The Role of Self-Concepts on The Relationship Between Fashion Brand Experience and Repurchase Intention

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Abstract

Background/Objectives: The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between brand experiences and repurchase intentions through self-concept constructs, including self-congruence and self-esteem.

Methods/Statistical analysis: Three hundred and sixty-two Korean undergraduate students participated in this study. Participants were recruited from online student community in a university and completed the survey questionnaire. Survey items were adopted from existing literature. The study used path analysis to examine how research variables related, and convergent validity and discriminant validity for these variables were confirmed.

Findings: The results of the structural model showed direct effects of brand experiences on self-congruence were supported. These effects include sensory, behavioral and intellectual experiences on self-congruence. However, the direct effect of brand experiences on self-esteem was only supported in the behavioral dimension. Also, self-congruence had a direct effect on self-esteem and an indirect effect on repurchase intention through self-esteem. In addition, self-esteem had a direct effect on repurchase intention and a mediating effect on the linkage between brand experience and repurchase intention. Similarly, self-congruence had a mediating effect on the connection between brand experience and repurchase intention, supporting the dual mediation model.

Improvements/Applications: Future research may compare the effectiveness of luxury and non-luxury brands. Brand managers may develop experiential strategies that extend beyond mere sensory experiences via marketing channel mix.

Keywords: fashion brand experience, sensory experience, self-congruence, self-esteem, repurchase intention

1. Introduction

Brand experience can be characterized by consumer's actual sensations in response to brand-related stimuli [1]. Based on human senses, sensory experience may produce a positive attitude towards a brand and purchase intention [2], because multisensory marketing yields better consumer experience in the competitive market. In this point, sensory experience has been highlighted as an important marketing strategy to strengthen the relationship between a brand and its customers. Moreover, customer experience with a brand provides an opportunity to expand brand identity and to create an emotional bond with the brand, suggesting that the customer-brand dyad can be strengthened [3]. This is because the present study proposed a hypothesized model of brand experience and self-concept.

Brand experience can be classified into four dimensions: sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral. Among them, sensory experience can be referred to as "sensations evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environment" [1, p. 52]. Intellectual experience, on the other hand, can be characterized by analytical and imaginative thinking that a brand triggers in customers, whereas behavioral experience can be referred to as the action that encompasses attitudes towards and intention to the brand [1]. Compared with the behavioral experience, intellectual experience tends to yield a stronger brand personality and to enrich the symbolic meaning of the self; behavioral experience may affect sincerity, excitement, and satisfaction of a brand [4,5]. On the contrary, this study did not include the affective dimension of brand experiences, because it could be confounded with affective and sensory dimensions, and they are inconsistent with the conceptualization of retail brand experience [1,6]. Therefore, the research model in the current study represented sensory, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions for predicting repurchase intention of fashion brands.

The sensory, intellectual, and behavioral experiences can be directly and indirectly related to brand equity and repurchase intention [5]. However, this study noted that sensory stimuli of brand experience may not directly influence repurchase intention, but may indirectly influence it through psychological variables. In fact, research on brand experience has shown that the linkage between brand experience and repurchase intention can be mediated by brand credibility, brand equity, and consumer identity in fashion brands [7,8]. Fashion brands typically reflect a unique symbol of self-concept; consumers tend to seek brands that may be congruent (or actualize) ideal self-concept.

Therefore, customer contact points should be maintained for repurchase customers of the brand. For example, fashion flagship stores may provide important contact points that help customers experience brand uniqueness and identity via the multiple senses. In addition, young consumers are likely to engage with a brand through online shopping on computer-based and mobile-based Internet; they perceive online shopping more valuable than conventional off-line market [9]. Therefore, the present paper considers customer experience as a response to brand experience in the offline and online shopping environments.

Consumer's brand experience can be stimulated by multisensory cues such as visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory senses. In addition to the five human senses, intellectual and behavioral experiences are integrated to link the brand to the self. That is, consumers are likely to realize their expectation of brand performance and to identify the congruence between the brand and their self-concept. Little research has investigated on how consumer's self-concept mediates the linkage between brand experience and purchase intention, especially in the fields of fashion brand.

