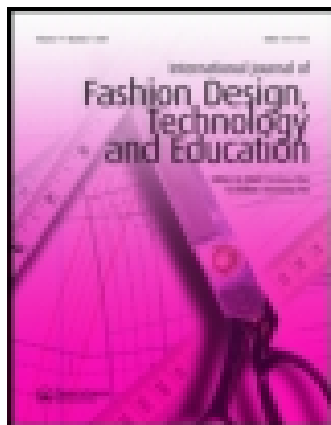


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Determinants of brand loyalty: self-construal, self-expressive brands, and brand attachment

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The purpose of this paper was to explore the relationships among self-construal, self-expressive brands, and brand attachment with an emphasis on understanding the link to brand loyalty in US college students (219 women; 41 men; mean age = 21.0). As a result, out of seven hypotheses, six hypotheses were accepted. Independent/interdependent self-construal is positively related to self-expressive brand. Self-expressive brand is positively related to ownership/emotion brand attachment. Ownership/emotion brand attachment is positively related to brand loyalty. Finally, self-expressive brand is positively related to brand loyalty. Results supported propositions of relationship theory and provided practical implications.

Keywords: brand loyalty; self-construal; self-expression; brand attachment

Global marketing is becoming more competitive, more saturated, and more information technology driven. Consequently it is more difficult for companies to retain existing customers and obtain new customers (Lin, 2010). As a result, successful marketing strategies depend on long-term customer relationships rather than improvements in tangible product benefits such as price or quality. Increasing and maintaining loyal customers has become an essential issue for long-term success of businesses. Thus, in recent years, brand loyalty has attracted increased attention from researchers, marketers, and academicians.

Based on a traditional marketing principle referred to as the 20–80 principle, 20% of customers create 80% of a company's profit (Kotler & Keller, 2005). That 20% of customers is likely to be brand loyal customers—providing businesses with competitive advantages. For example, brand-loyal customers reduce marketing costs because retaining current customers costs less than attracting new customers (Lin, 2010). Further, brand-loyal customers purchase more merchandise, give less attention to competitors' advertising, are less sensitive to price, are willing to pay higher prices, disseminate positive word-of-mouth, and recommend the brand to other potential customers (Knox & Walker, 2001; Krishnamurthi & Raj, 1991; Kumar, Luthra, & Datta, 2006; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990).

Consumer behaviour research has recognised the importance of the relationship between consumers' self-concept and brands. The relationship between a brand and a consumer can be viewed as an expression of an individual's identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Brand attachment is explained as a strong association or connectedness between the brand and the consumer's self (Kleine, Kleine, &

Kernan, 1993). The stronger the consumer's self-brand relationship, the stronger the consumer's attachment to the brand.

Brand loyalty may be affected by psychological self-concept variables such as self-construal, self-expression, and by feelings or affect elicited by the brand. Based on prior research, it can be predicted that consumers with greater self-concept, self-expression, and brand attachment are likely to develop higher levels of brand loyalty. However, there is little research to explore these relationships. Thus, it is meaningful to investigate further the determinants of brand loyalty with regard to psychological self-concept variables such as self-construal, self-expression, and brand attachment. The purpose of this paper was to explore the relationships among self-construal, self-expression, and brand attachment with an emphasis on understanding the link to brand loyalty.

Theoretical framework and review of literature

Relationship theory

Relationship theory provides a framework for better understanding the associations consumers form with brands (Fournier, 1998). Relationships in the interpersonal domain are characterised by reciprocity, meaning provision, multiplicity, and temporality (Hinde, 1979). Relationships involve *reciprocal* exchange between active and interdependent partners; relationships provide *meanings*; relationships are complex, having several *dimensions and forms* that provide benefits for participants; and relationships *evolve and change* over time and in response to changes in context.

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According to Fournier (1998), brands can and do serve as feasible relationship partners even though brands have no objective existence; they are merely perceptions in the consumer's mind. It is through marketing activities that a brand can be made to seemingly act or think or feel. Implementation of marketing tactics can be construed as actions by the brand in its relationship role.

