

## **Self-Congruence Facets and Emotional Brand Attachment: The Role of Product Involvement and Product Type**

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### **Abstract**

Consumers have emotional bond with the brands that are closer to their self-concept. The product involvement is consumers' perception of relevance of a product with needs, goals and consumers' self-concept. Therefore, the study aims to reconsider the role of product involvement in the association of self-congruence facets and emotional brand attachment. Furthermore, the study investigates the association of self-congruence facets and emotional brand attachment depending upon product type. The study followed a mixed method research approach and involved a focus group study and a survey. Hypotheses testing (through AMOS and Process Macro) indicated that ideal self-congruence yielded substantial influence on product involvement and emotional brand attachment. Whereas, ideal self-congruence direct effect on emotional brand attachment turned out to be insignificant in presence of mediator. Furthermore, the effect of product involvement on emotional brand attachment significantly depends upon product type. The conditional indirect effect of self-congruence facets was stronger for hedonic brands as compared to utilitarian brands. The study contributes to marketing literature by discovering product involvement as processing mechanism between the debate of self-congruence facets and emotional brand attachment. The study is first in nature to investigate the moderating role of product type in the relationship and exploring conditional indirect on emotional brand attachment.

**Keywords:** actual self-congruence, ideal self-congruence, product involvement, emotional brand attachment, hedonic brands, utilitarian brands, Pakistani consumers.

## 1. Introduction

Marketing practitioners and researchers engage in seeking unique ways to develop, enhance and uphold the consumer brand relationships over the long period of time. The strength and direction of relationships largely influence decisions making process and buying behavior of consumers (Japutra, Ekinici, & Simkin, 2014). The companies in this increasingly competitive environment are striving on to develop relationships with customers in the form of long-term bonds/connections to enhance trust, commitment, and loyalty (Levy & Hino, 2016; Louis & Lombart, 2010). The consumers being poignant tend to create emotional connections or positive affect toward the brands they interact, experience or encounter (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011). Several perspectives exist to develop and enhance emotional brand attachment, such as anthropomorphization (Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2008), motivational perspective (Ashworth, Dacin, & Thomson, 2009) and self-expansion (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). Communicating brands imbued with consistent personality to consumers' self-image are always preferred by the consumers (Chaplin & John, 2005). Resultantly, concept of self-congruence has been established as a prominent predictor of emotional brand attachment as compared to aesthetic pleasure (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2008), experience, responsiveness, quality and reputation (Japutra et al., 2014).

Product involvement is considered as an imperative element in influencing the consumer-brand processes (Hudson, Roth, Madden, & Hudson, 2015), cognitive responses, brand loyalty and consumer-brand relationships (Ferreira & Coelho, 2015). However, it further needs attention due to lack of understanding (Khare, 2012; Olsen, 2007), inconsistency and limited conceptualizations in prior research (Xue & Phelps, 2013). For instance, several studies in prior research operationalized product involvement as a moderating variable (Bernritter, van Ooijen, & Müller, 2017; Bian & Moutinho, 2011; Chung & Zhao, 2003) and others treated as mediator variable (C.-C. Chen & Chiu, 2009; Cruz, Leonhardt, & Pezzuti, 2017; Gendel-Guterman & Levy, 2013; O'Cass, 2004). The concept of product involvement is conceptualized as the perception of association of self-concerning needs, goals, and consumer self-concept (Ferreira & Coelho, 2015; Srivastava & Sharma, 2011). In this context, the product involvement might entail the self-concept congruence with the actual or ideal self of individual during evaluation of brands. Therefore, the inconsistency in the prior literature emphasized the need to reconsider the product involvement role in association of self-congruence facets with consumers' emotional brand attachment (Fu, Kang, & Tasci, 2017).

Moreover, through consuming products and/or brands, consumers seek customer value which can be classified in to: i) utilitarian value and ii) hedonic value, and respectively utilitarian brands and hedonic brands (Rintamäki, Kanto, Kuusela, & Spence, 2006). In this scenario, the differential role of brand types had tremendous importance and emerged as key area in marketing research (Chitturi, Raghunathan, & Mahajan, 2008). Consumers' consumption decisions between utilitarian and hedonic value involve a sense of self struggle between the will of being prudent and pleasure seeking (Keinan & Kivetz, 2008). Hedonic purchases tend to be more difficult to explain and rationalize (Kivetz &

Zheng, 2017), more conscious, involved and discretionary over the utilitarian purchases (Choi, Li, Rangan, Chatterjee, & Singh, 2014; Okada, 2005). Therefore, the relationship of actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence with respect to emotional brand attachment may vary across the product type due to the distinct attitudinal motives in consumers (Rintamäki et al., 2006). Despite the fact, surprisingly, prior literature overlooked the differential effect of brand types in the relationship of actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence with emotional brand attachment.

