

What Makes Bearcats Buy?
School Bonds, Attitudes toward School, and PI of School Merchandises

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INTRODUCTION

College students are likely to own a shirt with their school's logo (Frank, 2012). With the exception of a small number of religion affiliated schools, it is rather rare for colleges and universities to have a school dress code. However, it is not unusual to find college students who wear their school apparel. In the same matter, university decals or stickers are easy to be found among college alumni's cars. What makes them want to buy something that other people could identify them as a part of certain institution? More specifically, what makes them decide to purchase and own school merchandise? This research discusses the possible reasoning for these questions.

The purpose of this research is to discover the relationship between college students' purchase intentions toward school merchandise and school bonding. Establishing the linkage among these factors will enable marketers to figure out what would be the most efficient way to advertise and promote for school merchandise among college population. This research focuses on the motivation of college population regarding their intentions to purchase school merchandise. The main goal of the research is to discover the motivation that leads college students to buy school merchandise (e.g., t-shirts and mugs with school logo on).

In this study, the variables to measure school bonds are adopted from Hirschi's Social Bonding Theory. The original components from Hirschi's theory are: Attachment, Commitment, Involvement, and Beliefs (Hirschi, 1969). These concepts are then adjusted to the current research topic that hypothesizes the correlation between purchase intentions of school merchandise and school bonding. Social bonds will be clarified more in depth later in the article.

Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen, & Fishbein, 1980) is the basis of the theoretical framework of this study. TRA is widely used to explain people's behavior such as coupon usage, fast-food restaurant consumption, predicting unethical behavior, and so on (Shimp, & Kavas, 1984; Bagozzi, Wong, Abe, & Bergami, 2000; Chang, 1998). In this study, TRA will demonstrate what leads college students to purchase school merchandise by discovering the relationship among college students' motivation (school bonds), attitudes toward school, and the behavior (purchase intentions of school merchandise).

Theory of Reasoned Action

TRA (theory of reasoned action) is based on the proposition that an individual's behavior intention is to perform that behavior (Chang, 1998). The theory is a development of Fishbein's theory of attitude; it is variously known as Fishbein-Ajzen behavioral intentions model (Buttle, & Bok, 1996). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980), individuals' behavioral beliefs and normative beliefs motivate their attitudes towards the behavior and subjective norm, and then the beliefs and norm are linked to individual's intention and eventually the behavior. TRA suggests that a person's behavioral intention is a product of attitude toward the act and subjective norm (Buttle & Bok, 1996). In other words, individuals are more motivated to perform a behavior that will result in an outcome that is highly valued by others who are important to the individuals themselves (Blue, 1995).

Social Bonding Theory

Social bonding theory was developed by Travis Hirschi (1969). Social bonding theory, now better known as social control theory, was one of the first comprehensive conceptualizations of school bonding (Hirschi, 1969). Hirschi discusses different types of social bonds an individual may have with society such as family, peers, and school (Hirschi, 1969). Originally, social

bonding (control) theory was conducted to discover the causes of delinquency among society (Maddox, & Prinz, 2003). It is widely used in social or criminal justice fields. Social bonding theory claims that a man is less likely to depend on the group when the group he belongs to is more weakened, but more likely to depend on only himself. To put it differently, the theory predicts that individual's weak or broken bonds to society leads to delinquent acts (Hirschi, 1969). In contrast, social groups' strong bonds of attachment and commitment in members increase the behavior consistencies, and it results in preventing violations that goes against the group's standards (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999). Hirschi (1969) suggests that there are four dimensions to social bonding: attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs, and Clark (1971) identified the dimensions of social bonding and stated that social bonding includes the relation and interaction among groups. Many previous researches have adopted social bonding theory to their studies such as ethical rule breaking by employees, students' relationship to school, and evaluation of police legitimacy (Ferdik, Wolfe, & Blasco, 2013; Sims, 2002; Libbey, 2004).

