
Self-congruence and Consumer's Emotional Brand Attachment: Empirical Evidence from the Automobile Industry in Sri Lanka

M. M. Hakmanage^{a*}, P. A. P. Samantha Kumara^b

^{a, b}Faculty of Management and Finance, University of Ruhuna, Sri Lanka*

A B S T R A C T

Emotional brand attachment plays a major role in the competitive advantage aspect. Creating emotional brand attachment is very comprehensive. Therefore, research was conducted to address the key problem of which approach between actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence to use for strong consumer emotional brand attachment. The Purpose of the study is to measure the impact of self-congruence on consumer's emotional brand attachment. Thus, this research will provide a bridge to fulfill the research gap. The study was conducted with the use of empirical evidence from the automobile industry in Sri Lanka. Primary data was collected from 200 respondents through an online Google form questionnaire. The data collection method was the convenience sampling technique and data was analyzed through the SPSS software. According to the findings of the research both alternative hypotheses were accepted. Self-congruence (both actual and ideal self) has an impact on consumers' emotional brand attachment. The researcher discusses important managerial and theoretical implications and recommendations for future research in the current study. This study plays a major role at the industrial level in aiding brand managers to make effective decisions, as well as in guiding brand managers to position their brand names in consumer's minds effectively.

Keywords: actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, emotional brand attachment

1. Background of the study

Customers who are emotionally attached to a brand or a product have a positive impression and behavior towards the relevant company. Brand attachment expresses a tight emotional bond between the consumer and a brand or a product. Those bonds create strong and loyal customers who have a passion regarding the relevant brand. (Loureiro et al., 2017). The value

*Corresponding author: madhumalimnr@gmail.com

of emotional brand attachment to the brand is becoming a more powerful tool to compete with rival firms in The automobile industry. To be a competitive firm in the industry, organizations should directly focus on consumer's emotional brand attachment. In the modern world, it is difficult to create and maintain emotional brand attachment with customers. Companies seek different approaches to create, enhance, and maintain a strong emotional bond with consumers (Pourazad & Pare, 2014). For example, for years cosmetic companies have communicated to consumers that using their products will make them more attractive and beautiful, and bring them closer to realizing an ideal vision of themselves (an "ideal self"). More recently, however, Unilever's Dove line has used models who are more average in appearance, presumably corresponding more closely to how the majority of consumers actually see themselves (an actual self") (Malar et al.,2011). Those two approaches drive many consumers to make an emotional connection with the brand. Acquiring self-congruence on consumer's attachment to the brand has been an important issue in Marketing. However, it is not yet clear how the congruity between the consumer's self-concept and brand image influences product evaluations (kim & Lee, 2005). Thus the focus of the study is to investigate the impact of the self-congruence concept on consumer's emotional brand attachment in the automobile industry in Sri Lanka. The self-congruence concept can be used to select the most suitable approach to fit the consumer's emotional brand attachment. The objectives of the study are to understand the impact of actual self-congruence on the consumer's emotional brand attachment in the automobile industry in Sri Lanka and to understand the impact of ideal self-congruence on the consumer's emotional attachment in the automobile industry in Sri Lanka.

1.1. Problem statement

Self-congruity has largely been neglected in former researches (Ibrahim & Najjar, 2008) Even if there are studies on self- congruence, the said research has not investigated the emotional attachment to a brand. Most of the time the self-congruence concept has been investigated through consumer loyalty, satisfaction, and purchase intention. Previous studies primarily focus on the relationship between self-congruence and positive outcomes, such as consumer loyalty (i.e. intention to recommend or intention to purchase) (Japutra et al.,2019). When considering the automobile industry, past studies have mostly considered satisfaction, loyalty (Jahanshahi et al.,2011), and profitability (Kumar & Kaur, 2016) of the automobile industry, but have not concentrated on the emotional attachment and self-congruence concepts. The little research focused on self-congruence and the automobile industry has not concentrated on emotional brand attachment (Wang et al.,2009). They have checked the self-congruence concept and automobile industry with satisfaction, loyalty, and brand personality (Lee, 2009). Previous research indicates that self-image congruence can influence a variety of customer behavior phenomena (e.g., satisfaction, brand preferences, purchase intentions), and can encourage positive word of mouth and attitudes (Liu et al.,2012; Erikson, 1996). Not only that, but also no empirical studies have been performed yet for self-congruence, emotional attachment to a brand, and the automobile industry in Sri Lanka. The self-image congruence theory has been tested across many product categories such as (shoes, clothing, cameras, soft drinks, beer, credit cards, and so on) (Jamal & Goode, 2001). Thus, there is a gap in the self-congruence literature on the consumer's emotional attachment to a brand with special reference to the automobile industry in Sri Lanka. As such, this research intends to bridge these gaps in the literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Self-congruence

