The roles of identity and brand equity in organic consumption behavior: Private label brands versus national brands

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	We hereby resubmit the revised manuscript. Since we did not have permission to use the images displayed in Figure 1, we decided to remove this Figure 1 from the paper. Notice that this has no further consequences for the rest of the paper, since Figure 1 was only incorporated for illustrative reasons. Note that the contact details of one of the authors, Jos Bartels, have changed. We therefore also revised the author details and uploaded the correct ones. We would like to thank the reviewers again for their interest in the paper and we hope that the paper in its current form lives up to the standards that are expected for the Journal of Brand Management, and we look forward to your reply. Please contact us by e-mail if you have any questions or comments. Kind regards, Machiel Reinders Jos Bartels

Title: The roles of identity and brand equity in organic consumption behavior: Private label brands versus national brands

Running title: Drivers of organic brand consumption

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Abstract

Organic brands have become increasingly important as an offering by which retailers can differentiate themselves. The current study examines the role of two key drivers (i.e., brand equity and social identification) in the consumption of organic private label brands (PLBs) and the extent to which this role differs compared to organic national brands (NBs). Using a longitudinal panel study among consumers in Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S., we tested both mediating and moderating effects of brand equity, brand identification, and organic consumer identification on organic brand consumption and on organic consumption behavior in general. The results show that for both PLBs and NBs brand equity positively influences organic brand consumption and organic consumption behavior. For PLBs, brand identification is related to organic brand consumption as well as organic consumption behavior. In contrast, for NBs, organic consumer identification influences organic brand consumption and organic consumption behavior, which suggests a difference in identity salience for both types of brands. In addition, we found that the relationship between brand equity and organic brand consumption is partially mediated by brand identification, which implies that consumers are more likely to identify with brands that have higher brand equity. Marketing implications are discussed.

Key words: Organic; Private label brand; National brand; Brand equity; Brand identification; Organic consumer identification; Brand consumption

Introduction

Retailers increasingly use their own brands (i.e., private label brands) as a way to differentiate themselves from their competitors (Cuneo *et al*, 2015; González-Benito and Martos-Partal, 2012; Sethuraman and Gielens, 2014). As a consequence, the market shares of private label brands (PLBs) are growing in almost all European and U.S. markets. For example, the market shares of PLBs in the food and beverage industry in 2013 ranged from 18 percent in the U.S. to 42 percent in Germany (Statista, 2014). Consumers indicate that they prefer PLBs over national brands (NBs) and that many PLBs are equally as good as—or better than—their favorite NBs (Deloitte, 2015). This preference is reflected in the fact that PLBs have moved from low priced "me-too" products to high-quality brands (Grewal and Levy, 2009). At the end of the 1990s, strong national retailers such as Wal-Mart began to put innovative, good quality private brands on the market. In recent years, we have observed many retailers following this initiative. By increasing the quality of PLBs, retailers can increase profit margins by charging higher prices (Steenkamp *et al*, 2010).

This trend is also reflected in the fact that retailers are now increasingly incorporating environmental and social issues in their PLBs (Aouina Mejri and Bhatli, 2014; Chkanikova and Lehner, 2015; Gleim *et al*, 2013). One of the ways to accomplish this is by adding an organic label to a PLB. Organic (food) products carry an organic certification that is issued by an independent accredited institution for organic product testing (Bauer *et al*, 2013). The market for organic products has increased substantially over the last years (Willer and Kilcher, 2010). For example, sales of organic food and non-food products in the U.S. reached a record of $39.1 billion in 2014 (Organic Trade Association, 2015). Moreover, in 2012, 81% of U.S. families reported that they purchase organic products at least occasionally (Organic Trade Association, 2013). Organic PLBs have become increasingly important as an offering by which retailers differentiate themselves (Jonas and Roossen, 2005). Retailers can use

brands that are labelled with the organic logo to boost perceived product quality (Larceneux *et al*, 2012). Ngobo (2011) showed that households are more likely to buy organic PLBs than their national counterparts. In addition, a recent study by Bauer *et al* (2013) investigated the effect of organic labels on brands and found that private labels benefit more from the use of organic labels than global brands. It is therefore not surprising that many retailers have developed their own organic PLBs. For example, in the U.S., Whole Foods Market launched its own organic products under the label '365 Everyday Value' and the German retail chain Edeka uses 'Edeka Bio' as its private label.

