

Bond University
Research Repository



Antecedents and consequences of self-congruity

Roy, Rajat; Rabbanee, Fazlul K.

Published in:
European Journal of Marketing

DOI:
[10.1108/EJM-12-2013-0739](https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-12-2013-0739)

Published: 13/04/2015

Document Version:
Peer reviewed version

Licence:
Other

[Link to publication in Bond University research repository.](#)

Recommended citation(APA):
Roy, R., & Rabbanee, F. K. (2015). Antecedents and consequences of self-congruity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 49(3-4), 444-466. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-12-2013-0739>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

For more information, or if you believe that this document breaches copyright, please contact the Bond University research repository coordinator.

Introduction

Marketing researchers have long theorized that the motivation to express or present oneself can be a dominant force behind the purchase of branded products (Aaker, 1999). Brand consumption in this sense can fulfil important psychological needs such as constructing, expressing and reinforcing self-identity, asserting individuality and highlighting differences to others (Sirgy, 1982; McCracken, 1986). In fact, it has been known for some time that a match between a consumer's self-concept and the user image of a brand positively encourages consumption behaviour. This psychological congruence is referred as self-congruity in the marketing literature (Sirgy et al., 1997), and has been known to influence a range of consumer behaviours such as brand preferences, brand attitude, and satisfaction (Liu et al., 2012; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Marshall et al., 2008). While a plethora of research investigated the key role of self-congruity in predicting consumers' purchase intentions and loyalty (He and Mukherjee, 2007; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007; Liu et al., 2012; Mazodier and Merunka, 2012; Usakli and Baloglu, 2011); existing research is largely silent about the psychological drivers of attaining self-congruity, which is the key premise of this paper.

The interaction of self and brand underlying self-congruity helps to fulfil a range of self-expressive and social needs (e.g. social assimilation, expressing individuality), leading to positive psychological outcomes such as enhanced self-perception (Sirgy et al., 1997). Such needs may, in turn be influenced by several of the myriad forces that drive consumption behaviour. For example, brand choices driven by congruency between brand user image and self-image may fulfil consumers' need for social assimilation (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). Similarly, identification with a brand image (say, user of a luxury sports car) can signify distinctive social standing and address consumers' need to express individuality. Evidently, the need for social assimilation and the need for differentiation represent opposing forces that influence consumption behaviour (Ruvio, 2008). We argue that self-congruity can help consumers address the simultaneous need for social assimilation versus differentiation, as it is predominantly built upon the notion of self-expression.

In the current work, we propose a parsimonious model focusing on the drivers and consequences of self-congruity, and test it in the context of a luxury versus non-luxury brand. To the best of our knowledge no earlier research has proposed and tested an integrated framework for self-congruity, despite scholars' recommendation to investigate psychological variables that may drive it (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, and Sirgy, 2012; Graeff, 1996). Secondly, recent literature emphasizes on the need for a consumption model that incorporates the interplay of opposing forces such as need for social assimilation versus need for differentiation, as these factors provide richer and more elaborate explanations of consumption behaviour (Ruvio, 2008). The current study considers the interplay of such opposing forces, and thus, better explains the consumer motivation behind the purchase of a luxury brand. Thirdly, although the notion of self-congruity itself has been linked to the consumption of a luxury brand, scholars recommend the need to understand how self-congruity relates to non-luxury brands (Liu et al., 2012). This study shows empirical evidence that the psychological drivers such as social desirability, avoidance of similarity and status consumption positively influence self-congruity for the luxury brand as opposed to their negative influence on the self-congruity for the non-luxury brand. Finally, one of the key outcome variables of the current study is re-usage of luxury brand shopping bags, a phenomenon that has received little attention from the existing researchers (Prendergast, Ng and Leung 2001). The current study therefore, contributes to the extant 'self-congruity' literature by addressing the above mentioned research gaps.

In the following sections, we focus on theoretical aspects, develop our conceptual model and research hypotheses. Following this, we discuss our method of data collection and report our main findings followed by a discussion of managerial implications, limitations and avenues for future research.

Conceptual Model, Theory and hypotheses

The conceptual model for the current work is shown in Figure 1. The model posits that social desirability, need for uniqueness and status consumption can predict self-congruity for a luxury

brand. The model also affirms that self-congruity has a positive and direct association with self-perception and an indirect association with motivation to re-use a shopping bag from the luxury brand. The model is then applied to a non-luxury brand to contrast and compare the findings. In order to explain the model fully, the theory on self-congruity is introduced first. It is then followed by conceptual argument that social forces may shape self-identity concerns and drive self-congruity for the luxury brand.

Self-congruity

It is well documented in the marketing literature that consumers' purchase brands that act as vehicles for self-expression (Aaker, 1999; Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012). Consumers use brands not only for their functional benefits but also consume the symbolic meaning behind brands that are portrayed through brand images (McCracken, 1986). Brands with distinctive image or personality enable consumers to express, affirm or enhance their sense of self (Aaker, 1999; Park and John, 2010).

