkin', a chain that was perceived by some participants as being less environmentally friendly than its competitors and potentially irresponsible with its profits, might not garner friends' approval. This further demonstrates the importance of company values to Generation Z and Millennials. It is in a brand's best interests

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

to not only make ethical business decisions, but also to be on the forefront of trending issues as to not create backlash among consumers.

Communication of Brand Changes to Consumers

Simply having ethical corporate values and business practices is not enough in a successful rebranding; this research suggests that communication of these changes is just as important. Participants discussed the lack of environmentalism of Dunkin', and the questioning of how their dollars were being spent in as demonstrated in themes 1.2 (P. 41) and 4.2 (P. 46-47). However, as mentioned in the Dunkin' Overview (P. 3-6), Dunkin' is committed to sustainability and to minimizing its impact on the environment. Also, not all participants were aware of Dunkin's rebranding even though it was announced in September 2018 (Dunkin', 2018); only 17 out of the 44 participants, or 38.6%, were aware that the rebranding had occurred.

Merrilees & Miller (2008) presented a six-step process to ensure a successful rebrand. The first involved keeping core values of a brand (Merrilees & Miller, 2008 & Dunkin', 2018). It is clear that Dunkin' has used this first principle as a guiding point of its rebrand; the new Dunkin' brand continues to hold the same original company values, but also gives the company a refresh in order to stay relevant in the marketplace. The second principle says a brand should keep some identifying variables of its former identity: Dunkin' has kept one word of its original name, and the logo still features its signature colors and font (Merrilees & Miller, 2008 & Dunkin', 2018). The next principle says that a brand may appeal to a new market sector (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Dunkin' appears to be appealing to Generation Z and Millennials with its emphasis on convenience and its modernization of its logo (Dunkin', 2018). The fourth principle also deals with communication of brand changes, but to internal stakeholders of an organization (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Because Dunkin' internal documents could not be

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

procured, there is no way of confirming this occurred, but it is assumed that Dunkin' employees were debriefed of the brand changes. The fifth principle stresses the importance of consistency across the brand to integrate the new branding changes (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). Because the Dunkin' stores are all franchises, it is assumed that making physical stores match the new branding is an extensive change that has not been entirely completed at all locations (Dunkin', 2018).

The final principle set forth by Merrilees & Miller (2008) is affirmed in this research. This principle stresses the importance and effort that should be given to communicate rebranding changes being made to external stakeholders (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). If a consumer is unaware of changes that are being made, they may become suspicious of the motives behind the changes, as the participants that were discussing the money spent on Dunkin's rebranding did. Adequate distribution of knowledge about a rebrand reduces the chances of miscommunications to the consumer and minimizes the chances of a rebrand negatively impacting consumer perceptions. Widely dispersing information about rebranding changes also allows the company to put its own spin on the changes; if changes were being made due to a negative issue within the company, it can get in front of the narrative before public perceptions are conceived. Reduced brand perception by the consumer is possible following a rebrand. Therefore, precise and timely communication about changes being made in a rebranding is imperative.

Increased Brand Equity due to Modern Branding

Social identity theory posits that members of a group will continue to maintain social identification if the relationship continues to be beneficial (Tafjel & Turner, 1979). Therefore, a positive view of value and perceived equity for a company or organization encourages social identification. A change or rebranding of a company gives opportunity for consumers to re-

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

evaluate their viewpoints, and determine if the level of brand equity will increase or decrease based on the changes.

During the focus groups, participants noted that they thought the new Dunkin' branding was more modern and sleeker, which equated to higher quality in their minds. This was discussed in theme 4.1 on pages 45-46. This denotes a win for Dunkin': appearing more modern to consumers was a goal of its rebranding (Dunkin', 2018). This also suggests that more modern and sleek branding appeals to Generation Z and Millennials, which can be applied to company rebrandings in the future. Also, this finding confirmed that a brand refresh can result in consumers' perception of increased equity in the products, which is important to brands because it means consumers are willing to pay a higher premium price for its products. Therefore, a rebranding to modernize would be a good strategic move for a company looking to capture more of the Generation Z and Millennial market share.