This study focuses on marketing within a college environment; therefore it is relevant to Hirschi's social bonding theory which discusses the bonds of individuals to society (Hirschi, 1969). College is a community that has its own culture which includes its tradition, attitudes and values, and rules and norms among the people in it (Hartshorne, 1943). The dimensions of social bonding theory (attachment, commitment, involvement, and beliefs) are considered to be the indicators that reflect how individuals are tied to the society (Hirschi, 1969).

School Bonds

School bonding is important in students' experience in college (Maddox, & Prinz, 2003). In this research, the Social Bonding Theory is used to support the potential reasoning for college students' intentions of school merchandise purchasing. This study determines McKendree

University students' social bonds to school, and figure out how it may affect students' motivation and attitudes to buy school merchandise. The four dimensions of social bonding theory are geared toward college students.

Attachment to School

Attachment to school is a positive emotional link (Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999) that essentially measures how much an individual likes school as well as his or her peers, parents, and teachers. School attachment could easily be interpreted as a sense of connection an individual may have in school (Libbey, 2004). Having a sense of belonging, feeling pride in the institution, and feeling safe and comfortable at the institution are also related to this dimension (Maddox, & Prinz, 2003). Attachment to personnel that is accomplished by having positive interpersonal connections could also be incorporated with an attachment to school. Understanding the significance of the norm is important to fully comprehend the concept of attachment, because it means individuals are sensitive to what others expect of them, and they care about others' opinions (Hirschi, 1969).

School Commitment

Commitment is the efforts that are put in by people in order to achieve goals (Scahps, 2005); for college students, it is related to academics more than other categories. School commitment refers to personal investment in group activities in school (Maddox, & Prinz, 2003; Hawkins, Catalano, Kosterman, Abbott, & Hill, 1999). School commitment is one of the factors that facilitates students' academic devotion and outcome (Cavendish, 2013). Valuing educational goals, such as how hard students try and how much they desire to get good grades is essentially one's commitment in education (Maddox, & Prinz, 2003).

School Involvement

School involvement is a connection that students have to the institution that is usually represented by students' attention, concern, and effort that a student invests in school work (Laffey, 1982). Going to football games or participating in extracurricular activities could be an example of involvement in school (Maddox, & Prinz, 2003). Some other examples of school involvement are time-consuming work that students may get involved in school such as homework, sports and recreational activities. Students who are active in student organizations and interact with faculty often are considered to be highly involved in school (Astin, 1984). It is also important to note that students are highly engaged at institutions when faculty interacts with students (Umbach, & Wawrzynski, 2005).

Beliefs in School Rules

According to the California department of Education, students' faith in the institution of the school (Schaps, 2005) is an important component of school bonding. Students' positive social bonding in school is achieved by enhancing the clarity, fairness, and consistency of school rule enforcement (Schaps, 2005). Belief in school rules is how students perceive school discipline (Libbey, 2004). Believing in school rules means that students accept school rules as fair and legitimate (Jenkins, 1995) Students perceive whether or not school rules are applied fairly and different groups of people are being treated fairly, and they form their opinions and beliefs about school rules. For instance, students may think faculty at their school is too strict, and it will affect their beliefs in school rules (Libbey, 2004).

HYPOTHESES

Based on the assumption of the correlation between school bonding and purchase intention for school merchandise, three research hypotheses were conducted. Theory of reasoned action suggests that motivation (school bonds) affects attitude, which is eventually connected to the purchase intention of school merchandise.

Involvement in school is linked to students' levels of academic achievement, and eventually bonding to school (Laffey, 1982; Abbott, O'donnell, Hawkins, Hill, Kosterman, & Catalano, 1988). Students who play sports, or who are involved in student organization or any extra-curricular activities, are those who are recognized as active members of the college community.

H1: Students' school involvement and attitudes toward the school are positively correlated.

Valuing one's educational goals is a sign of psychological attachment to the organization (school) (O'reilly, & Chatman, 1986). Also, school commitment is related to school delinquency such as school crime, school misconduct, and school nonattendance (Jenkins, 1995). As Hirschi's Social Bonding Theory (1969) explains, people are less likely to be engaged in crime if they have positive bonds with the society.

