Enhancing Service Brand Passion Through Self-Congruity: The Moderating Role of Gender and Age

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Abstract

Purpose: Using congruity theory, triangular theory of love, gender schema theory, and generational cohort theory, this study aimed to examine the relationships between congruity types and consumers' service brand passion, along with the moderation effect of gender (i.e. male vs. female customers) and age (i.e. young vs. older customers) in these relationships.

Design/methodology/approach: A total of N = 252 valid responses were collected from the customers of service brands (e.g. bus riders), and the theoretical model was tested using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), structural equation modeling (SEM), and moderation analysis techniques.

Findings: After assessing four types of congruity, we discovered that the influence of brand use image congruity had the greatest impact on service brand passion, followed by brand user image congruity, and actual self-congruity. Our moderation variable of gender revealed that the effect of actual self-congruity is more essential in building service brand passion among male than female customers, whereas the effect of ideal self-congruity is more important among female than male customers. Similarly, the effect of ideal self-congruity is more essential for boosting service brand passion among young than older customers, while brand use image congruity better promotes service brand passion among older but not young customers.

Implications: This study offers strategies for boosting service brand passion among male (vs. female) and young (vs. older) customers in emerging markets.

Originality: This is the first study to look into the effects of congruity types on service brand passion, and it has given marketers a framework for targeting customers based on their gender and age.

Keywords: service brand passion, actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, user image congruity, image use congruity.

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Introduction

Consumers seek new ways to enrich their lives with a sense of purpose and meaning with significance. This profound desire is often satisfied with consumers' materialistic possession of the objects they love (Ahuvia, 2005; Wallendorf and Arnold, 1988; Gilal et al., 2019a). Brands strive to create this love and passion in consumers' life so that it plays a central role in their consumption behavior (Gilal et al., 2019b). One of the ways to comprehend these links is to concentrate on the concept of "passion" (Gilal et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021). A consensus exists among nearly all marketing researchers that passion is an important determinant in raising brand loyalty and involvement (Albert et al., 2008; Gilal et al., 2019c, 2019d), thus boosting the consumption behavior toward a product. Brand passion influences the desire to offer a premium price among consumers. Moreover, passion fulfills self-determined needs satisfaction, which in turn, leads toward the purchase and motivates positive word of mouth about the product linked to a particular brand, about which the consumer is passionate (Gilal et al., 2018; 2022a). A strong sense of passion and spiritual binding make consumers stay with brands of their preference (Fournier, 1998; Shahid et al. 2022). Apple's iPhone, Starbucks coffee, and Mercedes-Benz have succeeded in initiating an emotional connection with their consumers, which is driven by passion and love. In order to influence consumers to pay a premium price for products, marketing firms strive to create brand passion.

Self-image congruity is the focus of a lot of marketing research on consumer behavior (Liu, 2012). In comparison to actual self-congruity, the ideal self-congruity has a much greater impact on customer attitudes (Ibrahim et al., 2008; Zogaj et al., 2021a). Customers receive benefits, and these benefits influence their decision-making in future consuming behaviors so that ideal and actual self-congruity become essential antecedents of purchase decision-making and product choice (Quester et al., 2000; Zogaj et al., 2021b). Self-congruity, user image, and usage image are all terms used to describe how people perceive themselves (Aaker, 1997; Moons et al., 2020). According to Kwak and Kang (2009), the perceived quality and self-image congruity have a considerable influence on consumer purchase intentions. As a result, it has become crucial to research consumers' actual and ideal selves, along with the usage and user images of goods and services (Sirgy et al., 2008; Koo et al., 2014).

It is not only functional attributes that lead to consumer purchase but self-expression as well (Park et al., 1986; Šegota et al., 2021). Thus, to create passion, one must examine its determinants, most importantly how the self-concept of consumers adds to the creation of passion. To refer to self-image congruity, we will apply the term "self-congruity" in this article. Practitioners should understand whether the brand passion created by

self-congruity is strong for young or older people, male or female so that marketing efforts could be concentrated on demographics that create a significant brand passion.