Extending beyond the preceding literature (Huang, 2017; Japutra et al., 2014; Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011), the study is unique in nature to examine product involvement as a processing mechanism in the relationship of self-congruence facets and consumers' emotional brand attachment depending upon the product type (hedonic vs. utilitarian). Therefore, the study aims are threefold: first, to investigate the product involvement as a processing mechanism between self-congruence facets (actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence) and emotional brand attachment. Second, to investigate the differential effect of actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence on product involvement and emotional brand attachment. Lastly, to find out the effect of product type in association of product involvement and emotional brand attachment. The study is fruitful not only for academicians who are interested in understanding congruence-attachment relationships across the product type and but also for practitioners to better understand the drivers of emotional brand attachment.

## **2. Conceptual Background, Literature and Hypotheses Development**

### *2.1 Self-Congruence and Emotional Brand Attachment*

Brands are perceived as specific symbols in consumers' minds and they tend to relate these brand symbols to their self-concepts and favor those brands whose image is congruent to their self-concept (Aaker, 1999). Self-concept refers to the sum of the thinking and conception of an individual about himself/herself (Rosenberg, 1986) and has two major components- actual self-concept (the way a person currently perceive himself/herself) and ideal self-concept (the way a person wishes to perceive himself/herself) (Belch & Landon Jr, 1977). The notion of relating the self to the brand image or personality is known as self-congruence (Maehle & Shneor, 2010). These two components of self-congruence result in: i) actual self-congruence- is consumers' conception of relating actual self-concept with the personality of brand and ii) ideal self-congruence- is consumers' conception of relating ideal self-concept with the brand personality (Astakhova, Swimberghe, & Wooldridge, 2017; Koo, Cho, & Kim, 2014; Malär et al., 2011).

Self-congruence is a part of cognitive consistency theories which suggest that individuals always struggle to create and sustain synchronization between their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors as discrepancy among them result in psychological distress, anxiety, and tension (Festinger, 1962). Consumers have a specific image of themselves ( such as self-concept) that drives them to perform such actions like purchasing a brand projecting personality like their own that strengthen it over the time. Moreover, self-expansion theory postulates that individuals' instinct is to integrate others into their conception of self and they can also incorporate brands with their self-image (Aron & Aron, 1986). The more an entity (brand) is vicinal to self-definition of consumer, the higher the attachment will occur between them. Similarly, the stronger the feeling of self-connection, the stronger the emotional bond between consumer and specific brand (Kaufmann, Petrovici,

Gonçalves Filho, & Ayres, 2016; Sameeni & Qadeer, 2015). A person get attached with a brand when it boosts his/her feelings of autonomy and relatedness; and enables, gratify and enrich the self-concept by extending sensory and aesthetic pleasure of individual (Park et al., 2008; Thomson, 2006).

The self-verification theory argues that human beings expect others to perceive them, in the way they perceive themselves and that is irrespective of positive/negative self-views (Swann Jr, 1983, 2012). They engage in activities of verifying, validating and sustaining their existing self-concepts (Huber, Eisele, & Meyer, 2018). In order to develop actual self-congruence, consumers search the experiences that verify and support their self-concept and avert that can threaten or weaken their self-image (Hixon & Swann Jr, 1993). Moreover, self-verification need evokes consumers to involve in behaviors which reinforce their actual self. Consumers can achieve the feelings by buying the brand which provide consistency between consumers' self and the brand personality (Malär et al., 2011). Moreover, the self-enhancement motive is the prompting factor in ideal self-congruence that motivates people to enhance their self-concepts and seek information to increase their self-esteem (Huber et al., 2018; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Self-enhancement theory proposes that individual's self-concept is considered as a valuable possession, they are more likely to involve in activities and actions that enhance their selves and strengthens self-esteem (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Consuming a brand imbued with consistent brand personality (with ideal self) bring consumers closer to their aspirations (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). Therefore, consumers may be attracted and get emotionally attached to the brands that personify their desires and aspirations, i.e., ideal self-congruence (Huber et al., 2018; Liang, 2015; Malär et al., 2011).

## *2.2 Product Involvement*

Involvement construct can be traced back from the literature of psychology and defined as the extent of affect and concern concerning some object (Lesschaeve & Bruwer, 2010). Involvement can be conceptualized based on three approaches: cognitive approach, individual approach and response approach (Laaksonen, 1994). The study followed cognitive approach (can be referred to as the extent of relevancy between an object and consumers depending upon consumers' interests, necessities, morality, ambitions, and self-concept) due to its relevance and significance with individual's self. The conceptualization corresponds to Park and Mittal (1985) "enduring-state" perspective of involvement, which entails affective meaning of the product. In the enduring state, consumers are keenly concerned and tend to relate their self-image with the meaning of product (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008). In this perspective, involvement is referred to as the individual's internal psychological state or perceived importance of stimulus (brand) (Bloch, 1981) or the extent of attention and provocation with respect to stimulus (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997). Likewise, prior research also conceptualized as the degree of individual concern, long-term interest and attachment for particular product type (Bloch & Bruce, 1984).