Research shows that consumers tend to choose brands whose images are similar to their self-concepts or self-images (Liu et al., 2012; Mazodier and Merunka 2012). Consumer behaviour researchers argue that consumer's self-concept interacts with product user image and generates a subjective experience referred as self-congruity (Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg, 2000). Sirgy et al. (2000) identifies four different types of self-concepts, namely (a) actual-self ("me as I am") (b) ideal-self (how a person would like to see himself) (c) social-self (how others see the person) and (d) ideal-social self (how a person would like to be perceived by others). Self-congruity can be achieved across all the above self-dimensions (Hosany and Martin, 2012).

Achieving congruence between various self-dimensions and brand image serves important psychological functions such as satisfaction of self-consistency, self-esteem, social-consistency and social approval needs (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Hosany and Martin, 2012). For example, self-consistency needs are satisfied when a consumer perceives a congruity between the product user image and his/her actual self- image (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Sirgy, 1982). Similarly, congruity between product user image and consumers' ideal self-image leads

to higher satisfaction of self-esteem needs, which can be a potential driver of consumer behaviour (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Johar and Sirgy, 1991). Again, congruence between product user image and consumer's social self leads to fulfilment of social-consistency needs, while social-approval needs are fulfilled based on congruity between product user image and ideal social self-image (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Sirgy, 1982). Matching of product user image with consumer's self-concept therefore provides a "self-congruity" route to persuasion leading to favourable product and brand attitudes (Liu et al., 2012; Johar and Sirgy, 1991).

In the current work, we focus on self-congruity as conceptualized by Sirgy and his colleagues (1997). According to this research, self-congruity is defined as a holistic, gestalt-like perception that is induced in the mind of a consumer when he/she conjures up a typical product-user image, and perceives psychological congruity between his/her self-image and the product-user image (Liu et al., 2012; Sirgy et al., 1997). Current marketing literature uses the terms self-congruity, self-congruence, self-image congruence and image congruence interchangeably to describe this phenomenon (Hosany and Martin, 2012).

Self-congruity has important implications for consumer behaviour. It facilitates positive attitudes towards brands (Ericksen, 1996; Sirgy et al., 1997), and affects brand preferences, purchase intentions and loyalty (He and Mukherjee, 2007; Mehta, 1999). Image-congruity studies in different product domains such as automobiles, precious jewellery and tourism further show that it has a positive effect on brand satisfaction (Jamal and Al-Marri, 2000), and may even influence store patronage (Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg, 2000). In the context of luxury fashion branding, research shows that user and usage imagery are stronger predictors of brand attitude and loyalty (Liu et al., 2012).

Existing research on 'self-congruity' predominantly focuses on the effects of self-congruity on outcome variables like attitudes and intentions towards the brand (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak

and Sirgy, 2012; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Liu et al., Li, 2012). However, research that studies the antecedent variables that may drive self-congruity is limited. Only a few studies focus on antecedents like self-monitoring, advertising appeals and product conspicuousness (Sirgy, Grewal and Mangleburg, 2000; Graeff, 1996; Johar and Sirgy 1991). Scholars therefore recommend more research to better understand various motivations that enhance consumers' self-congruity with a brand (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak and Sirgy, 2012). Further, while current literature has studied the influence of self-congruity on luxury brand consumption (Liu et al., 2012), it is not clear as to how this variable may influence consumption decisions for non-luxury brands. This study taps into these research gaps and propose an integrated model of self-congruity incorporating its antecedents and consequences. The model is tested across a luxury versus non-luxury brand.

Antecedents to self-congruity

Unlike prior work, we focus on psychological variables that influences the way consumers' present themselves in the process of symbolic consumption. Building on the notion that traits like need for uniqueness and susceptibility to normative influence can impact luxury brand consumption (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012), the current work argues antecedent variables like social desirability, need for uniqueness and status consumption influence consumers' self-congruity with a brand.

Social desirability

Social desirability refers to "a need for social approval and acceptance, and the belief that this can be attained by means of culturally acceptable and appropriate behaviour" (Marlowe and Crowne, 1961, p. 109). Existing research shows that consumers often engage in protective self-presentations conveying desirable impressions in order to avoid losing approval and to get along with others (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2012; Wolfe, Lennox and Cutler, 1986). Social desirability, in this sense, might increase susceptibility of branded product consumption to normative social influences

(Mangleburg, Doney and Bristol, 2004). For example, findings show that consumers are motivated to enhance self-image with products or brands that conform to other's expectations during purchase decisions (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel, 1989).

As mentioned before, consumers' make brand choices to construct their self-identity and present themselves to others based on the congruity between brand-user image associations and their self-images (Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Such congruity in turn, fulfil needs for social approval and influence consumer behaviours that are perceived as instrumental to pleasing others (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). In fact, consumers' need to maintain or enhance their self-concept motivate them to associate with positively evaluated groups, and distance themselves from negatively evaluated groups (Mangleburg, Doney and Bristol, 2004). Consumers therefore choose a brand to associate with the typical brand user representing a desirable social group (Escalas and Bettman, 2005).

High-end luxury brands as opposed to non-luxury brands can serve as tools for social integration and enable consumers to reflect ties with family, community, cultural groups including brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The normative influence on consumption is even stronger when it is visible to others i.e. in case of conspicuous brands (Batra, Homer and Kahle, 2001). However, this may not be the case for a non-luxury brand. In everyday life, rewards for conformity and social approval tend to be strong driver of consumer behaviour (Fromkin and Snyder, 1980). Based on above it is hypothesized:

H1: Social desirability associates positively with self-congruity for the luxury brand but not for the non-luxury brand.