Despite that this research focused on Dunkin' Donuts rebranding to Dunkin', it provided valuable insights that are applicable outside of that brand. Findings showed that company values are important to Generation Z and Millennial consumers, that modernization can positively impact brand equity, and that communication of a rebrand is an important step to completing a successful rebrand. These three ideas can make a considerable impact for companies planning to implement a rebranding, especially when used in conjunction with the practical implications and suggestions detailed below.

Social identity theory served as a useful lens for this research on corporate rebranding. Social identity says that a person's organizational affiliations can become part of social identity; the foundation of the study was based upon the idea that being a loyal consumer at Dunkin' would make it part of the consumer's social identity (Tafjel & Turner, 1979).

Practical Implications

Research on rebranding and the impact that it has on consumers is important to guide companies in the manner in which rebrandings are conducted. Rebranding walks the line between capturing new audiences and maintaining previous loyal consumers; this study adds to the information available about the impact a recent rebranding has on Generation Z and Millennials. Furthermore, additional research on Generation Z and Millennials is key in continuing to understand their purchasing habits, perceptions, and what makes them loyal to a brand as their market share continues to rise in the United States. Companies will need to capture the Generation Z and Millennials' dollars to succeed in the future market.

Based on the findings of this study, the overall rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin' had a neutral to negative impact on participants. In order for future companies to be more successful in rebranding efforts with Generation Z and Millennials, companies should consider extending their information gathering with these generations' demographics and psychographics, and incorporate this information into strategic planning. Rebranding plans should include low pricing, coupons, or loyalty discounts; participants reported that they liked Dunkin's low pricing, which aligns with the idea that Generation Z and Millennials are motivated by good deals (Fromm & Garton, 2013).

The findings also suggest that participants appreciate companies that are environmentally friendly and financially responsible with their dollars. Millennials and Generation Z members are more cognizant of the impact they have on others around them (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Therefore, companies rebranding should ensure their products and packaging are environmentally and ethically friendly. Even beyond being green, brands should broadcast this

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

information in marketing efforts to inform these younger generations that the brand is environmentally conscious.

Product quality is another factor in a rebranding. If product quality is low, a rebranding may not be able to improve the brand's market share and perception. Further research into the problems currently faced by the brand in the eyes of the consumer offers an opportunity for improvement during a rebrand. Consumer feedback is a valuable tool in the creation of a rebranding plan.

Even if a brand does extensive market research to determine what the consumer is looking for, implementation of those changes is not the only thing that matters. A rebranding signifies a change to the public. It is the responsibility of the company to ensure that the consumer knows what has changed and what has not about the brand. This should be accomplished through marketing and advertising campaigns promoting awareness for the rebranding. Incorporating these different strategies into a rebranding plan could result in better acceptance and patronage from Generation Z and Millennials.

Limitations / Future Research

As with any research, this study was not without limitations. Only Virginia Tech students that had access to the Sona Experiment Management System were able to sign up for the study, and presumably, only those that needed class credits signed up for the study. Also, Virginia Tech students are able to use meal credits at Dunkin' on campus if they have the Virginia Tech sponsored meal plan. This could affect the number of trips and what students purchase at the chain.

Also, although it did not seem apparent in the focus groups, some participants may have already known each other outside of the interviews, leading to a more comfortable environment

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

for discussion. This focus group only interviewed Virginia Tech students, resulting in a homogenous sample group. An additional study could be conducted with different colleges and universities across America that have Dunkin' stores on campus to determine if the themes discovered at Virginia Tech are repeated. This study only observed the immediate thoughts and reactions of participants to the Dunkin' rebranding; further research could explore long-term implications of a rebranding.

