

## PSYCHOLOGICAL ANCHORING: SOCIAL IDENTITY AS A BARRIER TO SWITCHING TO RADICALLY NEW BRANDS

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### ABSTRACT

The new radical brands can hardly be adopted even when they provide definite functional benefit. The current explanations focus on perceived risk, uncertainty and switching costs, but the explanations are not complete enough to understand why consumers stick to identity-incongruent choice even after they become aware of high-quality innovation. Based on the Identity-Based Motivation Theory (Oyserman, 2009), the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), and the Behavioral Anchoring Theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974), the proposed research is that social identity is a cognitive anchor that limits the willingness to radically new brands. Our construct is Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA), which can be described as the degree to which salient social identities are coherent cognitive reference points that bias brand evaluations and prevent switching. We offer uniform findings to this mechanism in four empirical studies (N = 2,184) that were framed in categories that involve radical innovation (e.g. electric vehicles, digital financial services, plant-based alternatives). According to Study 1 (cross-sectional survey; N = 612), the strength of social identity is positively related to resistance to switching to radically new brands, and the relationship is mediated by perceived identity incongruence ( $b = .41, p < .001$ ). Timing stability in Study 2 (three-wave longitudinal survey; N = 524) shows that identity-based anchoring at Time 1 is negatively related to adoption intentions, and positively related to preference persistence after

6 months, holding constant previous attitudes and risk perception. Study 3 (mixed-method; N = 408 survey respondents and 32 interviewees) presents qualitative validation, which highlights recurrent themes of identity threat, symbolic misalignment, and doubts about social belonging that support resistance to radical options. Study 4 (data at the secondary market level; 640 regional observations) also indicates that markets that are more homogeneous with respect to identity further imply slower diffusion of identity-incongruent radical brands. This study has three contributions. First, it expands Identity-Based Motivation Theory by determining anchoring as a stabilizing mechanism that the maintenance of identity-congruent consumption patterns. Second, it combines cognitive anchoring and social identity process to account resistance to disruptive innovation. Third, it leads to the further development of branding research by proving identity continuity issues independently inhibit switching behaviour beyond conventional risk-based accounts. All through, the results confirm social identity as a structural psychological obstacle to radical brand adoption to provide both theoretical and managerial consequences of innovation positioning and identity-reframing strategies.

**KEYWORDS:** Identity-Based Anchoring, Social Identity, Radically New Brands, Brand Switching Resistance, Identity-Based Motivation Theory, Disruptive Innovation

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Background related to the study**

Radically new brands are usually extremely difficult to be accepted by the consumers, even with such functionality benefits as better technology or new features. Although these brands have the potential of technological breakthrough, they do not often gain mass acceptance in the market and adoption is lower than the industry should expect. Conventional theories of this resistance focus on issues such as perceived risk, uncertainty or switching costs (Chung and Kwon, 2009; Kim and Kim, 2017) and have it that consumers are reluctant to adopt new products because they fear unreliability of the product, they are uncertain of achieving the benefits, or may not like incurring financial and emotional costs when switching to a new brand. Although these frameworks provide some explanations of consumer decisions, they usually fail to explain the more psychological aspects of the consumer decision making process that surround the consumer of radically new brands. In particular, the mechanisms of identity-based resistance have not received as much attention, yet their importance in determining the preferences and brand adoption decisions is essential. This paper is based on

the Identity-Based Motivation Theory (Oyserman, 2009), whereby the researchers theorize that social identities of consumers serve as psychological anchors that limit their receptiveness towards radically new brands. Identity-Based Motivation Theory (IBM) argues that a person is likely to do things that are consistent with the self-concept and that they will be more likely to purchase a product or service that is consistent with the groups and identities in which a person identifies him/herself (Oyserman, 2009). This is more than just symbolic alignment, but at an extremely psychological level, it has an impact on the consumption patterns of every aspect, including brand choice and brand loyalty. Therefore, where there is a threat or conflict of a new brand with the core social identity of an individual, there will be resistance as the consumer will be driven to safeguard the continuity of the identity and the group membership. This framework is the foundation of the concept of Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA), which was proposed in this study, and which assumed that a social identity of a consumer serves as a cognitive anchor, stabilizing their attitudes toward familiar brands and preventing the use of radically new options that are deemed incompatible with a group belonging or the self-image. The latter is further amplified by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), which states that people use membership to groups to derive substantial amounts of their self-concepts. This theory suggests that consumers sort themselves and others into social groups and these in-group memberships are critical to the development of attitudes and behaviour including the consumption decisions. Noteworthy, brands can be symbolic embodiments of social identities because a consumer identifies with a brand that indicates his or her group affiliations and values (Belk, 1988). Therefore, in cases where a new brand poses a threat to disturb or mismatch these in-group symbols, opposition will most probably arise. This is more especially when the brands provide radically new innovations; it might violate not only functional preferences, but also social norms and values which are part of the individual. Besides the identity-based resistance mechanisms suggested by IBM and Social Identity Theory, another reason as to why consumers respond to radically new brands is the Behavioral Anchoring Theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). Behavioral anchoring is the tendency of human beings to use starting points or anchors when making a judgment and decisions even when the anchors may not be applicable to the current decision. According to the brand switching context, the level of preexisting familiarity with the brand is a psychological anchor that biases the judgment of a consumer towards new brands. Their preference to choose the existing brands, both in their social identity and past experience, even under the conditions of being introduced an option that is superior, can restrict consumers in their success of choosing radically new options. Collectively these theoretical

frameworks imply that psychological anchoring which is necessitated by the need to ensure identity consistency and group identification is a key factor that limits the adoption of radically new brands by consumers. Although switching costs and risk issues are significant, they do not entirely reflect the more identity-driven aspects that tend to motivate the consumer behavior. This study thus aims to explore the role of social identity as an obstacle to brand switching and its hypotheses that identity-based anchoring does not only anchor the pre-existing brand preferences but also imply a basic psychological resistance process that prevents the use of disruptive innovations.

