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## **A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH TO ANALYZING THE EFFECT OF SELF CONGRUITY ON SHOPPER'S RETAIL STORE BEHAVIOR**

Hafedh Ibrahim\*, Faouzi Najjar\*\*

### **Abstract**

Self congruity is an important concept since it plays a critical role in influencing consumer behavior. Taking the case of retail stores, we conduct a study to determine its effect on consumer satisfaction, overall attitudes, and purchase intentions. A measurement scale was developed to measure the self congruity. The study results indicate that actual self image congruity, ideal self image congruity, social self image congruity and ideal social self image congruity, are related to consumer behavior. Whereas their influence is varied. The paper, also, discusses the implications for store managers.

**Key words:** retail store, actual self image congruity, ideal self image congruity, social self image congruity, ideal social self image congruity, consumer satisfaction, overall attitudes, purchase intentions, measurement scale.

### **Introduction**

Over five decades ago marketing scholars began writing about relationships of stores, brands, and products as symbols and the importance of their interaction with consumer's perceptions and personalities (Gardner & Levy, 1955; Martineau, 1958). Levy (1959) suggested that consumers are not functionally oriented and that their behavior is significantly affected by the symbols which identify goods in the market place. Consumers do not consume products for their material utilities but consume the symbolic meaning of those products as portrayed in their images (Elliot, 1997).

Brands have personalities or images, and consumers seek those brands that match their self-image or the image they would like to project to others (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997; Solomon, 1996) and brand personality traits provide symbolic meaning or emotional value that can contribute to consumer's brand preference and can be more enduring than functional attributes (Rajagopal, 2005). To differentiate their brands, marketers focus on incorporating emotional values into their brand, portraying this through the metaphor of brand personality (McEnally & De Chernatony, 1999) since brands competing in the same category have become functionally more similar (De Chernatony & Mc Donald, 1997) due to advances in technology which make difficult to sustain a functional advantage (Lambin, 1997).

As a basic concept in consumer research, congruity of self-concept and brand personality offers a significant perspective to the understanding of consumer decision making. Consumers may decide not to buy a product or not to shop at a particular store if they feel that these actions are not consistent with their own perceptions of themselves (Britt, 1960). They will always need symbols to help them sort out the complexities of daily life as they use products to express their social identities (Eriksen, 1996). Purchase and consumption are good vehicles for self-expression, so consumers often buy products or brands that are perceived to be similar to their own self-concept (Graeff, 1996). This view has been reinforced by a number of researchers (for instance, Feinberg et al., 1992; Schwer & Daneschvary, 1995). This attention to the symbolic meaning of brands has been motivated in part by post-modern scholars who have long criticized traditional experimental re-

searchers for conceptualizing products too narrowly as bundles of functional attributes, and failing to consider product symbolism (Belk, 1988; Solomon, 1983).

Because symbolism is such an important tool in service, self-concept can be expected to play a central role in influencing consumer behavior. However, there has been relatively little empirical work in the service context and especially in retailing.

In the retail context we talk about the "manufacture of the experience" (Filser, 2002). Through his experiences, the consumers do not look only for the functional and cognitive values, but also his feelings, spirituality and sacred values (Hirshman & Holbrook, 1982). In many respects, we can say that the congruity might be closer to services than inanimate products.

The purpose of this study is to test, in retail context, the congruity theory which postulates that people evaluate products using the same dimensions by which they describe themselves (Sirgy, 1982). Our aim is to realize to what extent the congruity between brand personality and self-concept influences consumer behavior.

Our approach differs from most previous research which has been product oriented and has looked at pre-purchase evaluation. In fact most research dealing with the self-congruity has been confined to the pre-purchase types of consumer behavior. Moreover, self concept is usually thought of in two ways, an ideal self concept (How one would like to be) and a real self concept (How one really is). Whereas in the current study we take into account of two levels of public self such as the social self-concept (How one feels others see him) as well as the ideal social self concept (How one would like others to see him).

The remainder of this paper is organized in four sections. We will first look at the relevant concepts like brand personality, self concept, and self-congruity, then we present our hypotheses and the research methodology. Finally, the implications of the findings, the limitations and the future research are discussed.

## **1. Literature Review and Hypotheses**

### ***1.1. Brand Personality***

The attribution of human personality traits to products and services leads to the construct of brand personality (Plummer, 1985). A brand can be characterized by endowing the brand with personality traits and dimensions since consumers could often associate the brands with celebrity characters or famous historical figures (Mc Craken, 1989).