The notion that brands provide meaning has significance for self-definition (Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1995; McCracken, 1988; Richins, 1994). A consumer's self-concept can be changed or reinforced by meaningful brand relationships. However, meanings associated with such relationships are embedded within temporal, social, and cultural contexts; therefore, brand meanings will change as the context changes.

Brand relationships provide personal identity (e.g. confidence in personal value and worth) and social identity functions (e.g. impression management) as well as rewards (e.g. positive impression formation) (Fournier, 1998). Self-definition is a central life task at certain points in time (e.g. college to career transition). Brand relationships can facilitate transition-related tasks and bolster the changing definition of self. College students anticipating entering a career may explore possible roles and identities and arrive at a working definition of their career-self. Brand relationships can be tangible markers of that self as well as a way to indicate avoidance of a self he/she does not want to become. Others' evaluations (i.e. impression formations) are affected by the symbolic brand cues displayed and used. The linguistic power of brands can be functional in exploring, constructing, and announcing an identity. Carefully selected brands can express personal convictions. Thus, brand relationships can provide functional, psychological, social, and emotional benefits.

If self-construal is underdeveloped, it may lead to use of multiple brands and short-lived loyalties whereas a well-developed self-construal may lead to brand loyalty. Loyalty (i.e. a feeling of devotion, duty, or attachment to somebody or something) is a relationship concept. An investigation of the determinants of brand loyalty may contribute to relationship theory regarding consumer-brand relationships.

Brand loyalty

The importance of brand loyalty has been recognised in marketing literature for more than three decades. Brand loyalty was defined by Jacoby and Chestnut (1978, p. 80) as

The (a) biased, (b) behavioral response, (c) expressed over time, (d) by some decision-making unit, (e) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (f) is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes.

Jacoby and Olson (1970) defined brand loyalty as a mental consumption process shaped by certain decision

units who considered multiple brands. Brand loyalty leads to marketing advantages when the same brand is repeatedly purchased by loyal consumers (Assael, 1998).

The amount of the product purchased, along with the number and frequency of repeat purchases, is determined largely by brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand loyalty also influences the amount of money consumers are willing to pay for a product. Brand-loyal consumers find a unique quality in brands that they are loyal to and are, therefore, willing to pay more for products from that specific brand (Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978). Aaker (1991) discussed brand equity as it relates to loyalty, pointing out that there are specific marketing advantages stemming from brand loyalty such as lower marketing costs, and an increased number of new customers.

According to Baldinger and Rubinson (1996), brand loyalty includes affective loyalty and action loyalty. Affective loyalty refers to loyalty that is displayed through a preference or attraction to the brand which does not necessarily lead to a purchase. Action loyalty, on the other hand, refers to loyalty that leads to purchase of the specific brand. Oliver (1999) classified brand loyalty into four divisions: cognitive loyalty, affective loyalty, conation loyalty, and action loyalty. Dick and Basu (1994) divided brand loyalty into four categories: true loyalty, spurious loyalty, latent loyalty, and no loyalty. True brand-loyal consumers are committed to a specific brand psychologically and affectively and also consistently repurchase the brand.

Researchers (e.g. Lin, 2010; Meyer & Schwager, 2007; Morrison & Crane, 2007) have indicated that brands that offer a unique and distinct experience (both functionally and emotionally) and maintain consistent relationships with their customers can build brand loyalty. Brand loyalty depends on some pre-existing psychological or affective attachments. Aaker (1991) noted that recently global marketers have shifted from the acquisition of new customers to the retention of existing customers. Thus, understanding the brand loyalty link to psychological self-concepts such as self-construal and self-expression may lead to increased business.

Self-construal

Research has documented the importance of self-concept to the relationship between customers and brands. Relationships between consumers and brands can be viewed as expressions of self (i.e. individuals' identities) (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed, 2004). Self-construal consists of thoughts, feelings, and actions regarding the self as distinct from others and in relation to others (Singelis, 1994). Thus, self-construal consists of independent and interdependent components; individuals have both in varying degrees (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).

