



# Attribution analysis of luxury brands: An investigation into consumer-brand congruence through conspicuous consumption

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## ABSTRACT

Brands and their personalities constitute the basis upon which consumers identify and bond with various products or services. This study focuses on the factors influencing congruity between consumers' self-image and brand image for luxury brands in transitional economies like India. This study empirically evaluates a hypothesized theoretical framework in order to identify and understand the following key variables in each factor of consumer-brand congruence in the luxury brand category: brand perception, brand expectation, dimensions of brand image (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy), brand love, and brand respect. This study also discusses how the brand image dimensions relate to brand love and brand respect. A structural model is developed to analyze the relationship between these factors. The findings establish the relationship between consumers and brands through various attributes of luxury brand image and consumer self-image.

## 1. Introduction

Consumers indulging in the consumption of luxury brands are creating unique positions and identities. This notion helps in understanding luxury brands, as they claim their exclusivity in the marketplace through a disassociation from regular and affordable brands. Veblen (2007, p. 87) noted, for example, that the leisure class used silverware, hand-painted china, and high-priced table linens at meals when less expensive substitutes could work as well or better. People bought fine silverware not to convey food into their mouths but to display that they could afford such things. This is an example of a proof of wealth intended to demonstrate status and create a special identity.

According to Han, Nunes, and Drèze (2010), the conspicuousness of a brand signals the owner's intention to reflect the brand's prominence. Thus, the act of purchasing is intended to display possession. Klipfel, Barclay, and Bockorny (2014) hypothesize that consumers demonstrate conformity behavior by using brands that match the image of the group to which they wish to belong.

However, it is widely accepted that we make inferences about others on the basis of their possessions (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2012). Consequently, people's social image and self-image could be affected by their consumption behavior (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016). Therefore, a brand's attributes match the consumer's desired self-image and are used to achieve a sense of fulfillment.

Foroudi, Melewar, and Gupta (2014) noted that people can have a

strong emotional attachment as a part of their identity to a place they have never visited. This observation of Foroudi et al. (2014) suggests that individuals could also feel an emotional attachment to luxury brands they have never bought or used.

This study has two goals: (1) to develop a framework for the brand image dimensions (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy) leading to consumer brand congruence, and (2) to empirically test the "lovemark" theory (Roberts, 2006) by examining how the three brand image dimensions affect the lovemark experience (brand love and respect) in terms of consumer-brand congruence. Below, we review the literature; identify the main research gap; explain the study's conceptual framework, materials, methodology, and results; and provide an overall analysis.

## 2. Literature review

Affective and hedonic behaviors (Belk, 2009) and consumers' acceptance of brands as extensions of their selves are the major drivers of brand image dimensions in terms of consumer-brand congruence (Belk, 1988). Studies (Gil, Kwon, Good, & Johnson, 2012; Kim, Ko, Xu, & Han, 2012) have shown that mystery, sensuality, and intimacy are representative of the emotional attachments that lead to stronger consumer-brand congruence.

The conceptualization of this study begins with an understanding of brand perception and brand expectation. According to Fournier (1998),

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brand perception occurs when people relate to brands similarly to how they relate to the people around them. Brand expectations serve as the standards to which people compare subsequent experiences in order to evaluate satisfaction, quality (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1993), or performance. Consumer-brand attributes can influence brand image dimensions (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy). This study proposes that the alignment between consumer-brand attributes and brand image dimensions causes consumers to love and respect a brand. Thus, this study evaluates consumer brand congruence through brand love and brand respect.

According to Pawle and Cooper (2006), Robert's dimensions of brand experience consist of mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. Mystery emerges from elaborate past, present, or future metaphors, ideas, dreams, and symbols. Sensuality emerges when the five senses are stimulated. Intimacy is a feeling of empathy with someone, such as in a consumer's commitment to or pleasure felt in owning or interacting with a brand (Cho, Fiore, & Russell, 2015).

However, Roberts did not provide any scales by which to measure these three dimensions. Such scales were developed in the seminal work of Cho (2011). We extend Cho's work in order to evaluate consumer-brand congruity (Cho & Fiore, 2015). This study establishes the relationship between brand perception and brand expectation for luxury brands since these are aspirational among young Indians. India is the fastest growing luxury market in the world (Khosla, 2018). The study's sample is comprised largely of millennial and young-adult Indians.

Conspicuous consumption is an interesting facet of a consumer's desire for worldly goods (van Doorn et al., 2010) and has both theoretical and managerial importance for marketers and consumer researchers (Gil et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2012). Despite its importance, the concept of conspicuous consumption has attracted little serious attention from scholars (Lee & Shrum, 2012), and its assessment has remained largely theoretical (Hudders & Pandelaere, 2012; Podoshen, Li, & Zhang, 2012).

Emotion is an important aspect of conspicuous consumption. A product's emotional factors can be explicitly measured using various scales (Myszkowski, Storme, Davila, & Lubart, 2015; Schläusser, Dunning, & Fetchenhauer, 2013). A substantial literature supports emotions as theoretical understanding of brand experience (Cho, 2011; Roberts, 2006). However, those studies focus on product emotions. It is important to understand brand emotions and their relevance to consumer identity and/or image congruence. This can be done using various brand attributes and relating them to consumer self-image.

This study also conducts an attributional analysis of brands and consumers. Laczniak, DeCarlo, and Ramaswami (2001) state that the central theme underlying attribution theory (Heider, 1958) is that causal analysis is inherent in an individual's need to understand social events, such as why another person would communicate negative or positive information about a brand. Among the attributes of luxury brands are labels or logos, which are also a medium of communication and serve as integral elements of corporate and marketing communication. Logos induce emotions and moods, express personality, and impact consumers' perceptions and behaviors (Foroudi et al., 2014).