Despite the strong position that an organic label can provide to PLBs, organic labels have also proven to be an effective instrument for NBs in distinguishing their own brand from that of their competitors (Bauer *et al*, 2013). Given the increasing importance of organic brands for both brand manufacturers and retailers, the current study examines the role of a number of key constructs in the consumption of organic PLBs and organic NBs. First, we will explore whether brand equity also affects brand consumption in an organic context. In an organic (food) context, we define brand consumption as the number of times a brand is eaten or drunk. Brand equity can be defined as "the incremental utility or value added to a product by its brand name" (Yoo *et al*, 2000, p. 195). Previous studies have shown that brand equity is an important predictor of the purchase (intention) of brands (Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 1993). These effects are also found in a 'green' context (Bekk *et al*, 2016; Konuk *et al*, 2015). We extend these studies by examining whether brand equity also predicts consumption of brands in an organic context. Next, we try to further elaborate on how brand equity may relate to brand consumption in an organic context by stuyding the roles of brand identification and identification with the group of organic consumers. Brand identification refers to the degree of a brand's ability to integrate the brand into the consumer's self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), thus helping consumers to define themselves. In the organic context, we

expect that in addition to identification with a brand identification with the group of consumers also plays a role in stimulating the consumption of a brand. In this respect, we define organic consumer identification as consumer's perception of oneness or belongingness to the group of organic consumers (Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000). Due to the distinctive features that are associated with organic products relative to conventional products (e.g., they are environmentally friendly and chemical free), organic consumption is an attractive target for consumers to express their self-definition (i.e., who am I?) and to enact their identity (Ashforth and Mael 1989). In particular, the identity of organic consumers as a group is growing in popularity and carries rich and positive connotations (Hughner *et al* 2007). In this respect, Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis (1998) state that organic consumption is part of a way of life. Indeed, recent studies suggest that consumers' identity-related beliefs exert a significant positive impact on their decision to purchase organic products (Bartels and Reinders 2010; Dean *et al* 2012).

Furthermore, we investigate whether in an organic context positive brand equity and identification spill over to the consumption of other organic products. In this respect, Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) found that positive evaluations of a specific brand led to more positive buying behavior for organic foods in general.

Finally, we will investigate whether the proposed mechanism between brand equity, brand identification, organic consumer identification, organic brand consumption and general organic consumption differs between organic PLBs and organic NBs. Although many studies are devoted to comparing PLBs and NBs (Ailawadi *et al*, 2001; De Wulf *et al*, 2005; Steenkamp *et al*, 2010), research that compares these two types of brands in an organic context has been limited. More specifically, most studies in a regular context focus on the difference in price perceptions between NBs and PLBs (e.g., Olbrich and Jansen, 2014; Steenkamp *et al*, 2010), while in an organic context this discussion does not seem to focus on

price differences between NBs and PLBs but rather on price differences between regular and organic products (e.g., Aschemann-Witzel and Zielke, 2015; Rödiger and Hamm, 2015). Similarly, several studies in a regular context focus on quality variations between PLBs and NBs (e.g., De Wulf *et al*, 2005; Mieres *et al*, 2006), while in an organic context this discussion seems to focus more on quality comparisons between regular and organic products (e.g., Larceneux et al., 2012). In sum, most studies in an organic context focused on comparing organic with regular products and not on comparing organic PLBs with organic NBs. As a result, no studies have examined whether drivers of the consumption of PLBs and NBs may systematically differ in an organic context.

In sum, the current study aims to empirically explore the following research questions: *How is brand equity related to brand consumption in an organic branding context? What is the role of social identification in this relationship? Do these effects spill over to organic consumption in general?* and *To what extent do these relationships differ for PLBs and NBs?*

To answer these questions, we used a cross-country research design and tested both the direct and indirect (i.e., mediating and moderating) effects of brand equity, brand identification, and organic consumer identification on organic brand consumption and on organic consumption in general. Before introducing the method and results of this study, we first briefly review the literature concerning the key constructs of our study.

Literature Review

Brand equity and organic branding

To increase the perceived value of organic products, branding has become an important marketing strategy. A key construct that is often mentioned with regard to branding is brand equity (Esch *et al* 2006; Netemeyer *et al*, 2004). According to Yoo *et al* (2000, p.

195), brand equity is the "incremental utility or value added to a product by its brand name." Aaker (1991) defined brand equity as "a set of brand assets and liabilities linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service to a firm and to the firm's customers." In addition, Keller (1993) posited that brand equity can create the differential effect of a brand relative to other brands. The existing literature has also measured brand equity in the context of PLBs. For example, Erdem *et al* (2004) found that brand equity plays an important role in consumers' private label brand choices and seems to have a variety of impacts on PLBs. In addition, Cuneo *et al* (2012) found that private label brand equity varies across different products and markets. More recently, Calvo-Porral *et al* (2015) found that brand equity dimensions (i.e., awareness, perceived quality and loyalty) were positively related to purchase intention for PLBs. From these studies we can conclude that brand equity plays an important role in the evaluation and purchase of both NBs as well as PLBs.

Within the academic literature, an increasing number of studies have focused on the topic of green branding (e.g., Gupta and Kumar, 2013; Hartmann *et al*, 2005; Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008). For example, a number of studies have investigated the factors that influence the consumer purchasing behavior of green brands (Papista and Krystallis, 2013) and the roles of brand knowledge and attitudes (Bartels and Hoogendam, 2011). As a result, recent studies have also extended the brand equity research into the environmental context by introducing the concept of "green brand equity" (Bekk *et al*, 2016; Chen, 2010; Kang and Hur, 2011; Ng *et al*, 2013). This concept can be defined as "a set of brand assets and liabilities about green commitments and environmental concerns linked to a brand, its name and symbol that add to or subtract from the value provided by a product or service." (Chen, 2010, p. 310). These studies have especially focused on the antecedents of green brand equity, i.e., the aspects that drive brand equity for 'green' or eco-friendly brands. For example, Chen (2010)

demonstrated that green brand image, green satisfaction, and green trust are positively related to green brand equity. Additionally, Kang and Hur (2011) investigated green affect and green loyalty, and Chang and Chen (2013) explored the relationship between green perceived quality, green brand awareness, and green perceived risk in the building of green brand equity. Recently, Bekk *et al* (2016) and Konuk *et al* (2015) presented the first empirical evidence that green brand equity also influences brand outcomes (i.e., purchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth communication).