Product involvement is the personally relevant knowledge of the product and can be determined by the level of interest and arousal in consumers. It is considered as the predecessor in several product-related decisions of consumers (Park & Mittal, 1985) and compels consumers to access detailed information about the brand (Higie & Feick, 1989). When a consumer finds something personally significant, he gets into such an impelling

state that drives his cognitive behavior, i.e., comprehension, information search, and intention or emotional responses (Celsi & Olson, 1988). The involvement is directly associated with self-concept, values, and ego of consumers and entails both the individuals (consumers) and product conditions (Khare, 2012). The proximity of brand to consumers' self, enhances the involvement with the brand (Solomon, 2014). More specifically, a product with a higher fit/match between self-concept of consumers will enhance consumer involvement in the product (Khare, 2012; O'Cass, 2000).

Consumer purchase decisions are largely based on their interest, attention (Ferreira & Coelho, 2015) and self-interest, self-concept toward an object (Bloch, 1981). The attention can be termed as involvement with the product, which develops a personal attachment with the brands (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2008) and as much as the stimuli are perceived related with the consumer's self (Celsi & Olson, 1988). Emotional feelings of the customer are based on the extent of involvement with the product (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Therefore, consumers are required to be involved with products to develop strong emotional bond with the brand (Levy & Hino, 2016).

Research in psychology indicates that the act of self-verification indulges consumers in the considerable cognitive efforts and the tendency will be higher when consumers are provoked to think about it (Swann Jr, Hixon, Stein-Seroussi, & Gilbert, 1990). Most of the consumers process information deeply when they are involved with the product. Hence, highly involved consumers will have higher motivations to indulge themselves in the cognitive effort for self-verification (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Applying the characteristics of interpersonal relationship on brand relationships (Fournier, 1998); consumers prefer brands that reflect their actual selves, which cause them to process information deeply leading to product involvement. The impelling state of product involvement drives their emotional responses resulting in emotional brand attachment (Celsi & Olson, 1988; Liang, 2015).

In the scenario of ideal self-congruence and brand attachment, utilization of ideally self-congruent leads to the self-enhancement process that motivates the consumer's emotional brand attachment. Consumer's involvement theory states that consumers are highly involved with the products that provide them sign-value, i.e., self-enhancing benefits (Sedikides & Strube, 1997) and will get attached with them (Liang, 2015). This high involvement leads to the purchase of ideally self-congruent brands within the product class triggering consumers' affective (emotional) response towards the brand. The level of fit or match between product and individual will be stronger in the presence of involvement (Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008). Furthermore, this is consistent with the Michaelidou and Dibb (2006) findings that consumers are more prone to get involved with products that provide the fun and pleasure and help them in expressing and enhancing their selves. Thus, selection and consumption of the brands that help consumers in enhancing their self-image (ideal self-congruence) lead to high consumer involvement (Bloch & Bruce, 1984), that generate consumer emotional brand attachment. Thus, we can hypothesize that:

H<sub>1</sub>: Product involvement act as a processing mechanism between actual self-congruence and emotional brand attachment.

H<sub>2</sub>: Product involvement act as a processing mechanism between ideal self-congruence and emotional brand attachment.

### 2.3 Product Type (*Hedonic VS Utilitarian*)

The customer value is derived from consumption of products which can be categorized as hedonic brands and utilitarian brands based on their differential motives. The hedonic brands are purchased for the sake of pleasure and fun, and possess strong affective effect of inducing consumer's emotional responses (Y.-F. Chen & Chang, 2016). Whereas, utilitarian brands are purchased merely for utility, to fulfill functional needs and practical (H. Choi & Reid, 2016). Both are unique due to their distinctive purpose in consumer's mind and the effect on consumer relationships (Kivetz & Zheng, 2017) and decision-making process (Khan, Dhar, & Wertenbroch, 2005). The relationships may vary with product types derived by two different components of consumers' attitude (cognitive and affective), which therefore leads to different responses for hedonic and utilitarian brands (Astakhova *et al.*, 2017; Azhari & Afiff, 2015).