Another restriction was the limited demographic information collected from participants which limits further deductions based on hometown, exact age, etc. Also, because this study was based on focus groups and is therefore qualitative research, the data is not representative. Therefore, the opinions noted from this study do not reflect all of Millennials and Generation Z's perceptions about Dunkin's rebrand. In addition to the logistical limitations of the research, it is noted that because conversation about Dunkin' was largely negative, groupthink might have occurred, and participants may have wanted to feel as if they fit in with other focus group participants, which possibly resulted in a lower demonstration of social identity with Dunkin' across the board. Groupthink is the concept that faulty decision making can occur in groups that change their opinions to concur with the group majority opinion (Janis, 1972). Despite the limitations, this study brought some interesting data to light, and it can be used as a springboard for future research on rebranding.

Conclusion

Broadly speaking, the findings determined that because the rebranding of Dunkin' Donuts was perceived to be merely visual, there is no real impact upon consumers and their social identification with the brand. Change can be uncomfortable, as mentioned by a participant, but the change presented by Dunkin's rebranding was not enough to cause a major change to

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

purchasing habits, visual brand identification, and perceived brand equity in this limited sample. This also suggested that in terms of its rebranding effort, Dunkin' left opportunity for growth potential untapped within the Generation Z and Millennial market sector. If Dunkin' had better communicated with the public regarding its brand changes, a more successful rebranding according to the Millennial and Generation Z market might have happened. In addition to abiding by these principles, including these efforts in advertising and marketing campaigns is an important way to keep the public informed during a rebranding.

This research is important because companies are increasingly rebranding to adapt to the changing marketplace (Merrilees & Miller, 2008). As companies continue to rebrand to capture the new emerging needs of Generation Z and Millennial members, additional research should be conducted in other industries and with larger sample sizes to determine a more complete picture of the impact that rebranding has on purchasing habits, perceived equity, and visual identification with a brand. Studying with a group of participants that have a high level of social identification with a brand that is rebranding would be a contribution in this area as well. In the meantime, continuing to make adjustments to branding to fit the needs of Generation Z and Millennials is a wise strategy.

References

- 15 Companies That Changed Their Names. (2017, September 05). Retrieved from <http://mentalfloss.com/article/503464/15-companies-changed-their-names>
- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. New York: The Free Press.
- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity: Capitalizing on the value of a brand name*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Agar, M. H. (1986). *Speaking of ethnography*. (15)
<http://dx.doi.org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.4135/9781412985895.n1>
- Ashforth, B.E. and F. Mael. (1989). "Social Identity Theory and the Organization." *The Academy of Management Review*, vol. 14,20., doi:10.2307/258189
- Bagozzi, R. P., & Dholakia, U. M. (2006). Antecedents and purchase consequences of customer participation in small group brand communities. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*,23(1), 45-61. doi:10.1016/j.ijresmar.2006.01.005
- Barker, V., & Rodriguez, N. S. (2019). This Is Who I Am: The Selfie as a Personal and Social Identity Marker. *International Journal of Communication* (19328036), 13, 1143–1166.
Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=139171754&scope=site>
- Bartels, J., & Hoogendam, K. (2011). The role of social identity and attitudes toward sustainability brands in buying behaviors for organic products. *Journal of Brand Management*, 18(9), 697-708. doi:10.1057/bm.2011.3
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the Extended Self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139. doi:10.1086/209154