Independent self-construal is a bounded, unitary, stable self that is separate from the social context (Singelis, 1994). The elements comprising an independent

self-construal include a focus on (a) internal abilities, thoughts, and feelings, (b) uniqueness and self-expression, (c) recognition of internal attributes and promotion of personal goals, and (d) candid communication. Those with well-developed independent self-construals increase their self-esteem through self-expression and validation of internal attributes. Those who define themselves in terms of their internal traits and attributes may perceive their material possessions as self-expressive (i.e. as extensions of themselves).

According to Singelis (1994), an interdependent self-construal is a flexible, variable self. The elements comprising an interdependent self-construal include a focus on (a) external, public statuses, roles, and relationships, (b) being accepted, (c) occupying their relative position or standing in society or other groups and engaging in socially appropriate ways, and (d) indirect communication with an ability to interpret or understand a situation or something that was said. Those who define themselves in terms of their statuses, roles, and relationships increase their self-esteem via harmonious interpersonal relationships and the ability to adjust to various situations.

People with well-developed independent self-construals view themselves as separate individuals, while people with well-developed interdependent self-construals view themselves as more flexible and intertwined with the group (Singelis, 1994). Consumers tend to prefer brands that represent values and personality traits congruent with their self-concept (Kressmann et al, 2006). Self-concept connection, a dimension of the consumer-brand relationship, refers to the degree to which a brand contributes to an individual's identity, values, and goals (Fournier, 1998). The self-concept connection is based on a desire to express individuality and self as different from others. The impact of self-concept connection can be greater when an independent self-construal becomes primed and salient (Swaminathan, Page, & Gurhan-Canli, 2007).

For instance, a brand's image is likely to appeal to consumers whose self-concepts encompass the traits displayed in the brand image (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Therefore, a brand with a strong self-concept connection can symbolise an individual's personal identity. Likewise, a strong brand self-concept connection can contribute to an individual's social identity. For example, research has shown that brands can be used to communicate and reinforce national identity as when consumers prefer domestic versus imported goods (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Witkowski, 1998).

Self-expressive brands

The degree to which a brand is self-expressive refers to a consumer's perception of how well a specific brand reflects his or her inner self and enhances his or her social self (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The self-expressive benefits of a brand offer potential for encouraging consumer

behaviours such as brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. For example, a self-expressive brand positively influences brand attachment which is an antecedent to brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

According to Aaker (2009), a self-expressive brand strengthens the connection between the brand and the customer. Self-expressive brands are a means by which an individual can express him- or herself. Many apparel brands deliver self-expressive benefits. For example, a teen can symbolise he or she is *cool* by wearing the Hollister brand, a career woman can symbolise her *success* by carrying a Coach bag.

In addition to personal benefits, many apparel brands also deliver social benefits. According to Aaker (2009), there are several types of social benefits. Some can be stimulated by the brand website that allows members to talk to experts and connect with others. For example, Facebook, along with most other social media websites, allows fashion companies such as Burberry, Gucci, or Nike to create company pages. Many companies hire one or more social media representatives to monitor the company Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media accounts and to interact with customers on those websites. Customers can also interact with each other on these sites by commenting on each other's posts and by using 'hashtags', a word or phrase preceded by a pound symbol (e.g. #cuteshoes). If multiple customers use the same hashtag in their posts, those posts will be linked together by the hashtag and then other users can follow posts containing the specific hashtag and even join in by using the hashtag in their own posts. Another type of social benefit can be the brand's positive impact on what others think of the wearer. For example, others may interpret ownership of luxury brands such as Louis Vuitton or Gucci as a symbol of the wearer's social status.