The consumer and brand image congruity vary across the hedonic brands and utilitarian brands (Rocereto & Mosca, 2012). Being affectively driven, hedonic brands may strengthen the relationship between self-congruence and emotional brand attachment more as compared to utilitarian brands (Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003). Whereas, another perspective argue that the cognitive activity involved in the selection and consumption of utilitarian brands leads towards the development of emotional brand attachment as cognition is one of the determinants of emotions in human mind (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987; Rocereto & Mosca, 2012). Similarly, Lesschaeve and Bruwer (2010) proclaimed that hedonic products are expected to evoke intense involvement in consumers due to personal relevance. The pleasure-seeking purchases are a little bit more difficult to describe and rationalize and expect higher consumer involvement in contrast to utilitarian purchases (J. Choi *et al.*, 2014). In the perspective of central route processing, hedonic and utilitarian attitudes engender distinct component of product involvement. Thus, on the basis of above arguments we can hypothesize that:

H<sub>3</sub>: Product type will moderate the indirect effect of actual self-congruence on emotional brand attachment via product involvement; the mediated relationship will be stronger for hedonic products than utilitarian products.

H<sub>4</sub>: Product type will moderate the indirect effect of ideal self-congruence on emotional brand attachment via product involvement; the mediated relationship will be stronger for hedonic products than utilitarian products.

### 3. Research Methodology

The study involved a mixed-method approach (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2016). Firstly, through focus group discussion including two faculty members and fifteen business students, utilitarian and hedonic brands were identified. The two distinct components (hedonic and utilitarian) of consumer attitude while making consumption decision were explained to the group along with the difference between utilitarian brand and hedonic brands (Batra & Ahtola, 1990; Khan *et al.*, 2005). Then they were asked to identify each brand as hedonic or utilitarian from the list of 15 famous brands. The hedonic brands and utilitarian brands were classified by following the criteria outlined by Spangenberg, Voss, and Crowley (1997). The brand that is perceived beneficial, useful, valuable and wise was marked as utilitarian, and whereas, the brand that is perceived enjoyable, nice, gives pleasure and makes the consumer happy, was marked as hedonic.

The discussion ended with mutual consensus among all participants over the categorization of brands and preparation of two separate lists. Brands falling under utilitarian category include: Dalda Cooking Oil, Dawlance Refrigerator, Dove Soap, Gillette, Head and Shoulders, Nestle Drinking Water and Surf Excel and those falling under Hedonic category include: Coke, Dairy Milk Chocolate, I-Phone, L'Oreal, Nike, O'more Ice-cream, Pepsi, and Rolex.

Secondly, a survey of 242 undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled in business studies in 4 randomly selected institutes (2 public, 2 private) was conducted. In classroom settings, the participants randomly received hedonic and utilitarian questionnaires. A brief introduction, basic instructions, and explanation of difficult terms were provided in the beginning. From a list of the brands, respondents were required to select a brand and then check four reasons from the list of eight reasons which best describe their reasons for selecting the brand. Four of these reasons were hedonic, and four were utilitarian. The criterion of being the consumer of a brand was that she/he must have mentioned at least three of the reasons specific to each type of product. This enabled us to validate the results of the brand classification by the focus group.

We excluded the respondents who were unable to discriminate whether the brand they are opting for is hedonic or utilitarian and then the data was screened for missing values, unengaged responses, and outliers. After these data cleaning procedures, the final usable sample was 216 which consists of 64% females; 78% in the age category of 21-25 years; 85% single, and 70% unemployed. The greater part of the sample holds a master's degree (47%) followed by Bachelors (42%). Almost all respondents belong to middle and upper middle class (accumulating to 96.5%).

### *3.1 Measurements*

For assessing actual self-congruence, participants were directed to presume the selected brand as a human being and ascribe some human like qualities with the brand, and then imagine your own personality (that how you view yourself currently, i.e. actual self). Once the imagination process was over, participants were required to compare the personality of brand with their own self-image and then report the degree of match or mismatch on two items rated at a five-point Likert scale with 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree. Similarly, for assessing ideal self-congruence respondents perceived a match/mismatch of brand's personality with ideal self-concept (how one want to see himself/herself) on two items rated at a five-point numeric scale from 1(not at all) to 5 (very much) (Sirgy et al., 1997). Product Involvement was assessed regarding product importance and interest for the consumer with 2 items adopted from Van Trijpp, Hoyer, and Inman (1996) rated at Likert scale with 1 (strongly disagree) and 5 (strongly agree). The emotional brand attachment was measured regarding consumers' feelings and emotions for the specific brand by using four items (Thomson et al., 2005) rated from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much).

## **4. Data Analysis and Results**

The hypotheses testing involved AMOS (version 22) and SPSS (version 22). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was run analyze the relationships due to several advantages (i.e. a confirmatory approach, refine or assess measurement errors, involve both latent and measured variables and run multiple equations simultaneously) over traditional multivariate techniques (Byrne, 2013). The SEM involves two steps: first is to develop a

measurement model (CFA) and second is to structural model (testing hypotheses). Measurement model in SEM aimed to specify the patterns of measures with respect to each factor in the model. Whereas, structural model delineates affect or cause among unobserved or latent variables. In addition to this, moderated mediation hypotheses were tested through Process Macro (Hayes, 2018) in SPSS.