Need for uniqueness - Avoidance of similarity

While we argued above that consumption may indeed be influenced by need for social conformity, social interactions may sometimes promote deviation from the norm. Literature suggests that social identity is susceptible to a fundamental tension that arises from balancing the need for conformation and similarity with others to a countervailing need for uniqueness and individualization (Brewer,

1991). Consumers are capable of balancing interplay of such opposing forces. An individual can indeed express uniqueness in consumption behaviour without damaging his sense of social assimilation (Ruvio, 2008).

Consumers often attain intrinsic satisfaction from such counter-conformity resulting in the perception that they are separable from the masses; a phenomenon referred to as need for uniqueness (Fromkin and Snyder, 1980). Such consumers perceive themselves to be unique and often make an effort to establish their specialness by acquiring special or scarce products (Snyder, 1992). An individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others is achieved through acquisition of consumer goods that develop and enhance his/her personal and social identity (Tian, Bearden and Hunter, 2001). Based on this line of work, Tian et al (2001) developed a multi-faceted construct called consumers' need for uniqueness (CNFU). CNFU is posited to have three dimensions to capture the consumers' need for differentness. These dimensions are named as "creative choice counter conformity", "unpopular choice counter conformity" and "avoidance of similarity".

Consumers' demonstrate creative choice counter-conformity by making choices that helps to create a unique personal style, e.g. purchase a leather jacket and then assemble patches to make it a leather fighter pilot jacket. Similarly, unpopular choice counter conformity focuses on consumption behaviour that challenges existing consumer norms to emphasize differentness from others, albeit with the likely risk of facing social disapproval. An example would be a bizarre choice of shoes or clothing. Finally, avoidance of similarity refers to eschewal of consumption behaviour that is common place in order to establish one's distinctiveness (Tian et al., 2001).

We posit that consumers' of luxury brand are driven by need to avoid similarity with others (e.g. users of a non-luxury brand), since it helps them to achieve social distinctiveness. Firstly, luxury brands tend to symbolize success and are more expensive compared to the average in the product category (Fournier and Richins, 1991). Secondly, the lofty price tags and snob appeal associated with such brands encourage a feeling of superiority in consumers as only few can afford such products (Garfein, 1989). Further, consumption of luxury brand often reflects consumer lifestyle and can be

instrumental to expressing social distinction (Sirgy, 1982). Unlike non-luxury brands, consuming luxury brands therefore supports Veblen's (1899) classical argument that members of a certain class (e.g. high social standing) consume conspicuous goods to dissociate themselves from others e.g. those of lower social standing. Recent findings also show that consumers are indeed motivated to pay premium prices for luxury brands, since it signals their social distinctiveness (Han, Nunes and Dreze, 2010). Summarizing, consumers of luxury brand may perceive greater congruity with the product user image of a luxury brand since it emphasizes the notion of distinctiveness.

H2: Avoidance of similarity associates positively with self-congruity for the luxury brand but not for the non-luxury brand.

Status consumption

Thorstein Veblen in his classic treatise, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) argued that people use fine silverware as a display of wealth, rather than to convey food into their mouth. Evidently, what confers status according to Veblen is the wasteful exhibition of wealth. Status consumption has been defined as a "tendency to purchase goods and services for the status or social prestige value that they confer on their owners" (Eastman, Goldsmith and Flynn, 1999 p.41). Even contemporary researchers in marketing endorse similar views based on symbolic role of possessions in consumers' lives (Solomon, 1983, Belk, 1988).

In terms of luxury branding, such products can send meaningful social signals to others regarding the status of their owners (Han, Nunes and Dreze, 2010). Consumers use brands to convey the type of person they are (Wernerfelt, 1990), and conspicuous brands (e.g. status brands with loud logos) have been found to serve important social functions of self-expression and self-presentation (Wilcox, Kim and Sen, 2009; Park and John, 2010). The associations between a brand and its type of users often help consumers to derive symbolic meaning from the brand (Muniz and O' Guinn, 2001). For example, luxury brands often help consumers to reinforce their status in the society (Hosany and Martin, 2012). In this sense, consumers who crave status may find their self-image as more congruent

with typical consumer of a luxury brand as opposed to non-luxury brands. For example, consumers driven by status may prefer luxury brand cars (Han, Nunes and Dreze, 2010) and may find their self-image as more congruent with typical owners of the brand.

H3: Status consumption associates positively with self-congruity for the luxury brand but not for the non-luxury brand.

Consequents to self-congruity

Existing literature states that the effect of self-congruity on consumer behaviour is mediated by a range of self-concept motives. For example, Sirgy et al. (2000) argue that in the context of retail environment, the effect of self-congruity on store patronage can be mediated by motives related to self-consistency and self-esteem. Similarly, self-consistency and social confirmation motives have been found to mediate the effect of self-congruity on store attitude and loyalty (He and Mukherjee, 2007).