Brand attachment

Brand attachment refers to a strong connection between the brand and the customer's self (Kleine et al., 1995). Brand attachment focuses on the brand instead of a physical product (Fournier, 1998; Fournier & Yao, 1997). The stronger the consumer's self-brand relationship, the stronger the attachment to the brand. According to Ball and Tasaki (1992), 'objects that are socially visible; expensive; reflective of an individual's roles, relationships, accomplishments, and experiences; and usually "personalized" by the efforts of their owners are clearly more likely to reflect self' (p. 159). Thus, the construct of attachment is innately linked to the concept of self (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2005). Attachment has strong motivational and behavioural implications such as a willingness to devote cognitive, emotional, and financial resources to the object of attachment (Feeney & Noller, 1996). Therefore, attachment plays an influential role in how consumers react to brands (Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008). One

indication of marketing effectiveness is the extent to which a customer remains loyal to a brand (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Indeed, Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) found that emotional attachment to a brand predicted brand loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium.

According to Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger (2011), brand attachment differs by consumer traits such as product involvement, individual difference variables (i.e. self-esteem, public self-consciousness), and type of self-congruence (actual versus ideal self). Malär et al. found that actual self-congruence had the greatest impact on brand attachment. Product involvement, self-esteem, and public self-consciousness increased the positive impact of actual self-congruence but decreased the impact of ideal self-congruence on brand attachment.

Kuester, Hess, Hinkel, and Young (2007) proposed that the concept of identification is closely related to the value of self-expression. Identification is displayed as an individual's psychological attachment to a social entity that includes brands (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). A brand that is congruent with an individual's self-concept and that allows the individual to express himself or herself may lead to increased commitment to the brand (Kim & Sherman, 2007).

Similarly, the prestige value of a brand allows individuals to express their relative position in a social context, and to display their prestige, wealth, and status (Deeter-Schmelz, Moore, & Goeble, 2000). Extrinsic values (e.g. concern for public statuses, roles, and relationships, social acceptance, and socially appropriate behaviour) can encourage relationships between consumers and brands (Wee & Ming, 2003). Finally, research has found that psychological attachment to a brand can lead to consumption (e.g. Belk, 1988; Malär et al., 2011; Park, Macinnis, & Priester, 2006).

Ball and Tasaki (1992) proposed the definition of attachment as 'the extent to which an object which is owned, expected to be owned, or previously owned by an individual, is used by that individual to maintain his or her self-concept' (p. 158). The construct of attachment includes two aspects of the self (public and private). Private self is related to internal rehearsal of possession-linked

self-schemata and positive feelings of self-respect or negative feelings such as self-loss when an object is lost. On the other hand, the public self is related to external rehearsal of self-schemata which, depending on others' reaction to the possession, links the possession with positive or negative feelings of self-worth.

'The emotional significance of a possession is the total strength of association with significant events or people in the person's life, both good and bad' (Ball & Tasaki, 1992, p. 159). An increase in length of ownership and an increase in dependence on the object to maintain self-concept is likely to lead to an increase in the emotional significance of the object. Low attachment to a possession is likely to be associated with low emotional significance of the object. In contrast, high attachment is likely to be associated with strong emotional significance of the object (e.g. love or passion).

Thus, psychological attachment to a certain brand as displayed in ownership and emotional significance may be important determinants of consumer behaviours such as repeat purchases of the brand, and willingness to spend resources to obtain the brand (e.g. money and effort), and eventually leading to brand loyalty.

Hypotheses

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationship among self-construal (Independent/Interdependent), self-expressive brand, brand attachment (Ownership/Emotion), and brand loyalty. Based on relationship theory and the literature review, the following hypotheses were proposed (see Figure 1):

H1: Independent self-construal is positively related to self-expressive brand.

H2: Interdependent self-construal is positively related to self-expressive brand.

H3: Self-expressive brand is positively related to ownership brand attachment.

H4: Self-expressive brand is positively related to emotion brand attachment.