#### 4.1 Measurement Model

The measurement model was evaluated by performing confirmatory factor analysis (a confirmatory statistical technique for a theory-based model) and preferred due to its robustness as compared to exploratory factor analysis (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982). The goodness of fit indices fall within acceptable level, i.e. CFI=0.968, TLI=0.951, GFI=0.958, RMSEA=0.059 and  $\chi^2/df=1.736$ . Further confirmation of the hypothesized model was substantiated by analyzing alternative models' goodness of fit indices. Firstly, a three-factor model yielded goodness of fit indices below the threshold values, i.e. CFI=0.844, TLI=0.780, GFI=0.903, RMSEA=0.124, and  $\chi^2/df=4.313$ . Similarly, a single-factor model yielded the lowest goodness of fit indices (i.e. CFI=0.571, TLI=0.448, GFI=0.781, RMSEA=0.197, and  $\chi^2/df=9.312$ ) as compared to four-factor model (hypothesized model) and three-factor model.

**Table 1: Statistics for Construct Items and Construct Reliability**

	FL	Mean	SD	Alpha	CR	AVE
<b>Actual Self-Congruence</b>						
The personality of the brand X is:						
consistent with how I see myself	.82	3.63	0.98	.75	.76	.61
a mirror image of me	.74	3.50	0.99			
<b>Ideal Self-Congruence</b>						
The personality of the brand X is:						
consistent with how I would like to be	.81	3.47	0.95	.80	.80	.67
a mirror image of the person I would like to be	.83	3.22	0.95			
<b>Product Involvement</b>						
Compared to others, this product is important to me	.73	3.94	0.83	.72	.73	.57
I am interested in this product	.79	4.12	0.72			
<b>Emotional Brand Attachment</b>						
I feel captivated for this brand	.69	3.37	1.05	.81	.81	.52
I feel strongly bonded to this brand	.73	3.45	1.09			
I feel delighted for this brand	.74	3.72	0.94			
I feel passionate for this brand	.73	3.38	1.08			

In order to evaluate convergent validity three step criteria of Fornell and Larcker (1981) is followed. The criteria outline three conditions: first, composite reliability (CR) of each construct should exceed the threshold value of .70; secondly average variance extracted (AVE) should be greater than the threshold value of .50, and lastly, factor loadings of all items must be higher than .70. Results in Table 1 exhibit that all three conditions are satisfied except factor loading of EBA-1 which is .69. Discriminant validity analysis is

performed by observing square root of AVE and correlations for each construct. It can be observed from Table 2 that Square root of AVE (oblique in parenthesis) for each construct has a higher value than correlations. Thus, a measurement model of the study demonstrates both convergent validity and discriminant validity.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics, Correlations and the Square Root of the AVE**

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Actual Self-Congruence	3.17	.72	<b>(.78)</b>			
2. Ideal Self-Congruence	3.13	.72	.40**	<b>(.82)</b>		
3. Product Involvement	3.17	.49	.29**	.47**	<b>(.75)</b>	
4. Emotional Brand Attachment	3.47	.78	.26**	.34**	.65**	<b>(.72)</b>

\*\* p < 0.01

4.2 Hypotheses Testing

The model yields fit indices (CFI=.968, TLI=.951, GFI=.958, RMSEA=.059, and  $\chi^2/df=1.736$ ) higher than threshold values (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). The bivariate correlations (Table 2) between the study variables are in the hypothesized direction. The bootstrapping technique (Preacher & Hayes, 2008) was followed to investigate the indirect effects, due to several advantages over the traditional techniques i.e. causal step approach (Baron & Kenny, 1986), and product coefficient method (Sobel, 1982). Mediation analysis is performed with the help of AMOS by following bootstrapping technique (5000 bootstrap samples). Moreover, the moderation mediation hypotheses, the study used template model 14 in Process Macro (Hayes, 2018) along with bootstrapping technique (5000 samples).