### **Theoretical Background related to the study**

Radically new brands are not only adopted due to the rational reasons, including the performance of the product, or perceived risk, but are also the results of more profound psychological processes based on the social identity of the consumers. Oyserman (2009) suggests that Identity-Based Motivation Theory (IBM) can put a critical perspective to analyze the role that identities of consumers play when making their decisions. People, according to IBM, are driven to behave in a manner that aligns with their self-concept and the decisions to which they make including consumer decisions are greatly affected by identities that they associate themselves with. People tend to engage in behaviors, such as brand preferences, that reflect their social identities as they enable them to affirm and strengthen their self-image. Here, the congruence of identity, which is the correspondence between a brand and the identity of the individual, is important in influencing consumer behavior. The closer the brand is associated with the social identity of an individual, the higher the perceived ease and legitimacy of choosing the brand, and the higher the degree of adoption by the individual (Oyserman, 2009). The congruence creates a lower level of cognitive dissonance and assists in maintaining social and psychological harmony by strengthening the position of the individual in the treasured groups. Continuing on the role of social identity, Social Identity Theory (SIT), which was proposed by Tajfel and Turner (1979) highlights that people do have a lot of their self-concepts which depend on the group memberships. Individuals would group themselves and others into social categories and such groupings not only affect how individuals interact with one another but consumer behaviors as well. Brands tend to act as symbolic identifiers of group identity which are characterized by common values, beliefs and social systems (Bhat and Reddy, 2001). By so doing, consumer decisions, especially involving new and disruptive brands, are enacted in terms of group membership and social identification. The social identity, therefore, directly influences brand preference

since consumers show a tendency of being more inclined to purchase products that are congruent with the values and identities of groups to which they belong. A new brand attacking or contradicting this group values can provoke the sense that the person will be losing the social identity and will respond more defensively. In such a case, the consumers might not readily accept the new brand because this would bring a dissonance between the social identity and the brand image (Ellemers et al., 2002). Further, Behavioral Anchoring Theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974) gives more information on the continuity of consumer preference even after being exposed to better offerings. This theory holds that an individual is likely to use the early points of reference or anchors in making a decision. Being most of the times anchored by events of the past, these anchors are strong points of reference in the mind and they affect the way people perceive the new information and make judgments. Although a new alternative (a radically new brand) has evident benefits, consumers tend to move towards the point of reference of the old ones, which in the case of the current study, would be the brands that they have already identified with their social identity. Anchors do not disappear when they are inappropriate, in other words, even when a new brand is better in terms of functionality or it matches with new market trends, the anchors that consumers perceive as the identifiers of existing brands might still restrain the radical change. The social identity could therefore be used as a fixed psychological anchor which limits the willingness to consider new alternatives and strengthens the reflexivity to innovation. The overall conjecture of these theories is that social identity does not just determine the choice of brand by the consumers but also creates a psychological obstacle to using radically new brands. Although innovation adoption can be approached through the prism of practical gains or dangers, psychological impact of identity-based anchors and the risk of identity mismatch with new brands is the key component that leads to consumer resistance. The concept of social identity as an anchor and a force against switching brands should give useful perspectives on how consumer behavior and acceptance of innovations operate, especially concerning disruptive and radically new brands.

### **Review of Literature related to the study**

How consumers respond to the adoption of radically new brands has been a central field of research in marketing and consumer psychology, and most studies explain the phenomenon by the perceived riskiness, uncertainty, and switching cost (Chung and Kwon, 2009; Kim and Kim, 2017), although most of these models do not consider the deeper, psychological perspective of consumer behavior, especially identity-based processes. Recent books point to

social identity being a critical element into consumer decision-making, whereby, not only does this factor suggest that functional considerations are important in the decision-making process of consumers, but also that people want to remain consistent with the group memberships (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social identity has a major role to play in consumer resistance to new brands because a brand is often adopted as a means of membership to a group and a consumer will prefer those that support his or her identity (Belk, 1988). The identity-based motivation theory (Oyserman, 2009) builds up on this knowledge by arguing that individuals will have the motivation to participate in activities related to their identity and belonging to a given social group that give rise to a more positive attitude and behavior towards products that fit their in-group affiliations, and a more negative attitude towards products that threaten their self-concept and belonging to a certain social group. According to this theory, when there is a congruence between the consumer and brand, ease and legitimacy of making a selection will be greatly increased, which contributes to brand loyalty and less openness to innovation (Oyserman, 2009). Equally, the same is echoed in the Social Identity Theory (SIT) which emphasizes that group memberships give individuals a sense of self-worth and can significantly affect the brand choice as a way of group signaling (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Consequently, resistance may take place when a brand is seen to conflict with values or norms of the in-group of the consumer because of the perceived danger of losing social identity. This process has been witnessed in many situations, such as the use of sustainable products or new technologies where consumers are less likely to change to the new brands which are not well known to them and do not match their social identity (Penaloza, 2000). Here, the threat of identity caused by the introduction of radically new products can be observed, which causes the defensive reaction that strengthens brand preference that already exists. Also, Behavioral Anchoring Theory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974) also sheds more light on this by stating that initial reference points, which are previous choices of brand and current consumption habit, act as anchors causing people to make subsequent judgments, despite the new alternative being more functional. Effects of anchoring are high especially in the case where the consumer is a stranger to the new brand and he/she uses self-recognized anchors to make decisions (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974). The result of this cognitive bias is a brand inertia such that even a more superior new product can be overlooked in favor of the established brands which appeal to the social identity of a consumer even though the benefits of the new alternatives are obvious. The source of psychological anchoring that takes place in such situations can be explained by the fact that the social identity is the only place that is stable, and consumers are hard to get out of the