In order to understand the congruence of consumer and brand attributes, this study used three luxury brands: Louis Vuitton, Coco Chanel, and Emporio Armani. These three luxury fashion brands were selected as a consequence of a brand recall exercise that was executed before the survey instrument was finalized. These brands were considered luxuries due to various factors (Zheng, 2014). One was the legacy each brand represents: Louis Vuitton was founded in 1854, Coco Chanel in 1909, and Emporio Armani in 1975. These three brands have topped the list of the world's most desirable luxury brands (Ruiz, 2008), and most young people aspire to own them. They were ranked as the most influential luxury brands in 2017, with influence scores > 90 (Webber, 2017). These scores strengthen this study's hypotheses by providing evidence of consumers' interest in possessing a luxury brand. Therefore, conspicuous consumption is triggered not by purchasing

power but by hedonistic need.

This study requires an understanding of the complementary concepts of “self-image congruity” and “attribution theory.” Consumers relate their self-image to brand attributes as a behavioral reflection via symbolism. Sirgy (1982) defined self-image congruity as a process whereby consumers purchase products/brands they perceive as possessing symbolic attributes similar to the images they hold of themselves. This theory (Liu, Li, Mizerski, & Soh, 2012) postulated that luxury brands have symbolic meanings and display certain images.

Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, and Sirgy (2012) conducted a meta-analysis of self-congruity and found evidence of a robust self-congruity effect.

Creating brand attachment is an essential exercise in branding. One way to achieve a match between a brand and consumer congruence is to relate a brand's personality to a consumer's self-image. Congruity can influence consumers' product preferences and purchase intentions. As mentioned, this study identifies consumer-brand congruence using luxury brand attributes.

### 2.1. Research gap

The research on conspicuous consumption has focused on developed/Western societies, where the patterns of conspicuous consumption may be different from those in other societies due to differing primary motivations (Hung et al., 2011). The study by Desmet (2018) has limitations since it was conducted on a sample consisting mostly of female students. Economic achievement is arguably a cultural fixation specific to developed/Western societies, and many Western consumers may place more emphasis on symbolic products that bestow a desirable status (Gierl & Huettl, 2010).

The symbolic effects of brands have often been studied via two constructs: self-congruity and brand personality. Though both constructs have received much attention, few, if any, comparisons of the concepts and their measures have been conducted. According to Klipfel et al. (2014), the relationship between brand personality and self-congruity is anything but static. Saleki (2014) reviews the relationships between the four dimensions of self-congruity (actual, ideal, social, and ideal-social) and switching intentions. This study proposes several hypotheses (see Fig. 1) based on the literature (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011; He, Li, & Harris, 2012).

## 3. Conceptual framework

### 3.1. Antecedents of consumer-brand attributes

Regarding how consumers' positive affective experiences influence their relationships to brands, the research (Kim et al., 2012) finds that brand attachment strength is likely to increase when consumers remember prior positive brand impressions. In addition to being motivated by the social function of self-expression and self-presentation attitudes, consumers choose luxury brands because they grant hedonic rewards and sensory fulfillment (Bian & Forsythe, 2012).

One problem with perception studies (Bian & Moutinho, 2009) is that, while two individuals may be subject to the same stimuli under the same apparent conditions, how they recognize, select, organize, and interpret the stimuli is a highly individual process based on each person's own needs, values, and expectations (Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001). The social functions of self-expression (Gil et al., 2012), self-presentation attitudes (Godey et al., 2012), and consumer choice (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011) in the purchase of luxury brands as a form of conspicuous consumption involve an iceberg phenomenon from a psychological point of view. Therefore, the first hypothesis of this study is as follows:

**H1<sub>a</sub>.** Brand perception positively influences consumer-brand attribution.

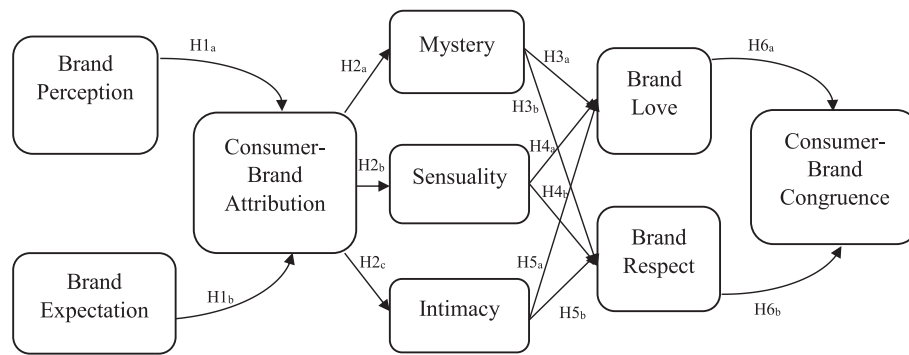


Fig. 1. Hypothesized consumer-brand congruence model.

Luxury brand personality traits as theorized by (Heine, 2010) provide a basis for further studies into luxury brand personality, enabling us to assess its background and implications. According to (Bian & Moutinho, 2009), the importance of studying attributes extends beyond products' physical characteristics, as consumers link attributes to the benefits of buying and consuming products. These advantages, or implications, lead in turn to certain end-states or values that customers want to achieve (Akpoymare, Adeosun, & Ganiyu, 2012)—for example, as representations of their perceived selves. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1<sub>b</sub>.** Brand expectation positively influences consumer-brand attribution.