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

- Bergami, M., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2000). Self-categorization, affective commitment and group self-esteem as distinct aspects of social identity in the organization. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 39(4), 555-577. doi:10.1348/014466600164633
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Bolhuis, W., de Jong, M. D. T., & van den Bosch, A. L. M. (2018). Corporate rebranding: effects of corporate visual identity changes on employees and consumers. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 24(1), 3–16. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1080/13527266.2015.1067244>
- Bond, R.M., Shulman, H.C., & Gilbert, M. (2018). Does Having a Political Discussion Help or Hurt Intergroup Perceptions? Drawing Guidance From Social Identity Theory and the Contact Hypothesis. *International Journal of Communication (19328036)*, 12, 4332–4352. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ufh&AN=139171655&scope=site>
- Bowen, J. T., & Chen McCain, S. L. (2015). Transitioning loyalty programs: A commentary on “the relationship between customer loyalty and customer satisfaction”. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 27(3), 415-430.
- Boyle, B. A., & Magnusson, P. (2007). Social Identity and Brand Equity Formation: A Comparative Study of Collegiate Sports Fans. *Journal of Sport Management*, 21(4), 497-520. doi:10.1123/jsm.21.4.497
- Castellini, A., & Samoggia, A. (2018). Millennial consumers’ wine consumption and purchasing habits and attitude towards wine innovation. *Wine Economics and Policy*, 7(2), 128–139.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wep.2018.11.001>

Chaudhuri, A., & Holbrook, M. B. (2001). The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty. *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), 81–93. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.65.2.81.18255>

Dan, A. (2018) “Rebranding Becomes A Pivotal Lifeline For Marketers.” *Forbes*, Forbes Magazine, www.forbes.com/sites/avidan/2018/10/01/as-loyalty-erodes-rebranding-becomes-a-crucial-lifeline-for-marketers/#5e6b708c7335.

Dawson, A. (2018). Saucony Teams up With Dunkin' Donuts for One Sweet Running Shoe. Retrieved from <https://www.runnersworld.com/gear/a19595602/saucony-dunkin-donuts-shoes/>

Drezner, N. D. (2018). Philanthropic Mirroring: Exploring Identity-Based Fundraising in Higher Education. *Journal of Higher Education*, 89(3), 261–293. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1080/00221546.2017.1368818>

Dunkin' Donuts. (2018). *Dunkin' Donuts Unveils Next Generation Concept Store in Quincy, MA* [Press Release]. Retrieved October 7, 2018, from <https://news.dunkindonuts.com/news/dunkin-donuts-unveils-next-generation-concept-store-in-quincy-ma>

Dunkin'. (n.d.). About Us: Dunkin'®. Retrieved from <https://www.dunkindonuts.com/en/about/about-us>.

Dunkin'. (2018, May 21). These Recent Grads Really Do Run on Dunkin'. Retrieved April 23, 2019, from <https://news.dunkindonuts.com/blog/these-recent-grads-really-do-run-on-dunkin>

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Dunkin'. (2018). *Welcome to Dunkin': Dunkin' Donuts Reveals New Brand*

Identity [Press release]. Retrieved from

<https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/welcome-to-dunkin-dunkin-donuts-reveals-new-brand-identity-300718723.html>

Dunkin' Brands' Commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility. (n.d.). Retrieved from

<https://www.dunkinbrands.com/community/corporate-social-responsibility/overview>.

“Dunkin' Donuts History.” *Dunkin' Donuts News*,

[news.dunkindonuts.com/internal_redirect/cms.ipressroom.com.s3.amazonaws.com/285/files/201610/Dunkin' Donuts History_11 3 16.pdf](https://news.dunkindonuts.com/internal_redirect/cms.ipressroom.com.s3.amazonaws.com/285/files/201610/Dunkin%27%20Donuts%20History_11%203%2016.pdf).

Dunkin' Donuts to Eliminate Foam Cups Worldwide in 2020. (2018, February 7). Retrieved from

<https://news.dunkindonuts.com/news/dunkin-donuts-to-eliminate-foam-cups-worldwide-in-2020>.

Esch, F. R. (2008). Brand identity: The guiding star for successful brands. In B. Schmitt & D. L.

Rogers (Eds.), *Handbook on brand and experience management* (pp. 58–73).

Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

Ewing, D. R., & Allen, C. T. (2017). Self-congruence is not everything for a brand: initial

evidence supporting the relevance of identity cultivation in a college student role-identity

context. *Journal of Brand Management*, (5). Retrieved from

<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbig&AN=edsbig.A511234127&site=eds-live&scope=site>

Ferrucci, P., & Tandoc, E. C. (2018). The Spiral of Stereotyping: Social Identity Theory and

NFL Quarterbacks. *Howard Journal of Communications*, 29(2), 103–121. [https://doi-](https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1080/10646175.2017.1315693)

[org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1080/10646175.2017.1315693](https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1080/10646175.2017.1315693)

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343-353. doi:10.1086/209515

Fromm, J., Butler, C., & Dickey, C. (2015). How to engage Millennials: Re-imagining the consumer as a partner, not a target audience, to increase engagement. *Journal of Brand Strategy*, 4(1), 27-36. Retrieved March 26, 2019, from <https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/hsp/jbs/2015/00000004/00000001/art00004#expand/collapse>.

Fromm, J., & Garton, C. (2013). *Marketing to millennials: Reach the largest and most influential generation of consumers ever*. New York: AMACOM, American Management Association.

Given, Lisa M. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*. SAGE, 2008.

Gurău, C. (2012). A life-stage analysis of consumer loyalty profile: Comparing Generation X and Millennial consumers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 29(2), 103-113. doi:10.1108/07363761211206357

He, H., Li, Y., & Harris, L. (2012). Social identity perspective on brand loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(5), 648-657. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.03.007

Houck, B. (2018, October 17). This Dunkin' Donuts Airbnb Literally Runs on Dunkin'. Retrieved from <https://www.eater.com/2018/10/17/17990614/dunkin-donuts-tiny-house-airbnb-coffee-grounds-biofuel>

Jacoby, Jacob, and David B. Kyner. (1973). Brand Loyalty vs. Repeat Purchasing Behavior. *Journal of Marketing Research*, vol. 10, no. 1, doi:10.2307/3149402.

Janis, I. (1972). *Victims of groupthink*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

KFC Says Chicken | The KFC Name Change History | KFC.com.” *Chicken Chattin'*, 24 May 2016, chickenchattin.kfc.com/kfc-name-change-history/.

Kaikati, J. G. (2003). Lessons from Accenture’s 3Rs: rebranding, restructuring and repositioning. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 12(7), 477–490. doi: 10.1108/10610420310506038

Kapferer, J. (1997). *Strategic Brand Management: Creating & Sustaining Brand Equity*. Kogan Page.

Lam, S. K., Ahearne, M., Hu, Y., & Schillewaert, N. (2010). Resistance to Brand Switching When a Radically New Brand Is Introduced: A Social Identity Theory Perspective. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 128–146. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1509/jmkg.74.6.128>

Lam, S. Y., Shankar, V., Erramilli, M. Krishna, & Murthy, B. (2004). Customer Value, Satisfaction, Loyalty, and Switching Costs: An Illustration From a Business-to-Business Service Context. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 32(3), 293–311. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1177/0092070304263330>

Lazarevic, V. (2012). Encouraging brand loyalty in fickle generation Y consumers. *Young Consumers*, 13(1), 45-61. doi:10.1108/17473611211203939

Lincoln, Y., & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE.

Luttrell, R., & McGrath, K. (2017). *The Millennial mindset: Unraveling fact from fiction*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

MacLean, T. (2008). Framing and Organizational Misconduct: A Symbolic Interactionist Study. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 78(1/2), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-006-9324-x>

Merrilees, B., & Miller, D. (2008). Principles of corporate rebranding. *European Journal of*

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Marketing, 42(5/6), 537-552. doi:10.1108/03090560810862499

