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Energizing the Reseller's Sales Force: The Power of Brand Identification

A manufacturer's success in the marketplace is contingent in part on its ability to energize its downstream channel members in support of its brands. Gaining the focused effort of the reseller's sales personnel is particularly important, and this has become increasingly challenging as resellers broaden their brand portfolios in the wake of industry consolidation. This study reveals a motivating influence that can potentially be harnessed by both manufacturer and channel member: identification. Using a multilevel analysis, the authors explore the sometimes conflicting impact of salesperson brand identification, salesperson organizational identification, and manufacturer–channel member control system alignment on brand and channel member sales performance. The authors also examine favorable extra-role consequences of salesperson brand identification. The results show that while organizational identification strengthens salesperson adherence to controls, brand identification can increase salesperson effort behind a specific brand, and ultimately improved brand performance, even in the face of control systems to the contrary. This suggests that suppliers can exercise influence over the reseller's sales force by strengthening the psychological connection between their brands and reseller sales personnel.

Keywords: brand identification, organizational identification, control systems, salesperson performance, sales force motivation, distribution channels, reseller

Many companies use a distribution network of independent intermediaries, relying on downstream channel members (e.g., brokers, agents, wholesalers, retailers) to sell their products effectively to other channel members and/or ultimately to the end users. While in some cases the reseller serves a single supplier, more often the reseller's product line includes products (or services) from multiple suppliers. For example, consumer products manufacturers routinely use wholesalers and/or brokers to sell to and to service retailers, a wide range of industrial products are sold through distributors, and even intangible products and services can be provided through external channel entities (e.g., independent agents). Often, these intermediaries represent multiple product lines, and given ongoing consolidation at all levels of distribution, increasingly these intermediaries represent competing products within the same product category (Gale 2005).

The challenge for the manufacturer is motivating the reseller to allocate resources on behalf of its products relative to the resources allocated in support of competitive products. Because the reseller has its own agenda that may differ from that of a manufacturer, the extent to which manufacturer and reseller goals, plans, and control systems are aligned will have a marked impact on what ultimately is executed in the market. As a result, many channel management activities initiated by the manufacturer are directed toward influencing channel member resource allocation behavior (Anderson, Lodish, and Weitz 1987).

The relative effort that reseller salespeople expend on the manufacturer's brands versus that expended on in-house competitive brands is a particularly critical resource allocation problem. A manufacturer's interests are best served if the reseller's salesperson is highly focused on its products relative to those provided by other manufacturers. However, the manufacturer has no direct control over the salesperson, and the reseller might have completely different priorities, whether it is to balance efforts across the portfolio or to concentrate on certain brands/products according to their relative profit contribution or other considerations. To protect its own interests, the reseller typically has formal control systems in place to direct the behavior of its sales personnel. These systems tend to be a combination of output controls (i.e., objective performance standards that are tracked and evaluated) and behavioral controls (i.e., monitored activities considered important in achieving desired results) (Anderson and Oliver 1987). Formal control systems have been found to be effective in reducing role ambiguity and role conflict while increasing salesperson motivation and performance (Baldauf, Cravens, and Piercy 2005).

This study explores an alternative, less formal mechanism of influence potentially available to both manufacturer and reseller in their attempts to gain the reseller salesperson's allegiance: identification. Drawing from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1985), we conceptualize

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organizational identification as occurring when an employee forms a psychological connection with the organization by incorporating the attributes that he or she believes define the organization into his or her own self-concept (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). Identification can serve as a powerful motivating influence for a person and an important one to the firm because, as self-goals and organization goals merge, the realization of the latter becomes more intrinsically satisfying. Organizational identification has been shown to have a positive impact on several desirable work-related outcomes, such as job satisfaction (Van Knippenberg and Van Schie 2000), employee retention (Mael and Ashforth 1995), organizational citizenship behaviors (Van Dick et al. 2006), organizational commitment (Meyer, Becker, and Van Dick 2006), and job performance (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005).

Not yet researched, however, is a notion highly relevant to the issue of capturing reseller salesperson share of mind—namely, that employees may identify not only with their company but also, to a greater or lesser degree, with particular brands that are represented by the firm, along with related implications. Moreover, few empirical studies consider what may occur when identification with different foci and/or with normative pressures conflicts (Richter et al. 2006). An important distinction to be examined here is the extent to which the salesperson identifies with his or her employing company (the reseller) and the extent to which the salesperson identifies with a manufacturer's brand. We propose that these two forms of identification interact differently with the reseller's control systems to influence salesperson effort and sales performance. The findings are strengthened through the use of a multilevel analysis that incorporates multiple sources of data across several companies. Although we believe that the tested relationships should generalize across different industries, products/services, and types of distribution channels, the context of this study is a three-tier distribution system in which a consumer products manufacturer sells its products through a wholesaler (distributor), which in turn sells to retail accounts in a designated territory.

