

What I Am, What I Want to be: The Role of Brand Experience in the Relationship of Self-Congruence Facets and Orientation toward Happiness

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The study aimed to address the key questions; how to deliver attractive and compelling brand experience and what could be the possible outcomes. Brand experience is likely to have an intervening role between self-congruence facets (actual self and ideal self) and orientation toward happiness. The study followed quantitative research design and positivism research philosophy based on deductive approach and it can be categorised as descript to-explanatory study. The data analysis involved descriptive analysis (descriptive study), structural equation modelling (online survey). The finding of the online survey supported self-congruity theory contention that, consumers generate stronger responses when their actual self-concept or ideal self-concept is consistent with the brand personality. The results confirmed that actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence had yielded indirect effect on orientation toward happiness through brand experience. Surprisingly, the inclusion of brand experience has turned the direct effect of self-congruence facets (on orientation toward happiness) as insignificant. The study considers actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence as distinct predictors of brand experience by extending beyond the prior studies. Furthermore, the study contributes to the current literature by introducing brand experience as processing mechanism between self-congruence facets and orientation toward happiness.

Keyword: Brand experience; brand personality; self-congruity; actual self-congruence; ideal self-congruence; orientation toward happiness.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pine and Gilmore (1998) engendered enormous interest by introducing the shift of paradigm from industrial (and service) economy to experience economy. After services being commoditised authors recognise that ‘experiences’ are gaining notorious importance in economic growth. In order to align with this new era of the experience economy, contrary to traditional marketing a new approach of ‘experiential marketing’ was proposed by Schmitt (1999). The approach posits that highest value is vested in experiences and hedonic elements, rather than utilitarian and functional benefits of products or services (Le, Scott, & Lohmann, 2019; Yuan & Wu, 2008). Subsequently,

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this innovative approach transformed the focus of marketers and researchers from features and benefits towards developing appealing experiences with customers (Skandalis, Byrom, & Banister, 2019).

The traditional branding approach poses brand as an identifier and focuses solely on features and product benefits. On the other hand, experiential branding regards brand as a vibrant source of holistic gestalt experiences and emphasises that in this era of the *experience economy*, brands need to deliver experiences (Nayeem, Murshed, & Dwivedi, 2019). *Brand experience* has been conceptualised as subjective responses of consumers in the form of feelings and/or sensations aroused/stimulated due to exposure to brand's stimuli (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). After this conceptualisation, further investigations concerning antecedents and consequences are still needed to establish the field. Furthermore, we need to understand how brands can evoke compelling (unique/strong) brand experience to engage the senses, touch the hearts and intrigue consumers.

Companies can successfully deliver strong, appealing and compelling (brand) experience if these experiences can offer relevance, bring novelty, intrigue surprise and encourage learning and engagement of consumers (Iglesias, Markovic, & Rialp, 2019; Poulsson & Kale, 2004). In order to arouse compelling brand experience, brands as being a source of self-expressiveness require congruent brand personality with consumer's self-concept (Grohmann, 2009). Researchers highlighted a vital role of *self-congruence* (that can be referred to as the extent to which self-concept of a consumer is consistent to the brand's personality) in building brand related responses (Gilchrist, Sabiston, & Kowalski, 2019; Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011). It can also be a strong predictor of online brand experience (Lee & Jeong, 2014; Yasin, Liébana-Cabanillas, Porcu, & Kayed, 2020). Based on this evidence, it can be assumed that self-congruence can predict a stronger brand experience. Furthermore, the role of self-congruence leads us to another vital question that which type of self-concept (*actual self and ideal self*) creates a stronger brand experience.

Marketers are always keen to establish strong emotional association/relationships between their brand and customers. Self-congruent brands induce emotional feelings such as pride, joy, love, and happiness in consumers (Gilchrist et al., 2019; Kim, Lee, & Ulgado, 2005). Based on the premise of positive psychology and optimal experiences, prior research proclaimed that brand experience positively affects the happiness of consumers (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2015). In this context, actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence have an indirect effect on orientation toward happiness through brand experience.

The current study aims to: (a) identify set of experiential brands; (b) examine the role of self-congruence facets in generating brand experience; (c) investigate the role of brand experience between self-congruence facets and orientation towards happiness. The study contributes to the concept of brand experience by validating its fifth dimension "relational experience" and moves the discourse forward by presenting a novel conceptual framework. It considers actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence's distinct predictors of brand experience by extending beyond the previous studies (Klabi, 2020; Lee & Jeong, 2014). Furthermore, it introduces brand experience as a mediating variable between self-congruence facets and orientation toward happiness. Last but not the least; the study contributes to the literature by identifying nine experiential brands in Pakistan.