- Metzler, M. S. (2001). The centrality of organizational legitimacy to public relations practice. In R. L. Heath (Ed.), *Handbook of public relations* (pp. 321-333). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Miller, D., Merrilees, B., & Yakimova, R. (2014). Corporate rebranding: An integrative review of major enablers and barriers to the rebranding process. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 16(3), 265-289.
- Miller, J. (2018). 10 Things You Need to Know about Gen Z. *HR Magazine*, 63(7), 50–56.
Retrieved from
<http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=133041652&scope=site>
- Molinillo, S., Ekinci, Y., & Japutra, A. (2018). A consumer-based brand performance model for assessing brand success. *International Journal of Market Research*, 61(1), 93-110.
doi:10.1177/1470785318762990
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publ.
- Multimedia. (2019). Retrieved from <https://news.dunkindonuts.com/multimedia/corporate/logos>
- Muzellec, L., & Lambkin, M. (2006). Corporate rebranding: Destroying, transferring or creating brand equity? *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 803-824.
doi:10.1108/03090560610670007
- Nicholls, S. B., & Rice, R. E. (2017). A Dual-Identity Model of Responses to Deviance in Online

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

- Groups: Integrating Social Identity Theory and Expectancy Violations Theory. *Communication Theory* (1050-3293), 27(3), 243–268. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1111/comt.12113>
- Oliver, R. (1999). Whence Consumer Loyalty? *Journal of Marketing*, 63, 33-44. doi:10.2307/1252099
- Palmatier, R. W., Dant, R. P., Grewal, D., & Evans, K. R. (2006). Factors Influencing the Effectiveness of Relationship Marketing: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4), 136–153. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1509/jmkg.70.4.136>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research & Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). CA: Sage Publications.
- Rakow, L. F. (2011). Commentary: Interviews and focus groups as critical and cultural methods. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 88, 416-428. doi:10.1177/107769901108800211
- Rossem, A. H. (2018). Generations as social categories: An exploratory cognitive study of generational identity and generational stereotypes in a multigenerational workforce. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*. doi:10.1002/job.2341
- Saucony's Dunkin' Donuts Sneakers Sold Out Quicker Than a Boston Kreme. (2018, March 31). Retrieved from <https://www.geek.com/culture/sauconys-dunkin-donuts-sneakers-sold-out-quicker-than-a-boston-kreme-1735535/>.
- Scardamalia, R. (2015). *Millennials in America*. Lanham, MD: Bernan Press. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=1089631&scope=site>

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

- Scott, C. (2007). Communication and Social Identity Theory: Existing and Potential Connections in Organizational Identification Research. *Communication Studies*, 58(2), 123–138.
<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1080/10510970701341063>
- Seemiller, C., & Grace, M. (2015). *Generation z goes to college*. Retrieved from <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu>
- Stets, J., & Burke, P. (2000). Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(3), 224-237. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2695870>
- Stokburger-Sauer, N., Ratneshwar, S., & Sen, S. (2012). Drivers of consumer–brand identification. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 29(4), 406-418.
doi:10.1016/j.ijresmar.2012.06.001
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. M. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing Grounded theory / Juliet Corbin*. Sage Publications.
- Stuart, H., & Muzellec, L. (2004). Corporate makeovers: Can a hyena be rebranded? *Journal of Brand Management*, 11, 472–482. doi:10.1057/palgrave.bm.2540193
- Tajfel, H. & Turner, J.C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W.G. Austin & S. Worschel (Eds.). *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. (pp.33–47).
Monterey, CA: Brooks/ Cole.
- Tajfel, Henri, and John C. Turner. (1982). *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Turner, A. (2015). Generation Z: Technology and Social Interest. *Journal of Individual Psychology*, 71(2), 103–113. Retrieved from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=a9h&AN=103721595&site=eds-live&scope=site>

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

Tuškej, U., Golob, U., & Podnar, K. (2013). The role of consumer–brand identification in building brand relationships. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(1), 53-59.

doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2011.07.022

Twenge, J. M. (2006). *Generation Me*. NY: Free Press.

Underwood, R., Bond, E., & Baer, R. (2001). Building Service Brands via Social Identity:

Lessons from the Sports Marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 9(1),

1-13. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40470193>

Watson, G., Beck, J., Henderson, C., & Palmatier, R. (2015). Building, measuring, and profiting from customer loyalty. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 43(6), 790–825.

