# A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON CELEBRITY ATTACHMENT WITH SELF-CONGRUENCE THEORY: INVESTIGATING THE CONSUMER-CELEBRITY-BRAND RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE OUTCOMES

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**Abstract**

Although previous studies have investigated the effect of celebrity endorsement on variables such as attitudes towards advertisement-brand, research on celebrity attachment is still in its infancy, and its effect on consumer-brand relations is not completely clear. The primary aim of this study is to examine celebrity attachment, which to date has been explained only by self-determination theory, from a different point of view (self-congruence theory) and to investigate its effect on brand attachment. Furthermore, researching the relationships between brand attachment, brand loyalty, and brand addiction is the second aim of this study. Data from 377 surveys collected from the UK were analyzed using SEM. Findings show that actual and ideal self-congruence have positive effects on celebrity attachment, which is consistent with self-congruence theory. Moreover, celebrity attachment also affects brand attachment, while brand attachment positively affects brand loyalty and brand addiction.

## 1. Introduction

Brand attachment positively affects company or brand value and produces positive marketing outcomes (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). Celebrities are one of the essential marketing communication tools widely used in establishing the consumer-brand relationship (Erdoğan, 1999). The majority of extant marketing research regarding celebrities has focused on the impact of celebrities on various consumer attitudes, such as towards the advertisement and the brand (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). However, celebrity attachment, which refers to the intense emotional bond that consumers establish with famous people (Thomson, 2006), is a relatively new area of study and shows significant effects on consumer behavior (Engle & Kasser, 2005).

In recent years, self-congruence has been proven to be an antecedent to brand attachment (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011; Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2017), which is the strength of the bond that connects the brand to the consumer's self and includes feelings of affection, passion, and connection (Park et al., 2010; Malär et al., 2011; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Over the past decade, most research in celebrity attachment has used the self-determination theory (La Guardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000). However, those studies (e.g., Thomson, 2006; Loroz & Braig, 2015) have not found consistent results about the antecedents of celebrity attachment. This inconsistency suggests that there may be other motivations behind celebrity attachment. In this context, it is the major aim of this study to explain celebrity attachment using self-congruence theory and to examine the effects of self-congruence types (actual and ideal self-congruence) on celebrity attachment by taking celebrities as brands based on Thomson's (2006) concept of "human brands." In previous literature, there have been very few studies (Ilicic & Webster, 2011) about the marketing outcomes that celebrity attachment creates. Since there are limited studies on the positive marketing results of celebrity attachment, there seems to be a gap in the literature. Therefore, the second aim of this study is to investigate whether celebrity attachment creates an attachment to the brand promoted by the celebrity. Further, brand attachment has generally been addressed regarding its positive outputs (Thomson et al. 2005). However, only a few studies (e.g., Japutra et al., 2017) have investigated the effect of attachment on negative attitudes and behavior for consumer and society. What is not yet clear is the relationship between brand attachment and negative consumer behavior,

particularly brand addiction. Thus, another aim of the study is to investigate the relationship between brand attachment, brand loyalty, and brand addiction.

## 2. Hypotheses Development

### 2.1. Celebrity Image's Congruence with Consumer's Actual and Ideal Self

According to self-congruence theory, consumers want to buy brands with images that are congruent with their selves (actual, ideal, or social self) (Sirgy, 1982), because they buy products and brands for the symbolic meanings of the brands and to express themselves (Levy, 1954). Additionally, many studies (e.g., Japutra et al., 2017) have found that consumers are emotionally attached to brands that have images congruent with their actual and ideal selves. The celebrities conceptualized by Thomson (2006) as "human brands" are considered and consumed as brands (Cocker, Banister, & Piacentini, 2015). Therefore, the congruence between the celebrity's image and the actual consumer's self is expected to create an emotional attachment to the celebrity. Self-verification theory (Swann, 1983), which argues that consumers want to validate and affirm their actual selves in order to better represent their actual selves (Swann, Rentfrow, & Guinn, 2003), supports this expectation. While the theoretical reasons for the effect of actual self-congruence on celebrity attachment support ideal self-congruence, there are some different consumer motivations specific to ideal self-congruence. Celebrities are desirable, accepted as role models and inspiring people in consumers' minds (Boon & Lomore, 2001). Because of these characteristics, consumers can associate celebrities with their ideal selves, and thus the ideal selves of consumers can be activated by the celebrity whom they admire or are attached to (Choi & Rifon, 2007).