In an interesting research on clothing preference, Ericksen and Sirgy (1992) found that female employees are more likely to wear the outfits that match their self-image. Wearing a professional outfit reinforces professional image of a woman leading to higher self-confidence. Research findings with passengers of cruise vacation show that higher self-congruity with perceived image of other tourists contribute to overall pleasant trip experience e.g. a positive psychological outcome (Hosany and Martins, 2012). Taylor, Strutton and Thompson (2012) find that consumer's self-congruity with a brand positively influence their desire to express themselves and spread positive online word of mouth. Self-congruity thus seems to promote a plethora of positive psychological outcomes related to the maintenance and enhancement of the self. In the similar vein, research on luxury branding shows that self-congruity with the brand affects self-related outcomes and influence attitudes towards the brand (Liu et al., 2012; Park and John, 2010). We therefore posit-

H4: Self-congruity associates positively with self-perception for the luxury but not for the non-luxury brand.

A range of dependent variables like brand evaluation, brand satisfaction, brand preference, and loyalty, store patronage, and purchase intention have been studied in the context of self-congruity (Hosany and Martin, 2012). In the branding context, self-congruity predicted greater liking for a focal brand e.g. a referent brand as compared to other brands in the category (Sirgy et al., 1997), and can further motivate behaviours like sharing messages in an online environment (Taylor, Strutton and Thompson 2012). Similarly, consumers who experienced self-congruity with respect to a certain automobile brand reported higher levels of brand loyalty (Kressman et al., 2006). In sum, existing research show that attitudes and behavioural intentions are significantly predicted, when consumers perceive greater levels of self-congruity with the brand (Yim, Chan and Hung, 2007).

In the current research, consumers' intention to re-use shopping bags is used as one of the key outcome variables. We have conceptualized this variable based on observed consumer behaviour of storing and re-using shopping bags with branded logos (Prendergast, Ng and Leung, 2001). We have conceptualized this dependent variable based on behaviours like careful storage of shopping bags, re-usage the same on special occasions, and carrying them around as a fashion symbol. We have named this variable as “hedonic usage” for shopping bags. Extant findings show that branded shopping bag re-usage can serve as a symbolic means of self-expression (Han, Nunes and Dreze, 2010), and is driven by emotions such as vanity (Prendergast, Ng and Leung, 2001). The underlying motivations to re-use shopping bags (e.g. symbolic expression, emotion) is aligned with notion of hedonic consumption (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), and can be distinguished from more utilitarian usage of shopping bags based on convenience (Prendergast, Ng and Leung, 2001). Given our prior discussion on the positive influence of self-congruity on attitude and behaviours (Yim, Chan and Hung, 2007), it is posited.

H5: Self-congruity associates positively with hedonic usage for the luxury but not for the non-luxury brand.

Finally, extant literature argues that consumers carry shopping bags from branded retailer as a means of self-expression, and to bolster self-perception (Park and John 2010; Prendergast, Ng and Leung, 2001). For example, Prendergast, Ng and Leung (2001) argue that consumers like to use branded shopping bags for self-expression; although no causal evidence was provided in their research. Similarly, Park and John (2010) conducted experiments to show that consumers reported more positive self-related outcomes when they carried a branded paper bag (Victoria's secret), as compared to an ordinary unappealing bag. In order to test this, Park and John (2010) first conducted a pre-test to confirm that consumers indeed perceived Victoria's secret as glamorous, feminine and good looking. After this, they ran experiments during which consumers were asked to briefly carry shopping bags from Victoria's secret and report their self-perceptions. Results showed that after carrying Victoria's secret shopping bags consumers perceived themselves to be more feminine, glamorous and better looking as compared to carrying an ordinary shopping bag.

Park and John (2010) work was however not in the context of self-congruity. In the current work we therefore use evidence that links self-related outcome and behaviour that is specific to the context of self-brand congruity e.g. Taylor, Strutton and Thompson (2012). This work finds evidence that the level of self-congruity with the brand positively affects consumers' motivation to enhance the self through posting of online word of mouth messages. Further, consumers are more likely to share the online messages when their motivation to express the self is higher. In other words, self-congruity positively influence consumers' self-related outcome which eventually affects their behavioural responses. Therefore, we believe that a motivation to enhance the self leads to a specific behaviour like using a shopping bag. This leads to the final hypothesis, H6. However, given the causal nature of findings in the literature e.g. Park and John (2010), we also test a rival model which is later described in the 'results' section.

H6: Self-perception associates positively with hedonic usage for the luxury but not for the non-luxury brand.

The hypothesized relationships are shown in Figure 1.

< Insert Figure 1 here >

Methodology

Tiffany and Co. vs. Mazzucchelli's

This study aims to explore the antecedents and consequences of self-congruity in the context of luxury brand as compared to a non-luxury brand. Based on a pre-test, the study identified Tiffany & Co. as a high end luxury brand as compared to Mazzucchelli's. Tiffany's is well-known for its signature jewellery and accessories, while Mazzucchelli's product offering also includes jewellery and accessories for the local Australian market. Our sample respondents (university students) are familiar with both the brands. The current literature also supports the usage of student sample for consumer behaviour (Liu et al., 2012; Ok, Shanklin and Back, 2008).