Self-congruence refers to the fit of the brand's personality with the consumer's self (Tan et al.,2019). There are two types of self-congruence: actual and ideal self-congruence (Tan et al.,2019). Actual self-congruence refers to the degree of fit between the brand's personalities and the consumers' conception of who they are, whereas ideal self-congruence refers to the degree of fit between the brand's personalities and the consumers' aspiration for who they would like to be in future (Japutra et al.,2019). In other words, "ideal self-concept," the way a person wants to be or would like to see himself, more closely corresponds to or explains his consumption preference than "actual self-concept," the way a person says he is or "really" sees himself (Ross, 2014). For example, forever cosmetics has used real people who are averagely on the same platform for their promotional advertisements to address how customers actually see themselves (actual-self), and Oriflame cosmetics has used celebrities in its commercials to address how consumers would like to see themselves (ideal self). Several studies conducted on self- congruence show that self-congruence influences compulsive buying (Japutra et al.,2019), consumer's purchase intention (Ye & Wu, 2016), behavioral intention (Ibrahim & Najjar, 2008), and brand loyalty (Park & lee, 2005). Ye and Wu (2016) identified that self-congruence has a significant reciprocal effect on purchase intention. Ahn et al. (2011) observed the relationship between self-congruence, functional congruence, and destination choice; and study results demonstrated that a tourists' destination choice is influenced strongly by functional congruence, but not by self-congruence. According to investigations on self-congruence, the actual self-congruence concept corresponds with impulsive buying, but the ideal self-congruence concept is not a component of the impulsive buying decision-making process. Jamal and Marri (2010) discovered that self-congruence has a positive relationship with brand satisfaction in the automobile market in Europe. Jamal and Goode (2001) Investigated that self-congruence has a correlation with brand preferences and satisfaction. The literature supports that self-congruence appears to be a predictor of brand satisfaction. The self-congruence theory explains the correlation between brands and consumers (Erikson, 1996). Furthermore, theory explains the connection between what consumers consider as important and what a brand offers. According to the self-congruence theory, self-concept positively influences consumers' behavior including attachment, loyalty, trust, and positive word of mouth (Japutra et al., 2019).

2.2. Consumer's emotional attachment to a brand

Customer emotional attachment is a critical construct in marketing literature as it describes the strength of the bond customers have with the brand (So, 2013). The term emotional brand attachment has been used in different ways in different literature (Thomson, 2005; Ahavia, 2005; Albert et al.,2008) use the term "love", while Yim et al. (2008) use the term "customer-firm affection" (Vlachos, 2010). In the current study the term "consumer's emotional attachment" is used. Emotional branding is crucial for firms in breaking the clutter through claiming distinctive associations in today's highly saturated environment where products and services are distinguished from each other by technological, causal, and benefit based differentiations (Akgun et al.,2013). Emotional attachment strongly is connected with other significant constructs including satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and commitment. By understanding what determines the strength of brand attachment, marketers are in a better position to foster more durable relationships with consumers (Hung & Lu, 2018). In an investigation on consumers' well-being and emotional attachment to the brand, findings indicate a positive relationship between emotional brand attachment and the well-being of consumers (Silva et al.,2018). An investigation on the relationship between satisfaction and

emotional brand attachment in the banking industry suggested that there is a direct positive relationship among the indicators (Hayiel, 2018). Brand love and brand romance act as supportive factors in creating an emotional brand attachment (KIm & Sullivan, 2019). Prior research has concentrated on consumer emotional attachment and loyalty (So, 2013; Loureiro et al.,2012). Hung and Lu (2018) Indicated that positive emotions (the rosy side) of brand attachments are a more effective predictor of brand repurchasing intentions and word of mouth behaviors than negative emotions (the blue side) of brand attachment. Nevertheless, consumers who feel a strong attachment to a brand will be more loyal and less price-sensitive (Dunn & Hoegg, 2014). Fedorikhin et al. (2008) argue in their research that brand attachment goes beyond attitude and fit in determining consumers' behavioral reactions, such as purchase intention, willingness to pay, word of mouth, and forgiveness to brand extensions. Dwivedi et al. (2019) found fully mediated effects of emotional brand attachment on social media brand equity. Dunn and Hoegg (2014) investigated a different argument on emotional attachment to a brand, which was that consumers who experience fear in the presence of a brand feel greater emotional brand attachment than consumers who experience other emotions such as happiness, sadness, or excitement.