*H₁: The congruence between the consumer's actual self and the celebrity image positively affects celebrity attachment.*
*H₂: The congruence between the consumer's ideal self and the celebrity image positively affects celebrity attachment.*

### 2.2. Effect of Celebrity Attachment on Brand Attachment

Image transfer theory and the meaning transfer model provide information to support the celebrity-brand relationship. Image transfer theory states that the images of celebrities and brands can be transferred to each other at the endorsement stage (Halonen-Knight & Hurmerinta, 2010). The transfer model (McCracken, 1989) indicates that celebrities give meaning to brands through their images, and these meanings are transferred to consumers during the consumption process. Therefore, positive emotions, meanings, images, and associations related to the celebrity to

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whom the consumer is emotionally attached are expected to be transferred to the brand promoted by the celebrity, thus developing an emotional attachment to the brand.

**H₃: Celebrity attachment positively affects brand attachment.**

*2.3. Brand Attachment's Effect on Brand Addiction and Brand Loyalty*

Thomson et al. (2005) found that brand attachment has several positive marketing outcomes, such as price premium and satisfaction. In our study, satisfaction is thought to be the basis of the expectation that emotional attachment will create addiction, because variables such as satisfaction, pleasure, and reward system are important determinants of addictive behaviors (Kostowski, 2002). For a person who is emotionally attached to a specific brand, some characteristics of the attached brand, such as captivation and passion (Thomson et al. 2005), will trigger the reward mechanism. Thus, that person will likely buy this brand repeatedly because of the resulting satisfaction and happiness. As the purchase increases (i.e., escalation of dosage) with increasing pleasure, the person will be addicted to the brand. Indeed, psychology-based studies (e.g., Höfler & Kooyman, 1996) have argued that emotional attachments will transform into an addiction to a drug, an impersonal object, an activity, or a specific behavior in future years.

**H₄: Brand attachment positively affects brand addiction.**

There is a consensus that emotional bonds consumers establish with brands can build long-term relationships, such as loyalty and commitment (Thomson et al. 2005). Park et al. (2010) and found that emotional attachment to a brand can create brand loyalty.

**H₅: Brand attachment positively affects brand loyalty.**

*2.4. Brand Addiction's Effect on Brand Loyalty*

Despite sharing common characteristics, the concepts of brand addiction and brand loyalty are completely different (Mrad, 2018). Studies about addiction indicate that some addiction characteristics, such as the escalation of dosage and psychological and physiological dependence, make it a different construct from habits or repeated behaviors (Eysenck, 1997; Mrad, 2018). The previous researches that considered addiction from a psychology and biology point of view have noted that reward mechanisms and dopamine, which is related to feeling good, have important roles in the creation of addictive behaviors (Franken, Booij, & van den Brink, 2005). Accordingly, as someone takes pleasure through certain behaviors, he/she will be likely to repeat that behavior with the effect of dopamine (Koob, 1992). Therefore, consumers might be

loyal and repeatedly purchase the brand as they take pleasure from the brand to which they are addicted.

**H₆**: *Brand addiction positively affects brand loyalty.*

Based on the hypotheses of the study, we developed a conceptual model (Figure 1) as below.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual Model
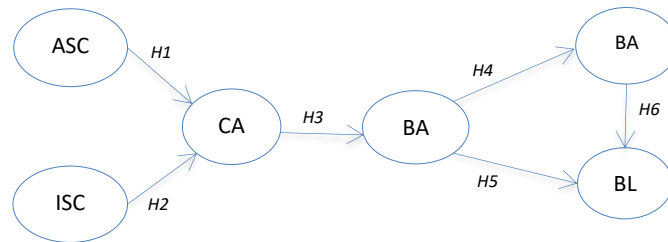


***ASC:*** Actual Self-Congruence, ***ISC:*** Ideal Self-Congruence, ***CA:*** Celebrity Attachment, ***BA:*** Brand Attachment, ***BAD:*** Brand Addiction, ***BL:*** Brand Loyalty

## 3. Method

*Sample and Data Collection*

Data was collected from the UK residences via an online survey through "Prolific Academic" online survey system. We preferred Prolific Academic online survey because crowdsourcing systems are reliable and diverse to collect the data (Sheehan, 2018). As a starting point, we showed eight images including one brand and a celebrity, for each image and asked them to choose one image they would like to. We also asked them to keep the image (both the brand and celebrity) they chose in their minds to complete the questionnaire. We used 7 point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to collect the data, and categorical questions for demographic information. 390 respondents completed the survey, and after eliminating the inadequate responses 13 responses, we used 377 data for analysis.