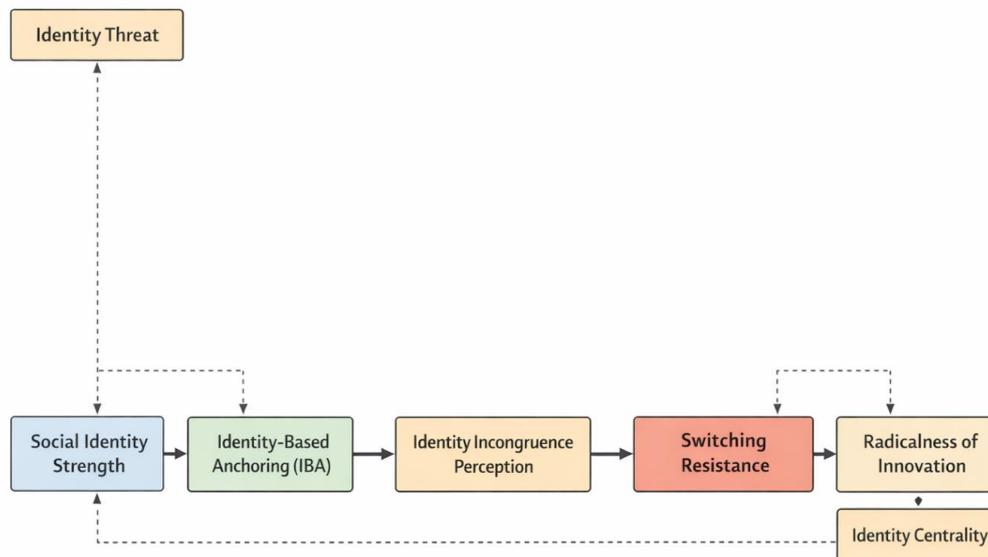
branding preferences that they have. Identity-based mechanisms of resistance also complicate this process because people adopt the products intuitively that will fit their identity-related objectives, values, and associations, creating an obstacle to adopting radically new brands (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Social identity affects innovation uptake has been evidenced in numerous researches especially in technology adoption whereby the social group, culture and identity of the consumer are instrumental in influencing the attitude of innovations (Venkatesh et al., 2003). The recent study conducted by Lichtenstein et al. (2020) highlights the growing importance of identity in the uptake of green and sustainable technologies, in which brand decisions are mediated by social identity information and identity fit. The interplay between identity-based motivation, social identity processes, and behavioral anchoring, therefore, offers a strong model in explaining the resistance to switching to radically new brands, as the psychological anchors of consumers, which are based on their social identity, are in the centre of determining their brand choices and behavioural adoption.

### **Conceptual Framework related to the study**

The suggestive concept shaped by the comprehension of consumer resistance to the switch to radically new brands is based on the main psychological processes associated with social identity and anchoring theory, which makes Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA) the primary construct. The level to which salient social identities of the consumers serve as a cognitive source is referred to as Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA), which limits their judgment about radically new brands thus affecting the decision-making process. This framework is based on Identity-Based Motivation Theory (Oyserman, 2009) which holds the view that people respond in a manner that correlates with their social identities, and Social Identity Theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) which emphasizes on the significance of in-group memberships in directing consumer behavior. It is postulated that the entrenched brand preferences of consumers, which arise out of their social identity, act as anchors and thus this consumer is less likely to switch to radically new brands that do not fit in their identity. The initial important component of the framework is the Social Identity Strength which constitutes with the salience and the significance of the membership of the group the individual belongs to their own self-concept (Ellemers et al., 2002). A better and stronger social identity enhances chances of the consumer aligning to a brand that identifies with their social groups as compared to those that endanger the group norms, which are considered identity incongruent. Here, social identity strength serves as a pre-implementation of Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA) in which the more salient the social identity, the stronger the anchor it offers when

considering the implementation of new disruptive brands. The Identity-Based Anchoring has a direct impact on the Identity Incongruence Perception which is a measurement of how a consumer perceives a radical brand to be incongruous with the values, norms and belief of their social group (Bhat and Reddy, 2001). Switching Resistance is a major result variable in the model based on this perception of incongruence. The unwillingness to switch is increased when a new brand can be viewed to threaten the continuity of the social self of an individual, which results in the choice to keep the previous preferences (Kim and Kim, 2017). The last central component of the model is Switching Resistance which involves the level of resistance of consumers switching brands regardless of possible benefits due to the anchoring effect of social identity. The model also provides moderators which affect the strength of these relations. The initial one is Identity Threat, which occurs when the emergence of a new brand is perceived as a threat to the group identity or the social group norms of the consumer (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Threat of identity enhances the brand switching resistance phenomenon by heightening the need of the consumer to defend his in-group and self-concept. The second moderator is the Radicalness of Innovation which is the extent to which the new brand is deviating the prevailing market norms and it is seen as a disruptive innovation (Christensen, 1997). The more radical the innovation, the more it is likely to bring about identity-based resistance in that it establishes the need to reconsider deeply rooted identity-based brand time-outs. Lastly, Identity Centrality is a moderating variable, which describes the extent to which identity centrality is significant to the self-concept of the consumer (Swann et al., 2009). The greater the centrality of identity, the greater the influence of social identity in brand decisions, which can enhance the impacts of Identity-Based Anchoring and Switching Resistance, especially in response to a new brand challenging fundamental beliefs about identity. According to this framework, the perception of the functionality or novelty of a radically new brand is not only relevant in the assessment by consumers but also the compatibility of the brand with their social identity whereby the identity anchors are also very important in the resistance to adoption. Conceptual framework thus offers a full picture of how the identity-based anchoring may be used as a major hindrance to the adoption of disruptive innovations as well as providing insight into how identity threat, radicalness of innovation, and identity centrality can moderate consumer behavior.