1.1. Literature Review

1.1.1. *Self-congruence*

Consumer behaviour and brand management literature recognised that brands could also satisfy the needs of self-expression in consumer along with functional needs (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). Consumers utilise brands as a tool of symbolic representation of their self while purchasing and using brands. Self-concept is referred to as "totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings, referring to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). Numerous streams of research viewed it as; self-system (psychoanalytic theory), conditioned responses (behavioural theory), holistic form of self (phenomenology), information processing conceptual systems (cognitive theory) and a function of interpersonal interactions (symbolic interactionism) (Sirgy, 1982).

At times, consumer ensures comfort by using brands which express consumer who they actually are in their real life (Ekinci & Riley, 2003). On another occasion, consumer use brands to look attractive and to seek their desired states (Ahn, Ekinci, & Li, 2013). In either situation, consumer's self-image (what they actually are and what they would like to be) interacts with brand image, and it requires a fit between both. The phenomenon of fit between consumer self-image about him/herself and the perceived image of the brand can be referred to as self-congruity (Sirgy, 1982). The concept further extended into self-congruity theory contends that consumer would prefer those products or brands which exhibit a consistent brand image/personality concerning consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). The perception of the match between actual self-concept with communicated brand personality will result in actual self-congruence (Sirgy, 1986). The degree to which brand personality matches with what an individual wants to be, or what an individual wishes/intends to be, the higher the ideal self-congruence will be (Sirgy et al., 1997). Keeping in view the above concept, actual self-congruence can be defined as the perception of consistency or fit between how the individual sees himself/herself in reality and the brand personality (Ahn, 2019; Malär et al., 2011). Similarly, the perception of consistency or match between the way an individual aspires/wishes to see himself/ herself and the brand personality can be termed as ideal self-congruence (Ekinci & Riley, 2003; Malär et al., 2011).

1.1.2. *Brand Experience*

In the twenty-first century, newly established brands (i.e. Apple), as well as deeply rooted brands (Coca Cola), utilise various marketing tactics to attract, attain and retain customers over the period of time. In this scenario, focusing on brand's functional attributes portray one side of a coin. The other aspect of the coin can be ascribed to sensory, affective, behavioural, intellectual, and relational appeals highlighted the significance of experiential marketing.

The concept of experience roots can be identified from traditional fields of philosophy and psychology. In terms of philosophers and psychologists, the experience can be described as subjective emotional feelings (Schmitt, 2011), intentions about a stimulus or reference (Husserl, 2012), perceptions of sensory, feelings, actions, and intellectual determinations based on knowledge (Yang et al., 2017). According to consumer behaviour research, the concept of experience or consumption experience

coined by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) in the seminal work explaining the experiential aspect of consumption. The experiential view was presented as an internal subjective state of recognition (phenomenological perspective), rather than functional and utilitarian attributes processing (information processing perspective) (Das, Agarwal, Malhotra, & Varshneya, 2019). After a gap of twenty years, the concept of experience manifested the field of marketing as; groundwork for experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 1998) and the era of experiential marketing (Schmitt, 1999). The new perspective emphasises that customer value is vested in hedonic/experiential elements while utilitarian functions are considered as a inherited feature (Yuan & Wu, 2008).

In order to cater the experiences provided by brands, Brakus et al. (2009, p. 53) conceptualised brand experience as “subjective, internal consumer responses (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioural responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand’s design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments”. The study also described dimensions of brand experience such as: ‘sensory experience’ refers to incitement or provocation of five senses (seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, and smelling). ‘Affective experience’ refers to internal feelings and positive emotions toward the brand. ‘Intellectual experience’ refers to the provocation of mental or cognitive experiences resulted from problem-solving or customer engagement creativity. ‘Behavioural experience’ includes actual action, physical interactions, and/or associated lifestyles of a consumer with the brand. Furthermore, ‘relational experience’ can be referred to as experiences evoked by relating to others or social systems (society or culture) (Nysveen, Pedersen, & Skard, 2013).