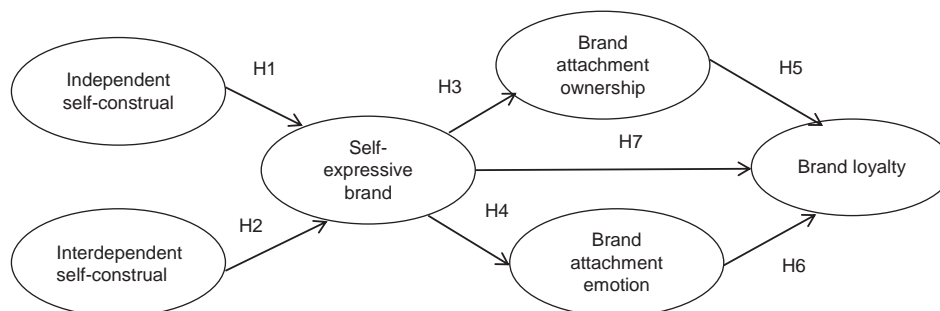


Figure 1. Research proposed model.

H5. Ownership brand attachment is positively related to brand loyalty.

H6. Emotion brand attachment is positively related to brand loyalty.

H7. Self-expressive brand is positively related to brand loyalty.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were undergraduate students in Midwestern universities.

Materials and procedure

Data were collected in large lecture classes from 275 university students. The questionnaire included demographic items, items about brand association, Singelis's (1994) independent and interdependent self-construal scale, Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) self-expressive brand scale, Ball and Tasaki's (1992) brand attachment scale (ownership and emotion), and Delgado-Ballester, Munuera-Aleman, and Yagtie-Guillen's (2003) brand-loyalty scale. Each item was accompanied by a 7-point scale (7 = strongly agree; 1 = strongly disagree).

Singelis (1994) developed a scale to measure the strength of an individual's independent and interdependent self-construals. 'These two images of self are conceptualised as reflecting the emphasis on connectedness and relations often found in non-Western cultures (interdependent) and the separateness and uniqueness of the individual (independent) stressed in the West' (p. 580). The scale was found to have satisfactory reliability (.72 independent items; .75 interdependent items) and face, construct, and predictive validity. Sample items include 'I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects' (independent) and 'I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact' (interdependent).

Participants were asked to list a fashion brand name with which they had a long association and to report how long their association with this brand had been. They were asked to keep this brand in mind as they responded to statements regarding consumer attitudes (measures of self-expressive brand, brand attachment, and brand loyalty).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) developed a scale to measure self-expressive brand. Some items measure how the brand is expressive of the inner self (e.g. 'This brand reflects my personality') and other items measure how the brand is expressive of the social self (e.g. 'This brand contributes to my image'). All items loaded on a single factor with acceptable reliability (coefficient alpha = .90).

Ball and Tasaki's (1992) measure of attachment measured the degree to which an object is used by an individual to maintain his or her self-concept. Ball and Tasaki demonstrated the construct has discriminant validity and the scale

has predictive validity as well as reliability (.89 ownership brand attachment; .84 emotion brand attachment). Attachment was correlated with emotional significance and was not highly correlated with materialism. Attachment consists of two dimensions – ownership brand attachment and emotion brand attachment. One sample item for ownership brand attachment is 'If someone praised this brand, I would feel somewhat praised myself.' Another sample item for emotion brand attachment is 'If I lost this brand, another one like it wouldn't be as meaningful.'

Brand-loyalty scale was developed based on previous research (e.g. Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003) The scale (coefficient alpha = .80) reflects how faithful a consumer is to a brand, for example, willingness to pay a higher price for the brand or willingness to re-purchase the brand. Sample items include 'I consider myself to be loyal to this brand' and 'I am willing to pay more for this brand than for other brands on the market.'

Analysis

Descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling (SEM) were conducted to analyse the data.

Results

Participants were 260 undergraduate students from more than 10 different majors; 219 females and 41 males. Their ages ranged from 18 to 29 (mean age = 21.0).

The proposed model presented in Figure 1 consists of two exogenous variables (i.e. independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal) and four endogenous variables (i.e. self-expressive brand, ownership brand attachment, emotion brand attachment, and brand loyalty).

