



# LOVING BRANDS FOR THEIR IMAGE:

Exploring the relationship between self-congruity, self-monitoring and brand love

Master thesis fulfilled in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Science, University of Twente, Enschede,  
Communication Science

**UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE.**

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## ABSTRACT

Nowadays, due to the wide range of products and brands consumers can choose from, organizations are having a hard time standing out and connecting with consumers. Establishing and maintaining a strong consumer-relationship is becoming more important but for organizations it is difficult to create a lovable brand. Brand love is a relative new phenomenon and the research on the consumer's perspective on this topic is scarce. The current research was aimed at gaining more insight in factors that make consumers feel love for a brand, especially at the congruity between different self-images and the brand image, and what role self-monitoring plays in this relationship.

In order to gain more insight into the extent to which self-congruity and self-monitoring influence brand love, two pretests and a main study were conducted. During the pretests scenarios were created in order to manipulate the respondents in the right congruity facet condition. The main study consisted of a scenario study wherein 226 participants were requested to analyze an advertisement by filling in an online questionnaire. This study provided better insights to which different congruity facets and their focus led to greater love for brands. The results indicated that congruity between the actual self-image and perceived brand image had a positive influence on brand love. Another marginally positive relationship was found between ideal social self-congruity and brand love. Furthermore, a marginally negative relationship was found for congruity between participant's actual social self-image and the brands image, and brand love. Participants who thought that the brand image was congruent with their actual social self, had a less greater feeling of love towards the brand. Finally, no significant results were found regarding to self-monitoring as moderator between self-congruity and brand love.

According to the outcomes, this research is very useful for organizations and marketers and therefore the results should take into account. To improve their branding approach it is advised to focus on possibilities for consumers to feel the sense of congruity between the actual self and the brand image. For example by carefully exploring the target group, segmenting the target group based on different self-image evaluations and, by creating different marketing instruments for each segment. Further, they should focus on the tactic to stimulate ideal social self-congruity. Because consumers like brands on social media to communicate idealized versions of themselves to others, social media can be used to segment target groups to address different social selves.

Keywords: brand love, self-congruity, self-monitoring, marketing.

## DUTCH ABSTRACT

Voor organisaties is het tegenwoordig moeilijk om op te vallen en zich te verbinden met consumenten. Dit valt mede te wijden aan het brede scala aan producten en merken waar consumenten uit kunnen kiezen. Het oprichten en volhouden van een sterke relatie met de consument is belangrijker geworden maar voor organisaties is het moeilijk om een liefdevol merk te creëren. Merkliefde is een relatief nieuw fenomeen en onderzoek wat zich richt op het consumentenperspectief van dit onderwerp is beperkt. Het huidige onderzoek was gericht op het verkrijgen van meer inzichten in factoren die consumenten liefde laten voelen voor een merk. Vooral als het gaat om congruentie tussen verschillende zelfbeelden en het beeld van het merk, en de rol die zelf-controle speelt in deze relatie.

Om meer inzicht te verkrijgen in de mate waarin zelf-congruentie en zelf-controle merkliefde beïnvloeden, zijn er twee vooronderzoeken en een hoofdonderzoek uitgevoerd. Gedurende de vooronderzoeken zijn er scenario's ontwikkeld om de respondenten te manipuleren naar het juiste facet van congruentie. Het hoofdonderzoek bestond uit een scenario studie waarin 226 respondenten werden gevraagd om een advertentie te analyseren en een online vragenlijst in te vullen. Het onderzoek biedt betere inzichten in welke verschillende congruentie facetten met verschillende focussen leiden tot meer liefde voor merken. De resultaten geven aan dat congruentie tussen het actuele zelfbeeld en het waargenomen merkbeeld, een positieve invloed had op merkliefde. Een ander marginale positieve relatie werd gevonden tussen ideale zelf-congruentie en merkliefde. Bovendien werd een marginale negatieve relatie gevonden tussen congruentie van het actuele sociale zelfbeeld van de respondenten en het merkbeeld en merkliefde. Respondenten die dachten dat het beeld van het merk congruent was aan hun actuele sociale zelfbeeld, voelden minder liefde voor het merk. Ten slotte werden er geen significante resultaten gevonden voor zelf-controle als bemiddelaar in de relatie tussen zelf-congruentie en merkliefde.

Kijkend naar de uitkomsten, is dit onderzoek erg bruikbaar voor organisaties en marketeers en daarom wordt geadviseerd om de resultaten in het achterhoofd moeten houden. Om hun branding benadering te verbeteren wordt geadviseerd te focussen op de mogelijkheden voor consumenten om hen een gevoel te geven van congruentie tussen het actuele zelfbeeld en het merkbeeld. Dit kan bijvoorbeeld door zorgvuldig de doelgroep te onderzoeken, deze doelgroep te segmenteren gebaseerd op verschillende zelfbeeld evaluaties en verschillende marketing instrumenten te creëren. Verder zullen organisaties en marketeers kunnen focussen op de tactiek om de ideale sociale zelf-congruentie te stimuleren. Omdat consumenten merken 'liken' op sociale media om ideale versies van zelfbeelden naar anderen toe te communiceren, kan sociale media gebruikt worden om doelgroepen te segmenteren en verschillende sociale zelf-beelden te benaderen.

Trefwoorden: brand love, self-congruity, self-monitoring, marketing.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It actually is a strange idea that by ending this thesis project and report, writing the acknowledgements, my career as a student on the University of Twente will be quickly finished. After three years of being a bachelor student and one year as a master student, the studentship will be over. I do not quite know what the next stop of my life train will be, but I am hoping a fruitful opportunity will pass my way and will offer me new gates of creativity, development and knowledge.

The last six months I was given the opportunity to create an interesting research with a topic of own choice. Because of my interest in consumer brand experience, delving myself into the field of brand love seemed a logical next step. The independence in creating and conducting a research was a difficult task, but also an opportunity to prove myself. It has cost me many hours, discipline and self-confrontations, but I am sure it was a valuable educational experience. With pride I present this Master Thesis laying in front of you.

Several persons have contributed academically, practically and with support to this Master thesis. I am extremely grateful and fortunate to have these people in my life and therefore I want to speak some words of gratitude. Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Sabrina Hegner, who really was a great supervisor. When I was confused, frustrated or stuck, she offered me a cup of tea and helped me out. Of course I also would like to thank Sabrina for her time, critical view and stimulating advice during the thesis period. I would like to thank Mirjam Galetzka for her feedback and supervising role. Further, I would like to thank my parents, sister, brother and boyfriend for their interest, listening to my concerns and help when I needed it. Finally, thanks to all the friends, further family and fellow students for their critical notes and support in the data collection.

Lisa Oude Lenferink

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary marketing and advertising environment where brands yell for attention through multiple offline and online media, consumers oppose to this commercial overkill and can be less easily manipulated by brands (Van der Mieden, 2012). Through the wide range of products and brands consumers can choose from, it is difficult for organizations to get noticed or stand out and connect with consumers. Therefore, the focus nowadays should be on creating long-term relationships with consumers.

More and more marketers and organizations hold the belief that brand love is the crucial marketing construct for a long-term relationship. Apple, Coca Cola and Douwe Egberts, the most lovable brands according to Dutch consumers (Panelteam, 2013), are examples of brands that maintain deep relationship with consumers. Although there are companies that have successfully created loveable brands, many organizations are still struggling about how to create real brand love and how to change a usual brand in a love brand (brands which consumers really love and identify with). The challenge for organizations seems to lay at the consumers side in their desires and motivations to step into a consumer-brand relationship or not: loving a brand or not.

The importance of establishing and maintaining a strong consumer-brand relationship fuels the need for research on the love consumers feel for brands. Despite the growing interest in the field of brand love, most research has focused on what brand love means and causes. However, little research about antecedents has been conducted. Currently, there is no research regarding the needs that drive brand love.

Self-congruity seems to influence consumer's relationship with brands and probably brand love. Self-congruity is described as the match between a product's value-expressive attributes and the consumer's self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) argue that brands that are perceived as enhancing or reflecting the consumer's social or inner self are loved more than brands that do not. This relationship raises the question: why are brands that enhance or reflect the social or inner self more loveable than brands who do not?

The questions that linger around the subject of self-congruity and brand love are important issues that needs to be addressed, both for brand marketers and academia. Several studies show that brand love is positively related to brand loyalty, word of mouth (WOM), resistance to negative information as outcomes and willingness to pay a premium price (e.g. Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi, 2012; Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson et al., 2005). All information that can enhance these outcomes can contribute to the success of companies. For academia research information about self-congruity and brand love can improve the understanding of drivers of this important marketing construct. Furthermore it can point out marketing activities that can be implanted to increase brand love and indirect positives outcomes (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006).

Although brand love is fairly 'new' in the scientific research field, there are researchers that have conducted studies about factors that make consumers feel love for a brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). However, research exploring needs that drive brand love is scarce. One of the main reasons why research on this topic is important is because the consumer environment has changed. Consumers do not only consume products for their utility anymore, but they also consume products because of their symbolic meaning which represents images. This means the brand tries to represent a selling entity and each consumer becomes an "illusion consumer" that buys the images the brand represents (Cove, 1999; Elliot, 1999).

This change has made it harder for brand managers to address consumers and getting their brand loved. To expand the current knowledge about brand love drivers, the current research explores self-congruity as a driver for brand love. Based on the objective of this study the following research questions will be answered: (1) to what extent is self-congruity related to brand love?, and (2) to what extent is the relationship between self-congruity and brand love moderated by self-monitoring?

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### 2.1 Consumer-brand relationships.

It is acknowledged that consumers create bonds with special brands (Thomason, Mac Innis & Park, 2005). Although some consumers might be unwilling to accept that they form a relationship with brands, the literature suggests that a brand can be treated as “an active contributing partner in a dyadic relationship that exists between the person and the brand” (Fournier, 1995, p. 345). Positive brand and personal interaction are central in building successful brand relationships. For consumers it is important to feel that brands have positive behavior and attitudes towards them (Blackston, 1993). They also expect emotional benefits from the purchased brands and also support a brand more when they feel the brand has the desired attitude toward the issues they perceive as important to their system of values (Kates, 2000; Pawle & Cooper, 2006). Brand relationships can be the result of imagination or actual participation in brand communications (Fournier, 1998).

