SELF-CONGRUENCE, EMOTIONAL BRAND ATTACHMENT, BRAND LOVE, AND BRAND ADVOCACY: A CASE OF FASHION BRANDS

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Abstract - Thestudy aims to investigate the interrelationship among actual-self congruence, ideal-self congruence, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand advocacy of fashion brands. The data was collected by questionnaires from 400 samples in Thailand. Then data was analyzed by using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The SEM result revealed that actual self and ideal self-congruence has the influence on emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand advocacy. The results supported five hypotheses of the study, showing 62% explains with emotional brand attachment, 75% explains with brand love, and 78% explains with brand advocacy.

Keywords - Self-Congruence,Actual Self-Congruence, Ideal Self-Congruence, Emotional Brand Attachment, Brand Love, Brand Advocacy, Fashion Brand

I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer needs to express themselves (Mowen & Minor 1998; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007; and Zaltman (1979). Consumers sometime choose a brand which is able to deliver a massage about themselves to other people. Consumers' trait can be reflected on the product/brand that they use. Consumers, when they make purchase decision, are not only oriented to the functional value of the brand but also affected by the symbolic value of the brand (Levy, 1959; Aaker, 1997; and Sirgy, 1982).

Self congruencecan be expressed as actual self-congruence or ideal self-congruence (Kokkoris and Kühnen, 2013). Consumers were thought to prefer brand with images, which arecongruent with their self-concept. Self-image/ brand-image congruityspecifically refers to the match or mismatch of one or more actual self-image, ideal self-image with the corresponding personality images of brand. Thematch between actual self-image and brand image has been referredto as "actual self- congruence"; between ideal self-image and brand image", "ideal self-congruence"(Gardner and Levy, 1959). Thus, individuals can show who their actually are, or who they want to be, projecting ideal self by purchasing and using particular possessions. Attachment as a bond implies one's categorizing the object as part of self-concept and developing a sense of oneness (Park et al., 2010). Malar et al. (2011) argue that consumers are motivated to search for experiences that affirm their self- congruence and one way for them to satisfy the motive is to consume a brand with a personality that is congruent with the actual/ideal self. They maintain that doing so results in positive reinforcement and leads to positive feelings about the brand, which turns to greater emotional brand attachment.Brand love can refer that is the consumers' passion relating to the brand. It is connected the emotion, feel, and strong attitude to the brand. In other words, brand love is a long relationship about customers' identity revealing emotion for a particular brand, and also force them to do the positive behavioral intention (Caroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012; Langner et al., 2015).

When a consumer becomes connected to a brand, this connection can lead to advocacy for the brand where the consumer spreads positive word-of-mouth about the brand to others. (Anderson, 1998). Often, Consumers use word-of-mouth referrals as tools to reduce the amount of information to be processed and to lessen anxiety (Hung and Li, 2007). In addition, the advocate encompasses loyalty, retention, and repurchases (Kotler, 2017).

Especially apparel products can be used as a certain code or language system that creates a message, as well as enables to understand it (Auty and Elliott, 1998). Consumers can 'send a message' to others by clothes they buy and wear. It says what they are like (O'Cass, 2001). Fashion clothing is used as a communication tool helping to reduce the distance between an individual and the society
and indicate individual's group membership or position within a particular societal group (Holman, 1980). Hence, Consumer purchasing and wearing fashion apparels can be helpful to define and communicate a self-image and identity in both personal and social context (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998; Saenger et al., 2013).