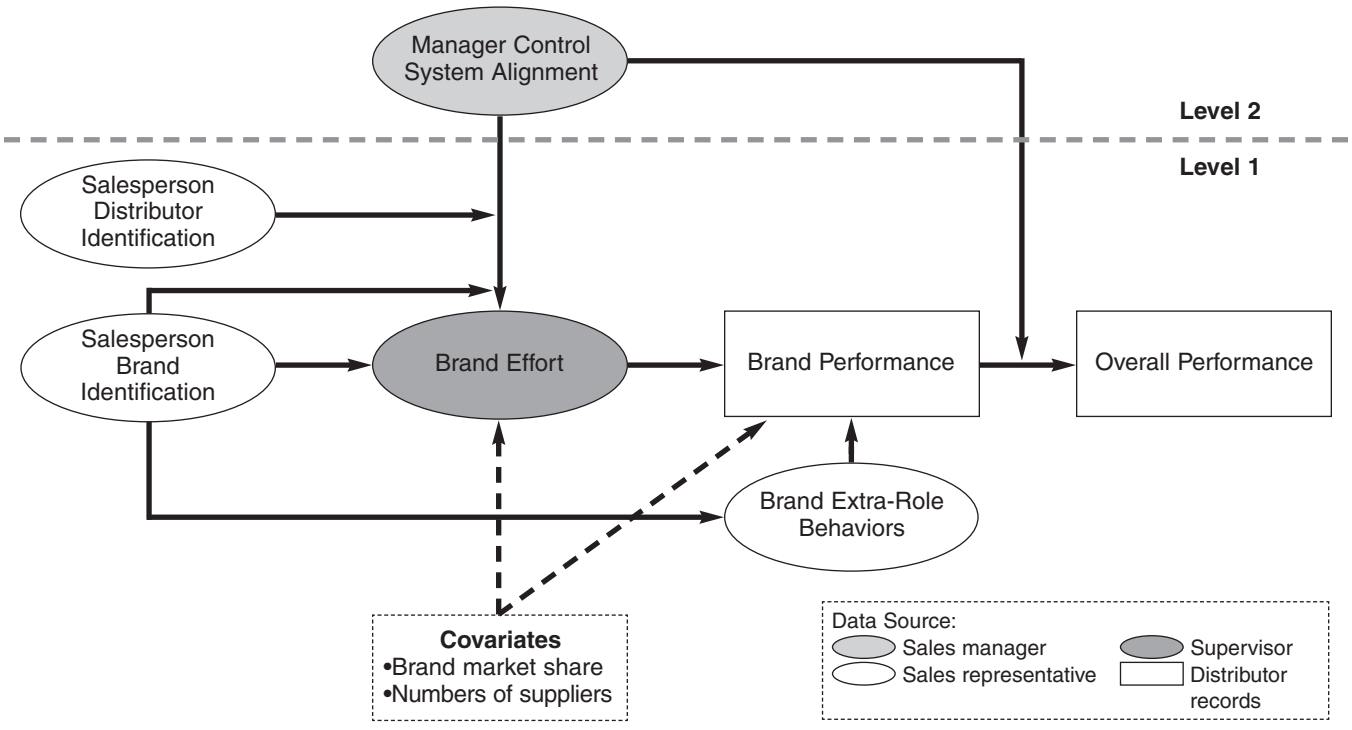
Conceptual Background and Hypotheses

As Figure 1 shows, we expect that the extent to which reseller sales control systems are aligned with manufacturer goals ("control system alignment") will be moderated by the extent to which the reseller salesperson identifies with two potentially competing organizational entities: the manufacturer's brand ("brand identification") and the reseller ("distributor identification"). We further suggest that this relative effort will affect the salesperson's brand sales performance and overall sales performance, the latter being moderated by the degree to which the reseller's sales control systems are aligned with manufacturer goals. Finally, we suggest that the value of brand identification goes beyond its influence on in-role effort and sales performance, by separately leading to positive extra-role behaviors that are directed at and supportive of the brand.

Control System Alignment

Athough manufacturers and their distribution channel intermediaries are interdependent, challenges in coordinating

FIGURE 1
Hypothesized Model



activities and conflict between channel members are inevitable because of their differing perspectives and goals (e.g., Gaski 1984). Each entity strives to maximize its profit, and the manufacturer's brands typically represent only a portion of the downstream channel member's portfolio of products, giving rise to resource allocation issues (Anderson, Lodish, and Weitz 1987). Critical to the manufacturer is its ability to influence the channel intermediary to increase its effort on the manufacturer's products and brands. We define control system alignment as the extent to which the control systems a channel member puts in place to direct and motivate its own sales personnel are aligned with supplier goals as they pertain to a particular brand during a given time frame.

In a marketing and sales context, the manufacturer must be concerned with two relevant relationships pertaining to goals and control systems: (1) the manufacturer–channel member and (2) the channel member–channel member salesperson. The manufacturer's first and primary point of contact is with the channel member's management team, and a key purpose of this interaction is to influence the extent to which the channel member prioritizes, supports, and puts necessary control systems in place to market the manufacturer's brands effectively downstream. Because the manufacturer relies on the channel member salesperson to sell its products downstream, an important element of this is the amount of focused effort the salesperson expends on each of the products or brands that he or she is responsible for selling. Depending on any number of factors, channel member management might put control systems (e.g., performance plans with formalized behavioral or outcome goals, incentives, differential compensation) in place that encourage the salesperson to put forth more or less effort on certain brands versus others. To the extent that these control systems coincide with the manufacturer's priorities, the manufacturer's interests are well served because process motivation theories predict that the salesperson will be motivated to act in a manner consistent with them (Ambrose and Kulik 1999; Steers, Mowday, and Shapiro 2004).

We investigate a pervasive but less obvious motivational influence that could compromise these assumptions: identification. Goal theorists recognize that behavior is influenced by the extent to which people are personally committed to their goals (Locke and Latham 2004) and argue that externally derived goals are less protected from competing desires and temptations than goals that arise autonomously from personal values (Meyer, Becker, and Vandenberghe 2004). The two potentially competing influences on the salesperson's response to company-initiated goals pertaining to brand emphasis are his or her identification with the company for which he or she works and his or her identification with the brand that he or she represents.

Social Identity Theory, Organizational Identification, and Brand Identification

Social identity theory asserts that self-concept is derived in part by psychological membership in various social groups (Tajfel 1978). Among the assumptions underlying social identity theory are that people strive for positive self-esteem, that self-esteem is in part derived from social group membership, and that a positive social identity is maintained or strengthened through in-group–out-group comparisons (Van Dick et al. 2004). Social identity theory has been used extensively as a basis for understanding a person's psychological attachment to an organization (e.g., Ashforth and Mael 1989; Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn 1995; Smidts, Pruyn, and Van Riel 2001). When a person identifies with an organization, his or her perceptions of membership become embedded in a general self-concept (Riketta, Van Dick, and Rousseau 2006). Thus, organizational identification can be conceptualized as the perception of oneness with the organization (Ashforth and Mael 1989), occurring when a person's beliefs about the organization become self-referential or self-defining (Pratt 1998). As people identify more strongly with the organization, they become more intrinsically motivated to behave in a manner consistent with its interests (Van Knippenberg and Sleebos 2006). Acting on behalf of the organization becomes congruent with self-interests.

It is worth noting that organizational identification differs from the related concepts of job involvement and organizational commitment. Involvement has been defined in a variety of ways depending on context, but in general, it has to do with the perceived relevance or importance of an object or activity based on a person's inherent needs, values, and interests (Andrews, Durvasula, and Ahkter 1990). In the work environment, involvement has been alternatively defined as a psychological connection with a person's work functions, the importance that work has in a person's life, the degree to which a person is engaged in the job or in carrying out specific work tasks, or some combination of these elements (e.g., Keller 1997; Morrow 1983; Rabinowitz and Hall 1977). Several researchers (e.g., Mael and Tetrick 1992; Riketta 2005) have demonstrated empirically that involvement and identification are distinct.

Organizational commitment is widely considered a three-dimensional construct (Meyer and Allen 1991) comprising affective attachment to the organization, perceived cost of leaving the organization, and internalized obligation to remain in the organization. In a channel context, organizational commitment has been conceptualized similarly (Kim and Frazier 1997) but also as a willingness to make short-term sacrifices to maintain a long-term relationship (Anderson and Weitz 1992) and as a state of attachment consisting of an economic calculation of the benefits of association and disassociation with a channel member along with an emotional feeling of allegiance and faithfulness to the channel member (Gilliland and Bello 2002). While identification involves a sense of shared fate and perceived similarity with the organizational entity, commitment is essentially an attitude toward the organization that develops from exchange-based factors (Van Dick 2004). The narrower, self-definitional aspect of organizational identification distinguishes it conceptually and empirically from organizational commitment (Bergami and Bagozzi 2000; Van Knippenberg and Sleebos 2006).

An employee's identification with the company for which he or she works is only one type of organizational identification. People are apt to identify with any group that

contributes to a positive sense of self (Ellemers, De Gilder, and Haslam 2004), and multiple potential foci of identification within a work setting offer a person the self-enhancing sense of inclusion and distinctiveness derived from group membership (e.g., occupation, industry, company, division, work unit, people) (Riketta and Nienaber 2007; Sluss and Ashforth 2007). Although empirical evidence is limited, researchers have speculated that the compatibility (or lack thereof) of goals, values, and norms among such collectives supports or undermines the relative identification with each collective and corresponding outcomes (Meyer, Becker, and Van Dick 2006).

Most research on workforce-related social identification has centered on the congruence of self-identities with formal organizational identities (e.g., a person's employer); however, it is plausible that salespeople also identify to varying degrees with upstream suppliers and even with individual brands. We conceptualize brand identification as the degree to which a person defines him- or herself by the same attributes that he or she believes defines a brand. Formal membership in a group is not required for identification (Pratt 1998), and just as consumers prefer brands that elicit associations consistent with self-identities (either actual or desired), self-congruity theory would suggest that salespeople form a stronger bond with brands when brand and self-identities converge (Aaker 1999; Burmann and Zeplin 2005; Sirgy 1982).