The present research adds to the body of knowledge on brand management in the following ways. First, this study examined the impacts of different congruity types (e.g. actual, ideal, user, and usage image) on a passion for service brands and determined which congruity types are crucial for increasing service brand passion. Second, we contributed by examining gender differences in how congruity types are related to men's and women's passion for a brand service. Finally, this article adds to the body of knowledge by studying the moderating effect of age (e.g.oldervs. young customers) on the relationship between congruity types and service brand passion.

Figure 1. Proposed theoretical framework
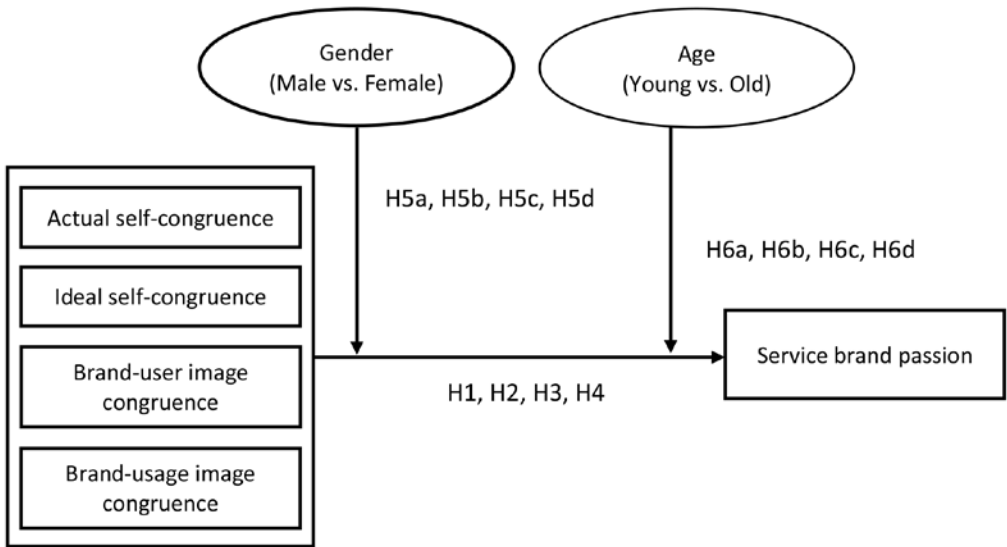
Source: own elaboration.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Brands play a key role in consumption behaviors and consumers' lives (Ahuvia, 2005; Jocob et al., 2020). Only strong relations bind consumers with the brands they prefer (Fournier, 1998; Shahid et al. 2022), causing customer retention. What influences consumer behavior constructs such as brand love, self-congruity, product involvement, brand attachment, and public self-consciousness (Confente et al., 2020), and a vast

amount of research is required to study the impact of these factors on brand passion, which has not been studied in previous literature. Brand passion has been defined as a strong positive emotion toward a brand that results in a strong attachment (Gilal et al., 2021a, 2020b).

Self-Congruity and Brand Passion

In consumer research, researchers employ two approaches to predict and explain brand attitude: the self-image congruity model and the multi-attribute model. However, there are several variations of the multi-attribute model (Sirgy, 1991; Zogaj et al., 2021a). Self-congruity, coherence across brand features, and customers' self-image are only a few of the main concepts explored in this study (Aaker, 1999; Sirgy, 1982). Self-congruity is presented as a way to improve emotional, social, and attitudinal customer reactions to companies (e.g. Grohmann, 2009; Zogaj et al., 2021b). The self-image congruity model is based on a cognitive match between a consumer's self-concept and a brand's value-expressing qualities.

Brand Passion, Actual Self-Congruity, and Ideal Self-Congruity

As mentioned above, self-image congruity is explained by the actual and ideal self. Accordingly, studies found the actual self-congruity model to be the most frequently implicated paradigm (Malhotra 1981, 1988; Sirgy 1985), followed by the model of ideal self-congruity, the social self-congruity model, the ideal social self-congruity model, and the affective self-(social) congruity models. The literature suggests that the "actual self" is most significant in consumers' quest for creating a reality in promotional endeavors. Both ideal and actual are distinctive forms of "self-concept," the emotional and mental constructs of what and who we are. Actual self-congruity shows coherence among brands' personalities and consumers' actual selves (Lazzari et al. 1978). Whereas, the perceived fit between a consumer's ideal self and brand personality is called "ideal self--congruity" (Aaker 1999). As a result, a fit between a consumer's ideal or actual self and a product fosters brand loyalty, which leads to a passion for a brand As a result, we proposed the following hypotheses:

H1: Actual self-congruity is significantly related to customers' passion for a service brand.

