

**THE ROLE OF TEMPORAL FOCUS AND SELF-CONGRUENCE ON CONSUMER
PREFERENCE AND WILLINGNESS TO PAY: A NEW SCRUTINY IN BRANDING
STRATEGY**

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aims to investigate the psychological mechanism that motivates consumers to pay more for a preferred brand that reflects their actual or ideal self-concept by examining the shift in attention between consumers' present, future, and past moments.

Design/methodology/approach: First, in a survey setting, we identify the relationship between temporal focus and self-congruence. Subsequently, we conduct three experiments to capture the effects of temporal focus on brand preference and willingness to pay (WTP). In these experiments, we manipulate consumers' self-congruence and temporal focus.

Findings: The findings show that consumers with a present focus (distant future and distant past foci) tend to evaluate a brand more preferably when the brand serves to reflect their actual (ideal) selves. However, in the absence of present focus consumers' WTP is more for a brand that reflects their ideal selves.

Limitations/implications: The study does not have an actual measure for consumers' WTP; instead, we use a single-item measure.

Practical implications: This study sheds new light on branding strategy. The results suggest that authentic and aspirational branding strategies are relevant to publicly consumed products. Brand managers could incorporate consumers' temporal focus into branding strategy that could significantly influence consumer preference and WTP for their brands.

Originality/value: This study expands our understanding of brand usage imagery congruity by showing that temporal focus is an important determinant of self-congruence. In this regard, this study empirically investigates the relationship of temporal focus, self-congruence, brand preference, and WTP. It further reveals that mere brand preference does not necessarily lead consumers to pay more for symbolic brands.

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1. Introduction

Consumers' willingness to pay (WTP) refers to the maximum amount a consumer is willing to pay for a product or service. Knowledge of consumers' WTP is important for branding strategy as it directly relates to planning and formulating competitive brand positioning. For instance, overpricing can have pernicious effects on valued and potential customers by estranging them, whereas, offering underpriced products can devastate the company's profitability and sustainability. Despite the significance of WTP in the overall branding strategy, only 8% of U.S. companies utilize a best-practice approach in their pricing strategy (PriceBeam, 2017).

In addition to functional (e.g., the quality and performance of the brand) and experiential (e.g., the positive feeling of using the brand) benefits, symbolic benefits (e.g., the fit between the brand's personality and the consumer's actual or ideal self, which in the literature is termed *self-congruence*) have a significant influence on consumers' WTP for a brand. In this regard, past studies have shown that self-congruence has a significant positive effect on consumers' brand preference (Sirgy *et al.*, 1997) and WTP (Chernev *et al.*, 2011). In practice, such findings are used by brand managers whereby they arrive at the market price by considering consumers' brand preference in addition to other considerations such as cost and competition. However, such a branding strategy is troublesome, as high brand preference may not always translate into higher WTP. To illustrate this, assume a consumer likes Adidas and is inclined to buy Adidas products

over any other brand as it fits her self-concept. Still, she may not be willing to pay a price premium for a new Adidas jacket that serves as a means of reflecting the actual self of the customer. If so, then *what kind of psychological factor can encourage consumers to pay more for a preferred brand?* This particular question demands an investigation into a psychological mechanism that can help managers by elucidating the effects of self-congruence on consumers' brand preference and WTP.

To this end, we posit that self-congruence is determined by temporal focus—the way consumers devote their attention to thinking about past, present, or future moments (Shipp *et al.*, 2009). In this regard, temporal focus differentiates between various types of self-concepts. Therefore, self-congruence captured in the context of temporal focus would provide an accurate measure of consumers' brand preference and their WTP for a brand. For instance, Markus and Nurius (1986) defined the identity of possible selves to be based on the explanation of past, present, and future selves. Wilson and Ross (2001) stated that the way people perceive their past and future selves is related to their perception of their current selves; consequently, they have a different evaluation of perceived self-improvement. Despite the rational linkage between temporal focus and self-concept, there is lack of empirical studies that investigate the relationship among temporal focus, self-congruence, brand preference, and WTP. We believe such an empirical investigation is important for branding strategy as consumer preference and WTP for various kinds of brands could be moderated by consumers' self-congruence in relation to the temporal focus.

Thus, in this study, we examine the effects of temporal focus on consumers' brand preference and WTP for brands that serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual and ideal selves. Our empirical results challenge conventional wisdom by revealing that although

temporal focus and self-congruence are drivers of consumers' brand preference, such a brand preference may not always yield higher WTP. This finding is particularly relevant for brand managers who would like to know an efficient strategy for setting appropriate prices for their products based on how brands are aligned with consumers' self-congruence.

This study is also relevant for consumer researchers who seek to understand the determinant of self-congruence and the impact of temporal focus on consumer responses. In this regard, the study contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, we explore the determinant that affects actual and ideal self-congruence. Second, we identify the effect of temporal focus on brand preference and WTP within the consumer context. Third, we expand construal-level theory (CLT; Trope and Liberman, 2010) by including temporal focus as an additional type of psychological distance. Managerial implications of our findings state that for branding strategy that considers influencing consumers' brand preference and WTP should incorporate: 1) customers' temporal focus into authentic (i.e., actual self) and aspirational (i.e., ideal self) branding considerations, and 2) one-on-one marketing approach to branding.

2. Background and conceptual framework

First, we review the core concepts used in this study namely temporal focus, self-congruence, and consumer responses. In this review, we provide an in-depth analysis of how the current research fits within the extant literature. Subsequently, we propose our conceptual framework.

2.1 Temporal focus

Time plays an essential psychological role in the way people think, feel, and behave (Zimbardo and Boyd, 2008). Time has a significant impact on consumer responses such as brand preference (Bluedorn, 2002) and WTP (Guo *et al.*, 2012). Hence, the temporal focus is vital to consumer research. It is important to note that temporal focus is a perceived notion of relativistic time instead of the actual passage of time (George and Jones, 2000). In this regard, the temporal focus is captured along three dimensions namely present focus, future focus, and past focus.

Present focus refers to the current moment and about what is presently happening (Shipp *et al.*, 2009), however, it does not relate to mindfulness. *Future focus* refers to the representation of how people wish to behave, feel, and look in the future (Markus and Nurius, 1986). *Past focus* relates to the individual's memories and conceptions of history (Karniol and Ross, 1996).

Numerous studies have identified the importance of temporal focus from the business and organizational perspectives. Foo *et al.* (2009) found that future focus mediates the relationship between the positive affect and the entrepreneur's efforts in venture tasks that extend beyond immediate proactive behavior. That is to say, a future-oriented entrepreneur tends to be more future optimistic and is motivated to think about their venture pursuit. Nadkarni and Chen (2014) suggested that the rate of new product introduction is highly related to the profile of the CEO's temporal focus, which is reflected in their strategic business behavior in stable and dynamic environments. Cojuharenco *et al.* (2011) argued that temporal focus serves as an additional factor to explain the injustice experience in the employment relationship, where present-oriented employees are more likely to be concerned about an interpersonal treatment; future-oriented employees are more likely to be concerned about an unfair outcome.