Although the extent to which salespeople identify with the brands they sell has not yet been well researched, there is a rich literature on consumer–brand relationships from which to draw inferences. What people consume, possess, and associate with contributes to their self-definitions, a concept dating back at least as far as William James (1890, p. 291), who asserted that "a man's self is the sum total of all that he can call his." Brands can act as symbolic resources in constructing social identity (Elliott and Wattanasuwan 1998), allowing people to appropriate meaning for themselves and communicate that meaning to others (McCracken 1988). Not only do people use objects to remind themselves of who they are and to indicate to others who they are (Wallendorf and Arnould 1989), but they also often imbue brands with human characteristics that define a distinct brand personality (Aaker 1997), leading to the formation of relationships with brands that reinforce self-concept through mechanisms of self-worth and self-esteem (Fournier 1998). Brand identification, as we conceptualize here, is a social construction that involves the integration of perceived brand identity (or brand image) into self-identity, brand identity referring to the set of brand associations from which a person derives functional, emotional, and self-expressive benefits (Aaker and Joachimsthaler 2000). Donavan, Janda, and Suh (2006) explore the idea of brand identification in the context of a sports franchise and find that it leads to heightened self-esteem and an increased propensity to purchase brand-related merchandise for personal use and for others.

Firms spend considerable resources attempting to build psychological connections between their brands and consumers through advertising and other marketing communications. We suggest that employees are not immune to these kinds of influences. Indeed, given their higher level of exposure to and involvement with the brands and the idea that the brand's success or failure has ramifications to the employee's economic well-being, it is possible that such an effect is even more pronounced. As one salesperson participating in prestudy qualitative work stated, "My customers call me 'Stan, the [brand name] Man,' and that's kind of the way I see it too. I bet half of my wardrobe has a [brand name] logo on it, and when [brand] does well, I feel good inside. I want everything I sell to succeed, but with [brand], it's personal."

In summary, people are apt to identify with various organizational entities, and identification with such entities can be mutually supportive or disruptive (Ellemers and Rink 2005; Meyer, Becker, and Van Dick 2006). In this study, we specifically examine the extent to which the distributor salesperson identifies with his or her employer (distributor identification) and the extent to which the salesperson identifies with a focal brand (brand identification) from a supplying manufacturer. Prior research has suggested that in nested or hierarchical forms of identification, identification with the lower-level or more proximal entity tends to be stronger and, thus, more prescriptive of related outcomes than identification with the subsuming entity. For example, identification with a work group under most circumstances will be more salient than identification with the company (Van Knippenberg and Van Schie 2000). However, in the circumstances we examine, there is no clear nesting relationship, and thus the relative strength and salience of identification is ambiguous.

Because organizational identification represents the cognitive link between the definitions of the organization and the self (Porter et al. 1974), it follows that there is an increased linkage between organizational goals and self goals when organizational identification is high. Because self goals exercise a strong motivating effect on behavior (Brown, Jones, and Leigh 2005), organizational identification should moderate the impact of distributor control systems on the relative effort the salesperson places on behalf of the organizational entity. More specifically, when salespeople strongly identify with their employer (the distributor) or a particular brand they sell, they become vested in its success or failure. Therefore, brand identification should influence the amount of effort a salesperson places on a brand, while amplifying the positive effects of manufacturer–distributor goal alignment and accompanying control systems on the effort expended on that brand. Conversely, if brand identification is low, the control system alignment–brand effort link should be weakened.

Effort has been defined as the "force, energy, or activity by which work is accomplished" (Brown and Peterson 1994, p. 71). However, given a wide assortment of brands in a salesperson's portfolio, a finite number of hours in a day, and a limited number of minutes in front of a buyer, the salesperson must make choices regarding what he or she focuses on. Time spent selling one brand necessarily means less time spent selling another brand. Therefore, expanding slightly on the preceding definition of effort, we conceptualize brand effort as the force, energy, or activity expended against the focal brand relative to that expended against all other brands.

The effects of distributor identification on relative brand effort are likely more complex. If distributor identification is high, the interests and goals of the distributor become more salient, and thus relative brand effort would be contingent on whether the goals of the brand were consistent with the goals of the company. If control systems support the brand, a salesperson who strongly identifies with the distributor is likely to follow suit and increase effort behind the brand. Conversely, if control systems do not support the brand (i.e., they are focused instead on other brands within the salesperson's portfolio), the distributor-identifying salesperson is likely to decrease effort on the brand in favor of these other brands.

In summary, because the salesperson is prone to act in accordance with the groups with which he or she identifies, strong identification with a particular brand and/or with the distributor gives rise to desires and temptations that either support or conflict with the employer's direction. When the salesperson identifies with an entity, goals in support of this entity are more likely to be perceived as more autonomous and self-controlled, resulting in stronger positive behavior in support of those goals. However, goals that run counter to the identified identity are likely to be perceived as less autonomous, less personally relevant, and potentially self-threatening, leading to reduced effort in support of the goals. Thus:

H_1: Higher levels of brand identification (a) result in increased brand effort regardless of whether control systems are aligned with the brand and (b) strengthen a favorable impact of high control system alignment on brand effort while softening a negative effect of low control system alignment on brand effort.

H_2: Higher levels of distributor identification strengthen brand effort when control system alignment is high but weaken brand effort when control system alignment is low.

Performance

Effort is one outcome of motivation, and many studies have shown a positive relationship between effort and various performance measures (e.g., Brown, Cron, and Slocum 1997; Brown and Peterson 1994). We consider two types of performance measures in this study: brand sales performance and overall sales performance. Brand sales performance is defined as the percentage of sales the focal brand represents out of the total sales volume produced by the salesperson; therefore, in a sense, it is a "share of portfolio" or "share of total sales" measure that reflects the relative success of the brand versus the other brands the salesperson sells. While share of market is a measure manufacturers use more routinely to judge the relative strength of a brand in the marketplace, a share of portfolio approach provides an indication as to the importance of the brand to the channel member's business and thus can serve as a source of manufacturer power or leverage over the channel member. However, the distributor is less concerned about the sales of a particular brand or supplier than about the sales of its entire collection of brands in the aggregate. Thus, overall sales performance is introduced as an outcome of greater interest to the distributor, conceptualized here as the sales trend improvement of the salesperson's entire portfolio of brands during a defined period.

In general, we might expect that strong sales performance on one brand would have a favorable impact on a salesperson's overall sales performance. However, the salesperson is responsible for selling a large number of brands and, because of time and other constraints, must make choices regarding the brands on which to focus his or her efforts. If the effort placed on one brand takes away effort from other brands that are more important to the distributor, it is conceivable that brand sales performance could have an adverse effect on overall sales performance. Because we assume that the profit-maximizing distributor will align its control systems with a given brand only when doing so is in its best interests, higher brand sales performance is likely to result in higher overall sales performance only when control system alignment is high. In other words, if a salesperson focuses on a brand that the distributor is not supporting, the impact of that brand's results on the salesperson's overall sales will be weakened. Conversely, if the salesperson achieves strong sales performance on a brand that the distributor is supporting, we would expect a positive relationship between that salesperson's brand performance and overall sales performance. Thus:

H_3: Greater brand effort results in increased brand sales performance.

H_4: Brand sales performance interacts with control system alignment to affect overall sales performance such that greater brand sales performance results in increased overall sales performance only when control system alignment is high.

Other Consequences

The literature points to other desirable consequences of organizational identification beyond effort and performance, such as increased job satisfaction, reduced employee turnover, enhanced cooperation, and organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., Ahearne, Bhattacharya, and Gruen 2005; Mael and Ashforth 1995; Richter et al. 2006). Organizational citizenship behaviors are discretionary behaviors beyond formal job requirements that promote the effective functioning of the organization. The relationship between organizational identification and organizational citizenship behaviors stems from the desire to protect, support, and improve the organization that surfaces when organizational identities and self-identities converge. Organizational identification aligns the interests of the organization with self-interest, and thus engaging in positive extra-role behaviors is a natural extension of the self.