### 3.2. Dimensions of brand image

Cho (2011) suggests that mystery, sensuality, and intimacy are facets of brand image's cognitive, sensory, and emotional dimensions. Mystery is the cognitive experience formed by previous and current relationships with a brand, as well as dreams of, and ambitions for the future that represent a certain lifestyle (Roberts, 2006). Cho (2011) state that positive associations with a brand can form through the personal dreams, aspirations, or inspirational spirit expressed by a story. Consumers' previous brand experiences can affect their current and future perceptions of a brand or firm. However, the analysis in Cho (2011) of the correlation between consumer-brand attribution and mystery is limited. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

**H2<sub>a</sub>.** Consumer-brand attribution is positively correlated with mystery.

The sensory element of a brand image relates to the brand experiences formed by consumers' physical senses (i.e., vision, smell, sound, touch, and taste). Sensuality represents an enjoyable sensory experience (Roberts, 2006). The research (Yasin and Shamim, 2013) suggests that providing a sensory experience is very important for generating positive perceptions of a brand. Thus, this study proposes the following:

**H2<sub>b</sub>.** Consumer-brand attribution is positively correlated with sensuality.

The emotional aspect of brand image is driven by the feelings consumers experience when interacting with a brand. Intimacy captures the affective and connective experiences between consumers and brands (Roberts, 2006). Studies in psychology (Kozhevnikov, 2007) and marketing (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008) have confirmed the importance of intimacy in evoking positive emotions and perceptions for a romantic partner, a brand, or a firm. Therefore, we propose the following:

**H2<sub>c</sub>.** Consumer-brand attribution is positively correlated with intimacy.

### 3.3. Brand love and brand respect

Roberts (2006) description of the lovemark framework demonstrates that it does not meet the empirical testing criteria. Cho (2011) empirically tested the Robert's lovemark framework. The author asserted that “lovemarks are brands, events, and experiences that people passionately love” (Roberts, 2006, p. 15). In Roberts' view, a lovemark is a combination of high brand love and respect. Roberts (2006) discriminated between lovemarks and brands, products, and fads based on the love and respect experienced by a consumer.

Products are characterized as having low levels of love and respect; fads have a high level of love but a low level of respect; brands have a low level of love but a high level of respect; and lovemarks have high levels of both love and respect. Triangular theory (Simon, 2018) is the most widely used framework for investigating brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). However, the literature provides insufficient evidence to determine the nature of the relationships between the brand image dimensions (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2015), especially mystery and brand love. Hence, to examine this relationship, we propose the following:

**H3<sub>a</sub>.** Mystery positively influences brand love.

Cho (2011) notes that favorable memories from previous experiences refer to beneficial memories from one's past experiences of incidents, place or family members. Future aspirations represent dreams of owning a brand that reflects an ideal image and future desires, and self-congruity refers to the ability of the brand to reflect one's self-image. The work of (Saleki, 2014) discusses three forms of self-image and self-congruity in an attempt to understand brand-switching intentions.

Loureiro, Ruediger, and Demetris (2012, p. 1) claim that their study, “for the first time, aims to integrate brand attachment as an antecedent of brand love and both, affective commitment and brand trust as mediators between brand love and loyalty.” A few studies on branding (Bian & Moutinho, 2009; Jang & Namkung, 2009) have discussed the roles of brand love and brand loyalty; however, brand respect is rarely examined. Hence, we formulate the following:

**H3<sub>b</sub>.** Mystery positively influences brand respect.

The literature has found that the physical shop environment affects the cognitive reactions and emotional conditions of customers (Turley & Milliman, 2000). For instance, pleasant colors enhance consumers' positive evaluations (Chebat & Michon, 2003) and feelings (Jang & Namkung, 2009). The pleasantness of an ambient scent evokes an effective response in the consumer (Morrison, Gan, Dubelaar, & Oppewal, 2011), and pleasingly scented products affect positive product evaluations (Spangenberg, Grohmann, & Sprott, 2005). In-store music impacts shoppers' product evaluations and emotional reactions (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). Pleasant tactile experiences increase the positive perceptions of a product. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed

in order to analyze the interdependence of sensuality for brand love and brand respect:

**H4<sub>a</sub>**. Sensuality positively influences brand love.

While Shukla and Purani (2012) compare the importance of luxury values, (Kuusik, 2017) discusses the creative consumption of aesthetic objects. Byun, Jones, and Wooldridge (2018) elaborate on design-driven consumers. Sirgy, Grewal, and Mangleburg (2000) focus on self-congruity and retail patronage with regard to store aesthetics. However, few studies have sought to establish a relationship between sensuality and brand respect. Roberts (2006) and Cho (2011) consider the dimensions of brand experience but not that of consumer brand congruence. Therefore, we propose the following:

**H4<sub>b</sub>**. Sensuality positively influences brand respect.

Socrates once stated the following: “One word frees us of all the weight and pain in life. That word is Love.” Langner, Bruns, Fischer, and Rossiter (2016) claimed that the accumulation of “interpersonal circumstances” supports this understanding of the influence of love. They elaborated by showing how intimate memories and incidents help to shape love trajectories. Cho (2011) demonstrates qualitatively that the empathy of a company and the engagement of a consumer can affect brand love and lead to the construction of beneficial long-term interactions with the brand. Brand colors and shopping intentions add to a brands' sensuality. The pleasure consumers feel when interacting with a brand and its goods (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2015) may affect emotions favorably (i.e., brand love). Thus, pleasant emotional experiences may contribute to creating a lovemark (i.e., high brand love and respect). Batra et al. (2012) state that brand love is an important aspect of modern brands for both consumers and marketers. Hence, we propose the following:

**H5<sub>a</sub>**. Intimacy positively influences brand love.

A sense of intimacy arises when a brand/firm evokes a memory of personal events. It is thus essential to test the relationship between intimacy and brand respect. Emotional associations that contribute to experiential benefits are shaped by both the product-related and non-product-related attributes perceived through direct and indirect interactions with the brand (Cho & Fiore, 2015). Yasin and Shamim, (2013) argued that brand love has a mediating effect on purchase intentions. However, no study has offered conclusive evidence on the link between brand respect and intimacy. Therefore, we propose the following:

**H5<sub>b</sub>**. Intimacy positively influences brand respect.

### 3.4. Consumer, brand, and congruence

Consumers are thought to prefer products with images congruent with their self-concept. According to Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. (2012), the self-congruity theory proposes that consumer behavior is partly determined by the congruence resulting from a psychological comparison between the product-user image (Springer, Cham., Eroglu, Machleit, & Davis, 2001) and the consumer's self-concept (actual self-image, ideal self-image, social self-image and ideal social self-image). An individual's self-concept consists of stable self-assessments, including personality attributes, self-knowledge of skills and abilities, occupation and hobbies, and a self-awareness of one's physical attributes (Wiggert, Wilhelm, Dertnl, & Bleichert, 2015).