Data collection procedure

Pre-test. 24 students from the same subject pool participated in the pre-test but did not take part in the original study. The subjects answered a number of questions on a nine point semantic differential scale, specifically whether they perceived Tiffany's to be higher end, luxurious, classic, self-expressive, conspicuous and distinctive as compared to Mazzucchelli's. Results showed that compared to Mazzucchelli's, Tiffany's was perceived as high end (Mean of 7.1 vs. 5.3, $F(1,23) = 23.9$, $p < 0.001$), luxurious (Mean of 7.0 vs. 5.4, $F(1,23) = 15.6$, $p < 0.01$), classic (Mean of 7.1 vs. 5.3, $F(1,23) = 13.4$, $p < 0.01$), self-expressive (Mean of 6.5 vs. 5.5, $F(1,23) = 6.6$, $p < 0.05$), represented conspicuous consumption (Mean of 6.4 vs. 5.1, $F(1,23) = 9.7$, $p < 0.05$), and more distinctive (Mean of 6.1 vs. 4.8, $F(1,23) = 8.4$, $p < 0.05$). Thus the pre-test results supported that the brand manipulation was successful.

Main study: The data for the main study was collected through a survey. The survey was conducted among a sample of female students in a large university in Western Australia. Only female students were considered for the survey due to their high involvement in shopping, greater knowledge of lifestyle brands, and higher intention to store and re-use logoed shopping bags as compared to their male counterparts (Park and John, 2010; Kinley, Josiam and Lockett, 2009; Seo et al., 2001).

The data collection took place over a period of two weeks. A total of 250 students were approached during lunch time in the university campus. 36 students refused to participate in the study. A total of 214 filled in questionnaires were received; out of which 12 were discarded due to incomplete answers. A final sample of 202 responses was used for further analyses. The age of the respondents ranged from 18-35 years with the average age being 22.63 years.

Survey instrument and sources of scale items

The survey instrument comprised of four sections. The first section was related to Tiffany & Co. and the second one was for Mazzucchelli's. The order of presentation of brands was counterbalanced. In the first and second section, respondents were shown pictures of shopping bag from either Tiffany's or Mazzucchelli's, following which they answered a number of questions related to the dependent variables - 'hedonic use' and 'self-perception'. Following Prendergast, Ng and Leung (2001), we operationalized hedonic use using three items such as 'I am likely to keep the shopping bags from Tiffany's (Mazzucchelli's) and store them in a proper manner', 'I am likely to reuse the shopping bags from Tiffany's (Mazzucchelli's) only for special occasions', and 'I am likely to tote the shopping bags from Tiffany's (Mazzucchelli's) as a status symbol'. The second dependent variable 'self-perception' was also brand specific and adapted from extant literature (Park and John, 2010). The items used were 'Carrying shopping bags from Tiffany's/ Mazzucchelli's can make me feel unique', 'Carrying shopping bags from Tiffany's/ Mazzucchelli's can make me feel desirable', 'When I carry shopping bags from Tiffany's/ Mazzucchelli's, the brand can reflect who I am as a

person', and 'Carrying shopping bags from Tiffany's/ Mazzucchelli's can enhance people's perception of me'. Following this, the questionnaire included four items to measure self-congruity sourced from Sirgy et al. (1997).

In the third section of the questionnaire, variables such as social desirability, CNFU - avoidance of similarity, and status consumption were measured. A five items scale adapted from Hays, Hayashi and Stewart (1989) was used to measure social desirability. Consumers' desire to avoid similarity was measured with a four items scale adapted from Tien et al. (2001), which was used in previous studies (e.g. Ruvio et al., 2008). Status consumption was measured with a five items scale adapted from Eastman, Goldsmith and Flynn (1999). All items were on a seven point Likert scale with end points like 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Strongly Agree'. Finally, the fourth section of the questionnaire comprised of demographic information of the respondents.

Scale assessment

The scale items used in this study were assessed for their uni-dimensionality, reliability, and validity (Anderson and Gerbing, 1982; Veloutsou, 2007). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was run to confirm that items actually loaded on the original constructs (Daunt and Harris, 2011). The EFA results revealed that the constructs were uni-dimensional and each item loaded highly on the respective construct except social desirability. The EFA of social desirability revealed two items (out of five) with cross loadings. These two items were deleted and were not considered for further analysis, which is in line with what has been done in existing literature (Sin et al., 2005). The EFA results demonstrated uniform results in terms of uni-dimensionality for those constructs, which were contextually adjusted for Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's (such as self-congruity, self-perception, and hedonic use).

Following Gerbing and Anderson (1988), a two-step approach to structural equation modelling was adopted: running a measurement model to assess the convergent and discriminant

validity prior to estimate the path relationship from a structural model. Consequently, a confirmatory factors analysis (using AMOS version 19.0) was conducted to assess the validity of the multi-item scales in context of both Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's. The convergent validity of the constructs were examined by checking the substantial factor loading of all items (Hair et al., 1995; Raimondo, Miceli and Costabile, 2008) which significantly (at 0.01 level) loaded onto the expected latent construct (see Table 1, Table 1A and Table 1B).