A number of different concepts exist to name relationships with brands. Brand commitment is an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship with a brand, which can form around economic, emotional and psychological attachments. Brand commitment is highly associated with brand loyalty which is a function of brand characteristics but also related to consumer traits (Lacy 2007; Moorman et al., 1992; Tifferet & Herstein, 2012). The ultimate committed consumer is described as a devoted consumer, which derives benefits from the brand that are affective by nature rather than merely utilitarian (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004). In that case, the brand logo has become a symbol for the devoted consumers and is displayed on several personal items. Another idea that consumers can have a relationship with a brand which is evidenced by the concept of brand personification. A brand can become associated with a set of personality traits in which it differs from competitors. As a result, people think of brands as having human characteristics and personalities.

The brand-consumer relationship might take a number of forms, depending on the personality of consumers and the manner in which the individuals develop relationships (Fournier, 1998). Fajer and Schouten (1995) for example describe five stages in friendship, from potential friends (brand trying), casual friends (brand liking), close friends (multi-brand resurgent loyalty), best friends (brand loyalty) and crucial friends (brand addiction). Ji (2002) studied the type of relation that children establish with brands. Ten types of relations between children and brands were identified: ‘first love’, ‘true love’, ‘fixed marriage’, ‘secret admirer’, ‘good friends’, ‘best buddies’, ‘old acquaintances’, ‘acquaintances’, ‘one night stand’ and ‘enemies’. Fournier (1998) described the association with brands in voluntary versus imposed, long term versus short term, public versus private, formal versus informal and symmetric versus asymmetric types of relationships. The relationship with a brand can grow to a level where consumers may form a passionate emotional attachment to brands that is characterized by brand love (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). In this stage, brands are love marks consumers are committed to, and feel empathy and passion towards them, as they love and respect them (Pawle & Cooper, 2006).

**2.1.1 Love in consumer-brands relationships.** What constitutes brand love? The roots of the research on brand love can be traced back to the work of Fournier (1988) and Belk (1998). Fournier (1988) argues that

brand love can be considered as an ultimate level of satisfaction that consumers want to achieve. Also close and intimate relationships, similar to interpersonal relationships, with brands may occur. Belk (1998) suggested that possessions could constitute an extended self. This means that love objects can form a person's identity through assisting the boundary between the self and identities that the consumer rejects. In other instances, love objects can help to symbolically support an identity that combines potentially conflicting aspects of the self, for example tensions between the past versus ideal identity (Ahuvia, 2005).

More recent research indicates that brand love and interpersonal love differ, in the way that brand love is unidirectional and interpersonal love bi-directional (Whang, Allen, Sahoury & Zhang, 2004). Also consumers are not expected to yearn sexual intimacy with brands, a feeling generally associated with passionate interpersonal love (Grunebaum, 1997). Additionally, Bengtsson (2003) argues that the interpersonal relationship metaphor is incompatible because brand relationships lack a sense of reciprocity. The relationship also behaves in other ways, with regard to the exchange of resources and a cognitive merging of self and other. However, humans form meaningful relationships with brands they know and use, but this cognitive merging due to perceived exchange of resources is not the same as in interpersonal relationships (Fournier & Alvarez, 2012). Batra et al. (2012) conclude that theories of interpersonal love cannot be applied directly to brand love.

A bi-directional relationship is also named as idolatry or parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Huang & Mitchell, 2014). Parasocial love is a relationship between two parties based on imagination. This relationship is similar to parasocial love that exist between media audiences and media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). When people are easily able to personify their brands, their personification becomes reality.

Brand love is also regarded as qualitatively different from liking, but rather as a construct related to liking (Sternberg, 1987). Liking creates extrinsic benefits whereas brand love on the other hand creates more of a reward which is tied to intrinsic benefits (Batra et al., 2012). If this is the way love differentiates from liking, then more-loved brands are especially successful in linking themselves to a consumer's sense of self-identity. This means that these brands are successful in given meaning by connecting to some life aspects considered inherently important or deeply held to individual values. The brand connection acts like a saving information point in mind and includes meaning of the brand consumers (Keller, 2001). Grounded on the theory of Belk (1998), people use these meaningful brands as a way to express their values as in an external self.

Keller (2001) argues that the brand-consumer connection is created with consumers' experience through a series of transactions and attachment with a central brand. Emotional attachment is an important aspect of brand love. In the branding context, brand love and emotional attachment are together. This is shown by the brand love definition of Ahuvia and Carroll (2006): 'the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name' (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). The researchers interpreted brand love as a sensational emotional dependence scale of satisfied customers to a special commercial name. Brand love necessitates emotional responses to something while emotional dependence does not need such intension. Consumers' love to fancy brands can increase when consumers recognize brands as important elements of their statement.

**2.1.2 Brand love dimensions.** The interpersonal triangular theory of love considers brand love to consist of the dimensions passion, intimacy and commitment and the intensity that explains the strength of love (Sternberg, 1986). According to Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) brand love entails the following characteristics: passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotion in response to the brand and declaration of love for the brand. However, their measurement of brand love is one-dimensional and fails to catch the complexity of love, which is multidimensional (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008). Therefore Fetscherin and Dato-on (2012) believe that brand love is a more complex construct and characterize it as: “a multidimensional construct consisting of a satisfied consumer’s experience with a brand which lead to brand loyalty and precedes a deeply emotional relationship” (p. 151). Additionally, they see brand love as a perceived relationship of love by a consumer with a brand.

The most recent study that investigated brand love stems from Batra et al. (2012). They argue that brand love is a consumer-brand relationship that is constituted by seven factors: passion driven behavior, self-brand integration, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, attitude valence and attitude strength. The main difference with other studies on brand love is that Batra et al. (2012) state that brand love is considered as a less important construct in the sense that this only can be a perceived relationship in the mind of the consumer, because brands cannot love people back. Because this model is the first empirically constituted grounded brand love model in the field, this model, shown in figure 1, will be used in the current study.

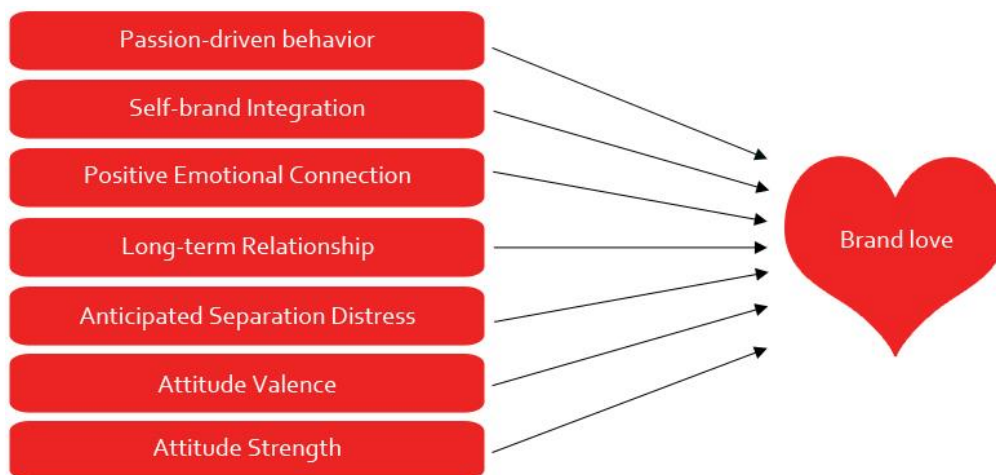


Figure 1. Brand love model and dimensions according to Batra et al. (2012)

## 2.2 Identification and self-congruity in consumer-brand relationships.

Identification with a brand is also known as self-image congruence and self-connection (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009). In this report the used term is self-congruity, which is the umbrella term for self-congruity and social self-congruity. Self-congruity concerns how the image about who you are or want to be, is congruent with an image of a product or brand. Social self-congruity concerns how the image about who others see in you or want to see, is congruent with an image of a product or brand.

According to the self-congruity theory of Sirgy (1986), people select, purchase and use goods and services that have a user-image that is consistent with their own self-image. Doing this, allows consumers to reinforce their own personal identity or especially their own view of themselves, their self-concept. Brands also help to convey a particular image to others (Albert & Merunka, 2013). According to Sirgy (1982) four different types of self-images exist: an actual self-image (an image an individual has of himself or herself), an ideal self-image (an image one aspires to have), a social self-image (an image involving beliefs about how one is viewed by others) and an ideal social self-image (an image one aspires others to have of himself or herself). In this report these four self-images are characterized by a self or social focus and actual or ideal focus. The self versus social focus refers to whether the image concerns the image an individual has about him or herself (self), or whether the image concerns how one is viewed by others (social). The actual versus ideal focus refers to whether the image concerns how one sees him or herself or is seen by others (actual), or whether the image concerns how one wants to be or wants to be seen by others (ideal).

Studies on self-congruity show that self-congruity with a product or store (match between the brand user's image and the consumer's actual self-image) seem to have a positive influence on a variety of consumers behaviors such as brand attitude, brand preference, purchase motivation, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty (Bauer, Heinrich & Albrecht, 2009; Mira, Chupani, Panahandeh & Hossein, 2013; Sirgy, 1982). Also, it was shown that the greater the self-congruity is, the greater the satisfaction of personal needs and the enhancement of the attitude towards a product or brand is (Sirgy, 1982).

**2.2.1 Self-congruity and brand love.** According to Fournier and Mick (1991) the integration of the brand into the consumers' identity is leading to brand love. Each individual strives to create a unique identity that is based on his choices, background and past experience (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014). As mentioned earlier, brands can serve as external signals and can be used to create and confirm a unique identity. As human beings we tend to feel more loyal to what we feel connected with, attached to and love (Browlby, 1979). Fournier (1998) claims the idea that this also counts for brand. The suggestion is that brand love is greater for brands that play a significant role in shaping consumers' behavior. This means that consumer's love also should be bigger as they think that brands image is congruent with their self-concept. A positive relation is suggested by the study of Kressman, Sirgy, Herrman, Huber, Huber and Lee (2006), who have found a relationship between brand identification and brand relationship quality, which include love and passion. Bergvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) also showed that there is a positive relationship between identification with the brand and brand love however, the brand love measure was only made up of two items. Therefore hypothesis 1 states:

**H1. There is a positive influence between self-congruity and brand love.**

## **2.3 Self-congruity facets, their focus and needs.**

Consumers purchase products not only for the utilitarian benefits but also for self-expressive needs. Often, the motivation to express their own self is the driving force for people to purchase goods and services (Sirgy, 1982). Brands allow satisfying underlying needs for personal expression and social approval (Aaker, 2012; Keller, 1993).