It is noted that self-image congruence is limited to two types—ideal and actual: “The consumer tends to purchase brands which have a similar image to his/her self-image” (Engel, 2001, p. 399). This phenomenon will create a strong and intimate relationship between the consumer and the brand. A substantial literature supports this idea (e.g., Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2012; Albert et al., 2008; Michon, Chebat, & Turley, 2005), but very little effort has been made to explain brand love and consumer-brand congruence. Therefore, we propose the

following:

**H6<sub>a</sub>**. Brand love positively influences consumer-brand congruence.

Research on brand love began with a conceptual article by (Shimp, Carolina, & Madden, 1988). This was followed by the first major empirical study on brand love (Ahuvia, 1998) and Fournier's (1998) now classic work on consumer brand relationships, which included brand love as a relationship type. Rauschnabel, Ahuvia, Ivens, and Leischnig (2015) provide more insights into the personality of brand-lovers and into the interplay between social relationships and consumer-brand relationships.

Rossmann and Wilke (2017) state that the impact of customer orientation on brand love is powerful. Especially in markets featuring low competitive differentiation in products and services (Yalch & Spangenberg, 2000). The stronger brand love in undifferentiated segment (Hosany & Martin, 2012) refers to brand relationship quality. However, there is limited research on how brand respect influences consumer-brand congruence. Hence, we propose the following:

**H6<sub>b</sub>**. Brand respect positively influences consumer-brand congruence.

## 4. Materials and methodology

### 4.1. Empirical setting

Mumbai, with its multilingual, diverse culture and heterogeneous demographics, is the research setting for this study. High levels of competition and a growing Indian economy that features increasing conspicuous consumption have been increasing the demand for luxury brands in India. It is the financial capital of one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, is thus a strategically important research setting. Additionally, the city has a large concentration of high-net worth households that engage in the display of earned and/or inherited wealth.

### 4.2. Data collection

The following section describes the study's measurement constructs, sampling plan, and data-collection procedure. A pilot study provided insights into the modifications required for the final questionnaire. Data collection was carried out over a six-week period using convenience and referral sampling on participants who were easily accessible in order to achieve a response from every contact made (Denscombe, 2007).

To investigate consumer-brand congruence in Mumbai, 900 questionnaires (hardcopy) and > 200 contacts (softcopy) were circulated. A total of 488 usable completed questionnaires were received. Since it is important to ensure that a sample is representative of the main population (Churchill, 1999), the study validated the complexity of the model by having the participants self-administer the questionnaires. The study took precautions by discarding responses with missing values. This study employed structure equation modeling (SEM). As reported by Foroudi et al. (2014), an empirical ratio of at least five observations per estimate parameter is necessary, and communalities above 0.5 have also been proposed (Hair, William, & Barry, 2006).

### 4.3. Measurement

Aaker's brand personality scale has been widely used since 1997. This study argues that a stricter definition of brand personality is needed in order to overcome the current state of conceptual confusion in the branding research, which has affected studies of brand image. Concrete definitions are also needed to allow brand personality to serve as a rich concept useful for understanding and managing brands.

This study uses brand perception and brand expectation to evaluate the influence on consumer-brand attribution. Brand perception and



**Table 1**  
Measurement items with major reference.

Constructs	No of items	Major references	Code
Brand perception	10	Hohenstein et al. (2007)	P
Brand expectation	7	Hohenstein et al., (2007)	Ep
Mystery	10	Cho E., (2011)	M
Sensuality	10	Cho E., (2011)	S
Intimacy	16	Cho E., (2011)	I
Brand love	6	Roberts (2006)	BL
Brand respect	11	Frei and Shaver (2002)	BR

**Table 2**  
Demographic profile (N = 488).

	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	271	55.5
Female	217	44.5
Age		
18–28 yrs	250	51.2
29–39 yrs	177	36.3
40–50 yrs	51	10.5
50 yrs & above	10	2.0
Annual income (in INR)		
3–5 lac	189	38.7
5–7 lac	118	24.2
7–9 lac	71	14.5
9 lac & above	110	22.5
Brands		
Louis Vuitton	256	52.5
Coco Chanel	56	11.5
Emporio Armani	176	36.1

brand expectations have 10 and seven items, respectively (Hohenstein, Sirgy, Herrmann, & Heitmann, 2007). The dimensions of brand image, such as mystery (10 items), sensuality (10 items), intimacy (16 items), brand loyalty (seven items), and brand respect (11 items) (Frei & Shaver, 2002) are adapted from the seminal work of Cho (2011) (see Table 1). These were evaluated on a five-point scale (5 = “strongly agree,” 1 “strongly disagree”). The sample characteristics (see Table 2) were as follows: gender (55.5% male and 44.5% female), age (18–28 years = 51.2%; 29–39 years = 36.2%; 40–50 years = 10.4%; 50 and above = 2.0%), and annual income (3–5 lac = 38.7%; 5–7 lac = 24.2%; 7–9 lac = 14.5%; 9 lac and above = 22.5%). Choices of luxury brand were as follows: Louis Vuitton = 52.5%, Coco Chanel = 11.5%, Emporio Armani = 36.1%.

Though most participants were in the 18–28 age group and were students, this was not deemed to be a problem. The use of student samples is supported by Foroudi et al. (2018): “Students as a fairly heterogeneous group...are future managers and decision makers” (c.f. Van Heerden & Puth, 1995). There was a remarkable percentage of working professionals in the 29–39 age group.

**5. Results and analysis**

Prior to collecting the completed questionnaires, this study conducted seven personal interviews with communication and branding experts specifying the content domain, especially with respect to selecting the luxury brands vis-à-vis the dimensions of brand experience (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy) used in the main version of the survey (Churchill, 1979). A pilot study was conducted among academics. Based on their comments, necessary changes were incorporated into the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was then completed by 242 postgraduates and working professionals. The sample was increased to 488 (useful sample) in order to validate the complexity of the model (Kenny, 2012; Lowry & Gaskin, 2014).

