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Influence of Congruency between Ideal Self and Brand Image on Sustainable Happiness

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11 **Abstract:** Building on the Sustainable Happiness Model, this study examined how congruency
12 between ideal self-image and brand image influence a sense of happiness. The findings show that
13 when ideal self-image and ideal social self-image are congruent with brand image a sense of
14 happiness can be enhanced through brand identification and positive emotions. This study
15 contributes to literature as it reveals the mechanism of how congruency between ideal self-image
16 and brand image positively affect happiness.

17 **Keywords:** sustainable happiness; ideal self; ideal social self; brand identification; positive emotion

18

1. Introduction

20 Happiness is a common pursuit of value for all human beings, and people strive for happiness
21 in a variety of ways. Some people seek happiness through their works, and others seek happiness
22 through relationships with family members or friends. Others find happiness through leisure time
23 alone. In this regard, prior studies have attempted to reveal how to increase the happiness. For
24 example, Sustainable Happiness Model [1] suggests that it is effective to express the ideal-self as one
25 of the ways to continuously raise and maintain a sense of happiness.

26 Improving happiness of people has also drawn much attention from business researchers.
27 Kotler et al. [2] argue that a company's marketing activities should move in the direction of moving
28 people's hearts and improving the quality of life. As a good example of these efforts, Nike has made
29 it possible for consumers to express their imagination beyond their limits for what they want,
30 through Michael Jordan. Therefore, building on the Sustainable Happiness Model, we expect that a
31 company's marketing efforts can positively influence consumer's sense of happiness by reflecting
32 consumers' ideal self-images through brands. Specifically, we expect that congruency between ideal
33 self-image and brand image affect brand identification, which in turn enhances a sense of happiness
34 through positive emotions. In this regard, a main objective of this study is to reveal the mechanism
35 of how the congruency of the people's ideal-self and the brand image enhances their happiness.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

37 Self-concept has been studied from a multidimensional point of view in psychology research.
38 Sirgy [3] suggests multi-dimensions of self-concept which are actual self-image, social self-image,
39 ideal self-image, and ideal social self-image. By applying the sustainable happiness model
40 postulating that expressing ideal self-image is effective way to enhance a sense of happiness, we
41 expect that congruency between ideal self-concepts (ideal self-image and ideal social self-image)
42 and brand image is likely to help increase the happiness.

As previous studies suggest, consumers tend to connect their self-images with a brand image and thus they identify themselves with the brand that has congruent image with their self-images. It is a common way for consumers to express themselves through the brands they use. For example, some wealthy consumers use luxury brands such as Channel to express their social and economic status. This is referred as a brand identification which is defined as people perceiving and defining themselves according to the attributes of the brand [4]. For instance, Kim et al. [5] find that people are more likely to feel a brand identification as the brand expresses their self-concepts. Of the multidimensional self-concepts, previous studies suggest that reflecting ideal self-concept is a stronger predictor for brand identification than actual self-image. Specifically, people can be more attractive to brands reflecting their ideal self-images than actual self-images [6, 7]. LaPrelle et al. [8] also show that people try to have a stronger relationship with a person who shows their ideal self-images than a person who shows their actual self-images. Based on the argument, we propose the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1: Congruency between ideal self and brand image will be positively associated with brand identification.

Hypothesis 2: Congruency between ideal social self and brand image will be positively associated with brand identification.

People have basic needs for belongingness to build relationships with others [9]. According to previous studies in branding, we expect that building relationship with brands, brand identification, can fulfill the innate needs of belongingness for people. Fournier [11] suggests that a relationship between a consumer and a brand is very similar to a relationship with other people. Thus, fulfilling the needs through the relationship with brands is likely to evoke positive emotions. Prior studies support this view. For example, Branscombe & Wann [10] find that a strong sense of unity with their favorite sports team can eliminate depressed emotions and alienation, which results in increasing self-worth. Based on the argument, it can be expected that the brand identification can satisfy a sense of belongingness, which results in enhancing positive emotions. Thus, we propose following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Brand identification will be positively associated with positive emotions.

Emotions are composed of various reaction tendencies [12]. A high level of positive emotions is a positive energy, a strong concentration, and a positive attitude to the task at hand, while a low level of positive emotions is negative for sadness, lethargy, bitterness, and immediate situation [13]. Also, according to the broaden-and-build theory model proposed by Fredrickson [14], positive emotions broaden new ideas and activities, and promote personal wealth, such as social support and spirited passion. The enhancement and strengthening of these psychological resources have a positive impact on physical and mental health [14, 15]. In line with this, those who experience high levels of positive emotions experience less mental and psychological difficulty or suffering [16]. Therefore, positive emotions are expected to enhance a sense of happiness by helping people feel less stress, hope, and quality of relationships. Therefore, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 4: Positive emotion will be positively associated with happiness.