1.1.3. Orientation toward Happiness

With the emergence ‘positive psychology’ movement, researchers became more interested in the happiness of people (Schmitt, 2011). The concept of happiness can be conceived as an overall mindset of one’s good life (Myers, 1992) and the life have several positive aspects and feelings (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Generically, happiness can be described as a mental state of personal well-being and a mindset of positive affection throughout the world (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013; Lorente, Tordera, & Peiró, 2019). Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) conceptualised orientation toward happiness and proposed that people feel happiness through three routes: the pursuit of pleasure (seeking pleasure in every aspect); pursuit of meaning (sense of serving a purpose); pursuit of engagement (sense of focused and involved) in their daily work life activities.

For this, the field of positive psychology has observed two different yet overlapping streams, grounded in different philosophies and perspectives that focus on happiness and ways of realising it (Ryan & Deci, 2001). One is the emotional state that makes a person momentarily happy or unhappy depending on the feelings. The other stream of research holds a view beyond transitory feelings and focuses on more integrative views of a person about life and its assessment (Baumeister et al., 2013). These two perspectives can be traced back from the conceptual distinctions provided by Aristotle about ‘feeling happy and living a good life’. These research traditions have been linked to hedonic philosophy (subjective humans well-being) and eudaimonic philosophy (psychological well-being) (Ahn, Back, & Boger, 2019; Linley et al., 2009). The other

perspective considers happiness because of right actions that are rooted in nature and doing anything that has a value and significance to do (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This perspective is called eudemonia (Waterman, 1993) and is conceptualised as a process of realising the true nature of a person's own psychology (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Contrary to the hedonic view, the eudemonic view argues that not all desires a person might think giving happiness can yield well-being hence clearly distinguishing the happiness and well-being which is considered inseparable in hedonic tradition (Disabato et al., 2016; Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Beyond the two major perspectives, few studies included a flow view of happiness based on engagement with daily activities in real life (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). The third perspective extends the debate of happiness beyond the hedonic and eudaimonic view of happiness. The flow view of happiness offers an integrative and holistic view of hedonic and eudaimonic qualities for people (Disabato et al., 2016). The flow view of happiness is based on the engagement of person within the activities to feel happy (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999; Fu, Kang, Jeeyeon, & Wiitala, 2020).

Taking the term happiness in consumer behaviour, the common question arises in one's mind is that how should I spend my money to get happiness (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Pavlidis, Paya, Peel, & Spuru, 2009). Largely it remains unclear that what can bring happiness in one's life when taking the consumer behaviour into account (Nicolao, Irwin, & Goodman, 2009). Consumers try to gain happiness either from the material possessions of things or the experiences they gain from interaction with brands and possess certain fulfilling criteria. In comparison to the material purchases; experiences are understood to be more connected to happiness (Ahn et al., 2019; Carter & Gilovich, 2012; Chan & Mogilner, 2014). In contrast to this, the study followed the experiential marketing approach and contends that brand experience positively affects the happiness of customers (Brakus et al., 2015). The study discussed that experience and happiness are conceptually tied to each other.

1.1.4. Hypotheses Development

The self-congruity theory states that an individual exhibits favourable attitude towards an object when he/she perceives the phenomenon or the object consistent with him/her (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). He and Mukherjee (2007) studied store image congruity and shopping behaviour of consumers. The study argued that self-congruence strengthens the consistency, expectations and more specifically enhances the shopping experience of consumers. Dolbec and Chebat (2013) investigated flagship store image congruity as an antecedent to brand experience and empirically demonstrated that store image congruity along with store experience enhanced the brand experience of customers. Similarly, Roy and Rabbane (2015) investigated self-congruence as a predictor and proposed that self-congruity incites consumer to have positive brand experience.

More specifically, several theoretical underpinning arguments uphold a significant relationship of actual self-concept and brand experience. The cognitive-consistency theories claim that people tend to develop consistency between their beliefs (that can be actual self-concept) and their behaviours (buying or purchasing) to reduce unpleasantness (Festinger, 1957). Similarly, self-expansion theory proclaims that people's (customers) innermost inclination drive them to assimilate individuals/entities with their own sense of self-conception (Aron et al., 2005).

The self-verification theory (Swann Jr, 1983) postulates that people are internally inclined to strengthen their sense of self by corroborating, affirming and upholding it. Self-verification motive encourages individuals to gain those experiences which validate their sense of self and avert those that challenge it (Swann Jr, 2012; Swann Jr, Stein-Seroussi, & Giesler, 1992). Similarly, brands which are imbued with actual self-concept, reinforce consumers' self-identity and their achievements (Fournier, 1998; Xu & Pratt, 2018). Subsequently, actual self-congruence will generate positive responses in consumers (Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2019; Malär et al., 2011). Hence, the discourse can be encapsulated into the following hypothesis:

H1: Actual Self-congruence positively and significantly predicts brand experience.