In the domain of consumer research, Winterich and Haws (2011) examined the role of temporal focus in explaining the positive affect and self-control. They integrated affect and temporal focus into CLT to provide a greater understanding of the different positive emotions involved in the consumer decision and preference. Mogilner *et al.* (2012) found that temporal focus functions by shifting people's happiness, and subsequently, affect their choice of product that is being associated with an exciting or calming attribute. Thus, past studies have suggested that one's temporal focus—how people temporally allocate their attention—can influence their subsequent preference. Thus, the temporal focus could significantly influence different kinds of consumer responses (such as brand preference and WTP) under various circumstances.

2.2 Self-congruence

Self-congruence refers to the fit of the brand's personality with the consumer's self (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Malär *et al.* (2011) suggest that there are two types of self-congruence: actual and ideal self-congruence. Previous research has found that the variation of self-congruence is affected by one's self-esteem, public self-consciousness, product involvement, social tie strength, social desirability, and consumers' need for uniqueness and status consumption (Malär *et al.*, 2011; Roy and Rabbanee, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2017). Self-congruence has a significant positive effect on brand attitude, brand loyalty (Han *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2012), emotional brand attachment (Malär *et al.*, 2011), brand love, positive word of mouth (Wallace *et al.*, 2017), and brand preference (Sirgy *et al.*, 1997; Ross, 1971). Self-congruence is evident when consumers perceive their self-concept to match with the brand personality, brand user imagery, or brand usage imagery (Liu *et al.*, 2012); subsequently, they tend to have a higher preference for the brand and are willing to pay more for the brand (Chernev *et al.*, 2011).

Although much research on self-congruence has taken place in the last few decades, previous scholars have found that in some cases ideal self-congruence would best describe the positive outcomes while in other instances actual self-congruence would have the best results (Ekinici and Riley, 2003). As shown in Table 1, ideal self-congruence is found to be a better indicator than actual self-congruence in predicting consumer's overall attitude towards the firm, customer satisfaction, intention to return, and customer experience (Ekinici *et al.*, 2008; Hosany and Martin, 2012). In contrast, actual self-congruence is found to be a better indicator than ideal self-congruence in predicting emotional brand attachment (Malär *et al.*, 2011). Most of the recent studies (e.g., Bennett and Vijaygopal, 2018; Han *et al.*, 2016; Liu *et al.*, 2012; Roy and Rabbane, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2017) consider an aggregate level of self-congruence that do not differentiate between actual and ideal self-congruence. Furthermore, some studies do not compare between actual and ideal self-congruence as their focus is on exclusively examining the effect of either actual self-congruence (Jamal and Goode, 2001; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007) or the impact of ideal self-congruence (Japutra *et al.*, 2018) in a narrow setting. Thus, current research findings are limited in their applicability to researchers (and brand managers) as they do not provide clear guidelines regarding in which conditions to emphasize more on actual self-congruence (authentic branding) or ideal self-congruence (aspirational branding). For this reason, previous studies call for future research that investigate the determinant of actual and ideal self-congruence (Ekinici and Riley, 2003; Liu *et al.*, 2012). Such research is vital as it broadens our understanding of how self-congruence varies across different conditions.

[Table 1 about here]

2.3 Consumer responses: Brand preference and willingness to pay (WTP)

We capture consumer responses along two important dimensions: brand preference and WTP. Previous studies have defined brand preference as the most pertinent consumer response in identifying the effect of self-congruence (Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007; Jamal and Goode, 2001; Sirgy *et al.*, 1997; Ross, 1971). First, consumers' brand preference represents the symbolic meaning they have assigned to the brand in conjunction with their own personality (Chernev *et al.*, 2011). In this regard, there is only one extant study that examines the effect of actual and ideal self-congruence on brand preference (Ross, 1971). Second, brand preference is sensitive towards low-level (e.g., actual self) and high-level (e.g., ideal self) construals of self (Maier and Wilken, 2014).

In addition to brand preference, we also capture consumer response by measuring WTP, which is an important consideration in branding strategy. To the best of our knowledge, no existing studies have proposed or tested the effect of actual and ideal self-congruence on WTP. Therefore, we consider WTP as another consumer response to represent the behavioral outcome associated with the strength of brand preference (Chernev *et al.*, 2011). We are particularly interested in WTP as social psychologists have found that a shift of temporal focus affects the way people respond to a monetary transaction (Guo *et al.*, 2012).

2.4 Conceptual framework

We draw from the literature on CLT (Trope and Liberman, 2010) and situational self-image (Schenk and Holman, 1980) to build our conceptual framework. CLT is adopted as it provides a theoretical underpinning for explaining the association between psychological distance and low-level versus high-level construals of self (Trope *et al.*, 2007). Although CLT

illustrates the relationship between temporal focus and consumers' selves, it has limited application in self-congruence research. For example, CLT does not provide an explanation for the relative importance of distinct types of consumer's selves that the consumer wishes to express while selecting a brand in a specific situation. The situational self-image is adopted as it characterizes the way in which consumers utilize a brand's ability to reflect their actual or ideal selves (Liu *et al.*, 2012; Schenk and Holman, 1980). While consumers are in a static cognitive state with regard to their actual and ideal selves, the literature of situational self-image argues that the consumer's need for actual or ideal self-congruity depends upon the perception of others in various situations and the individual's repertoire of self-images (Schenk and Holman, 1980). In summary, consumers have many self-concepts and thus decide which brand could be used to reflect their self-image in the temporal perspective of a given situation (Belk, 1975).

We present our conceptual framework in Figure 1. In this framework, we propose a branding strategy for authentic and aspirational brands. *Authentic branding* refers to positioning a brand as means of representing the consumer's actual self (i.e., low-level construals of self), whereas *aspirational branding* is related to highlighting a brand's ability to reflect the consumer's ideal self (i.e., high-level construals of self) (Malär *et al.*, 2011). We capture consumers' responses towards such brands using their brand preference and WTP. Furthermore, we posit that temporal focus and self-congruence moderate these consumer responses that vary across brands. The consideration of self-congruence in branding strategies would allow a brand to act as a timely informational cue that serves as a personal identity signal (Schmitt, 2012). Furthermore, if one's temporal focus is associated with possible selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986); then, it could determine *what* information concerns consumers and how they react to it (Shipp *et al.*, 2009).

[Figure 1 about here]

To illustrate such a branding strategy for aspirational brands, consider a consumer who is sitting in front of her laptop and thinking about a future moment. Based on our conceptual framework, we posit that her percentage of browsing for online information that relates to her ideal self would be higher than the percentage of browsing for information that reflects her current self because an ideal self is related to a future self (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Thus, the consumer who is currently engaging with a future focus will be more interested in ads that display brand information that is congruent with her ideal self; therefore, in such a situation, she will be more likely to disregard those ads that show brand information corresponding to her actual self.

Based on our conceptual framework, we advocate that the temporal focus could influence consumers' need for actual (ideal) self-congruity, which would subsequently drive them to actual (ideal) self-congruence while they are exploring authentic (aspirational) brands, therefore, they will have a higher preference and WTP for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual (ideal) self.