H2: Students' school commitment and attitudes toward the school are positively correlated

How much students care about their school, peers, and faculty affect one's emotional link to school. Children are more likely to complete school without dropping out if they have healthy attachment to their peers and teachers in the institution due to their positive attitudes and feelings toward the institution (Marcus, & Sanders-Reio, 2001).

H3: Students' school attachment and attitudes toward the school are positively correlated.

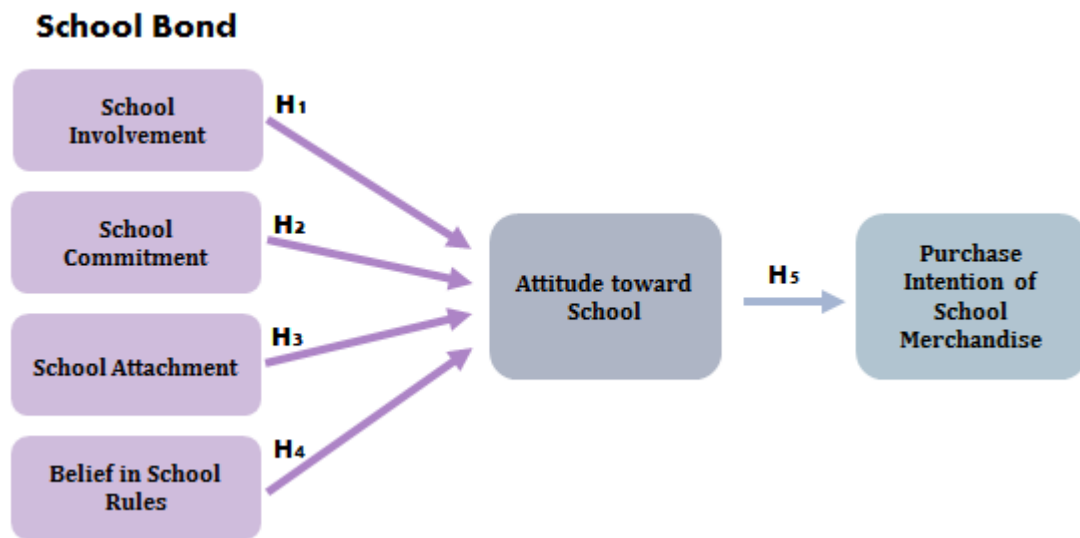
Students perceive their teachers' teaching method and judge whether or not it is fair and appropriate for every student (Thorkildsen, 1989). If students think the rules at school are too harsh, or teachers do not treat students with respect, students' perceptions of fairness of school rules would be negative which in return will be linked to low liking of school (Yang, Bear, Chen, Zhang, Blank, & Huang, 2013)

H4: Students' beliefs in school rules and attitudes toward the school are positively correlated.

Attitudes develop through experiences, and they influence directly on people's behavior (Breckler, & Wiggins, 1989). Previous researches has demonstrated that university students tend to wear school-identifying attire more after their school's team win a football game than when they lose (Robert, Richard, Thorne, Walker, Freeman, Sloan, 1976; Wann, & Branscombe, 1990). These studies indicates that a positive attitude, such as one that students would toward their winning football team, leads students to desire to identify themselves as a part of the community. Libbey (2004) outlines students' attitude toward school that it is essentially how students feel about going to school. The School Spirit Study Group (2004) used the term "school spirit" as an indicator of students' positive attitude toward school. The researchers measured school spirit by several operational criteria such as school apparel wearing, [purchasing of school] car stickers as well as some other variables. The result of the research showed these criteria have a positive correlation with school spirit.

H6: Students' positive attitudes toward the school lead to purchase intentions of school merchandise.

