

The Role of Self-Construal and Emotions in Younger Consumers' Commitment to Luxury Brands

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(Received April 23, 2012 : Accepted August 1, 2012)

Abstract

Despite the increasing recognition of the value of emotions and younger consumers in luxury market segments, little research has focused on the role consumer characteristics and emotions play in younger consumers' commitment to luxury brands. Drawing on the identity-motivation model and the idea of self-construal, this study identifies the contributing factors of younger consumers' commitment to luxury fashion brands. Specifically, this study examines the role of consumer characteristics (i.e., self-construal), the self-expressiveness of brands, and emotional factors (i.e., brand love and brand attachment) in developing consumer-brand relationships. The proposed model was tested with college students in the U.S., which supplied a representative group of younger consumers of luxury fashion brands. The data were collected using web-based surveys and analyzed using structural equation modeling method. The results showed that consumers who were characterized with interdependent self-construal had positive perceptions of self-expressive luxury fashion brands. Furthermore, the perception of self-expressive brands promotes the consumers' brand love and brand attachment to luxury fashion brands. Also, while both improved brand commitment, brand attachment had a greater impact on brand commitment than brand love. This study contributes to the literature by identifying driving forces of younger consumers' brand commitment. It also provides managerial implications for luxury fashion brands.

Keywords: luxury brands, self-construal, brand love, brand attachment, brand commitment

I . Introduction

Human beings tend to be committed to what they feel connected with (Bowlby, 1979), and the target can be other people or intangible entities like brands. In branding literature, this relationship between the consumer and the brand, or the *consumer-brand relationship*, has received increasing attention, given its contribution to brand success in competitive markets. For example, the consumer-brand relationship enhances

consumers' willingness to pay premium prices (Thomson et al., 2005) and consumers' loyalty to a focal brand (Park et al., 2006), which ultimately increase the financial profitability of a brand in the market (Peelen, 2003).

A fundamental premise of the consumer-brand relationship is that consumers' behavior is influenced by not only the functional benefits, but also the sociopsychological benefits of what they purchase. The latter, in particular, is based on the notion that individuals often identify a product in terms of "me" or "not

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me” (Kleine et al., 1995), and thereby the consumption decisions reflect who they are (Belk, 1988). As an illustration, consumers purchase certain brands in order to satisfy their desire to establish self-concept or communicate the self with others through branded products. These notions explain that consumers purchase luxury brands, such as Chanel or Mercedes Benz, not only because of their quality, but also because of their symbolic meanings (e.g., classic or higher social status) perceived by other members in society. For these reasons, the notion of self-expressiveness of a brand is an important consideration in the branding context (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). Also, although it may seem irrational, consumers tend to feel emotional bonds to luxury fashion brands (Okonkwo, 2007). The current study focuses on luxury brands to scrutinize consumer behaviors driven by sociopsychological benefits such as emotional bonds and identity-based motivations.

Previous research has increasingly strived to understand consumer behavior in luxury brands. Topics of prior work include value perceptions of luxury brands (Shukla & Purani, 2011), critical key attributes of luxury fashion brands (Fionda & Moore, 2009), symbolic representation of social status leading to consumers’ preference for luxury brands (Mandel et al., 2006), and the effects of individual characteristics and consumer attitudes on purchase intention of luxury brands (Bian & Forsythe, 2011). Also, emotional bonds such as brand attachment or brand love have been found to play important roles of branding and brand loyalty (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011; Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). However, little attention has been paid to 1) the role of emotional factors, such as brand love or brand attachment, in the luxury fashion brand-consumer relationship context, 2) the important consumer segment comprised of younger consumers, such as teenagers and generation Y (people born between 1977 and 1994), and 3) underlying mechanisms of the relationship between self-expressiveness and brand commitment. Notably, younger consumers

have become a profitable consumer group for luxury fashion brands, creating \$7.4 billion business in the US and \$1 trillion on a global scale (IBIS World, 2010; Truong, 2010).

