



## Journal of Consumer Marketing

Social persuasion: targeting social identities through social influencers  
Sascha Langner, Nadine Hennigs, Klaus-Peter Wiedmann,

### Article information:

To cite this document:

Sascha Langner, Nadine Hennigs, Klaus-Peter Wiedmann, (2013) "Social persuasion: targeting social identities through social influencers", Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 30 Issue: 1, pp.31-49, <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363761311290821>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/07363761311290821>

Downloaded on: 02 February 2018, At: 01:09 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 135 other documents.

To copy this document: [permissions@emeraldinsight.com](mailto:permissions@emeraldinsight.com)

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 7904 times since 2013\*

### Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2008), "Word of mouth and viral marketing: taking the temperature of the hottest trends in marketing", Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 25 Iss 3 pp. 179-182 <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363760810870671>

(2012), "Create a buzz around your business through influence marketing: interview with Mark W. Schaefer, author of Return on Influence", Strategic Direction, Vol. 28 Iss 9 pp. 33-36 <https://doi.org/10.1108/02580541211256549>



Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:271967 []

### For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit [www.emeraldinsight.com/authors](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/authors) for more information.

### About Emerald [www.emeraldinsight.com](http://www.emeraldinsight.com)

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

\*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

# Social persuasion: targeting social identities through social influencers

Sascha Langner, Nadine Hennigs and Klaus-Peter Wiedmann

Institute of Marketing and Management, Leibniz University of Hannover, Hannover, Germany

## Abstract

**Purpose** – Buying behaviour can be interpreted as a signal of social identity. For example, individuals may purchase specific cars to indicate their social status and income, or they may dress in particular ways to show their taste in fashion or their membership in a social group. This paper aims to focus on the identification of market place influencers in a social identity context, in order to better market products and services to social groups.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A structural model linking consumers' individual capital (motivation to influence), social capital (opportunistic use of social influence), and social leadership ability (persuasive "power") is introduced. Hypotheses on the interrelations of these factors are proposed and the model is empirically tested using causal analysis. The survey data were collected in Germany in the context of socially influenced automotive buying behavior (428 valid questionnaires).

**Findings** – The proposed model supports significant relations between individual capital and social capital and social leadership ability. The results suggest which factors (individual and social capital) describe social influencers, helping to identify powerful social influencers in a social identity context. Different types of social influence leaders and followers are presented and characterized.

**Originality/value** – This paper offers marketing researchers and practitioners a new integrative approach to target consumers with specific social identities via social influencers.

**Keywords** Social influencer, Individual capital, Social capital, Leadership ability, Social identity, Influence, Consumers

**Paper type** Research paper

**An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.**

## 1. Introduction

Identities, especially social identities, can be characterised as labels that transform over time and across various situations and that are used by consumers to categorise themselves and to express who they are in a social context (Reed, 2004; Reed *et al.*, 2009). For example, individuals may buy specific cars to indicate their social status and income, or they may dress in particular ways to show their taste in fashion or their membership in a social group. Buying behaviour can be interpreted as a signal of social identity (Douglas and Isherwood, 1978) and as a marker of consumers' other identity-oriented preferences (Solomon, 1988; Solomon and Assael, 1987). In every phase of life, different resources (e.g. material, symbolic, and experiential) are used by consumers to fulfil personal, role, and social identities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In this way, people follow a fundamental motivation to gain or maintain positive social identities that contribute to their self-esteem and ego (i.e. the self-enhancement motive) (Turner, 1982).

Nevertheless, a review of the existing literature on identity reveals that research into social identity-oriented buying behaviour is limited. Many studies have shown a strong connection between belonging to a social group and a

person's attitudes and buying decisions (e.g. Forehand and Deshpande, 2001; Grier and Deshpande, 2001; Jaffe and Berger, 1988; Jaffe, 1991; Meyers-Levy, 1988), but few studies have attempted to identify the reasons for this connection or to conceptualise how people are influenced by or in their social groups. Existing research on the question of how firms can target consumers with specific social identities has concentrated on social network theory, social ties and their effect on buying patterns (e.g. Money *et al.*, 1998). Little research has analysed in-groups and their characteristics, especially the different types of social influencers that act as role models – and even as leaders – inside social groups and that affect group (and buying) behaviour. Hence, to gain a theoretically and empirically founded understanding of social identity-oriented buying behaviour, it is important to study the underlying driving forces and individual motivations of social influencers. This examination has the potential to further both research and marketing practice and to efficiently target potential customers from a social group.

The purpose of this paper is to provide an initial conceptual model of influencers in social groups. In this context, we define dimensions of individual and social capital as key drivers of social influencers in a social identity context. Three sets of hypotheses are developed. The first set of hypotheses arises from the perspective that social influencers possess certain attributes that distinguish them from others (individual capital), and the second set of hypotheses arises from the perspective that influence is tied to social dominance and power, which enables an individual to affect others within their group (social capital). The combination of individual and social capital produces the social leadership that constitutes the core of social influence and leads to the third set of hypotheses. Based on the theoretical framework and associated hypotheses, the potential and value of different social influencers are explored in an initial research step that

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at [www.emeraldinsight.com/0736-3761.htm](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/0736-3761.htm)



Journal of Consumer Marketing  
30/1 (2013) 31–49  
© Emerald Group Publishing Limited [ISSN 0736-3761]  
[DOI 10.1108/07363761311290821]

uncovers three individual, three social, and three leadership factors that characterise four types of social influencers. A follow-up cluster analysis shows how social influencers are embedded in social structures and how they can influence self-categorisation and customer behaviour in social groups.

## 2. Construct definition and literature review

### 2.1 Social identity theory

Global society can be broken down into a wide range of social categories and social groups. Each individual may be part of several groups at the same time. To put it more clearly, each person plays a “role” in society. These roles can be continuous over one’s lifetime (e.g. father or son) or over a particular period of time (e.g. student, athlete, employee), or they may be transitory (e.g. Democrat, environmentalist). A social category contains social elements that originate from culture, social networks, social groups and society as a whole. Every consumer can declare himself or herself a member of any social category. However, not every social category can, in fact, be represented by everyone (Kihlstrom, 1992). Of particular importance are those social categories with a high level of self-relevance. These self-relevant social categories form a consumer’s social identity.

“Social identity” can be defined as “the individual’s knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership” (Tajfel, 1972). Accordingly, social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his/of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership [or her] knowledge” (Ellemers *et al.*, 2002). Because social identities are often associated with stable classifications such as gender or race, Table I provides a comprehensive overview of foundational research in social identity, showing that the theory is well founded, based on a transitory understanding of identity and well connected to consumer behaviour in general.

The topic of salience is a main concept in social identity. A salient identity “is an identity that is likely to be played out (activated) frequently across different situations” (Stets and Burke, 2002). Only if marketers are able to anticipate that a consumer is self-categorising him- or herself into a certain social group, they can properly target this consumer. There are several ways a social identity can be described as “salient”. For example, “in-groups” may be distinctly different from “out-groups” (Randel, 2002), especially when these groups differ in their social status or their position of power (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Brewer and Miller, 1984; Vanman and Miller, 1993). For marketers, social identity salience generally relates to situations and circumstances when a consumer associates the features of a product or situation that “draw, grab, or hold” his or her attention with elements of his or her social identity or social group (Higgins, 2000).

### 2.2 Social identity and consumer behaviour

Consumers are often attracted to brands and products that incorporate features of their social identity (extensive psychological and marketing-related research has been conducted on this subject, e.g. Forehand *et al.*, 2002; Stayman and Deshpande, 1989; Shavitt, 1990; Katz, 1960; Smith *et al.*, 1956). On one hand, this consumer attraction can occur because a product or brand represents particular

personality traits of the consumer (Aaker *et al.*, 2001; Aaker, 1997). On the other hand, the product may deliberately remind the consumer of his or her ideal position in society or another social identity related self-image (Belk *et al.*, 1982). Research studies have extensively analysed the impact of social identity on consumer attitudes and beliefs (for example, in terms of common norms and traits, shared avocations, similar political affiliations or shared religious beliefs: Deaux *et al.*, 1995; Kleine *et al.*, 1993; Laverie *et al.*, 2002). A consumer’s concept of his or her social identity can affect the way he or she selects purchases, including food items (O’Guinn and Meyer, 1984; Stayman and Deshpande, 1989; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983; Wooten, 1995). Furthermore, social identity can determine how consumers react to advertising (Forehand and Deshpande, 2001; Grier and Deshpande, 2001; Jaffe and Berger, 1988; Jaffe, 1991; Meyers-Levy, 1988) or even how they use media (Bhattacharya *et al.*, 1995; Saegert *et al.*, 1985). Social identity may also influence brand loyalty (Deshpande *et al.*, 1986). People even select their method of collecting information about particular topics based on their social identity (Meyers-Levy and Sternthal, 1991). In summary, literature shows that self-identification with specific social groups not only helps consumers to relate products with particular social identities (Kleine *et al.*, 1993; Shavitt *et al.*, 1992; Shavitt and Nelson, 2000) but also enables them to socially categorise other consumers by analysing what they buy (Baran *et al.*, 1989).

### 2.3 Social influence in social groups

The extent to which an individual self is derived from collective terms can be described as “social identification” (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Social identification can be defined as the process in which an individual psychologically consolidates his or her self with a social group to attribute group-defining characteristics (Van Knippenberga *et al.*, 2004; Hogg, 2003; Sedikides and Brewer, 2001; Turner *et al.*, 1987). An individual who defines himself or herself as a member of a specific social group will often assimilate the main characteristics of the social group, enticing the individual to take the collective’s interest to heart – also in terms of buying behaviour. O’Shaughnessy and O’Shaughnessy (2002) explain that “consumers seek ‘positional’ goods to demonstrate group membership, to identify themselves and mark their position” within a social group.

Consumers adapt to social group behavior (in terms of affective reactions, norms, beliefs, and attitudes) when they experience a high level of in-group salience (Turner, 1982). Still some individuals, such as group leaders or social role models, may even be able to intensify this in-group salience by influencing in-group behavior (Forehand and Deshpande, 2001; Grier and Deshpande, 2001; Jaffe and Berger, 1988; Jaffe, 1991; Meyers-Levy, 1988; Deshpande and Stayman, 1994). This can occur directly, such as when a professional golf player recommends a particular equipment shop to new members. It can also occur indirectly, such as when a feminist organisation leader is often seen consuming a certain brand of soft drink. But who are these highly influential group members in general? How can they be identified and directly addressed? What characteristics or attributes do they have in common?