While the previous research has cautiously begun to focus on brand equity in a green context, to the best of our knowledge there are no studies that pay attention to how the sbrand equity of organic brands affects their consumption. For organic products, brand equity could both reflect the equity of the brand itself as well as the equity that is obtained by the organic labels that are carried by these products (Larceneux *et al*, 2012). Although organic products are a type of product that is sold under many brand names, the concept itself also offers a strong and differentiated advantage as compared with products that do not carry an organic label. In this respect, Stanton and Guion (2015) posit that the organic concept could be regarded as being akin to a brand. Consequently, it is useful to explore how consumers might affiliate with this overall concept of organic, apart from brand equity. More specifically, this relationship between an individual and the organic concept could be best explained by investigating how individuals perceive other individuals or groups that consume organic products.

Social identification

A concept for explaining a relationship between an individual and a group is social identification (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identification refers to "the perception of oneness with or belongingness to a group, where the individual defines him or

herself in terms of the group of which he or she is a member" (Mael and Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). Many studies have confirmed the relevance of strong identification in an organizational context (Mael andAshforth, 1992; Van Dick *et al*, 2004), marketing context (Bhattacharya *et al*, 1995; Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Homburg *et al*, 2009), brand community context (Algesheimer *et al*, 2005; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Dholakia *et al*, 2004) and, more recently, in a sustainable consumption context (Bartels and Hoogendam, 2011; Bartels and Reinders, 2010). For example, Bartels and Reinders (2010) found that social identification was strongly related to organic food consumption. In addition, Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) showed that in addition to brand knowledge and brand attitude, social identification with green consumer groups had distinct indirect and direct effects on buying behaviors with respect to organic foods. Consequently, we expect that identification with organic consumer groups plays an important stimulating role in the consumption behavior of organic brands.

Based on insights from social identity theory, a growing body of research has also focused on what it means for consumers to identify with brands as a consumer-brand relationship construct (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; Stokburger-Sauer *et al*, 2012). Because consumer-brand identification involves affective attachment with a brand, consumers with stronger brand identification are more likely to evaluate the value of a brand more favorably (He *et al*, 2012). Brand identification positively affects brand commitment (Tuškej *et al*, 2013), brand passion (Albert *et al*, 2013) and brand loyalty (Lam *et al*, 2010). In turn, brand passion was also found to have a direct effect on word-of-mouth and an indirect effect on the willingness to pay a higher price. Because recent research shows that consumers' identification with a brand plays an important role in the evaluation of the brand, in the current study, we investigate the role of brand identification in the relationship between brand equity and organic brand consumption.

In sum, we aim to empirically clarify how brand equity, organic consumer identification and brand identification are related to brand consumption for PLBs and NBs. By doing so, we distinguish between identification with organic consumer groups (i.e., organic consumer identification) and consumer-brand identification with organic brands (i.e., brand identification). Accordingly, we test different models in which we incorporate both the direct and indirect (i.e., mediating and moderating) effects of organic consumer identification and brand identification on organic consumption.

Method

Procedure

We conducted a longitudinal online panel study among consumers in five globally dispersed countries (i.e., Australia, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, and the U.S.). Participants were approached by email to fill out an online self-administered questionnaire. The data were collected by a market research agency (MSI-ACI Europe BV). The respondents completed questions on brand equity, brand identification, identification with organic consumers, brand consumption and organic consumption in general. The market research agency translated the original English items of the questionnaire into the relevant national languages. We collected data on brand consumption and organic consumption in general more than a year later to reduce common method variance and increase the validity of the dependent variables (Podsakoff *et al*, 2003). The data were collected in December 2010 (T1) and in February 2012 (T2). In total, 1,584 respondents completed the questionnaire at T1, and 706 of these respondents also completed the questionnaire at T2. Only the respondents who completed questionnaires at both T1 and T2 (within-subjects design) were included in the analyses. Furthermore, for each country, the respondents received questionnaires that featured either a PLB or NB. For each country, we used one NB and one or two PLBs. We selected the

PLBs from retailers that are most well-known in every country. The respondents randomly received one of these brands to evaluate. This process resulted in 404 respondents for PLBs and 302 respondents for NBs.