This raises a noteworthy question in the context of this study and one that is of great importance to the manufacturer in particular: Are there corresponding brand-enhancing extra-role behaviors (separate from company-oriented organizational citizenship behaviors) that might result from brand identification? For example, it could be that the salesperson who identifies with a particular brand, for the same self-enhancing and self-protecting reasons we discussed previously for organizational citizenship behaviors, is prone to personally consume the brand at home and in public set-

tings; to make the brand available at parties/gatherings when appropriate; to recommend it to friends and defend it from criticism; to encourage other employees and management to focus on the brand; to confront or report colleagues for behavior detrimental to the brand; to report competitive initiatives that threaten the brand; and (in a consumer packaged goods environment) to correct out-of-stock situations, pull up facings, rebuild displays, place point-of-sales (POS) materials when shopping on personal time, and so forth. All these things are of great benefit to the manufacturer and to the brand itself. Thus, we define brand extra-role behaviors as proactive behaviors on the part of the salesperson that are outside the scope of the job description but that contribute to the viability and vitality of the brand. The notion of separate extra-role behaviors related to a specific organizational identity is consistent with Ullrich and colleagues' (2007) "identity-matching principle," which suggests that the relationship between identification and relevant behavioral outcomes is stronger when they address the same level of categorization. Although in most cases such extra-role behaviors could be expected to benefit both brand and distributor, it is possible that such behaviors could be supportive to the brand but not maximally effective for the distributor (if those behaviors instead could have been directed at more important brands within the distributor's portfolio) or, in extreme cases, even counterproductive to the distributor (e.g., offering excessive brand promotional support to retailers). Although this latter point is worthy of investigation, here we focus only on the positive benefits of the extra-role behavior to the brand. Thus:

H_5: Brand identification is associated with salesperson demonstration of brand extra-role behaviors.

H_6: Brand extra-role behaviors have a positive influence on brand performance.

Methodology

Sample

Data were gathered from 18 large distributor sales organizations located in metropolitan areas across the United States. The distributors represent a shared set of consumer products manufacturers operating in the same product category, and they perform the function of warehousing the various manufacturers' brands and selling them to retailers in assigned exclusive geographic areas. Among the distributor salesperson's brand-building responsibilities are securing and increasing distribution, expanding shelf space, selling product displays, placing POS materials, selling promotions, and so forth. Although the distributors selected for the study were largely homogeneous with respect to the primary suppliers they represent, we controlled for externalities pertaining to company and geographic differences. Specifically, we included brand market share and the number of suppliers each distributor salesperson represents as covariates in the analysis. The organization structure was consistent across organizations, with each salesperson reporting to a route supervisor, who in turn reports to a distributor sales manager. Surveys were administered to the salespeople, route supervisors, and sales managers in each operation, and objective sales performance data were obtained from company records for the outcome measures (described subsequently).

In total, survey questionnaires were delivered to 260 salespeople, 59 route supervisors, and 18 sales managers, with a response rate of 81%, 100%, and 100%, respectively. Sales managers provided control system alignment measures, route supervisors rated salesperson brand effort, and salespeople provided all other latent measures. The surveys were distributed to the sales force at company offices; sales personnel were asked to complete the survey at their leisure and then return the survey directly to the researcher using provided self-addressed postage-paid envelopes. Merging all three data sets with objective company records (brand and company sales performance data) resulted in a data set containing 192 full data records, for a usable response rate of 74%. Because each salesperson rated four separate brands, there were 768 (4×192) possible observations. However, because 25 sales representatives were responsible for selling (and thus reported on) only three of the four focal brands, there were 743 actual usable observations. The average respondent was 33 years of age and had 8.5 years of experience in sales, 5.8 years with his or her company, and 3.5 years in his or her current position. Ninety-three percent were men, not atypical for this particular industry, with an ethnicity breakdown as follows: 60% white, 25% Hispanic, 6% African American, and 9% Asian/other. Thirty-four percent of respondents had a college degree or higher.

Construct Measures

We assessed the constructs with a combination of proven and new scales, the latter of which we developed in accordance with the procedures that Churchill (1979) outlines. For each of the new scales, we developed an initial pool of items using exploratory research; we refined these items after receiving expert feedback from academic researchers and distributor general managers and then pretested them with a small sample of distributor sales personnel.

Control system alignment refers to the extent to which distributor control systems are aligned with manufacturer brand goals. To assess this construct, distributor sales managers were surveyed using a new scale (see the Appendix) that asked the managers to assess the extent to which incentives, commissions, performance plan objectives, sales meetings, and ride-with activity for a designated period (a specific month) focused on a particular brand. This was completed for each of the four brands, with the sales manager allocating 100 points among the four brands and "all other brands" carried by the distributor.

Distributor identification and brand identification were individually rated through self-reports (salesperson) using an eight-point visual and verbal representation of the perceived overlap of salesperson and distributor/brand identity that Bergami and Bagozzi (2000) developed. This was completed separately for identification with the distributor and for identification with each of the four brands included in the survey. Before rolling out the formal survey, we tested the questionnaire with a small sample of distributor sales-

people and interviewed them after they completed it to ensure that their interpretations of all questions matched our intentions. These pretests showed that an illustration was helpful in ensuring consistent interpretation of the identification scale across respondents, so we included an example on the survey form before providing it to the respondents.

Brand effort refers to the force, energy, or activity expended by the salesperson against the focal brand relative to that expended against all other brands. This was assessed by the line manager overseeing each salesperson (i.e., the route supervisor) using a new seven-point Likert scale (see the Appendix) that taps into the execution responsibilities of the salesperson. Here, the supervisor rated each of his or her sales representatives on the effort exerted against certain brands in performing particular selling and merchandising activities that are part of the salesperson's ongoing responsibilities (e.g., selling promotions, selling/building displays, expanding shelf space, increasing distribution, placing POS materials). This assessment was completed for each of the four brands included in the survey. Given the low span of control for each supervisor, the strong emphasis on ride-with activity in each distributor operation, and the managerial expectations that the route supervisor will be monitoring salesperson selling and merchandising activities, the route supervisor is in a particularly good position to assess salesperson effort on these tasks. In addition, the multisource nature of the data greatly minimizes the risk of common method bias.

We measured brand extra-role behavior with a new five-point Likert scale (see the Appendix) that asked salespeople to rate the extent to which they engage in various brand-supportive activities that are beyond the scope of the job description but that promote the brand in some way (e.g., "I serve this brand at parties/gatherings," "I encourage other employees to focus their efforts on this brand," "I correct out-of-stock situations, pull up facings, rebuild displays, place POS materials, and so forth, in retail accounts on personal time for this brand, for example, when shopping while off work").

Brand sales performance is an objective measure gleaned from distributor sales reports that assesses the proportion of the salesperson's total monthly volume that is accounted for by the brand. In other words, it is defined as the percentage of sales that the focal brand represents out of the total sales volume produced by the salesperson for the period of interest in the study (in this case, a specific month) and thus can be considered a brand's "share of total sales" for each salesperson. A similar approach has been used to assess constructs such as share of customer or share of wallet (Ahearne, Jelinek, and Jones 2007). As we discussed previously, this is an important measure from the perspective of the manufacturer because it indicates the relative performance of its brand versus that of other brands sold by the salesperson.