The way to do this is to add meaningful brand associations that create value beyond the intrinsic characteristics of the product (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014). In other words, people are motivated to hold a set of beliefs about themselves and act in ways to reinforce their self-concepts. The tension behind this need is that brands can restore their consonance, if their self-perceptions are inconsistent with their self-concept and causes dissonance (Epstein, 1980). For example, think about purchasing clothes. Most people buy clothing that fits their actual self-image regardless of if these images reflect their ideal self. Consumers who view themselves as casual looking are likely to buy clothes that reinforce themselves as casual looking, even though they may not like themselves as casual looking (Eriksen & Sirgy, 1989).

The effect of self-congruity is assumed to originate from our need to express a consistent and positive view from our self. Brands can serve as means by which an individual symbolically can display his or her self-concept to oneself and to others (Sirgy, 1982). In the next section, the four self-congruity facets (actual self-congruity, ideal self-congruity, social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity) will be further discussed, based on their self or social focus and actual or ideal focus.

**2.3.1 Self versus social focus.** As mentioned earlier, the self focus means that there is a match between the image of the brand-to-buy and the image an individual has of him or herself or wants to have. On the other hand there is the social focus, which can be defined by a match between the image of the brand-to-buy and the image one has about how one is viewed by others or want to be seen by others. Looking at the four different congruity facets this means a distinction between actual- and ideal self-congruity versus actual social and ideal social self-congruity. Earlier studies have shown that brands are more likely to be loved when brands are connected to something more deeper, like self-actualization (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). Earlier studies found that consumers select brands that are connected to their identity, values or goals they think that represent themselves (e.g. Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). These studies suggest a positive influence of actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity on brand love.

Further, it is proven that a successful brand must have a certain degree of resonance with not only the consumers' personal identity, but also with the social identity (Cătălin & Andreea, 2014). Consumers do not only analyze how a brand can relate to their life goals and values but also they also are aware that brands can be used to project values to the 'outside world'. Predilection for a certain brand can be the result of interaction with other member of the community. However, little research has been done on the social focus of the congruity facets. It might be the case that consumers think that their social surrounding wants them to be attracted to a certain brand, when they are more attracted to the brand, they feel more love towards the brand. Due to that brand love arises from self-brand integration, the expectation is that the self focus of self-congruity facets lead to higher brand love than the social focus of self-congruity facets.

**H2. The self focus of self-congruity facets leads to higher brand love than the social focus of the self-congruity facets.**

**2.3.2 Actual versus ideal focus.** Evidence was found that brands can express both the actual and ideal selves (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). The actual focus means that there is a match between the image of the brand-to-buy and the actual image an individual has of him or herself. On the other hand there is the ideal focus, which means a match between the image of the brand-to-buy and the image one aspires to have. This ideal self is based on imagination of ideals and goals related to what a person aspires to become (Malär et al., 2011). Looking at the congruity facets this means a distinction between actual self and actual social self-congruity versus ideal self and ideal social self-congruity. When consumers experience actual self-congruity and actual social self-congruity, they will be motivated to purchase the brand because the use of the brand will satisfy their need for self and social consistency (Aaker, 1997; Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy & Johar, 1999). People want to behave consistent to the perceived reality of themselves: who and what I think I am right now (Malär et al., 2011). But people also want to be consistent to social norms: who and what the social surrounding expects of me to be. On the other hand, if consumers experience ideal self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity, they will be motivated to purchase the brand because the use will satisfy their need for self-esteem or social approval. In line with the theory of self-enhancement, individuals seek for preserving and enhancing their self-concept by purchasing certain products (Kuester, Hess, Hinkel & Young, 2007).

Evidence was found that consumers link themselves to brands that represent the actual self. Also was demonstrated that consumers which see their aspirations and dreams embodied in a brand, consumers are more attracted and emotional attached to the brand (Malär et al., 2011). Therefore the suggestion is that both the actual and ideal focusses of the self-congruity facets have a positive relationship with brand love. Because brands are more likely to be loved when they are connected to something deeper like self-actualization and existing meaning (Batra et al., 2012), the expectation is that the actual focus of self-congruity facets lead to higher brand love than the ideal focus of self-congruity facets. In addition, self-actualization with a product means that the product expresses the need to exploit the abilities to get the best out of yourself. An example of self-actualization is if a product represents creativity such as Apple does.

**H3. The actual focus of self-congruity facets leads to higher brand love than the ideal focus of self-congruity facets.**

## **2.4 Self-monitoring.**

Self-monitoring refers to the degree to which people are concerned about the assessment by others (Hogg, Cox & Keeling, 2000). High self-monitors typically strive to be the type of person called for each situation. Said differently this means that a high self-monitor is particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of theirs to others and uses social cues as behavioral guidelines (Snyder, 1974). The opposite of high self-monitors are low self-monitors, which do not attempt to hold their behavior to fit the requirements of the situation in making a good impression (Hogg, Cox & Keeling, 2000). One might argue that the behavior of low self-monitoring individuals is associated with dispositional variables such as personality traits, while the behavior of high self-monitors is more related to situational cues. Even though considerable advances have been made in understanding consumer behavior via self-monitoring traits, a debate was on about the



conceptual domain and measurement. Lennox and Wolfe (1984) restricted the concept of self-monitoring to the ability to modify self-presentation and sensitivity to the expressive behavior of others. Since then there has been consensus about this conceptualization of self-monitoring.

**2.4.1. Self-monitoring and consumer behavior.** The degree to which individuals possess self-monitoring characteristics may be reflected in product and brand choices. This is because of differences in orientations and concern for prestige and appearance (O'Cass, 2001). It has been suggested that self-monitoring affects consumer behavior because it is associated with the degree of interest in maintaining a front thought brands that are used as properties to convey an image of the self to other people (Snyder, 1974; Snyder, Berscheid & Glick, 1985; Snyder & Cantor, 1980). This is confirmed by O'Cass (2001) who says that, along with the sensitivity to social environments and modification of behavior, many consumers appear to emphasize image and utilize material possessions such as fashion clothing to portray images that display success and status.

**2.4.2 High versus low self-monitoring consumers.** High self-monitors are aware of the impressions of messages that brands send to others about themselves (Snyder & Cantor, 1980). This implicates that high self-monitors use brands to express themselves because they want to portray the image of the brand to themselves. High self-monitors tend to be more responsive to appeals that reflect the image of the self they strive to be in social situations (Graeff, 1996). But what is important for low self-monitors? Where high self-monitors tend to rely on a brands image-enhancing capabilities, low self-monitors tend to rely on brands performance (DeBono, 2006). The research of Auty and Elliot (1988) shows that low self-monitoring individuals perceive branded jeans as more negatively whereas unbranded jeans were perceived as more positive in comparison with high self-monitoring individuals. Low self-monitoring consumers are more responsive to information that reflect their values and current attitudes. This information reflects topics that give meaning to themselves and who they are instead of who their socials surrounding wants them to be.

**2.4.3 Self-congruity, self-monitoring and brand love.** Relevant to the current study is the proposal that behavior as self-monitoring is logically connected to higher product involvement (O'Cass, 2004). Especially it seems that this involvement may be understood via attachments or relationships. According to Malär et al. (2011) consumers will be more likely to prefer self-verifying brands (i.e., with a high self-congruity) when involvement is high. The reason is that increased cognitive effort leads to a greater incorporation of the brand into the consumer's self-concept. When this occurs, the consumer feels a greater personal connection between the self and the brand resulting in a stronger emotional brand attachment. The opposite occurs when involvement is low. Consumers may not be willing to process the incorporation of the brand into the consumer's self-image deeply. Therefore the brand's image is not important enough to invest effort of choosing the brand as a self-verifying brand relationship partner. As a result, these consumers are less likely to make a connection between brands and their self and therefore are less likely to form an emotional brand attachment.

The study of O’Cass (2001) showed a weak relationship between self-monitoring and involvement with (fashion) brands. Graeff (1996) argues that the relation between image self-congruity and brand evaluation is stronger for high self-monitoring individuals than for low self-monitoring individuals. Looking at studies on self-monitoring and emotional brand attachment, the expectation is that self-monitoring is mediating the relationship between self-congruity and brand love. However, the expectation is that self-monitoring has a different influence for the four self-congruity facets based on their self or social focus. The expectation is that congruity facets with the social focus (actual social self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity) have a stronger influence on brand love for high self-monitors. Further it is expected that the congruity facets with the self focus (actual self-congruity and ideal self-congruity) have a stronger influence on brand love for low self-monitors. Therefore H4a and H4b are stated as follows:

**H4a. The social focus of congruity facets have a stronger influence on brand love for high self-monitoring people compared to low self-monitoring people.**

**H4b. The self focus of congruity facets have a stronger influence on brand love for low self-monitoring people compared to high self-monitoring people.**

These hypotheses, together with the previous hypotheses can be summarized in the following conceptualized research model (figure 2) of the self versus social focus and the actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets as predictors for brand love and self-monitoring as moderator in this relationship.

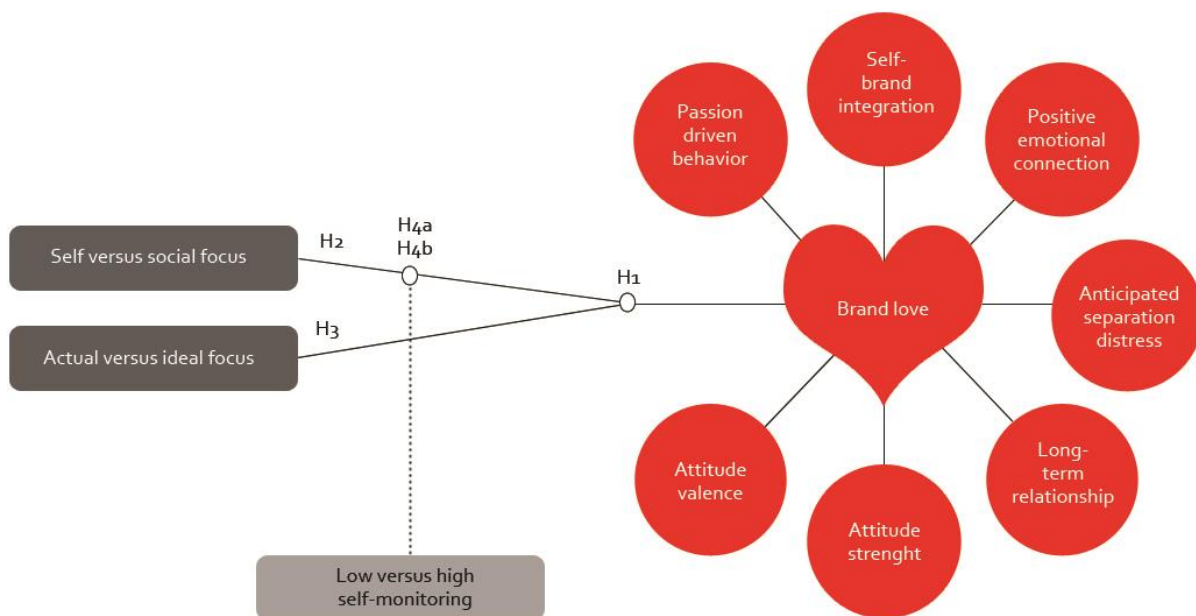


Figure 2. Final conceptualized research model including hypotheses.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The current research tries to investigate if four different facets of self-congruity are drivers for brand love. To investigate whether these self-congruity facets are drivers for brand love, the respondents first were manipulated in such way that they experience the certain type of self-congruity according to their self versus social and actual versus ideal focus. Therefore the aim of the preliminary study was to create four scenarios that stimulate the different focus that the self-congruity facets reflect by manipulating advertisements with claims. The first pretest was not successful, therefore it was necessary to change the manipulations and carry out a second pretest.