Figure 1) Research Model and Hypotheses



METHODS

Data Collection

Study participants were randomly selected on the McKendree University campus. Participants were informed that their participation is done voluntarily and that the survey results will be kept confidential. A total of 118 McKendree students took the survey, 55 males and 63 females. The age range of the participants was 18 to 29. About half of them were business majors (49.1%), and the other half consisted of social sciences, education, humanities, and health profession majors. Caucasian was the dominant ethnicity among the participants (79.7%), other ethnic groups were significantly smaller: African-American (9.3%) Asian-American (3.4%) and Hispanic-American (7.6%). Thirty-one freshmen (26.5%), 37 sophomore (31.6%), 25 junior (21.4%), 21 senior (17.9%), and 3 graduate students (2.6%) took the survey. In terms of annual family income, 10.4% of the respondents had low income (less than \$20,000); 23.5% had a low-middle income (between \$20,001 to \$60,000); 44.4% had a high-middle income (between \$60,001 to \$100,000); and 21.7% had a high income (\$100,001 or more).

Measurement

School bonds were measured in their four different components: school involvement, school commencement, school attachment, and belief in school rules (see *Table 1*). Scale items for social bonds were adopted from Jenkins' study (1997). School involvement scale items resulted in Cronbach's alpha of .435; school commitment .727; school attachment .794; and belief in school rules .830 (see *Table 2*). Most survey items for school bonds and purchase intention were measured on 7-point Likert scale, and some were yes or no questions. A few items had A through E choices, and attitude scale items were rated on the spectrum of a positive word (i.e. exciting) and a negative word (i.e. dull).

Table 1) Demographic profiles

| | |
|--------------------------------|------------|
| Variables | |
| Gender | |
| Male | 55 (46.6%) |
| Female | 63 (53.4%) |
| Age (range) | 18-29 |
| Major | |
| Computing | 2 (1.7%) |
| Humanities | 12 (10.2%) |
| Science and Mathematics | 4 (3.4%) |
| Social Sciences | 16 (13.6%) |
| Business | 58 (49.1%) |
| Education | 12 (10.2%) |
| Nursing and Health Professions | 9 (7.6%) |
| Undecided | 5 (4.2%) |
| Ethnicity | |
| Caucasian | 94 (79.7%) |
| African-American | 11 (9.3%) |
| Asian-American | 4 (3.4%) |
| Hispanic-American | 9 (7.6%) |
| Year at School | |
| Freshman | 31 (26.5%) |
| Sophomore | 37 (31.6%) |
| Junior | 25 (21.4%) |
| Senior | 21 (17.9%) |

| | |
|----------------------|------------|
| Graduate | 3 (2.6%) |
| Family Income | |
| <10,000 | 5 (4.3%) |
| 10,001-20,000 | 7 (6.1%) |
| 20,001-40,000 | 10 (8.7%) |
| 40,001-60,000 | 17 (14.8%) |
| 60,001-80,000 | 27 (23.5%) |
| 80,001-100,000 | 24 (20.9%) |
| >100,001 | 25 (21.7%) |

Table 2) Reliability

| Constructs | Items | Composite Reliability |
|--------------------|---|-----------------------|
| School Involvement | Do you belong to any student organization? | .435 |
| | Are you a student athlete? | |
| | During the present school year, have you participated in a fundraising event? | |
| | Do you participate in any extra-curricular activities? | |
| | Do you read SGA minutes? | |
| | Do you attend CAB events? | |
| | Do you voluntarily attend events at the Hett? | |
| | Did you perform at any non-athlete events this school year? | |
| | How much time each day do you spend doing homework assignments? | |
| | How much time do you spend studying for test and quizzes? | |