Preliminary analysis and measurement model

Measurement model results

SEM with AMOS programme was used to analyse the data (see Table 1). Reliability was examined through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and composite reliability (above .70). CFA was used to validate the measurement model that consisted of six constructs. According to CFA, each indicator loaded significantly on its designated factor ($p < .001$) indicating the possession of convergent validity of the measures. The measurement models show a moderate model fit: $\chi^2 = 702.511$, $df = 407$; χ^2/df ratio = 1.726; $p < .000$; GFI = .856, AGFI = .824, CFI = .928, TLI = .918, IFI = .929, RMSEA = .053.

Structural model results

Following CFAs, the structural model was tested. The structural model was constructed to examine the hypothesised relationships among constructs. The structural model

Table 1. Measurement model.

Constructs/scale items	Standardised estimate	SE	t-Value	Composite reliability
<i>Independent self-construal</i>				.72
Item 1	.806	Fix	—	
Item 2	.551	.095	7.771***	
Item 3	.514	.104	7.282***	
Item 4	.689	.092	9.302***	
<i>Interdependent self-construal</i>				.75
Item 1	.737	.193	7.811***	
Item 2	.744	.189	7.840***	
Item 3	.500	.208	6.173***	
Item 4	.595	.153	6.948***	
Item 5	.554	Fix	—	
<i>Self-expressive brand</i>				.90
Item 1	.771	Fix	—	
Item 2	.828	.061	15.754***	
Item 3	.794	.060	16.629***	
Item 4	.741	.069	12.029***	
Item 5	.783	.078	12.875***	
Item 6	.727	.070	11.782***	
Item 7	.536	.075	8.452***	
<i>Brand attachment ownership</i>				.89
Item 1	.570	.089	—	
Item 2	.775	.095	8.453***	
Item 3	.734	.098	11.700***	
Item 4	.681	.103	11.195***	
Item 5	.576	.100	9.947***	
Item 6	.816	.098	11.445***	
Item 7	.690	Fix	—	
<i>Brand attachment emotion</i>				.84
Item 1	.741	.077	12.452***	
Item 2	.610	.086	9.957***	
Item 3	.690	.73	11.588***	
Item 4	.819	Fix	—	
<i>Brand loyalty</i>				.80
Item 1	.787	Fix	—	
Item 2	.785	.090	12.240***	
Item 3	.634	.086	9.838***	
Item 4	.628	.061	9.739***	

*** $p < .0001$.

showed good model fits to the data ($\chi^2 = 4.05$; $df = 6$; χ^2/df ratio = .675). Therefore, the proposed model was deemed to be a good fit for hypothesis testing.

For achieving discriminant validity, construct correlations need to be below 0.85 (Kline, 1998). Correlations among variables are presented in Table 2. As a result discriminant validity of the measurement model was proved.

Hypotheses testing

As seen in Table 3, H1 proposed that independent self-construal is positively related to self-expressive brand (parameter = .190, t -value = 2.887). H1 was

supported. However, interdependent self-construal was not significantly positively related to self-expressive brand (parameter = .069, t -value = 1.041); H2 was not supported. H3 was supported: self-expressive brand is positively related to ownership brand attachment. (parameter = .719, t -value = 16.661). H4 was supported: self-expressive brand is positively related to emotion brand attachment (parameter = .544, t -value = 10.457). H5 was supported: ownership brand attachment is positively related to brand loyalty (parameter = .327, t -value = 4.066). H6 was supported: emotion brand attachment is positively related to brand loyalty (parameter = .166, t -value = 2.489). H7 was supported: self-expressive brand is positively related to brand loyalty (parameter = .227, t -value = 3.295). Therefore, based on these results, out of seven hypotheses, all except one (H2) was supported (see Figure 2).

Discussion

The current research indicates how consumer-brand relationship dimensions can influence brand loyalty. It is necessary for fashion firms or fashion marketers to develop and establish strong brand relationships with their customers. This has critical implications for the enhancement of brand loyalty.