Sample

We instructed the market research agency that our study samples should be representative of the specific country in terms of age, gender, education and income distribution at T1. The total sample was composed of 354 males and 352 females with a mean age of 49.5 years (SD=14.8). Overall, 18.6% of the respondents had a low educational level, 47.5% had a moderate educational level, and 34.0% had a high educational level. With regard to income, 25.6% of the respondents reported a low income level, 32.0% reported a medium income level, and 30.6% reported a high income level. A percentage of 11.8% of the respondents did not want to report their income. Table 1 provides a description of the sample in each of the countries. As shown in the table, organic consumption behavior differs between the countries. Organic consumption is highest in Germany and lowest in Australia and the U.S. Consumption of the specific organic brands that the respondents received (depending on the country and the condition of the questionnaire) also differed per country. Overall, brand consumption is found to be highest in Canada and lowest in the U.S. and Australia. In addition, differences are observed between the consumption of PLBs and NBs, whereby in most cases consumption of PLBs seems to be higher.

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Measures

The questionnaire covered a number of topics at T1 and T2. Brand equity, brand identification, identification with the organic consumer and organic product familiarity were measured at T1. Organic brand consumption and organic consumption behavior were measured at T2. *Brand equity* at T1 was operationalized as constituting the dimensions brand awareness, perceived quality and brand loyalty (cf. Yoo and Donthu, 2001) and was measured for the PLBs and NBs, depending on the condition of the questionnaire. We measured the construct on a 5-point Likert scale using three items. An example item is, "The likely quality of this brand is very high." The reliability of the scale was adequate for both PLBs and NBs (Cronbach's α = .79 and .83, respectively). *Brand identification* at T1 was operationalized as the degree of overlap between the self-definition and the identity of the brand as measured by Bergami and Bagozzi's (2000) visual scale to assess identification. The respondents choose the number that corresponded to the pair of circles (1="far apart," 2= "small overlap," 3= "moderate overlap," 4= "large overlap," 5= "complete overlap") that best reflect the degree of overlap they perceive between their own identity and that of the brand. Likewise, *organic consumer identification* describes the degree of overlap between the self and the group of organic consumers and was also measured with Bergami and Bagozzi's (2000) visual scale. The respondents choose the number that corresponded to the pair of circles (1="far apart," 2= "small overlap," 3= "moderate overlap," 4= "large overlap," 5= "complete overlap") that best reflect the degree of overlap that they perceive between their own identity and the identity of the organic consumer. Because organic brands are not well-known to the general public (compared to regular food and beverage brands, e.g., Coca-Cola) and familiarity with a product seems to be important in predicting consumption behavior (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987; Biswas, 1992), we incorporated *organic product familiarity* as a control variable. We used 4 items based on Yoo *et al* (2000) and adapted them to the organic product domain, with

sample items such as, "I can recognize organic products among other regular brands" and "Some characteristics of organic products come to my mind quickly" (Cronbach's α = .72 for PLBs and .72 for NBs). *Organic brand consumption* at T2 was measured with the following single item: "How often did you eat or drink Brand X in the last month?" The scale ranged from 1 (never) to 5 (five times a week or more). What was exactly mentioned under "Brand X" was dependent on the version of the questionnaire that the respondent received (i.e., PLB or NB) as well as on the country of the respondent. *Organic consumption behavior* was measured by asking the respondents to indicate how often they ate organic meat, vegetables, fruit, and dairy products following Onwezen *et al* (2014) on a five-point scale (ranging from 1='never' to 5 = 'five times a week or more'). Note that, compared to organic brand consumption, this question was the same for all of the respondents that participated in the study, regardless of the version of the questionnaire (i.e., PLB or NB) or country. The Cronbach's alphas were .90 for PLBs and .91 for NBs. Finally, *demographic variables* (i.e., age, gender, income and education) were included as control variables in the analyses. Multi-item scales were averaged across their scale items to create composite construct scores.

Results

The respondents who completed the questionnaire for PLBs (N = 404) awarded the highest average scores to organic product familiarity (M = 3.06; SD = .82) and the lowest to organic brand consumption (M = 1.73; SD = .98). In addition, all of the independent and dependent variables were positively correlated ($p < .01$). The respondents who completed the questionnaire for NBs (N = 302) also gave the highest average scores to organic product familiarity (M = 3.05; SD = .82) and the lowest to organic brand consumption (M = 1.62; SD = .95). Again, all of the independent and dependent variables were positively correlated ($p < .01$). We compared the means for both samples and found that the mean for brand equity was

significantly higher for PLBs (M = 2.74) than it was for NBs (M = 2.58; t = 1.99, df = 704, p < .05). The Fisher's Z-tests revealed significant differences between PLBs and NBs for the correlations of organic consumption behavior with organic brand consumption (z = -3.07, p < .01), the correlations of organic consumer identification with organic brand consumption (z = -2.15, p < .05) and the correlations of organic product familiarity with organic brand consumption (z = -2.22, p < .05). In all of the cases, correlations are stronger for NBs compared to PLBs. Table 2 displays the means, standard deviations and correlations for both samples.