Based on psychology literature, people tend to strengthen their self-esteem (Brown, Collins, & Schmidt, 1988; Markus & Wurf, 1987) by comparing and identifying the discrepancy between ideal self-concept and actual self-concept (Ekinci & Riley, 2003; Higgins, 1987). A strong need for corroborating one's self-esteem drive to the development of self-enhancement motive (Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Self-enhancement theory posited that individuals have an underlying tendency to encourage feelings of their own importance/value and to avoid threatening entities in the surroundings (Ditto & Lopez, 1992). It was further argued that people seek experiences which increase their self-esteem and avoid the experiences which reduce self-esteem (Shrauger, 1975). The self-enhancement motive can be an upward self-enhancement (Collins, 1996) in which an individual tends to attain his/her goals to create a sense of consistency and to evoke positive responses in their selves (Boldero & Francis, 2002).

In marketing, a brand imbued a personality which offers consistency with the aspired self and grounding self-enhancement opportunity will generate positive feelings and responses (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967). Therefore, the consumer would prefer to associate themselves with those brands which offer positive arousal over the period of time. The brands with aspired self will generate stronger attractions and feelings in consumers' minds (Boldero & Francis, 2002; Tan Teck, Salo, Juntunen, & Kumar, 2019). Hence, the discourse can be summed up into the following hypothesis:

H2: Ideal self-congruence positively and significantly predicts brand experience.

Happiness has never been a simple construct. The inherent complexity of the construct is discussed by Ryan and Deci (2001), which discussed two different approaches i.e. hedonic and eudaimonic. While the complexity of the construct happiness dominates the overall research in the area and still seeks for clarity what happiness can constitute, literature provides consistent evidence that positive purchase experiences can impact the happiness of consumer (Howell & Hill, 2009; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003). The concepts of happiness and well-being have been utilised interchangeably in several research studies (Nicolao et al., 2009) but it is evident from the literature that well-being is analogous to the subjective viewpoint which is conceptually near to the hedonic happiness (Linley et al., 2009). Since the last decade, a stream of positive psychology research emphasised the subjective experiences of individuals that may contribute to the overall well-being or happiness of consumers (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The

notion ‘experience recommendation’ discussed by Nicolao et al. (2009) grounded in the work of Haidt (2006) suggests that experiences gained on the brand spending results in happiness of the consumers.

The seminal literature of Pine and Gilmore (1998) inspired many research studies on experiences and happiness of consumers. A group of research studies deliberated experiential purchases in dichotomous comparison with material purchases and empirically demonstrated experiential purchases contribute to the happiness (Bastos, 2019; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Guevarra & Howell, 2015). Whereas, the conceptualisation of brand experiences suggested that brand experience and happiness are closely related to each other (Brakus et al., 2009). Brakus, Schmitt, and Zhang (2014) confirmed the relationship of happiness with everyday life consumption experiences. Hence, the discourse can be encapsulated into the following hypothesis:

H3: *Brand experience directly and positively predicts orientation toward happiness.*

Sirgy, Grzeskowiak, and Rahtz (2007) investigated the relation of self-congruence and happiness. Roy and Rabbane (2015) in their work, discuss how the self-congruity may impact the positive behavioural outcomes in individuals. Several research studies discussed the relationship of (consumptions or brand) experiences with the happiness of customers (Bastos, 2019; Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Calder, Hollebeek, & Malthouse, 2018; Gilovich, Kumar, & Jampol, 2015; Guevarra & Howell, 2015). In addition to this, Brakus et al. (2014) predicted in their study that experience can be an important contributor to happiness in consumers. Hence, the discourse can be summed up into the following hypothesis:

H4: *Brand experience mediates the relationship between actual self-congruence and orientation toward happiness.*

Prior literature suggested that products have more tendency to be purchased by individuals when they exhibit convergence between brand image and self-image of consumers (Sirgy et al., 2007). A plethora of prior literature established that ideal self-congruence reflects the positive consumer behaviours in future purchases (Sirgy et al., 1997; Sirgy et al., 2007). Similarly, the self-enhancement theory (which serve a base for ideal self-congruence), states that when a there is the source of aspirations for a consumer in the brand, it will not only provide happiness for him but also can result in attachment for consumers (Boldero & Francis, 2002; Calder et al., 2018). Hence, the discourse can be summed up into the following hypothesis:

H5: *Brand experience mediates the relationship between ideal self-congruence and orientation toward happiness.*