Fashion Industry sales growth of only 1.5 percent in 2016. The MGFI expects industry sales growth to reach 2.5 to 3.5 percent globally in 2017. They expect a continued uptick in global fashion industry sales growth of 3.5 to 4.5 percent in 2018 (McKinsey Global Fashion Index, 2017). The global fashion industry is moving into a decisive phase of digital adoption by the mainstream consumer, and online sales of apparel and footwear is projected to grow rapidly about 10 percent in 2020. Moreover, consumer purchase decisions are influenced by social

media about 74 percent, peer reviews and influencer marketing about 55 percent (The state of fashion, 2018). Therefore, the researcher decided to study actual self- congruence, ideal self-congruence, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand advocacy. The researcher focused on fashion brands because of its annual report on the world that fashion brands has the most valuable brand. The fashion brand dominates the world's most valuable brands with 11 of the 500 which is the highest among other brands. (Forbes, 2018) Thus, the researcher noticed that this point is interesting in the field, so the researcher decided to choose this point to the present study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Actual Self-Congruence

Sirgy (1982) explained that single self dimension consists of actual self, real self, and basic self, it was described as the perception of oneself.The actual self congruence as the degree of match between a customer's actual self-image and a brand image.(Sirgy et al., 2000).

B. Ideal Self-Congruence

The ideal self-congruence was defined as the degree of match between a customer's ideal self-image and a brand image (Sirgy et al., 2000). The ideal self-congruence has been labeled as ''ideal self,'' ''idealized self,'' and ''desired self,'' and has been defined as ''the image of oneself as one would like to be'' (Waugh, 2001).

C. Emotional Brand Attachment

In psychology, attachment is defined as an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object (Bowlby, 1979; Thomson, McInnis, and Park, 2005).From a cognitive perspective, this bond can be represented by a rich and accessible memory network and characterized by perceived ease and frequency with which the object-related thought and feeling are brought to mind (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007).However, consumer researchers as well as social and personality psychology researchers have characterized attachment as extending one's self-concept to or identifying oneself with an object (Belk, 1988; Aron et al., 1991; Kleine, Kleine, and Karnan, 1993). That is, attachment as a bond implies one's categorizing the object as part of self-concept and developing a sense of oneness (Park et al., 2010).

D. Brand Love

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined brand love as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name". Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) described seven dimensions of brand love: (1) Passion-driven behavior, (2) Positive emotional connection, (3), Self-brand integration (4) Anticipated separation distress, (5) Long-term relationship, (6) Attitude valence, and (7) Attitude strength. These dimensions are used to help greater understand the construct of love that consumers feel towards a brand.

Brand love is a relationship between a consumer and a brand that has a more intense relationship than the likes. Consumers with a brand relationship can express their feelings about the brand through the story of love because consumers have relationships and emotions with the brand (Halilovic, 2013).

E. Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy was defined as the influential consumers who have built a strong connection with the brand or company at an intrinsic, emotional level. They emphasized that these consumers are not simply repeat purchasers of a brand. They are profiled as those who are passionate about a brand, those who feel that a brand or company's product is a must-have not simply a nice-tohave, and those who wouldn't stop talking to other consumers about how the brand changed their life (McConnell and Huba 2003; Yaverbaum et al. 2006).

The advocacy of word-of-mouth is strong when the message is conveyed in a firm, assertive, and passionate manner and through the usage of body language (e.g., gestures, eyecontact) (Mazzarol et al. 2007). Considering both word-of-mouth themes, word-of-mouth is a more significant event for both the source and receiver when the message involves rich descriptive, evocative language and storytelling and when the message is conveyed in a strong and passionate manner.

F. Conceptual framework and hypothesis

The conceptual framework for the study, illustrated the relationship among actual self-congruence, idealself- congruence, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand advocacy, are shown in Figure 1.

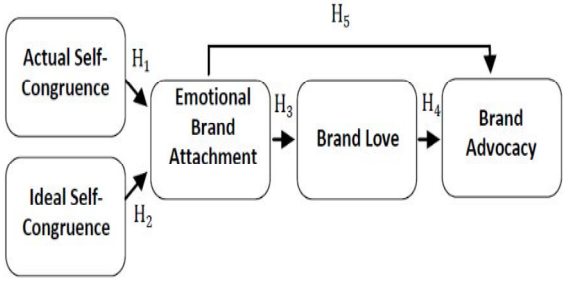


Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework

According to the literature review, Actual self and ideal self-congruence impact on emotional brand attachment (Malär et al., 2011; Ishikawa, 2013; Yusof and Ariffin, 2016). Emotional brand attachment has the influence on brand love(Loureiro et al., 2012; Kaufmann et al., 2015). Brand Love impacts on brand advocacy (Thomson et al., 2005; Kaufmann et al., (2016. Other than emotional brand attachment has the

direct influence on brand advocacy (Park et al., 2010; Wan, 2012).