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Model testing

We conducted multiple regression analyses to answer the research questions. First, we tested the direct effects of brand equity on organic brand consumption (Model 1). Then, we estimated the simultaneous effects of brand equity, brand identification and organic consumer identification on organic brand consumption (Models 2 and 3). In Model 4, we tested whether brand identification and organic consumer identification moderate the relationship between brand equity and organic brand consumption. Finally, we tested whether these effects also hold for general organic consumption behavior as a dependent variable (Models 5 to 8). We also included organic product familiarity in all of the models as a control variable. Additionally, we performed a mediation analysis by conducting Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrap analysis of indirect effects to test whether the relationships between brand equity and organic brand consumption, on the one hand, and brand equity and organic consumption behavior, on the other hand, were mediated by brand identification and identification with the organic consumer. Before conducting the analyses, we first centered the means of all of the

variables for both private label and NBs. Tables 3 and 4 list the estimation results of the models for both PLBs and NBs. The various countries were incorporated as dummy variables in the analyses.

Private label brands

Table 3 displays the results of the regression analyses for PLBs. Brand equity showed a positive direct effect on organic PLB consumption (Model 1: $\beta = .43$; $p < .01$). None of the control variables (i.e., demographics and countries) were significant. When brand equity and brand identification were simultaneously regressed on organic brand consumption in Model 2, the coefficient of brand equity decreased somewhat ($\beta = .29$; $p < .01$), while the coefficient of brand identification was found to be significant ($\beta = .24$; $p < .05$). These results are indicative of a partial mediating role of brand identification in the relationship between brand equity and brand consumption for organic PLBs. To test this more formally, we performed a mediation analysis following the procedure of Preacher and Hayes's (2008) bootstrap analysis of indirect effect, using 5,000 bootstrap samples. Our bootstrap analysis showed that the indirect effect of brand equity on organic brand consumption through brand identification is positive and significant (estimated effect = .14), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero (.07 to .24). In addition, Model 3 shows that adding organic consumer identification to the model did not lead to a significant improvement of the model. Finally, Model 4 shows that the moderating effects between brand equity and brand identification and between brand equity and organic consumer identification on organic brand consumption were insignificant.

Model 5 shows that for NBs, brand equity had a positive direct effect on generic organic consumption behavior ($\beta = .31$; $p < .01$). In contrast to the previous models, organic product familiarity also had a significant effect on generic consumption ($\beta = .30$; $p < .01$).

When brand equity and brand identification were simultaneously regressed on generic organic consumption behavior in Model 6, the coefficient of brand equity decreased somewhat (β = .16; $p < .01$), while the coefficient of brand identification was also found to be significant (β = .26; $p < .01$). These results are indicative of a partial mediating role of brand identification in the relationship between brand equity and generic organic consumption behavior. A bootstrap analysis using 5,000 bootstrap samples (Preacher and Hayes, 2008) showed that the indirect effect of brand equity on generic organic consumption behavior through brand identification is positive and significant (estimated effect = .16), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero (.08 to .25). When adding organic consumer identification to the model (Model 7), we see that brand equity remained a significant predictor (β = .16; $p < .01$), while the significance of brand identification decreased somewhat (β = .16; $p < .05$) at the expense of organic consumer identification (β = .19; $p < .01$). This could imply a partial mediating role of organic consumer identification in the relationship between brand identification and generic organic consumption behavior. We again performed a bootstrap analysis of indirect effect, using 5,000 bootstrap samples, which showed that the indirect effect of brand identification on generic organic consumption behavior through organic consumer identification is positive and significant (estimated effect = .10), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero (.03 to .19). Finally, in Model 8, we found that the moderating effects between brand equity and brand identification and between brand equity and organic consumer identification were also insignificant for generic organic consumption behavior.

-- INSERT TABLE 3 HERE--

National brands

Table 4 displays the results of the regression analyses for NBs. Brand equity showed a positive direct effect on organic brand consumption (Model 1: $\beta = .40$; $p < .01$). Interestingly, organic product familiarity also had a positive significant effect on organic brand consumption ($\beta = .23$ $p < .01$) in the NB condition. When brand equity and brand identification were simultaneously regressed on organic brand consumption (Model 2), the coefficient of brand equity decreased somewhat ($\beta = .27$; $p < .01$), while the coefficient of brand identification was found to be significant ($\beta = .22$; $p < .01$). Again, these results could be indicative of a partial mediating role of brand identification in the relationship between brand equity and brand consumption for organic NBs. To test this outcome more formally, we again conducted a mediation analysis using 5,000 bootstrap samples. The results of this bootstrap analysis showed that the indirect effect of brand equity on organic brand consumption through brand identification is positive and significant (estimated effect = .12), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero (.02 to .21). Model 3 shows that when adding organic consumer identification to the model, brand equity remained a significant predictor ($\beta = .27$; $p < .01$), while brand identification became insignificant at the expense of organic consumer identification ($\beta = .16$; $p < .05$). This could imply a full mediating role of organic consumer identification in the relationship between brand identification and organic brand consumption. However, a bootstrap analysis with 5,000 bootstrap samples showed that for the indirect effect of brand identification on organic brand consumption through organic consumer identification, the 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval straddles zero. This implies that there is no mediation. Finally, Model 4 shows that the moderating effects between brand equity and brand identification and between brand equity and organic consumer identification on organic brand consumption were insignificant.