The current study, therefore, focuses on younger consumers and emotional aspects in identifying an underlying mechanism of the consumer-luxury-brand relationship. Specifically, drawing upon the identity-motivation model and the notion of self-construal, this study examines the relationship among consumer characteristics (i.e., self-construal), brand characteristics (i.e., self-expressiveness of brand), and brand-driven emotional factors (i.e., brand love and brand attachment), which interplay influencing brand commitment. To find the relative contribution of two emotional factors to brand commitment is another interest of this study. The focus on brand love and brand attachment are drawn from Fournier’s (1994, 1998) model of brand relationship quality, or *BRQ model*, which will be elaborated on in the next section. The focus of luxury fashion brands, rather than a broad set of fashion brands, is beneficial because it can prevent potential confounding effects due to possibly different degrees of brand symbolism across product categories. Previous research has shown that some brands (e.g., luxury, hedonic) can communicate with the user more conspicuously than other brands (e.g., necessity, utilitarian) (Bearden & Etzel, 1982), and thus, brand symbolism may create moderating effects in predicting the self-brand connection associated with the perception of the self (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

II. Theoretical Background

1. Consumer-brand relationship

Like interpersonal relationships, people establish relationships with brands (Aaker, 1996; Fournier, 1998). The relationship is nurtured through reciprocal exchanges through a series of transactions that promotes consumers’ association with a focal brand (Aaker,

1991; Keller, 2001). Such associations are based on the perception of product and/or non-product related attributes, benefits, or affective responses to the brand, such as brand attitude (Fournier, 1998). Once built, brand associations promote the formation of brand images in consumers' minds, working as nodes containing the meaning of the brands and being stored in consumers' memories (Keller, 2001).

In the literature on consumer-brand relationships, Fournier's (1994, 1998) model of brand-relationship quality (BRQ model) is widely used because of its comprehensive approach to the consumer-brand-relationship quality. The BRQ model proposes that diverse dimensions of relationship quality affect the relationship's strength. Specifically, she highlighted the following dimension: psychological closeness (intimacy), positive feelings toward a brand (passionate attachment, love), perception of a brand as the part of the self (self-concept connection), loyalty to the brand (personal commitment), connection to the consumer's history and particular memories (nostalgic connection), and taking good care of its consumers (partner quality). Among these, as noted earlier, the current study focuses on the emotional ones (i.e., attachment and love), given that signaling the status of individuals is more relevant to hedonic products, such as luxury brands, and that emotional aspects, such as brand love, are crucial in enhancing relationship quality (Berger & Heath, 2007; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson et al., 2005).

2. Consumer identity and identity management

Theorists have proposed that the self has an array of identities based on an individual's own perception (or inner-self) and on his or her perception of the self in social settings (or social-self) (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In particular, a social identity of an individual is identified according to the following: 1) the individual's own assessment of a membership that he or she belongs to (a cognitive aspect), 2) the value of the membership (an evaluative aspect), and

3) affective input in the process (an emotional aspect) (Tajfel, 1982). There are several theoretical approaches—such as social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), self-concept (Markus, 1977), or the identity-motivation model (Oyserman, 2009)—that have been adopted to explain the role of self-identity in consumer behavior contexts. The current study highlights the identity-motivation model proposed by Oyserman (2009), given that it is a more unifying approach to consumer identity (Kirmani, 2009).

The premise of the identity-motivation model is that individual identity is persuasive enough to drive cognitive and behavioral actions to be consistent with identity. Oyserman (2009) asserted that the identity is more than simple knowledge of membership; it is more like socially situated cognition, in that whether inner-self or social-self is activated depends on a focal context. In the model, the consequences of an evoked situated identity are action readiness and procedural readiness. Oyserman (2009) argued that identity-based motivation triggers an identity-congruent action (action readiness) and an identity-congruent cognitive procedure (procedural readiness). More specifically, action readiness involves “self-controlling, self-regulating behaviors and embodied stances—how one stands, moves, dress, and talks” (p. 252), while procedural readiness is drawn from the notion that cognitive actions, such as thinking, encompass a high sensitivity to a focal context. In short, the identity-based model argues that contextual cues determine “at least in part, not only whether a particular identity will be cued but also how a cued identity will be interpreted, and therefore which procedures, behaviors, choices, and motivations are primed” (p. 253). In addition to the dynamics of consumer identity, Oyserman (2009) also noted that identity serves as a filter for individuals to view brands affecting consumers' brand perceptions and choices. This argument is in line with a stream of research on identity suggesting that brands are often used to satisfy identity-relevant goals such as using a brand

to express an important part of the self (Aaker, 1999; Berger & Heath, 2007). In this way, consumers “manage” their identities by making a purchase decision or choices that are consistent with the self-identity. For example, consumers tend to purchase brands that signal in-groups that are preferred by the individuals while trying to avoid brands that are associated with out-groups (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; White & Dahl, 2007).