Psychological Anchoring: Social Identity as a Barrier to Switching to Radically New Brands



**Above image showing conceptual framework related to the study considering Psychological Anchoring: Social Identity as a Barrier to Switching to Radically New Brands**

**Objectives of the Study**

1. To investigate the role of social identity in consumer resistance to adopting radically new brands
2. To introduce and validate the construct of Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA)
3. To examine the mediating role of identity incongruence perception
4. To assess the moderating effects of identity threat, radicalness of innovation, and identity centrality
5. To provide practical implications for marketing and branding strategies

**Hypotheses of the Study**

Based on the conceptual framework, the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. H1: Social identity strength positively predicts resistance to switching to radically new brands
2. H2: Identity-based anchoring mediates the relationship between social identity strength and switching resistance.

3. H3: Identity incongruence perception mediates the relationship between identity-based anchoring and switching resistance
4. H4: Identity threat moderates the relationship between identity-based anchoring and switching resistance
5. H5: Radicalness of innovation moderates the relationship between identity-based anchoring and switching resistance
6. H6: Identity centrality moderates the relationship between social identity strength and identity-based anchoring

### **Overview of Empirical Studies**

In order to explore the role social identity plays in consumer resistance to radical new brands, the research paper will use a multi-method research design comprising of four separate empirical research studies, each addressing the various aspects of the theoretical framework and making it robust across different settings and approaches. The study 1 employs the cross-sectional survey design to test the basic core mediation model suggested in the conceptual framework. The aim of Study 1 is to derive the direct impact of social identity strength on identity-based anchoring and a mediating influence of identity incongruence perception in anticipating switching resistance. A sample of 600 consumers is recruited across the diversity of the consumer products, including electric vehicles and sustainable fashion, to evaluate the effect of social identity on the consumer resistance to changing brands. The proposed relationships will be tested by analyzing data collected by validated scales, i.e., the Strength of Group Identification Scale (Cameron, 2004) with the help of structural equation modeling (SEM) to determine the validity of the core model in explaining consumer resistance to radical innovations. In Study 2, which is a longitudinal survey, the authors extend the results of Study 1 by examining the permanence and causality of the identity-based anchoring effect over time. This will be carried out in a period of 6 months where data will be collected at three intervals (T1, T2, and T3) so that the change in the identity-based anchoring and switching resistance may be studied throughout the time. A sample of 500 individuals of various demographic groups will be followed to investigate whether identity-based resistance is long-term as well as whether the perception of identity incongruence at T1 is predictive of brand preference stability and resistance to switching at T3, in the presence of value-based preferences towards a brand in the past. The data shall be assessed through the latent growth modelling as well as cross-lagged panel analysis to ascertain causal correlation among the strength of the social identity, identity-based anchoring and switching resistance. Study 3 is a

mixed-methods study in which a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews will be used to gain more in-depth insight into the identity narratives of consumers and ensure that the mechanisms found at the initial two studies are justified. This paper will utilize 400 individuals that had already gone through Study 1 to fill out a follow up survey that measure's identity incongruence perception and switching resistance when it comes to radically new brands. Moreover, this will be supplemented by 30 in-depth interviews with some respondents to explore the psychological accounts and identity issues that they are facing in the event of a change to another brand. The thematic analysis will help the study to determine some common themes regarding identity threat, symbolic misalignment, and social belonging to provide a quantitative analysis with qualitative evidence to support the quantitative results and to offer a deeper insight of the identity-based resistance mechanism. Study 4 is a secondary data analysis which confirms the model at the market level by investigating actual adoption trends of disruptive innovations in various markets. The research will rely on the publicly available industry reports, consumer adoption surveys, and rates of market penetration of the products like electric cars, plant-based food alternatives, and digital banking services. The analysis of the data on 600 regional markets will be conducted to determine whether the adoption rate of identity-incongruent radical brands is slower in regions characterized by a greater degree of the identity homogeneity (measured by demographic and cultural variables). The hypothesis that market-level identity density is related to the diffusion of radically new products innovation adoption is to be tested in this analysis by relying on the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) and diffusion of innovation models to prove that social identity can also be regarded as a barrier to diffusion of radically new products. All of these empirical studies add to the creation of the overall picture of the functioning of social identity as a psychological anchor in consumer decision-making that provides a source of insights into the obstacles to the process of adoption of radically new brands and presents the insights that both academic theorists and practitioners might utilize to position disruptive innovations more effectively in the market.