Self-congruence refers to the similarity perception between brand and the self; it emerges when individuals perceive that their self-concept matches brand identity [10]. Furthermore, consumers may often select a brand that builds a specific social identity with brand community or a sense of belonging to reference groups [11]. The current study classified self-concept into two dimensions of self-congruence and self-esteem, and both dimensions are positive customer outcomes of multisensory marketing that deliver brand symbolism.

According to social exchange theory, consumers prefer a brand that enhances their self-concept. They tend to compare their self-concept with a brand that reflects their values of life and/or their uniqueness. Therefore, consumers are willing to become loyal to a brand when the brand is congruent with individual's actual or ideal self [12]. In other words, congruence with brand personality may affect a positive attitude toward brands and may consequently influence brand loyalty. On the contrary, customer experiences can be negatively influenced if a consumer perceives incongruence between the self and brands [3]. This suggests that self-congruence can mediate the relationship between brand experiences and repurchase intention. Furthermore, consumers tend to emotionally attach with the brand if they believe that brand identity is congruent with their self-concept [13,5]. The perception of congruence with brand identity depends on consumer's overall experience, although experiences with a brand are stimulated by multiple cues such as store, reputation, and brand personality. Therefore, the greater the multisensory experiences, the stronger the effect on the relationship between brand experience and repurchase intention [14].

Self-esteem may also serve as a predictor of repurchase intention than other self-concepts, because it is considered a fundamental human need. Naturally, people naturally seek to enhance their self-esteem. In general, self-esteem refers to the individual's positive or negative assessment of the self [15]. Those with high self-esteem tend to exert sufficient motivation and utilize resources to foster their self-esteem; they also tend to have high self-confidence and self-certainty to take social risks in a threat situation [16,17]. With regard to consumer behavior, a high level of self-esteem may reduce an uncertainty in decision-making and brand choice, particularly when matching the self and brand image. Therefore, self-congruence can be directly associated with self-esteem and consequently affect behavioral intention of brands. This means that brand choice is influenced by how consumer think of their self-concept. Some research has provided evidences that self-esteem affects brand attachment, word of mouth, and repurchase intention [18], and it can mediate the connection between psychological variables. Previous research has revealed that consumer's self-esteem mediates the linkage between trust and customer loyalty [19] as well as between brand personality self-congruity and repurchase intention [20]. Moreover, self-esteem can moderate the impact of self-congruence on emotional brand attachment [13]. These findings suggest that self-esteem may play an important role in fostering brand relationships, as individuals with high self-esteem are strongly committed to the brand as loyal customers.
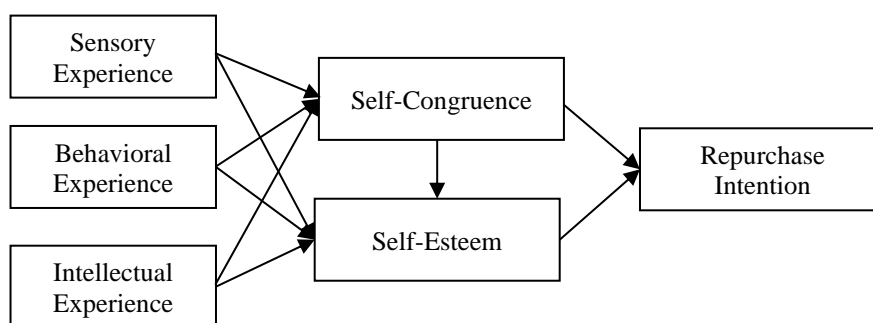

Figure 1. Research Model

In view of the current study, brand experience can help establish congruence with a brand and, in turn, affect repurchase intention. Furthermore, the impact of brand experiences on repurchase intention can be mediated by both self-congruence and esteem, thus implying a dual mediation model. Figure 1 shows the research model adopted by this study based on the above discussions.

2. Methods

2.1. *Sample and Procedure*

Data were selected using convenience sampling at a large Korean university. Participants were recruited from an online student community in the university, and were asked to indicate a self-administered questionnaire. The survey items included research variables and demographics. The sample of the present study was young consumers that they had brand experiences via offline (e.g., retail store, flagship store) and online (e.g., shopping mall, branded application) sectors. Younger consumers are generally more conscious and motivated to join brand community that build a specific social identity [21]. Because the study excluded unexperienced individuals with fewer than three months of shopping experience in offline/online fashion brands, it provided a suitable measurement for analyzing the impact of brand experiences on repurchase intention. A total of 362 undergraduate students participated in the survey. The sample of the present study consisted of 164 males (45.3%) and 198 females (54.7%). The average age of respondents was 20.698 (SD = 1.901).