#### 3.1 Pretest 1.

**3.1.1 Participants.** 10 Dutch respondents, 3 males (33.3%) and 7 females (66.7%), were presented with a questionnaire. The age ranged from 19 to 24 years and the main age was 21.8. Participants were recruited by e-mail and Facebook wherein they received the request to fill in the questionnaire.

**3.1.2 Material.** Four different advertisements were created in which the focus of the self-congruity facets were manipulated by a claim. These claims were formed based on the descriptions of self-congruity from Epstein (1980). For example, the actual self-congruity facet includes you behave in ways consistent with how you see yourself. In other words, this reflects how you see yourself and who you are. The claim that was created to evoke this congruity facet with the self and actual focus was: *'Just be yourself for yourself'*. The claims that evoke the congruity facets with the self and ideal focus, social and actual focus, and social and ideal focus were created in the same way. These claims were: *'Just be the one you always wanted to be for yourself'* (congruity facet with self and ideal focus), *'Just be yourself in eyes of the world'* (congruity facet with social and actual focus) and *'Just be the one you always wanted to be in eyes of the world'* (congruity facet with social and ideal focus). The current study used a fictive brand because preexisting attitudes and opinions could bias the outcomes. As a product, perfume was chosen. The reason to choose for perfume as the product, is that Becherer and Richard (1978) stated that that perfume is a social product. This means this is a product that is socially visible, and in the case of this study, can be used for reinforcing ones self-concept. Perfume was also chosen for this study, since consumers' love is greater for brands in product categories perceived as hedonic, rather than utilitarian (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Besides this claim, the ad consisted of a picture of a man and woman to interest both genders. Also a perfume bottle and the brand name 'Emerald' was shown in the advertisements (all advertisements used in the pretest are shown in Appendix B).

**3.1.3 Procedure.** The questionnaire (see appendix A) started with an introduction, in which the respondents were told that they got to see four different ads whereby for each ad, four questions needed to be answered. Further, the instruction to thoroughly analyze all elements of the advertisements was emphasized. The four manipulation check questions consisted of statements related to the four different selves: *'This ad concerns how I see myself'*, *'This ad concerns how I want to see myself'*, *'This ad concerns how others see me'* and

'This ad concerns how I want others to see me'. Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which each statements was true on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree). At the end of the questionnaire it was requested to fill in demographic measures like gender, age and education level.

**3.1.4 Results.** By comparing the means (see table 1) results of this pretest suggest that the manipulations of the four different self-congruity facets were successful, but the mean differences of the manipulation scores were minor. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate between groups differences for the four ads on the manipulation check scores. No significant effects were found for the congruity facet with self and actual focus,  $F(3, 36) = 1.05, p = .38$ , congruity facet with self and ideal focus,  $F(3, 36) = 1.66, p = .19$ , congruity facet with social and actual focus,  $F(3, 36) = 1.54, p = .22$  and the congruity facet with social and ideal focus,  $F(3, 36) = 1.31, p = .29$ , and the manipulation check questions.

An explanation for this insignificance can be that the claims on the advertisements were too complicated, for the fact that these claims were written in English and the respondents Dutch. Another explanation might be that respondents accidentally skipped the claims because the font size used for the claims was considered that small that the respondents paid no to less attention to the claims. Finally, the validity of the measures was low. The Likert scale was not precise enough to measure differences between the manipulation scores. For the second pretest a semantic differential scale was used to measure the difference between self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the different self-congruity facets.

Table 1

*Means and standard deviations of the manipulation check factors in pretest 1, N = 11 per condition.*

Condition	Self and actual focus score	Self and ideal focus score	Social and actual focus score	Social and ideal focus score
	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
<i>Congruity facet with self and actual focus</i>	2.8 (1.32)	2.7 (1.49)	1.9 (0.99)	2.3 (1.34)
<i>Congruity facet with self and ideal focus</i>	2.3 (1.16)	3.0 (1.49)	1.8 (0.79)	2.0 (1.05)
<i>Congruity facet with social and actual focus</i>	2.2 (1.23)	2.2 (1.23)	2.8 (1.55)	2.4 (1.26)
<i>Congruity facet with social and ideal focus</i>	1.9 (0.88)	1.8 (0.92)	2.3 (1.16)	3.1 (1.45)

### 3.2 Pretest 2.

A second pretest was conducted in which the advertisements were manipulated with stronger claims which were written in a bigger typeface on the bottom of the ad.

**3.2.1 Participants.** 11 Dutch respondents, 4 males (36.4%) and 7 females (63.6%), were presented with a questionnaire. The age ranged from 19 to 25 years and the main age was 22.1. Participants were recruited through email and Facebook wherein they received the request to fill in the questionnaire.

**3.2.2 Material.** For the second pretest the same picture, bottle and name were used for the advertisements as in the first pretest. Because the first pretest revealed that the claims were too complex, new more concrete claims were created. The final claims were: '*Just be who you really are*' (congruity facet with self and actual focus), '*Just be who you always wanted to be*' (congruity facet with self and ideal focus), '*Just show everybody who you really are*' (congruity facet with social and actual focus), '*Just show everybody who you always wanted to be*' (congruity facet with social and ideal focus). In order to prevent that the claims were considered as unobtrusive, the claims were written in a font size of 60 pt. instead of the font size 25 pt. The increase in font size was done so that the claims were more likely to grasp the immediate attention from the respondents.

**3.2.3 Procedure.** In the second pretest, the procedure was similar to the procedure used in the first pretest. Each respondent saw four different advertisements, but the manipulation questions were changed (see appendix A). This time, the manipulations were measured using two 5-points semantic differential scales reflecting the self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the different self-congruity facets. After each ad, the respondents were asked to rate the ad on the semantic differentials: 'This ad concerns how I see myself' versus 'This ad concerns how others see me'. And: 'This ad concerns how I really see myself, as I look in the mirror' versus 'This ad concerns how I ideally see myself, how I want to be'. The items and scales used in this pretest also served as a manipulation check in the main study.

**3.2.4 Results.** A one-way between groups ANOVA was performed to compare the manipulation check scores of the scenarios with the four different self-congruity facets. A main effect was found for the self focus versus social focus of the congruity facets on the manipulation check items,  $F(3, 39) = 4.38, p = 0.01$ . This result means that in the condition of the congruity facet with the self and actual focus, the participants perceived the ad as more concerning of how they see themselves than the ad was concerning of how others see them ( $M = 2.27, SD = 0.79$ ). This was also the case for the congruity facet condition with the self and ideal focus ( $M = 2.36, SD = 0.67$ ). This result as well means that, in the congruity facet condition with the social and actual focus, the participants perceived the ad as more concerning of how others see them, more than the ad was concerning of how they see themselves ( $M = 3.36, SD = 1.36$ ). This was also the case for the congruity facet condition with the social and ideal focus ( $M = 3.50, SD = 1.08$ ). See table 2 for means and standard deviations.

The one-way between groups ANOVA also showed a significant effect of the actual focus versus ideal focus of the four different self-congruity facets on the manipulation scores,  $F(3, 39) = 5.97, p = 0.00$ . This result means that, in the condition of the congruity facet with the self and actual focus, the participants perceived the ad as more concerning of how they actually see themselves than the ad was concerning of how they ideally see themselves ( $M = 2.27, SD = 0.91$ ). This was also the case for the congruity facet condition with the social and actual focus ( $M = 2.27, SD = 1.01$ ). This result also means that in congruity facet condition with the self and ideal focus, the participants perceived the ad as more concerning of how they ideally see themselves, than the ad was concerning of how they actually see themselves ( $M = 3.55, SD = 0.93$ ). This was also the case for congruity facet condition with the social and ideal focus ( $M = 3.60, SD = 1.17$ ). Means and standard deviations can be found table 2.

Based on these analyses it was concluded that the four different self-congruity facets were successfully manipulated in the advertisements, and therefore used as the stimulus materials for the main study.

Table 2

*Means and standard deviations of the manipulation check factors in pretest 2, N = 11 per condition.*

Condition	Self (1) vs. Social (5)	Actual (1) vs. Ideal (5)
	focus score	focus score
	M (SD)	M (SD)
<i>Congruity facet with self and actual focus</i>	2.27 (0.79)	2.27 (0.91)
<i>Congruity facet with self and ideal focus</i>	2.36 (0.67)	3.55 (0.93)
<i>Congruity facet with social and actual focus</i>	3.36 (1.36)	2.27 (1.01)
<i>Congruity facet with social and ideal focus</i>	3.50 (1.08)	3.60 (1.17)

### 3.3 Main study.

**3.3.1 Design.** A 2 (self vs. social focus) x 2 (actual vs. ideal focus) x 2 (high vs. low self-monitoring) between-groups scenario design was employed for the purpose of the main study. The aim of the main study was to investigate the relationship between dependent the variable brand love and the independent variable self-congruity facets. Specifically, this research tried to investigate whether these four self-congruity facets were important when consumers want to develop a love relationship with a brand. This research also tries to investigate whether if self-monitoring plays a moderating role in the proposed relationship. To test the moderating effect of this variable, the variable was transformed to a categorical variable by dividing the sample into two groups, using the median as cut-off point ( $Mdn = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 0.82$ ).