In sum, previous literature has suggested that consumer identities play important roles in consumer behavior and in the development of consumer-brand relationships.

III. Development of Hypotheses

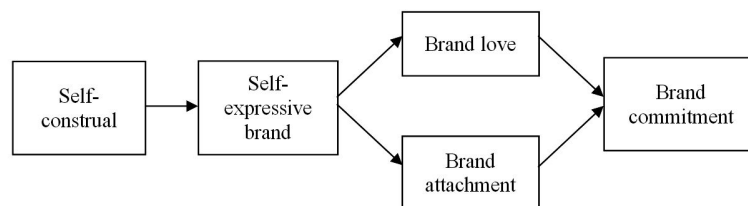
1. Interdependent self-construal and self-expressive brand

Social cognition research focusing on the self has contended that the self consists of multiple aspects, and thus, diverse factors can explain consumer behaviors related to the self. This study considers self-construal because it is a relevant and important construct that explains the relationship between self-schema associated with others and self-expressiveness of luxury brands.

Self-construal reflects how individuals construe the self with respect to one’s relationship to others (Singelis, 1994). Depending on the reference used in understanding of the self, it can be either independent or interdependent self-construal. Specifically, an independent dimension of self-construal leads individuals to confer a meaning to one’s behaviors

by referencing one’s internal feelings or thoughts, while interdependent self-construal leads an individual to impose meanings by referencing others’ thoughts or opinions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Of course, both dimensions coexist in individuals, and different aspects of the self can be activated, depending on situations that affect consumer cognitions and behaviors. For example, in Swaminathan et al.’s (2007) study, salient interdependent self-construal promoted consumers’ favorable evaluation toward a brand that signals a group-level identity (e.g., national identity).

The current study proposes that interdependent self-construal has a positive impact on consumers’ perception of luxury fashion brands to satisfy identity-related goals, such as the expression of the social self (Figure 1). This argument is supported by previous studies, which provide evidence that self-construal influences consumers’ understanding of brand meaning and the perception of connection between the self and the brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) and consumers’ brand attitude and evaluations based on country-of-origin of brands (Swaminathan et al., 2007). By definition, interdependent self-construal reflects the tendency of understanding the self by referencing others. If the perception of the social-self is meaningful to a consumer (characterized by interdependent self-construal), the consumer follows the norms and beliefs held by the others. Furthermore, the individual has *action readiness* and *procedural readiness*, driving identity-congruent cognition (Oyserman, 2009). Hedonic brands such as luxury brands are more publicly visible, signaling the social membership of the self



<Fig. 1> Conceptual framework

(Belk, 1988). In this context, such motivations are to gain approval in social situations rather than to display one's uniqueness or inner-self (Debono, 1987; Oyserman, 2009). In other words, those characterized by an interdependent self-construal characteristic have the desire to enhance the identification of the self with social membership, and thus, they consider the self-expressiveness of luxury brands important. These discussions are reflected in the following hypothesis:

H1: Interdependent self-construal has a positive impact on self-expressiveness of luxury brands.

2. Brand love and brand attachment

Consumer-brand relationships can be developed based on multiple ties (functional, emotional, and symbolic). As discussed earlier, this study considers the emotional aspects, brand love, and brand attachment of Fournier's BRQ framework, given that: 1) the role of emotion has received increasing attention from the consumer-brand relationship literature; 2) how such emotions are evoked (e.g., process of emotional bonds) and how very strong emotions (e.g., brand love) toward brands are elicited have become important research questions (Batra et al., 2011); and 3) very little research has identified the role of emotion in understanding the relationship between younger consumers and brand in the context of luxury fashion brands.