There are five research hypotheses, including:

H_1 :Actual self-congruity has the positive relationship with emotional brand attachment.

H_2 :Ideal self-congruity has the positive relationship with emotional brand attachment.

H_3 :Emotional brand attachment has the positive relationship with brand love.

H_4 :Brand love has the positive relationship with brand advocacy.

H_5 :Emotional brand attachment has the positive relationship with brand advocacy.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is quantitative research. To get the best result, the researcher decided to use the questionnaires as a material to collect data. Questionnaires were given to a sample of 400 fashion brand customer in Thailand. The questionnaire was divided into 5 parts, including 1) screening question, 2) general information, 3) actual self-congruence, 4) ideal self-congruence, 5) emotional brand attachment, 6) brand love, and 7) brand advocacy

The measure used in the study was the questionnaire developed from reviews of the related literature. Actual self and ideal self-congruence was adapted from Malar et al. (2011), composed of 5 questions. Emotional brand attachment was adapted from Park et al. (2010), composed of 4 questions. Brand love was adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), composed of 8 questions. In terms of brand advocacy was adapted from Park et al. (2006) and Park et al. (2010), composed of 5 questions.

The researcher used the measure of Likert scale 7-point by analyzing Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), composed of measurement and structural model (Kline, 2010).

IV. RESULTS

A. Preliminary Data Analysis

The data analysis of 400 questionnaires found that most of the samples were female (86.3%), aged between 18-24 years (49%), most were single (92%) and their education level is the bachelor (64.5%). The most common career among respondents was student (46.3%) and their average income per month was between 10,000-20,000 Thai Baht (37%). The data has skewness between -.346 and .273, while kurtosis between -.391 and .086. It can be seen that the skewness and kurtosis are within -2 to 2, which shows that the data is normally distributed (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). The correlation coefficient between variables is between .426 and .770. The variance inflation factor (VIF) is between 1.670 and 3.420. Tolerance is between .292 and .599 revealed that no problem of multicollinearity (Stevens, 2009).

B. Measurement Model Analysis

The results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of actual self-congruence (4 items), ideal self-congruence (4 items), emotional brand attachment (3 items), brand love (7 items), and brand advocacy (4 items). The values were determined as follows: Chi-Square = 459.336 df = 199 Chi-Square/df = 2.308, GFI = .902, CFI = .963, RMSEA = .057 and SRMR = .0343.

Reliability and validity analysis revealed that the values of Cronbach's Alpha are between .894 and .915, higher than .70. The values of standardized factor loading are between .697 and .909, higher than 0.50. Thus, the measurements used in this study are within the acceptable level, supporting the reliability and validity of the constructs (Hair et al., 2010; Kline, 2010). Table 1 shows the results of Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient and factor loading of the constructs.

Table 1: Mean, SD, Cronbach's Alpha, and Factor Loading Analysis

Constructs	No. of Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's Alpha	Loading Analysis
Actual self- congruence (ASC)	4	5.10	1.07	.920	.796-.886
Ideal self-congruence (ISC)	4	5.11	1.14	.907	.863-.909
Emotional brand attachment(EBA)	3	5.28	.90	.894	.762-.841
Brand Love (BLO)	7	5.37	.91	.915	.780-.865
Brand advocacy (BAD)	4	5.25	.88	.914	.698-.816

C. Structural Model Analysis

In terms of the investigation of the relationship between actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand advocacy, the results of structural equation modeling analysis revealed coherence with empirical data, with Chi-Square = 463.775, df = 203, Chi-Square/df = 2.285, GFI = .901, CFI = .963, RMSEA = .057, and SRMR = .035 (Byrne, 2010; Kline, 2010) in figure 2, and the research hypotheses in table 2.