**3.3.2 Participants.** During a period of 21 days, a total of 266 respondents distributed over the four conditions participated voluntarily in the research and completed the online survey by answering all questions. The respondents' age ( $N = 266$ ) varied from 17 to 77 years, with an average age of 25.7 ( $SD = 9.5$ ). Moreover, 69 (25.9%) were men and 197 (74.1%) female. In addition, the majority of the respondents had either a higher vocational education (30.1%) or scientific education (54.1%). Table 3 displays the statistical representation of the respondents.

Table 3

*Statistical representation of the respondents.*

		<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total number of respondents</b>		266	100
<b>Gender</b>	Men	69	25.9
	Female	179	74.1
<b>Education</b>	Primary education	1	0.4
	Secondary education	11	4.1
	Intermediate vocational education	30	11.3
	Higher vocational education	80	30.1
	Scientific education	144	54.1
		<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Age</b>		25.7	9.5

**3.3.3 Instrument.** In order to research the constructs, a quantitative online questionnaire (see appendix C) was used, consisting of 22 questions. In addition, there were items that served as a manipulation check, self-congruity, self-monitoring and brand love. The original items were in English, whereas the majority of the respondents were Dutch. In order to ensure that the items were comprehensible and that there was no translation bias, the statements were separately translated by two persons.

The successful manipulated advertisements, as tested in pretest 2, were used in the main study. The scenarios stimulating the congruity facets with the self and actual focus, self and ideal focus, social and actual focus, and social and ideal focus are shown below.





A. Congruity facet with the self and actual focus



B. Congruity facet with the self and ideal focus



C. Congruity facet with the social and actual focus



D. Congruity facet with the social and ideal focus

Figure 3. The stimulus material used in the main study.

**3.3.4 Procedure.** The online survey began by explaining the basic concepts and aim of the research. Hereafter, the participants were informed that by starting the questionnaire, they declared that they had read the information above and agreed to participate in the research. Hereafter it was informed that an advertisement might be shown of the brand Emerald. The participants were requested to carefully look at the advertisement because the following questions concerned this ad. After viewing one of the four ads, respondents answered questions on manipulation checks, self-congruity, brand love, self-monitoring, and demographic measures.



**3.3.5 Variables and measures.** The study was designed to investigate the relationship between the independent variable *self-congruity facets* and the dependent variable *brand love*. Specifically, it was investigated whether the congruity facets with a self focus would lead to higher brand love scores than the congruity facets with a social focus. Furthermore was investigated whether the congruity facets with an actual focus would lead to higher brand love scores than congruity facets with an ideal focus. The scales used to measure these factors will be discussed below.

*Manipulation checks.* In order to measure if the manipulation of the congruity facet scenarios were successful, two 5-points semantic differential scales were used concerning the self or social, and actual or ideal focus. The respondents were asked to rate the ad on: *'This ad concerns how I see myself / how others see me'*. And: *'This ad concerns how I really see myself, as I look in the mirror / how I ideally see myself, how I want to be'*.

*Brand love.* Brand love was measured using the short 8 items scale of brand love from Ahuvia (2012). The 8 items scale has a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not all) to 7 (very much). An example question is: 'To what extent do you feel emotionally connected to brand X?'. The final two questions needed to be rated on a different scale. Respondents need to give a number for their overall liking for the brand from 1 (negative) to 7 (positive) and needed to rate the intensity of feelings for brand X from 1 (not intense) to 7 (intense).

*Self-congruity.* Because it is impossible to measure the fictive brands image directly, measures of the image of the typical user were used, in line with Johar and Sirgy (1991). This means: the stereotype brand-user image the consumer has about the typical user of the brand. The scales measuring actual and ideal self-congruity were derived from Sirgy et al. (1997). These scales both consist of 1 item with a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). No scales were found for measuring social and ideals social self-congruity. Therefore the items from Sirgy et al. (1997) were transformed to represent the social self-image instead of the self-image. For example the question representing actual self-congruity: *'the typical person who uses this brand is very much like me'* was transformed to: *'the typical person who uses this brand is very much like how others see me'*. Because the intention is to let the respondents think about the typical user before they rate the self-congruity items, the following text will be shown: *'Take a moment to think about brand x. Think about the kind of person who typically uses brand x. Imagine this person in your mind and then describe this person using one or more personal adjectives such as, stylish, masculine, sexy, old, or whatever personal adjectives you can use to describe the typical user of brand x. Once you've done this, check the option below and click on further'*.

*Self-monitoring.* Self-monitoring was measured with the 5 items scale shortened from the scale of Lennox and Wolfe (1984). The 5 items needed to be answered using a 7-point Likert scale rating from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). An example question is: *'Even when it might be to my advantage, I have difficulty putting up a good front'*.

Finally, four questions were asked to generate demographic information about the respondents, such as age, gender, education level and familiarity with the proposed brand.

**3.3.6 Reliability analysis.** Internal consistency of the constructs was measured by a reliability analysis in SPSS 21. Table 3 shows the Cronbach's alpha of the independent variables. A score higher than 0.7 is considered as satisfying and scores higher than 0.8 as good (Pallant, 2005). As presented in table 4, the reliability

of the constructs self-congruity and brand love was considered as good and reliability of the construct self-monitoring was considered as satisfying. For a complete overview of the Cronbach's alpha scores of all constructs (and 'if item deleted scores'), see appendix D.

Table 4

*Reliability of the different constructs.*

	Cronbach's alpha	N (amount of items)
<b>Dependent variables</b>		
Self-congruity	.83	4
Brand Love	.85	8
Self-monitoring	.71	5

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1 Manipulation check.

A manipulation check was conducted in order to ensure that the independent variables were perceived as intended. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted with *the self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets* as dependent variables and the *manipulation check items* as independent variables. This analysis revealed a significant main effect for the self focus versus social focus of the congruity facets on the manipulation check items,  $F(3, 1) = 8.05, p = .01$ . This result indicated that the respondents in the condition of the congruity facet with the self and focus ( $M = 2.83, SD = 1.09$ ) and congruity facet with the self and ideal focus ( $M = 2.78, SD = 0.98$ ) perceived the ad as more concerning of how they see themselves than the ad was concerning of how others see them. This result as well means that respondents in the congruity facet condition with the social and actual focus ( $M = 3.24, SD = 1.18$ ) and social and ideal focus ( $M = 3.13, SD = 1.15$ ) perceived the ad as more concerning of how others see them, than the ad was concerning of how they see themselves.

The MANOVA also revealed a significant main effect for the actual focus versus ideal focus of the congruity facets on the manipulation check items,  $F(3, 1) = 14.59, p = .00$ . This result means that the respondents in the congruity facet condition with the self and actual focus ( $M = 3.45, SD = 1.11$ ) and in the congruity facet condition with the social and actual focus ( $M = 3.36, SD = 1.16$ ) perceived the ad as more concerning of how they actually see themselves, than the ad was concerning of how they ideally see themselves. As well, this result means that respondents in the congruity facet condition with the self and ideal focus ( $M = 3.78, SD = 1.04$ ) and social and ideal focus ( $M = 4.03, SD = 0.89$ ) perceived the ad as more concerning of how they ideally see themselves, than the ad was concerning of how they actually see themselves. Means and standard deviations are shown in table 5.

Table 5

*Means and standard deviations of the manipulation check factors in the main study,  $n = 266$ .*

Condition	Self (1) vs. Social (5)	Actual (1) vs. Ideal (5)
	focus score	focus score
	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>
<i>Congruity facet with self and actual focus</i>	2.83 (1.09)	3.45 (1.11)
<i>Congruity facet with self and ideal focus</i>	2.78 (0.98)	3.78 (1.04)
<i>Congruity facet with social and actual focus</i>	3.24 (1.18)	3.36 (1.16)
<i>Congruity facet with social and ideal focus</i>	3.13 (1.15)	4.03 (0.89)

### 4.2 Main study.

The dependent variables in the current study is *brand love*. *Self-congruity* is a control variable. The independent variables were the following *congruity facets*: the congruity facet with the self and actual focus, with the self and

ideal focus, with the social and actual focus, and with the social and ideal focus. First, the results for self-congruity will be discussed. Second, attention will be given to the brand love scores and self-monitoring scores. Finally, the results of the regression analysis will be shown.

**4.2.1 Self-congruity.** In order to measure if the different congruity facets had a relationship with self-congruity, a 2 x 2 between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with *the self versus social focus* and *the actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets* as independent variables and *self-congruity* as the dependent variable. The ANOVA revealed no main effect for the self focus versus social focus on self-congruity,  $F(1, 262) = .49, p = .49$ . In addition, the main effect of the actual focus versus ideal focus was non-significant,  $F(1, 262) = .02, p = .90$ . Furthermore, no interaction was found between the self versus social focus and the actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and self-congruity,  $F(1, 262) = 1.83, p = .18$ . Means and standard deviation of the self-congruity score per focus can be found in table 6.

Table 6

*Means and standard deviations (M, SD) of the self-congruity scores per condition.*

Condition	N	Self-congruity
<i>Congruity facet with self and actual focus</i>	66	3.41 (1.25)
<i>Congruity facet with self and ideal focus</i>	67	3.21 (1.25)
<i>Congruity facet with social and actual focus</i>	66	3.30 (1.32)
<i>Congruity facet with social and ideal focus</i>	67	3.53 (1.29)

**4.2.2 Brand love.** In order to measure if the different congruity facets had a relationship with brand love a 2 x 2 between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with *the self versus social focus* and *the actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets* as independent variables and *self-congruity* as the independent variable. No significant main effect was found for the self focus versus social focus of the congruity facets and brand love,  $F(1, 262) = .034, p = .85$ . Also a non-significant main effect was found for the actual focus versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and brand love,  $F(1, 262) = 1.58, p = .21$ . Thus H2 and H3 were non-confirmed. Furthermore, the ANOVA revealed a marginal significant interaction effect between the self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and brand love,  $F(1, 262) = 3.66, p = .06$ . This effect means that the level of brand love was greater for participants in the condition of the congruity facet with the self and actual focus than participants in the conditions of the congruity facet with the self and ideal focus, social and actual focus and social and ideal focus. Means and standard deviations can be found in table 7.

**4.2.3 Brand love dimensions.** In addition, a 2 x 2 between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with *the self versus social focus* and *actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets* as independent variables and the eight brand love dimensions: *direct brand love (DBL)*, *self-brand integration (SBI)*, *passion-driven behavior (PDB)*, *Positive emotional connection (PEC)*, *long-term relationship (LTR)*, *anticipated separation distress*

(ASD), *attitude valence* (AT) and *attitude strength* (AS), as dependent variables. All mean scores and standard deviations of the brand love dimensions per condition can be found in table 7.