H2: Ideal self-congruity is significantly related to customers' passion for a service brand.

Brand Passion, Brand User, and Usage Image

Studies well documented the conception of self-congruity in different ways, including(a) brand user image congruity and brand usage image congruity. Brand user image congruity is the level of the potential match that a user or purchaser of a brand sees with its users (Sirgy et al., 1997). The user image congruity is founded on the visual attributes of consumers such as gender, age, and culture. In turn, brand usage image congruity is the connection between purchasers' impression of the specific use of the brand with how the brand is believed to be proper in given circumstances. Brand image congruity can create self-expressive advantages in which buyers can utilize visually expanded brands to express their personalities (Youn and Dodoo, 2021). User imagery congruity elucidates the link between the perceived image of a user and the self-image of the buyer (Sirgy et al., 1997), while usage image focuses on a link between the product's functional benefits and attributes. Brand image congruity is considered a significant component in building brand equity (Cuesta-Valiño et al., 2021). According to Youn and Dodoo (2021) and Schnittka et al. (2012), brand image is defined as multiple brand associations that connect with strength, favorability, and uniqueness, with uniqueness reinforcing brand passion. Research requires a focus on adopting the self-congruity theory in brand passion creation (Sirgy, 1986) with other stimuli or objects. Self-congruity is broadly embraced in branding literature to aid practitioners and managers in understanding brand-related purchasing behavior (Christodoulides and Veloutsou, 2009). Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

> **H3:** Brand user image congruity is significantly related to customers' passion for a service brand.

> **H4:** Brand usage image congruity is significantly related to customers' passion for a service brand.

Moderation of Gender and Age

Just like other social and psychological attributes, age and gender are the most decisive variables that enable one to form individual differences (de Lizárragaet al., 2007). Given the fact that society moving toward lowering gender bias between men and women, we should identify the differentiating factors among them that determine their decisions by scrutinizing their process of consumer decision-making. Moreover, according to the *gender schema theory*, gender differences are duly involved in the process of decision-making (Gilal et al., 2019, 2020a), while Gill et al. (1987) argue that

the environment strongly affects women, as they seek more information than men in consumer decision-making. Thus, we may infer that women have a significant impact on the usage imagery congruity and can moderate the impact of brand usage imagery congruity on brand passion, whereas men are dominant, assertive, realistic, and objective (Wood, 1990; Gilal et al., 2020b, 2020c), thus more energetic and active in the acquisition of goods (products).In line with these studies, we believe that the effect of actual self-congruity on brand passion can be stronger for men. Thus, we should finally examine the influence of age and gender on the relation of self-congruity and brand passion. Young and senior consumers' behaviors, as also male and female consumers' behavior, receive less attention in the literature (de Lizárraga et al, 2007; Gilal et al., 2020c; Gilal et al., 2021). As a result, we should analyze what are the moderating effects on brand passion, as it is crucial to determine which gender in a specific age group will have the greatest impact. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses.

H5: Customer gender (e.g.male vs. female) moderates the influence of (a) actual self-congruity, (d) ideal self-congruity, (c) brand user image congruity, and (d) brand use image congruity on service brand passion.

H6: Customer age (e.g.young vs. old) moderates the influence of (a) actual self congruity, (d) ideal self congruity, (c) brand user image congruity, and (d) brand use image congruity on service brand passion

Research Methodology

Data Collection and Participants

Data were collected from passengers of different bus services operating in Pakistan based on the convenience sampling method. The participants were contacted in the following ways. We began by sending links to an online survey to 250 university students who travel frequently from home to university and back. Similarly, we recruited passengers at bus terminals in major cities throughout Pakistan, including Karachi, Hyderabad, and Sukkur. We sought respondents in these cities for two reasons. First, the areas selected above represent Pakistan's urbanized cities, where people travel more frequently. Second, residents in these areas are better educated and more familiar with the brands and quality of travel services. After analyzing the returned surveys, 30 completed questionnaires were dropped due to missing data, resulting in the final sample size of N = 252.