*Measures*

We measured celebrity image consumer actual self-congruence and celebrity image consumer ideal self-congruence with the scale adapted from Zhu, Teng, Foti, & Yuan (2019). Each scale has four items. Four items scale were used for measuring celebrity attachment adapted from Thomson (2006). The brand attachment scale is a multi-dimensional scale with three sub-dimensions (four items for affection, three items for passion, and three items for connection). We adapted the items for brand loyalty from two studies (Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) and we adapted brand addiction from Mrad & Chi Cui (2017). Among the

respondents, %65,3 of them were female, %53,6 of them graduated from university and college, and the majority of the respondents were young (%35,3 between 27-35 years old)

**Analysis and results**

We measure brand attachment as a second-order construct (affection, passion, and connection). Correlations between the second-order sub-dimensions were significant (p< .01) ranging from .81 to .83. The mean values were 4,21 (SD: 1,42) for affection, 4,19 (SD: 1,58) for passion, and 3,89 (SD: 1,59) for connection. Skewness and kurtosis values for the sub-dimensions were between the recommended range [skewness < 2, kurtosis < 7] (Tang, Fang, & Wang, 2014).

We checked common method variance, whether a single factor explains majority of the variance in factor analysis. Harman's single factor test showed that %49,42 variance was explained with single factor with no rotation, which is lower than the recommended level of %50 (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986). In addition, confirmatory factor analysis showed a bad fit ($X2$= 6125,114, df = 594; $X2/df$ = 1,312; CFI = .58; NFI:.56 TLI = .56; GFI = .39; RMSEA = .16) when all the items loaded to single factor (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). These results indicated that common method variance was not a threat.

*Measurement Model*

Exploratory factor analysis was performed to test the uni-dimensionality. Items loaded to their factors with high factor loadings, ranging from .77 to .95 (> .50, Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, &Tatham, 1998) for all the factors in the model. Results indicated uni-dimensionality. Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency. All the Cronbach alpha values were higher than the recommended level of .70 (affection =.88, passion= .89, and connection= 93, actual-self=.92, ideal-self= .93, celebrity attachment= .90, brand loyalty=.93, and brand addiction=.95).

Confirmatory factor analysis was necessary to understand if the model fits the data. First, we applied CFA for the sub-dimensions for brand attachment to determine whether the sub-dimensions explain brand attachment as their latent variable. Therefore, the model fit was acceptable for the sub-dimensions ($\chi2$ = 152.597, df = 32, p = .000, $\chi2/df$ = 4.77, CFI = .97, NFI = .96, GFI = .93, AGFI: .88, TLI = .95, and RMSEA = .10). All the factor loadings were significant (<0,01) with lowest t-value of 16.07. Factor loadings for the items of the sub-dimensions of brand attachment ranged between .73 to .94, supporting that brand attachment fits

good as a second-order reflective construct. Hair et al. (1998) recommend testing composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE). CR values were .88 for affection, .89 for passion, and .93 for connection (>.70, Fornell & Larcker, 1981). AVE values were also higher than the recommended level of .50 (.65 for affection, .73 for passion, and .82 for connection) thus, convergent validity was achieved. To assess discriminant validity, we checked AVE values if the values are higher than the squared correlation between variables (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). AVE values were higher than the squared correlation of the sub-dimensions except for affection and connection. AVE value for affection was slightly higher than squared correlation of affection and connection (.65 < .68). Additionally, we compared the $X^2$ difference test between constrained (fixing the correlation to 1) and unconstrained relationships of affection and connection and found that the $X^2$ difference was significant (> 3.84), indicating that there was no discriminant validity for these sub-dimensions.