First, as a concept drawn from interpersonal love, brand love characterizes strong feelings toward a specific brand (Kleine et al., 1995). Batra et al. (2011) identified seven core elements of brand love in terms of self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, positive overall attitude valence, attitude confidence, and anticipated separation distress. Second, brand attachment is based on the interpersonal attachment theory proposed by Bowlby (1979). Attachment is the process of establishing emotional bonding (Collins & Read, 1990), and brand attachment refers to emotional responses to a brand, based on the

closeness of the self to a brand (Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2006). Brand attachment also represents strong cognitive and affective perceptions of a focal brand (Fournier 1998; Park et al., 2006).

Expressing an important part of the self with a brand is an important motivation for consumers' purchase of hedonic brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Oyserman, 2009). Consumers try to represent themselves as members of the society that they belong to by wearing some brands that other members also wear. In so doing, it is necessary to identify the self with a brand (e.g., a brand that fits the ideal standard of self-image), which induces affect (Park et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2005). Applying to the current study context, self-expressive luxury fashion brands can elicit consumers' emotions, particularly brand love and brand attachment. Wearing luxury fashion brands like Chanel can signal ones' social status with respect to a shared identity between the user and the brand. Notably, being iconic is crucial for younger consumers, and luxury fashion brands are preferred by younger consumers to confer such iconic images on the self (Mandel et al., 2006). In so doing, younger consumers try to identify themselves with luxury fashion brands, and the degree of similarities between consumers and a brand determines the level of emotional bond between the two (Fournier, 1998; Sirgy, 1982). Also, the process of identifying the self with brands induces a "hot" affect to the consumer (Park et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2005). Taken together, the self-expressive luxury fashion brands can elicit positive emotions and emotional bonds between the consumer and the brand. Thus,

H2: Self-expressiveness of luxury brand has a positive impact on brand love.

H3: Self-expressiveness of luxury brand has a positive impact on brand attachment.

3. Brand commitment

Defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 316),

commitment has been noted to be crucial to successful relationship building (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Commitment has been often considered as a synonym of attitudinal loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Commitment has calculative and affective dimensions. In branding contexts, calculative commitment is based on the calculation of functional benefits such as functional performance and functional uniqueness of a brand, while affective commitment is grounded upon one's appraisal of sense of belonging or involvement with a brand (Fullerton, 2003).

In Fournier's (1998) BRQ model, brand love is discussed as a critical factor for improved consumer-brand relationships. Her argument is supported by empirical evidence of recent research showing that brand love enhances brand loyalty, word-of-mouth, and further resistance to negative information (Batra et al., 2011; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Such a positive impact of brand love on brand commitment is expected to hold true for luxury fashion brands such that consumers' brand love toward a luxury fashion brand will drive consumers to maintain the relationship with the brand.

In the case of brand attachment, attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979) posits that the degree of attachment to a person (or a brand) determines the level of commitment of the person to the relationship. As such, the binding between the brand and the consumer can be presented as a continuous commitment of a consumer to the branded products (Thomson et al., 2005) and to forgive negative information about the brand (Ahluwalia et al., 2001). When it comes to luxury fashion brands, consumers' emotional attachment to luxury fashion brands sometimes look irrational, but such irrational responses are evidence of the contribution of emotional bonds to brand loyalty (Okonkwo, 2007). In these aspects, when consumers feel closeness between the self and a brand, and/or when they form intense emotional bonds between the self and the brand, the consumers' brand commitment is likely to increase. Therefore,

H4: Brand love positively influences brand commitment.

H5: Brand attachment positively influences brand commitment.