2.2. *Measurement*

The survey items were adopted from previous research, and they were measured using the 5-point Likert-type scale, anchored by (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The measurement items were modified to capture the setting of fashion brand experiences. The measurement of brand experience was adopted from Brakus et al. [1]; it classifies the second order constructs into sensory, behavioral, and intellectual dimensions. Each dimension included three statements; "I can find this fashion brand interesting in a sensory way", "I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this fashion brand", and "I engage in physical action and behaviors when I use this fashion brand." The internal consistency reliability of sensory, behavioral, and intellectual was .862, .874, and .893, respectively.

The four-item measurement of self-congruence was adopted from the existing literature [22,10]. Self-congruence is regarded as the extent to which personality and identity of the brand matches the real consumer's self-concept [23]. The example items were, "I feel a personal connection to my favorite fashion brand" and "I think my favorite fashion brand reflects who I am." The internal consistent reliability of self- congruence items was .865. Furthermore, the seven-item measurement of self-esteem was adopted from the Rosenberg's Adolescent-Related Self-Esteem Scale [24]. This scale assesses individual's positive and negative feeling about the self, and the example items contained, "I feel that I have a number of good qualities", "I feel that I have much to be proud of", and "I take a positive attitude toward myself." The internal consistent reliability of the self-esteem scale for the present sample was .863. Finally, the three-item measurement of repurchase intention was adopted from Nikhashemi et al. [25]. The example items included, "I intent to buy my favorite fashion brand right away" and "If I want to buy my outfits in future, I will consider buying this apparel retail brand." The internal consistent reliability of repurchase intention was .765.

2.3. *Analysis*

Path analysis using AMOS 24.0 was employed to examine the relationship between consumer's brand experience and repurchase intention through self-concept variables. To avoid the threat of common method variance (CMV), the current paper controlled for CMV by including a single source (first-order factor) in the structural model [26]. As recommended in existing literature, convergent validity and discriminant validity were assessed [27]. As all the average variance extracted (AVE) values were higher than 0.5, convergent validity was supported (Table 1). Discriminant validity, on the other hand, was assessed by comparing the square root of the AVEs of each construct with correlations among the constructs. As shown in Table 1, the square roots of AVEs of each construct were greater than any of the correlations among the constructs, thus corresponding to a discriminant validity.

3. Results and Discussion

Table 1 represents the correlations among research variables in the model, ranging from .062 to .465. Although intercorrelation between intellectual experience and repurchase intention was not significant ($r = .062$, n.s.), most of the correlation coefficients were significant at the 0.01 level. In particular, repurchase intention were highly correlated with sensory ($r = .324$, $p < .01$) and behavioral ($r = .227$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, the correlation coefficients of repurchase intention and self-concept variables were fairly significant (self-congruence $r = .371$; self-esteem $r = .209$, all $p < .01$).

The evaluation of the structural model involved the estimation and statistical test of the proposed relationships. Scores of the constructs in path analysis were aggregates of the observed variables. As shown in Table 2, the direct effects of brand experiences on self-congruence were supported at a significance level of 0.01 (sensory $\beta = .181$, $t = 3.915$; behavioral $\beta = .150$, $t = 3.069$; intellectual $\beta = .374$, $t = 7.786$). The amount of variance explained by the three dimensions of brand experiences was 27.7% in self-congruence. However, the direct effect of brand experiences on self-esteem supported only the behavioral dimension ($\beta = .137$, $t = 2.437$, $p < .05$). The direct effects of sensory and intellectual dimensions were not significant at a significance level of 0.05 (sensory $\beta = .040$, $t = .740$; intellectual β

= -.006, t = -.104).