We applied confirmatory factor analysis for the whole model as well. The result showed acceptable fit ($\chi2$ = 1417.015, df = 573, p = .000, $\chi2$/df = 2.47, CFI = .94, NFI = .90, GFI = .82, AGFI: 80, TLI = .93, and RMSEA = .06). All the factor loadings were significant (p< .01). Factor loadings of the items ranged from .73 to .96. CR values ranged from .92 to .97, and AVE values ranged from .67 to .91 supporting convergent validity for the whole model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). All AVE values were higher than the squared correlation between the constructs, while the correlation ranged between .34 to .78. The results supported discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

*Hypothesis testing*

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to test the hypotheses. The fit for the model was satisfactory. ($\chi2$ = 15443.263, df = 581, p = .000, $\chi2$/df = 2.66, CFI = .93, NFI = .89, GFI = .81, TLI = .92, and RMSEA = .07). Results indicated that all hypotheses were confirmed (Table 1).

**Table 1: The structural model results**

|    |     |     |     | Est. | Stn.Err. | C. R. | Stn.Est. | $R^2$ |
|----|-----|-----|-----|------|----------|-------|----------|-------|
| H1 | ASC | →   | CA  | 0,44 | 0,08     | 5,32* | 0,41     | .42   |
| H2 | ISC | →   | CA  | 0,26 | 0,07     | 3,56* | 0,27     |       |
| H3 | CA  | →   | BA  | 0,45 | 0,05     | 9,84* | 0,54     | .30   |
| H4 | BA  | →   | BAD | 0,34 | 0,07     | 4,82* | 0,70     | .49   |
| H5 | BA  | →   | BL  | 0,85 | 0,06     | 14,15*| 0,53     | .68   |
| H6 | BAD | →   | BL  | 0,45 | 0,07     | 6,58* | 0,36     |       |

p<.01, *ASC:* Actual Self-Congruence, *ISC:* Ideal Self-Congruence, *CA:* Celebrity Attachment, *BA:* Brand Attachment, *BAD:* Brand Addiction, *BL:* Brand Loyalty

**4. Conclusion**

In the paper, self-congruence theory was adapted to the concept of celebrity attachment, and results concordant with the theory (Sirgy, 1982; Malär et al. 2011) were obtained. According to the findings, when the consumers' actual and ideal selves are congruent with the images of celebrities, consumers become attached to them. This result is considered to be an important contribution to the literature of celebrity attachment and self-congruence theory. Although celebrity attachment is a psychological and emotional structure, it has the potential to affect consumers' behavior and attitude (Wong & Lai, 2015). Indeed, this study confirms that celebrity attachment might create brand attachment. Accordingly, consumers who are attached to celebrities tend to get emotionally attached to the brand that the celebrity promotes. Since our knowledge of the effects of celebrity attachment on consumer behavior is still limited, this result contributes to the literature of consumer-celebrity-brand relations. Secondly, consistent with the literature related to consumer-brand relations (Thomson et al. 2005), emotional attachment to brands was found to create brand loyalty. Although previous studies have demonstrated a positive relationship between brand attachment and brand loyalty, there are very few studies about the effect of brand attachment on brand addiction. Thus, this study further supports the idea that good feelings have an important effect on addictive behaviors (Franken et al. 2005) by demonstrating the emotional brand attachment's positive impact on brand addiction. These results shed light on the literature of loyalty-attachment-addiction.

Since self-congruence affects celebrity attachment, companies should know customers' images and determine the celebrity endorser who has a corresponding image with customers. Since the congruence between brand and celebrity creates a positive attitude toward the brand (match-up hypothesis), in addition to celebrity-brand congruence, exploiting from the celebrity-consumer congruence might constitute extra advantages for the firms such as brand attachment and loyalty. Therefore, considering the image of endorser celebrity studiously will be beneficial for the companies. In future studies, research into the role of social self-congruence and ideal-social self-congruence in consumer-celebrity relationships will further improve the related literature. Besides, researchers should probe other brand-related variables' (e.g., brand love, brand trust, brand equity) relationships with celebrity attachment, since the congruence and interaction between consumer and celebrity have the potential to influence the endorsed brand.

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