The ANOVA revealed non-significant main effects for the self focus versus social focus of the congruity facets and all the brand love dimensions: direct brand love,  $F(1, 262) = .00, p = 1.00$ , self-brand integration,  $F(1, 262) = 1.48, p = .23$ , passion-driven behavior,  $F(1, 262) = .19, p = .66$ , positive emotional connection,  $F(1, 262) = .09, p = .76$ , long term relationship,  $F(1, 262) = .03, p = .86$ , anticipated separation distress,  $F(1, 262) = .11, p = .75$ , attitude valence,  $F(1, 262) = 1.32, p = .25$  and attitude strength,  $F(1, 262) = .71, p = .40$ .

The ANOVA also revealed non-significant main effects for the actual focus versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and all the brand love dimensions: direct brand love,  $F(1, 262) = 1.18, p = .28$ , self-brand integration,  $F(1, 262) = .24, p = .62$ , passion-driven behavior,  $F(1, 262) = 1.59, p = .21$ , positive emotional connection,  $F(1, 262) = 1.07, p = .30$ , long term relationship,  $F(1, 262) = 1.32, p = .25$ , anticipated separation distress,  $F(1, 262) = .08, p = .78$ , attitude valence,  $F(1, 262) = .57, p = .45$  and attitude strength,  $F(1, 262) = .68, p = .41$ .

Furthermore, the ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect for the self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and passion driven behavior,  $F(1, 262) = 5.14, p = .02$ . This result means that participants in the congruity facet condition with the self and actual focus perceived more passion to use the brand than participants in the conditions of the self-congruity facets with the self and ideal focus, social and actual focus and social and ideal focus.

Also a significant interaction effect was found for the self versus social focus and the actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and long-term relationship,  $F(1, 262) = 6.06, p = .01$ . This means that participants in the congruity facet condition with the self and actual focus expected a more long-term relationship with the brand than participants in the conditions of the self-congruity facets with the self and ideal focus, social and actual focus and social and ideal focus.

No interaction effects was found for the self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets and the brand love dimensions: direct brand love,  $F(1, 262) = 2.24, p = .14$ , self-brand integration,  $F(1, 262) = .13, p = .72$ , positive emotional connection,  $F(1, 262) = 1.79, p = 0.18$ , anticipated separation distress,  $F(1, 262) = 2.65, p = .11$ , attitude valence,  $F(1, 262) = .01, p = .91$  and attitude strength,  $F(1, 262) = 2.66, p = .10$ . All mean scores and standard deviations of the brand love dimensions per condition can be found in table 7.

Table 7

*Brand love and brand love dimension means and standard deviations (M, SD) per condition.*

		BL total	DBL	SBI	PDB	PEC	LTR	ASD	AV	AS
Condition	N	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)	M (SD)
Congruity facet with self and actual focus	66	3.05 (1.09)	3.55 (1.43)	2.58 (1.43)	3.33 (1.59)	3.21 (1.69)	2.41 (1.50)	1.73 (1.24)	4.41 (1.35)	3.23 (1.70)
Congruity facet with self and ideal focus	67	2.67 (0.84)	3.10 (1.39)	2.55 (1.33)	2.64 (1.55)	2.73 (1.64)	1.84 (0.99)	1.46 (0.84)	4.28 (1.08)	2.76 (1.49)
Congruity facet with social and actual focus	66	2.80 (1.03)	3.29 (1.41)	2.85 (1.46)	2.80 (1.68)	2.88 (1.76)	2.05 (1.32)	1.55 (1.11)	4.23 (1.13)	2.76 (1.42)
Congruity facet with social and ideal focus	67	2.88 (0.97)	3.36 (1.28)	2.70 (1.44)	3.00 (1.56)	2.94 (1.52)	2.25 (1.32)	1.73 (1.27)	4.13 (1.13)	2.91 (1.57)

Note. BL total = brand love total, DBL = direct brand love, SBI = self-brand integration, PDB = passion-driven behavior, PEC = positive emotional connection, LTR = long-term relationship, ASD = anticipated distress, AV = attitude valence and AS = attitude strength.

**4.2.4 Self-monitoring.** In order to measure whether self-monitoring moderates the influence of the congruity facets on brand love, a 2 x 2 between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted with *the self versus social focus of the congruity facets* and *low versus high self-monitoring* as independent variables and *brand love* as the dependent variable. Means and standard deviations can be found in table 8. No significant interaction effect was found between the independent variable self versus social focus of the congruity facets and low versus high self-monitoring and dependent variable brand love,  $F(1, 262) = .67, p = .42$ . Therefore H4a and H4b were non-confirmed.

Table 8.

*Means and standard deviations (M, SD) of brand love per self versus social focus scenario and low versus high self-monitors.*

	Self focus		Social focus	
	N	M (SD)	N	M (SD)
Low self-monitors	74	2.77 (.96)	71	2.84 (.95)
High self-monitors	59	2.97 (1.01)	62	2.84 (1.07)

#### 4.2.5 Regression of measured congruence on brand love and brand love dimensions.

**4.2.5.1 Self-congruity total.** A linear regression analysis was performed to explore the relationship between *brand love* and *self-congruity*. First, a regression analysis was performed between brand love total and self-congruity total. As the corresponding regression coefficients in table 9 show, self-congruity was a strong predictor for brand love ( $\beta = .46, p = .00$ ). It was found that 21% of the variance of the variable 'brand love total' could be explained by the predictor 'brand love total' ( $R^2 = .21$ ). Therefore H1 was supported.

Table 9

Summary of regression coefficients for self-congruity as predictor for brand love.

Brand Love total ( $R^2 = .21$ )				
	B	SE	B	P
<i>Self-congruity Total</i>	.36	.04	.46	.00

**4.2.5.2 Self-congruity facets.** In addition, a regression analysis was performed for the different congruity facets: *actual self-congruity*, *ideal self-congruity*, *actual social self-congruity* and *ideal social self-congruity*, as predictors for *brand love*. As the corresponding regression coefficients from table 10 show, the actual self-congruity facet was the strongest predictor for brand love ( $\beta = .40, p = .00$ ). Furthermore, actual self-congruity explained 50% of the explained variance of brand love ( $R^2 = .50$ ).

Also is shown that the actual social self-congruity ( $\beta = -.12, p = .10$ ) and the ideal social self-congruity ( $\beta = .17, p = .06$ ) facets had a marginal influence on brand love. However, the relationship seems to be negative because participants who experienced a higher actual social self-congruence, were less likely to love the brand. Participants who experienced a higher ideal social self-congruence, were more likely to love the brand.

Table 10

Summary of regression coefficients for the self-congruity facets as predictors for brand love.

BL total ( $R^2 = .50$ )				
Scenario	B	SE	$\beta$	P
<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.25	.05	.40	.00
<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.07	.05	.11	.21
<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.09	.05	-.12	.10
<i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.10	.05	.17	.06

Another regression analysis was performed for the following congruity facets: *actual self-congruity*, *ideal self-congruity*, *actual social self-congruity* and *ideal social self-congruity*, as predictors for the eight brand love dimensions: *direct brand love (DBL)*, *self-brand integration (SBI)*, *passion-driven behavior (PDB)*, *positive emotional connection (PEC)*, *long-term relationship (LTR)*, *anticipated separation distress (ASD)*, *attitude valence (AT)* and *attitude strength (AS)*. Table 11 presents the regression coefficients for all predictors. The significant results are highlighted in bold.

***Actual self-congruity facet.*** Table 11 shows that the actual self-congruity facet is a significant predictor for all eight brand love dimensions. It was found that actual self-congruity is a strong predictor for direct brand love ( $\beta = .35, p = .00$ ), self-brand integration ( $\beta = .28, p = .00$ ), passion-driven behavior ( $\beta = .30, p = .00$ ), positive emotional connection ( $\beta = .25, p = .00$ ), long-term relationship ( $\beta = .32, p = .00$ ), anticipation separation distress ( $\beta = .23, p = .01$ ), attitude valence ( $\beta = .41, p = .00$ ) and attitude strength ( $\beta = .17, p = .05$ ).

***Ideal self-congruity facet.*** It was found that the actual self-congruity facet had a marginal influence on the brand love dimension passion-driven behavior ( $\beta = .17, p = .06$ ).

*Actual social self-congruity facet.* Table 11 shows that the actual social self-congruity facet is a significant predictor for two brand love dimensions: direct brand love ( $\beta = -.19, p = .02$ ) and attitude valence ( $\beta = -.254, p = .00$ ). However, these relationships seems to be negative. This means that brand love is greater when participants' ideal image is not congruent with the brands image.

*Ideal social self-congruity facet.* It was found that the ideal social self-congruity facet is a significant predictor for attitude valence ( $\beta = .19, p = .03$ ) and has marginally influence on passion-driven behavior ( $\beta = .18, p = .05$ ) and positive emotional connection ( $\beta = .16, p = .08$ ). Table 12 provides an overview of the tested hypotheses and whether they were supported or not.

Table 11

*Summary of regression coefficients for the self-congruity facets as predictors for brand love dimensions.*

		B	SE	$\beta$	P
<b>DBL</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.30	.07	.34	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.13	.08	.15	.10
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	..19	.08	-.19	<b>.02</b>
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .38)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.04	.08	.05	.62
<b>SBI</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.24	.07	.28	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.02	.08	.03	.78
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.03	.08	-.03	.75
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .32)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.07	.09	.07	.43
<b>PDB</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.30	.08	.30	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.17	.09	.17	<b>.06</b>
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.13	.09	-.12	.13
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .48)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.18	.09	.17	<b>.05</b>
<b>PEC</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.26	.08	.25	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.14	.09	.14	.13
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.05	.09	-.04	.61
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .44)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.16	.09	.16	<b>.08</b>
<b>LTR</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.26	.07	.32	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.04	.08	0.05	.69
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.06	.07	-.06	.45
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .39)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.11	.08	.13	.17
<b>ASD</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.16	.06	.23	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	-.04	.07	-.06	.58
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.03	.07	-.04	.61
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .25)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.09	.07	.12	.22
<b>AV</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.30	.06	.41	<b>.00</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	.09	.06	.12	.19
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.21	.06	-.25	<b>.00</b>
	<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .48)</i> <i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.14	.07	.19	<b>.03</b>



<b>AS</b>	<i>Actual self-congruity facet</i>	.17	.08	.17	<b>.05</b>
	<i>Ideal self-congruity facet</i>	-.01	.10	-.01	.89
	<i>Actual social self-congruity facet</i>	-.00	.09	-.00	.96
<i>(R<sup>2</sup> = .18)</i>	<i>Ideal social self-congruity facet</i>	.04	.10	.04	.69

Note. DBL = direct brand love, SBI = self-brand integration, PDB = passion-driven behavior, PEC = positive emotional connection, LTR = long-term relationship, ASD = anticipated distress, AV = attitude valence and AS = attitude strength.