Table I Social identity foundational theory – an overview

Author(s)/year	Title/focus	Key concept	Definition
Tajfel, 1972	"La categorization sociale [social categorization]", In S. Moscovici (Ed.), <i>Introduction à la psychologie sociale</i> , pp. 272-302, Paris, Larousse	Social identity	Social identity is defined as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership"
Tajfel, 1978	The Social Psychology of Minorities. London: Minority Rights Group.	Social identity	Social identity is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his of his [or her] membership of a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership [or her] knowledge"
Tajfel, 1981	<i>Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology</i> , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press	Social identity	"[...] The assumption is made that, however rich and complex may be the individuals' view of themselves in relation to the surrounding world, social and physical, some aspects of that view are contributed by the membership of certain social groups or categories. Some of these memberships are more salient than others; and some may vary in salience in time and as a function of social situation"
Turner, 1982	"Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group", In H. Tajfel (Ed.), <i>Social Identity and Intergroup Relations</i> , pp. 15-40, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.	Social identity	Social identity theory states that in situations of high in-group salience, the given cognitions, attributes and stereotypes of in-groups and out-groups influence how "the self" is interpreted potentially leading consumers to behave like the "in-group stereotype" in terms of attitudes, beliefs, norms, affective reactions, and behaviours
Lorenzi-Cioldi and Doise, 1994	"Identité sociale et identité personnelle", In R.Y. Bourhis and J.P. Leyens (Eds.), <i>Stéréotypes, discrimination et relations intergroupes</i> , pp. 69-96, Liège: Mardaga	Social identity	Social identity theory defines the self-concept as a cognitive structure deriving out of a social categorisation (involving those characteristics of the self, that are associated with a social group membership) and a personal identity (incorporating those elements of the self that are unique to the person)
Tajfel and Turner, 1986	"The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour", In S. Worschel and W.G. Austin (Eds.), <i>Psychology of Intergroup Relations</i> , pp. 7-24, Chicago, IL: Nelson Hall		
Turner, 1982	"Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group", In H. Tajfel (Ed.), <i>Social Identity and Intergroup Relations</i> , pp. 15-40, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press		
Andrews, 1991	<i>Lifetimes of Commitment. Aging, Politics, Psychology</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press	Group identity	In social identity theory, group identification is defined by the individual's self-identification to a specific social group. The intensity of identification depends on the distinction between voluntary and involuntary group membership as well as on the social context in which the identity is triggered. For example sex, age, and race are involuntary group memberships, whereas professions, hobbies, or religion are voluntary memberships. Identification to voluntary groups is proposed to be more intense as they are actively chosen
Taylor and Whittier, 1992	"Collective identity in social movement communities: Lesbian feminist mobilization", In A. Morris and C. McClurg Mueller (Eds.), <i>Frontiers of Social Movement Theory</i> , pp. 104-130, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press	Collective identity	In the theory complex of social identity a collective identity is defined as "shared definitions of a group that derive from members' common interests and solidarity." Collective identity describes social group membership in wider environment and context, as it incorporates not only one individual's self-identification with a group but also the identification of the whole group as a collective

(continued)

Table I

Author(s)/year	Title/focus	Key concept	Definition
Tajfel, 1978	<i>Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies in the Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations</i> , London: Academic Press	Social categorisation	Social identity theory proposes that the behaviour of an individual towards a member of a target out-group is determined by a social categorisation process involving specific stereotypes implied by group membership rather than by personality traits
Turner, 1982	"Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group", In H. Tajfel (Ed.), <i>Social Identity and Intergroup Relations</i> , pp. 15-40, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press	Social categorisation	Social identity theory proposes that people follow a fundamental motivation to hold up or gain positive social identities that add to their self-esteem and ego (i.e. self-enhancement motive). In inter-group contexts "[...] the need for positive social identity motivates a search for, and the creation and enhancement of, positive distinctiveness for one's own group in comparison to other groups"
Higgins, 2000	"Social cognition: Learning about what matters in the social world", <i>European Journal of Social Psychology</i> , Vol. 30, pp. 3-39	Social identity salience	Social identity salience "can be used to capture the notion that not all of the features of a stimulus receive equal attention at any point in time. The salient features of a stimulus event are those features that draw, grab, or hold attention relative to alternative features" social identity salience generally relates to situations and circumstances when the features of the self that "draw, grab, or hold" a consumer's attention in defining "who they are" are tangible and can be more or less directly connected to the membership in a particular social group
Randel, 2002	"Identity salience: a moderator of the relationship between group gender composition and work group conflict", <i>Journal of Organizational Behaviour</i> , Vol. 23, pp. 749-766	Social identity salience	Under the premise that if there is an unequal ratio of in-group members compared out-groups, a social identity becomes salient if there are distinctive, visible differences of the in-group compared to the out-groups
Ashforth and Mael, 1989	"Social identity theory and the organization", <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , Vol. 14, pp. 20-39	Social identity salience	A social identity becomes salient, if there is a distinctive difference in status and power of the in-group compared to the out-groups
Brewer and Miller, 1984	"Beyond the contact hypothesis: theoretical perspectives on desegregation", In N. Miller and M.B. Brewer (Eds.), <i>Groups in Contact: The Psychology of Desegregation</i> , pp. 281-302, Orlando, FL: Academic Press		
Vanman and Miller, 1993	"Applications of emotion theory and research to stereotyping and intergroup relations. In D.M. Mackie and D.L Hamilton (Eds.), <i>Affect, Cognition and Stereotyping: Interactive Processes in Group Perception</i> , pp. 297-315, San Diego, CA: Academic Press		
Earley and Laubach, 2001	"Creating hybrid team cultures: an empirical test of transnational team functioning", <i>Academy of Management Journal</i> , Vol. 43, pp. 26-50	Social identity salience	A social identity becomes salient, if out-group members treat members of a specific social group differently because of their social identity
Stone and Colella, 1996	"A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled individuals in organizations", <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , Vol. 21, pp. 352-401		
Ashforth and Mael, 1989	"Social identity theory and the organization", <i>Academy of Management Review</i> , Vol. 14, pp. 20-39	Social identity salience	In particular contexts inter-group competition can lead to situations where a social identity becomes salient

(continued)

Table I

Author(s)/year	Title/focus	Key concept	Definition
Turner, 1982	"Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group", In H. Tajfel (Ed.), <i>Social Identity and Intergroup Relations</i> , pp. 15-40, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press		
Tajfel and Turner, 1979	"An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", In W.G. Austin and S. Worschel (Eds.), <i>The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations</i> , pp. 33-47, Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.	Social context	If and to what extent a person interprets himself as an individual or out of his social identity, depends on social context features like, e.g. the permeability of group boundaries and the stability and legitimacy of inner group statuses
Ellemers <i>et al.</i> , 2002	"Self and social identity", <i>Annual Review of Psychology</i> , Vol. 53, pp. 161-186	Social context	"The motivational implications of a particular social identity are shaped by contextual features [...]" (e.g. risk avoidance, self-esteem boost, and better distinctiveness) that affect different facets of social identification (e.g. strength of identification, self-stereotyping, and affiliation with a group on an emotional base)

#### 2.4 Identification of social influencers

Several factors have been identified as reasons why specific "selves" have the ability to influence consumers in a social group more than others. These factors include source expertise (Bansal and Voyer, 2000; Gilly *et al.*, 1998), tie strength (Brown and Reingen, 1987; Frenzen and Nakamoto, 1993), leadership abilities (Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948), demographic similarity (Brown and Reingen, 1987), reference group influence (Bearden and Etzel, 1982), and perceptual affinity (Gilly *et al.*, 1998). Research studies have shown that certain types of consumers have a personal predisposition to influence other consumers (e.g. opinion leaders, market mavens, or Machiavellians; Feick and Price, 1987; Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1944; Henning and Six, 1977). Reliable and valid measurements must be developed to identify and to make ideal use of consumers with a significant level of influence on the behaviour of others. In previous research, four basic techniques have been successfully tested: socio-metric techniques, interviews with key informants, observations, and self-designating techniques (Jacoby, 1974; Rogers and Cartano, 1962; Weimann, 1994). Of these methods, self-identification techniques are the most popular method as they can easily be administered in surveys. However, the disadvantage of this approach is that individuals sometimes overestimate their influence on others by evaluating themselves more positively than others would. Not everyone who claims to be a leader and source of advice in a social group can be a convincing social influencer (Stanforth, 1995). To profile, evaluate, and target different types of social influencers – specifically, those with a leadership personality, who are highly involved in their social identity and whose advice is sought and those with comparably low levels of information but compensatory influential resources (Kang and Park-Poaps, 2010) – a consumer's potential to influence must be subdivided into individual, social, and leadership aspects.

### 3. Conceptualisation and hypotheses: categories of social influencers

Identifying consumers with the greatest potential influence in a social group requires a comprehensive understanding and management of influence behaviour as well as an in-depth analysis of its conditions and drivers. For the purposes of this

paper, the influence potential of consumers is related to the consumer's individual and social capital attributes (Cova *et al.*, 2007; Bourdieu, 1989) and leadership abilities.

A consumer's individual capital derives from an individual's knowledge, involvement, and expertise (Phau and Chang-Chin, 2004). A consumer's social capital arises from social dominance gained from specific and sustained relationships within a social group. When determining a consumer's influence value, individual capital addresses the consumer's motivation to influence, whereas social capital refers to the consumer's opportunistic use of social influence, defined by the consumer's independent, self-centred, and calculated use of his influencing powers. Both individual and social capital contribute to a social influencer's leadership abilities, which illustrate his persuasive "power". Derived from factors such as leadership narcissism or personality strengths, leadership in a social group is a marker of social influence. However, few studies have attempted to conceptualise and empirically test the effect of consumers' individual and social capital and leadership abilities on their perception of certain products and services and their associated influence.

#### 3.1 Individual capital dimensions

To identify the common characteristics of marketplace influencers, research has focused on various socioeconomic factors that set those influencers apart from other individuals, such as media habits, individual lifestyles, status, prestige, values, and traits, specific involvement and knowledge levels (Anderson, 1962; Black, 1982; Kingdon, 1970; Levy, 1978; Robinson, 1976). In this paper, we will focus on the following deduced individual factors: involvement, expertise, and knowledge and Mavenism. As our conceptual model proposes, Mavenism functions as a central motivation for influencing behaviour, whereas involvement and expertise/knowledge determine the degree and quality of motivation. The factors, the corresponding literature and the resulting hypotheses are described as follows.

*Expertise and knowledge:* As the "ability to perform product related tasks successfully" (Feick and Higie, 1992), expertise defines the influence of specific information (e.g. Deutsch and Gerrard, 1955; Herr *et al.*, 1991; Lascu and Zinkhan, 1999; Yale and Gilly, 1995). Because expert sources have a greater

influence on the receiver (e.g. Bone, 1995; Herr *et al.*, 1991; Feick and Higie, 1992), expertise and knowledge about a product category or a social environment are essential qualifications that define a consumer's influence potential, especially in the context of social identity (Troidahl and van Dam, 1965; Myers and Robertson, 1972). Social influencers are frequently asked for advice in their area of expertise and are significantly more influential within their social groups than others are (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). Experts are opinion leaders in a product category more often than non-experts (Jacoby and Hoyer, 1981), and their advice is considered to be of higher quality than the advice of others (Gilly *et al.*, 1998). Communicating expertise and/or knowledge effectively is crucial because the clarity of a message plays a vital role in the process and outcome of social influence (Gatignon and Robertson, 1991). Regarding Mavenism, expertise, and knowledge contribute to the ability to help others with vital information and constitute the basis for substantial advice. This leads us to our first hypothesis:

*H1.* The level of expertise and knowledge in a specific area of interest significantly influences Mavenism through a consumer's motivation to influence other group members.