Measures

The study's constructs were adapted from previous research, and all responses were scored on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "strongly disagree" and 5 indicating "strongly agree. The questionnaire was pilot tested with 20 postgraduate students to ensure clarity, comprehension, and ease of completion. We adapted from Sirgy et al. (1997) the four-item brand user image congruity scale, the five-item brand usage image scale, and the measures for ideal (e.g. four items), and actual (e.g. four items) self-congruity. The seven-item scale used to assess customer passion for a service brand was adapted from Gilal et al. (2018). Finally, the questions about respondents' age and gender were adapted from Gilal et al (2020a,2020b, 2020c, 2021).

Findings

Exploratory Factor Analysis(EFA)

All of the latent variables utilized in the study –including ideal and actual self-congruity, service brand passion, and brand user and usage imagery congruity –were calculated in SPSS 24.0 using Varimax rotation (see Table 1).

Table 1. Factor loadings of exploratory factor analysis for the five-factor model

Factors	Factor Loading	% of Variance Explained	Eigen-Value	Cumulative %	Cronbach α
Factor 1		*31.831*	*4.775*	*31.831*	*0.788*
Brand-User Image Congruity (B-UIC)					
B-UIC-1	.771				
B-UIC-2	.780				
B-UIC-3	.714				
B-UIC-4	.717				
Factor 2		*10.036*	*1.505*	*41.867*	*0.784*
Service Brand Passion (SBP)					
SBP-1	.839				
SBP-2	.748				

SBP–4	.657				
SBP–3	.688				
Factor 3		*9.740*	*1.461*	*51.606*	*0.747*
Brand Usage Image Congruity (BUIC)					
BUIC–3	.715				
BUIC–2	.804				
BUIC–1	.817				
Factor 4		*8.715*	*1.307*	*60.321*	*0.755*
Actual Self Congruity (ASC)					
ASC–3	.855				
ASC–4	.867				
Factor 5		*7.575*	*1.136*	*67.897*	*0.701*
Ideal Self Congruity (ISC)					
ISC–2	.845				
ISC–1	.842				
KMO Test of sampling adequacy = .800		*Bartlett's test of sphericity (Chi-square) = 1224.6 637*			

Source: own elaboration.

The EFA yields five-factor results with a total variance of 67.897 and eigenvalues larger than 1.00. We eliminated some scale items (e.g. SBP5, SBP6, SBP7, BUIC4, ASC1, ASC2, ISC3, and ISC4) due to low factor loadings, as suggested by Hair et al. (1998). Second, as shown in Table 1, all extracted items were loaded on their respective variables, and the commonalities of all items were greater than 0.6. The sphericity of Bartlett was also found to be statistically significant (2 (105) = 1224.6 637, p > 001), and KMO = 0.800 was significantly greater than the 0.6 criteria.

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The SEM was then conducted to see if brand user, brand usage, and actual and ideal self-congruity are useful in predicting consumers' service brand passion. The estimated model showed an acceptable fit:$X^2/DF = 1.713$; CFI = 0.949; TLI = 0.933; RFI = 0.852; NFI = 0.887; SRMR = 0.048; RMSEA = 0.054; AIC = 217.024. The standardized estimates were used to test the research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 stated that customer passion for service brands is positively influenced by actual self-congruity, which was supported by our data ($\beta = 0.213^{**}$, t = 2.681). On the other hand, the data did not support Hypothesis 2, which claimed that ideal self-congruity strengthens service brand passion, so we rejected this hypothesis ($\beta = 0.048$, t = 0.618[ns]). As a result, we concluded that ideal self-congruity will not be sufficient to increase service brand passion. Similarly, our findings confirmed Hypothesis 3, which stated that brand user image congruity increases service brand passion ($\beta = 0.303^{**}$, t = 3.136). Similarly, our findings confirmed Hypothesis 4 by indicating that brand usage image congruity considerably enhances service brand passion ($\beta = 0.349^{**}$, t = 3.289). Overall, the SEM revealed that actual self-congruity, brand user image, and brand use image congruity have a substantial effect on service brand passion, whereas ideal self-congruity appears to be an inconsequential determinant of service brand passion. The detailed findings are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Structural equation modeling results

