

Brand Authenticity and Self-Brand Congruence: A Conceptual Approach to Understanding Fashion Brands

Hye-Shin Kim (University of Delaware) and Eunjoo Cho (University of Arkansas)

Keywords: Fashion brand, brand authenticity, self-brand congruence

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses. Consumer demand for brand authenticity is noted as increasing over the past years in contemporary marketing (Brown et al., 2003). Seen as a factor desired by consumers in times of change and uncertainty, consumers search for authenticity to differentiate between competing brand choices (Napoli et al., 2014). As the evaluative qualities of brands have become similar, Gilmore and Pine (2007) note that authenticity is the “new” quality that determines consumers’ brand choices. Bruhn et al. (2012) define brand authenticity with characteristics of continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness. Several studies have expanded understanding of this concept by investigating antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity (Choi et al., 2015; Fritz et al., 2017). Studies found positive relationships between self-brand congruence and brand authenticity (Kumar and Kaushik, 2022; Fritz et al., 2017). Self-brand congruence is an important factor for fashion brands because consumers prefer to choose fashion brands that are congruent to their self-concept (Anand & Kaur, 2018). Brand image is a broad concept that goes beyond brand authenticity for fashion products. There is limited knowledge in the literature that examines multi-dimensions of brand authenticity in conjunction with self-brand congruence for fashion brands. The purpose of this study is to examine the dynamics of the four dimensions of brand authenticity (*continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness*) and *self-brand congruence* within the context of a single product category of fashion brands. Instead of assigning consumers with a preselection of fashion brands, this study allows the consumers to freely list fashion brands with which they are familiar resulting in a more realistic representation of how brand authenticity plays a role in consumer attitude and decision making.

Figure 1 shows the hypothesized relationship among variables. H1, H2, H3, and H4 examines the effects of four dimensions of brand authenticity (*continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness*) on brand attitude. H5 examines the effect of self-brand congruence on brand attitude. H6 examines the relationship between brand attitude and purchase intention. In addition to the causal relationships between the variables, the moderating effects of self-brand congruence on the relationship between the four brand authenticity dimensions and brand attitude and purchase intentions are examined (H7).

Methods and Results. Data was collected from 401 participants enrolled at two universities located in the southeastern region of the United States. Participants were U.S citizens (95%), female, (86%) white (80%), and 18-22 years-old (96%). Students were recruited for the study in exchange for extra course credit. Using a Qualtrics survey, students were asked to list two fashion brands they know and, for each brand listed, answer questions measuring their opinions about the *brand authenticity dimensions (continuity, originality, reliability, and naturalness)* (Bruhn et al., 2012), *self-brand congruence* (Malär, 2011), *brand attitude* (Grohmann & Bodur, 2015) and *purchase intention* (Dodds et al., 1991). In total, the data sample size for study was 802 responses (401 participants x 2 brands). SPSS and AMOS were used for statistical analysis. The results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) validated the measurement of seven constructs in the hypotheses; fit indices ($\chi^2/df=1.980$; CFI=0.990, GFI=0.964, AGFI=0.950, SRMR=0.021, RMSEA=0.035, PCLOSE=1.00), significant factor loadings (0.784-0.965), composite reliability (CR>.70), convergent validity (AV>.50), and discriminant validity (MSV<AVE) were all acceptable. Cronbach's alphas for constructs ranged from 0.850 to 0.964.

Structural equation modeling showed that the fit indices of the structural model demonstrated satisfactory fit to the data; fit indices($\chi^2/df=2.563$; CFI=0.983, GFI=0.953, AGFI=0.936, SRMR=.034, RMSEA=0.044, PCLOSE=0.962), All hypotheses were statistically supported except H2 (the path from *originality* to *brand attitude*). A high modification index indicated a new path from *self-brand congruence* to *purchase intention*. A revised model to reflect these changes resulted in the following fit indices: Chi-square/df=2.089; CFI=0.988, GFI=0.961, AGFI=0.947, SRMR=.029, RMSEA=0.037, PCLOSE=1.000. As illustrated in Figure 1, one new significant path (*self-brand congruence* → *purchase intention*) was added to the structural model.