*Involvement:* The context of specific product categories also seems to affect influencing behaviour in social groups (Kim, 2005). Research studies have shown that the level of involvement in a specific area of interest not only affects the motivation to disseminate information about a "product" but also lowers the cognitive costs related to processing new information, allowing for the better and faster accumulation of knowledge over time (Bloch and Richins, 1983). The energising characteristics of involvement in the context of social identity generate Mavenism. Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

*H2.* The degree of involvement within a particular product class or category is a basic driver of social influence and will positively impact Mavenism as an individual's motivation and ability to influence others.

*Mavenism:* Consumers who are defined by an individual predisposition to propagate knowledge and opinions (specific or general knowledge/expertise in products, purchase situations and other market-related matters) to fellow consumers are described as market mavens or opinion leaders (Feick and Price, 1987; Lazarsfeld *et al.*, 1944; Kotler and Zaltman, 1976; Kassarian, 1981; Slama and Tashchian, 1985). In a marketplace environment, the so-called maven is a trusted person who is known as an expert in a specific area of interest or a product category, helping consumers to reduce their perceived risks in decision-making processes (Wiedmann *et al.*, 2001; Walsh *et al.*, 2004). In a social identity context, Mavenism is the primary individual capital that helps consumers act as influencers. Moreover, Mavenism acts as a motivational source to use of one's knowledge to achieve social power and social dominance. Consequently, we hypothesise the following:

*H3.* Mavenism has a significant positive effect on Machiavellianism because knowledge and involvement combined with the ability to provide valuable advice motivate a social influencer to use his expertise to achieve social dominance.

### 3.2 Social capital dimensions

Whereas the first group of factors refers to characteristics of individual capital that enable an influencer to affect others, the second group shows that social capital plays a vital role in explaining social influencing behaviour. To measure social capital, it is useful to deduct the sources of social capital by defining three factors: ego drive, independence and Machiavellianism. The next section presents a brief description of these factors and their corresponding hypotheses.

*Ego drive:* Ego drive is characterised by receiving personal enjoyment from persuading another consumer to act in a certain way (Greenberg and Greenberg, 1983). Ego-driven individuals receive a deep feeling of satisfaction when they are able to deliberately change other consumers' point of view. Ego-driven consumers constantly attempt to assert and affirm their sense of self. Therefore, research studies suggest that the ego drive can be triggered by exhibiting connoisseurship, suggesting a pioneering spirit, demonstrating insider information, connoting status, evangelising, and asserting superiority (Dichter, 1966). In our social identity context, ego drive not only supports but also encourages consumers to act as social influencers. Because ego-driven social influencers persuade other consumers for the sake of their own ego, ego drive is a main driver of Machiavellianism, as the essence of social dominance. This effect leads us to the following hypothesis:

*H4.* Ego drive acts as a main driving force for consumers to persuade others and thereby significantly affects Machiavellianism as the ability to opportunistically use one's influencing capabilities.

*Independence:* In this research context, independence is defined as a condition in which an individual is able to use his mind and body, regardless of social constraints or conscience. Independence is an element of authoritarianism (Oesterreich, 1998; Ogawa, 1981; Oesterreich, 1974; Adorno *et al.*, 1964) that enables a person to act on his authority without hesitation or questioning his conscience. Regarding social influencers, independence acts as a measure of a consumer's conviction to influence. The more independent an individual is, the more he can opportunistically use his influencing powers. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H5.* Independence determines the level of social risks a consumer is willing to take and acts as a driving force of Machiavellianism, as the ability to opportunistically use one's influencing capabilities.

*Machiavellianism:* Machiavellian personalities can be defined as opportunistic power seekers with self-centred attitudes towards other people and the world (Christie and Geis, 1970). Machiavellians search for power and leadership and act in their own interest. When they persuade others, they mostly do so wisely and always in the context of a bigger picture (Dahl, 1957; Mayer and Greenberg, 1964). However, Machiavellians do not only enjoy influencing the minds and actions of others; they also follow an inner drive. In an attempt to constantly prove their positions as pioneers and leaders, they must constantly affect and persuade others (Weigel *et al.*, 1999). Machiavellians in social groups embody social influence and leadership capabilities as they receive satisfaction and self-assurance from others following them

(Dichter, 1966; Gatignon and Robertson, 1986). Consequently, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H6. Machiavellianism has a significant positive effect on social leadership because ego-drive combined with independence and the conviction to achieve social dominance enables a social influencer to use his abilities effectively.

### 3.3 Social leadership

While individual capital and social capital describe the personal motivation and social competence to influence, social leadership constitutes the core ability to persuade others in a social group. To measure social leadership, we rely on three factors: personality strength, leadership narcissism and leadership ability. A brief description of these factors and their corresponding hypotheses are presented in the following sections.

*Personality strength:* Personality strength is a central trait of individuals; it is a mirror of their confidence in leadership roles, their talent for forming others' opinions, and their self-perceived influence on social and political outcomes. Consumers with high personality strength achieve higher levels of satisfaction in life and are generally more integrated into their communities (Scheufele, 1999). Personality strength is positively related to a person's engagement in social activities, and it has been shown that people with high personality strength engage in larger social networks and talk to others more often (Schenk and Rössler, 1997). Due to their larger networks and integration into larger communities, consumers with high personality strength frequently meet new people, speak at meetings, participate actively in discussions, and take part in social events (Weimann, 1994; Noelle-Neumann, 1985). In the context of this research, personality strength enables social influencers to affect and persuade others by indirectly leading them. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

- H7. High personality strength is a basic driver of leadership because it gives social influencers confidence in the process of persuading others.

*Leadership narcissism:* In general, leadership narcissism is seen as the excessive belief in one's own abilities and/or attractiveness to others. Leadership narcissism, as defined in this research, is derived from the concept of the narcissist personality (Raskin and Terry, 1988). This healthy characterisation of individuals who are often portrayed as self-centred and conceited (Ames *et al.*, 2006) fits our conceptual model because social influencers require an overwhelming sense of self-confidence to overcome objections or resistance against their attempts to influence other group members. Therefore, we hypothesise the following:

- H8. Narcissism is a basic driver of leadership because an excessive belief in one's own attractiveness helps social influencers to reassure themselves and to overcome apparent doubts.

*Leadership ability:* In our conceptual model, acclaiming social leadership is a central goal of social influence. Social influence is conclusively identified only if an influential consumer can lead his social group directly or indirectly towards a specific stereotype or buying behaviour. Leadership in social groups

can therefore be defined as the process of forming and organising a group of people to achieve a common goal through the power of social influence. As we search for the leadership of a social influencer, we refer to the persuasive abilities derived from the concept of narcissistic leadership (Raskin and Terry, 1988). In contrast to common examples of leaders, such as a company's CEO, leadership in social groups requires no formal authority (Mann, 1959; Stogdill, 1948). Consistent with our conceptual model, research studies have shown that leadership can evolve from various factors, such as personal traits (Arvey *et al.*, 2006), situational circumstances (Kenny and Zaccaro, 1983), visions and values, charisma, and intelligence (Judge *et al.*, 2002).

Based on our theoretical analysis, Figure 1 shows the conceptual model we propose to explore the key drivers of social influence in social groups and the set of individual, social, and leadership characteristics that constitute the ideal social influencer.

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Measurement instrument

To measure the antecedents and behavioural outcomes of individual and social capital in the context of our conceptual model, we used existing and tested measures, as shown in Table II.

All items were rated on five-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) and specified to a product-specific context. For the purposes of our study, the context of automotive marketing was chosen. More than any other product, automobiles are a mirror of society and social identity. Material possessions, such as automobiles, symbolise and communicate not only personal qualities but also group membership, social status, and social position (Dittmar, 1992; O'Cass and McEwen, 2004), qualities that can be seen by other consumers as distinctive expressions of social identity (McCracken, 1989; Wattanasuwan, 2005). Therefore, this research context is ideal for analysing the individual and social drivers of market influencers in the context of social identity. The automotive market is appropriate for conclusions regarding socially embedded car-buying behaviour and a wide range of high-involvement goods. The first version of our questionnaire was face-validated using exploratory and expert interviews to check the length and layout of the questionnaire and the quality of the items.

### 4.2 Sample and data collection

To investigate the research model, an internet survey with a snowball sampling method was developed in Germany. This survey used an Internet form sent to selected web pages and personalised e-mails to private customers with an invitation to contribute to the survey. In April 2011, a total of 428 valid questionnaires were received. The sample characteristics are described in Table III.

Regarding gender distribution, 55.4 per cent of the respondents were male and 44.6 per cent were female. In terms of age, 36.9 per cent of the participants were between 26 and 35 years of age, with 35.6 years as the mean age. With regard to educational level and occupational status, 75.2 per cent of the sample had received a university entrance diploma or a university degree, and 60.7 per cent of the sample were employed full time. Regarding the automotive context, 88.2



Figure 1 Conceptual model

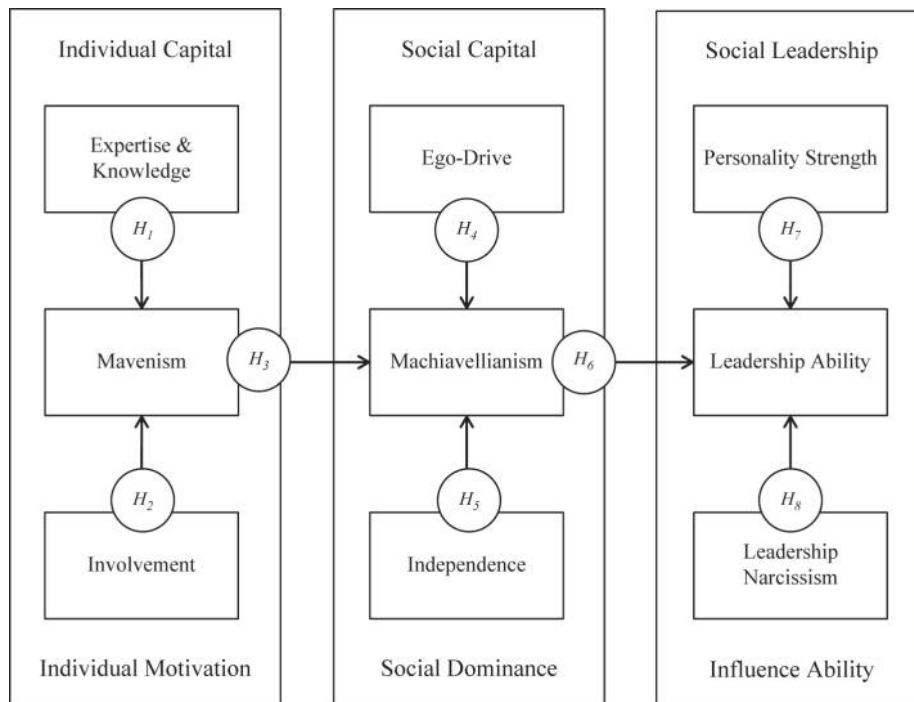


Table II The questionnaire scales

<b>Individual Capital</b>	
Product-specific involvement	Zaichkowsky, 1985
Expertise and knowledge	Sambandam and Lord, 1995
Market Mavenism	Feick and Price, 1987
<b>Social capital</b>	
Empathy and ego drive	Schiemann and van Gundy, 2000
Independence	Oesterreich, 1998
Machiavellianism	Henning and Six, 1977
<b>Social leadership</b>	
Personality strength	Noelle-Neumann, 1983
Leadership Narcissism	Raskin and Terry, 1988
Leadership ability	Raskin and Terry, 1988

per cent of the respondents owned a car and drove it on a regular basis. Although this is not a representative sample, the convenience sample used in this study is an appropriate basis for the empirical investigation of our conceptual model.