The scale items showed a high degree of reliability, with a

**Table 3**  
Study constructs, Cronbach alpha, scale items, mean, standard variation.

Code	Items	Factor loadings	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	
					Pre	Re
	Brand perception (P) defined people relate to brands in their life quite similarly to the way they relate to people around them (Madden, Fehle, & Fournier, 2002), and brand knowledge characteristics refer to brand perception; customer response refers to the customer's processing of those perceptions to form subsequent comparative evaluations, preferences, behavioral intentions, or behavior (Hartman & Spiro, 2005)					
P7	My preferred brand ...	0.727	3.68	1.02	0.70	0.78
P8	I would use ....	0.819	3.51	1.06		
P9	I would be inclined...	0.655	3.82	1		
	Brand expectation (Ep) can be defined as expectations that serve as standards with which subsequent experiences are compared, resulting in evaluations of satisfaction or quality Zeithaml et al. (1993) or performance.					
Ep4	My friends use brand X...	0.734	3.09	1.03	0.73	0.75
Ep7	...feel connected	0.647	3.03	1.16		
	Mystery (M) Cho et al. (2015) define it as cognitive experiences shaped by great stories, past and present brand experience, as well as future dreams and aspirations (Saleh, & Abubakar, 2017)					
M2	This brand adds...	0.582	3.68	0.83	0.70	0.81
M3	This brand...	0.665	3.46	0.93		
M5	This brand captures ...	0.672	3.53	0.99		
M6	This brand captures ...	0.655	3.27	0.97		
M9	when I want...	0.729	3.26	1.12		
M10	This brand....	0.681	3.23	0.99		
	Sensuality (S) Sensuality refers to pleasant sensory experiences with a brand such as its visual look, scent, shape, or ads (Cho & Fiore, 2015; Roberts 2004). The brands' strong memory recall associated with the aesthetics of the brand (Bloch, Brunel, & Arnold, 2003)					
S2	The design...	0.689	3.75	0.84	0.92	0.80
S3	The packaging...	0.678	3.72	0.88		
S4	The smell...	0.653	3.68	0.84		
S5	The store...	0.642	3.76	0.82		
S6	The textures...	0.571	3.78	0.82		
S8	The well-ordered....	0.634	3.81	0.86		
	Intimacy (I) captures the affective and connective feelings derived from using or interacting with a brand (Cho & Fiore, 2015; Roberts, 2006). According to Yalch and Spangenberg, 2000, music helps to strengthen the affective feelings toward the brand.					
I1	I am confident ...	0.642	3.68	0.95	0.96	0.92
I2	I can rely ...	0.694	3.81	0.95		
I3	I feel comfortable....	0.672	3.78	0.96		
I4	I feel connected....	0.712	3.59	0.99		
I6	I feel happy .....	0.685	3.73	0.86		
I7	I have fun .....	0.615	3.38	0.89		
I9	I have ....	0.631	3.65	0.92		
I10	I like l....	0.645	3.78	0.9		
I11	I really....	0.683	3.69	0.96		
I12	I see ...	0.742	3.7	0.93		
I13	I will ....	0.673	3.72	0.97		
I14	I would ...	0.675	3.69	0.98		
I15	I would stay ...	0.732	3.67	1.01		
I16	This brand....	0.728	3.7	0.91		
	Brand love (BL) as defined by Batra et al. (2012) is an amalgamation of passion driven behavior, self-brand integration and positive emotional connect. Rossmann and Wilke (2017) describe brand love as the degree of emotionality a consumer has with a particular brand. This includes positive emotions that the consumer experiences vis-à-vis a brand, as well as his/her loyalty and attachment to a specific brand (Bergkvist, & Bech-Larsen, 2010).					
BL1	I am...	0.749	3.62	0.92	0.93	0.88
BL2	I love...	0.756	3.64	0.83		
BL3	I'm very attached...	0.735	3.52	0.97		
BL4	This brand...	0.742	3.78	0.94		
BL5	This brand...	0.733	3.81	0.9		
BL6	This brand ....	0.712	3.7	0.93		
BL7	This is a...	0.631	3.84	0.87		

(continued on next page)

**Table 3** (continued)

Code	Items	Factor loadings	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	
					Pre	Re
Brand respect (BR: Pieters, Wedel, & Batra, 2010) is a combination of personality, promise, and position. A strong brand can build confidence, optimism, and respect from its loyal consumers.						
BR1	I approve ...	0.805	3.72	0.9	0.91	0.86
BR3	I respect ....	0.816	3.38	0.97		
BR4	I'm very ...	0.615	3.18	1.01		
BR6	This brand...	0.64	3.9	0.82		
BR10	This brand ....	0.692	3.39	1.11		
BR11	This brand...	0.68	3.49	1.17		

Cronbach's alpha > 0.7.

Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.8, which is greater than the 0.7 considered highly acceptable for most research purposes (Hair et al., 2006). The descriptive and confirmatory factor (CFA) analyses resulted in 44 variables being retained based on their significant values.

Table 3 shows the resulting confirmatory factor loading, average variance extracted, and composite reliability (Foroudi et al., 2014). The pretest of internal consistency was within the acceptable range (Foroudi et al., 2014).

The initial CFA confirmed that the absolute correlation between the construct and its manifestation indicator measurement (i.e. factor loading) was above the acceptable threshold of 0.6 and met the requirements for reliability (Churchill, 1979). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was higher than the acceptable value and exceeded the criterion (0.875 through 0.967 > 0.70), which met the psychometric test requirements (Hair et al., 2006). We examined the results of the constrained model. The goodness of fit indices of the model (Cheung & Rensvold, 2002) with modifications suggested an acceptable fit for the model with a comparative fit index (CFI) of 0.917 (> 0.90 indicates good fit), a Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.909, a root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of 0.06, and an incremental fit index (IFI) of 0.94. The measurement model was nomologically valid (Steenkamp & van Trijp, 1991). Therefore, each fit criterion indicated that the fit of the suggested measurement model was acceptable. Thus, the model's fit was adequate (Hair et al., 2006). The homogeneity of the construct was also tested with respect to convergent validity. The average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct ranged from 0.64 to 0.84 (Table 4). A good rule of thumb is that an AVE of 0.5 or higher indicates adequate convergent validity.