3. Hypothesis development

When the focus is on the present moment, people think in concrete terms as they currently experience that moment and are inclined to utilize all of its rich and contextualized features (Trope *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, their psychological distance from the direct experience of reality appears to be closer to and associated with the low-level construals of self (Trope and Liberman, 2010). That is, people activate their need for actual self-congruity while they are

focusing on the present moment. The reason given is that the actual self reflects how they see themselves and who they are at the moment (Markus and Nurius, 1986). Hence, we suggest that actual self-congruence exists when present-focused consumers are engaged with a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual self (where they are in the here and now), and they are likely to have higher preference for and be willing to pay more for that brand in order to seek for an answer as to how the brand could possibly represent their current identity (Trope and Liberman, 2010). In contrast, a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the ideal self requires people to imagine their possible selves, and these are represented in an abstract and decontextualized manner. Thus, the selves are vague and less likely to match with people engaged with the present moment.

H1. A consumer who focuses on the present moment tends to have a higher preference for and be willing to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self, rather than selecting a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's ideal self.

When the focus is on a distant future moment, people conceptualize objects in abstract terms because they do not have any direct experience of them. Thus, they have greater psychological distance from the immediate experience and are inclined to associate with high-level construals of their future selves (Trope *et al.*, 2007). High-level construals of one's future self adopt a psychologically distant position that portrays the desired self, which is separable from the current self. That is, people activate their need for ideal self-congruity while they are focusing on the distant future moment. Markus and Nurius (1986) defined an ideal self as a

future self that allows people to consider their potential in terms of ideas, beliefs, goals, hopes, and images. We advocate that ideal self-congruence exists when consumers focused on the distant future are engaged with a brand that serves as a means of reflecting on their ideal self, and as a result, they are likely to have higher preference for and be willing to pay more for the brand as it reflects the way they think, and it anticipates their optimal selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

H2. A consumer who focuses on a distant future moment tends to have a higher preference for and be willing to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's ideal self, rather than selecting a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self.

We propose that people who focus on a distant past moment are associated with high-level construals of self. The reason for this is that when people recall memories from the distant past events, it results in a distal psychological position, thus forming abstract mental construals. Markus and Nurius (1986) stated that people selectively create a positive image of their past self from their memories in an abstract way. Thus, people reactivate their desired past self because of their beliefs about self-efficacy that result from their past success (Bandura, 1982), which then functions as a set of interpretive frameworks for making sense of past behavior, and as means-ends patterns for new behavior (Markus and Nurius, 1986). To illustrate this, people who have completed an Ironman Triathlon three years ago may well believe that they can still complete it as long as they start the training program a few months before the event. People who have made a poor property investment in the past two years will believe that they can make a sound property

investment as they have learned their lesson. The reason given is that people tend to view their positive past self as their future self, whereas people believe that they can make an improvement from their negative past self (Kahneman, 2011). Based on this notion, we suggest that consumers activate their need for ideal self-congruity while they are focusing on a distant past moment. Thus, ideal self-congruence exists when consumers focused on the distant past are engaged with a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their ideal selves and they are likely to have a higher preference for and be willing to pay more for the brand as it reflects the way they perceive their possible successful selves (Markus and Nurius, 1986).

H3. A consumer who focuses on the distant past moment tends to have a higher preference for and be willing to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's ideal self, rather than selecting a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self.

The goal of Study 1 is to test the association between temporal focus and self-congruence. In particular, this study intends to investigate whether there is a difference in a brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self versus consumer's ideal self when the consumer focuses on the present moment versus future moment. Study 2 is designed to examine the effect of temporal focus on brand preference and WTP.

4. Study 1

4.1 Design and procedure

Three hundred students (59% women) from a large public university in Finland were approached to participate in a self-administrated questionnaire. Twenty-seven percent of the sample were aged from 18 to 20 years old, 62% were from 21 to 30 years old, and 11% were from 31 to 60 years old. Participants were asked to answer on a 7-point scale (ranging from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*) three items about self-esteem ($\alpha = .89$; adapted from Rosenberg, 1965) and four items about public self-consciousness ($\alpha = .74$; adapted from Fenigstein *et al.*, 1975). Self-esteem and public self-consciousness were judged to examine if there are moderating effects on self-concept (Malär *et al.*, 2011). Next, the participants were asked to answer on a 7-point scale the extent to their temporal focus by completing the phrase “At this moment in time, I am thinking about ...” and “At this moment in time, my mind is focused on ...” 1 = *the present moment* and 7 = *a future moment* ($\alpha = .71$, adapted from Shipp *et al.*, 2009). Lastly, the participants were asked to answer on two items of self-congruence by completing the phrase “I would prefer a brand that is consistent with how I see my ...” and “I would prefer a brand to reflect my ...” 1 = *actual self* and 7 = *ideal self* ($\alpha = .80$, adapted from Sirgy *et al.*, 1997). We included “*I would prefer*” for the self-congruence measure as this method would require respondents to indicate their favorable attitude to as whether the brand serves as a means of reflecting their actual or ideal self (Sirgy *et al.*, 1997; pp. 235).

4.2 Results and discussion

Age group did not have significant main effect with the self-congruence as dependent variables ($F = .83, p = .44$); thus will not be discussed further. The Pearson correlation revealed a

significant positive relationship between temporal focus and self-congruence ($r = .27, N = 300, p < .001$). We categorized the present and future focus groups by using 4 $[(1 + 7)/2]$ as a cut-off point for temporal focus mean scores. The participants' mean scores below 4 were categorized as the *present focus group* ($N = 107$), whereas the mean scores that were above 4 were categorized as the *future focus group* ($N = 154$). We grouped those with a mean score of 4 into the *neutral group* ($N = 39$). The participants in the temporal focus groups did not show significant differences in self-esteem ($F(2,297) = .64, p > .10$) and public self-consciousness ($F(2,297) = 2.46, p > .05$), but there was a significant difference in self-congruence ($F(2,297) = 7.33, p = .001$). The participants placed in the future focus group rated the brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 4.05, SD = 1.24$) compared to those in the present focus group ($M = 3.46, SD = 1.27; t(259) = 3.71, p < .001$), but there was a non-significant difference in rating from the neutral group ($M = 3.68, SD = 1.05; t(191) = 1.70, p > .05$). We used a similar classification method to group self-congruence into *actual self*, *ideal self*, and *neutral* options. The participants in the present focus group preferred a brand that served as a means of reflecting their actual self (58%) over their ideal self (27%) or the neutral option (15%; $\chi^2 (31.53), N = 107, p < .001$). In contrast, the participants in the future focus group preferred a brand that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self (54%) over their actual self (29%) or the neutral option (17%; $\chi^2 (34.34), N = 154, p < .001$). The result showed a non-significant difference in option from the neutral temporal group ($\chi^2 (1.08), N = 39, p > .10$).