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study which portrays the influence of congruency between ideal self-image and brand image on sustainable happiness
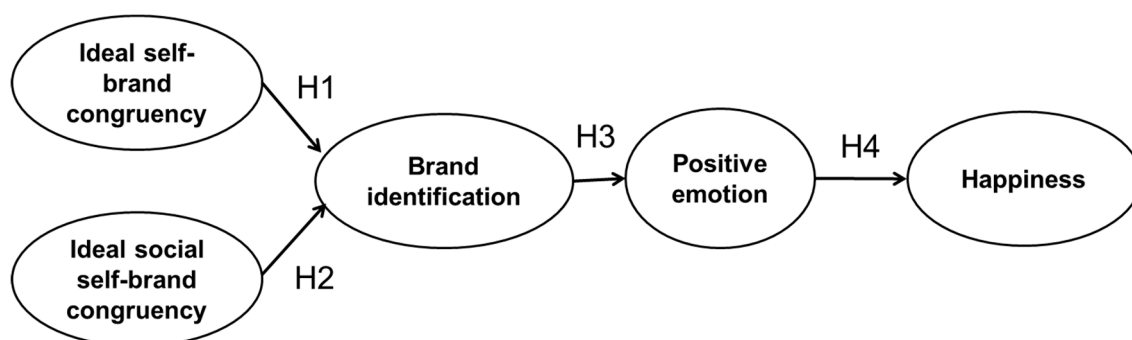
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

3. Methods

3.1. Participants and procedure

In order to select brands for our experiment, we first compiled the list of Interbrand's "Global Top 100 brands" which is one of most reliable sources for the brand ranking list. Among the candidate brands, we selected the final eight brands for an experiment. The selected brands for our study were Facebook, Coca-Cola, Google, Apple, Mercedes-Benz, Disney, Starbucks, and Nike. A survey was conducted on undergraduate students at a major university in Seoul, Korea by using the selected brands. Participants were given extra credits for their respective class as an incentive.

The participants were randomly assigned to one of the eight selected brands and asked to indicate their familiarity with the brand [17]. Samples with an average familiarity of less than 4.0 were removed. Through this process, a total of 180 usable respondents were collected. Of the respondents, 52.9 % were male and 47.1 % were female.

In the main experiment, participants were asked to describe the image of the brand, the ideal self-image and ideal social self-image. Then, they were asked to indicate the degrees of congruency between the brand image and their ideal self-image and between the brand image and their ideal social self-image, respectively. After this, we measured brand identification, positive emotion, and happiness.

3.2. Measures

The measurement items for this study were adapted from previous studies and all of the constructs were measured using seven-point Likert scales anchored by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree."

The measurement items used to measure the ideal self-brand image congruency are, "The image of brand expresses the ideal image of myself," "The image of this brand is consistent with how I would like to be," "The image of this brand is mirror image of the person I would like to be," "The image of this brand is consistent with the values I consider ideal." [18, 19] The measurement items used to measure the ideal social self- brand image congruency are, "The image of this brand is consistent with how I would like to present myself to others," "The image of this brand is mirror image of the person I would like to present myself to others," "The image of this brand expresses myself that others think to be ideal," "The image of this brand is consistent with the values that others consider ideal." The Cronbach's Alpha value of the constructs were .933 and .913 respectively.

The measurement items of brand identification are "When someone praises this brand it feels like a personal compliment," "I am very interested in what others think about this brand," "I feel good when I see a positive report in the media about this brand," "If the media evaluates this brand badly, I am in a bad mood." [20] The Cronbach's Alpha value of the construct was .881.

The measurement items of positive emotions are "When I use this brand I feel fulfilled/pleased/joyful/excited/amazed." [21] The Cronbach's Alpha value of construct was .914.

130   The measurement items of happiness are "In most ways my life is close to my ideal," "The
131 conditions of my life are excellent," "If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing," "In
132 general, I consider myself very happy," "Compared to most of my peers, I consider myself more
133 happy." [22, 23] The Cronbach's Alpha value of the construct was .899.

134 **4. Results**

135   To test the reliability of the major constructs, we examined Cronbach's Alpha values of them.
136 All Cronbach's Alpha values are greater than .70, indicating that the construct measures embody
137 internal consistency. To test the validity of the constructs used in this study, especially in terms of
138 convergent and discriminant validity, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) by using
139 AMOS program. The model fits (CMIN/DF=2.111, CFI=0.929, IFI=0.930, TLI=0.917, NFI=0.879, and
140 RMSEA=0.081) generally satisfy the required level. As to convergent validity, all the factor loadings
141 of measurement items for the constructs turned out to be significant ($t \geq 1.96$). In addition, the values
142 of composite reliability for each construct are greater than 0.7, which means that the construct
143 reliability is sufficient. Table 1 shows the results of CFA.
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Table 1. Result of confirmatory factor analysis.