Table 12.

*Overview of the tested hypotheses.*

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Content</b>	<b>Results</b>
<b>H1</b>	There is a positive influence between self-congruity and brand love.	Supported
<b>H2</b>	The self focus facets of congruity leads to higher brand love than the social focus.	Non-confirmed
<b>H3</b>	The actual focus facets of congruity leads to higher brand love than the ideal focus facets.	Non-confirmed
<b>H4a</b>	Social and ideal social self-congruity have a stronger influence on brand love for high self-monitoring people compared to low self-monitoring people.	Non-confirmed
<b>H4b</b>	Actual and ideal self-congruity has a stronger influence on brand love for low self-monitoring people compared to high self-monitoring people.	Non-confirmed

## 5. DISCUSSION

Drivers of brand love are an important aspect to consider in the process of establishing and maintaining a strong consumer-brand relationship. To get a better understanding of how different types of self-congruity with the brand's image and self-monitoring influence consumers' love for a brand, is a matter of great importance from both an academic as managerial point of view. Academia want to understand and explain based on what considerations a specific person feels love for a brand. Managers want to know to what extent a love relationship between the consumer and brand can contribute to the success of their company. Understanding the process of establishing and maintaining brand love is from a marketing point of view important because understanding of these drivers can point out marketing activities that can be implemented to increase brand love and indirect positive outcomes, such as brand loyalty, WOM and willingness to pay a premium price for products and services.

The present study contributes to a further understanding of the concept of brand love by examining self-congruity and self-monitoring on brand love as drivers for brand love. Therefore the following research questions were developed: (1) to what extent is self-congruity related to brand love?, and (2) to what extent is the relationship between self-congruity and brand love moderated by self-monitoring?

A total of 7 hypotheses were proposed and tested. The results of this study revealed a strong positive relationship between brand love and self-congruity. Especially actual self-congruity indicated to be a strong predictor for brand love. Furthermore this study found that ideal social self-congruity had a marginal positive influence on brand love. This study also found an interesting result regarding actual social self-congruity: actual social self-congruity appeared to have a negative relationship with two brand love dimension, specifically direct brand love and attitude valence. Unfortunately, it appears that there is no moderating influence of self-monitoring on the relationship between self-congruity and brand love. The next section will discuss these findings based on existing literature and will propose alternative explanations.

### 5.1 Discussion of the results.

**5.1.1 The influence of self-congruity on brand love.** As expected, self-congruity showed a strong relationship with brand love. This can be explained by the study of Bergkvist and Larsen (2010), who have studied the relationship between identification and brand love. Results of this study show that, in order to fortify brand love, identification with the brand has to be build up by activities that convey a brand image congruent with the self-image of the target audience. It can be concluded that, in order to create consumers' love brands, a feeling of self-congruity with the brand's image should be created.

**5.1.2 The influence of actual self-congruity on brand love.** Congruence between one's actual self-image and the image of the brand seems to be the strongest predictor for brand love. Actual self-congruity was therefore a significant predictor for all the brand love dimensions. This is in line with the research of Malär et al. (2011), Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) and Hwang and Kandampully (2012). When consumers believe that the brand advertisement is concerning how they are, they directly feel love towards the brand, they feel that the

brand is an important part of the self-identity, they feel passion to use the brand, they feel a positive emotional bond towards the brand, they feel the sense of a long commitment, they feel anxiety to lose the brand, they feel that the brand compares well to their ideal brand and, feel that all of these evaluations are to some extent, strong. The question is why brand love is greater when the brand reflects the actual self and not the ideal self, actual social self or ideal social self. An explanation could be that people care more about satisfying their need for self-consistency than their needs for self-esteem, social constancy and, social approval. It can be more important for people that the brands identity, values or goals are consistent with who they represent themselves, rather than who they want to be, or are seen or want to be seen by others.

In addition, brand love is something that people need to show to others (Batra et al., 2012). People need to show their love to receive extrinsic rewards and establish their self-identity. For people it could be more rewarding to share their love for brands that reflect their actual self instead of their ideal or social self. This can be explained by Stapel and Van der Linde (2011) who argue that the rewards of value-affirmation boost self-clarity more than self-esteem.

Another explanation for actual self-congruity as only self-congruity facet predictor for brand love is, linking back to the study of Hofstede and Hofstede (2005), due to cultural dimension. The sample of this study contains only Dutch respondents. According to Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) the Dutch culture scores high on individuality and low on masculinity. The individualistic score of the Dutch society means that the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him- or herself. This also has consequences for the ways people use brands. Individualistic cultures like brands that confirm their independence and give individual gratification whereas collectivistic cultures like brands that enhance group membership and affiliation. This can clarify the positive relationship between actual self-congruity and the brand because the Dutch participants, who share the individualistic culture, like brands more when they gain individual gratification. It also clarifies the insignificant effect between social self-congruity and brand love because the individualistic participants are characterized by wanting the feeling to be independent and therefore do not care about their social image.

Another cultural dimension that can explain why there were no effects between ideal self, actual social self and ideal social self is masculinity. Dutch participants have a low score on masculinity which results in a high score for femininity. In according to consumption, this femininity score means that Dutch consumers do not like to show off with a brand as a sign of status: fitting in is considered as more important. Extending this to the current research this means that Dutch consumers want to act normal, be modest and dislike brand who concerns there selves as something that they are not, just as a status symbol.

**5.1.3 The negative influence of actual social self-congruity on brand love.** An interesting result was found with regard to the marginal influence of actual social self-congruity on brand love. Results show that the level of brand love is less great when the actual social self-image of participants is congruent with the image of the brand. When looking at the brand love dimensions, it seems when consumers think the brand is showing an image that is similar to the image others have of you, that they perceived less direct love for the brand. Furthermore, they feel that the brand compared less well to their ideal brand.

A logical explanation seems that we know our social surrounding has a certain image of us, but we actually don't want to be like this image and therefore provoke this image by not liking this brand, which is attracted for our social surrounding. The underlying idea could be satisfying the need for social consistency, but in another way one would expect. To be more specific, consumers do not want to be consistent with social norms, but they do want to be consistent in the image that is reflected to their social surrounding. Because less research has been done on actual social self-congruity, there are no clues available for or against this suggestion.

**5.1.4 The marginal positive influence of ideal social self-congruity on brand love.** The results showed a marginal positive influence of ideal social self-congruity on brand love. Participants experienced a greater level of brand love when the brand was showing an image that was similar to the ideal image others have of us. Brand love in this case meant that the consumers felt a positive emotional connection, felt passion for using the brand and, felt that the brand compared well to their ideal brand. The relationship between the ideal social self and the brand love dimensions positive emotional connection, passion-driven behavior and attitude valence, seems to be logical, because consumers can experience feelings of admiration and prestige when using a brand (Belén del Rio, Vázquez & Iglesias, 2001). Social approval is one of the characteristics of the status function of brands, which corresponds to the individual desire to achieve prestige and recognition of others without necessary meaning that the brand is representing a social group. Like Belén et al. (2001) argue, associations of status or luxury imply a social distinction of the brand that affords the consumer positive emotional experiences. This could work for the current study because it was found that brand love for a brand whereof the image is congruent with how you want to be perceived by others concerns a positive emotional connection. In addition, 44% of the variance of brand love could be explained by a positive emotional connection.

**5.1.5 The moderating influence of self-monitoring between self-congruity and brand love.** Surprisingly, even though it was hypothesized, no significant effects were found for moderator self-monitoring. Earlier experiments have shown that high and low self-monitors differ in their focus when making product judgments because it is associated with the degree of interest in maintaining front thought brands that are used to convey an image of the self to other people (Snyder, 1974; Snyder & Cantor, 1980; Berscheid & Glick, 1985). Several explanations can clarify the insignificant effects in this research.

First, it can be explained by the fact that 80% of the self-monitoring scores were between 3.8 and 5.2, what resulted in a minimum of differences between the high and low self-monitors. Actually, there were no clear low or high self-monitors in this study, because most of the scores were around the middle of the 7-point scale. This could be attributed to the fact that the participants in the current study were Dutch. The Dutch society is, next to an individual and feminine culture, characterized by an average score on uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). This means that Dutch people feel generally average in being threatened by uncertain or unknown situations and try to avoid such situations in which they feel uncomfortable. The suggestion is that Dutch consumers do not extremely want to avoid or like situations in which they can be threatened by other people, due to that Dutch people in general do not like or dislike

uncomfortable situations. Therefore, they feel average in the way they like to be influenced by other people, what the average self-monitoring score includes.

Secondly, the scale of Lennox and Wolfe (1984) was used to measure self-monitoring. Due to the length of the survey, the original 13 item scale was shortened. Although the internal reliability of the used scale with 5 items was considered as good, it cannot be absolutely excluded that this might have created a difference in outcomes on the moderating influence of self-monitoring between self-congruity and brand love.

## 5.2 Conclusions.

**5.2.1 RQ1: to what extent is self-congruity related to brand love?** The first aim of this research was, as expressed in research question 1, to find out to what extent self-congruity is related to brand love. In general, self-congruity is positively related to brand love. Self-congruity can be divided in four facets, which each addressed a kind of 'self': actual self, ideal self, actual social self and ideal social self. The main study investigated if consumers feel that these different selves were congruent with the image of the brand and if this self-congruity boosts their brand love scores. This with help of the focus of the congruity facets: self versus social and actual versus ideal. Based on the described results in the previous chapter, it was found that participants who thought that the brands image was congruent with their actual self, had a greater feeling of love towards the brand. This positive influence on brand love corresponds with all eight brand love dimensions.

Results also indicate that participants who thought that the brand image was congruent with their actual social self, had a less great feeling of love towards the brand. This marginally negative influence between actual self-congruity and brand love corresponded to two brand love dimensions: direct brand love and attitude valence.

Further was found that participants who thought that the brands image was congruent with their ideal social self, had a greater feeling of love towards the brand. This marginal positive influence corresponded to three brand love dimensions: positive emotional connection, passion-driven behavior and attitude valence.