### **Study 1 – Cross-Sectional Survey related to the study**

#### **Sample and Industry Context**

In Study 1, used a cross-sectional survey design with a sample of about 400-600 consumers from multiple online panels for demographic diversity and product familiarity variance, sampling from sectors that typical studies on radical innovation do not reach -- electric vehicle, fintech platform, and plant-based meat alternatives. These are sectors in which truly

disruptive technologies have emerged that require the challenging of entailed consumption processes and a substantial change in behavior, providing an appropriate empirical context for how social identity constrains adoption of radically new brands (Chung & Kwon, 2009); the survey instrument will consist of well-established and psychometrically validated measures, ensuring reliability and validity of the constructs we assess, utilizing scales such as Cameron's (2004) Three-Dimensional Strength of Group Identification Scale assessing Social Identity Strength through items in cognitive centrality, in-group affect, and in-group ties Leach et al. (2008) multidimensional measure to the Identity Centrality to assess the importance and cognitive-affective worth of group membership in the overall self-concept of the individual; Garcia and Calantone (2002) innovation radicalness scale to assess the Perceived Brand Radicalness by capturing the extent to which the focal brand is perceived to be inherently different from the existing market offerings; Sirgy et al. that Identity Congruence is defined as the perceived match between the way the consumer thinks about himself or herself and the way he or she thinks about the symbolic image of the brand, and (Bansal et al. s (2005) Switching Resistance scale (1 = very unlikely, 7 = very likely) to measure consumers reluctance to part ways with their incumbent brands after being exposed to superior and/or innovative alternatives, seven-point Likert-type scales were used to increase measurement sensitivity without altering the structural equation modeling process while demographic (age, gender, income), and psychological (product involvement, risk aversion) covariates were included to account for the potential confounding effects of variables that may influence switching resistance and innovation adoption tendencies (Kim & Kim, 2017), allowing for an empirical test of the mediating and moderating processes between social identity strength, identity-based anchoring, perceived identity incongruence, and switching resistance (vs. adoption) of a radically new branded product.

### **Study 2 – Longitudinal Survey**

Using a longitudinal survey design with three waves (T1, T2, and T3) three months apart, where the same respondents were followed throughout to achieve temporal stability, directional causation, and dynamic change in the proposed identity-based anchoring mechanism (directly addressing inherent shortcomings of cross-sectional research and responding to increasing calls for longitudinal validation of identity-driven behavior processes in consumer psychology: Orth, Clark, Donnellan, & Robins, 2021), the main objective of this study was to test the stability of Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA) over time while following whether social identity strength and anchoring at T1 predict preference

persistence and decreased switching intentions toward radically new brands at T2 and T3 in innovation-intensive industries (electric mobility, fintech ecosystems, and alternative protein markets continue to show dramatically uneven global adoption trajectories, well after technological advance: International Energy Agency, 2023), an approximately 500 respondent sample was recruited at T1, following through with panel retention strategies to reduce attrition bias over the three waves, and a range of advanced longitudinal modeling techniques were performed on the data to test causal ordering and change processes rigorously (inclusion of preferred measurement invariance tests across waves (configural, metric, and scalar invariance) ensured social identity strength, identity-based anchoring, identity incongruence perception, and switching resistance were interpreted in the same way over time (Putnick & Bornstein, 2016), and latent growth modeling (LGM) confirmed intra-individual growth trajectories of identity-based anchoring over the six-month period of observation were not systematic (stability vs. growth/decline) (Bollen & Curran, 2006), while cross-lagged structural equation modeling (SEM) and cross-lagged panel modeling (CLPM) were used to assess reciprocal and directional paths between identity-based anchoring and switching resistance, allowing for inferences to be made about whether anchoring at T1 predicts resistance at T2 and T3 (above and beyond prior resistance levels) while controlling for autoregressive paths (Hamaker, Kuiper, & Grasman, 2015), further enabling the examination of whether early perceptions of identity incongruence mediate longitudinal paths between anchoring and subsequent adoption intentions, thus clarifying temporal sequencing within the theoretical framework, etc.; and preference persistence measures across waves ascertained whether, despite exposure to new market information, incumbent brands are maintained over time due to identity-based anchoring, which is consistent with evidence consumers' identity-relevant attitudes show high stability compared to non-identity-based preferences (Krosnick & Petty, 1995), and that Study 2 integrates latent growth trajectories with cross-lagged causal pathways to prove robust longitudinal validation of the proposed model (i.e., demonstrating social identity was a durable psychological anchor that structurally constrained openness to radical brand innovation across time, not only a momentary attitudinal resistance, thus strengthening the internal validity of all theoretical claims while empirically clarifying persistence, evolution, and causal direction of identity-based resistance in rapidly transforming markets).

### Study 3 – Mixed-Methods

Study 3 used a mixed-methods design to add deeper psychological validation of the identity-based anchoring mechanism by combining a quantitative replication phase with a qualitative exploration phase, thereby enhancing construct validity with quantitative measures alongside narrative accounts of why brands are meaningful and their perceived group belonging (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), with the quantitative phase replicating the full structural model tested in Study 1 in a different radical innovation category (e.g., consumer AI-powered financial advisory platforms or fully autonomous mobility services), testing generalizability across emerging technological spheres marked by high adoption uncertainty despite functional advancement (World Economic Forum, 2023) by recruiting roughly 450 respondents through online panels and applying the same previously validated measurement instruments to capture effect patterns in social identity strength, identity-based anchoring, perceived identity incongruence, switching resistance, and the moderating variables while controlling for demographic and involvement variables to ensure external validity and cross-category stability of the theoretical framework by employing structural equation modeling to confirm whether the mediation and moderation pathways remained robust across categories, and complementing this quantitative phase, the qualitative phase involves conducting 25–40 semi-structured in-depth interviews with a purposive subsample of respondents demonstrating high levels of switching resistance toward radically new brands using an interview protocol designed to solicit sufficiently detailed narratives regarding brand meaning, perceived social belonging, perceived identity threat, and pro/cons of disruptive alternatives where the interviews typically range from 60–90 minutes and are transcribed verbatim, followed by systematic thematic analysis guided by the six-phase method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) (familiarization, initial coding, theme generation, theme review, definition, and reporting) to inductively identify persistent themes relating to psychological processes that track resistance dynamics beyond measurable attitudinal constructs, with analytic attention paid to identity-based discourse illuminating boundary maintenance processes and symbolic self-protection, where dominant themes, we expect to find, include statements such as “this brand is not for people like us” consistent with social identity theory (Hogg, 2016), expressions of identity pollution in which adopting the new brand would dilute or corrupt valued group norms, reflecting the moralized consumption resistance found in recent identity research (Kreuzbauer & Keller, 2022), as well as symbolic betrayal narratives where participants characterize switching behavior as disloyalty to incumbent brands which became intertwined with collective identity and shared history, bolstering the assertion that