Finally, the moderating effects of self-brand congruence were tested. The results showed that self-brand congruence dampened the positive relationship of brand attitude with the brand authenticity dimensions. Contrary to expectations, *self-brand congruence* did not positively moderate the relationship between the four brand authenticity dimensions and *purchase intentions*.

Discussion. Results of the study showed differing results from marketing studies that used a preselected listing of brands representing a wide range of product categories. Although H1, H3, H4, and H5 were supported, brand *originality* did not positively influence consumers' attitude toward fashion brands (H2 rejected). Also, the impact of self-brand congruence on purchase decisions was evident. These results squarely point to the unique attitude of fashion consumers. Furthermore, the study found that self-brand congruence lowered the strength of the relationship between brand authenticity dimensions and brand attitude. Although findings cannot

be generalizable to the larger population, the study offers a realistic understanding of the target market studied because the brands were self-selected by the participants. Future studies should explore how self-brand congruence strengthens consumer attitude toward fashion brands.

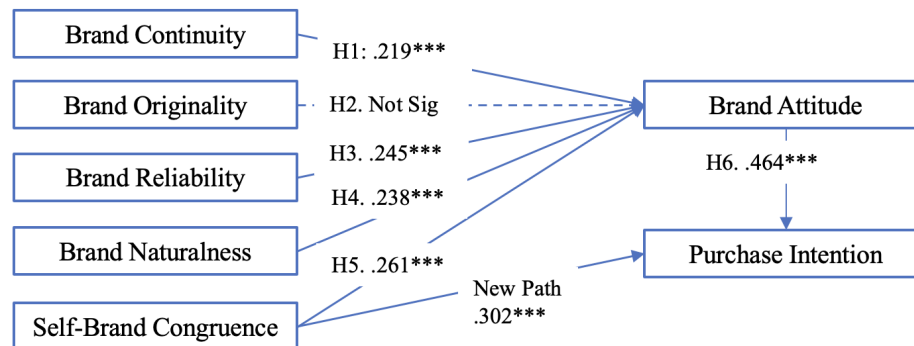


Figure 1. Hypothesized and Revised Model

Note: Except where indicated, all standardized estimates are significant $p < .001$

References

- Anand, S., & Kaur, H. (2018). Fashion self-congruity: scale development and validation. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal*, 22(2), 158-175. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JFMM-05-2017-0048>
- Brown, S., Kozinets, R. V., & Sherry, J. F., Jr. (2003). Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro branding and the revival of brand meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(3), 19-33. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.67.3.19.18657>
- Bruhn, M., Schoenmüller, V., Schäfer, D., & Heinrich, D. (2012). Brand authenticity: Towards a deeper understanding of its conceptualization and measurement. *Advances in Consumer Research*, 40, 567-576.
- Choi, H., Ko, E., Kim, E. Y., & Mattila, P. (2015). The role of fashion brand authenticity in product management: A holistic marketing approach. *The Journal of Product Innovation Management*, 32(2), 233-242.
- Dodds, W. B., Monroe, K. B., & Grewal, D. (1991). Effects of price, brand, and store information on buyers' product evaluations. *JMR, Journal of Marketing Research*, 28(3), 307-319.
- Fritz, K., Schoenmueller, V., & Bruhn, M. (2017). Authenticity in branding – exploring antecedents and consequences of brand authenticity. *European Journal of Marketing*, 51(2), 324-348. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2014-0633>
- Gilmore, J. H., & Pine, B. J. II (2007). *Authenticity: What consumers really want*. Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.
- Grohmann, B., & Bodur, H. O. (2015). Brand social responsibility: Conceptualization, measurement, and outcomes. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 131(2), 375-399.

- doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10551-014-2279-4>
- Kumar, V., & Kaushik, A. K. (2022). Engaging customers through brand authenticity perceptions: The moderating role of self-congruence. *Journal of Business Research*, 138, 26-37. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.08.065>
- Malär, L. (2011). Emotional brand attachment and brand personality: The relative importance of the actual and the ideal self. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(4), 35-52. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.75.4.35>
- Napoli, J., Dickinson, S. J., Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. (2014). Measuring consumer-based brand authenticity. *Journal of Business Research*, 67(6), 1090-1098.