Study 1 suggests that the people who characteristically devoted their attention to thinking about the present moment were more likely to associate with actual self-congruence and those who thought about the future moment were more likely to associate with ideal self-congruence. However, scholars found that people may be involved in more than a single time frame (Shipp *et*

al., 2009; Zimbardo and Boyd, 2008). For instance, people who focus on the present moment can be equally interested in current events as they are in future activity. Thus, we suspected that the participants who had a mean score of 4 in their temporal focus were engaged with multiple temporal foci, where this group of the participants was not shown to have a significant difference in self-congruence.

In Study 1, we noticed the challenge of using a self-administrated questionnaire to identify an individual's temporal focus. Further, the question remains as to whether the effect of temporal focus and self-congruence influence on brand preference and WTP. We addressed these issues in the three experimental studies that manipulated participants' attention to thinking about a present moment (Study 2a), a future moment (Study 2b), and a past moment (Study 2c).

5. Study 2: Experimental Design

We conducted true experiments to determine a cause-and-effect relationship that included control groups and utilized random assignment to lessen the external validity of the design (Cooper and Schindler, 2013). A self-customization procedure was adapted to prompt the consumer's need for self-congruity because this method leads to high product involvement and it is commonly used in the self-concept and marketing research (Chernev *et al.*, 2011). We adapted the priming procedure from Zimbardo and Boyd (2008) to manipulate the temporal focus, which consists of a set of questions that reveal deeper layers of psychological meaning, visualize future goal setting, and recall memories. To increase internal validity, in the treatment group, we collected the measurement of dependent variables after manipulating self-congruence and temporal focus; in the control group, dependent variables were collected after manipulating self-congruence. Thus, this experimental design ensured that the variations of dependent variables

were caused by the participants' temporal focus. A clothing brand was chosen as clothing is a publicly consumed product that is commonly used by consumers to express their self-image and it is widely used in the self-congruence research (Liu *et al.*, 2012, Tan *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, clothing is considered as a frequently purchased product to which consumers can relate themselves due to the brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting their actual or ideal self in an anticipated usage situation (Schenk and Holman, 1980).

5.1 Study 2a

The objective of Study 2a was to test Hypothesis 1 by investigating the effect of present focus and the effect of a brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self versus consumer's ideal self on brand preference and WTP.

5.1.1 Design and procedure

Sixty students (62% women) from a large public university from Finland were approached to participate in an experiment in exchange for a small gift. To reduce the possibility of duplicate participants, we recruited participants using similar gift and research titled "Consumer Study" across Studies 2a, 2b, and 2c. We only recruited those participants who had not been explored in this study by confirming with a personal ID number. However, the personal IDs were not attached to the participants' response to ensure the given information would be treated confidentially and no identifying personal data would be collected. Thirty-eight percent of the sample were aged from 18 to 20 years old, 50% were from 21 to 30 years old, and 12% were from 31 to 60 years old. The study was a 2 (self-congruence: actual or ideal) \times 2 (temporal focus: present focus or control) between-subjects design. The participants were randomly

assigned to think about customizing a clothing that could serve as a means of reflecting their actual self or ideal self by indicating responses to seven items that relate to their clothing styles, size, favorite colors, and so on (see appendix). We included the following definitions of consumer's self (Hollenbeck and Kaikati, 2012) in order to have a better understanding of the terminology used: *Actual self* relates to who you are now; how you see yourself and maintain your self-concept. Your actual self reflects your actual personality traits, social roles, and what happens in your life and experiences. *Ideal self* relates to the many selves you could be; how you expand yourself and enhance your self-concept. Your ideal self reflects your ideal personality traits, social roles, and what will happen in your life and experiences. The participants then were asked to rate on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*) the extent to which they were "in the present moment" and their mind was "in the here and now" ($\alpha = .75$; adapted from Shipp *et al.*, 2009). Next, the participants were randomly assigned to either a control or a treatment in which they were given a present focus writing a task that was adapted from Zimbardo and Boyd (2008, pp. 129-131). The participants were informed that personal data was not to be collected. After that, they were asked to answer a set of present focus questions. They were encouraged to use their native language to list their answers to engender better expression. Further, they were encouraged to respond to the questions at a slow pace by focusing on themselves, their surroundings, and their feelings. The task then went on to instruct the participants to stay calm and silently repeated five times "I am here in the present moment" (Mogilner *et al.*, 2012). The participants then were asked to indicate their post rating for the present focus items. The participants in the control group were not exposed to this task.

Next, the participants were asked to imagine they were in a shopping complex. They were told that a new brand called Vero Ideale matched their customized clothing. They were

asked to respond to three items of brand preference: “I like Vero Ideale better than any other brand,” “Vero Ideale is my preferred brand over any other brand,” and “I would be inclined to buy Vero Ideale over any other brand” ($\alpha = .84$; 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree*; adapted from Sirgy *et al.*, 1997). Then they were presented with a set of clothing price tags (Brand 1: 52.95€; Brand 2: 79.95€; Brand 3: 39.95€; Brand 4: 65.95€), and this was followed by asking them to indicate their WTP Vero Ideale clothing (Chernev *et al.*, 2011; Guo *et al.*, 2012) that ranged in price between 39.95€ and 79.95€. We limited the participants’ response on the highest WTP and the lowest WTP as this method control the extreme outliers of monetary value that faced by open-ended questions (Guo *et al.*, 2012). Lastly, the participants were asked to rate on two items of self-congruence check by completing the phrases “Vero Ideale is consistent with how I see my ...” and “Vero Ideale serves as a means of reflecting my ...” 1 = *actual self* and 5 = *ideal self* ($\alpha = .87$).

5.1.2 Results and discussion

The manipulation checks confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the present focus writing task were more present focused ($M_{\text{post}} = 4.12$, $SD = .50$) than those in the control group ($M = 3.28$, $SD = .63$; $t(58) = 5.69$, $p < .001$). A paired-samples t-test showed a significant difference in the pre- versus post-present focus measure after the manipulation ($M_{\text{pre}} = 3.22$, $SD = .77$; $t(29) = -5.77$, $p < .001$). The self-congruence check revealed that the participants rated brands statistically lower when they were assigned to customize a brand that served as means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 2.37$, $SD = .63$) versus a brand that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .45$, $t(58) = -11.77$, $p < .001$).

As shown in Table 2, participants in the control group did not show significant differences in brand preference and WTP. However, the participants who focused on the present moment evaluated the customized brand more preferably when the brand served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 4.09$, $SD = .60$) than when the brand served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 3.42$, $SD = .65$; $t(28) = 2.93$, $p < .05$, $d = 1.07$). Unexpectedly, there was a non-significant difference in WTP although the participants in the present focus group allocated a higher average amount to the brand that served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 59.85$, $SD = 12.45$) compared to the brand that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 53.22$, $SD = 9.34$; $t(28) = 1.65$, $p > .10$, $d = .60$). A critical remark is that a higher level of brand preference exists when the present-focused participants are given to a brand that serves as a means of reflecting their actual self. However, such strength of brand preference did not drive to WTP. As for CLT explanation, we suspect that reflecting four clothing price tags to participants led to an alternative brand comparison instead of assessing the focal brand itself. The effect of present focus and low-level construals of self (i.e., the consumer's actual self) may not be sensitive to the alternatives under evaluation when given in the temporally proximal condition in comparison to people in the temporally distant condition with high-level construals (Fujita *et al.*, 2008). In term of situational self-image explanation, present-focused participants might not be willing to pay more for a brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self although the brand fits their need for self-image congruity. The reason given is that the actual self is owned or belongs to them and they might think that there was not necessary to pay more for a brand that portrayed their current self-concept. Thus, Hypothesis 1 is partially supported.