Model 5 shows that both brand equity (β = .33; p < .01) and product familiarity (β = .34; p < .01) were significant predictors of generic organic consumption behavior. When brand equity and brand identification were simultaneously regressed on generic organic consumption behavior in Model 6, the coefficient of brand equity decreased somewhat (β = .20; p < .01), while the coefficient of brand identification was also found to be significant (β = .21; p < .01). These results are indicative of a partial mediating role of brand identification in the relationship between brand equity and brand consumption for generic organic consumption behavior. A bootstrap analysis using 5,000 bootstrap samples showed that the indirect effect of brand equity on generic organic consumption behavior through brand identification is positive and significant (estimated effect = .12), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero (.04 to .20). When adding organic consumer identification to the model (Model 7), we see that brand equity remained a significant predictor (β = .20; p < .01), while brand identification became insignificant, and organic consumer identification became a significant predictor (β = .31; p < .01). This could imply a full mediating role of organic consumer identification in the relationship between brand identification and generic organic consumption behavior. Indeed, a bootstrap analysis of indirect effect, using 5,000 bootstrap samples, showed that the indirect effect of brand identification on generic organic consumption through organic consumer identification is positive and significant (estimated effect = .17), with a 95% bias-corrected bootstrap confidence interval excluding zero (.09 to .27). Finally, in Model 8, we found that the moderating effects between brand equity and brand identification and between brand equity and organic consumer identification were also insignificant for generic organic consumption behavior.

-- INSERT TABLE 4 HERE --

Discussion

Organic brands have been gaining significant momentum over the past several years. This study was one of the first studies that investigated the role of brand equity and social identification in the context of organic branding. By doing so, we compared organic PLBs with organic NBs. This study yields several key findings, which will be discussed below.

First, as expected, brand equity positively influences organic brand consumption for both PLBs and NBs. This is in line with a vast amount of studies that found that brand equity plays an important role in brand consumption behavior (e.g., Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995; Keller, 1993). The results of this study extend the previous research by showing that in an organic context, the brand equity of a specific organic brand also enhances generic organic consumption. These findings seem to be in contrast with a non-organic, regular context. For example, in a regular context, a positive evaluation of a brand such as Coca-Cola does not necessarily lead to more consumption of other cola or soda brands in general. This relationship between brand equity and general organic consumption behavior could be explained by possible spillover effects. In this context, Bartels and Hoogendam (2011) found moderate to strong positive relationships between attitude towards a specific organic brand and buying behavior for organic food.

Second, the current study confirms the importance of multiple identities in explaining behavior (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001; Pratt and Foreman, 2000). Previous studies in a green context have already found that multiple social identities play a role in explaining different environmentally friendly behaviors (Bartels and Reinders, 2016; Murtagh *et al*, 2012). In addition to these studies, the current study showed that the role of multiple identities on adjacent behaviors also depend on the type of product or brand that is at stake. More precisely, the role of brand identification and organic consumer identification in predicting

both organic brand consumption and general organic consumption behavior differs for PLBs compared to NBs. For PLBs, brand identification is related to organic brand consumption as well as organic consumption behavior in general. In contrast, for NBs, brand identification is no longer related to organic brand consumption and general organic consumption behavior when controlling for organic consumer identification. Further, the role of organic consumer identification seems to differ for PLBs compared to NBs. For PLBs, identification with organic consumers does have a positive impact on organic consumption behavior in general, but it does not influence the consumption behavior for that particular brand. In contrast, concerning NBs, identification with organic consumers also leads to an increase in consumption of the brand. Tapping the concept of identity salience[1] (Arnett *et al*, 2003; Stryker and Burke, 2000), consumers' identity salience could differ between organic PLBs and organic NBs. Under the PLB condition, the identity of the brand could be more salient, while under the NB condition, the identity of the green or sustainable consumer (i.e., the greenness of the concept) could be more salient. This difference in identity salience could explain why brand identification and organic consumer identification seems to have different roles for PLBs and NBs.

Third, based on the results from the current study, we can conclude that identification also plays a role in explaining the relationship between brand equity and consumption behavior. On the one hand, for both PLBs and NBs, this relationship was not strengthened or weakened by brand identification or organic consumer identification (i.e., moderation). On the other hand, the relationship between brand equity and consumption behavior of that brand is partially determined by identification with the brand or organic consumer group (i.e., mediation). Social identity theory states that consumers want to identify with groups or brands that have high status and positive publicity (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2008). Because brand

[1] Identity salience can be defined as the probability that an identity will be invoked across a variety of situations, or alternatively across persons in a given situation (Stryker and Burke, 2000, p. 286).

equity is related to the quality and status of a brand, it logically follows that consumers are more likely to identify with brands that have higher brand equity, and they are subsequently more likely to buy these brands. Moreover, brand identification seems to lead to stronger organic consumer identification. This could imply that in the case of a specific concept such as organic products, attractive features of a brand could positively reflect on the group of organic consumers. As a result, positive identification with the brand also leads to stronger identification with the group that adheres to this concept (i.e., organic consumers), which indicates so-called 'nested identities' (Ashforth and Johnson, 2001).