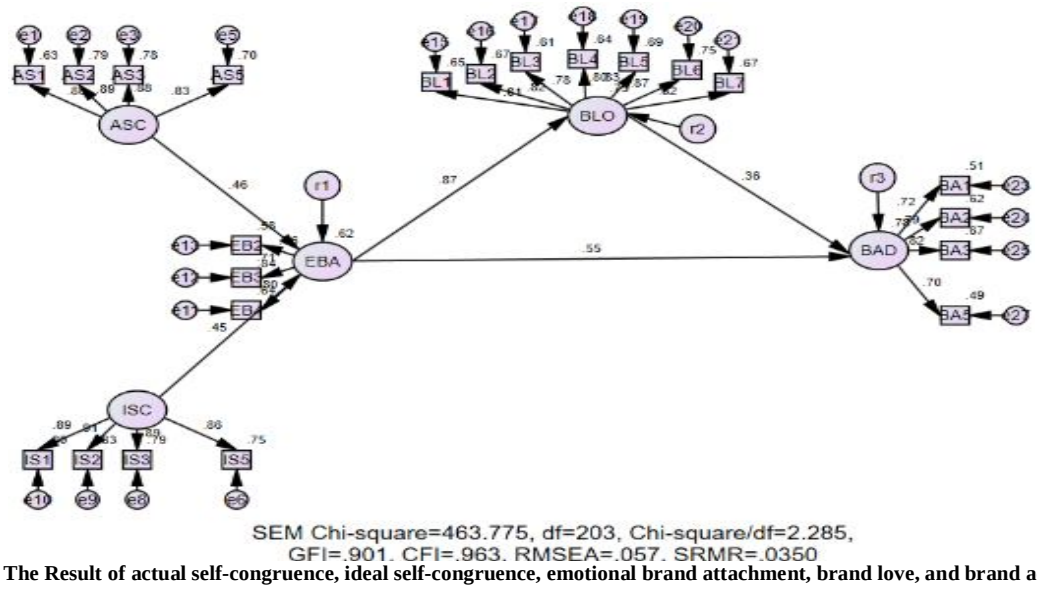


Figure 2: The Result of actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand advocacy.

Table 2: Summary of the Findings of the Study

No.	Hypothesis	β	t-value	Result
H_1	Actual self-congruence will have a positive relationship with emotional brand attachment.	.46	9.118***	Supported
H_2	Ideal self-congruence will have a positive relationship with emotional brand attachment.	.45	9.290***	Supported
H_3	Emotional brand attachment will have a positive relationship with brand love.	.87	8.665***	Supported
H_4	Brand love will have a positive relationship with brand advocacy.	.36	9.628***	Supported
H_5	Emotional brand attachment will have a positive relationship with brand advocacy.	.55	9.624***	Supported

R^2_{EBA} =.62, R^2_{BLO} =.75, R^2_{BAD} = .78
*P < .05, **P < .01, ***P < .001

From Table 2, it can be seen that all hypothesis are supported. The standardized estimates for these hypotheses are all statistically significant (β = .46, P <.001, β = .45, P <.001, β = .87, P <.001, β = .36, P <.001, and β = .55, P <.001). In addition, the model showed 62% explains with emotional brand attachment, 75% explains with brand love, and 78% explains with brand advocacy.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

1. The result of the study revealed that the emotional brand attachment has the direct and indirect influence on brand advocacy through actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, and brand love. The findings of the study help provide a better understanding of brand advocacy in the marketing literature.

2. For fashion industry, they can improve marketing strategies of brand advocacy by applying the results of the study.

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