5. Results and discussion

SPSS 17.0 and SmartPLS 2.0 were used to analyse the data. To assess common method variance, following Podsakoff *et al.* (2003), we used Harman’s (1976) one-factor test to determine whether a single factor accounted for most of the covariance in the relationships between the independent and dependent variables. A principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation revealed a nine-factor structure with no general factor present (the first factor accounted for 23 per cent of the variance). Thus, no single factor accounted for a majority of the covariance in the variables, so the common

method variance was unlikely to present a significant problem in our study. The results of the measurement of the constructs, the test of our hypotheses, and the cluster segments of market influencers in a social identity context are described in the following.

5.1 Measurement of constructs

For a reliable and valid measurement of the latent variables, we used several criteria to assess our measurement models, following the suggestions of Chin (1998). For all factors, our results show sufficiently high factor loadings, with 0.606 as the smallest loading. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE), the reliability tests (Cronbach’s alpha, indicator reliability, factor reliability), and the discriminant validity (Fornell-Larcker criterion) revealed satisfactory results, as shown in Table IV.

5.2 Evaluation of structural relations

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a PLS path modelling analysis with case-wise replacement and a bootstrapping procedure (individual sign changes; 428 cases and 1,000 samples). As shown in Figure 2 and Table V, the assessment of the aggregate PLS path coefficients in the inner model results in statistically significant relations ( $p < 0.01$ ).

The latent variables Product-specific Involvement and Expertise & Knowledge reveal a positive and significant relationship to the latent variable Market Mavenism, providing full support for *H1* and *H2*. In *H4* and *H5*, we postulate that Ego Drive and Independence have a positive effect on Machiavellianism. Our results show that the postulated effects are significant and strongly positive, so *H4* and *H5* receive full support. The same holds for *H7* and *H8*, indicating that Personality Strength and Leadership Narcissism are significant drivers of Leadership Ability. Regarding *H3* and *H6*, we analysed the impact of Market

Table III Demographic profile of the sample

Variable	n	%
<b>Age (yrs)</b>		
18-25	97	22.7
26-35	158	36.9
36-45	84	19.6
46-55	53	12.4
56-99	31	7.2
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	237	55.4
Female	191	44.6
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	244	57.0
Married	146	34.1
Widowed	4	1.0
Divorced	31	7.3
<b>Education</b>		
Lower secondary school	16	3.7
Intermediate secondary school	87	20.3
University entrance diploma	126	29.4
University degree	196	45.8
<b>Occupation</b>		
Full time	260	60.7
Part time	44	10.3
Pensioner/retiree	9	2.1
Housewife/husband	9	2.1
Job training	3	0.7
Student	93	21.7
Seeking work	6	1.4
<b>Income</b>		
> €500	12	2.8
€500-999	55	12.9
€1,000-1,999	69	16.1
€2,000-2,999	106	24.8
€3,000-3,999	74	17.2
€4,000-4,999	40	9.3
< €5,000	43	10.0

Mavenism on Machiavellianism and the effect of Machiavellianism on Leadership Ability. The results provide full support for *H3* and *H6*; the causal relations between Market Mavenism and Machiavellianism and between Machiavellianism and Leadership Ability are positive and significant. With reference to the evaluation of our inner model (see Table VI), the coefficients of the determination of the endogenous latent variables (*R*-square) reveal high values at 0.807, 0.637 and 0.656. Moreover, Stone-Geisser's *Q*-square (Stone, 1974; Geisser, 1975) yielded a value higher than zero for the endogenous latent variables, suggesting the predictive relevance of the explanatory variables.

In summary, referring to our initial hypotheses, the assessment of the measurement models and the structural relations support the proposed causal relations between individual motivation and the social drive to act as a marketplace influencer and the resulting leadership qualities. To develop appropriate market strategies aimed at different

types of social influence leaders and followers, in a next step, we used cluster analysis in conjunction with discriminant analysis.

### 5.3 Cluster analysis: types of social influence leaders and followers

To conduct the cluster analysis, the factor scores for each respondent were saved. In our analysis, we used a combination of Ward's method of minimum variance and non-hierarchical k-means clustering. The results strongly suggested the presence of four clusters. With regard to classification accuracy, we also used discriminant analysis to check the cluster groupings once the clusters were identified; 96.3 per cent of the cases were assigned to their correct groups, validating the results of cluster analysis for the useful classification of consumer subgroups based on the factors included in the model. To develop a profile of each market segment, more detailed information was obtained by examining the factor scores cross-tabulated by cluster segment, as presented in Table VII.

Comparisons among the four clusters were conducted on a variety of descriptive variables, including demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Based on the variables from which they were derived, the four clusters were labelled as follows:

*Cluster 1: The Occasional Influencers*, with a mean age of 35.0 years, form 24.3 per cent of the sample, with 35.7 per cent male and 64.3 per cent female respondents and a middle income level. Referring to our study context, 78.8 per cent state that they possess a car (mostly Ford or Volkswagen) and drive it on a regular basis. To them, the most important criteria when buying a car are its reliability and safety. Taken as a whole, this segment does not seem to be greatly excited about cars; the mean scores for Product-specific Involvement, Expertise and Knowledge and Mavenism are the lowest of all clusters, indicating that the given automotive context does not motivate these respondents to engage in related conversation. Typical consumers in this cluster can be considered more as social followers than leaders, as evidenced by the lowest ratings for Ego Drive, Independence, and Machiavellianism. Although they do not perceive themselves as socially social dominant, they show medium ratings for Personality Strength, Leadership Narcissism, and Leadership Ability, which are not connected to the given product context in our study but might be relevant in another product category.

*Cluster 2: The Narrative Experts*, with a mean age of 31.6 years, form 43.0 per cent of the sample, with 69.9 per cent male and 30.1 per cent female respondents with low to medium income. Overall, 89.5 per cent of the respondents in this group state that they possess a car and drive it on a regular basis; the most important criteria when buying a car are its reliability and its price-quality relation. With reference to car brand (a wide spectrum from Audi, BMW, Mercedes, and Volkswagen to Ford), this group shows the second-highest mean scores for brand identification, willingness to choose the same brand again and to recommend the brand to others. Considering the factors included in our model, this group shows medium ratings for all clusters. Specifically, they are more interested in cars than clusters 1 and 4, have higher ratings for Expertise & Knowledge and consider themselves market mavens in the automotive context. The factor with the highest mean scores in this group is Ego Drive, with the second-highest rating of all groups in leadership qualities. In

Table IV Evaluation of the measurement models

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor loadings	t-value	Composite reliability	AVE	Fornell-Larcker criterion (AVE > Corr <sup>2</sup> )
<i>Individual capital</i>						
<i>F1 Product-specific involvement</i>						
Unimportant – important	0.932	0.899	115.674	0.947	0.748	0.748 > 0.643
Boring – interesting		0.904	118.621			
Mundane – fascinating		0.908	143.363			
Means nothing – means a lot to me		0.810	52.812			
Irrelevant – relevant		0.796	49.497			
Uninvolving – involving		0.862	88.848			
<i>F2 Expertise and knowledge</i>						
A car brand reflects the driver's ability	0.908	0.688	28.470	0.928	0.684	0.684 > 0.596
My car is a reflection of my social status		0.821	61.575			
To me, a car is an expression of the owner's personality		0.845	69.885			
To be able to drive an attractive car is worth the extra costs		0.842	60.588			
Compared to the average person, I know a lot about cars		0.865	75.755			
My friends consider me an expert on cars		0.888	121.356			
<i>F3 Market Mavenism</i>						
In general, my friends and I talk very often about cars	0.982	0.865	78.666	0.984	0.826	0.826 > 0.768
If I talk to friends about cars, I provide most of the information		0.894	90.135			
I have talked with various people about cars and car brands during the last six months		0.822	52.681			
My friends often ask my advice about cars		0.944	162.692			
In a discussion of financial services, I usually convince my friends of my ideas		0.934	166.894			
I feel that I am regarded by my friends as a good source of advice and/or information about cars		0.946	190.529			
I like to introduce new car models to my friends		0.944	194.320			
I like to help people by providing them with information about cars and car brands		0.937	153.272			
People often ask me for information to get the best deal on cars		0.932	156.107			
If someone asked me where to get the best deal on cars, I could tell the person where to purchase them		0.895	87.070			
My friends think of me as a good source of information for cars and car brands		0.949	219.586			
I like to share my car knowledge with other people		0.871	75.650			
Think about a person who has information about a variety of car models and car brands and likes to share this information with others. This person knows a lot about cars but does not necessarily feel that he or she is an expert on one particular model. How strongly would you agree that this description fits you?		0.871	79.769			
<i>Social capital</i>						
<i>F4 Ego-drive</i>						
I do not get emotionally involved with friends' problems	0.869	0.831	68.461	0.901	0.546	0.546 > 0.403
I do not get upset because a friend is troubled		0.861	86.286			
When a friend starts to talk about his or her problems, I try to steer the conversation to something else		0.821	62.413			
I do not feel very sorry for other people when they are having problems		0.605	23.543			
Other people's sorrows usually do not disturb me		0.862	74.851			
I have never felt so close to someone else's difficulties that they seemed as if they were my own		0.662	27.790			
I feel that other people ought to take care of their problems themselves		0.775	63.023			

(continued)