Fourth, we found a distinguishing role of organic product familiarity between organic PLBs and organic NBs. For PLBs, organic product familiarity does not affect the consumption of the brand. A possible explanation for this effect is that the purchase and consumption behavior of organic PLBs is more likely to be related to familiarity with the retailer and its brands than to familiarity with organic products in general. In contrast, for NBs, there is a clear relationship between organic product familiarity and brand consumption. Organic product familiarity could then be one of the drivers of brand consumption.

Finally, the results of this study are robust, given that the effects were tested in a variety of countries with different levels of consumption of organic brands and organic products in general. This study therefore meets the requirement of cross-validation for a better understanding of consumer behavior (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Moreover, temporarily separating the measurement of the independent variables and dependent variables allows us to reduce biases in consumers' self-reported responses by making prior responses less salient (Podsakoff *et al*, 2003).

Marketing implications

The results of the current study offer some interesting marketing implications. The current study shows that building successful organic brands could pay off for retailers as well as brand manufacturers. Building brand equity for organic brands seems to stimulate brand purchases for both PLBs and NBs. This recommendation is relevant given that organic brands are gaining in importance (Organic Trade Association, 2015). The sale of specific organic brands expectedly has spillover effects to other organic products. Thus, creating good quality brands and selling them in attractive stores could help to enhance the market for organic products in general. Although in the short term this seems not to be in the interests of brand managers, they could potentially benefit from a more developed organic market because higher market shares for organic products in general could also stimulate sales of their own organic brands.

In addition, for both organic PLBs and NBs, brand identification plays a crucial role in enhancing consumer demand for brands. For both retailers and brand manufacturers, brand identification can be used as a catalyst to improve the sales of organic brands. More specifically, the results of the current study imply that brand managers can use the principles of 'basking in reflected glory' to boost the sales of their brands (Cialdini *et al*, 1976). For example, brand managers may activate consumers' status motives by linking their organic brands with visible status (e.g., prestigious events) (Griskevicius *et al*, 2010).

Apart from these similarities between organic PLBs and organic NBs, there are also differences to which brand managers should pay attention. For NBs, managers should focus more on organic consumer identification in general. For example, communicating that it is 'cool' to be part of a green consumer group. For PLBs, managers should focus more on brand identification. For example, managers can try to enhance consumers' sense that the brand boosts their status and therefore their self-esteem.

Limitations and directions for future research

This study has several limitations that could be addressed in future research. First, this study does not make a distinction between different types of PLBs based on the underlying characteristics of the retailer that is offering the brand. As the retail landscape is rather diverse, ranging from hard-discount to luxury stores, and a retailer's price positioning has been shown to influence private label brand consumption (González-Benito and Martos-Partal, 2012), future research could further elaborate on the evaluation of organic private label brands based on these retailer differences. Similarly, there are a number of differences in how private label brands are labelled. For example, some private label brands bear the name of the retailer (e.g., 'Edeka Bio' from Edeka), whereas other private label brands bear their own name (e.g., '365 Everyday Value' from Whole Foods Market). The type of labelling could also influence how organic private label brands are evaluated and, therefore, represents another research opportunity.

Second, we focused on organic food. Although food products constitute an important product category in the context of retailing, future research could focus on non-food categories such as organic apparel or personal care products. For example, organic apparel has not only proven to be a promising growth market (Textile Exchange, 2014), but also could be a consequence of potential spill-over effects. In this respect, a recent study by Ellis *et al* (2012) showed that consumers who had previously purchased organic foods were willing to pay more for organic apparel, thus suggesting the presence of spill-over effects.

Third, the findings for organic NBs seem to be somewhat in contrast to a regular context. For example, in a regular context, a positive evaluation of the Coca-Cola brand does not necessarily lead to more consumption of other cola brands in general. Future research could elucidate to what extent it will be more difficult for organic brands to compete with each other compared to how brands in a regular context compete (e.g., Coca-Cola versus

Pepsi Cola) and the consequences for future organic brand marketing strategies. In addition, little is known about the way in which the consumption of PLBs and NBs may complement rather than substitute each other (Sethuraman and Gielens, 2014). A recent a study by Krystallis (2015) found that in certain situations, consumer motivation could be equal for both PLBs and NBs, thus suggesting some degree of complementarity. Future research endeavors could focus on this complementarity for organic and other green brands.

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Table 1: Sample characteristics