**Table 3: Mediation Results (Bootstrapping)**

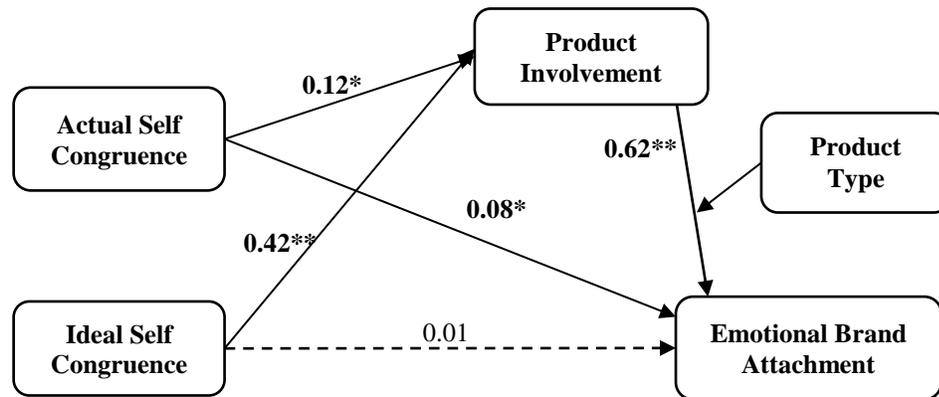
Relationship	Direct		Indirect	Confidence Interval	
	Without Mediator	With Mediator		Lower	Upper
ASC - EBA	0.17**	0.08*	0.07*	0.032	0.122
ISC - EBA	0.29**	0.01	0.26**	0.214	0.317

ASC= actual self-congruence; ISC= ideal self-congruence; EBA= emotional brand attachment

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01

Table 3 exhibits that actual self-congruence ( $\beta=.17$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) and ideal self-congruence ( $\beta=0.29$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) yielded significant direct effect on emotional brand attachment in the absence of product involvement. The inclusion of product involvement in the model yielded significant direct effect of actual self-congruence ( $\beta=0.08$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and surprisingly, turned ideal self-congruence direct effect ( $\beta=0.01$ ,  $p=0.79$ ) into insignificant. However, actual self-congruence ( $\beta=0.07$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and ideal self-congruence ( $\beta=0.26$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) both have a significant influence on emotional brand attachment through product involvement. In the light of these results hypotheses, H1 and H2 are accepted that product involvement mediates the relationship between self-congruence facets (actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence) and emotional brand attachment. Furthermore, it can be observed that after inclusion of mediator, the

direct path turned to be insignificant and affirmed a complete mediation relationship with ideal self-congruence.



**Figure 1: Results for the Hypothesized Model**

\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01

The moderation hypothesis involved a multi-group analysis in AMOS graphics. The multi-group analysis conducted Chi-square difference test of parameter estimates across hedonic and utilitarian brands. The results exhibit that the path of product involvement to emotional brand attachment yielded a significant chi-square difference test ( $\chi^2= 5.43$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) and supported H<sub>3</sub>. The results supported that product type moderates the relationships between product involvement and emotional brand attachment.

**Table 4: Moderated Mediation Results across Product Type**

Variable(s)	Emotional Brand Attachment	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Product Involvement*Product Type+	0.31	0.15	0.006	0.629
Product Involvement*Product Type++	0.32	0.15	0.012	0.637
<b>Conditional Indirect Effect of ASC</b>				
Utilitarian (0)	0.15	0.04	0.088	0.246
Hedonic (1)	0.22	0.05	0.124	0.343
<b>Conditional Indirect Effect of ISC</b>				
Utilitarian (0)	0.25	0.05	0.166	0.369
Hedonic (1)	0.36	0.06	0.254	0.506

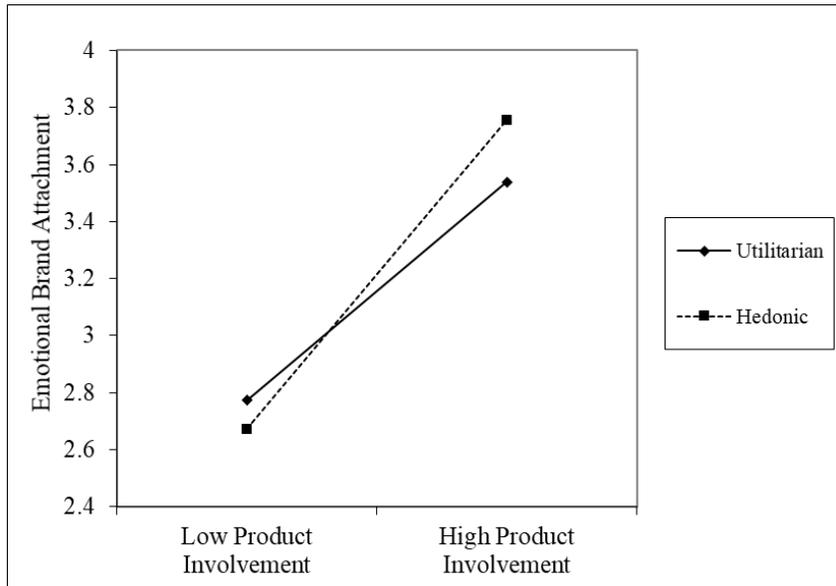
+ IV= Actual Self-congruence; ++ IV= Ideal Self-congruence; SE= Standard Error

The Table 4 exhibits results for moderated mediation. It can be observed that the conditional indirect effect of actual self-congruence on emotional brand attachment is positively and significant through intervening variable of product involvement. The conditional indirect effect of actual self-congruence gets stronger in hedonic brands

( $\beta=.22$ ,  $CI=.124$  to  $.343$ ) as compared to utilitarian brands ( $\beta=.15$ ,  $CI=.088$  to  $.246$ ). Similarly, the conditional indirect effect of ideal self-congruence gets stronger in hedonic brands ( $\beta=.36$ ,  $CI=.254$  to  $.506$ ) as compared to utilitarian brands ( $\beta=.25$ ,  $CI=.166$  to  $.369$ ). Thus, the results confirmed moderated mediation hypotheses H3 and H4 in the study's model.