< Insert Table 1, 1A and 1B here >

Further, an AVE (average variance extracted) greater than 0.50 for each construct also supported convergent validity of the constructs of interest (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Correlation values between the constructs: social desirability, avoidance of similarity, status consumption, self-congruity, and self-perception were within the acceptable limit that supported discriminant validity of the constructs (Kline, 2005). The lowest value of construct reliability (CR) was 0.77 for social desirability, which suggested adequate internal consistency of the scale items used in the study. Average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct revealed that all exceeded the minimum cut-off point of 0.5 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2010). The square root of AVE of a given construct was greater than the absolute value of the standardized correlation value between the given construct and the remaining other constructs (see Table 2A and 2B), which supports convergent and discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

< Insert Table 2A and 2B about here >

In addition, the goodness of fit measures for the measurement model show a good fit for both Tiffany and Mazuchelli's (For Tiffany: $\chi^2 = 326.32$, $df = 213$, $\chi^2/df = 1.53$, RMSEA = 0.051, CFI = 0.96, NFI = 0.89; TLI = 0.95; and SRMR = 0.048; and for Mazuchelli's: $\chi^2 = 351.66$, $df = 214$, $\chi^2/df = 1.64$, RMSEA = 0.057, CFI = 0.95, NFI = 0.88; TLI = 0.94; and SRMR = 0.06), which also lend support that the constructs were different from each other (Garson, 2011).

This study employs self-reported measures for both independent and dependent variables from the same source in a single survey. Hence the study may suffer from common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In order to minimize the effects of common method bias, we carefully crafted a cover letter for the questionnaire assuring respondents' anonymity and requested for their honest responses. This helped reducing respondents' evaluation apprehension and thus controlled possible sources of common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). We also used visuals of the brands (Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's) as cues to subsequent question items so that the respondents can relate them appropriately with the given context. In addition, based on Harman's single-factor test, the unrotated factor solution was run for all the items used in the study, which generated more than a single-factor and lend support for the fact that common method bias is not an issue for this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although it is difficult to identify the exact source(s) of the method bias, however these procedural remedies help us to minimize the effect of common method bias in this study (Sharma, 2011; Ramaseshan et al. 2013).

Results

The hypotheses for the study were tested through structural equation modelling (SEM) using AMOS 19. The fit indices of our structural model showed acceptable fit with the data for both the brand (for Tiffany: $\chi^2=354.19$; $df = 219$; $\chi^2/df = 1.61$; RMSEA = .055; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; NFI = .88; SRMR = 0.06; for Mazzucchelli's: $\chi^2=356.07$; $df = 220$; $\chi^2/df = 1.62$; RMSEA = .055; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; NFI = .88; SRMR = 0.06). The structural path relationships and the corresponding coefficients for both the brand are shown in the Table 3A and 3B.

< Insert Table 3A 3B about here >

Table 3A and 3B revealed different results for Tiffany and Mazuchelli's. For Tiffany, self-congruity is positively associated with its three antecedents – social desirability ($\beta = 0.18$; $p < 0.05$); avoidance of similarity ($\beta = 0.12$; $p < 0.05$), and status consumption ($\beta = 0.59$; $p < 0.05$). Self-congruity has significant positive **influence** on self-perception ($\beta = 0.56$; $p < 0.05$). The relationships

of self-congruity with hedonic use was found to be insignificant ($\beta = -0.02$; $p > 0.05$). Self-perception has significant positive **influence** on hedonic use ($\beta = 0.92$; $p < 0.05$).

On other hand, for Mazzucchelli's, self-congruity is negatively associated with all of its antecedents – social desirability ($\beta = -0.17$; $p < 0.05$), avoidance of similarity ($\beta = -0.13$; $p < 0.05$), status consumption ($\beta = -0.58$; $p < 0.05$). Self-congruity has significant negative **influence** on self-perception ($\beta = -0.27$; $p < 0.05$) as opposed to the positive **influence** found in case of Tiffany for the same relationship. The **influence** of self-congruity on hedonic use was found to be negatively significant ($\beta = -0.15$; $p < 0.05$). Self-perception has significant positive **influence** on hedonic use ($\beta = 0.60$; $p < 0.05$), but the strength of the **influence** is lower than the β – value for the same relationship in case of Tiffany. The above results therefore, fully support H1, H2, H3 and H4. H5 was not found to be supported. The result for our sixth hypothesis (H6) shows that self-perception has positive **influence** on hedonic use for both Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's, although the **influence** of self-perception on hedonic use is found to be stronger for Tiffany ($\beta = 0.92$) than Mazzucchelli's ($\beta = 0.60$). H6 was therefore partially supported.

Since, self-congruity was not found to have a significant effect on hedonic use for Tiffany's, we further examined the mediating role of self-perception in relationships between self-congruity and hedonic use for both Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's. Following Reimann et al. (2010), we examined both the direct effect (from self-congruity to hedonic use) and the indirect effect (from self-congruity to hedonic use via self-perception) to check for full/partial mediation. For Tiffany, the indirect **influence** was found to be significant for hedonic use ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = 0.52$, $CR = 4.63$, $p < 0.05$) but the direct effect of self-congruity on hedonic use was insignificant. Hence, self-perception fully mediates the relationship between self-congruity and hedonic use in context of Tiffany. For Mazzucchelli's, the indirect **influence** was also found to be significant for hedonic use ($\beta_{\text{indirect}} = -0.16$, $CR = -3.83$, $p < 0.05$). Notably, in case of Mazzucchelli's, the direct effect of self-congruity on hedonic use was negatively significant. The indirect effect of self-congruity on hedonic use via self-perception is

negative whereas self-perception has significant positive **influence** on hedonic use. This contradictory result supports inconsistent mediation, where the mediator ‘self-perception’ has a suppressing effect on the relationship between self-congruity and hedonic use (MacKinnon et al. 2000; 2007). The structural path relationships are shown in Figure 2, Table 3A and Table 3B.