<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.vt.edu/10.1007/s11747-015-0439-4>

“Weight Watchers Becomes WW, Reinforcing Its Mission to Focus on Overall Health and Wellbeing.” *WW*, WW, Sept. 2018,

corporate.ww.com/IRW/file/4071814/Index?KeyFile=395108713.

Zhao, Y., Calantone, R. J., & Voorhees, C. M. (2018). Identity change vs. strategy change: the effects of rebranding announcements on stock returns. *Journal of the Academy of*

Marketing Science, 46(5), 795–812. doi: 10.1007/s11747-018-0579-4

Appendix A: Focus Group Protocol

Today I would like to talk to you about Dunkin' Donuts. This focus group should last approximately 30 minutes. I will ask a few questions, but please feel free to discuss whatever comes to mind. My goal for this group is to facilitate conversation, not to influence it. This session will be recorded and later transcribed. Please speak loudly and clearly during the discussion.

Please take a moment to review the consent and demographics form. Your signature guarantees your confidentiality. Please let me know if you have any questions before we begin.

General source use:

1. Tell me about a food brand that you strongly identify with.
 - a. What do you like about that brand?
 - b. How does it stand out from its competitors?
 - c. How do you demonstrate your loyalty to that brand?
2. I would like to establish your knowledge of Dunkin' Donuts as a brand. Tell me about:
 - a. How familiar are you with Dunkin' Donuts?
 - b. What comes to mind when you hear "Dunkin' Donuts"?
 - c. How closely do you identify with Dunkin' Donuts?
3. How often do you visit Dunkin' Donuts? (Weekly, monthly, rarely)
 - a. Have you visited the on-campus Dunkin' Donuts in Owens Hall?
 - b. How likely are you to go out of your way to visit a Dunkin' Donuts store?
 - c. What do you like about Dunkin' Donuts? What do you dislike about Dunkin' Donuts?
 - d. How do you feel about Dunkin' Donuts in relation to other coffee shops?
 - e. Do you use the Dunkin' Donut app? Why or why not?
4. Why do you visit Dunkin' Donuts?
5. Tell me your thoughts about the quality of Dunkin' Donuts products?
 - a. How satisfied are you with Dunkin' Donuts products?
 - b. How do you feel about pricing of items at Dunkin' Donuts?
6. **(Show first slide (Figure 1) of Dunkin' Donut images)** What are your thoughts regarding Dunkin' Donuts branding? What feelings does the logo and branding evoke?
 - a. Do you own any Dunkin' Donuts branded merchandise? If so, what do you own?

Dunkin' Donuts officially rebranded to Dunkin' on January 1, 2019. (Show Figures 2-4 on slide.)

7. Were you aware of the rebranding?
8. What are your thoughts on the rebranding from Dunkin' Donuts to Dunkin'?

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING

- a. How does the new logo and branding make you feel?
 - b. Which branding do you prefer and why?
 - c. What comes to mind when you hear “Dunkin’”?
9. How does the rebranding of Dunkin’ affect your level of identity with the brand?
10. Which company name do you associate more with and why? Dunkin’ Donuts or Dunkin’?
11. How has the rebranding impacted your thoughts or opinions on Dunkin’ Donuts?
12. How has the rebranding of Dunkin’ Donuts to Dunkin’ impacted the number of trips you make to the store?
- a. Has it affected what you purchase at the store?
 - b. How likely are you to purchase merchandise with the new Dunkin’ logo?
13. How does the rebranding of Dunkin’ Donuts make you feel about going out of your way to visit the store? Why?
14. How does the rebranding of Dunkin’ make you feel in relation to other coffee shops?
15. How does the rebranding affect the value or quality of Dunkin’ products in your mind?
- a. How does the rebranding affect your satisfaction with their products?
16. Why do you think Dunkin’ Donuts rebranded to Dunkin’?

Follow-up questions: Are there any questions I should have asked but did not? Do you have anything you would like to add to the discussion?