2. METHODS

The quantitative research designs followed descripto -explanatory study- a descriptive study to identify a list of experiential brands in Pakistan and an online survey. The data analysis involved first-generation analysis techniques (exploratory factor analysis) and second-generation analysis techniques (Structural Equation Modelling). In the descriptive study, procedures outlined by (Delgado-Ballester & Fernandez Sabiote, 2015) was followed

and 41 Master level business administration students were selected in Lahore. The description of experiential brands and functional brands was presented (Brakus et al., 2009) to provide a clear understanding of the concepts. In the online survey, a web-based approach was followed to administer the questionnaire due to popularity and several advantages (Hewson, Yule, Laurent, & Vogel, 2003). The respondents were not only expected to have a strong familiarity about the brand but also imagine the brand as a human being and respond to questionnaire items. Based on this assumption, the questionnaire was pretested on a sample of medical sciences master level students from a public-sector university in Lahore. The feedback from students during the survey and their responses (a major portion of the questionnaire was left blank) confirmed our assumption that a specific pool of people with a background of business studies should only be considered for the research. The current study employed non-probability sampling method to select the sample due to certain assumptions that the respondent: must understand questionnaire in true sense; studied business or can understand business concepts; high familiarity with pool of brands; proficient user of the internet (with internet access); well educated; and more preferably belongs to young or middle age group. Therefore, a combination of judgmental sampling and snowball sampling (non-probability sampling techniques) were used to select the sample.

The instrument was designed in the English language and email invitations were sent to respondents. Actual self-congruence (consisting of two items) and ideal self-congruence (consisting of two items) were measured on 5 points Likert scale (Sirgy et al., 1997) that is consistent with prior studies (Malär et al., 2011). The brand experience measures were adopted from Brakus et al. (2009) study. Brand experience measures included four dimensions: “sensory experience”, “affective experience”, “intellectual experience” and “behavioural experience”. Whereas, the fifth dimension “relational experience” was measured through scale proposed by Nysveen et al. (2013). The orientation toward happiness is measured through fifteen items on a 5 points scale in which 1 represents very much unlike me and 5 represents “very much like me” (Peterson et al., 2005).

3. RESULTS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

3.1. Descriptive Study

The selection of experiential brand study involved students enrolled in the master level class (16 years of education). The sample’s gender in selection of experiential brands study is dominantly constituted of male respondents i.e. 75 percent. The employment status of most of the respondents i.e. 61 percent is a full time students and rest are working in a part-time or full-time job. Overall, the age of major share i.e. 70 percent of the sample falls in 18-25 years’ category, followed by 26-30 years category i.e. 27 percent. The majority of the sample economic class is middle-classfamily i.e. 73 percent and rest are from upper-middle economic class. The respondents mentioned 25 brands in experiential brands category. The selection criterion of experiential brands was based on the frequency of the brands. The brands which yielded high frequency in the experiential category were considered for selection and brands with low frequency were eliminated. In this process, the criterion for the minimum frequency of the brands was set at 05. Therefore, 12 brands were eliminated due to frequency of less than five. Additionally, one more filter was applied, that foreign brands must have extensive operations or availability of the product (services) in the Pakistani market. Therefore, 04

variables (i.e. Starbucks, Disney) were further removed from the list. Finally, the researcher yielded 09 experiential brands with the frequency ranged from 10 to 05. The selected experiential brands are Samsung, Sensodyne, Mountain Dew, Adidas, Coca Cola, Bahria Town, Sting, Apple, and Daewoo.

3.2. Online Survey

The cleaning and checking process is an essential process due to expected concerns in raw data such as missing data (omissions), unengaged responses, illogical responses (outliers: univariate and multivariate), and normality of the data (through Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). After the cleaning process, a total sample of 249 was analysed for testing the hypothesised relationships.

3.2.1. Descriptive Statistics

The results confirmed that 26-30 years' age category entailed the majority of the sample i.e. 46 percent and shows that a major portion of the sample falls in the young age category. It is evident from the results that unmarried respondents constituted a major share i.e. 56 percent of the sample and males were considerably more employed i.e. 82 percent as compared to females 54 percent. The consumers educational level ranges from graduation level to PhD and M. Phil (or 18 years) education category contribute the highest share i.e. 68 percent in the respondents. The brands' selection among respondents shows that majority of the respondents i.e. 33 percent selected Coca Cola brand. The selection of Coca Cola brand portrays a high share of mind in both male and female consumers. Samsung and Apple brands were selected by 25 percent and 20 percent consumers respectively. Overall, 78 percent respondents selected the Coca Cola, Samsung and Apple brands and rest picked Daewoo, Mountain Dew and other brands. Furthermore, females' preference was higher for Samsung brand i.e. 28 percent and Apple brand i.e. 24 percent as compared to males.