Table IV

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	Factor loadings	t-value	Composite reliability	AVE	Fornell-Larcker criterion (AVE > Corr <sup>2</sup> )
<b>F5 Independence</b>						
Freedom primarily means freedom from social and state compulsion	0.739	0.763	40.555	0.836	0.560	0.560 > 0.320
People without firm principles are at the mercy of manipulation from others		0.716	35.372			
Our society prevents the satisfaction of important human needs		0.735	30.962			
Individuals should obey only those state restrictions of freedom that they consider justified		0.778	43.677			
<b>F6 Machiavellianism</b>						
The best way to handle people is to tell them what they want to hear	0.950	0.606	21.238	0.957	0.615	0.615 > 0.549
It is not as important how one wins but that one wins		0.844	77.581			
Modesty is not only unprofitable, it is also disadvantageous		0.756	43.141			
It is every man for himself		0.738	40.930			
One should adhere to a good policy as long as possible but should not be afraid of a bad one if necessary		0.611	28.241			
To succeed with a good idea, it is not important which means one uses		0.832	56.456			
Never tell anyone the real reason you did something unless it is useful to do so		0.855	73.341			
A person who lets himself be exploited by others without noticing it does not deserve sympathy		0.807	57.088			
One can only reach ambitious goals if one is willing to break some rules		0.656	28.762			
One can break a promise safely if one gets reasonable benefits from it		0.874	85.971			
One should choose one's acquaintances by their usefulness		0.881	108.590			
It is mostly favourable to keep one's own intentions to oneself		0.751	45.115			
A person who helps others to advance in their careers breaks his own back		0.856	80.975			
One must judge people's actions by their success		0.835	75.361			
<b>Social leadership</b>						
<b>F7 Personality strength</b>						
I usually count on being successful in everything I do	0.900	0.663	26.174	0.919	0.558	0.558 > 0.425
I am rarely unsure about how I should behave		0.664	29.739			
I like to assume responsibility		0.813	56.023			
I often notice that I serve as a model for others		0.791	45.621			
I enjoy convincing others of my opinions		0.758	44.988			
I am good at getting what I want		0.829	68.882			
I am often a step ahead of others		0.778	50.759			
I often give others advice and suggestions		0.645	23.993			
I like to take the lead when a group does things together		0.755	44.232			
<b>F8 Leadership narcissism</b>						
I like to be the centre of attention	0.817	0.874	86.840	0.872	0.581	0.581 > 0.512
I am an extraordinary person		0.732	30.772			
I will usually show off if I get the chance		0.854	76.947			
I like to be complimented		0.559	18.218			
I like to look at myself in the mirror		0.752	38.126			
<b>F9 Leadership ability</b>						
I know that I am good because everyone keeps telling me so	0.873	0.724	35.096	0.905	0.615	0.615 > 0.512
I see myself as a good leader		0.848	71.051			
I have a natural talent for influencing people		0.804	54.048			
I like to take responsibility for making decisions		0.673	27.314			
I would prefer to be a leader		0.863	90.205			
I am more capable than other people		0.777	43.753			

Figure 2 Empirical model

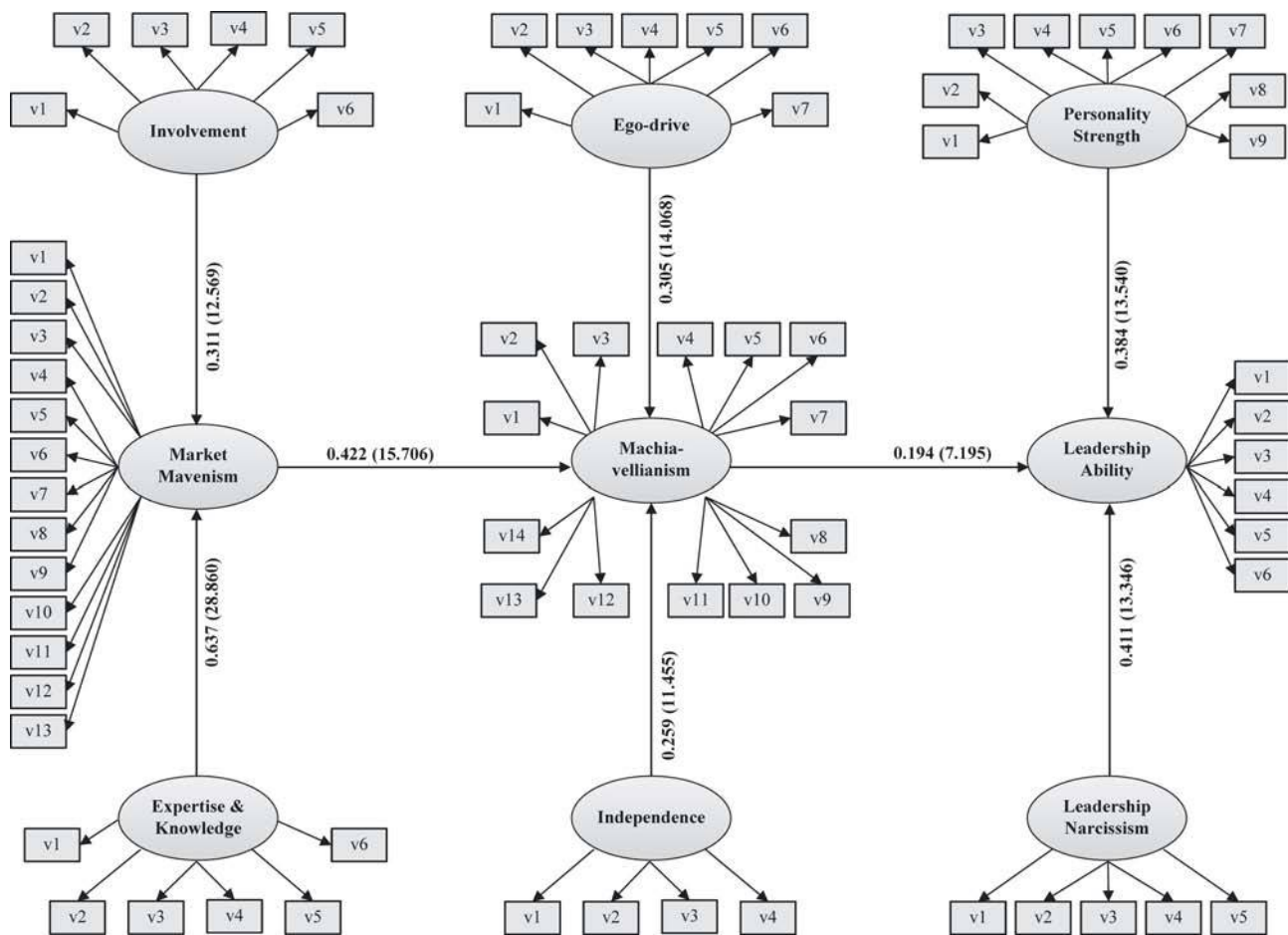


Table V Evaluation of the measurement models

Exogenous LV → Endogenous LV	Original sample	Sample mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	t-statistics
H1. Product-specific Involvement → Market Mavenism	0.311	0.310	0.025	0.025	12.569
H2. Expertise and Knowledge → Market Mavenism	0.637	0.637	0.022	0.022	28.860
H3. Market Mavenism → Machiavellianism	0.422	0.420	0.027	0.027	15.706
H4. Ego Drive → Machiavellianism	0.305	0.306	0.022	0.022	14.068
H5. Independence → Machiavellianism	0.259	0.260	0.023	0.023	11.455
H6. Machiavellianism → Leadership Ability	0.194	0.193	0.027	0.027	7.195
H7. Personality Strength → Leadership Ability	0.384	0.386	0.028	0.028	13.540
H8. Leadership Narcissism → Leadership Ability	0.411	0.412	0.031	0.031	13.346

Table VI Evaluation of the inner model

Endogenous LV	R <sup>2</sup>	Q <sup>2</sup>
Market Mavenism	0.807	0.255
Machiavellianism	0.637	0.180
Leadership Ability	0.656	0.255

comparison to cluster 3, the most important reason to lead others is not the drive for social dominance but the individual expertise and knowledge in a certain product category.

Cluster 3: The Social Leaders, with a mean age of 41.8 years, comprise 13.1 per cent of the sample, with 98.1 per cent male

and 1.9 per cent female respondents and the highest income level of all groups. All of these respondents state that they possess a car and drive it on a regular basis. Members in this cluster are significantly more likely to drive a sports car, a convertible or a SUV from BMW, Mercedes, Audi or even luxury cars, such as Porsche. To these consumers, the most important criteria when buying a car are its comfort and driving enjoyment. They are less likely than all other clusters to purchase pre-owned cars, and they are more loyal than others to a brand; they drive a car for five to ten years and would choose the same brand again. Significantly more than members of all other groups, the members in this cluster state that they fully identify with their car brand and would

Table VII Cluster means

	Factor Means Cluster 1	Factor Means Cluster 2	Factor Means Cluster 3	Factor Means Cluster 4	F	Sig
<i>n</i>	104	184	56	84		
Product-specific involvement	−0.951	0.214	1.455	−0.260	160.174	0.000
Expertise and knowledge	−0.836	0.154	1.883	−0.558	340.609	0.000
Market mavenism	−0.862	0.157	1.924	−0.560	400.293	0.000
Ego drive	−0.717	0.319	1.208	−0.616	108.685	0.000
Independence	−0.650	−0.080	1.487	−0.010	92.675	0.000
Machiavellianism	−0.601	−0.066	2.050	−0.478	308.700	0.000
Personality strength	0.186	0.161	1.098	−1.315	151.945	0.000
Leadership narcissism	−0.191	0.050	1.601	−0.941	153.225	0.000
Leadership ability	−0.098	0.161	1.508	−1.237	223.622	0.000

recommend it to friends and family members. With reference to the factors included in our model, this segment shows significantly higher ratings on all aspects. The highest mean rating of all factors is on Machiavellianism and Market Mavenism, followed by Expertise and Knowledge, Leadership Narcissism, and Leadership Ability. In sum, typical consumers in this cluster have the individual motivation and expertise to engage in car-related conversation and the social dominance that drives them to lead this conversation, which is reflected in their leadership qualities. Given the significantly high ratings for all aspects, this group is not only a context-driven social leader (in the automotive context) but socially dominant on a general basis.

*Cluster 4: The Social Followers*, with a mean age of 35.9 years, comprise 19.6 per cent of the sample, with 36.6 per cent male and 64.4 per cent female respondents with middle income. In this cluster, 90.7 per cent state that they possess a car and drive it on a regular basis. They drive rather small cars from Ford and Volkswagen, and their most important criterion is car safety. In comparison to the other clusters, this group is less likely to identify with the car brand, less likely to choose it again and less likely to recommend this brand to others. Taken as a whole, similar to the cluster means of the first cluster group, all factors included in the model show low ratings. Whereas cluster 1 has the lowest ratings for the automotive context, this group has the lowest ratings for leadership qualities: The mean scores for Personality Strength, Leadership Narcissism, and Leadership Ability are the lowest of all groups. Respondents in this group do not perceive themselves as socially dominant or as social leaders, regardless of the given product context.

From a research and managerial perspective, the results of our empirical study, which reveal important motivational drivers and different types of social influence leaders and followers, are useful for further research and business practice.