IV. Research Method

1. Pretest

To identify appropriate luxury fashion brands, the list of the top 100 brands published in Business week were used. The nine fashion brands obtained were Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Chanel, Gap, Zara, Hermes, Prada, Burberry, and Polo Ralph Lauren (based on rank order, with the highest first). To ensure the luxuriousness of these brands as perceived by the target sample of this study, a pretest was conducted with a convenience sample of undergraduate students ($n=47$) at a Midwestern university in the US. Subjects were asked to indicate perceived luxuriousness of each brand and familiarity with each brand. The brands were measured on a seven-point Likert scales (1=not at all and not familiar at all, 7=very much and very familiar, respectively). Based on the consideration of both familiarity and luxuriousness, the following brands were chosen to be used for the main test: Chanel ($M_{\text{luxuriousness}}=6.45$), Louis Vuitton ($M_{\text{luxuriousness}}=6.32$), Burberry ($M_{\text{luxuriousness}}=5.98$), and Polo Ralph Lauren ($M_{\text{luxuriousness}}=4.68$). Prada, Gucci, and Hermes were excluded from the list because they scored high in luxuriousness but low in familiarity among the brands and Gap was excluded due to low rating in luxuriousness.

2. Main test and measurement

The data collection for the main test was done with undergraduate students at a Midwestern university via a self-selected online survey. For this study, college students are an appropriate sample, given that they are a representative group of young consumers for luxury fashion brands, and using a homogeneous sample is appropriate for theory testing

(Calder et al., 1982; IBISWorld, 2010).

In the survey, participants were first asked to choose one of the five brands and then to indicate their responses to questions with respect to the chosen brand. It was ensured that no participants did both the pretests and main tests. The measurement items were adopted or adapted from previous studies. For interdependent self-construal, two items were adopted from Singelis (1994) (e.g., "It is important for me to respect decisions made by the group;" $\alpha = .736$). For self-expressiveness of luxury fashion brands, four items were adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Swaminathan et al. (2007) (e.g., "This brand adds to a social 'role' I play;" $\alpha = .916$). For emotional attachment, three items were adopted from Thomson et al. (2005) (e.g., "I feel emotionally connected to this brand;" $\alpha = .973$). Five items adopted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) were used for brand love (e.g., "This brand is totally awesome;" $\alpha = .976$). Four items from Kanak et al. (2007) were adapted to assess brand commitment (e.g., "I am committed to this brand;" $\alpha = .895$). All were measured on seven-point Likert scales (e.g., 1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree), except for demographic information.

V. Results

1. Sample characteristics

Out of two hundred forty three undergraduates contacted, one hundred twenty seven students participated; initial screening yielded one hundred seven usable responses (44.03% response rate). The sample characteristics are mostly female ($n=83$), Caucasian ($n=83$), between 20 and 24 years old ($n=80$), with household incomes of \$40,000 to \$99,999 ($n=57$), or more than \$120,000 ($n=31$). The participants were found to have purchase experiences with five brands: Ralph Lauren (72.9%), Burberry (58%), Chanel (47.7%), and Louis Vuitton (32.7%). These results suggest that the sample of this study have product experiences for luxury fashion brands with premium prices.

2. Model assessment and hypothesis testing

For structural equation modeling, the two-step approach was adopted (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). First, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed using AMOS 18.0. The model fit of the constructs with multiple indicators were found to be unacceptable: $\chi^2=236.924$, $df=125$, $p=.000$, NFI=.893, TLI=.933, CFI=.946, RMSEA=.092 [.074, .110]. Based on modification indices, three errors of the brand commitment construct that showed high covariance were correlated, and one indicator of brand love creating high residuals across constructs was deleted (Arbuckle, 2008). The revised model showed a satisfactory model fit: $\chi^2=145.853$, $df=106$, $p=$

<Table 1> Correlation matrix for study variables

	SC	SB	BL	EA	BC	Mean	α (number of items)
SC	1.513					3.981	.736 (2)
SB	.245*	1.509				4.675	.916 (4)
BL	.283**	.587**	1.691			3.243	.976 (5)
EA	.120	.447**	.373**	1.393		5.834	.973 (3)
BC	.260**	.587**	.572**	.622**	1.601	4.339	.895 (4)

Note: SC=self-construal; SB=self-expressive brand; BL= brand love; EA=emotional attachment' BC=brand commitment; Diagonals are standard deviation; * indicates that correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed); ** indicates that correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