The reliability and validity of the study variables were examined through AMOS version 22. It can be observed from Table 1 that all the variables yielded composite reliability higher than .70, which indicate the scales were reliable (Bentler & Chou, 1987; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). More specifically, discriminant validity was confirmed by analysing the square root of AVE (i.e. .698) that is higher than inter construct correlations (MSV) (i.e. .486) of the variables (Byrne, 2010). Similarly, the convergent validity of the variables was confirmed by analysing the AVE for the study variables is higher than .50 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Table 1

Reliability and Validity of the Study Variables

Variable	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV	ASC	BE	OTH	ISC
ASC	0.822	0.698	0.486	0.357	0.836			
BE	0.871	0.575	0.376	0.374	0.609	0.758		
OTH	0.751	0.501	0.375	0.254	0.463	0.612	0.708	
ISC	0.851	0.741	0.486	0.345	0.697	0.613	0.416	0.861

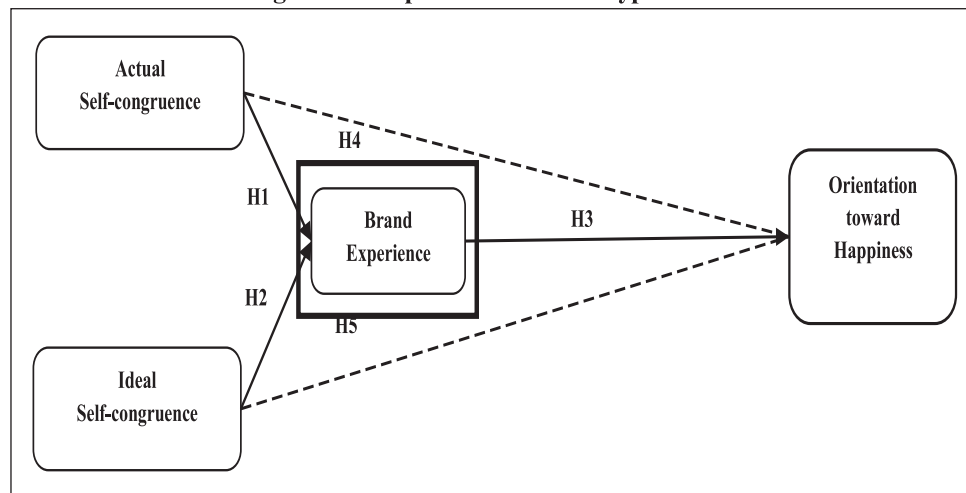
Notes: ISC= Ideal Self-congruence; ASC= Actual Self-congruence; BE= Brand Experience; OTH= Orientation toward Happiness; CR= Composite Reliability; AVE= Average Variance Extracted; MSV= Maximum Shared Variance

3.2.2. Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Hypotheses Testing

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) can be utilised to validate or confirm consistency with theoretical understanding or expectations. The proposed higher-order model yielded better goodness-of-fit in incremental indices i.e. CFI= .95, TLI=.94, GFI=.88, $\chi^2/df=1.44$ and RMSEA= .04 and all the indices are in acceptable range (Byrne, 2010). The structural model was run to test the hypotheses through AMOS version 22 and directional relationships between variables were drawn. The model yielded fitness indices values: CFI= .96, TLI=.95, GFI=.89, $\chi^2/df=1.34$ and RMSEA= .04 and all the indices are in the acceptable range.

The results in Table 2 that actual self-congruence has a positive and significant effect on the brand experience ($\beta=.35$, $p<.01$). Thus, the results supported H1 that actual self-congruence has significantly and positively affected brand experience. Secondly, ideal self-congruence yielded a significant and positive association with brand experience ($\beta=.36$, $p<.02$) of consumers. Thirdly, it is evident from Table 2 that brand experience generates positive orientation toward happiness ($\beta=.51$, $p<.01$).