## 6. Managerial implications and further research

The purpose of this paper was to examine social influence drivers based on individual motivation, the degree of social dominance and related leadership qualities to gain a better understanding of the driving forces behind different types of social leaders and followers. A better understanding of the key drivers of social influence and social identification in a specific product context is valuable for both marketing researchers

and marketers. Especially when consumers are confronted with an increasingly complex variety of products, the social identification aspect of products provides consumers with a feeling of belonging and well-being. Related to the desire to belong to a certain group, consumers tend to define themselves in terms of a group to which they feel strongly connected and to adopt shared attitudes and (consumption) behaviours. Thus, consumers' individual product choices and usage are often influenced by concerns about what relevant others in their social network might think of them or how others might act towards them (Miniard and Cohen, 1983). Defined as "the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others or seeking information from others" (Bearden *et al.*, 1989), the individual susceptibility to social influence and the willingness to actively engage in the search for information about socially approved products are important drivers of consumption.

In our comprehensive conceptual model, we suggest that individual and social capital dimensions form the basis of leadership qualities and social influence in a social identity context. Based on our empirical results, significant causal relations can be identified between the key individual and social drivers of an individual's ability and willingness to influence others in his/her social network. A cluster approach revealed four types of social influence leaders or followers that can be distinguished according to their perception of the suggested aspects of individual motivation, social dominance, and leadership ability. Although our results are only initial empirical suggestions, they are useful for further exploration in research and implementation in managerial practice. In future analyses, analytical techniques or PLS typological alternatives may provide further differentiated path modelling results that allow for more precise interpretation and the identification of differences in path coefficients across the subgroups of social influence leaders and followers. Furthermore, the perceived relevance and perceptions of the individual and social drivers of interpersonal influence may vary in different product contexts. Hence, a longitudinal study should compare the causal relationship between individual motivation, the degree of social dominance and the leadership abilities of consumers over time and with reference to different products and social situations (i.e. business vs. leisure time). Additionally, a focus on culture-specific issues might enhance the conceptualisation, measurement, and management of the phenomenon of social identification and social influence.

For marketing managers, our study may form the basis of a structured understanding of social influence and identification. Our results provide strong evidence that consumers' individual motivation, social dominance, and leadership ability are important drivers, and these results provide an appropriate basis to distinguish between social influence leaders and followers. A comprehensive business approach dedicated to the activation and management of a successful social network marketing campaign includes the identification of those consumers who have the knowledge, ability, and motivation to lead others as well as the access to potential followers in their social environment. In the current context, when consumers tend to rely on interpersonal communication more than on traditional marketing activities and when Facebook has become the ubiquitous form of social identification on a global level, a better understanding of the reasons consumers identify themselves on the basis of shared consumption behaviours and actively engage in product-related recommendation activities is crucial for a company's lasting success.

## References

- Aaker, J. (1997), "Dimensions of brand personality", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 34 No. 3, pp. 347-56.
- Aaker, J.L., Benet-Martinez, V. and Garolera, J. (2001), "Consumption symbols as carriers of culture: a study of Japanese and Spanish brand personality constructs", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 81, pp. 492-508.
- Adorno, T.W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D.J. and Sanford, R.N. (1964), *The Authoritarian Personality*, Science Editions, New York, NY.
- Anderson, B. (1962), "Opinion influentials and political opinion formation in four Swedish communities", *International Social Sciences Journal*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 320-6.
- Andrews, M. (1991), *Lifetimes of Commitment. Aging, Politics, Psychology*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Ames, D.R., Rose, P. and Anderson, C.P. (2006), "The NPI-16 as a short measure of narcissism", *Journal of Research in Personality*, Vol. 40, pp. 440-50.
- Arnould, E. and Thompson, C. (2005), "Consumer culture theory (CCT): twenty years of research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31 No. 4, pp. 868-82.
- Arvey, R.D., Rotundo, M., Johnson, W., Zhang, Z. and McGue, M. (2006), "The determinants of leadership role occupancy: genetic and personality factors", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 17, pp. 1-20.
- Ashforth, B.E. and Mael, F. (1989), "Social identity theory and the organization", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 20-39.
- Bansal, H.S. and Voyer, P.A. (2000), "Word-of-mouth processes within a services purchase decision context", *Journal of Service Research*, Vol. 3 No. 2, pp. 166-77.
- Baran, S.J., Mok, J.J., Land, M. and Kang, T.Y. (1989), "You are what you buy: mass mediated judgments of people's worth", *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 39 No. 2, pp. 46-54.
- Bearden, W.O. and Etzel, M.J. (1982), "Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 183-94.
- Bearden, W.O., Netemeyer, R.G. and Teel, J.E. (1989), "Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, pp. 473-81.
- Belk, R.W., Bahn, K.D. and Mayer, R.N. (1982), "Developmental recognition of consumption symbolism", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9, pp. 4-16.
- Bhattacharya, C.B., Rao, H. and Glynn, M.A. (1995), "Understanding the bond of identification: an investigation of its correlates among art museum members", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 59 No. 4, pp. 46-57.
- Black, J. (1982), "Opinion leaders: is anyone following?", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 46 No. 2, pp. 169-76.
- Bloch, P.H. and Richins, M.L. (1983), "A theoretical model for the study of product importance perceptions", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 47 No. 3, pp. 69-81.
- Bone, P.F. (1995), "Word-of-mouth effects on short-term and long-term product judgments", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 213-23.
- Bourdieu, P. (1989), "Social space and symbolic power", *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 14-25.
- Brewer, M.B. and Miller, N. (1984), "Beyond the contact hypothesis: theoretical perspectives on desegregation", in Miller, N. and Brewer, M.B. (Eds), *Groups in Contact: The Psychology of Desegregation*, Academic Press, Orlando, FL, pp. 281-302.
- Brown, J.J. and Reingen, P.H. (1987), "Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 14 No. 3, pp. 350-62.
- Chin, W.W. (1998), "The partial least squares approach for structural equation modelling", in Marcoulides, G.A. (Ed.), *Modern Methods for Business Research*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 295-336.
- Christie, R. and Geis, F. (1970), *Studies in Machiavellianism*, Academic Press, New York, NY.
- Cova, B., Kozinets, R.V. and Shankar, A. (2007), *Consumer Tribe*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford and Burlington, MA.
- Dahl, R.A. (1957), "The concept of power", *Behavioral Science*, Vol. 2, pp. 201-18.
- Deaux, K., Reid, A., Mizrahi, K. and Ethier, K. (1995), "Parameters of social identity", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 68, pp. 280-91.
- Deshpande, R. and Stayman, D.M. (1994), "A tale of two cities: distinctiveness theory and advertising effectiveness", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 57-64.
- Deshpande, R., Hoyer, W.D. and Donthu, N. (1986), "The intensity of ethnic affiliation: a study of the sociology of Hispanic consumption", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 13, pp. 214-20.
- Deutsch, M. and Gerrard, H. (1955), "A study of normative and informational social influences upon individual judgement", *Journal of Abnormal Social Psychology*, Vol. 51, pp. 629-36.
- Dichter, E. (1966), "How word-of-mouth advertising works", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 44 No. 6, pp. 147-60.
- Dittmar, H. (1992), *The Social Psychology Of Material Possessions: To Have Is To Be*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, Hemel Hempstead and St Martin's Press, New York, NY.
- Douglas, M. and Isherwood, B. (1978), *The World Of Goods: Towards An Anthropology Of Consumption*, Allen Lane, London.
- Earley, P.C. and Laubach, E. (2001), "Creating hybrid team cultures: an empirical test of transnational team functioning", *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol. 43, pp. 26-50.

- Ellemers, N., Spears, R. and Doosje, B. (2002), "Self and social identity", *Annual Review of Psychology*, Vol. 53, pp. 161-86.
- Feick, L.F. and Higie, R.A. (1992), "The effects of preference heterogeneity and source characteristics on ad processing and judgments about endorsers", *Journal of Advertising*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 9-24.
- Feick, L.F. and Price, L.L. (1987), "The market maven – a diffuser of marketplace information", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 51 No. 1, pp. 83-97.
- Forehand, M.R. and Deshpande, R. (2001), "What we see makes us who we are: priming ethnic self-awareness and advertising response", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 336-48.
- Forehand, M.R., Deshpande, R. and Reed, A. (2002), "Identity salience and the influence of differential activation of the social self-schema on advertising response", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87 No. 6, pp. 1086-99.
- Frenzen, J. and Nakamoto, K. (1993), "Structure, cooperation, and the flow of market-information", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 20 No. 3, pp. 360-75.
- Gatignon, H. and Robertson, T.S. (1986), "An exchange theory model of interpersonal-communication", *Advances Consumer Research*, Vol. 13, pp. 534-8.
- Gatignon, H. and Robertson, T.S. (1991), "Innovative decision processes", in Kassarian, H.H. (Ed.), *Handbook of Consumer Behavior*, Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, pp. 316-48.
- Geisser, S. (1975), "The predictive sample reuse method with applications", *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, Vol. 70, pp. 320-8.
- Gilly, M.C., Graham, J.L., Wolfenbarger, M.F. and Yale, L.J. (1998), "A dyadic study of interpersonal information search", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 83-100.
- Greenberg, H.M. and Greenberg, J. (1983), "The personality of a top salesperson", *Nation's Business*, available at: www.calipercanada.com/personality.htm (accessed February 6, 2002).
- Grier, S.A. and Deshpande, R. (2001), "Social dimensions of consumer distinctiveness: the influence of social status on group identity and advertising persuasion", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 216-24.
- Harman, H.H. (1976), *Modern Factor Analysis*, 3rd ed., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL.
- Herr, P.M., Kardes, F.R. and Kim, J. (1991), "Effects of word-of-mouth and product-attribute information on persuasion – an accessibility-diagnostics perspective", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 454-62.
- Henning, H. and Six, B. (1977), "Konstruktion einer Machiavellismus-Skala", *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie*, Vol. 8, pp. 185-98.
- Higgins, T. (2000), "Social cognition: learning about what matters in the social world", *European Journal of Social Psychology*, Vol. 30, pp. 3-39.
- Hogg, M.A. (2003), "Social identity", in Leary, M.R. and Tangney, J.P. (Eds), *Handbook of Self and Identity*, The Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 462-79.
- Hogg, M.A. and Abrams, D. (1988), *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes*, Routledge, London.
- Jacoby, J. (1974), "The construct validity of opinion leadership", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 38 No. 2, pp. 81-9.
- Jacoby, J. and Hoyer, W.D. (1981), "What if opinion leaders didn't know more? A question of nomological validity", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 8, pp. 299-303.
- Jaffe, L.J. (1991), "Impact of positioning and sex-role identity on women's responses to advertising", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 31 No. 3, pp. 57-64.
- Jaffe, L.J. and Berger, P.D. (1988), "Impact on purchase intent of sex-role identity and product positioning", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 259-71.
- Judge, T.A., Bono, J.E., Ilies, R. and Gerhardt, M.W. (2002), "Personality and leadership: a qualitative and quantitative review", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 87, pp. 765-80.
- Kang, J. and Park-Poaps, H. (2010), "Hedonic and utilitarian shopping motivations of fashion leadership", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 312-28.
- Kassarjian, H.H. (1981), "Low involvement: a second look", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 8, pp. 31-4.
- Katz, D. (1960), "The functional approach to the study of attitudes", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 24, pp. 163-204.
- Katz, E. and Lazarsfeld, P.F. (1955), *Personal Influence*, Free Press, Glencoe, IL.
- Kenny, D. and Zaccaro, S. (1983), "An estimate of variance due to traits in leadership", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 68 No. 4, pp. 678-86.
- Kleine, R.E. III, Schultz Kleine, S. and Kernan, J.B. (1993), "Mundane consumption and the self: a social-identity perspective", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 2 No. 3, pp. 209-35.
- Kihlstrom, J.F. (1992), "Dissociation and dissociations: a commentary on consciousness and cognition", *Consciousness and Cognition*, Vol. 1, pp. 47-53.
- Kim, H.-S. (2005), "Consumer profiles of apparel product involvement and values", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 207-20.
- Kingdon, J. (1970), "Opinion leaders in the electorate", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 256-61.
- Kotler, P. and Zaltman, G. (1976), "Targeting prospects for a new product", *Journal of Advertising Research*, Vol. 16, pp. 7-18.
- Lascu, D.-N. and Zinkhan, G. (1999), "Consumer conformity: review and applications for marketing theory and practice", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 1-12.
- Laverie, D.A., Kleine, R.E. III and Schultz Kleine, S. (2002), "Reexamination and extension of Kleine, Kleine, and Kernan's social identity model of mundane consumption: the mediating role of the appraisal process", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 28 No. 4, pp. 659-69.
- Lazarsfeld, P.F., Berelson, B. and Gaudet, H. (1944), *The People's Choice; How The Voter Makes Up His Mind In A Presidential Campaign*, Columbia University Press, New York, NY.
- Levy, M. (1978), "Opinion leadership and television news use", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 402-16.
- Lorenzi-Cioldi, F. and Doise, W. (1994), "Identité sociale et identité personnelle", in Bourhis, R.Y. and Leyens, J.P. (Eds), *Stereotypes, discrimination et relations intergroupes*, Mardaga, Liège, pp. 69-96.