H	Proposed Relationship	βeta	t-value	p-value	Decision
H1	Actual Self Congruity → Service Brand Passion	0.213	2.681	0.007	Supported
H2	Ideal Self Congruity → Service Brand Passion	0.048	0.618	0.537	Not Supported
H3	Brand User Image Congruity →Service Brand Passion	0.303	3.136	0.002	Supported
H4	Brand Usage Image Congruity → Service Brand Passion	0.349	3.289	0.001	Supported

Source: own elaboration.

Moderating Effect of Age and Gender

The moderation analysis procedure suggested by Preacher et al. (2007) was used to check for Hypotheses 5a–5d, which stated that the impact of(a) actual self-congruity, (b) ideal-self congruity, (c) brand user image congruity, and (d) brand usage image congruity on service brand passion is moderated by a customer's gender. The moderation results presented in Table 3 showed a significant interaction effect of actual self-congruity ($\beta = 0.257^{***}$, t = 3.767), ideal self-congruity ($\beta = 0.204^{**}$, t = 2.796), and gender on service brand passion, thus supporting H5a and H5b. Similarly, the interaction effects of brand user image congruity($\beta = 0.087$, t = 1.227[ns]), brand usage image congruity ($\beta = 0.050$, t = 0.734[ns]), and gender on service brand passion were found statistically insignificant, thus rejectingH5c and H5d. Our results for moderation analysis further showed that the impact of actual self-congruity is essential for

strengthening service brand passion for male customers ($\beta = 0.331^{***}$, t = 7.304) but not for female customers ($\beta = 0.074$, t = 1.444^{ns}). Similarly, the influence of ideal self congruity was stronger for female customers ($\beta = 0.390^{***}$, t = 7.663) than for male customers ($\beta = 0.186^{***}$, t = 3.563).

Table 3. Moderating effect of gender

H	Path	Interaction effect (t-value)	Male Customers (t-value)	Female Customers (t-value)
H5a	ASC → SBP	0.257(3.767)***	0.331(7.304)***	0.074(1.444)ns
H5b	ISC → SBP	0.204(2.796)**	0.186(3.563)***	0.390(7.663)***
H5c	B-UIC → SBP	0.087(1.227)ns	0.240(5.167)***	0.327(6.081)***
H5d	BUIC → SBP	0.050(.734)ns	0.086(1.838)ns	0.036(.719)ns

Note: ASC = Actual Self Congruity, ISC = Ideal Self Congruity, B-UIC = Brand User Image Congruity, BUIC = Brand Usage Image Congruity, SBP = Service Brand Passion; ns = nonsignificance;*** = Significant at the 0.001 level.
Source: own elaboration.

Table 4. Moderating effect of age

H	Path	Interaction effect (t-value)	Young Customers (t-value)	Older Customers (t-value)
H6a	ASC → SBP	0.089(1.271)ns	0.172(3.293)***	0.261(5.549)***
H6b	ISC → SBP	0.165(2.221)*	0.387(7.285)***	0.222(4.308)***
H6c	B-UIC → SBP	0.050(0.071)ns	0.316(6.339)***	0.265(5.196)***
H6d	BUIC → SBP	0.207(2.961)***	0.044(0.881)ns	0.162(3.348)***

Note:ASC = Actual Self Congruity, ISC = Ideal Self Congruity, B-UIC = Brand User Image Congruity, BUIC = Brand Usage Image Congruity, SBP = Service Brand Passion; ns = nonsignificance;*** = Significant at the 0.001 level.
Source: own elaboration.