[Table 2 about here]

We further conducted post hoc analysis and the results were non-significant when comparing brand preference and WTP between the participants in present focus group who were assigned to customize clothing that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self versus the those in the control group who were assigned to customize clothing that served as a means of reflecting their actual self (brand preference: $t(28) = -.25, p > .10$; WTP: $t(28) = 1.03, p > .10$) and ideal self (brand preference: $t(28) = -.34, p > .10$; WTP: $t(28) = .27, p > .10$).

5.2 Study 2b

The objective of Study 2b was to test Hypothesis 2 by investigating the effect of future focus and the effect of a brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self versus consumer's ideal self on brand preference and WTP.

5.2.1 Design and procedure

Sixty students (65% women) from a large public university from Finland were approached to participate in an experiment in exchange for a small gift. Thirty percent of the sample were aged from 18 to 20 years old, 65% were from 21 to 30 years old, and 5% were from 31 to 60 years old. The study was a 2 (self-congruence: actual or ideal) \times 2 (temporal focus: future focus or control) between-subjects design. The design and procedure were similar to Study 2a except for the future focus measure—"I think about what my future has in store," "My mind focuses on my future" ($\alpha = .73$; adapted from Shipp *et al.*, 2009)—and the future focus writing

task (Zimbardo and Boyd, 2008, pp. 155-156). Next, the participants were asked to respond in regard to brand preference ($\alpha = .93$), WTP, and self-congruence check ($\alpha = .88$).

5.2.2 Results and discussion

The manipulation checks showed that the participants who were assigned to the future focus writing task were not statistically more future focused ($M_{\text{post}} = 3.77$, $SD = .74$) compared to those in the control group ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .94$; $t(58) = .69$, $p > .10$). In addition, participants in the future focus group did not show significant difference in the pre- versus post-future focus measure after the manipulation ($M_{\text{pre}} = 3.53$, $SD = .77$; $t(29) = -1.41$, $p > .10$). We suspect that the non-significant results happened because 95% of the participants were young adults, aged thirty or less, who tend to be future-focused (Mogilner *et al.*, 2012). Alternatively, we checked the manipulation effect by counting the number of participants who had rated the post-future focus measure higher than the pre-future focus measure. The result showed that 73% of the participants in the future focus group had rated the post-future focus measure higher after the future focus writing task ($\chi^2 (6.53)$, $N = 30$, $p < .05$). The self-congruence check confirmed that the participants rated the brand statistically lower when they were assigned to customize a brand that served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 2.25$, $SD = .67$) versus a brand that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 4.00$, $SD = .59$, $t(58) = -10.79$, $p < .001$).

As shown in Table 3, the participants in the control group did not show significant differences in brand preference and WTP. As predicted, the participants who focused on the future moment evaluated the customized brand more preferably when the brand served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .60$) than when the brand served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 3.36$, $SD = .95$; $t(28) = 2.31$, $p < .05$, $d = .83$). Moreover,

participants in the future focus group were willing to pay more for the brand that served as a means of reflecting on their ideal self ($M = 65.25$, $SD = 11.78$), the average being significantly higher than that which they were willing to pay for the brand that served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 52.92$, $SD = 15.43$; $t(28) = 2.46$, $p < .05$, $d = .90$). Thus, Hypothesis 2 is supported.

[Table 3 about here]

As expected, the results were non-significant when comparing between the participants in future focus group who were assigned to customize clothing that served as a means of reflecting their actual self versus the those in the control group who were assigned to customize clothing that served as a means of reflecting their actual self (brand preference: $t(28) = .62$, $p > .10$; WTP: $t(28) = 1.00$, $p > .10$) and ideal self (brand preference: $t(28) = -.76$, $p > .10$; WTP: $t(28) = -.26$, $p > .10$). However, the question remains as to whether the customers associate with their actual self or ideal self when they devote their attention to thinking about a distant memory. Thus, we addressed this issue and the effect on brand preference and WTP in the next study.

5.3 Study 2c

The objective of Study 2c was to test Hypothesis 3 investigate the effect of past focus and the effect of a brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's actual self versus consumer's ideal self on brand preference and WTP.

5.3.1 Design and procedure

Sixty students (63% women) from a large public university from Finland were approached to participate in an experiment in exchange for a small gift. Fifty percent of the sample were aged from 18 to 20 years old, 48% were from 21 to 30 years old, and 2% were from 31 to 40 years old. The study was a 2 (self-congruence: actual or ideal) \times 2 (temporal focus: past focus or control) between-subjects design. The design and procedure were similar to Study 2a except for the past focus measure—“I replay memories of the past in my mind now,” “My mind thinks about things from my past” ($\alpha = .85$; adapted from Shipp *et al.*, 2009)—and the past focus writing task (Zimbardo & Boyd, 2008, pp. 91-93). Next, the participants were asked to respond to brand preference ($\alpha = .90$), WTP, and self-congruence check ($\alpha = .84$).

5.3.2 Results and discussion

The manipulation checks confirmed that the participants who were assigned to the past focus writing task were more past focused ($M_{\text{post}} = 4.27$, $SD = .50$) than those in the control group ($M = 3.35$, $SD = .83$; $t(58) = 5.16$, $p < .001$). A paired-samples t-test showed a significant difference in the pre- versus post-past focus measure after the manipulation ($M_{\text{pre}} = 3.42$, $SD = .82$; $t(29) = -6.35$, $p < .001$). The self-congruence check revealed that the participants rated the brand statistically lower when they were assigned to customize a brand that served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 2.43$, $SD = .64$) versus a brand that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .64$, $t(58) = -9.26$, $p < .001$).

As shown in Table 4, the participants who focused on the past moment evaluated the customized brand more preferably when the brand served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 4.04$, $SD = .73$) than when the brand served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M =$

3.38, $SD = .80$; $t(28) = 2.39$, $p < .05$, $d = .86$). Further, the participants in the past focus group were willing to pay more for the brand that served as a means of reflecting their ideal self ($M = 60.58$, $SD = 11.83$) than for the brand that served as a means of reflecting their actual self ($M = 49.18$, $SD = 10.93$; $t(28) = 2.74$, $p < .05$, $d = 1.00$). Again, as expected, the participants in the control group did not show significant differences in brand preference and WTP, which supports Hypothesis 3.

[Table 4 about here]

As predicted, the results were non-significant when comparing between the participants in past focus group who were assigned to customize clothing that served as a means of reflecting their actual self versus the those in the control group who were assigned to customize clothing that served as a means of reflecting their actual self (brand preference: $t(28) = .57$, $p > .10$; WTP: $t(28) = .26$, $p > .10$) and ideal self (brand preference: $t(28) = -.66$, $p > .10$; WTP: $t(28) = -1.30$, $p > .10$).