**5. Discussion**

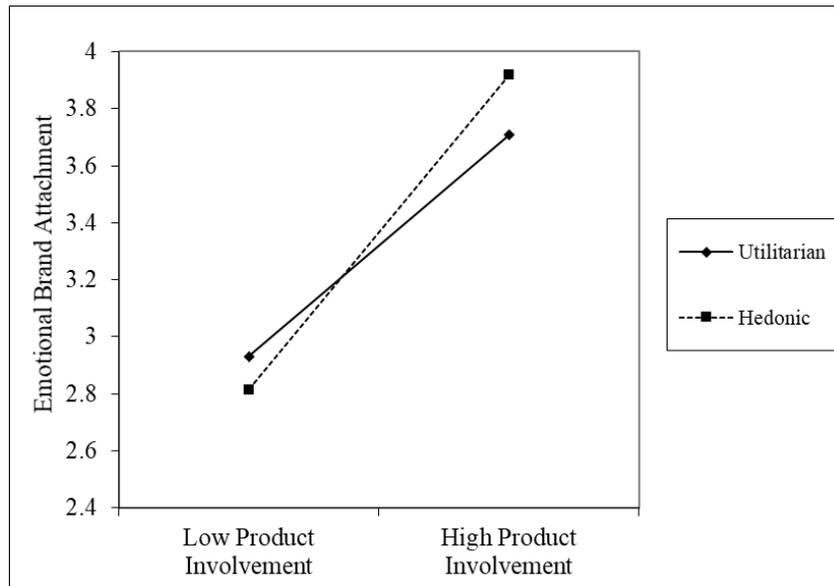
Emotional brand attachment is one of the fastest growing concerns of the organizations seeing the important potential outcomes of it. It has been established that consumers create an emotion-laden bond with the brand, which they perceive consistent with their actual or ideal self. However, the inconsistency in prior literature emphasizes the need to reconsider the product involvement role between self-congruence and emotional brand attachment. Due to the vital importance and a call for further investigation of product involvement as a processing mechanism in self-congruity effect (Fu et al., 2017), the study tested product involvement as a mediator. Along with this, the study further tested the relationship of product involvement with emotional brand attachment depending on the product type (hedonic versus utilitarian). Previously, no research to date has considered the role product involvement as a processing mechanism and product type as moderator in the relationship.



**Figure 2: The Moderation Effect of Product Type on Product Involvement-Emotional Brand Attachment Relationship (Actual Self-Congruence as IV)**

We found that product involvement is a vital mechanism to understand the self-congruence and emotional brand attachment relationship while depending on the product type. Contrasting the prior research, the study find that consumers tend to build emotional brand attachment with the brands that corresponds to their ideal self (Malär et al., 2011). The more a brand is closer to the consumers' ideal self the more a person will be involved with the product and the more it feels an attachment to the brand. Moreover, the

product involvement is based on the perception of the relevance of self with respect consumer’s self-concept (Ferreira & Coelho, 2015; Srivastava & Sharma, 2011) and yield brand attachment. The consumers get involved in the brands that fulfill their desires and provide them pleasure, resulting in emotional brand attachment with such brands. The product involvement entails the self-concept congruence with the actual or ideal self of individual during evaluation of brands and emerges as a powerful intervening mechanism. More importantly, Ideal self-congruent brands (e.g., personal computers, clothing) result in high level of consumer involvement in an effort to make right selection that ultimately leads to stronger attachment (Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Zaichkowsky, 1985). Thus, the more a brand image corresponded to ideal self-concept and embodied consumers’ desired image, he/she get involved with the product and yield stronger effect over the emotional brand attachment as compared to actual self-concept. Furthermore, the presence of product involvement in the relationship vides the direct effect of ideal self-congruence. This signifies the importance of product involvement, which when brands are congruence with ideal self, they must develop product involvement to develop an emotional brand attachment. In other case, brands carrying actual self-concept may or may not consider product involvement in developing emotional brand attachment of consumers.