In the same way, the moderation results reported in Table 4 showed a significant interaction effect of ideal self-congruity ($\beta = 0.165^*$, t = 2.221), brand usage image congruity ($\beta = 0.207^{**}$, t = 2.961), and age on service brand passion, thus supporting H6b and H6d. Moreover, our moderating findings showed that age did not affect the impact of actual self-congruity ($\beta = 0.089$, t = 1.271^{ns}) and brand user image congruity ($\beta = 0.050$, t = 1.071^{ns}) on service brand passion, thus rejecting H6a and H6c. In addition, our results showed that the effect of ideal self congruity is more important for strengthening service brand passion among young consumers ($\beta = 0.387^{***}$, t = 7.285) than

among older consumers ($\beta = 0.222^{***}$, t = 4.308). Similarly, the effect of brand usage image congruity surfaced to be more prominent for older customers ($\beta = 0.162^{***}$, t = 3.348) but not for young customers ($\beta = 0.044$, t = 0.881^{ns}).

Discussion

The present study is the first of its kind to examine the impact of congruity types on service brand passion using the triangle theory of love and congruity theory as a theoretical framework. Indeed, we made a significant contribution to the literature on service marketing in the following ways. To begin with, scholars have long questioned the importance of self-congruity in generating customer passion for a brand. To our best knowledge, this is the first study of its sort to examine the relation between self-congruity and service brand passion. Second, knowing whether consumers choose to use products because of their usage circumstances or because of the products' affiliation with other users who encourage them in their self-expression is critical for managers to sketch out specific approaches and reduce confusion. Third, the study looks into the causal effect of the actual, ideal, user, and usage image self-congruity on a customer's passion for a service brand, which is important when considering consumer behavior in the formation of attitudes toward brands, such as whether they meet current needs or contain attributes that consumers constantly seek, and with which they want to identify. Fourth, the study investigated the gender differences with respect to how brand users, usage, actual, and ideal congruity differ for both men's and women's passion for a service brand. Finally, we contributed by determining whether age substantially moderates the relationships between congruity types and service brand passion.

Hypothesis 1 was supported, thus indicating that actual self-congruity has a strong positive influence on service brand passion, which was in line with our expectations. This finding suggests that a customer's passion for a service brand is fueled by actual self-congruity. Although the findings were consistent with recent research that found a significant impact of actual self-congruity on donor loyalty and consumers' purchase intention (Zogaj et al., 2021a), they differ significantly from the findings of Manyiwa (2020), who reported the trivial impact of actual self-congruity on emotional attachment. Similarly, Hypothesis 2 did not support our data, which claimed that consumers' service brand passion is significantly influenced by ideal self congruity. Our findings indicate that the ideal self-congruity has no role in determining customer passion for a service brand. These findings agree with recent research that revealed that ideal self-congruity has a trivial impact on ecologically responsible behavior (Li et al., 2020) and attendee emotional attachment to events (Meeprom and Fakfare, 2021).

In a similar vein, Hypothesis 3 was confirmed, thus indicating that brand user image congruity influenced service brand passion significantly. This fact supports the findings of recent research by Xie et al.(2020), Liu et al.(2012), and Lu and Xu (2015) who revealed that brand user image congruity can significantly boost self-brand connection, brand attitude, and consumers' behavior toward sportswear brands. Furthermore, our findings indicated that brand usage image congruity has a considerable influence on customers' passion for a service brand. Although this conclusion differs from previous research (Kumagai and Nagasawa, 2016; Pradhan et al., 2016; Roy and Rabbanee, 2015), it is consistent with Jamal and Goode's (2001) and Liu et al.'s (2012) findings, which documented the considerable impact of brand usage image congruity on brand preference and loyalty. Moreover, our moderation analysis findings reveal that the effect of actual self-congruity is crucial for developing service brand passion in men than in women. Similarly, the impact of ideal self-congruity is stronger for women than men. These results corroborate those of Gilal et al. (2018), Fan et al. (2021), and Gilal et al. (2020a) who found significant gender differences in consumer preferences for product design aspects and motives for brand choice. Finally, our results of moderation of age showed that the influence of ideal self-congruity is essential for strengthening service brand passion among young compared to older customers, while the brand usage image congruity has a considerable influence on service brand passion for older but not for young customers. Moreover, these results agree with recent research by Gilal et al. (2019, 2020b, 2020c, 2021), which found significant age differences in consumer engagement in brand resurrection movements, brand passion formation, service brand avoidance, and motivations to watch the T20 World Cup in cricket.