Overall sales performance, an outcome of greater interest to the distributor, is an objective measure obtained from distributor sales records that computes the sales trend improvement for each salesperson's entire brand portfolio during the study period.

Because there was geographic variation in market share among the focal brands, as well as some differences in the total number of suppliers represented across distributors, and because it is possible that these variables could influence both brand effort and brand sales performance for a given salesperson, we also included brand market share and number of suppliers as covariates in the model.

Measurement Model

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis in SPSS to evaluate the reflective scales, using principal components analysis and a Varimax rotation. All items loaded onto their factors as anticipated, though brand extra-role behavior split into two separate factors: one reflecting brand usage (e.g., "I personally consume this brand at home," "I serve this brand or make it available at parties/gatherings") and one reflecting extra-role brand support (e.g., "I encourage other employees to focus their efforts on this brand," "I correct out-of-stock situations, pull up facings, rebuild displays, place POS materials, and so forth, in retail accounts on my own personal time for this brand"). Given the result of the exploratory factor analysis and that, to date, this notion of brand-specific extra-role behaviors has been unresearched and thus is worthy of exploration, we elected to treat the two factors as two separate latent variables, so that we could assess potential differential effects of brand identification on them. Factor loadings for all constructs ranged from .66 to .91 with no unusually high cross-loadings. We calculated reliabilities for each scale and deemed them to be acceptable (all above .86; see Table 1).

Next, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to test the discriminant validity of the measures. Although the CFA chi-square statistic (1886, d.f. = 306) was significant, an examination of the comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and standard root mean square residual (SRMR) estimates (.94, .08, and .04, respectively) suggests that the measurement model fits the data well. Values for the CFI above .90 and close to .95 are considered desirable, while RMSEA and SRMR estimates less than or equal to .08 are considered indicative of a good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999; Kline 2005). All factor loadings of the indicators to their respective latent constructs were significant. Moreover, all individual reliabilities were larger than .86, the lowest composite reliability was .83, and the lowest average variance extracted was .56, providing evidence that all constructs possess adequate reliability and convergent validity (Bagozzi 1980; Fornell and Larcker 1981). In addition, all squared correlations between the latent constructs were smaller than the average variance extracted from the respective constructs, in further support of the measures' discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

Analytic Approach

Because the theoretical model is multilevel and some of the data could vary across the 72 distributor–brand clusters and among salespeople within clusters, thus violating the assumption of independence, it was important to test for the suitability of the multilevel analysis. To determine whether

TABLE 1
Construct Reliabilities and Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Control systems	1.00							
2. Brand identification	.30*	1.00						
3. Distributor identification	.06	.34*	1.00					
4. Brand effort	.55	.35*	–.02	1.00				
5. Extra-role brand support	.39*	.45*	.21*	.38*	1.00			
6. Brand usage	.50*	.47*	.07	.45*	.58*	1.00		
7. Brand performance	.72*	.32*	.09	.51*	.34*	.52*	1.00	
8. Overall performance	.02	–.01	–.01	.01	–.02	–.02	0	1.00
M	17.4	4.6	5.4	4.5	3.6	3.0	.1	1.0
SD	15.9	1.9	1.9	1.6	1.3	1.4	.1	.1
α	.99	—	—	.97	.87	.92	—	—
ρ	.95	—	—	.94	.83	.87	—	—
AVE	.61	—	—	.56	.56	.78		

*$p < .05$.
Notes: α = Cronbach's index of internal consistency reliability, ρ = Bagozzi's (1980) composite reliability index, and AVE = Fornell and Larcker's (1981) index of the average variance extracted by the construct.

a two-level approach was warranted, we examined intraclass correlation coefficients (ICCs) and corresponding design effects to ascertain the extent of systematic group-level variance (Duncan et al. 1997). The resultant ICCs indicate that the proportion of total variance accounted for by between-cluster variance is of sufficient size to substantiate a multilevel approach. In addition, design effects, calculated by multiplying the ICC by (average cluster size – 1) and adding 1, were generally greater than 2, suggesting that a multilevel structure should not be ignored (Muthen and Satorra 1995). Consequently, we used a multilevel structural equation model, using MPlus 5 and estimated with full maximum likelihood, for the analysis to account for the hierarchical structure of the data (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). This has the advantage over other hierarchical linear modeling methods of enabling us to model both structural and measurement models simultaneously. In this study, control system alignment varies by distributor–brand cluster; therefore, we model it as a Level 2 variable. We model the remaining constructs as Level 1 variables.

As Figure 1 shows, three of the hypothesized relationships reside within Level 1 and thus can be represented as simple linear regressions. However, the outcome variable overall sales performance is a function not only of brand sales performance but also of Level 2 variable control system alignment. Here, the analysis can be thought of as including two steps, though the two-level modeling technique incorporates these steps into a single model. Step 1 regresses overall sales performance on the Level 1 predictor variable brand sales performance:

$$OP_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(BP_{ij}) + r_{ij},$$

where OP_{ij} is salesperson i's overall sales performance across cluster j, BP_{ij} is the brand sales performance of salesperson i in cluster j, and r_{ij} is an error term assumed to be distributed $N(0, \sigma^2)$.

In Step 2, the regression parameters (intercept and slope) from Step 1 become the outcomes variables and are regressed on control system alignment:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}CS_j + u_{0j}, \text{ and}$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}CS_j + u_{1j},$$

where CS_j represents the control system alignment for cluster j. Thus, these two equations capture the variation present at Level 2. Combining the two sets of equations yields the following:

$$OP_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}CS_j + \gamma_{10}(BP_{ij}) + \gamma_{11}CS_j(BP_{ij}) + u_{0j} + u_{1j}(BP_{ij}) + r_{ij}.$$

Thus, the effects of control system alignment, brand performance, and the cross-level interaction of control systems alignment with brand performance on overall sales performance are captured by γ_{01}, γ_{10}, and γ_{11}, respectively.

Predicting brand effort (i.e., the impact of control system alignment, brand identification, distributor identification, and the cross-level interaction of control system alignment with brand identification and distributor identification) involves a similar hierarchical approach:

$$BE_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(BI)_{ij} + \beta_{2j}(DI)_{ij} + r_{ij},$$

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}CS_j + u_{0j},$$

$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10} + \gamma_{11}CS_j + u_{1j}, \text{ and}$$

$$\beta_{2j} = \gamma_{20} + \gamma_{21}CS_j + u_{1j}.$$

Thus,

$$BE_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}CS_j + \gamma_{10}(BI)_{ij} + \gamma_{11}CS_j(BI)_{ij} + \gamma_{20}(DI)_{ij} + \gamma_{21}CS_j(DI)_{ij} + u_{0j} + u_{1j}(BI)_{ij} + u_{1j}(DI)_{ij} + r_{ij}.$$

Four brands are observed for each of the 18 distributors in the study; thus, Distributor $X_{1–18}$, Brand $Y_{1–4}$ represents the 72 clusters used as the Level 2 grouping variable. Having 72 clusters rather than 18 enables us to overcome a lack-of-power concern in multilevel structural equation modeling with fewer than 30 groups (Kreft and De Leeuw 1998). However, because this simultaneously creates a nesting issue in that each salesperson has rated four brands, we included three dummy variables in the analysis that correspond to the brands. In doing so, we control for differential

effects of the various brands included in the analysis and, as such, reduce the possible bias associated with the salesperson reporting on more than one brand. Furthermore, to alleviate potential concerns regarding non-i.i.d. observations, we tested the model separately for each of the four brands using path analytic techniques, with distributors (n = 18) as the grouping variable. The results were consistent with the aggregated approach, providing evidence that they are unaffected by nesting of observations within salesperson. Finally, although there is no theoretical justification for modeling the data at the supervisor level, since the supervisor simply serves as a data source, we estimated the ICCs and corresponding design effect for brand effort using "supervisor" as the grouping variable to ensure that ignoring this potential nesting level had no substantive effect on the results. Indeed, the design effect is less than 2, in support of this approach.