In addition to examining item reliability, the study examined the loadings for two reliability measures for each construct: the composite reliability and the AVE. As Table 4 illustrates, the composite reliability measures were above 0.7. The AVE was above 0.6 for all research constructs. As a result, the measures satisfied the suggested reliability criteria (Hair et al., 2006).

In order to assess the hypotheses, the study estimated the assumed causal and covariance linear relationships among the exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) latent variables through multiple paths (Lowry & Gaskin, 2014). Based on the structural model,

**Table 4**  
Inter-construct correlation and AVE.

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	M	I	S	BR	Ep	P	BL
M	0.81	0.51	0.34	0.82	0.68						
I	0.92	0.51	0.87	0.93	0.56	0.68					
S	0.80	0.44	0.30	0.80	0.43	0.52	0.66				
BR	0.86	0.51	0.47	0.87	0.27	0.68	0.55	0.71			
Ep	0.75	0.61	0.22	0.76	0.47	0.07	0.13	0.00	0.78		
P	0.78	0.54	0.37	0.80	0.58	0.61	0.45	0.42	0.06	0.74	
BL	0.88	0.52	0.87	0.89	0.51	0.93	0.49	0.67	0.22	0.60	0.72

AVE (the average variance extracted) > 0.50; Construct reliability > 0.7.

**Table 5**

Models with hypothesized paths and goodness of fit indices.

	CMIN/DF	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
	i. P + Ep → CBA	2.64	NA	NA	NA
ii. CBA → M → S → I → BL	3.18	0.05	0.96	0.92	0.57
iii. CBA → M → S → I → BR	3.26	0.04	0.94	0.91	0.63
iv. Structural Model	2.76	0.05	0.95	0.92	0.63

	CFI	TLI rho2	RMSEA	AIC	BCC
	i. P + Ep → CBA	0.98	0.97	0.06	59.80
ii. CBA → M → S → I → BL	0.94	0.91	0.07	177.96	179.32
iii. CBA → M → S → I → BR	0.93	0.91	0.07	258.81	260.58
iv. Structural Model	0.94	0.93	0.06	263.26	265.48

CBA = Consumer brand attribute; CBC = Consumer brand congruence.

the hypotheses were examined using the standardized estimate and t-value (critical ratio). The goodness-of-fit indices of the modified model (see Table 5) provided mixed evidence about the model's fit:  $\chi^2$  (193), CFI = 0.93, TLI = 0.92, RMSEA = 0.061, IFI = 0.91. The CFI, IFI, and TLI were above 0.90, and the RMSEA was below 0.08, showing that the model had an acceptable fit (Hair et al., 2006).

## 6. Discussion and implications

The objective of this study was to extend the existing concept of luxury brand personality in a way marketers could use to project a unique luxury brand personality. These attributes act as a metaphor for consumers' symbolic self-completion (He et al., 2012). The conceptual groundwork for the study comprises the dimensions of brand image and the components of the lovemark and attribution theories. The literature (Illia & Van Rekom, 2012; Roy & Banerjee, 2014; Viot, 2011; Zheng, 2014) on brand self-congruity is limited in terms of sample generalizability and the empirical investigation of self-image and brand congruence, especially as a measure of conspicuous consumption.

The study's findings show (see Table 6) that H1<sub>a</sub> (consumer brand attribute → brand perception) was significant and supported ( $\gamma = 0.548$ ,  $t = 24.17$ ) and that H1<sub>b</sub> (consumer brand attribute → brand expectation) was also supported ( $\gamma = 0.15$ ,  $t = 6.62$ ). H4<sub>b</sub> (sensuality → brand respect) ( $\gamma = 0.202$ ,  $t = 6.02$ ), H5<sub>a</sub> (intimacy → brand love) ( $\gamma = 0.803$ ,  $t = 29.02$ ) and H5<sub>b</sub> (intimacy → brand respect) ( $\gamma = 0.613$ ,  $t = 17.27$ ) were also supported. Meanwhile, the paths for H2<sub>a</sub> (mystery → consumer brand attribute), H2<sub>b</sub> (sensuality → consumer brand attribute), H2<sub>c</sub> (intimacy → consumer brand attribute), H6<sub>a</sub> (consumer-brand congruence → brand love), and H6<sub>b</sub> (consumer-brand congruence → brand respect) were constrained. H3<sub>a</sub> (mystery → brand love), H3<sub>b</sub> (mystery → brand respect), and H4<sub>a</sub> (sensuality → brand respect) were not supported.

The validation of the model begins with H1<sub>a</sub>, which was statistically supported. This result confirms the positive relationship between consumer-brand attribute and brand perception. The second antecedent, consumer-brand attributes and brand expectation, was statistically significant (see Fig. 2). The model validated the positive relationships between both brand respect and brand love with intimacy. Brand love and sensuality were statistically significant. The relations of both brand love and brand respect to mystery were statistically insignificant. The relationships between the consumer-brand attributes and the brand experience dimensions (mystery, sensuality, intimacy) were constrained in order to operationalize the structural paths.