2.3. Self-congruence and consumer's emotional attachments to a brand

A study by Malar et al. (2011) suggested that consumers are more likely to form a strong emotional connection with a brand that validates who they are right now than with a brand that promises them help to achieve an ideal self. According to the study of Japutra et al. (2018), ideal self-congruence is positively associated with brand attachment. On the other hand, the investigation of Malar et al. (2011) identified a great impact of actual self-congruence on emotional brand attachment. Works found product involvement, self-esteem, and public self-consciousness increase the positive impact of actual self-congruence, but decrease the impact of ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment. The study of Japutra et al. (2018), examined the mediating effect of brand attachment on the relationship between self-congruence and negative behaviors. The study of Malar et al. (2011) referred to the brand attachment as the strength of the emotional link that connects the consumer and brand, involving feelings towards the brand. While considering these studies, emotional brand attachment can be suggested as a facilitator of self-congruence. Hung and Lu (2018) research revealed that customer's positive side (rosy side) emotional brand attachments are driven by autonomous motivations, including satisfying the intrinsic motivation of pursuing pleasure and fulfilling needs for self-determination and self-congruence in the car brand consumption context. Silva et al. (2018) examined that consumers become attached to the brand as a way to ensure that they feel emotionally secure and satisfied about the consumption process. Viewed from this perspective, luxury brands serve as emotional support for consumers. According to Akgun et al. (2013) "emotional attachment is considered as positively influencing emotional brands, the constructs appearing as antecedents of emotional attachment to a brand; namely, emotional memory, ideal and actual self-congruence can be tested as antecedents of emotional branding in future studies".

2.4. Conceptualization

The first objective of the research is to investigate the impact of actual self-congruence on consumer's emotional attachment to the brand. The hypothesis, that is actual self-congruence has the greatest impact on emotional brand attachment, is supported by literature, (Malar et al.,2011).

H1: There is a significant impact of actual self-congruence on consumer's emotional brand attachment.

The second objective of the study tests the impact of ideal self-congruence on consumer's emotional attachment to the brand. This hypothesis, that is ideal self-congruence has the greatest impact on emotional brand attachment, is supported by literature, (Japutra et al., 2018).

H2: There is a significant impact of ideal self-congruence on consumer's emotional brand attachment.

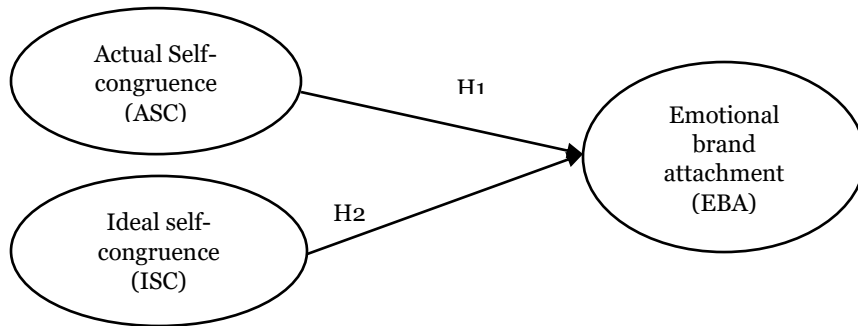


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

2.5. Operationalization

Table 1: Study Variables

variable		Item	Source
Self-congruence	Actual Self-Congruence	This brand is consistent with how I see myself. This brand is a mirror image of me. This brand is similar to me.	(Japutra et al., 2019)
	Ideal Self-Congruence	This brand is the mirror image of the person I would like to be. This brand is similar to the person I would like to be.	(Japutra et al., 2019)
Emotional Brand Attachment	Affection	This brand is consistent with how I would like to be. I feel that I love the brand. My feelings towards the brand can be characterized by affection.	(Dwivedi et al., 2019)
	Passion	I am passionate about the car. My feelings towards the car can be characterized by delight.	
	Connection		I feel captivated by the car. My feelings towards the car can be characterized by a sense of personal connection.
			I feel attached to the car.