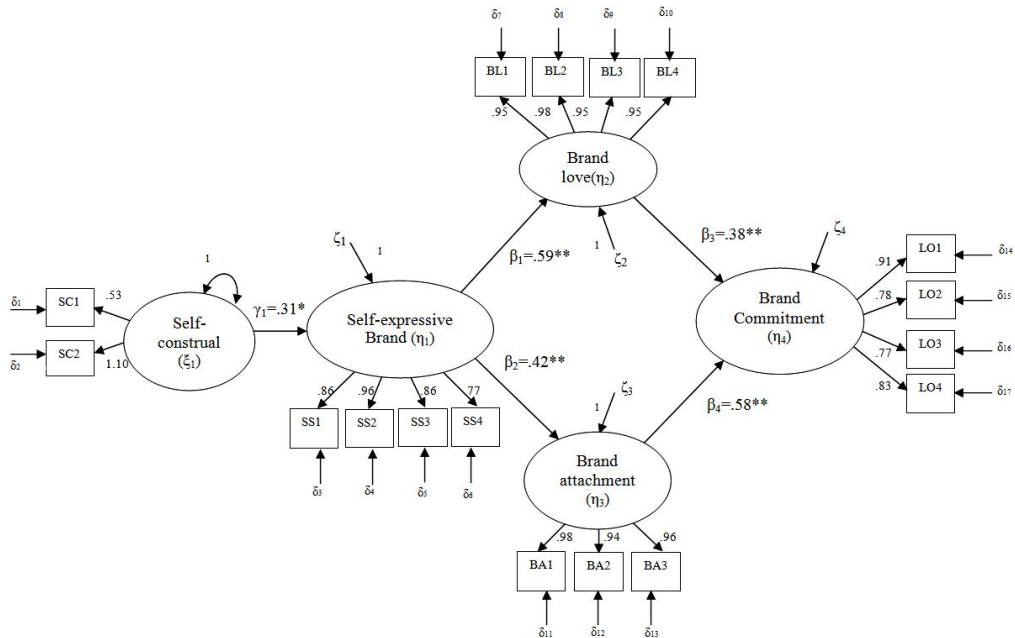
.006, NFI=.929, TLI=.974, CFI=.979, RMSEA=.060 [.033, .082]. All factor loadings (λ) were significant and greater than .80, except for one indicator of self-construal (.50). Overall, these results evidenced convergent validity (Nunnally, 1978). Also, as indicated in the discussion on measurement, the reliability of each multi-item scale was satisfactory ($\alpha = .736-.976$), supporting internal consistencies of measurement items. Means, standard deviations, and correlations of study constructs are presented in <Table 1>.

The second step of structural equation modeling (SEM) involved analysis of the measurement model. SEM with a maximum likelihood estimation technique using Amos 18.0 showed a satisfactory fit with the data: $\chi^2=159.748$, $df=111$, $p=.002$, NFI=.923, TLI=.969, CFI=.975, RMSEA=.064 [.039, .086]). The results of the SEM analysis supported the proposed hypotheses. First, it was found that interdependent self-construal had a positive impact on the self-

expressive brand, supporting H1 ($\gamma = .31$, $p = .002$). The perception of self-expressiveness of luxury brands increased consumers' brand love (H2) and brand attachment (H3) ($\beta = .59$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .42$, $p < .001$, respectively). Furthermore, brand love and brand attachment enhanced consumers' brand commitment, supporting H4 and H5 ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$, $\beta = .58$, $p < .001$, respectively). All details are provided in Figure 2.

VI. Discussion

The link between the self and the brand is not an entirely new concept, but research gaps exist regarding an underlying mechanism through which the younger-consumer-brand relationship is developed. In this article, the researchers proposed a mechanism to describe the role of consumer characteristics (i.e., self-construal), self-expressiveness of brand, and emotional factors (i.e., brand love and brand attachment)



Note: **significant at $p < .001$, *significant at $p < .01$; Model fit : $\chi^2=145.853$, $df=106$, $p=.006$, NFI=.929, TLI=.974, CFI=.979, RMSEA=.060 [.033, .082]

<Fig. 2> Final model and the result

in the development of the relationships between younger consumers and luxury brands. In making this claim, the researchers integrated literature from the sociological and social psychology research on the identity-motivation model and the notion of self-construal. The findings of this study supported the proposed hypotheses, providing insights into how to increase consumers' commitment, which is a critical issue to symbolic brands and luxury brands.