Interestingly however, ideal self-congruity did not significantly affect brand love. As mentioned in the previous discussion section, this can be attributed to a low score on the cultural dimension masculinity. This score means that Dutch consumers don't like to show off with a brand as a sign of status. They just want to act normal, be modest and dislike brand who concerns themselves as something that they are not, just as a status symbol.

**5.2.2 RQ2: to what extent is the relationship between self-congruity and brand love moderated by self-monitoring?** As expressed in research question 2, the second aim of this study was to explore whether the relationship between self-congruity and brand love is moderated by self-monitoring. To analyze differences between low and high self-monitoring participants, a median split was used to divide the sample into two groups based on their self-monitoring score. Unfortunately, the results of the main study did not find evidence for this relationship. As mentioned in the discussion section, this can be attributed to the cultural dimension called uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). The average score means that Dutch people feel average in being threatened by uncertain or unknown situations and try to avoid such situations. This characterizing

culture element of Dutch consumers led to an overall average self-monitoring score. Thus still it is unknown whether there is a relationship between self-congruity, self-monitoring and brand love.

### 5.3 Practical implications.

The findings of this study offer practical guidelines for marketers and companies to improve their branding approach. First of all, there is now evidence through this study that actual self-congruity has a positive influence on brand love. Practitioners should focus more on this actual self to offer the possibility for consumers to feel the sense of self-congruity between their actual self and the brand's image. Identification with the brand specifically has to be built up by activities that convey a brand image congruent with the image of the target audience (Bergkvist & Larsen, 2010).

Bergkvist and Larsen (2010) argue that image advertising can be designed to strengthen image dimension common to the brand and the target audience. It is important that marketers and companies explore the self-image evaluation of the target group. Then, the target group can be segmented for their different self-image evaluations and different marketing instruments can be created to address the different self-concepts. One possible tactic is the use of a strong brand personality tailored to the actual self (Batra et al., 1996).

An example of a brand who used this is Dove with the 'Real Beauty Campaign'. The aim of the campaign is to celebrate the natural physical variation embodied by all women and inspire them to have the confidence to be comfortable with themselves (Unilever, 2006). The ads displayed women of all different physical types, to represent imperfection and natural beauty. For Dove this campaign, who started a conversation around the world about real beauty, led to brand love and loyalty for the brand which was positive for the power of the brand and sales (Bahadur, 2014).

Secondly, this research has shown that there is evidence that ideal social self-congruity has a marginally positive influence on brand love. Earlier research showed that people like brands on Facebook to boost their self-image (Hollenbeck & Kaikate, 2012). By using brands as subtle cues, consumers communicate idealized versions of themselves to others (Gollwitzer et al., 2009; Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1981). Marketers and companies should focus more on this tactic to stimulate ideal social self-congruity. In addition, with social media it is also possible to segment the target group and address different social selves.

### 5.4 Limitations.

Like all studies, the current study has its limitations. First, the number of females is overrepresented compared to Dutch statistics on females: 51% (Nationaal Kompas, 2013). The high percentage of females in this study could have influenced the results because according to Monga (2002) men and women differ in the ways they view their relationship with brands. While men tend to view their relationship as being one-way, women tend to see their relationship as being more dual in nature. Future research should try to acquire a more balanced sample.

A second limitation is that this study only included one brand, the created perfume brand Emerald. The results could have been different when more than one brand was used. Future research could examine whether the effects in this research are different depending on different categories of brands that are investigated.

Also, the use of a median split can be considered as a point of discussion. The spread of the self-monitoring scores was from 1.8 to 6.6. The problem with this data analysis method is that values just above or under the median split score are treated the same way as values further away from the median. This means that values close to the median are considered as low or high monitoring while they actually lay close to each other.

A final discussion point is the fact that in this study four types of congruity were presented and tested in the main study. But in real life it could be that the four types don't exist separately but are blended. For example it seems logical that *the person who you are* is strongly associated with *the person you like to be*. And it also seem logical that *the person you are* is strongly associated with *the person who others see in you*. This point of discussion says something about the generalization of the results of this study to real life. This discussion point also underpins why no significant results were found for the self versus social focus and actual versus ideal focus of the congruity facets on brand love.

### 5.5 Further research directions.

Several interesting avenues for further research have come forward through this study. One of the possible explanations for differences between the scores of the self-congruity facets on brand love could be that cultural influences, according to the dimensions of Hofstede & Hofstede (2005), have an influence. It seems interesting to see if a country with different dimensions leads to different outcomes for self-congruity, brand love and their relationship.

Another input for research seems the insignificant relationship between ideal self-congruity and brand love and the negative marginally significant relationship between ideal social self-congruity and brand love. The question lingers why the relationship between the ideal focus of self-congruity and brand love seems to be not existing or negative. Further research should focus on certain needs or motivations for these relationships.

Finally, research that explores the way to make consumers feel that their actual image is congruent with the brands image is interesting. For example it seems interesting if images are more effective than words.

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## APPENDIX B. STIMULUS MATERIAL PRETEST 1



A. Congruity facet with the self and actual focus



B. Congruity facet with the self and ideal focus



C. Congruity facet with the social and actual focus



D. Congruity facet with the social and ideal focus



## APPENDIX C: SCALES AND ITEMS

Table 1.

*Items and translation for manipulation check.*

English	Dutch
1. This ad concerns how I see myself / how others see me.	1. Deze advertentie speelt in op hoe ik mezelf zie / hoe anderen mij zien.
2. This ad concerns how I actually see myself, as I look in the mirror / how I ideally see myself, as how I want to be.	2. Deze advertentie speelt in op hoe ik werkelijk mezelf zie, zoals ik in de spiegel kijk / hoe ik mezelf in idealen zie, zoals ik wil zijn.

Table 2.

*Items and translation for self-congruity (Source: Sirgy et al., 1997), brand love (Source: Ahuvia, 2012) and self-monitoring (Source: Lennox & Wolfe, 1984).*

English (original)	Dutch (translated)
<b>Self-congruity</b>	<b>Congruentie</b>
1. The typical person who uses this brand is very much like me.	1. De persoon die doorgaans dit merk gebruikt, lijkt erg veel op mij.
2. The typical person who uses this brand, is very much like the person I would like to become.	2. De persoon die doorgaans dit merk gebruikt, lijkt erg veel op de persoon die ik wil zijn.
3. The typical person who uses this brand is very much how others see me.	3. De persoon die doorgaans dit merk gebruikt, lijkt erg veel op de persoon die anderen in mij zien.
4. The typical person who uses this brand is very much like the person I would like to be seen by others.	4. De persoon die doorgaans dit merk gebruikt, lijkt erg veel op de persoon waarvan ik graag zou willen dat anderen die persoon in mij zien.
<b>Brand love</b>	<b>Merkliefde</b>
1. Overall, how much do you love brand Emerald?	1. In het algemeen, hoeveel houd je van het merk Emerald?
2. To what extent is brand Emerald connected to something "deep" and valuable about whom you are as a person?	2. In hoeverre is het merk Emerald verbonden met iets dieps en waardevols van wie jij bent als persoon?
3. To what extent do you feel yourself desiring to use brand Emerald?	3. In hoeverre voel jij het verlangen om het merk Emerald te gebruiken?
4. To what extent do you feel a positive emotional connection to brand Emerald?	4. In hoeverre voel jij een positieve emotionele band ten opzichte van het merk Emerald?
5. Please express the extent to which you expect that brand Emerald will be part of your life for a long to come?	5. In hoeverre verwacht je dat het merk Emerald voor langere tijd deel van je leven zal uitmaken?
6. Suppose brand Emerald was to go out of existence, to what extent would you feel upset?	6. Veronderstel dat het merk Emerald zou ophouden te bestaan, in hoeverre zou je van streek zijn?
7. What is your overall evaluation of brand Emerald?	7. Wat is je algemene beoordeling van het merk Emerald?
8. How intense are these overall feelings and evaluations you just gave above?	8. Hoe intens zijn deze gevoelens en beoordelingen die je bij de vorige vraag hebt gegeven?
<b>Self-monitoring</b>	<b>Zelf-controle</b>
1. In social situations, I have the ability to alter my behavior if I feel that something else is called for.	1. Ik ben in staat om mijn gedrag te veranderen als ik in een sociale situatie ben die daarom vraagt.
2. I have the ability to control the way I come across to people, depending on the impression I wish to give them.	2. Ik ben in staat om controle uit te oefenen op de manier waarop ik over kom op anderen, afhankelijk van de indruk die ik wens te geven.
3. When I feel that the image I am portraying isn't working, I can readily change it to something that does.	3. Wanneer ik het gevoel heb dat de indruk die ik van mezelf geef niet juist is, dan ben ik in staat dat beeld gemakkelijk veranderen naar een indruk welke wel juist is.
4. I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations.	4. Ik vind het lastig mijn gedrag af te stemmen op verschillende personen en situaties.
5. I have found that I can adjust my behavior to meet the requirements of any situation I find myself in.	5. Ik kan mijn gedrag zo afstemmen dat het voldoet aan elke situatie waarin ik terecht kom.

## APPENDIX D: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF ALL ITEMS

Construct	Item	N	M	SD	$\alpha$ (if item deleted)
<b>Self-congruity</b>	Self-congruity with actual self	266	3.27	1.595	0.798
	Self-congruity with ideal self	266	3.59	1.630	0.776
	Self-congruity with actual social self	266	3.04	1.393	0.810
	Self-congruity with ideal social self	266	3.55	1.618	0.768
<b>Total</b>		266	3.36	1.275	0.833
<b>Brand love</b>	Direct brand love	266	3.32	1.393	0.846
	Self-brand integration	266	2.67	1.410	0.825
	Passion-driven behaviors	266	2.94	1.609	0.808
	Positive emotional connection	266	2.94	1.652	0.814
	Long-term relationship	266	2.14	1.305	0.813
	Anticipated distress	266	1.62	1.128	0.841
	Attitude valence	266	4.26	1.175	0.852
	Attitude strength	266	2.91	1.550	0.864
<b>Total</b>		266	2.85	0.991	0.852
<b>Self-monitoring</b>	Ability to alter behavior in social condition	266	5.43	1.104	0.678
	Ability to control behavior	266	5.08	1.085	0.605
	Change portraying image	266	4.47	1.274	0.616
	Trouble suiting behavior	266	3.28	1.274	0.755
	Adjust behavior to requirements of situation	266	4.52	1.280	0.646
<b>Total</b>		266	4.56	0.823	0.712