6. General discussion

Study 1 presented that people who characteristically devoted their attention to thinking about the present (future) moment were more likely to associate with actual (ideal) self-congruence. Studies 2a to 2c demonstrated that people in the present (future) focus tended to evaluate a brand more preferably when it served as a means of reflecting their actual (ideal) self. As for WTP, the effect only had a significant difference for people who focus on the distant future and distant past moments. The current research also presented that the effect size of

significant results in Studies 2a, 2b and 2c ranged from 0.83 to 1.07, showing a large effect (Cohen, 1988) and supporting the notion that temporal focus influences the consumers' brand preference and WTP for the brand that serves as a means of reflecting the consumer's self. Based on these findings, we propose the following theoretical and managerial implications.

6.1 Theoretical implications

Addressing temporal focus and demonstrating the effects on brand preference and WTP empirically makes essential contributions to existing research on self-congruence. Specifically, our findings contribute to brand usage imagery congruity, which refers to how a brand is perceived to be suitable regarding the situation of use and the consumer's expectation of the typical use of the brand (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Our study provides an alternate explanation for the effect of actual and ideal self-congruence on consumer responses (Ekinici and Riley, 2003; Liu *et al.*, 2012). The current study adds to the extant literature by showing how temporal focus affects the psychological mechanism of brand usage imagery congruity. That is, consumers' temporal focus determines their expectation for a symbolic brand that is caused by the temporal perspective of the situational self-image (Schenk and Holman, 1980). In addition to time pressure (Sirgy and Su, 2000), temporal distance (Tan *et al.*, 2017), the temporal situation in mind (i.e., public vs. private consumption; Graeff, 1997), and the situational characteristics of future and past consumption (Belk, 1978; 1990), temporal focus is proven to have significant influence on the fit of the consumer's self and the consumer's expectation regarding the personal identity signals of the brand. An important note is that brand usage imagery congruity exists when consumers have a high level of involvement with the brand. Consumers should have a certain level of knowledge about the brand image before they choose to express their self-image

by using the brand (Schenk and Holman, 1980). Based on this reason, our findings are limited in their applicability to low-involvement brand or product categories.

Second, the current study investigates the moderating effects of temporal focus and self-congruence on brand preference and WTP within consumer research. Consumers tend to have a higher preference for a symbolic brand that fits with their self-image in a given temporal situation. However, our findings show that a higher level of brand preference only leads to a higher level of WTP for ideal self-congruence, but this is not significantly found for actual self-congruence. Our explanation is in line with situational self-image and suggests that consumers have a higher desire to pay more for a brand that allows them to project their ideal self (rather than their actual self) because the ideal self is related to a mental image of their potential selves: The possibility of consumers paying more for a brand that could realize their ideas, beliefs, goals, hopes, and images about their optimal selves or possible successful selves should be greater than the possibility of consumers paying more for a brand that reflects their current self-concept (Hong and Zinkhan, 1995). Thus, the temporal focus can shift the consumer's need for self-congruity and directly influences his or her brand preference, but the effect of temporal focus on WTP was only found for ideal self-congruence.

Generally, compared to past and present foci, a future focus tends to result in a more positive attitude and behavior, such as lower preference for unhealthy snacks (Winterich and Haws, 2011), greater preference for consistency (Zimbardo and Boyd, 2008), and future optimism (Foo *et al.*, 2009). In contrast, the current research shows that present (past and future) focus contributes to a higher preference for a brand that serves to reflect the consumer's actual (ideal) self. We further show that no significant adverse impact on consumers' brand preference or WTP results from the disassociation of temporal focus and the consumer's self. We advocate

that this disassociation only results in positive self-incongruity (Sirgy, 1982), which means that consumers still perceived a positive image of a brand, although the brand is incongruent with their self-image in a given temporal situation. The reason given is that temporal focus only shifts the consumer's need for actual or ideal self-congruity, which is related to his or her self-view and which self he or she wishes to express while selecting a brand in the given temporal situation. Thus, the temporal focus is not going to cause consumers to perceive a negative brand image because it is unrelated to a brand or product image, in which case it will not cause an adverse impact on brand preference and WTP.

Third, these findings contribute to CLT regarding a new type of psychological distance (Trope and Liberman, 2010). Although much research on temporal construal has taken place in consumer studies (Chen, 2016; Maier and Wilken, 2014), the temporal focus has received limited consideration as a temporal construal, with an exception being the work of Winterich and Haws (2011). The current research suggests that a present focus is related to psychologically proximal entities, which are associated with low-level construals of self, whereas both a future and past focus are related to psychologically distal entities, which are associated with high-level construals of self. It is important to note that we instructed the participants to think about their future in fifteen years' time or to recall distant-past events, rather than instructing them to reflect on near-future or recent-past events. The reason for this is that near-future or recent-past events are related to psychologically proximal entities (Trope and Liberman, 2010).

6.2 Managerial implications

Previous studies suggest that authentic branding is more relevant to privately consumed products (Hong and Zinkhan, 1995; Sirgy, 1982) and in the evaluation of emotional branding

activities (Malär *et al.*, 2011), whereas the assessment of a publicly consumed product is more affected by aspirational branding as it represents the consumers' desirable self-concept (Ekinci and Riley, 2003; Ekinci *et al.*, 2008; Hosany and Martin, 2012; Graeff, 1996). In contrast, we suggest that both authentic and aspirational branding strategies are found to be relevant to publicly consumed products (e.g., clothing). To enhance brand preference and WTP, brand managers can influence the customers' temporal focus to match their branding strategy. For authentic branding, brand managers can induce customers to become present focused by providing an environment or designing an advertisement that focuses on a relaxed feeling. In-store fashion managers could choose low-tempo or relaxing music as the background music so that customers will feel calm while shopping. Further, brand managers could design more offline or online activities that can induce customers to focus on the current moment, such as mix-and-match outfit ideas, an augmented reality virtual fitting room, a photo booth, a fashion seminar, and a discussion forum that relates to "being your real self." For aspirational branding, brand managers can associate their advertisement with an exciting feeling or a nostalgic feeling (Shields and Johnson, 2016). The in-store manager could select high tempo or exciting music as the background music in order to induce a future focus, or they could choose sentimental love songs as the background music in order to induce customers to think about their past. Besides this, the manager could use retro in-store decorations to influence people to think about their past. Brand managers could use virtual reality technology to immerse their customers in a futuristic city (e.g., a city in the year 2050 with a pronounced technological-product environment) or a distant past world. Indeed, brand managers could integrate application software that allows users to connect themselves with their distant future self (e.g., the #Futureself project by French Orange S.A. on www.jam3.com) or distant past self. A critical remark is that such an effect only

results in a higher level of the consumer's WTP for a preferred brand that reflects his or her ideal self-concept.