3. Research methodology

The current study can be identified as quantitative research and a deductive approach is applied to conduct the study. The research relates to the cross-sectional method because the

study was conducted through a survey at once by using the same sample. The population of the study was all the customers who consume automobiles using their self-congruence. A total of 200 consumers of varying automobile brands in Sri Lanka participated in this study. The same questionnaire was given to the respondents as an online Google form. The methodology of the study is mainly based on primary data. Data was collected through a sample. Primary data, which was the most important part of the study, was collected via a structured questionnaire using a survey given to 200 respondents. The questionnaire was created on Google docs (docs.google.com), which is a useful survey-making website. The questionnaire was distributed through social media from April 2020. The study has used the convenience sampling technique to collect the data. A total of 200 questionnaires were distributed to the automobile users, who reside in Sri Lanka. The Automobile brands considered in this study are Toyota, Nissan, Honda, BMW, Hyundai, Mercedes Benz, Perodua, Audi, Maruti Suzuki, and Mitsubishi.

3.1 Demographic profile

The result of the demographic profile indicates that the majority of the respondents were male: 61% out of a total of 200 respondents, whereas 39% of respondents were female. The highest proportion of the respondents fell into the 25–40 age group (66.5%), followed by the 41–56 age group (23.5%) and above 56 age group (10%). Most of the respondents use Toyota (12%) followed by, Honda (11.5%), BMW (11.5%), Nissan (10.5%), Hyundai (10%), Mitsubishi (10%) and Maruti Suzuki (9%). Furthermore, Audi and Perodua Brand users have responded at an equal minimum level of 8%.

4. Data analysis

4.1. Internal consistency reliability

Table 2: Reliability Test

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
Actual Self Congruence (ASC)	0.781	03
Ideal Self Congruence (ISC)	0.819	03
Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA)	0.882	07

Source: Survey Data 2021

According to Table 2, Cronbach's Alpha value for all these five variables exceeds 0.7. It reveals that there is a strong internal consistency of the scale and it has a high reliability level. It means that all 13 items were reliable to measure the impact of self-congruence on emotional brand attachment.

4.2. Summary of descriptive statistics

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std.
Actual Self Congruence (ASC)	3.8217	0.53767
Ideal Self Congruence (ISC)	3.5150	0.58627
Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA)	3.7407	0.52290

Source: Survey Data 2021

The mid-point value was 3.5 on this 5-point Likert scale. According to Table 3, the mean values of all three variables exceeded 3.5, and values of standard deviation stayed around 0.5 (less than 1). It can be identified that most automobile users have an overall positive attitude towards emotional brand attachment in Sri Lanka.

4.3. Impact of self congruence on consumer's emotional brand attachment

Table 4: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin Watson
1	0.817	0.668	0.665	0.30268	1.793

Source: Survey Data 2021

According to Table 4, *R*-value indicates a simple correlation ($R = 0.817$), which signifies a high degree of correlation between the predictors and dependent variable. The value of the explanatory power (R^2) shows that 66.8% (0.668) of the total variance of consumer's emotional attachment to the brand has been explained by actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence in this study. Only 33.2% of the variance of emotional brand attachment is explained by other influencing factors which are not covered by the current study. Furthermore, the high adjusted *r*-square value implies that the model has a good fit. According to Table 4, and the value of Durbin–Watson estimates is 1.793 (closer to 2). It indicates that the data points among the predictors are independent.

4.4. Anova test

Table 5: ANOVA Test

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.363	2	18.181	198.449	0.000
	Residual	18.049	197	0.092	-	-
	Total	54.411	199	-	-	-

Source: Survey Data 2021

According to Table 5, the *P*-value (sig. value) of the model is as 0.000 and it is less than 0.05 ($p < 0.05$). It indicates that, overall, the regression model statistically significantly predicts the outcome variable. Further, it is disclosed that independent predictors are most suitable to explain consumer's emotional brand attachment.