Results

Model Comparison and Tests of Hypotheses

In accordance with procedures that Mathieu and Taylor (2007), MacKinnon and colleagues (2002), and Baron and Kenny (1986) suggest, we fit several structural models to test the direct and intervening effects represented in the conceptual model. To assist with the interpretation of cross-level interactions and the magnitude of effects among differently scaled variables, we first standardized the independent variables in the model (i.e., control system alignment, brand identification, and distributor identification variables), with higher values representing greater amounts of each variable. We chose to grand-mean-center them to aid in interpretation. Grand-mean-centering of explanatory variables provides the "advantage that variances of the intercept and the slopes have a clear interpretation. They are the expected variances when all explanatory variables are equal to zero, in other words: the expected variances for the 'average' subject" (Hox 2002, p. 56).

Because standard fit indexes are not available with the numerical integration procedure used by MPlus to estimate a multilevel model with cross-level interactions, we employed a log-likelihood difference test ($-2 \times$ difference in log-likelihoods ~ χ^2, d.f. = number of freed paths) to compare the fit of evaluated nested models, and we used Akaike's information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC) to compare the fit of selected nonnested models.

We first ran an unconditional (intercepts only) model to examine the proportion of between variance to total variance for the dependent variables. Intraclass correlation coefficients of .49 for brand effort, .91 for brand performance, .39 for brand usage, .15 for brand extra-role behaviors, and .13 for total sales performance, with accompanying design effects (given an average cluster size of 10.3) ranging from 2.2 to 9.4, substantiated our multilevel design. Next, we fit a baseline model that estimated only the direct effects of control systems alignment and brand identification on brand performance by eliminating the paths to and from mediating variable brand effort, while retaining brand effort in the model. The results indicate positive relationships between control system alignment and brand performance ($\beta = .26$, $p < .05$) and between brand identification and brand performance ($\beta = .42$, $p < .05$), in support of the overall framework of the model. Next, we estimated the hypothesized model minus the interactions. A comparison of AIC and BIC values confirms that this less restricted model fits better than the direct effects–only model (68 lower AIC, 45 lower BIC for the less restricted model). This improved model reflects positive relationships between brand identification and brand effort ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$) and between brand effort and brand performance ($\beta = .42$, $p < .05$), fulfilling additional requirements for a mediated structure (i.e., significant antecedent–final outcome and mediator–final outcome relationships) (Baron and Kenny 1986).

Next, we estimated the hypothesized model, and a log-likelihood difference test confirmed that the inclusion of the random slope effects (i.e., cross-level interactions) provides a stronger fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 2300$, d.f. = 4, $p < .05$) than the nested model that did not include these moderating effects. We summarize the results of this model as follows in the context of the hypotheses.

A nonsignificant γ_{11} coefficient and significantly positive γ_{10} coefficient in the foregoing equations indicate a positive relationship between brand identification and brand effort across all levels of control system alignment and of control system alignment across all levels of brand identification ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), in support of H_{1a} but not H_{1b}. Thus, when a salesperson identifies with a given brand, he or she is more likely to expend effort against that brand relative to other brands in the portfolio, regardless of whether distributor control systems support the brand. We also find that distributor identification and control system alignment positively interact to influence brand effort ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), as represented by a positive corresponding slope coefficient (γ_{21}) in the equations, which in turn supports H_2. In other words, when a distributor puts sales controls in place behind a particular brand and the sales force identifies with the distributor, there is an accompanying increase in the effort a salesperson places on that brand relative to other brands in the portfolio. In the next section, we explore and discuss the interpretation of this interaction further.

A positive relationship between brand effort and brand performance substantiates H_3. The significant, positive interaction between control system alignment and brand performance, combined with the negative relationship between brand performance and overall sales performance, lends support to H_4, which posits that overall sales performance results from strong brand performance only when control system alignment is high.

Finally, H_5 pertains to another favorable outcome predicted to be positively associated with brand identification—the performance of brand-specific extra-role behaviors that, over time, potentially could enhance the brand's viability in the marketplace. Consistent with H_5, brand identification was positively related to both the personal use of the brand (brand usage) and the exhibiting of various non-usage-oriented extra-role behaviors (extra-role brand support).

However, we found no support for H_6, which predicted a positive relationship between extra-role brand support and brand performance.

Although in general the results support the hypothesized conceptual model, we ran two more saturated models, incorporating both direct and intervening effects, with corresponding log-likelihood difference tests examined, to assess whether the mediation present was full or partial. A model including the direct effect of brand identification on brand performance resulted in no improvement over the hypothesized model ($\chi^2 = 1.97$, d.f. = 1, not significant). However, a model including the direct effect of control system alignment on brand performance exhibited a superior fit to the hypothesized model ($\chi^2 = 6.46$, d.f. = 1, $p < .05$), while revealing a significant relationship between control systems and brand performance. Therefore, we find that brand effort partially, rather than fully, mediates the control systems–brand performance link.

The results of these series of models appear in Table 2. Following Snijders and Bosker's (1999) method, we estimated pseudo-R-squares for each of the dependent variables—brand effort (.29), brand performance (.33), and total performance (.20)—suggesting significant variance explained. As Becker (2005) suggests, we conducted the analyses with and without the control variables, and the results were virtually identical, with no differences in the significance of relationships among the variables of interest.

Cross-Level Effects and Interactions

An important aspect of this study is its multilevel effects and interactions involving the three focal independent variables on the relative effort that a salesperson chooses to expend against a particular brand. To interpret the findings more fully, we graphed the interacting relationships by plotting points corresponding to +/– one standard deviation from the means as high and low cases, respectively. This enabled us to examine the various high–low combinations of control system alignment and distributor identification as they relate to the corresponding effort put forth behind the brand. As Figure 2 depicts, upward-sloping lines represent the consistently positive effect of control systems on salesperson brand effort. Moreover, consistent with our previously arguments, there is a cross-over interaction between control system alignment and distributor identification, suggesting that strongly identifying with the distributor results in heightened effort behind the brand when control systems support the brand but work against the brand when control systems do not support the brand. In other words, distributor identification serves to strengthen the salesperson's adherence to the control systems put in place by his or her employer, and this can work either for or against the brand.