| | | |
|----------------------|--|------|
| School Commitment | I care if my homework is done correctly. | .727 |
| | I think most of my classes at McKendree are important. | |
| | I think most of my classes at McKendree are waste of time. | |
| | I have been on the honor roll this school year. | |
| | My grades matter a lot to me. | |
| | I would like to quit school right now. | |
| | I think education is important. | |
| | I feel like I fail no matter how I try. | |
| | I failed one or more course this school year. | |
| | I would like to continue my education after undergraduate. | |
| School Attachment | I care about what my professors think of me. | .794 |
| | I have a favorite professor at McKendree. | |
| | Most of my professors at McKendree like me. | |
| | I like most of my professors at McKendree. | |
| | I wish I went to a different university. | |
| | It is easy for me to talk over schoolwork problems with most of my professors. | |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|------|
| | Most professors are not interested in anything I say or do. | |
| | McKendree is considered as a good university compared to other schools in the area. | |
| | McKendree faculties are well-respected in classrooms. | |
| Belief in School Rules | Most school rules are fair. | .830 |
| | School rules are too tough and strict. | |
| | Students are treated fairly by most professors in this school. | |
| | Rules in this school are too strict. | |
| | The punishments for breaking rules are the same in this school no matter who you are. | |
| | Faculties in this school are too strict. | |
| | In this school, every ethnic group is treated equally. | |
| | In this school, females and males are treated equally. | |
| | In this school, students are treated fairly regardless their grades. | |
| Purchase Intention | I am more likely to purchase the McKendree school merchandises (e.g., shirts, hoodies, cups, hats, and bags). | .879 |
| | I would consider purchasing the McKendree school merchandise (e.g., shirts, hoodies, cups, hats, and bags) even if it is expensive. | |
| | In the near future, I intend to buy the McKendree school merchandise (e.g., shirts, hoodies, cups, hats, and bags). | |

Analyses

The first multiple regression analysis was performed using consumers' attitudes as a dependent variable and the school bond's measures (i.e., involvement, commitment, attachment, and belief in school rules) as independent variables (see *Table 1*). This analysis was performed to test the hypotheses concerning school bonds, college students' attitudes toward school, and purchase intention for school merchandises (i.e., Hypothesis 1, Hypothesis 2, and Hypothesis 3). The regression model has shown its significance with some of the measures and indicates that school bonds were associated with students' attitudes toward school ($F = 18.611$, $p < .001$). The model accounted for roughly 45% of the variance explained ($R^2 = .445$).

The second regression analysis was performed using purchase intention as a dependent variable and students' attitude toward school as an independent variable. Reliability test was done for each variables of school bonds. With the exception of school involvement (.435), other components (school commitment: .727, school attachment: .794, belief in school rules: .830) had fair reliability. Purchase intention (.879) and attitude towards school (.957) questions also had good reliability (see *Table 3*).

Table 3) Multiple Regression Results

| | Involvement → Attitudes | Commitment → Attitudes | Beliefs → Attitudes | Attachment → Attitudes | Attitudes → PI |
|--|--|---------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Beta (β) Coefficient ^a | .396 | .190 | .265 | .696 | .659 |
| t-value | -.999 | 1.123 | 2.385 | 4.473 | 6.496 |
| p-value | .321 | .264 | .019 | .000 | .000 |
| School bonds → Attitudes | Adjusted R^2 = .421 $R^2 = .445$ $F = 18.611$, $p < .001$ | | | | |

RESULTS

Most of the hypotheses were accepted with the exception of Hypothesis 1. Students' involvements in school were negatively correlated with students' attitudes toward school.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study are quite exciting findings. The outcomes of this study could be used in universities that wish to sell more school merchandises. What makes college students open their wallet and buy school clothing, coffee mugs, and hats is their positive school bonds and attitudes toward their school. In other words, schools should not overlook the impact of their students' experience at the institution, because it will affect the commercial growth side of the school.

As the results of this study indicate, colleges and universities need to focus on building positive relationships between faculty and students as well as among the student body itself. Also, the colleges and universities need to create positive image by hiring faculties who are well-respected for their academic achievements and providing safe environment for students to discuss their concerns. Establishing fair rules at school, and being mindful about punishments for breaking the school rules are important to generate students' positive attitudes toward school.

Making sure that students' perception of how fairly different groups of people are treated at school is very important. Different ethnic groups, genders, and even different levels of academic achievements are acknowledged among students, and how different groups are treated regulates whether students have positive or negative attitudes toward school. The more students think their school is favorable, enjoyable, fun, and exciting, the more students will intend to

purchase school merchandises. It is something to keep in mind that students' pleasant experience will eventually earn the school some money.

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