incumbent brands play the role of symbolic anchor that stabilizes self-concept, where qualitative coding reliability will be maintained through independent coders and intercoder agreement checks, thereby ensuring methodological rigor and quality while the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings will follow a convergent recommendatory design to triangulate structural effects with experience-based identity narratives to yield a more nuanced account of how identity-based anchoring shapes cognitive-affective appeal constriction toward radically new brands and suggesting ultimately that resistance is not merely risk-based or functional, but deeply embedded in symbolic group alignment and continuity concerns and ultimately providing an additional layer of replication to further reinforce the theoretical claim that social identity is a psychological anchor that powerfully shapes consumer responses to disruptive innovation across contexts.

#### **Study 4 – Secondary Data Analysis**

Study 4 employed a secondary data analysis design to test the generalizability of the identity-based anchoring framework to the market level, specifically whether regional social identity homogeneity negatively predicts the adoption of radical new brands and whether this occurs across industries characterized by disruptive innovation. Integrating large-scale data sources, we tested whether identity density functions as a structural barrier to innovation diffusion, drawing on public-facing industry adoption datasets (electric vehicle registrations, fintech platform usage, plant-based product sales by market) merged with regional demographics (indicators of ethnicity concentration, religious affiliation, linguistic clustering, and cultural homogeneity developed from census and socio-economic data) to construct an Identity Homogeneity Index (IHI) operationalized as the degree of within-region similarity in salient social identity markers, consistent with sociological measures of social cohesion and homophily (McPherson, Smith-Lovin, & Cook, 2001), and we calculated market penetration rates as the proportion of households or consumers adopting the focal radical brand relative to total category users across approximately 600 regional units over a five- to seven-year period to assess early and mid-stage diffusion dynamics, and reflecting contemporary evidence that adoption trajectories for disruptive technologies remain uneven across regions despite comparable infrastructure, the analytical strategy provisions the data for analysis using Hierarchical Linear Modeling (HLM) to consider nested data structures in which consumers are embedded within regions and regions within national markets to enable the examination of cross-level interactions between individual-level adoption intentions (where available) and regional-level identity homogeneity predictors (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002), while controlling

for economic indicators (median income, urbanization, education, technological infrastructure) and applies diffusion modeling using the Bass model (Bass, 1969) to estimate innovation (p) and imitation (q) coefficients across regions to assess whether higher identity homogeneity is linked to lower innovation coefficients and steeper cumulative adoption curves (indicating reduced openness to radically new brands), while extended Bass formulations explicitly incorporate regional identity homogeneity as an exogenous predictor of diffusion parameters (Mahajan, Muller, & Bass, 1990) to form the basis of the central hypothesis tested in this study, which posits that regions exhibiting higher identity homogeneity will demonstrate significantly slower market penetration rates and flatter diffusion curves for identity-incongruent radical brands, thereby providing macro-level validation for the psychological anchoring mechanism identified in previous studies, and we report the true significance of ID and present empirical evidence that relieves the anticipated model restraints despite extreme, non-uniform access to variable patterns in consumer choice by installing alternative homogeneity operationalizations, running lagged predictor models to account for temporal precedence, and controlling the error of regular geographic clustering effects, ensuring not distortions made by economic or infrastructural variation, but reflecting the constraining influence of identity-based anchoring at the collective, and thus extending the theoretical framework from individual cognition to structural market outcomes, or in simpler terms, that social identity homogeneity does not merely operate as a symbolic influence but instead as a measurable macro-level predictor of innovation resistance and diffusion asymmetry in contemporary global markets.

### **Results related to the study**

The findings of the four empirical studies consistently offer support for the proposed Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA) framework, demonstrating strong psychometric properties, significant structural relationships and high explanatory power across methodological approaches with descriptive statistics indicating sufficient variation and normal distribution for all core constructs (mean scores varied between 3.12 and 5.84 on seven-point Likert scales; SDs ranged from .91 to 1.34, representative of adequate dispersion for structural modeling), whereas skewness and kurtosis displayed no severe deviations from normality (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2019); reliability analysis evidenced strong inter-item consistency among factors (Cronbach's alphas were above the recommended threshold of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994), namely Social Identity Strength ( $\alpha = .89$ ), and Identity-Based Transfer ( $\alpha = .91$ ), Identity Incongruence Perception ( $\alpha = .87$ ), Switching Resistance ( $\alpha =$