H1 and H2 proposed that both independent and interdependent self-construal would be related to self-expressive brands. Independent self-construal was related to self-expressive brand, but interdependent self-construal was not. An individual who has a well-developed independent self-construal is likely to have an interest in uniqueness and self-expression. Clothing and, in particular, brand names are excellent ways to express uniqueness and self attributes. Through product promotion and a well-defined brand image, companies can help a customer create a unique self-image and, thereby, increase a customer's self-esteem through ownership of a brand that the customer perceives to contribute to his or her image and to be an extension of his or her inner self. Wearing or owning a self-expressive brand allows other people as well as the individual him- or herself to perceive who the person is. The brand is a part of an individual's personal identity, presenting the individual's image (internal traits and attributes). Results are consistent with the idea that individuals with well-developed independent self-construals are more likely to be interested in self-expressive brands than individuals with well-developed interdependent self-construals.

H3 and H4 proposed that self-expressive brands lead to a stronger attachment (both emotional significance and ownership) between the customer and the brand. A self-expressive brand reminds an individual of significant people, places, or experiences to which he or she has some emotional attachment; thus, if the brand was no longer available, the memories might be less vivid or lost entirely.

Table 2. Construct intercorrelation.

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Independent self-construal	1.00	0.402**	0.218**	0.118	0.060	0.146*
(2) Interdependent self-construal	0.402**	1.00	0.145*	0.113	0.091	0.145*
(3) Self-expressive brand	0.218**	0.145*	1.00	0.719**	0.544**	0.552**
(4) Brand attachment ownership	0.118	0.113	0.719**	1.00	0.697**	0.606**
(5) Brand attachment emotion	0.060	0.091	0.544**	0.697**	1.00	0.517**
(6) Brand loyalty	0.148*	0.145*	0.552**	0.606**	0.517**	1.00

* $p < .05$.** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Hypothesised model.

Structural model path	Estimate	SE	t -Value	p -Value
H1: Independent \rightarrow Self-expressive brand	.190	.094	2.887	.004
H2: Interdependent self-construal \rightarrow Self-expressive brand	.069	.094	1.041	.298
H3: Self-expressive brand \rightarrow Ownership attachment	.719	.045	16.661	.000
H4: Self-expressive brand \rightarrow Emotion attachment	.544	.060	10.457	.000
H5: Ownership attachment \rightarrow brand loyalty	.327	.082	4.066	.000
H6: Emotion attachment \rightarrow brand loyalty	.166	.062	2.489	.013
H7: Self-expressive brand \rightarrow brand loyalty	.227	.074	3.295	.000

Notes: $\chi^2 = 4.05$; $df = 6$; $p = .670$; χ^2/df ratio = .675; GFI = .995; AGFI = .982; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.009; IFI = 1.009; RMSEA = .000.

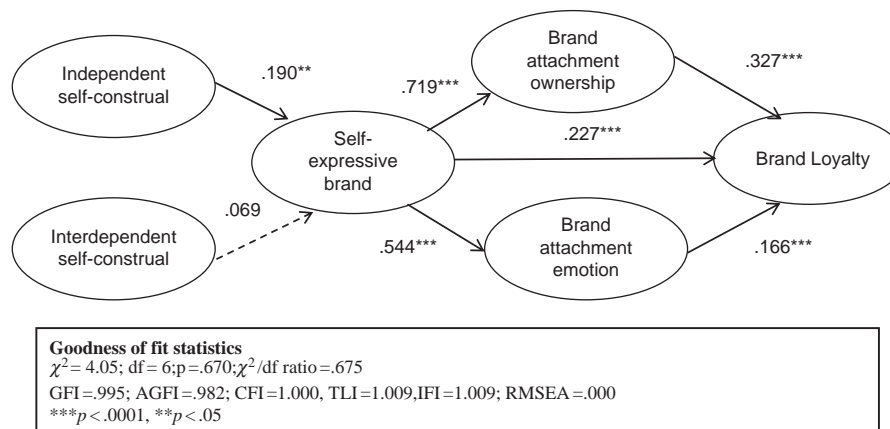


Figure 2. SEM analysis of the proposed model. Notes: Goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 4.05$; $df = 6$; $p = .670$; χ^2/df ratio = .675; GFI = .995; AGFI = .982; CFI = 1.000; TLI = 1.009; IFI = 1.009; RMSEA = .000. ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .0001$.