**Figure 3: The Moderating Effect of Product Type on Product Involvement-Emotional Brand Attachment Relationship (Ideal Self-Congruence as IV)**

Hedonic brands have inherent potential to evoke consumer emotions (Rocereto & Mosca, 2012) and the strong involvement with the brands carrying hedonism results in more intense and affective behaviors such as emotional brand attachment (Cohen & Areni, 1991). The effect of ideal self-congruence is the major driving force behind emotional brand attachment (Rocereto & Mosca, 2012). The underlying propensity of ideal self-congruence, i.e., self-enhancement brings consumer close to their aspirations. Thus they

are attracted and become emotionally attached with the brands that embodied their aspirations and dreams (Boldero & Francis, 2002). Based on this, a intense association between product involvement and hedonic brands is also expected in consumers (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982) because consumers are much involved in the selection of self-expressing and self-enhancing brands which give them pleasure and fulfill their desires (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Michaelidou & Dibb, 2006; Spangenberg et al., 1997). The moderating results of product type are exhibited in Figure 2 (based on ideal self-congruence) with stronger impact than Figure 3 (based on actual self-congruence). In consistent with the theory, hedonic brands yield stronger conditional indirect effect on emotional brand attachment.

Whereas, the purchase of utilitarian brands is derived by the cognitive component of consumer attitude (Voss et al., 2003) and indulges consumer in cognitive activity while choosing and utilizing utilitarian brand (Rocereto & Mosca, 2012). This cognitive activity requires consumers to take out less involvement in thinking about the brand that leads to less emotional feelings (Oatley & Johnson-Laird, 1987). The relationship between product involvement and emotional brand attachment depends upon the product type as shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3. The increasing level of product involvement enhances more emotional brand attachment in hedonic brands as compared to utilitarian brands. Furthermore, the indirect effect of actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence depend upon the product type. In consistent with the theory, utilitarian brands yield weaker conditional indirect effect on emotional brand attachment.

### *5.1 Practical Implications*

The study highlights strategic ways to emotionally indulge consumers with the brands. Managers should emphasize more on the ideal self-concepts of the targeted consumer in designing and defining the brand's personality. Utilization of such an approach will make consumers feel the brand's personality like their own leading to emotional brand attachment. Managers should adopt different marketing strategies for hedonic and utilitarian brands. The brands carrying utilitarianism image should focus on authentic branding strategy and whereas, brands with an emphasis on hedonism image should entirely focus on aspirational branding and get the customer involved to yield stronger emotional brand attachment. In designing communication messages, marketers are required to focus on self-enhancement stimuli in aspirational branding. While conducting the communication activities for aspirational branding, of the brand. The divergence among actual and ideal self of the consumer should be highlighted along with the brand projected as the solution to lessen this discrepancy. Incorporating product involvement strategies (like product differentiation, competitor orientation) into their marketing activities can help in creating emotional brand attachment.

### *5.2 Limitations and Future Directions*

Due to time and resources constraints, large extensive data collection could not be done. Data is collected from students who may limit generalizability. Although students being energetic, informative, brand oriented and actual consumers in their daily lives make a good sample. However, results may vary if the future study involves males, employed/experienced consumers and married participants in the sample. The data are cross-sectional only; longitudinal analysis can be done to see whether the emotional brand attachment has a long-lasting or temporary impact. Dual nature brands can't be

marked strictly as hedonic or utilitarian; for instance, toothpaste can prevent cavities (utilitarian benefit) and can also provide fresh breath, good taste and white teeth (hedonic benefits). Further study can be done in this third category of brands specifically. Fourthly, the first part of the study was used for the identification of brands. The separate study can be directed on the identification of brands as hedonic and utilitarian on a large scale. Moreover, actual and ideal self-congruence outcomes were considered in the study, and future studies can explore the process comprehensively.

### 5.3 Contributions of the Study

The study entails several contributions to the prevailing marketing literature by not only revealing the impact of ideal and actual self-congruence on emotional brand attachment but also by unleashing the mediating role of product involvement. The study contributes to the construct of emotional brand attachment by empirically investigating the differential effect of actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence through the processing mechanism of product involvement. In addition to this, the study provided evidence for the moderating role of product types in the relationship. The study contributes to the construct by investigating the product involvement and emotional brand attachment relationship depending upon the effect of product type (hedonic brands and utilitarian brands). Moreover, the study contributes to self-congruity theory by highlighting the stronger effect of ideal self-congruence as compared to actual self-congruence. The product involvement with brand image congruity serves as a vehicle to attachment and leads to more favorable beliefs and affects towards the brand in question. In contrast to prior research, ideal self-congruence yielded stronger influence on product involvement and emotional brand attachment. The product involvement as an intervening variable in process turned out the direct influence of ideal self-congruence insignificant and emphasized the stronger processing mechanism. More importantly, the study contributes to literature by investigating the conditional indirect effect through product involvement depending upon the product type (hedonic brands vs. utilitarian brands).

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