< Insert Figure 2 about here >

< Insert Table 3A 3B about here >

Further, we ran a multi-group analysis between Tiffany and Mazzucheli’s to check whether the path coefficients of the two brands significantly differ from each other. Following the procedure of running multi-group analysis in the extant literature (e.g. Walsh et al. 2008), we compared the Chi-square values and degree of freedom of totally free (TF) model (without restricting any of the paths of the model) with the Chi-square and degree of freedom values of fully constrained (FC) model (by restricting all the paths of the model). The fit indices of the TF model was found to be satisfactory with $\chi^2 = 714.37$, $df = 440$, $\chi^2/df = 1.62$, RMSEA = 0.039, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94 and NFI = 0.88. On the other hand, the fit indices of the FC model was also found to be acceptable with $\chi^2 = 1020.88$, $df = 462$, $\chi^2/df = 2.21$, RMSEA = 0.055, CFI = 0.90, TLI = 0.89 and NFI = 0.83. The differences of Chi-Square and degrees of freedom values were: $\Delta\chi^2 = 306.51$; $\Delta df = 22$; $p < 0.05$. Therefore, the path coefficients of the two models for Tiffany and Mazzuchelli’s significantly differ from each other.

Rival model

As SEM provides overall model fit indices that enable finding a model that best fit with the given dataset, comparing the proposed model with rival model(s) has become a consensus in SEM (Bollen and Long 1992). In the literature review leading to H6, we have argued that there is inconsistent evidence with regards to direction of causality between self-perception and hedonic usage (Taylor, Strutton and Thompson 2012; Park and John 2010). Although we proposed and eventually found empirical evidence that self-congruity influences self-perception, which then affects hedonic use, one

can argue that self-congruity influences self-perception via hedonic use (Kressman et al., 2006, Park and John 2010). In order to test this possibility, we developed a rival model shown in Figure 3.

< Insert Figure 3 about here >

Following Lee, Pae and Wong (2001), we compared the fit indices of the rival model with that of our main model for both Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's. The fit indices of the rival model was found to be satisfactory for both Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's (for Tiffany: $\chi^2=358.21$; $df = 220$; $\chi^2/df = 1.63$; RMSEA = .056; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; NFI = .88; for Mazzucchelli's: $\chi^2=360.55$; $df = 221$; $\chi^2/df = 1.63$; RMSEA = .056; CFI = .95; TLI = .94; NFI = .88). However, the rival model neither provided a better fit for Tiffany nor for Mazzucchelli's compared to the fit indices of the original model. A Chi-Square difference test (for Tiffany: $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.02$; $\Delta df = 1$; $p < 0.05$; for Mazzucchelli's: $\Delta\chi^2 = 4.48$; $\Delta df = 1$; $p < 0.05$) also indicates that the original model is significantly better than the rival model for both Tiffany and Mazzucchelli's.

Discussion

The study offers a parsimonious model for self-congruity complete with its antecedents and consequences, and tests it in the context of a luxury versus non-luxury brand. Findings show that consumer traits like social desirability, need to avoid similarity and status consumption strengthen self-congruity for the luxury brand. Firstly, results show that when consumers are susceptible to normative influences of symbolic consumption (e.g., be part of an aspirational group) they perceive greater congruity between the self-image and user image for the luxury brand. Secondly, our findings show that the need to be distinct from others also drive self-congruity for the luxury brand. Finally, consumers with a need for social status perceive greater self-congruity between self-image and user image for the luxury brand. In contrast, consumers driven by social desirability, status consumption and need for uniqueness are less likely to align their self-image with the user image for the non-luxury brand.

On the outcome side, self-congruity positively affects self-perceptions and intention to re-use a shopping bag, albeit for the luxury brand. Aligning self-image with the user image of the luxury brand enhances positive perceptions about the self, and this enhanced self-perception in turn encourages re-usage of shopping bag. Findings for the luxury brand show that there was no direct effect of self-congruity on shopping bag usage, rather an indirect effect mediated through self-perception. This seems to be in line with extant findings of Taylor, Strutton and Thompson (2012), who report a lack of direct effect of self-congruity on behaviour (e.g. “likelihood to share” in their study), and finds an indirect effect on behaviour mediated through self-enhancement .

In comparison, aligning self-image with the user image for non-luxury brand discourages shopping bag usage and undermines self-perception. While a strong positive relationship between self-perception and hedonic use was evidenced for the luxury brand, interestingly a positive but relatively weaker relationship was also found to hold for the non-luxury brand as well. A possible explanation could be that since Mazzucchelli’s sell jewellerys in local market, it may be still perceived by some as prestigious to tote around; although our pre-test establishes Tiffany to be significantly more high end and status oriented as compared to Mazzucheli’s.