TABLE 2
Model Comparison and Effects

Relationships	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3 (Hypothesized)	Model 4 (Final)
Control system alignment × distributor identification → brand effort	—	—	.16*	.16*
Brand identification → brand effort	—	.18*	.16*	.16*
Control system alignment × brand identification → brand effort	—	—	n.s.	n.s.
Brand identification → extra-role brand support	—	.38*	.38*	.38*
Brand identification → brand usage	—	.59*	.59*	.59*
Brand effort → brand performance	.42*	.42*	.43*	.41*
Extra-role brand support → brand performance	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Control system alignment × brand performance → overall performance	—	—	.12*	.12*
Control system alignment → brand performance	.26*	—	—	.25*
Covariates				
Brand share of market → brand effort	—	.06*	.06*	.06*
Brand share of market → brand performance	.74*	.82*	.83*	.72*
Suppliers → brand effort	—	.03*	.02*	.02*
Suppliers → brand performance	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Dummy 1 → brand effort	—	.87*	.78*	.80*
Dummy 1 → brand performance	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Dummy 2 → brand effort	—	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Dummy 2 → brand performance	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Dummy 3 → brand effort	—	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Dummy 3 → brand performance	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
d.f.	107	112	116	117
Log-likelihood	–26,203.35	–26,164.22	–25,014.39	–25,011.04
–2LL change	—	—	2299.66*	6.70*
AIC	52,620.70	52,552.44*	50,440.78	50,438.07
BIC	53,113.61	53,068.39*	50,975.15	50,981.66
N	743	743	743	743

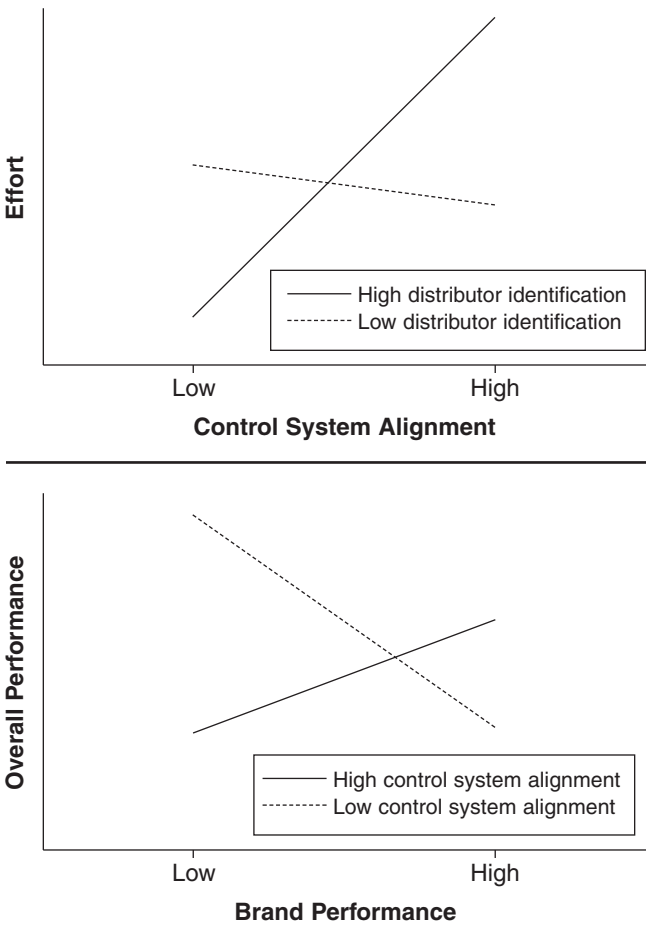
*$p < .05$.
Notes: n.s. = not significant.

If control systems are focused on a particular brand, the salesperson who identifies with the distributor falls in line with the dictates of the distributor and expends effort against the brand. However, if control systems are directing efforts elsewhere, the salesperson lessens effort directed toward the brand, choosing instead to expend effort elsewhere in accordance with the controls. Given the relative slopes of the high and low distributor identification lines, another interpretation is that control systems' positive influence on salesperson brand effort occurs only when the salesperson identifies with the distributor.

Though not hypothesized, we conducted a post hoc analysis to determine whether there was a three-way interaction among control system alignment, distributor identification, and brand identification on brand effort. We did not find a significant three-way interaction.

The lower half of Figure 2 depicts the interaction between brand performance and control system alignment in influencing overall performance for the salesperson, revealing that a salesperson's performance on a particular brand is beneficial to the salesperson's overall sales performance only when that brand is one that the company supports with its control systems. In other words, if a salesperson is performing strongly on a brand that is not prioritized by the company, he or she is likely to be less attentive to brands that are more important contributors to the company's overall success. Strong brand performance pays off in improved total sales performance only when salesperson and distributor both prioritize the brand.

FIGURE 2
Interactions



Discussion

Conclusions and Research Implications

The finding that control systems are effective in driving salesperson behavior is consistent with both economic theory and the literature on sales force controls. When normative pressure and financial incentives support the exertion of effort on a particular brand, the self-interest of the salesperson is facilitated by acting in accordance with those controls. Recognizing this, upstream suppliers spend considerable resources attempting to directly and/or indirectly influence the control systems that downstream channel members put in place to direct their sales forces, and as evidenced by the results of this study, such an emphasis is well placed. However, as the balance of power shifts in the wake of consolidation at all levels of the distribution channel, supplier influence on downstream channel members' sales force controls can become more challenging to attain, particularly in the case of a supplier that is relatively small. This is a huge issue to the supplier because the channel member's sales force is also serving as the supplier's sales force as the channel member sells its products further downstream, whether this is to consumers, business end users, or other intermediaries.

A key argument we make herein is that there are other psychological forces a company could leverage to positively influence the effort that a reseller's sales force places on its brand relative to the host of other brands that the salesperson is responsible for selling. At the same time, resellers should be aware of these potential influences so that their own interests are maximized. This study makes several contributions in this regard. First, to our knowledge, we are the first to explore the forces of organizational identification within the context of a distribution channel, testing the extent to which a salesperson identifies not only with his or her own company but also with an upstream supplier's brand. The results of this study clearly establish not only that salespeople identify to varying degrees with the brands they sell but also that the effort expended against a brand is increased as identification with the brand strengthens. Moreover, there are potentially even longer-term, positive benefits to such brand identification, as evidenced by the positive relationship between brand identification and brand-specific extra-role behaviors that may, over time, further contribute to the brand's strength in the marketplace. This demonstrated notion of brand extra-role behaviors, and the delineation of two distinct types of such behaviors—brand use and extra-role brand support—is another contribution to theory, marrying the literature on organizational citizenship behaviors with the developing work on brand communities in the context of a sales force, while opening the door for further exploration of its potential longer-term consequences. Although we did not find a positive relationship between brand extra-role behaviors and brand perfor-

mance, this may be a function of these supportive behaviors being more important to the brand in the long run rather than them having an immediate impact on short-term sales. For example, though favorable to the brand in the long run, it is less likely that "talking up" the brand to friends and management and defending it from criticism would have a direct effect on brand sales in the current period. This is consistent with organizational citizenship behavior literature, which has found that some organizational citizenship behaviors have a long-term rather than short-term influence on performance (Podsakoff, Ahearne, and MacKenzie 1997).

We also contribute by investigating the simultaneous and sometimes conflicting influence of two forms of identification within an organizational setting—the extent to which a salesperson identifies with his or her company and the extent to which the salesperson identifies with a supplier's brand. Whether these forces support or conflict with each other depends on the nature of a third variable, control systems. When control systems support the brand, brand identification and distributor identification work in concert to further strengthen brand effort. However, when control systems do not support the brand, these two forms of identification are at odds with each other. The salesperson is motivated to act in a manner consistent with the interests of the entity to which he or she identifies, but brand identification prompts action in favor of the brand, while distributor identification urges the salesperson to exert effort in a different direction. The differing effects of these two variables underscore the independent interests of the supplier and distributor. The distributor wants its sales force to act in concert with the control systems it has put in place, and salespeople who identify with the distributorship are more apt to do this. However, this may not be in a particular manufacturer's best interest. The manufacturer benefits instead when the salesperson identifies with its brand because then the salesperson will increase effort on the brand regardless of the direction he or she receives from distributor management, possibly to the detriment of the distributor's overall interests.