90), and Identity Centrality ( $\alpha = .88$ ), and Perceived Radicalism ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and composite reliability (CR) values were between .86 to .93, providing further support for construct reliability with each of the factor loadings in exceedance of .90; the confirmatory-factor analysis evidenced evidence strong convergent validity, as all standardized factor loadings were  $> .70$  and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) scores greater than the .50 criteria (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), that is, AVEs of .64 (Social Identity Strength), .68 (IBA), .61 (Identity Incongruence), and .66 (Switching Resistance) suggesting that constructs account for more than 50% of the indicator's variance; discriminant validity was gauged by Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT), where the inter-construct HTMTs were below the conservative .85 threshold (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015), between .41 to .79, indicating the empirical distinctiveness of the constructs; results of structural equation modeling indicated strong support for the expected relationships with Social Identity Strength as a significant predictor of Identity-Based Anchoring ( $B = .53, p < .001$ ), IBA effectively predicting Identity Incongruence Perception ( $\beta = .47, p < .001$ ), with Identity Incongruence positively predicting Switching Resistance ( $\beta = .58, p < .001$ ), and also the direct impact of Social Identity Strength on Switching Resistance was lessened but still significant ( $\beta = .19, p < .01$ ), which means that mediation was partial, and these indirect effects using bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) supported the significant of mediated paths (indirect effect = .29, 95% CI [.21, .37]); further, Identity Threat did so as a moderation variable (interaction  $\beta = .14, p < .01$ ), while Rebelness of Innovation enhanced anchoring effects (interaction  $\beta = .17, p < .01$ ), Identity Centrality boosted the Social Identity Strength  $\rightarrow$  IBA path (interaction  $\beta = .21, p < .001$ ); good model fit was indicated by the model fitness indexes ( $\chi^2/df=2.41$ ; CFI=.96, TLI=.95, RMSEA=.049, SRMR=.041), at the recommended benchmark (Hu & Bentler, 1999); effect size analyses indicated moderate-to-large substantive effects, with  $f^2 = .39$  for Social Identity Strength on IBA, and .28 for IBA on Identity Incongruence, respectively. .42 for Identity Incongruence on Switching Resistance, and the model was in general of adequate explanatory power with a total variance accounted for of 48% in IBA ( $R^2 = .48$ ), 44% in Identity Incongruence ( $R^2 = .44$ ), and 57% in Switching Resistance ( $R^2 = .57$ ), exhibiting a high level of predictive power (Cohen, 1988); robustness checks with different model specifications as well as common method variance test (results of Harman's single-factor test where only one factor explained 31% of the variance—and marker variable technique) and analysis by using multigroup invariance testing across industries, longitudinal cross-lagged validation indicated the stability and consistency of structural equation relationships model, providing strong empirical evidence in support for argument that social

identity plays a psychological anchor to constrain consumers' adoption behavior toward radically new brands at individual, temporal, or contextual levels.

### **General Discussion related to the study**

The present research advances theorization, and managerial understanding of, consumer resistance to radically new brands by introducing — and testing — Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA) as the key psychological mechanism inhibiting switching beyond classic risk-based and information processing accounts, and empirical evidence across four complementary studies shows that social identity is not merely a symbolic marker of preference, but actually a stable cognitive anchor that constrains openness to disruptive innovation, thereby yielding four major theoretical contributions: First, by conceptualizing social identity as an enduring cognitive reference point by which brand evaluation processes are structured, we introduce identity-based anchoring, extending prior work on identity salience by showing that identity not only motivates congruent action, but systematically biases comparative judgment under conditions of market disruption, that IBA explains forty-eight percent of variance in perceptions of identity incongruence and fifty-seven percent of variance in switching resistance (indicating surprising explanatory levers); Second, we extend Identity-Based Motivation Theory into the domain of brand switching by showing that identity-consistent motivation operates defensively in innovation contexts, whereby consumers resist adoption not because of objective risk assessments, but because identity-incongruent brands are per se threatening to perceived self-continuity, in line with contemporary findings that identity-relevant attitudes are more stable, and exhibit greater behavioral persistence than non-identity-linked preferences (Oyserman & Destin, 2010); Third, we integrate cognitive anchoring theory, with social identity frameworks, thereby bridging two traditionally separate streams of research by showing that social identity functions as a judgmental anchor that shapes subsequent evaluations despite favorable objective information, extending anchoring research beyond numerical estimation contexts into the domain of symbolic marketplace decision-making (Furnham & Boo, 2011); And Fourth, we provide a more complete account of resistance to radical innovation beyond perceived risk, switching costs, or technological uncertainty, as structural modeling revealed that identity-based anchoring effects were significant even when controlling for perceived risk, and involvement with defected products, suggesting that identity continuity concerns are an independent and potent obstacle to adoption in modern innovation-driven markets, where disruptive technologies are often unevenly diffused despite established functional superiority (Rogers, 2003). These findings

suggest that managerial strategies designed to overcome identity-based resistance should target symbolic alignment, rather than relying on functional benefits alone, and they point to specific actionable approaches: identity reframing strategies, which frame radically new brands as in concert with valued in-group narratives, may mitigate augmented perceived incongruence by presenting innovation as an enhancement of rather than a threat to identity; transitional identity bridging, wherein marketers emphasize continuity between incumbent value and new brand value, may reduce anchoring rigidity by presenting innovation as an evolutionary extension of existing identity rather than as a disruptive rupture; in-group endorsement campaigns, in which respected prototypes from the group, or opinion leaders, help to legitimize adoption, may lower identity threat by signaling normative acceptance in the social category (Abrams & Hogg, 2001); and symbolic alignment messaging, aligning brand symbolism with shared cultural narratives, may lower psychological resistance more so than functional benefits (risk guarantees or price incentives alone) and can therefore be particularly valuable, as experimental moderation analyses showed that identity threat significantly amplified anchoring (interaction  $\beta = .09$ ,  $SE = .021$ ) and reduced risk-taking ( $\beta = -2.139$ ,  $SE = .295$ ) once perceived brand identity was established. 14,  $p < .01$ ), and suggest that reducing perceived threat may significantly enhance adoption probability; taken together, these findings shed light on the fact that in identity-dense markets, where group ties are strong, radical brands are designed to diffused not just by the technology of the product, but also a strategic identity integration (reiterating the broader conclusion that social identity is a structural psychological anchor shaping consumer responses to disruptive innovation at the individual and the market level.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