Figure 1: To be shown to focus group participants (Multimedia, 2019)

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND REBRANDING



Before



After



Figures 2-4: Images to be shown to focus group participants. (Dunkin', 2018)

Appendix B: Research Subject Consent Form

Title: Social Identity Theory and Rebranding: The brand formerly known as Dunkin' Donuts

Protocol No.: 19-504

Sponsor: N/A

Investigator: Meghan Gaskill
702 University Boulevard
Blacksburg, VA 24061
U.S.A.

Daytime Phone Number: 540-392-3879

RESEARCH CONSENT SUMMARY

You are being invited to take part in a research study. A person who takes part in a research study is called a research subject, or research participant.

You are being asked for your consent to take part in a research study. This document provides a concise summary of this research. It describes the key information that we believe most people need to decide whether to take part in this research. Later sections of this document will provide all relevant details.

What should I know about this research?

Someone will explain this research to you.

This form sums up that explanation.

Taking part in this research is voluntary. Whether you take part is up to you.

You can choose not to take part. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

You can agree to take part and later change your mind. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you don't understand, ask questions.

Ask all the questions you want before you decide.

How long will I be in this research?

We expect that your taking part in this research will last 30 minutes

Why is this research being done?

The purpose of this research is to better understand your perceptions of Dunkin' Donuts.

What happens to me if I agree to take part in this research?

If you decide to take part in this research study, the general procedures include your participation in one 30- minute long focus group that will be audio-recorded.

What are my responsibilities if I take part in this research?

If you take part in this research, you will be responsible to:

- Participate in one focus group by answering questions when you feel comfortable, honestly, about your own personal feelings and purchasing habits with Dunkin' Donuts.

Could being in this research hurt me?

There is no more than minimal risk.

Will being in this research benefit me?

It is not expected that you will personally benefit from this research.

Possible benefits to others include the benefit of this knowledge through the potential dissemination of a conference presentation and/or journal publication.

Will it cost me money to take part in this research?

No. Taking part in this research will not cost you any money.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

The only information collected for this research will be your first and last name and your email address in SONA. This information will only be available to the researchers and your name and email will not be used in the data analysis.

We may publish the results of this research. However, we will keep your name and other identifying information confidential.

We protect your information from disclosure to others to the extent required by law. We cannot promise complete secrecy.

Who can answer my questions about this research?

If you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or think this research has hurt you or made you sick, talk to the research team at the phone number listed above on the first page.

This research is being overseen by an Institutional Review Board (“IRB”). An IRB is a group of people who perform independent review of research studies. You may talk to them at (540) 231-3732, irb@vt.edu if:

You have questions, concerns, or complaints that are not being answered by the research team.

You are not getting answers from the research team.

You cannot reach the research team.

You want to talk to someone else about the research.

You have questions about your rights as a research subject.

Can I be removed from this research without my approval?

The person in charge of this research can remove you from this research without your approval. Possible reasons for removal include:

You are unable to keep your scheduled appointments

The research study is canceled or postponed

What happens if I agree to be in this research, but I change my mind later?

There is no penalty for changing your mind and choosing not to participate.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?

No. You will not be paid for your participation in this research.

Statement of Consent:

Your signature documents your consent to take part in this research.

_____ Signature of adult subject capable of consent	_____ Date
_____ Signature of person obtaining consent	_____ Date

MEMORANDUM

DATE: August 12, 2019
TO: Stephanie A Smith, Meghan Lynne Gaskill
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Social Identity Theory and Rebranding: The brand formerly known as Dunkin’ Donuts
IRB NUMBER: 19-504

Effective August 11, 2019, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) and Institutional Review Board (IRB) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **June 7, 2019**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this protocol, if required.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS:

This amendment, submitted August 9, 2019, changes the research protocol by revising participant collection methods to use of SONA instead of emailing professors and soliciting students directly at Virginia Tech dining halls. Recruitment materials were also changed by adding SONA.

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the HRPP office (irb@vt.edu) immediately.