### 6.1. Theoretical and practical implications

#### 6.1.1. Theoretical implications

The research has found that self-image congruence affects advertising effectiveness. Self-image congruence plays a significant role in

**Table 6**  
Results of hypotheses testing.

				Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Hypothesis
H1 <sub>a</sub>	CBA	<—	P	0.548	0.023	24.17	***	Supported
H1 <sub>b</sub>	CBA	<—	Ep	0.15	0.023	6.62	***	Supported
H2 <sub>a</sub>	Mystery	<—	CBA	1				Constrained
H2 <sub>b</sub>	Intimacy	<—	CBA	1				Constrained
H2 <sub>c</sub>	Sensuality	<—	CBA	1				Constrained
H3 <sub>a</sub>	BrandLove	<—	Mystery	0.031	0.029	1.05	0.294	Not supported
H3 <sub>b</sub>	BrandRespect	<—	Mystery	-0.036	0.038	-0.95	0.344	Not supported
H4 <sub>a</sub>	BrandLove	<—	Sensuality	0.202	0.033	6.02	***	Supported
H4 <sub>b</sub>	BrandRespect	<—	Sensuality	0.035	0.026	1.35	0.179	Not supported
H5 <sub>a</sub>	BrandLove	<—	Intimacy	0.803	0.028	29.09	***	Supported
H5 <sub>b</sub>	BrandRespect	<—	Intimacy	0.613	0.036	17.27	***	Supported
H6 <sub>a</sub>	CBC	<—	BrandLove	1				Constrained
H6 <sub>b</sub>	CBC	<—	BrandRespect	1				Constrained

\*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

Notes: Path = Relationship between independent variable on dependent variable;  $\beta$  = Standardized regression coefficient; S.E. = Standard error; p = Level of significance.

influencing consumer behaviors (Kressmann et al., 2006); it facilitates positive attitudes toward brands (Ekinci & Riley, 2003) and influences consumers' choices, attitudes (Das, 2015), perceived quality (Hee Kwak & Kang, 2009), brand preferences, and brand loyalty (Kressmann et al., 2006). Brand choice can send meaningful social signals to other consumers (Hosany & Martin, 2012) about the type of person using that brand. The extant research also reports a strong relationship between self-image congruence and satisfaction (Sirgy et al., 2000). This study makes a theoretical contribution to research on brand respect, which has been understudied in the context of luxury marketing.

6.1.2. Practical implications

According to a study conducted by the Assocham (PTI, 2018) the Indian luxury market is poised to expand five-fold in the next three years, and the number of millionaires is expected to multiply by three times within five years. By 2020, approximately 250 million Indians will be involved in online trading. Approximately 20% to 25% of all luxury retail spending will occur via online shopping (Shrivatsva, 2018). In addition, India is home to the fourth-largest population of millionaires in the Asia-Pacific region. High-net-worth individual (HNI) wealth is expected to increase from \$949 billion in 2010 to \$2.3 trillion in 2020 (India luxury goods, 2017). By 2020, the wealth of HNIs in India will rise by 94%, as opposed to China's 74%, thus providing attractive opportunities to luxury retailers (Indian retail, 2019).

India's growing disposable income shows the affinity for aspirational luxury brands among the population: "The inner conflict between a middle class mindset and the globally rich income level, between conspicuous consumption and a level of luxury which is a reward for hard work shapes what we call the closet consumer" (Bureau, 2013). Closet consumers are cost-conscious and seek "value" even when buying luxury products (Shukla & Purani, 2012). Their definitions and

symbols of luxury are often different from conventional ones (Bureau, 2013).

Table 7 displays estimations of consumer brand-image and the dimensions of the brand-image matrix. The brand-image dimensions were estimated through a word association exercise. Thirteen synonyms were given for each dimension (intimacy, sensuality, and mystery) as multiple-choice questions. The respondents were asked to choose the synonyms that were relevant to their self-image ("I am...") and to choose a luxury brand: Louis Vuitton, Coco Chanel, or Emporio Armani ("brand X..."). High counts were observed regarding intimacy for both self-image and brand image. This supports the view that stronger intimacy leads to higher congruence.

Studies (Gil et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2012) have found that attachment with a brand results in consumers' identity congruity with the brand's image. The consumer-brand congruence matrix exhibits congruity with consumer brand attributes. Respondents were asked to rate ("most," "moderate," or "least") the congruence that they felt with the three stated luxury brands. Cross-tabulation was conducted, and the row totals were used to determine the positive predictive values. Table 7 shows that Louis Vuitton holds the highest congruence in the matrix. This analysis shows that consumers felt intimately attached to Louis Vuitton and believed that Louis Vuitton was compatible with their personalities.

These results help us to derive insightful practical implications, such as that the growing luxury market is of strategic importance to luxury brands in a developing country (Shukla & Purani, 2012), and that purchase intentions are pleasure-seeking (Sirgy et al., 2000) rather than pragmatic. It is not always purchasing power that dictates one's consumption of luxury brands (Stokburger-Sauer & Teichmann, 2013; Tuškej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013); the social need to belong to an aspired group is also a driver (Zhan, & He, 2012; Ji, 2014). It is observed that

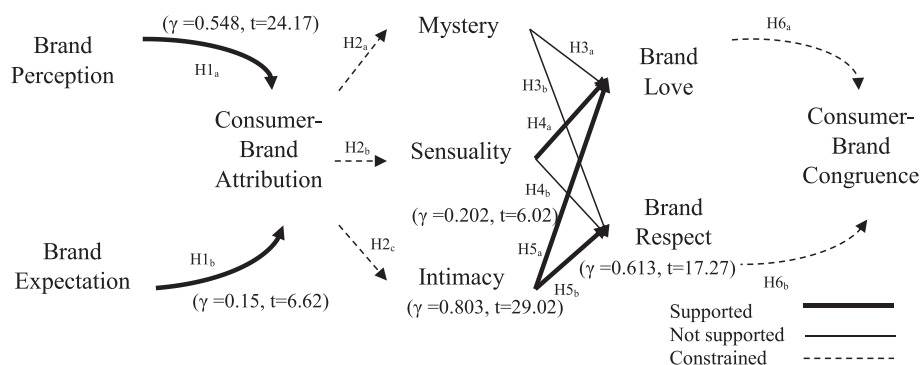


Fig. 2. Validated consumer-brand congruence model.