- McCracken, G. (1989), "Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 16 No. 3, pp. 310-21.
- Mann, R.D. (1959), "A review of the relationships between personality and performance in small groups", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 56, pp. 241-70.
- Mayer, D. and Greenberg, H.M. (1964), "What makes a good salesman?", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 42, pp. 119-25.
- Meyers-Levy, J. (1988), "Gender differences in information processing: a selectivity interpretation", in Cafferata, P. and Tybout, A. (Eds), *Cognitive and Affective Responses to Advertising*, Lexington Books, Lexington, MA, pp. 219-60.
- Meyers-Levy, J. and Sternthal, B. (1991), "Gender differences in the use of message cues and judgments", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 28, pp. 84-96.
- Miniard, P.W. and Cohen, J.E. (1983), "Modeling personal and normative influences on behavior", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 169-80.
- Money, R.B., Gilly, M.C. and Graham, J.L. (1998), "Explorations of national culture and word-of-mouth referral behaviour in the purchase of industrial services in the United States and Japan", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 62 No. 4, pp. 76-87.
- Myers, J.H. and Robertson, T.S. (1972), "Dimensions of opinion leadership", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 41-6.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1983), "Persönlichkeitsstärke – ein neues Kriterium zur Zielgruppenbeschreibung" [Personality strength – a new criteria to describe target groups], in SPIEGEL-Verlag (Ed.), *SPIEGEL-Dokumentation: Persönlichkeitsstärke*, Spiegel-Verlag, Hamburg.
- Noelle-Neumann, E. (1985), "Identifying opinion leaders", paper presented to the 38th Annual Convention of the European Society of Market Research, Wiesbaden.
- Oesterreich, D. (1974), *Autoritarismus und Autonomie: Untersuchungen über berufliche Werdegänge, soziale Einstellungen, Sozialisationsbedingungen und Persönlichkeitsmerkmale ehemaliger Industriehilfslinge*, Klett, Stuttgart.
- Oesterreich, D. (1998), "Ein neues Maß zur Messung autoritärer Charaktermerkmale", *Zeitschrift für Sozialpsychologie*, Vol. 29, pp. 56-64.
- Ogawa, S. (1981), "A cross cultural study of social norms and authoritarianism: a comparison of Japanese, German and American adolescents", New York, NY, thesis.
- O'Cass, A. and McEwen, H. (2004), "Exploring consumer status and conspicuous consumption", *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, Vol. 4 No. 1, pp. 25-39.
- O'Guinn, T. and Meyer, T. (1984), "Heterogeneity in ethnic media use: a study of Spanish language media preferences", paper presented to the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA.
- O'Shaughnessy, J. and O'Shaughnessy, N.J. (2002), "Marketing, consumer society and hedonism", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 36 No. 5, pp. 524-47.
- Phau, I. and Chang-Chin, L. (2004), "Profiling fashion innovators – a study of self-concept, impulse buying and internet purchase intent", *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management*, Vol. 8, pp. 399-411.
- Podsakoff, P.M., MacKenzie, S.B., Lee, J. and Podsakoff, N.P. (2003), "Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies", *Journal of Applied Psychology*, Vol. 88, pp. 879-903.
- Randel, A.E. (2002), "Identity salience: a moderator of the relationship between group gender composition and work group conflict", *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, Vol. 23, pp. 749-66.
- Raskin, R. and Terry, H. (1988), "A principal-component analysis of the narcissistic personality inventory and further evidence of its construct validity", *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 54 No. 5, pp. 890-902.
- Reed, A. (2004), "Activating the self-importance of consumer selves: exploring identity salience effects on judgements", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 31, pp. 286-95.
- Reed, A., Cohen, J.B. and Bhattacharjee, A. (2009), "When brands are built from within: a social identity pathway to liking and evaluation", in MacInnis, D.J., Park, C.W. and Priester, J.R. (Eds), *Handbook of Brand Relationships*, M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, pp. 124-50.
- Robinson, R. (1976), "Interpersonal influence in election campaigns: two-step flow hypothesis", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 155-67.
- Rogers, E.M. and Cartano, D.G. (1962), "Methods of measuring opinion leadership", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 26, pp. 435-41.
- Saegert, J., Hoover, R.J. and Hilger, M.T. (1985), "Characteristics of Mexican American consumers", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 12, pp. 104-9.
- Sambandam, R. and Lord, K.R. (1995), "Switching behavior in automobile markets: a consideration sets model", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 23, pp. 57-65.
- Schenk, M. and Rössler, P. (1997), "The rediscovery of opinion leaders. An application of the personal strength scale", *European Journal of Communication Research*, Vol. 22, pp. 5-30.
- Scheufele, D.A. (1999), "Participation as individual choice: comparing motivational and informational variables and their relevance for participatory behaviour", University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, unpublished doctoral dissertation.
- Schiemann, S. and van Gundy, K. (2000), "The personal and social links between age and self-reported empathy", *Social Psychology Quarterly*, Vol. 63 No. 2, pp. 152-74.
- Sedikides, C. and Brewer, M.B. (2001), *Individual Self, Relational Self, Collective Self*, Psychology Press, Philadelphia, PA.
- Shavitt, S. (1990), "The role of attitude objects in attitude functions", *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, Vol. 26, pp. 124-48.
- Shavitt, S., Lowrey, T.M. and Han, S. (1992), "Attitude functions in advertising: the interactive role of products and self-monitoring", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 1, pp. 337-64.
- Shavitt, S. and Nelson, M.R. (2000), "The social identity function in person perception: communicated meanings of product preferences", in Maio, G.R. and Olson, J.M. (Eds), *Why We Evaluate: Function of Attitudes*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, pp. 37-58.
- Slama, M.E. and Tashchian, A. (1985), "Selected socioeconomic and demographic characteristics associated with purchasing involvement", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, pp. 72-82.

- Smith, M.B., Brunner, J. and White, R.W. (1956), *Opinions and Personality*, Wiley, New York, NY.
- Solomon, M.R. (1988), "Mapping product constellations: a social categorization approach to consumption symbolism", *Psychology & Marketing*, Vol. 5, pp. 233-58.
- Solomon, M.R. and Assael, H. (1987), "The forest or the trees? A gestalt approach to symbolic consumption", in Umiker-Sebeok, J. (Ed.), *Marketing and Semiotics: New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale*, Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin, pp. 189-217.
- Stanforth, N. (1995), "Fashion innovators, sensation seekers, and clothing individuals", *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, Vol. 81 No. 3, pp. 1203-10.
- Stayman, D. and Deshpande, R. (1989), "Situational ethnicity and consumer behaviour", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 16, pp. 361-71.
- Stets, J.E. and Burke, P.J. (2002), "A sociological approach to self and identity", in Leary, M.R. and Tangney, J.P. (Eds), *Handbook of Self and Identity*, The Guilford Press, New York, NY, pp. 123-52.
- Stogdill, R.M. (1948), "Personal factors associated with leadership: a survey of the literature", *Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 25, pp. 35-71.
- Stone, M. (1974), "Cross-validators choice and assessment of statistical predictions", *Journal of Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 36 No. 2, pp. 111-47.
- Stone, D.L. and Colella, A. (1996), "A model of factors affecting the treatment of disabled individuals in organizations", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 352-401.
- Tajfel, H. (1972), "La catégorisation sociale", in Moscovici, S. (Ed.), *Introduction à la psychologie sociale (Vol.1)*, Larousse, Paris.
- Tajfel, H. (1978a), *Differentiation Between Social Groups: Studies In The Social Psychology Of Intergroup Relations*, Academic Press, London.
- Tajfel, H. (1978b), *The Social Psychology Of Minorities*, Minority Rights Group, London.
- Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1986), "The social identity theory of inter-group behaviour", in Worchel, S. and Austin, L.W. (Eds), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Nelson-Hall, Chicago, IL.
- Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C. (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", in Austin, W.G. and Worschel, S. (Eds), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Wadsworth, Belmont, CA, pp. 33-47.
- Taylor, V. and Whittier, N.E. (1992), "Collective identity in social movement communities: lesbian feminist mobilization", in Morris, A. and McClurg Mueller, C. (Eds), *Frontiers of Social Movement Theory*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, pp. 104-30.
- Troldahl, V.C. and van Dam, R. (1965), "Face-to-face communication about major topics in the news", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 29 No. 4, pp. 626-34.
- Turner, J.C. (1982), "Towards a cognitive redefinition of the social group", in Tajfel, H. (Ed.), *Social Identity and Intergroup Relations*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 15-40.
- Turner, J.C., Hogg, M.A., Oakes, P.J., Reicher, S.D. and Wetherell, M.S. (1987), *Rediscovering the Social Group: A Self-Categorization Theory*, Basil Blackwell, New York, NY.
- Van Knippenberga, D., van Knippenberga, B., De Cremerc, D. and Hogg, M.A. (2004), "Leadership, self, and identity: a review and research agenda", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 15, pp. 825-56.
- Vanman, E.J. and Miller, N. (1993), "Applications of emotion theory and research to stereotyping and intergroup relations", in Mackie, D.M. and Hamilton, D.L. (Eds), *Affect, Cognition and Stereotyping: Interactive Processes in Group Perception*, Academic Press, San Diego, CA, pp. 297-315.
- Wallendorf, M. and Reilly, M. (1983), "Ethnic migration, assimilation, and consumption", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 10, pp. 292-302.
- Walsh, G., Gwinner, K.P. and Swanson, S.R. (2004), "What makes mavens tick? Exploring the motives of market mavens' initiation of information diffusion", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 21 No. 2, pp. 109-22.
- Wattanasuwan, K. (2005), "The self and symbolic consumption", *Journal of American Academy of Business*, Vol. 6 No. 1, pp. 179-84.
- Weigel, R.H., Hessing, D.J. and Elffers, H. (1999), "Egoism: concept, measurement and implications for deviance", *Psychology, Crime and Law*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 349-78.
- Weimann, G. (1994), *The Influentials: People Who Influence People*, State University of New York Press, Albany, NY.
- Wiedmann, K., Walsh, G. and Mitchell, W. (2001), "The manmaven: an agent for diffusing market information", *Journal of Marketing Communications*, Vol. 7, pp. 195-212.
- Wooten, D.B. (1995), "One-of-a-kind in a full house: some consequences of ethnic and gender distinctiveness", *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 205-24.
- Yale, L.J. and Gilly, M.C. (1995), "Dyadic perceptions in personal source information search", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 225-34.
- Zaichkowsky, J.L. (1985), "Measuring the involvement construct", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 12, pp. 341-52.