Fig. 1. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses



For the purpose of testing mediation hypotheses, the bootstrapping technique was utilised proposed by Preacher and Hayes (2008). The fourth hypothesis involves an indirect relationship of actual self-congruence with orientation toward happiness through mediator (brand experience). It can be observed from Table 2 that actual self-congruence has an indirect effect on orientation toward happiness and it yielded a significant parameter estimate ($\beta=.18$, $p<.00$). The indirect effect estimate pertained a 95 percent confidence interval which did not consist a zero between lower bound (.07) to upper bound (.35). Furthermore, the results established a full mediation case with the insignificant direct path ($\beta=.15$, $p<.30$) after inclusion of mediator in a relationship. Thus, the findings corroborated that brand experience of consumers positively mediates the effect of actual self-congruence on orientation toward happiness.

Table 2

Bootstrapping Mediation Results

Direct Effects					
Path of Variables	Coefficient	Sig.	BC 95% CI		
			Lower	Upper	
ASC-BE	.35	.01	.13	.58	
ISC-BE	.36	.02	.10	.57	
ASC-OTH	.15	.30	-.07	.41	
ISC-OTH	-.01	.97	-.27	.21	
BE-OTH	.51	.00	.30	.70	
Indirect Effects					
Path of Variables	Coefficient	Sig.	BC 95% CI		Result
			Lower	Upper	
ASC-BE-OTH	.18	.00	.07	.35	Full Mediation
ISC-BE-OTH	.19	.01	.06	.36	Full Mediation

Notes: ISC= Ideal Self-congruence; ASC= Actual Self-congruence; BE= Brand Experience; OTH= Orientation toward Happiness; BC= Bias Corrected; CI= Confidence Interval

The last hypothesis of the study pertains the mediating relationship of brand experience between ideal self-congruence and orientation toward happiness. It can be observed from Table 2 that the indirect effect through brand experience yielded a significant relationship ($\beta = .19$, $p < .01$). The significance of the association was validated by analysing confidence interval (95 percent) between lower CI bound (.06) to upper CI bound (.36). The results confirmed a full mediation case (Baron & Kenny, 1986), as the direct path between ideal self-congruence and orientation toward happiness ($\beta = -.01$, $p < .97$) turned insignificant in presence of brand experience. Thus, the findings substantiated brand experience work as a processing mechanism the relationship of ideal self-congruence and orientation toward happiness.

4. DISCUSSION

The finding supported self-congruity theory contention that stronger internal responses will be evoked when consumers perceive consistent brand personality with his/her own (actual/ideal) self-concept. Similarly, actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence are significantly associated with brand experience. Surprisingly, in contrast to previous research, ideal self-congruence has strongly affected brand experience as compared to actual self-congruence (Malär et al., 2011). The results are also consistent with the local study of self-congruence facets in Pakistan (Sheeraz, Qadeer, Masood, & Hameed, 2018). Similarly, consistent with positive psychology contention, brand experience enhanced consumer's happiness by contributing to the pleasure of life, the meaning of life and engagement of life. The results confirmed that brand experience intervened the association among actual self-congruence, and ideal self-congruence with orientation toward happiness. More surprisingly, brand experience worked as a full mediator in the path between actual self-congruence and orientation toward happiness, and ideal self-congruence and orientation toward happiness. The results confirmed

hypotheses of the study and emphasised the vital role of brand experience in self-congruity effects over pleasure feelings of consumers.

The *first* result illustrated that both facets of self-congruence have a positive effect on brand experience. The findings established that marketing stimuli which exhibits consistent brand personality with the self-concept facets would increase “sensory experience”, “affective experience”, “cognitive experience”, behavioural experience” and “relational experience”. These findings are consistent with Lee and Jeong (2014) study based on the self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1986) and prior experimental studies of self-congruence (Graeff, 1996; Kim, Yoo, & Lee, 2015; Kleijnen, De Ruyter, & Andreassen, 2005). The *second* result demonstrated that brand experience yielded positive effect on the orientation toward happiness and the findings are lined up with prior study (Brakus et al., 2015). The current study also corroborated that human beings seek pleasure through optimal experiences (brand experience) (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Theoretically, the study substantiated a three-dimensional orientation toward happiness concept: pleasure, meaning, and engagement (Peterson et al., 2005). The stronger results strengthened the claim of positive psychology stream of research which endorsed that people seek pleasure through their daily work-life activities (Bhattacharjee & Mogilner, 2014; Linley et al., 2009; Swaminathan, Stilley, & Ahluwalia, 2008).

The *third* result exhibited that actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence have yielded direct link with orientation toward happiness. The finding established the argument of self-verification motive (Swann Jr, 1983) that consumers feel more pleasure when they experience persistence. Surprisingly, the personality congruence with ideal self-concept has yielded an insignificant relationship with meaning of life, engagement of life and pleasure of life. The finding strengthened the argument of Koo, Cho and Kim (2014) that too much ideality can result in undesired feelings of sadness or disappointment in consumers (Higgins, 1987).