**Table 7**  
Estimation of consumer-brand image and consumer brand congruence matrix.

	Consumer-brand image			Consumer-brand congruence	Consumer-brand attributes		
		Self	Brand		Louis Vuitton	Coco Chanel	Emporio Armani
Dimensions of brand-image	Intimacy	865 <sup>a</sup>	923 <sup>a*</sup>	High	57.1%	1.1%	44.4%
	Sensuality	401 <sup>b</sup>	541 <sup>b</sup>	Medium	51.6%	13.8%	34.6%
	Mystery	398 <sup>c</sup>	427 <sup>c</sup>	Low	54.4%	14.3%	28.6%

\* a = high, b = medium, c = low.

consumers feel that the brands they use represent their extended selves (Loureiro et al., 2012). Thus, conspicuous consumption is a portrayal of the symbolic self (Kressmann et al., 2006).

6.2. Limitations and suggestions for future study

According to (Godey et al., 2012), conspicuous consumption is a phenomenon whereby people acquire consumer-brand congruence in the luxury category. Nam, Ekinci, and Whyatt (2011) noted that brand-lifestyle congruence differs from brand-self congruence and brand identification because consumers use their self-concept and social groups as comparison standards.

However, regarding brand-lifestyle congruence (Michon et al., 2005), “the comparison standards are associated with consumers' consumption opinions, activities, interests and goals, which might be related to different social and personal values that are not captured by self-concept and social identity” (Nam et al., 2011, p. 1014). The dimensions of brand image influence the degree of congruence (Bosnjak, Sirgy, Hellriegel, & Maure, 2011). However, this study allows future research to estimate the interplay (Morrison et al., 2011) between the brand image dimensions. The challenge is to empirically demonstrate self-image and brand-image congruity since they are subjective. This study concludes that the influence of brand expectations and brand perceptions on consumer-brand attributions is moderately strong for the sample examined.

The influence of mystery, sensuality, and intimacy via mediators (brand love and brand respect) on consumer-brand congruence makes it a complex model; however, the study validates the various paths by evaluating multiple models. The significant and predominant variables are considered with respect to the final validity of the model. The study found that the literature on brand love is substantial; however, there is a considerable gap in the literature (Hartman & Spiro, 2005) on brand respect, the study of which could support and substantiate the complexity of the model. Therefore, it would be interesting to extend this

model to various categories.

Lastly, future research could focus on the relative performance of the various brand-image and self-image scales for predicting consumer-brand congruence. For instance, Ilaw's (2014) self-image congruity scale measures general self-image and preferred brands' images. Sowden and Grimmer (2009) capture consumers' in- and out-group identities through their self-image in car purchases. Another perspective from which to evaluate brand image dimensions and consumer congruence would be store atmospherics (Jang & Namkung, 2009; Spangenberg et al., 2005; Turley & Milliman, 2000). This study's measures are specific to brand perceptions; expectations; and cognitive, sensory, and emotional experiences.

Future research may also compare the effects of brand image on low-involvement categories. Studies might investigate the link between personality and buying or appreciating well-designed products using other, more in-depth measures. Further studies could also focus on the influence of other personality traits, such as self-esteem, conformity, and self-presentation strategies, and on the tendency to prefer well-designed products (Cho & Lee, 2006). In transitional economies, as affluence rises, consumers (i.e., emerging middle- and upper-class consumers) might feel the need to display their newfound wealth. This type of research may identify the relative usefulness of brand image or brand experience scales in predicting consumers' sense of symbolic self-completion.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

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Appendix 1

Items	Code	
Brand perception (P)		
Use brand X more than other brand	P1	Hohenstein et al., (2007)
Value brand X more than other brands	P2	
Brand X is my preferred brand	P3	
Inclined to buy brand X	P4	
Brand X image corresponds to my self-image	P5	
Through brand X, I can express what I find important in life.	P6	
Brand X is consistent with how I see myself.	P7	
Brand X reflects who I am.	P8	
Brand expectation (Ep)		
Connected to my friends while using brand X.	Ep1	Hohenstein et al., (2007)
Brand X to be like my friends.	Ep2	
Friends use brand X.	Ep3	
Positive feedback from people while using brand X.	Ep4	
Brand X helps me feel a part of a bigger group.	Ep5	
Satisfied with brand X.	Ep6	
Mystery (M)		



Brand captures the times.	M1	Cho. E (2011)
When I want to purchase a fashion product.	M2	
Brand has changed my life for the better.	M3	
Brand captures a sense of my life.	M4	
Brand comes to mind immediately	M5	
Brand is a part of my life.	M6	
Brand adds to the experience of my life.	M7	
Brand adds to the quality of my life.	M8	
Brand always has what I'm looking for.	M9	
Sensuality(S)		
Brand has incredible displays.	S1	Cho. E (2011)
Website design for this brand is really well done.	S2	
Brand has a beautiful color scheme.	S3	
Brand's packaging really appeals to me.	S4	
Design of this brand's ads is really well done.	S5	
Brand is as pleasing as the product.	S6	
Store environment of this brand is pleasing.	S7	
Intimacy (I)		
Happy when I wear this brand.	I1	Cho. E (2011)
My relationship with this brand will last a long time.	I2	
Fun with this brand.	I3	
Rely on this brand.	I4	
Connected to this brand.	I5	
Disappointed if this brand was no longer available.	I6	
Really excites me.	I7	
Trust this brand.	I8	
Stay with this brand.	I9	
Looking at the products of this brand.	I10	
Comfortable when I wear this brand.	I11	
This brand as cool.	I12	
Brand Love (BL)		
Brand is a pure delight.	BL1	Roberts (2006)
Brand is totally awesome.	BL2	
Passionate about this brand.	BL3	
Love this brand.	BL4	
Attached to this brand.	BL5	
Wonderful brand.	BL6	
Brand makes me feel good.	BL7	
Brand respect (BR)		
Pay attention to what is going on with this brand.	BR1	Frei and Shaver (2002)
Brand leads fashion trend season to season.	BR2	
Brand is very faithful.	BR3	
Approve of this brand's performance.	BR4	
Brand is honest to me.	BR5	
Committed to this brand.	BR6	
Respect this brand.	BR7	
Brand is responsible to society.	BR8	
Brand is responsible to me.	BR9	

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