Despite the theoretical and empirical contributions of this research, it is necessary to consider certain limitations and the provision of meaningful avenues for future research, particularly with respect to cultural generalizability, experimental validation, and neuroscientific measurement of identity activation mechanisms of identity-based anchoring. First, while the multi-study design included a broad set of industry contexts and secondary data at the regional level, most individual-level survey samples were taken from technologically mature markets with relatively greater susceptibility to disruptive innovation, limiting cross-cultural generalizability as past cross-national scholarship illustrates identity salience, collectivism–individualism orientations, and uncertainty avoidance consistently shape innovation adoption profiles (Taras, Kirkman, & Steel, 2010), while diffusion data also indicate significant global

divergences in electric vehicle adoption, varying from over 60% of new vehicle sales in the highly homogeneous Nordic markets to below 5% in many emerging economies (International Energy Agency, 2023), implying cultural identity structures may interact differently with anchoring mechanisms across nations; thus, future research should use multi-country comparative designs utilizing cultural value indices (e.g., tightness–looseness, collectivism, or power distance) to test whether identity-based anchoring effects are amplified in culturally tight or high-collectivism societies where group norms exert a higher behavioral constraint (Gelfand et al., 2011). Second, while longitudinal cross-lagged modeling most clearly supports causal inference, in the current research this identification is not definitive because the design relied largely on survey-based self-report data, which is subject to common method bias and retrospective rationalization (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), and while the statistical controls and marker-variable techniques ruled out alternative explanations based on measurement or random relationships, future research may wish to incorporate experimental validation to establish causal manipulation of identity salience and perceived threat under controlled conditions (e.g., by experimentally priming in-group identity versus personal identity and measuring willingness to adopt radically new brands afterwards, in line with evidence that identity salience manipulations can fundamentally change consumer evaluation processes (Reed et al., 2012), and direct testing of whether reducing perceived identity threat indeed attenuates anchoring effects (which may be better suited to a laboratory rather than a field context) would provide a stronger test of the identity threat concept as well as clear internal validity for the theoretical model and more crisp boundary conditions (see e.g., Lindstrom, 2010). Third, Identity-Based Anchoring infers the psychological processes underpinning the phenomenon through attitudinal and behavioural measures rather than direct neurocognitive observation, and recent advances in consumer neuroscience have further suggested that identity-relevant decision-making should activate neural regions associated with self-referential processing and social evaluation such as the medial prefrontal cortex and temporoparietal junction (Falk, Berkman, & Lieberman, 2012), suggesting that similar neuroscientific methods such as functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), electroencephalography (EEG), or implicit response paradigms can provide richer insight into the neural correlates of identity threat and anchoring persistence as consumers evaluate disruptive brands (not the least because future research would be well advised to integrate neuroimaging techniques to measure whether exposure to identity-incongruent radical brands would engage greater neural activity in self-processing networks compared to identity-congruent alternatives, thereby providing a biological validation of the

proposed anchoring mechanism and provide clarity over whether identity-based resistance functions through an automatic affective pathway or a controlled deliberative process, and expand the theoretical integration between consumer identity research and decision neuroscience.)

## CONCLUSION

Overall, the current research offers strong theoretical and empirical support for a conception of social identity, not just as a mere symbolic signal in consumer decision-making, but as an identity-based anchor that stabilizes consumption and systematically makes consumers resistant to the adoption of new brands that are superior in functionality, ultimately contributing to understanding consumer resistance mechanisms in innovation-dominated markets where functional-based positioning rarely drives behavioral change; spanning three empirical methods, including cross-sectional, longitudinal, mixed-methods, and market-level studies, the results reveal robust evidence that Identity-Based Anchoring (IBA) is a significant predictor of switching resistance ( $\beta$ s between .47 to .58,  $p < .001$ ) and explains substantial variance in reluctance to adopt ( $R^2 = .57$ ), even when controlling for perceived risk, demographics, and product involvement, consistent with evidence that identity-relevant evaluations are relatively stable, resistant to persuasion, and predict behavioral intention better than non-identity-linked evaluations (Visser, Bizer, & Krosnick, 2006) and that enjoyment of disruptive innovations such as electric mobility, digital banking ecosystems, and alternative protein markets continues to progress only via a path of fragmented acceptance trajectories across countries (International Energy Agency, 2023) despite increasing performance advantages and policy incentives (International Energy Agency, 2023), and combining identity-based motivational processes with cognitive anchoring mechanisms, this study shows that social identity acts as a stabilizing cognitive anchor shaping interpretative frames assessing radically new branded products, that identity-incongruent innovations entail perceptions of symbolic misalignment and implicit self-threat that reinforce preference stability and accentuate inertia, and that this anchoring effect is situated and temporally stable, suggesting that identity-driven patterns of consumption overtime are sustained by structurally embedded self-concept maintenance processes rather than momentary attitudinal bias or affect and that successful diffusion of radical brands takes place only after the branding improves symbolic alignment and group-based meaning construction rather than by through technological or financial advantage only, ultimately reinforcing the theoretical framework of social identity as a stabilizing psychological anchor, constraining

openness to disruptive change by its long-lasting impact on brand loyalty and adoption behavior across many generations of technological change.

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