Specifically, the consumer characteristic of interdependent self-construal had a positive influence on younger consumers' perception of self-expressive luxury fashion brands. Those who are characterized by interdependent self-construal tend to understand the self and confer meanings to their behaviors by referencing others' thoughts or opinions (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). It was found that this self-identity characteristic plays as a motivation to gain approval in social situations, thereby considering presenting the self with luxury fashion brands. Thus, interdependent self-construal motivated younger consumers to consider self-expressive brands that can enhance the self-image presented to others. This can be an interesting finding regarding the conventional distinction between Easterners vs. Westerners. That is, interdependent self-construal has been known to characterize Easterners rather than Westerners, but as found in this study, interdependent self-construal appeared to contribute to the perception of younger consumers—who are considered as Westerners—toward self-expressive luxury fashion brands. This finding suggests that the conventional idea about Westerners vs. Easterners with respect to self-construal may not be applicable to younger consumers, perhaps because being iconic is crucial for younger consumers, and luxury fashion brands can contribute to achieving their self-presentation goals (Mandel et al., 2006). In these aspects, it is reasonable to say that understanding younger consumer behaviors necessitates careful consideration of the context.

Also, this research found that self-expressive luxury

fashion brands elicited positive consumer emotions, brand love, emotional bonds, and brand attachment. These findings supported the argument that the self-expressiveness (in a positive, desirable way) of luxury fashion brands contributes to building strong emotional bonds with younger consumers (Park et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2005). Furthermore, these two emotional factors were found to improve consumers' brand commitment. Notably, both brand love and brand attachment had positive impacts on brand commitment, but brand attachment created a relatively stronger effect on brand commitment than brand love did. These results highlighted the importance of brand attachment as a strong motivational implication (Park & Macinnis, 2006). Together, the study findings supported the assertion that brand-elicited affects drive consumers to maintain the relationship with the brand and to make a continuous commitment to the brands (Batra et al., 2011; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Okonkwo, 2007)—and the assertion can be applicable in the context of younger consumers and luxury fashion brands.

The results of this research have some managerial implications. As noted earlier, younger consumers have arisen as an important consumer segment for luxury fashion brands (IBIS World, 2010). The market has faced several challenges due to increasing competition during ongoing economic recessions. In such business circumstances, consumers' brand commitment is crucial for the sustainability of luxury fashion brands. First, the findings of this study suggest that it would be wise for brand managers to pay attention to emotional aspects and to put forth efforts to improve emotional bonds. Also, it is suggested that they should recognize that emotional bonds can be enhanced by focusing on the expression of the social self as it relates to younger consumers. Brand managers may utilize brand communication with these consumer groups to achieve emotional appeals. Second, in a global context, the finding regarding a consumer trait, interdependent

self-construal, suggests that it is important for brand managers to consider that the tendency of understanding the self can also influence the perception of self-expressive luxury fashion brands. These considerations might allow luxury fashion brands to strengthen the relationship with younger consumers, an important consumer segment for the brands.

VII. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

This study has limitations that can provide a venue for future research. First, the sample of this study was a legitimate subgroup of younger consumers, but the overall generalizability of the findings can be enhanced with a broader sample of younger consumers. Also, future research may employ cross-cultural samples to investigate whether self-construal (interdependent vs. independent) may create moderating roles in its relationship with self-expressive brands. More specifically, it would be interesting to see if the effect of interdependent self-construal demonstrated in this study would be consistent or different depending on the ethnic background (Easterners vs. Westerners). In addition, while this study supported the proposed mechanism in the context of fashion luxury brands, it is possible to test the model by comparing product categories. This approach can allow researchers to identify the robustness of the important role of emotional aspects to brand commitment. Conversely, it is also possible that if the model is not supported across product categories (e.g., luxury fashion products vs. luxury electronic products), researchers may demonstrate the unique role of the emotional aspects of luxury fashion brands such that emotional aspects play more important roles in regards to luxury fashion brands than with other products and brands.

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