	Total study population (N= 706)	The Netherlands (N = 160)	Germany (N = 171)	United States (N = 178)	Canada (N = 119)	Australia (N = 78)
Age (mean)	49.5 years	52.1 years	48.8 years	49.1 years	46.5 years	51.6 years
Gender:						
Male	50.1%	43.1%	50.9%	53.4%	50.4%	55.1%
Female	49.9%	56.9%	49.1%	46.6%	49.6%	44.9%
Education:						
Low level (i.e., primary education or secondary education)	18.6%	35.6%	27.5%	11.2%	4.2%	2.6%
Medium level (i.e., vocational education)	47.5%	35.6%	43.9%	51.7%	47.9%	69.2%
High level (i.e., college or university)	34.0%	28.7%	28.7%	37.1%	47.9%	28.2%
Income:						
Low income	25.6%	29.4%	31.6%	23.6%	19.3%	19.2%
Medium income	32.0%	34.4%	35.7%	28.7%	25.2%	37.2%
High income	30.6%	13.1%	21.6%	43.3%	45.4%	34.6%
Will not say	11.8%	23.1%	11.1%	4.5%	10.1%	9.0%
Organic brand consumption PLB Measured on a scale 1 (never) to 5 (five times a week or more); standard deviation in brackets	1.73 (.98)	1.84 (1.02)	1.62 (.94)	1.56 (.97)	2.03 (.97)	1.80 (.92)
Organic brand consumption NB Measured on a scale 1 (never) to 5 (five times a week or more); standard deviation in brackets	1.62 (.95)	1.70 (1.01)	1.77 (.97)	1.44 (.88)	1.74 (1.03)	1.15 (.44)
Organic consumption behavior Measured on a scale 1 (never) to 5 (five times a week or more); standard deviation in brackets	1.99 (1.00)	1.95 (.97)	2.26 (1.03)	1.88 (.96)	1.93 (1.01)	1.86 (.96)

Table 2: Descriptive results

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
PLBs (*N*=404)							
1. Organic consumption behavior	2.05	1.00	--				
2. Organic brand consumption	1.73	.98	.56**	--			
3. Brand equity	2.74	.96	.43**	.48**	--		
4. Identification organic consumer	2.20	1.00	.48**	.31**	.43**	--	
5. Brand identification	2.07	.96	.45**	.45**	.61**	.64**	--
6. Organic product familiarity	3.06	.82	.45**	.26**	.43**	.54**	.38**
NBs (*N*=302)							
1. Organic consumption behavior	1.92	.99	--				
2. Organic brand consumption	1.62	.95	.70**	--			
3. Brand equity	2.58	1.07	.45**	.52**	--		
4. Identification organic consumer	2.15	.94	.54**	.45**	.48**	--	
5. Brand identification	2.00	1.03	.50**	.52**	.69**	.64**	--
6. Organic product familiarity	3.05	.82	.49**	.41**	.51**	.48**	.49**

Table 3: Drivers of organic brand consumption for PLBs

	Organic brand consumption (T2)				Organic consumption behavior (T2)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Brand equity	.43**	.29**	.29**	.29**	.31**	.16*	.16**	.16**
Brand identification	--	.24**	.27**	.26**	--	.26**	.16*	.16*
Organic consumer identification	--	--	-.05	-.06	--	--	.19**	.19**
Organic product familiarity	.10	.07	.08	.07	.30**	.26**	.20**	.20**
Brand equity X Brand identification	--	--	--	.01	--	--	--	.02
Brand equity X Organic consumer identification	--	--	--	.10	--	--	--	-.04
Income	.04	.04	.04	.03	.07	.07	.07	.08
Education	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.02	.06	.05	.04	.03
Age	.01	.01	.02	.01	.02	.02	.02	.02
Gender	-.01	-.02	-.02	-.03	.06	.05	.05	.05
Country Netherlands	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05	.05
Country Germany	-.06	-.07	-.08	-.07	.07	.06	.07	.07
Country Australia	.06	.06	.06	.06	.03	.04	.04	.04
Country Canada	.04	.07	.07	.08	-.02	.00	.01	.01
N	404	404	404	404	404	404	404	404
R^2	.25	.28	.28	.29	.29	.33	.34	.35
F Value	11.40**	12.34**	11.35**	10.16**	14.05**	15.33**	15.13**	12.96**

Note: *p <.05, **p <.01. Country variables are dummy variables, with the U.S. as the benchmark.

Table 4: Drivers of organic brand consumption for NBs

	Organic brand consumption (T2)				Organic consumption behavior (T2)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8
Brand equity	.40**	.27**	.27**	.28**	.33**	.20**	.20**	.20**
Brand identification	--	.22**	.14	.12	--	.21**	.04	.03
Organic consumer identification	--	--	.16*	.17*	--	--	.31**	.32**
Organic product familiarity	.23**	.19**	.15*	.16*	.34**	.31**	.23**	.24**
Brand equity X Brand identification	--	--	--	-.07	--	--	--	-.03
Brand equity X Organic consumer identification	--	--	--	.13	--	--	--	.08
Income	-.09	-.09	-.09	-.09	.05	.05	.05	.05
Education	.09	.08	.08	.08	.04	.03	.03	.03
Age	.10	.09	.09	.10	.03	.02	.03	.03
Gender	.05	.05	.04	.05	.05	.04	.03	.03
Country Netherlands	-.01	.00	.01	.01	-.15*	-.14*	-.13*	-.12*
Country U.S.	.02	.02	.02	.02	.00	.00	-.01	-.01
Country Australia	-.02	.01	.00	.01	-.02	-.01	-.03	-.02
Country Canada	.03	.06	.06	.06	-.16*	-.14*	-.13*	-.13*
N	302	302	302	302	302	302	302	302
R^2	.33	.35	.37	.38	.36	.38	.43	.43
F Value	12.44**	12.47**	12.03**	10.67**	14.09**	13.99**	15.81**	13.65**

Note: *p <.05, **p <.01. Country variables are dummy variables, with Germany as the benchmark.