The current research has important theoretical contributions. Firstly, this is the only study to the best of our knowledge that has reported antecedents and consequences of self-congruity in an integrated framework. While extant research supports that self-congruity drives brand consumption (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, and Sirgy, 2012), the current research further extends it by focusing on the antecedent variables of self-congruity. Secondly, while the process to understand luxury brand consumption has been linked to self-congruity (Liu et al., 2012), the current work applies the notion of self-congruity to compare and contrast the differences that may underlie luxury versus non-luxury brand consumption decisions. Finally, given that there is a clear dearth of research on why consumers re-use shopping bags, the present work extends theoretical understanding of the underlying psychological mechanism that may drive such behaviour.

Managerial Implications

Our findings have important implications for managerial decision making. Luxury brand managers may consider developing brand image based on the status of its owners. For example, a luxury brand can be positioned as a preferred brand amongst high status seekers. The user image associated with the brand may in turn attract conspicuous consumers who would aspire to be part of the group, and in turn distinguish themselves from other consumers e.g. those of a non-luxury brand. However, although an individual can be a status seeker, he or she still may want to emphasize uniqueness within the group. In other words, one may try to balance the opposite needs to “fit in” within a group (e.g. status seekers) and yet avoid similarity with other members in the group. Managers may like to cater to such consumers by offering them “limited editions” of the brand, which will reinforce their unique social status, and yet help them to stand out.

In terms of communication, managers of luxury brands may focus on symbolic messages to attract target consumers. For example, marketing managers may engage transformational advertisements to target consumers with high need for differentiation, in order to help them achieve social distinctiveness (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). Similarly, communication messages can be adapted depending on whether consumers have high need for uniqueness or need to assimilate socially. A luxury product advertisement may promote the brand as a part of social interaction (e.g., high end social gathering) when the need for social assimilation is high. When this need is low, product/brand consumption can be promoted as a unique personal experience.

In terms of packaging, research shows that a paper bag can act as a cost-effective vehicle for outdoor advertising and is often viewed as a walking billboard (Holden, 1998). Further, evidence shows that a well-produced shopping bag can be used 50-100 times and re-usage may therefore continue to promote the brand long after the purchase is made (Prendergast, Ng and Leung, 2001). Managers of luxury brands may therefore use signature designs to enhance prestige and attractiveness associated with their shopping bags. This may further encourage consumers of such brands to store

and re-use shopping bags in the future. Although users of non-luxury brands may not be driven by image concerns, managers of such brands may still like to focus on making their packaging attractive, as our findings show that consumers of such brand may be motivated to re-use their bags as well.

Limitations and future research

The current work is not without its limitations, some of which leaves avenues for future research. Firstly, we have only used “avoidance of similarity” as an antecedent to self-congruity. Future work may consider other facets of CNFU, namely “creative” and “unpopular choice counter conformity”. The current study does not engage a causal design, and future studies may therefore use experimental designs in order to manipulate the key variables in the study.

The present study proposes and tests a model of self-congruity in the context of a luxury (non-luxury) brand; albeit using a student sample. Results may be therefore treated with caveat. For example, students surveyed in the study may have obtained shopping bags with gifts, and not an actual customer of the luxury brand. It is also possible that students surveyed could have been predominantly motivated to show off through re-usage of branded luxury bags, and therefore demonstrate a distinctive behaviour as compared to the actual users. All of these could have influenced the findings. However we allay some of the concerns raised in this regards. Firstly, extant research has used student sample to study self-congruity for luxury brands (Liu et al., 2012). Secondly, although consumers may have different perceptions and attitudes towards re-using shopping bags, nevertheless, evidence shows that consumers indeed engage in such behaviours (Prendergast, Ng and Leung, 2001). Future research may however replicate the current findings using techniques like “mall intercept” to survey actual consumers of the luxury brands, thereby covering wider demographics.

The current study focuses on shopping bag re-usage as driven by consumers’ motivation of self-expression through symbolic consumption. Given that shopping bags may be stored and re-used for utilitarian motives (e.g., convenience), this could have influenced the findings on self-congruity,

especially with respect to the non-luxury brand. Future studies may therefore adopt “utilitarian usage” as the dependent variable and compare the findings with “hedonic usage” in the context of luxury versus non-luxury brands.

An interesting finding from the current work is that aligning self-image with user-image for the non-luxury brand actually undermines self-perception. Future research may look into this further. For example, future work can compare self-congruity for high end luxury with affordable luxury and low end brands, to compare when and how this relationship with self-perception is strengthened or weakened. It is also possible that consumers may hold different views about the self, and are differentially impacted by the image and self-enhancement motives associated with luxury brands. For example, Park and John (2010) show that while entity theorists are driven by self-enhancement motives while using luxury brands, their counterpart’s i.e. incremental theorists are unaffected. Future research can therefore compare how self-congruity for the non-luxury brand influences self-enhancement motives for entity versus incremental theorists. It is possible that for entity theorists self-congruity with the non-luxury brand may undermine self-perception, while incremental theorists may be unaffected.