Ownership of a self-expressive brand allows individuals to communicate their personal identity—both for their own benefit (to reinforce their personal identity) as well as the benefit of other people.

H5 and H6 proposed that brand attachment (emotional significance and ownership) can lead to brand loyalty. Ball and Tasaki (1992) asserted that socially visible objects that signify an individual's roles, relationships, accomplishments, and experiences can be used to reflect the self.

H5 proposed that brand attachment (ownership) can lead to brand loyalty. An individual is likely to become attached to an object (e.g. a brand name) that he or she

perceives to reflect the self. If ownership of a brand reinforces an individual's personal and social identities, it is likely to influence the owner's commitment to purchase the brand again and again. Thus, ownership attachment to a specific brand may lead to greater brand loyalty.

H6 proposed that brand attachment (emotional significance) can lead to brand loyalty. Consumers may feel a variety of emotions towards particular brands. A customer's attachment to a brand can reflect an emotional bond. Emotional attachment to a brand may influence individuals' commitment to a maintaining a relationship with the brand and a willingness to invest in the brand.

Thus, stronger emotional attachment to a specific brand may lead to individuals' willingness to pay more for the brand.

H7 proposed that self-expressive brands can lead to brand loyalty. Self-expressive brands have the ability to reflect one's inner self and contribute to one's social self. Consumers' loyalty to a self-expressive brand could play an important part in strengthening both their personal and social identities. So brand loyalty could be influenced directly by self-expressive brand. Consumers may be more loyal to a brand when the brand is more self-expressive.

Theoretical implications

Relationship theory (Fournier, 1998) provided the framework for examining determinants of brand loyalty. The determinants of self-construal (independent, interdependent), brand attachment (emotional significance and ownership), and self-expressive brand supported the theoretical notion that consumers do form relationships with brands. Consistent with independent self-construal's focus on internal traits, self-expression, and promotion of personal goals, results showed that independent self-construal was related to brand loyalty through self-expressive brands and brand attachment. It is unclear why interdependent self-construal with its focus on external, public statuses, roles, and relationships was not related to brand loyalty through the other variables examined. Perhaps there are other determinants of brand loyalty that relate to interdependent self-construal. Further research is necessary to ferret out those variables.

Practical implications

The results of the current study lead to recommendations for brand managers. For example, new promotional strategies might be developed specifically to appeal to the emotional and ownership dimensions of brand attachment. Examples of such strategies that help customers feel emotional attachment to the brand and keep customers returning to the store are *rewards programmes* or *family and friends programmes*. These types of promotions encourage not only current customers to repeatedly purchase brand name products but also encourage brand-loyal customers to extend to others the opportunity to experience benefits of purchasing brand name products. Training for employees should include acknowledgement of the role they play as representatives of the brand. Representatives of the brand need to understand the personal meanings and social meanings of the brand they represent. Because they personally interact with customers at the store level, brand representatives have an opportunity to impact not only customers' ownership of the brand but also affective commitment to the brand.

Limitations and further research

The current study had several limitations related to the US college students as participants (i.e. age, culture, and status) and variables examined (i.e. self-construal, self-expression, brand attachment and brand loyalty). Future research can extend our understanding of similarities and differences in consumer behaviour by including gender comparisons as well as participants from other cultures, ages, and statuses. An investigation of other variables related to brand loyalty such as brand trust, brand charisma, and brand experiences might contribute to understanding why consumers are loyal to brand names. Cross-cultural comparisons may further enlighten understanding of brand loyalty in different contexts. Self-construal is largely determined by the cultural contexts of individualism and collectivism (Triandis, 1995) so it would be meaningful to investigate interdependent/independent self-construal with respect to brand loyalty and brand equity within cultural contexts.

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