Limitations and Further Research

As with any research undertaking, it is important to recognize the limitations imposed by the study design. First, this study is cross-sectional in nature, so though we provided theoretical rationale in support of the directional relationships proposed and tested, there is no statistical evidence of causality. Further research could add value in this regard by taking an experimental or longitudinal approach. A longitudinal study would also enable the testing of possible lags among salesperson attributes, behaviors, and performance outcomes, including the potential cumulative effect of brand extra-role behaviors on brand performance. Second, common method bias is a frequent concern in survey research; however, we took great pains to minimize this risk by obtaining measures from four separate sources: salesperson (identification), route supervisor (brand effort), sales manager (control system alignment), and company records (brand and overall sales performance). Finally, we conducted this study using several firms in the same industry, and though we believe that the results, supported by a strong theoretical foundation, should generalize to other settings, additional studies could confirm this.

Indeed, the results of this study pave the way for many additional avenues of research. This study represents an important start, but we have only begun to scratch the surface on the idea and ramifications of conflicting forms of identification within an organizational setting, and this topic could be extended even further to consumer–brand and customer–company relationships. An examination of the resilience and salience of competing forms of identification under different conditions, along with an exploration of possible adverse consequences of identity conflict to both salesperson and company, could be fruitful. Additional investigation within the current context of a distribution channel, with the introduction of appropriate moderators, could also shed light on related questions, such as whether identification under certain conditions could serve as a complete functional substitute for controls.

Given this study's demonstrated positive impact of brand identification on brand effort and performance, an important issue is determining what the antecedents of brand identification across a distribution channel are. In other words, what steps can a manufacturer take to facilitate the development of brand identification among reseller salespeople? Several potential tactics come to mind—for example, internal marketing communication initiatives, relationship marketing efforts targeting the channel salesperson, increased direct contact between supplier representatives and channel sales representatives, supplier-hosted orientation programs, and distribution of brand-identified apparel. Moreover, suppliers likely engender (or not) brand identification among channel salespeople through the latter's observation of other externally directed activities, such as consumer advertising, public relations coverage, and the selection and behavior of supplier representatives. Research exploring such possible antecedents would be valuable. From a resource allocation perspective, research is needed to instruct companies as to the relative emphasis that should be placed on building salesperson–brand identification versus more traditional efforts to influence channel member control systems.

In addition, although this study focuses on intercompany relationships within a distribution channel, it might be worthwhile to explore the competitive nature of brands within a single company. Brand managers within the same company often compete for resources and for the attention of the sales organization. An examination of how brand identification influences resource allocation and sales-related decisions might be worthwhile, factoring in other forms of organizational identification. Finally, in this study, the supplier and the supplier's brand were the same (i.e., they shared the same name, and the brand was the supplier's flagship). It would be useful to investigate, in cases in which there is not as close an overlap, the extent to which the channel salespeople identify with the supplier itself versus identifying with an individual brand, along with accompanying ramifications.

Managerial Implications

Beyond the theoretical value of the findings, there are important managerial implications to both upstream and downstream companies. For the supplier, an alternative route to influencing the behavior of downstream channel member's salespeople is revealed and substantiated, a finding particularly welcome given industry consolidation and the increasing array of in-house competitive brands carried by many channel members. In attempting to affect sales performance, suppliers have two primary focal points in their interactions with downstream channel members: channel member management and channel member sales personnel. Regarding the first, suppliers invest considerably in attempting to positively affect the amount of resources that channel member management allocates to its brands and the control systems that it puts in place to direct its sales personnel. Influencing this process is one of the critical roles played by the field organizations responsible for calling on the channel member, and the results support the value in this because sales personnel are apt to act in concert with control systems. However, by demonstrating the power of brand identification in influencing salesperson effort and performance, we offer suppliers—even relatively smaller ones that lack channel power—an alternative avenue (beyond incentives and spiffs) to directly influence reseller sales force behavior. Specifically, the results of this study suggest that suppliers can attain incremental effort behind their brands, and ultimately increased brand sales, by forging a strong bond between brand and salesperson such that the salesperson incorporates the brand's defining attributes into his or her own self-concept.

The question is, How can brand identification be built with reseller sales personnel? Although explicating antecedents to salesperson brand identification is beyond the scope of this article, existing research provides some hints. Identification is believed to be a function of the attractiveness and distinctiveness of an entity's identity as perceived by a person along with its construed external identity (i.e., the person's belief as to how others perceive the entity) (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). This implies that the manufacturer should be as deliberate in how and what it communicates to its downstream sales force as it is to its customer base. The implementation of internal branding programs aimed at managing brand perceptions across its extended (i.e., channel member) sales organization may reap dividends for the supplier seeking to gain an edge over competing brands. In addition, research suggests that heightened visibility of a member's affiliation with an organizational entity can build identification (Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail 1994). Therefore, it could be to the supplier's advantage to take appropriate steps to ensure that connection between its brand and its reseller's sales force is as externally visible as possible (e.g., perhaps through branded apparel or other communication mechanisms).

For the downstream company, the findings reinforce the value of engendering high levels of organizational identification because salespeople who identify with the company more closely follow the dictates of its control systems (i.e., they more closely follow the direction of management in performing their responsibilities). At the same time, this study suggests that downstream companies would be well served by casting a wary eye at the extent to which their salespeople identify with any particular supplier's brand, particularly those suppliers that are less important to the channel member's business. Such brand identification works in favor of both the supplier and the channel member when control systems are aligned with the brand, but when the channel member wants its sales force focused on other products, brand identification can influence salesperson effort in a direction counter to that dictated by the controls. For the supplier, high organizational identification is also a "good news/bad news" situation. When control systems are aligned with a brand, high distributor identification has a favorable effect on brand effort and, ultimately, on brand performance, but when control systems are not aligned with the brand, high distributor identification further detracts from brand effort and brand performance. The bottom line for both supplier and channel member is that they should strive to build salesperson brand and salesperson channel member identification, respectively, while viewing with caution the extent to which the salesperson identifies with the other entity.

Appendix
New Construct Scale Measures and Loadings

Control System Alignment: Sales Manager (Loadings in Parentheses)

Managers were asked to allocate 100 points among four named brands and "all other brands" in rating the relative emphasis that was placed on each brand for the following items during a particular month:

- Incentive programs (.97)
- Commission payout (.93)
- Monthly performance plan objectives (.92)
- Sales meeting focus (.98)
- Ride with focus (.97)
- Overall (.99)

Salesperson Brand Effort: Route Supervisor (Loadings in Parentheses)

Using a seven-point Likert scale with 1 being "no effort" and 7 being "very strong effort," route supervisors were asked to rate the effort that each of their salespeople expended on four named brands relative to other brands that the distributor carries and other salespeople the supervisor oversees, specific to the following activities and circumstances:

- Selling in promotions (.91)
- Selling/building displays (.91)
- Expanding shelf space (.91)
- Increasing distribution (.90)
- Placing point-of-sale material (.84)
- Overall (.95)

Brand Extra-Role Behaviors: Sales Representative (Loadings in Parentheses)

Using a five-point Likert scale with 1 being "never," 2 being "rarely," 3 being "occasionally," 4 being "frequently," and 5 being "always," sales representatives were asked to rate the extent to which they do the following:

1. Brand Use:
   - •Personally consume the brand at home (.93)
   - •Personally consume the brand in public settings (.95)
   - •Serve the brand or make it available at parties/gatherings (.80)
2. Extra-Role Brand Support:
   - •Recommend this brand to friends (.75)
   - •Defend this brand from criticism (.70)
   - •Encourage other employees to focus their efforts on this brand (.87)
   - •Encourage distributor management to support this brand (.86)
   - •Report to management competitive initiatives that might impact this brand (.76)
   - •Correct out-of-stock situations, pull up facings, rebuild displays, place POS, etc. in retail accounts on personal time for this brand, e.g., when shopping or in a retail establishment while off work (.66)

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