Besides the above, our findings shed light on the one-on-one marketing approach to branding. Nowadays, brand managers can collaborate with companies that are capable of tracking the real-time users' experience, such as social media sites, mobile apps, cloud computing, and real-time big data consultancies. Thus, brand managers might identify the particular component of temporal focus that customers are currently experiencing before matching it with their branding strategy that relates to the customers' actual selves or ideal selves. For instance, brand managers can assume that customers have a present focus when they are experiencing spiritual practices such as yoga and meditation (Farb *et al.*, 2007) using fitness apps, whereas they can assume customers have a future focus while they are watching Goalcast videos or motivational speeches on YouTube. They can identify customers as having a past focus when they are feeling nostalgic (Zhou *et al.*, 2012) while they see memorable photos on Facebook Memories.

6.3 Limitations and future research directions

The current study used a single-item measure of WTP as it is considered a direct and hypothetical approach. Its key advantage is that it can be used to test the WTP for a new product or a product that is not available in the market (Cameron and James, 1987). Further, it has the potential to forecast an accurate demand curve (Miller *et al.*, 2011). However, it may be limited to the external validity. The reasons given are that responses are hypothetical (Hoffman *et al.*, 1993) and respondents do not receive any incentive to reveal their real WTP (Wertenbroch and Skiera, 2002). Future research should be extended to methods that measure consumer's actual

WTP, such as Becker, DeGroot, and Marschak's incentive-compatible mechanism and incentive-aligned choice-based conjoint analysis because such methods may lead to better pricing decision (Miller *et al.*, 2011). Besides, the current study is limited to clothing brands; future studies should explore the effect of temporal focus with different high-involvement product category brands.

It is always challenging to measure the manipulating effect of temporal focus. In studies 2a, 2b, and 2c we did not have other evidence to identify the participants' temporal focus apart from the self-reported measures. Thus, a laboratory environment equipped with advanced technology tools (e.g., fMRI or another brain sensing headband) is recommended in order to measure the manipulating effect. Guo *et al.* (2012) found that WTP could be affected by temporal focus and cultural differences: Eastern people willing to pay more for vacations when they characteristically devote their attention to thinking about the past (rather than the future), whereas Western people placed more monetary value on vacations when they anticipated future events (rather than when recollecting memories). Thus, future research could examine the cultural differences in valuing temporal focus within the consumer context.

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Figure 1

Conceptual framework

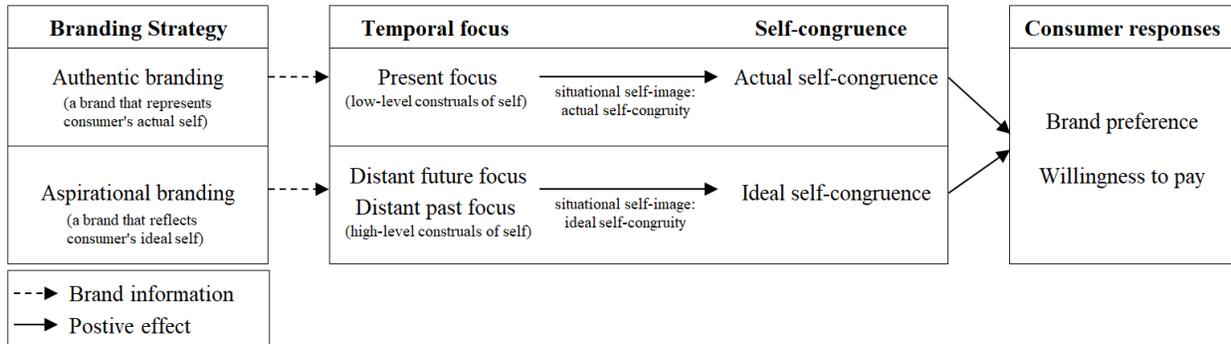


Table 1

Overview of selected research on self-congruence

Studies	Main contribution	Consumer responses	Investigation of		Findings that relate to self-congruence
			Actual self-congruence	Ideal self-congruence	
Jamal and Goode (2001)	Self-congruence in precious jewelry market	Brand preference and consumer satisfaction	Yes	Not investigated	Actual self-congruence positively predicted brand preference and satisfaction
Ekinçi and Riley (2003)	Self-congruence in service context	Consumer's attitude, satisfaction, and service quality	Yes	Yes	Ideal (actual) self-congruence has more relevance than actual (ideal) self-congruence in predicting consumer's attitude, satisfaction, and service quality in the first (second) study, which calls for future research as self-congruence may be affected by a determinant
Jamal and Al-Marri (2007)	The role of expertise in self-congruence research	Brand preference and satisfaction	Yes	Not investigated	Actual self-congruence positively predicted brand preference and satisfaction among consumers with lower levels of expertise in the automobile sector, but such effects are not evident among consumers with higher levels of knowledge in the automobile sector
Ekinçi <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Self-concept theory and satisfaction research	Consumer's overall attitude to the firm, satisfaction, and intention to return	Yes	Yes	Ideal and desire self-congruence positively predicted consumer's overall attitude to the firm, satisfaction, and intention to return; whereas actual self-congruence positively predicted intention to return
Malär <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Consumer-brand relationship	Emotional brand attachment	Yes	Yes	Actual self-congruence positively predicted emotional brand attachment; ideal self-congruence positively predicted emotional brand attachment among consumers with low levels of self-esteem, product involvement, or public self-consciousness
Hosany and Martin (2012)	The effect of self-congruence on tourist post-consumption	Cruisers' experience and satisfaction	Yes	Yes	Ideal self-congruence is a stronger predictor of cruisers' experience than actual self-congruence. Both ideal and actual self-congruence did not significantly predict satisfaction

Liu <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Brand self-congruity concepts in luxury fashion brand context	Brand attitude and brand loyalty	Investigated brand personality congruity, user imagery congruity, and usage imagery congruity		User imagery congruity and usage imagery congruity are stronger predictors of brand attitude and brand loyalty than brand personality congruity
Roy and Rabbaneh (2015)	Self-congruence in luxury branding context	Hedonic use and self-perception	Investigated a general level of self-congruence		Antecedents and consequences of consumer's self-congruity are varied upon a luxury and a non-luxury brand
Han <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Symbolic consumption in restaurant context	Brand affect and brand loyalty	Investigated a general level of self-congruence		Brand reputation and collectivism/individualism are positively related to self-congruence, but self-congruence is not positively related to brand affect and brand loyalty
Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Congruence of self-presentation on social networks sites	Brand loyalty, brand love, and word of mouth	Aggregated actual and ideal self-congruence indices		Evidence of self-congruence with a "Liked" brand and its positive effect on brand loyalty, brand love, and word of mouth
Bennett and Vijaygopal (2018)	Theory of stereotyping and self-congruence formation	Consumer attitudes, stereotype formation, and willingness to purchase	Aggregated actual, ideal, social, and ideal social self-congruence indices		Self-congruence could be formed by using gamification. Self-congruence positively predicted favorable attitude towards electric vehicles
Japutra <i>et al.</i> (2018)	Dark side of ideal self-congruence and brand attachment	Emotional brand attachment, compulsive buying, and external trash-talking	Not investigated	Yes	Ideal self-congruence positively predicted compulsive buying and external trash-talking
This study	Brand usage imagery congruity	Brand preference and WTP	Yes	Yes	Actual and ideal self-congruence are affected by one's temporal focus, subsequently to have a positive impact on brand preference, but the effect of temporal focus on higher consumer's WTP is only found for ideal self-congruence