Constructs		Cronbach's α	CFA Estimate (t-value)	Composite reliability	AVE
Ideal self Brand congruency	1		.874		
	2	.933	.906 (17.321)	.867	.620
	3		.903 (17.226)		
	4		.848 (15.235)		
Ideal social self Brand congruency	1		.890		
	2	.913	.916 (18.028)	.859	.606
	3		.866 (16.184)		
	4		.743 (12.268)		
Brand Identification	1		.736		
	2	.881	.749 (9.989)	.791	.489
	3		.936 (12.350)		
	4		.826 (11.092)		
Positive Emotion	1		.754		
	2		.794 (11.096)		
	3	.914	.916 (13.077)	.843	.576
	45		.934 (13.314)		
Happiness	1	.899	.752	.845	.522

2	.814 (11.071)
3	.742 (9.985)
4	.863 (11.778)
5	.848 (11.568)

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148   As to discriminant validity, as shown in Table 2, all the values of Average Variance Extracted
149   (AVE) for each construct exceed the squared correlations between all pairs of constructs [24].
150   Therefore, we also confirmed that the degree of discriminant validity for all constructs is sufficient.
151   In summary, our results of analysis indicated that our measurement items of the constructs are
152   reliable and valid to test our hypothesized model. Therefore, we proceeded to the main analysis
153   with confidence.
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156   **Table 2.** Correlation, square of correlation between variables, and AVE.

	1	2	3	4	5
Ideal self Brand congruency	.620	.226	.215	.142	.010
Ideal social self Brand congruency	.475**	.606	.137	.106	.001
Brand Identification	.464**	.371**	.489	.334	.024
Positive Emotion	.377**	.327**	.578**	.576	.038
Happiness	.104	.033	.156*	.197**	.522

157   Diagonal: AVE, below diagonal: correlation between variables, above diagonal: square of
158   correlation between variables
159   * $p< .05$, ** $p< .01$
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161   We proceeded to test hypotheses after confirming reliability and validity of our data. Structural
162   equation modeling analysis was conducted to test our hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 and 2 stated that the
163   congruency between ideal self and brand image and congruency between ideal social self and brand
164   image have positive effects on brand identification. Path coefficients for the effect of ideal self-brand
165   image congruency and ideal social self-brand image congruency on brand identification are positive
166   and significant (β=.416, $p<.01$; β=.217, $p<.01$), which supports hypothesis 1 and 2. Also the path
167   coefficient for the effect of brand identification on positive emotion is positive and significant
168   (β=.572, $p<.01$), which supports hypothesis 3. Lastly, analysis showed that positive emotion has a
169   significantly positive effect on happiness (β=.241, $p<.01$), in support of hypothesis 4. Table 3 shows
170   the summary of the hypotheses test results.
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Table 3. Summary of the hypotheses test results.

Hypothesis (path)	Path coefficient	t-value	Accept or not[a]
H1: Ideal self-brand congruency → Brand identification	.416	4.944***	Accept
H2: Ideal social-self brand congruency → Brand identification	.217	2.594***	Accept
H3: Brand identification → Positive emotion	.572	7.188***	Accept
H4: Positive emotion → Happiness	.241	2.941***	Accept

173   *** Significant at 5% level of significance.

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175   **5. Discussion**

176   In this study, we examined how congruency between ideal self-concepts (ideal self-image and
177   ideal social self-image) and brand image positively influences happiness by applying sustainable
178   happiness model. As expected, we find that when ideal self-image and ideal social self-image are
179   congruent with brand image a sense of happiness can be enhanced through brand identification and
180   positive emotions. The findings of this study can provide useful and noble insights that the
181   Sustainable Happiness Model can be applied to the brand research. That is, people can feel
182   enhanced happiness through a brand that is congruent with their ideal self-image and ideal social
183   self-image. We believe that this study can contribute to the literature by revealing the mechanism of
184   how congruency between ideal self-image and brand image positively affect happiness.

185   As for a company, our findings can provide important implications. A company' marketing
186   efforts have been criticized for unnecessary and provocative advertising and pushing consumers to
187   spend more money. In this regard, our findings suggest new directions for marketing strategy of a
188   company. A company can practice effective marketing strategy and positively influence consumers'
189   happiness at the same time by reflecting consumers' ideal self-image in the process of developing
190   brand image.

191   Although this study made contributions, it has some limitations that further research should
192   address. First, since we apply the Sustainable Happiness Model which argues the role of presenting
193   ideal self on enhancing happiness, we focus on the positive effect of ideal self-brand congruency on
194   happiness. However, according to self-discrepancy theory, the gap between actual self and ideal self
195   can generate negative feeling. If the ideal self is excessively presented, there is a possibility that the
196   gap between the actual self and the ideal self becomes large, which leads to a negative result. This
197   may decrease a sense of happiness. Thus, it would be interesting to simultaneously examine the
198   positive and negative effect of presenting ideal self on happiness in further study. In addition, since
199   respondents who participate in our study are all Asians, it would be worthwhile if further studies
200   examine cultural difference on the effect of presenting ideal self on happiness for deeper
201   understanding.

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207   **Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, Jeongsoo Han and Mina Jun; Methodology, Jeongsoo Han,
208   Mina Jun; Software, Miyea Kim; Formal Analysis, Jeongsoo Han and Miyea Kim; Investigation, Mina Jun
209   and Miyea Kim; Resources, Mina Jun and Sookyoung Key; Data Curation, Mina Jun and Sookyoung Key;
210   Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Jeongsoo Han; Visualization, Miyea Kim and Sookyoung Key;
211   Supervision, Mina Jun; Project Administration, Jeongsoo Han. All authors finalized the paper.

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