

# Fallible Human Brands and Consumer Identity-Related Responses

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Cite as:

Preiksaitis Kimberley (2019), Fallible Human Brands and Consumer Identity-Related Responses. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 48th, (9041)

Paper presented at the 48th Annual EMAC Conference, Hamburg, May 24-27, 2019.



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## **Abstract**

Human brands offer consumers cultural material that differs from product-based brands yet are inherently more risky to consumers as they are based on an inherently fallible human being (Fournier, Eckhardt, Fournier, Dean, & Eckhardt, 2018). When human brands encounter critical incidents—discrete moments instructive to consumer reactions (Thomson et al. 2005)—consumers must re-evaluate their understanding of the human brand and its relation to their own personal construction of identity. Using netnographic analysis, this paper examines consumers immediate responses to Lance Armstrong's 2013 admission to doping throughout his successful cycling career. Findings offer insights to the ways in which consumers view sources of blame, respond to the critical incident, and examine their previous identity connections with the human brand, potentially adapting their own personal narrative and perhaps discarding relevant cultural material acquired from the brand in a quest to reform their own identity as a result of the critical incident.

**Keywords:** *human brands; identity; consumer-brand relationships*

**Track:** Product and Brand Management