Table 6: Coefficient

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>T</i>	Sig.
		<i>B</i>	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.975	0.155	-	6.273	0.000
	ASC	0.162	0.061	0.167	2.673	0.008
	ISC	0.610	0.056	0.684	10.969	0.000

Source: Survey Data 2021

According to Table 6, *B* value for Ideal Self Congruence (ISC) is 0.61, which indicates that increasing 1 unit of ISC causes the increase of Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) in 0.61 units, while other independent variable remains constant. The positive *B* coefficient depicts that there is a positive impact between ISC and EBA. The *P*-value (sig. value) for the ISC is 0.00 ($p < 0.05$), which indicates that the impact between ISC and EBA is statistically significant. In addition, when comparing with Actual Self Congruence (ASC), Ideal Self Congruence (ISC) is the most dominant predictor in this study because it is the strongest influencer on consumer's emotional brand attachment, which has the highest standardized

beta equal of 0.684, while that of Actual Self Congruence is 0.167. Actual Self Congruence (ASC) involves a 0.162 B value, which indicates, when ASC increases by 1 unit, EBA would increase by 0.162 units. Positive β coefficient signifies that there is a positive impact between ASC and EBA. The P value for ASC is 0.000 ($p < 0.05$), which shows that the impact between ASC and EBA is statistically significant. According to Table 6, Actual Self Congruence (0.167) has the lowest standardized β value of 0.167, which implies that ASC has a relatively weak influence on consumer's emotional brand attachment.

Table 7: Hypothesis Summary

Variable	P-value	Decision
Actual Self Congruence (ASC)	0.008	H1 – Accepted
Ideal Self Congruence (ISC)	0.000	H2 – Accepted

Source: Survey Data 2021

5. Results and discussion

The current observation provides evidence of the impact of self-congruence on consumer's emotional brand attachment in the automobile industry in Sri Lanka. The results of the hypothesis test logically found that there is an impact on the dependent variable of consumer's emotional attachment while maintaining sig value 0.008 and 0.000 for Actual and Ideal self-congruence respectively. Thus, the actual and ideal self-congruence have an impact on consumer's emotional attachment to automobile brands in Sri Lanka. The findings of previous studies on the self-congruence concept confirmed that actual self-congruence directly influences emotional brand attachment (Malar et al.,2011), and the ideal self-congruence has an impact on emotional brand attachment (Jamal & Goode, 2001). According to previous research on the self-congruence concept and emotional brand attachment, ideal self-congruence has an impact on emotional brand attachment (Japutra et al., 2018). According to empirical observation on self-congruence and emotional brand attachment, consumers prefer automobile brands that fit their self-image congruence.

5.1. Theoretical and practical implications

existing studies indicated the requirement of literature in relation to self-congruence and consumer's emotional brand attachment (Hayiel, 2016). The current study observed the impact of self-congruence on consumer's emotional brand attachment in the Sri Lankan context. The current study contributed to provide inadequate theoretical knowledge regarding self-congruence and consumers' emotional brand attachment. The study provides applicable managerial implications for brand managers about ways of positioning automobile brands on consumer's minds set long term. When positioning a brand in a consumer's mind, brand managers should highly consider the self-congruence concept. Previous research emphasizes that (Silva et al.,2018) "A good understanding of consumer's self-image and brand image by managers can help managers to position their products or brands in the most effective way". According to the empirical findings of the study, the researcher can conclude that the self-congruence concept plays a major role in consumer's emotional brand attachment with regards to the automobile industry in Sri Lanka. Thus, the automobile industry should promote the self-congruence concept to develop an emotional brand attachment to their Automobile Brand. When designing a marketing campaign, brand developers should align it with the self-congruence concept.

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted based on the self-congruence concept and consumer's emotional brand attachment concept with reference to the Automobile industry in Sri Lanka. The study observed the impact of self-congruence (both actual and ideal self) on consumers' emotional brand attachment. Based on observation, the actual and ideal self-congruence have an impact on the consumer's emotional attachment to automobile brands in Sri Lanka. Finally, based on the results, theoretical and practical implications have been proposed to users.

6.1. Limitations and future research

Some respondents rejected to respond questionnaire due to personal reasons (due to the global threat of covid-19, respondents refused to respond to questionnaires). Hence, the researcher had opt for another respondent. The researcher has used a five-point Likert scale to get responses for scaled items. Hence, respondents were limited to 5 options.

There are several unexplained variables that affect the consumer's emotional brand attachment known as product involvement, brand personality, and brand loyalty. Future researchers should pay attention to those unexplained variables to produce a comprehensive image of consumer's emotional brand attachment and should focus on the automobile industry and the self-congruence concept.

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