Theoretical Implications

This research contributes to theory and practice in a variety of ways. This study emphasized the importance of the triangular theory of love, which connects passion and consumer psychology. According to Stenberg's love theory, three elements (decision, passion, and intimacy) interact to create intense brand love and the drive that leads to interest, sexual consumption, romance, and other related traits in loving relationships (Sternberg, 1997). Our study contributes to Stenberg's love theory by examining the impacts of congruity types on service brand passion. Second, our research adds to the self-congruity theory, which describes how consumers tie their views of a brand's user image to their self-concepts (Islam et al., 2019). Our study suggests that consumer brand passion is likely to be strengthened by focusing on actual self, user, and usage image congruity. Third, our findings add to gender schema theory, which aims to explain how gender mental representations evolve in early childhood and influence attention,

motivation, perception, impression formation, and behavior (Bem, 1981, 1983). According to the literature, male customers prefer brands that are concerned with their identity, whereas female customers prefer brands that are stylish in appearance. Our research suggests that brand concentrating on ideal self-congruity is likely to boost female customers' service brand passion, whereas companies focused on actual self-congruity can improve male customers' service brand passion. Finally, our findings support generational cohort theory, which states that generations of people who experience similar political, economic, and social events throughout their formative years will adopt similar ideas, values, and behaviors (Inglehart, 1997). Our research suggests that brands concentrating on ideal self-congruity are more likely to boost young customers' service brand passion, whereas brands focused on brand usage image congruity can improve older customers' service brand passion.

Implications for Policy

This research has important implications for service practitioners. For instance, the link between self-congruity and brand passion should be explored, because it is crucial for practitioners in creating, communicating, and delivering value to target consumers. This research aimed to fill this vacuum by looking into the impact of different factors of self-congruity on service brand passion. After evaluating four types of self-congruity, the study revealed that the influence of brand usage image congruity had the greatest impact on service brand passion, followed by brand user image congruity, and actual self congruity. These findings show that in emerging countries, brand usage image congruity is the most important factor of service brand passion.

As a result, service firms that wish to capture and develop customers' passion for their service brands should use our findings to refocus on brand use image congruity, brand user image congruity, and actual self-congruity. Especially practitioners of service firms can make strategic investments in brand usage imagery congruity to increase return on investment and create enthusiasm in customers, which would lead to long-term client retention, thereby increasing customer lifetime value and equity.

Second, our study revealed that brands concentrating on ideal self-congruity are more likely to boost women's service brand passion, whereas companies focused on actual self-congruity can improve men's service brand passion. These findings are valuable for service firms that wish to target male (vs. female) customers. Especially firms can build a strong passion for brands by focusing on ideal self congruity if they wish to target female customers and vice versa. Finally, our findings showed that brands

focused on ideal self-congruity are more likely to increase young customers' service brand passion, while businesses focused on brand usage image congruity can improve older customers' service brand passion. These findings can help marketers reinforce brand passion by focusing on ideal self-congruity if they want to target young emerging market consumers, whereas companies can benefit from these findings by focusing on brand usage image congruity if they want to target older emerging market consumers.

Limitations and Future Research

Like many empirical studies, ours has a weakness that could serve as a guiding source for further research on self-congruity and brand passion. First, the analyses ignored one of the key dimensions in the research study of self-congruity – "brand personality congruity" – as suggested by Pamuksuz et al. (2021) and Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021). Thus, future research should look at brand personality congruity as an independent variable, with age and gender as moderating variables, to see how it affects service brand passion. Second, following Hofstede's (1980) cultural typology, we should keep in mind that this study happened in a collectivistic cultural setting. Thus, cross-cultural studies are required to confirm the findings of this research, so we invite scholars to perform cross-cultural studies, particularly those based on individualistic cultures. Third, while the study included a sample of customers from the travel services businesses, future research should look at the impact of congruity types on service brand enthusiasm in other industries such as banking, restaurants, and manufacturing. This study only considered age and gender for the moderation effect. Future studies should look into moderating impacts of other demographic factors such as occupation, income, and education. Finally, the mediating effect of consumers' satisfaction with autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs (Gilal et al., 2021) – along with other motivational regulations (Gilal et al., 2022b) –should be examined to check whether a direct or indirect effect is stronger in capturing service brand enthusiasm in emerging markets.

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