In addition, self-congruence had a positive and direct effect on self-esteem (β = .157, t = 2.651, p < .01), which in turn has a positive and direct influence on repurchase intention (β = .313, t = 6.963, p < .01). Moreover, self-congruence had a positive and direct effect on repurchase intention (β = .137, t = 2.789, p < .01), although the path coefficient of self-congruence was less than that of self-esteem. The amount of variance explained by self-congruence and self-esteem was 15.5%, and it was substantial in repurchase intention. The structural model estimation produced the following goodness-of-fit statistics: $\chi^2_{(3)}$ = 34.870, p = .000, RMR = .025, GFI = .971, AGFI = .795, IFI = .901, CFI = .897. These fit statistics provide evidence of good model fit and valid structural relationships.

Table 1: Correlations and Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sensory	3.289	.728	**.507**					
2. Behavioral	3.340	.929	.263**	**.763**				
3. Intellectual	2.168	.728	.196**	.369**	**.761**			
4. Self-Congruence	2.771	.667	.294**	.335**	.465**	**.470**		
5. Self-Esteem	3.589	.633	.121*	.198**	.125*	.212**	**.727**	
6. Repurchase Intention	3.794	.612	.324**	.227**	.062	.371**	.209**	**.515**

$^*p$ < .05 $^{**}p$ < .01
Diagonals represent the Average Variance Extracted (AVE)

Table 2: Structural Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	B	SE	β	t	R^2
Self-Congruence	Sensory	.166	.042	.181	3.915**	.277
	Behavioral	.108	.035	.150	3.069**	
	Intellectual	.343	.044	.374	7.786**	
Self-Esteem	Sensory	.035	.047	.040	.740	.065
	Behavioral	.094	.038	.137	2.437*	
	Intellectual	-.005	.051	-.006	-.104	
	Self-Congruence	.149	.056	.157	2.651**	
Repurchase Intention	Self-Congruence	.132	.047	.137	2.789**	.155
	Self-Esteem	.313	.045	.342	6.963**	
Goodness-of-Fit Indices	$\chi^2_{(3)}$ = 34.870, p = .000, RMR = .025, GFI = .971, AGFI = .795, IFI = .901, CFI = .897					

$^*p$ < .05 $^{**}p$ < .01
Note. B = Unstandardized beta, SE = Standardized error, β = Standardized beta

The result of structural model estimation indicated that brand experiences were directly related to self-congruence and indirectly related to self-esteem through self-congruence. Self-congruence had a direct effect on repurchase intention as well as an indirect effect on repurchase intention through self-esteem, thus suggesting a mediating effect of self-esteem. These findings supported the existing work on the mediating role of self-esteem [19]. Results of the present research also demonstrated mediating effect of self-congruence on the relationship between consumer's experience and behavioral intention of the brand, consistent with the recent findings of Yoganathan et al. [3]. Therefore, the results of the current study implied that the impact of consumer's brand experiences on repurchase intention could be mediated by both the self-congruence and self-esteem, thus indicating dual mediation model. Young consumers are committed to a brand that is congruent with their actual or ideal self and that enhances self-esteem.

Although the present study provides some insight into the effectiveness of brand experiences by mediating consumer's self-concept, there are several limitations that should be considered in the future research. First, this study is limited to a sample of undergraduate students in Korea, and therefore external validity of the results could be restricted. Secondly, the study excluded affective dimension of brand experiences to avoid confounding effects of sensory and affective constructs [1]. Future research should evaluate relative effects of affective experience dimension by keeping the separation of the two constructs. Thirdly, future research may investigate the differences in luxury and non-luxury brands, because consumers can be influenced by price, reputation, and brand equity,

particularly in the context of fashion brand market.

4. Conclusion

The current research provides a valid understanding the effectiveness of self-concept on the linkage between brand experiences and the repurchase intention. In particular, the mediation model can be utilized to test the impact of brand experiences on purchase intention, which is mediated by consumer's self-concept. Although no research to date has examined a dual effect of self-congruence and self-esteem, this research has showed that self-congruence and self-esteem may sequentially mediate the relationships among brand marketing variables. These findings may contribute to set a theoretical basis to understand the customer loyalty in fashion brands markets. From the theoretical perspective, this study can benefit brand managers in understanding the role of customer's self-concept. Because self-concept is a reflection of brand identification and self-image enhancement, brand managers should consider long-term relationship with customers by enhancing self-esteem and self-congruity with the brand. Moreover, they need to develop experiential strategies that extend beyond mere sensory experiences via marketing channel mix and lead to emotional connection with the brand.

5. References

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