The *fourth* result demonstrated that actual self-congruence and ideal self-congruence yielded a significant indirect link with orientation toward happiness. The self-concept consistent with brand personality yielded a positive influence on orientation toward happiness through sensory, affective, intellectual, behavioural and relational experience. The higher the self-congruence with a brand, the more consumers tend to feel the pleasure of life, the pleasure of engagement and pleasure of meaning in their work-life activities (Brakus et al., 2015). The *fifth* result showed that mediating role of brand experience turned the direct effect insignificant between self-congruence facets and orientation toward happiness. The findings are beyond the study hypotheses and confirmed that self-congruence facets can only influence through the brand experience toward life of meaning, life of pleasure and life of engagement. The results are consistent insignificant direct link in case of mediation in self-congruence (Roy & Rabbane, 2015; Wallace, Buil & de Chernatony, 2017).

The *sixth* result established support for relational experience as the fifth dimension of brand experience concept. Brand experience included all five components: sensory experience, affective experience, intellectual experience, behavioural experience and relational experience. The brand experience concept developed by Brakus et al. (2009) validated first four dimensions and confirmed by various research studies (Schmitt, Brakus, & Zarantonello, 2014; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010, 2013). However, the

current study included relational experience dimension, based on strong arguments of prior research (Nysveen et al., 2013). The emergence of relational experience could be due to a collectivist society and more influence of individual over one another. The society in Asia, more specifically in South Asia, can be categorised as high collectivist society and people largely influence the living style and buying decisions of individuals related to them.

4.1. Practical Implications

The study offers various managerial and practical implications focused on how to evoke the strong brand experience and to develop/maintain consumer-brand relationships. The overarching practical implications suggest that marketers should design congruent brand personality which should adhere to five brand experience dimensions to yield affective response in consumers. More specifically, a brand can emphasise to evoke one or two brand experience dimensions with respect to the type of brand or product category. The study finds a stronger relationship of ideal self-congruence in evoking brand experience and orientation toward happiness. The selected brand fall in a luxurious or above-average category in Pakistan. Therefore, customers might seek higher ideal self-congruence as compared to actual self-congruence. Marketers should emphasise ideal self-congruence in developing distinct brand positioning, delivering marketing communication messages and designing brand elements, especially in luxurious brands. The result emphasise that brand managers should carefully design brand experience with respect to brand's product category (i.e. personal accessories) and product type i.e. (hedonic or utilitarian). Last but not the least, the results highlighted a vital role of brand experience in evoking emotional and positive responses of customers. It emphasises that marketers cannot develop emotional brand attachment and orientation toward happiness without properly provoking brand experience.

4.2. Limitations and Future Directions

The study involves several constraints which can be minimised in future research endeavours. *First*, the study utilised Internet Mediated Research (IMR) design due to collect online data. The study also entails some limitations such as no access to non-user of internet, crowded with younger age group, computer or smart phone anxiety, junk email, and technical or internet problems. Future studies should try to overcome or reduce these limitations. *Second*, the study involved a cross-sectional design and the data was collected from respondents through an online survey. The brand experience of customers should be studied over the period of time along with its predictor and criterion variables. A longitudinal study may enhance the accuracy and generalisability of the results as compared to cross-sectional study. *Third*, the study utilised a single brand to examine the role of brand experience with predictors and criterion variables. However, in future studies, multiple products entailing different brand experience can be utilised to arouse several types of strong brand experience. One product may have intense intellectual experience or sensory experience as compared to others which might emphasise affective or behavioural or relational experience. *Fourth*, the future studies may investigate personal level (i.e. self-construal) or cultural level (i.e. social influence) moderating variable to comprehensively cater the concept. Similarly, future studies may

comparatively analyse the individual dimensions in influencing direct and indirect (mediating) relationship of brand experience.

4.3. Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the question that how marketers can evoke the attractive and compelling brand experience and what would be the consumer responses. The consistency between brand personality consumer's self-concept yielded strong brand experience and resulted in positive consumer responses which are aligned with the study's hypotheses. In the light of premises of self-congruity theory, the current study emphasised that consumers are more concerned to develop consistency with their aspired self in evoking internal psychological responses. More specifically in experiential brands, consumers develop affective responses through brand experience evoked from congruent brand personality.

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