Table 2

Effect of present focus and the brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's self on brand preference and willingness to pay

Consumer responses	Present focus				Control group			
	Actual self <i>M (SD)</i>	Ideal self <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect <i>t(28)</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Actual self <i>M (SD)</i>	Ideal self <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect <i>t(28)</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Brand preference	4.09 (.60)	3.42 (.65)	2.93 <i>p</i> < .05	1.07	3.49 (.82)	3.51 (.76)	-.08 <i>p</i> > .10	.03
Willingness to pay	59.85 (12.45)	53.22 (9.34)	1.65 <i>p</i> > .10	.60	49.19 (11.88)	52.05 (13.85)	-.61 <i>p</i> > .10	.22

Table 3

Effect of future focus and the brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's self on brand preference and willingness to pay

Consumer responses	Future focus				Control group			
	Actual self <i>M (SD)</i>	Ideal self <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect <i>t(28)</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Actual self <i>M (SD)</i>	Ideal self <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect <i>t(28)</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Brand preference	3.36 (.95)	4.02 (.60)	2.31 <i>p</i> < .05	.83	3.13 (1.03)	3.58 (.62)	1.43 <i>p</i> > .10	.53
Willingness to pay	52.92 (15.43)	65.25 (11.78)	2.46 <i>p</i> < .05	.90	47.98 (11.46)	54.19 (11.15)	1.50 <i>p</i> > .10	.55

Table 4

Effect of past focus and the brand's ability to serve as a means of reflecting the consumer's self on brand preference and willingness to pay

Consumer responses	Past focus				Control group			
	Actual self <i>M (SD)</i>	Ideal self <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect <i>t(28)</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>	Actual self <i>M (SD)</i>	Ideal self <i>M (SD)</i>	Effect <i>t(28)</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
Brand preference	3.38 (.80)	4.04 (.73)	2.39 <i>p</i> < .05	.86	3.22 (.69)	3.56 (.67)	1.34 <i>p</i> > .10	.50
Willingness to pay	49.18 (10.93)	60.58 (11.83)	2.74 <i>p</i> = .01	1.00	48.09 (12.30)	55.32 (14.60)	1.47 <i>p</i> > .10	.54

Methodological Details Appendix

Study 2a–2c: Self-Customization Procedure

INSTRUCTIONS: Kindly think about customizing a clothing brand that could serve as a means of reflecting your actual or ideal self by indicating responses to seven items.

1. Clothing size:

X Small (XS), Small (S), Medium (M), Large (L), X Large (XL), XX Large (XXL), XXX Large (XXXL)

2. Color:

Grey, Pale Grey, Black, Sky Blue, Red, Navy, White, Turquoise, Pink, Purple, Gold, Other

3. Clothing materials:

Cotton, Flax, Wool, Ramie, Silk, Denim, Leather, Down for down-filled parkas, Fur, Other

4. A nickname or an unique name on the clothing:

Yes: small, Yes: big, No

5. A graphic or symbol on the clothing:

Yes: small, Yes: big, No

6. A hidden message or favorite quote inside the clothing:

7. A clothing style that could reflect your actual or ideal personality:

Down-to-earth, Honest, Wholesome, Cheerful, Spirited, Imaginative, Up-to-date, Reliable, Intelligent, Successful, Upper class, Charming, Outdoorsy, Tough

Study 2a: Present Focus Manipulation Writing Task

INSTRUCTIONS: Be sure to focus on who you are today, not who you were yesterday or who you will be tomorrow. The given information will be treated confidentially; please be honest in your answer. Remember that this is not a speed test. Take your time and let your thoughts and feelings surface at their own rate. No identifying personal data will be collected. Kindly use your native language for better expression.

Part A: Who are you today?

1. Who are you today?
2. Who are you presently? Focus on your positive characteristics.
3. Who are you presently? Focus on your negative characteristics.

Part B: Where are you today timewise?

1. Where is your career or where are your studies? (e.g., “Today I have been 3 years and 4 months in X business.”)
2. Where is your determination? (e.g., “Today I have 45 days to stop smoking, drinking, partying, or eating candies.”)
3. Inform us of anything related to this that comes to your mind now (e.g., “It is 4 weeks and 3 days since I bought my new car” or “Today I have been together with my partner for 5 months and 6 days.”)

Part C: Where are you now?

1. Look at your surroundings now: find something special or unique about them that you never noticed before.
2. Describe the thing(s) that you like or dislike about your surroundings.
3. Select a person from around you and try to predict what is he or she is thinking now.

Part D: How do you feel now?

1. What is the feeling in your heart now? What are your emotions?
2. Try to sense your body now: How does your physical body feel?
3. Try to relax your mind now for 10 seconds: How do you feel?

Make yourself calm and peaceful, and repeat the phrase “I am here in the present moment” in your head five times.

Study 2b: Future Focus Manipulation Writing Task

INSTRUCTIONS: Think of the person you want to become in the fifteen years time. The given information will be treated confidentially; please be honest in your answer. Start with the broad picture: your ultimate dream—something of substance, such as your: future career, family plan, future traveling destination, future aim, place, or company, future business, future lifestyle, wish list or bucket list, or something you want to contribute to society. No identifying personal data will be collected. Kindly use your native language for better expression.

Part A: I will be ...

1. Who will you be in the year 2030? Think about your dream
2. To achieve your dream, who will you be in the year 2027?
3. Who will you be in the year 2025?
4. Who will you be in the year 2022?
5. Who will you be in the year 2019?

Part B: When will I succeed?

Go through your “I will be ...” answers and identify two concrete goals that you aim to reach by 31st December 2017 in order to achieve your wish by 2019. What are the goals that you must accomplish by 31st December 2017?

1. Concrete goal 1: to be accomplished in 2017 by a targeted date
2. Concrete goal 2: to be accomplished in 2017 by a targeted date

Study 2c: Past Focus Manipulation Writing Task

INSTRUCTIONS: Be true to yourself, there is no need to make yourself look better or worse than you are. Take your time and a deep breath and try to take your mind back to the past. No identifying personal data will be collected. Kindly use your native language for better expression.

Part A: Who was I?

1. State a positive characteristic that you had in the past. Unfortunately, it does not exist now for some reason.
2. State a negative characteristic that you had in the past: You realized that through this you hurt somebody badly.
3. When was the last time you cried and what had happened to you? How would you describe yourself at that time?
4. Bring your childhood to mind. How would you describe yourself at that time?
5. Think about something you have done in the past that you were proud of. How would you describe yourself at that time?

Part B: List one significant negative event that has occurred in your life

Please take at least thirty seconds to refresh your memory of the past negative event. Before you start writing, take yourself back to the past scenario.

Part C: List one significant positive event that occurred last summer

Please take at least thirty seconds to refresh your memory of the positive past event. Before you start writing, take yourself back to the past scenario.

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