### Further reading

- Roch, C.H. (2005), "The dual roots of opinion leadership", *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 67 No. 1, pp. 110-31.

### About the authors

Dr Sascha Langner is Assistant Professor at the Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany, Institute of Marketing and Management. His main subjects of research and teaching as well as consulting are: internet marketing, word of mouth marketing and consumer behaviour. Sascha Langner is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: langner@m2.uni-hannover.de

Dr Nadine Hennigs is Assistant Professor at the Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany, Institute of Marketing and Management. Her main subjects of research and teaching as well as consulting are: marketing research, international marketing, marketing strategy, and consumer behaviour.

Professor Dr Klaus-Peter Wiedmann is Professor at the Leibniz University of Hannover, Germany and Director of the Institute of Marketing and Management. His main subjects of research and teaching as well as consulting are: marketing management, reputation and international consumer behavior.

## Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

*This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of this article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefits of the material present.*

Wider society constitutes a significant number of different social categories or groups. Instead of a single role, each individual typically belongs to several groups simultaneously. Certain roles including family ones are permanent, while others are performed during a certain time of life. Student or work-based roles are examples of this. Some are more ephemeral in nature and could include pressure group or political involvement. Social groups that are highly self-relevant are regarded as especially important.

With regard to social identity, some analysts note the concept of salience. This refers to an identity which remains significant across different situations. The notion of “in-groups” and “out-groups” is cited to illustrate how salience functions. Salience also relates to instances where product or situation features closely align with elements of a particular social identity or group.

Plenty research indicates a tendency for consumers to prefer brands and products which closely reflect certain personality traits or aspects of their social identity. Social identity perceptions of a consumer can impact on purchases made, response to advertising, how media is used and brand loyalty. It is also common for people to socially classify other individuals based on what they buy.

The term “social identification” is used to explain how an individual will absorb key traits of the social group he or she is a member of. This bond influences to an extent that the person acts in the best interests of the whole and this is reflected through their purchase activities. When in-group salience is high, it is usual for consumers to adjust their behaviors according to social group norms.

Of particular interest are prominent individuals who serve as leaders or role models within the group. They can exert considerable direct or indirect influence on group behavior and heighten in-group salience as a result. From a marketing perspective, it could prove beneficial to identify these influential members and their key characteristics. Among the various reasons forwarded as to why such people can be influential are “source expertise”, strength of group ties, ability to lead, similarity of demographic profile and influence within the specific reference group. Also, some people are naturally predisposed to manipulate others.

Langner *et al.* aim to address this question by identifying which factors drive influence within a social group context. Based on earlier studies, it is assumed that ability to influence is determined by various individual, social and leadership attributes. Individual factors are labeled:

- *Expertise and knowledge.* People are influenced more by sources with greater knowledge of issues like a product category or social environment. These individuals are often opinion leaders and their advice is valued because of its perceived quality;

- *Involvement.* Those who are more involved in a certain area possess higher motivation to distribute information pertaining to it; and
- *Mavensim.* These are seen as trusted individuals inclined to offer opinion and knowledge and known to help others. However, the actions of such market mavens or opinion leaders are often motivated by a desire for social power. Expertise and knowledge are considered as defining features of mavenism.

The authors identify social capital dimensions as:

- *Ego Drive.* The rationale here is that some people gain personal satisfaction from persuading others to behave in a certain way. This trait helps to “assert and affirm” their self concept and the role of social influencer is therefore highly appealing;
- *Independence.* Social influence provides an opportunity for independent people to express what researchers consider a show of authoritarianism. The higher this trait, the more likely that influencing powers will be used; and
- *Machiavellianism.* Self-centeredness and a desire for power mark those with this personality type. Such individuals serve their own interests and seek to continually influence others in order to demonstrate their leadership position. When others follow their lead, “satisfaction” and “self-assurance” is heightened.

Social leadership reflects the aptitude to influence others within a social group and is determined by the factors:

- *Personality strength.* Confidence in their ability to lead combined with self-perceived influence on social outcomes is relevant here. A strong personality also inspires confidence to meet new people and speak at meetings and social events;
- *Leadership narcissism.* This reflects a person’s “excessive belief” in their own abilities and such individuals can be characterized as “self-centered and conceited”. Having strong self-confidence is necessary to overcome any opposition to their attempts to influence; and
- *Leadership ability.* In a social group setting, leaders do not need “formal authority” and leadership instead often emerges through personal qualities like charm and intelligence through principles, vision and situational factors.

The impact of these factors and relationships between them are investigated using an online survey involving 428 subjects. Males accounted for 55.4 percent of the total sample and mean age of respondents was 35.6 years. Automobile marketing was chosen for the study context because of the product’s symbolic function and connection with status and social identity. Data revealed that 88.2 percent of respondents owned a car and drove regularly.

Analysis confirmed the significance of the individual, social and leadership characteristics and relationships between them. Further scrutiny of data enabled Langner *et al.* to sort participants into four different clusters they respectively described as:

- *Occasional influencers.* Accounting for 24.3 percent of the sample, these middle-income consumers were 35 years-old on average and 35.7 percent were males. Reliability and safety are most important criteria for car buying. Medium and low ratings for all factors indicate lack of interest in cars and conversation surrounding them. The

role of social followers rather than leaders is deemed more likely;

- *Narrative experts.* Reliability and quality-price balance are driving factors behind car buying for consumers who make up 43 percent of the sample. Consumers enjoy low to middle incomes and 69.9 percent are male. They demonstrate an interest in cars and regard themselves as market mavens. Desire to lead others is motivated by having expertise and knowledge;
- *Social leaders.* Average age of 41.8 years and 13.1 percent of the sample. Highest earners and 98.1 percent male. These subjects have a passion for prestige models, with comfort and driving enjoyment mattering most. They identify with brands and show loyalty. Expertise motivates conversation among individuals who show leadership qualities and a general inclination to be socially dominant; and
- *Social followers.* Comprising 19.6 percent of the total, males account for 36.6 percent of these middle income subjects who have a mean age of 35.9 years. Car safety is paramount for such customers, who prefer small cars.

Low ratings in all factors demonstrate lack of interest in brands and absence of leadership qualities. They do not regard themselves as social leaders where any product is concerned.

This study confirms that consumption can be extensively driven by social influence and enthusiasm to seek knowledge about products which are socially sanctioned. The authors have also shown it is possible to segment consumers based on their perception of individual, social and leadership factors and the associations between them.

Further study is recommended in order to utilize findings within managerial practice. Consideration of different contexts may reveal differences in how the factors are perceived and longitudinal research which explores their relevance to different products, social situations and cultures is another suggestion.

*(A précis of the article “Social persuasion: targeting social identities through social influencers”. Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)*

**This article has been cited by:**

1. Katie N. Overbey, Lee-Ann Jaykus, Benjamin J. Chapman. 2017. A Systematic Review of the Use of Social Media for Food Safety Risk Communication. *Journal of Food Protection* **80**:9, 1537-1549. [[Crossref](#)]
2. Persaud Ajax, Ajax Persaud, Schillo Sandra R., Sandra R. Schillo. 2017. Purchasing organic products: role of social context and consumer innovativeness. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* **35**:1, 130-146. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
3. Azwardi Md Isa, Mohammad Basir Saud, Md Daud Ismail. 2016. Examining reasons for post-purchase satisfaction in buying local brands: When local meets local. *Asia Pacific Management Review* **21**:1, 48-61. [[Crossref](#)]
4. Katayoun Zafari, Gareth Allison, Catherine Demangeot. 2015. Practising conviviality: social uses of ethnic cuisine in an Asian multicultural environment. *Journal of Consumer Marketing* **32**:7, 564-575. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
5. Rebecca Abraham, Charles W. Harrington. 2015. Consumption Patterns in the Aftermath of the Financial Crisis: The Case of Baby Boomers. *Modern Economy* **06**:02, 245-258. [[Crossref](#)]
6. Tilottama Ghosh Chowdhury, Kalpesh Kaushik Desai, Lisa Bolton. 2014. Accentuate the positive: how identity affects customer satisfaction. *Journal of Consumer Marketing* **31**:5, 371-379. [[Abstract](#)] [[Full Text](#)] [[PDF](#)]
7. Jörg Burkhardt, Martina Steul-Fischer. 2013. Versicherungsunternehmen in Social Networks – ein Überblick über aktuelle Forschungsfelder und eine experimentelle Studie zur Kundenansprache. *Zeitschrift für die gesamte Versicherungswissenschaft* **102**:5, 473-490. [[Crossref](#)]
8. Qiang (Steven) Lu, Zhen Yi Seah. Social Media Influencers and Consumer Online Engagement Management 1398-1406. [[Crossref](#)]
9. Guida Helal, Wilson Ozuem. Social Identity Matters 326-361. [[Crossref](#)]
10. Qiang (Steven) Lu, Zhen Yi Seah. Social Media Influencers and Consumer Online Engagement Management 81-91. [[Crossref](#)]