Aaker (1997) defines brands personality as "The set of human characteristics associated with a brand". It is a component of brand image (Aaker, 1996; Biel, 1992; Keller, 1993) and its an important topic of study since it has been applied to maintain and build brands (Plummer, 1985), to differentiate brands (Crask & Henry, 1990; Doyle, 1989; Meenaghan, 1985), to identify meaning to consumers (Sirgy, 1982; Belk, 1988) and to develop advertising (Azevedo & Farhangmehr, 2005; Rajagopal, 2005). Brand personality cannot be easily imitated and the uniqueness of projects gives the holding company an economic advantage over its competitors (Carpenter, 2000; Kim, 2001). Some studies demonstrated that the perceived personality of a brand provides consumers with the means to express specific dimensions of the self (Kleine et al., 1995; Malhotra, 1988). This will reinforce the consumer self-concept and it is consistent with the symbolic meaning. Consumers buy products not for what they can do, but also for what they mean (Levy, 1959). People exploit brand to construct their own self-identity (Fournier, 1998). In the retail context Martineau (1958) was one of the first to propose that a consumer exhibits a preference for a store that has a personality consistent with the consumer's image of himself.

### ***1.2. Self-Concept***

The self-concept is a universe of potential different identities that may guide behavior (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). Markus et al. (1985) have considered self-concept as a set of self-schemata, which

are organized cognitive structures in certain domain of the self. The structures are activated depending on the situation.

Based on Sirgy's work (1982) and Jamal & Goode's work (2001) we find a multiple component perspective of self. According to the authors actual-self is the perception of oneself, as one believes he actually is. Ideal-self may be defined as the perception of oneself as one would like to be. Social-self is the perception of oneself as one believes others actually perceive him to be, and ideal-social-self refers to the perception of one self as he would like others to perceive him.

Levy (1981) suggested that most products say something about the social world of those who consume them. So, consumers search for products which have images compatibles with their perceptions of self. Sheth et al. (1991) stated that buy versus no-buy decisions are influenced by social value in that consumers perceive various product classes as either congruent or incongruent with the norms of the reference groups to which they belong or aspire. This result was described as "self image congruity" (Sirgy et al., 1997).

### *1.3. Self Image Congruity And Consumer Behavior*

According to Sirgy et al. (2000), since there are different self-concept dimensions (actual, ideal, social, and ideal social) it follows that we should have four corresponding types of self image congruities: actual self image congruity (the degree of match between a shopper's actual self image and a store personality), ideal self image congruity (the degree of match between a shopper's ideal self image and a store personality), social self image congruity (the fit between how shoppers believe they are seen by others in relation to store personality) and ideal social self image congruity (the fit between how shoppers would like to be seen by others in relation to retail store personality).

Self image congruity affects consumer's purchase motivation because people have a motive to behave consistently with their self perceptions (Epstein, 1980). That is, they prefer products with personalities that match their own self image. To do otherwise would cause dissonance, resulting in a state of psychological discomfort that threaten to invalidate the person's beliefs about him or herself (Sirgy, 1985). Theoretically speaking, the effect of self-image congruity on consumer behavior has been explained by the self-image congruity theory developed by Sirgy (1982). Self image congruity is guided by self concept motives such as the need for self esteem and self consistency (Malhotra, 1988). Much of research conducted in terms of consumer goods shows that the greater the match between the brand user image with the consumer's self image, the more likely that consumers implicitly infer that the use of the brand should meet their need for self esteem.

Table 1 summarizes the findings of the most recent studies conducted on self image congruity.

Table 1

The effect of self image congruity on customer behavior

Authors	Findings
Azevedo & Farhangmehr, 2005	A significant positive correlation does exist between self concept and brand personality congruity and advertising response.
Kleijnen et al., 2005	Consumers with low image congruity are influenced more by their surroundings than consumers with high image congruity and image congruity has a significant impact on consumer attitudes and the adoption decision.
Jamal & Goode, 2001	Self-image congruity was a very strong predictor of consumer's brand preferences and a good predictor of consumer satisfaction. And consumers with higher levels of self-image congruity were more likely to prefer the brand and enjoy higher levels of satisfaction with the brand as compared to those with lower levels of self image congruity.
Amstrong, 2001	A difference in the self-images, product-images and level of image congruity experienced, does exist between males and females.

Table 1 (continued)

Authors	Findings
Quester et al., 2000	Confirm the role of self-congruity in consumer's choice and show that culture influences the use of actual versus ideal self-image in the evaluation of product.
Heath and Scott, 1998	Find that when different brands of motor vehicles were physically similar, owners perceived no difference between their own self-concept and the self concept they attributed to owners of competing product brands.
Hong & Zinkhan, 1995	Brand memory is not mediated by the extent to which advertising expressions are congruent with viewer's self-concept. However brand preference and purchase intention were shown to be influenced by the self-congruity of an ad.

Several previous researches provide evidence about the positive effect of self image congruity in the tangible product context (only for the actual and the ideal self image congruity) on overall satisfaction (Azevedo & Farhangmehr, 2005; Blackston, 1992; Jamal & Goode, 2001), overall attitude (Ericksen & Sirgy, 1992; Kleijnen, 2005), and purchase intentions (Ericksen, 1996; Mehta, 1999; Sirgy, 1985).

Backed up by literature, in our study we want to confirm the validity of the relationship between self-image congruity and consumer behavior in retail context. We look into the extent to which self image congruity can lead to customer satisfaction, attitudes and purchase intention.

*H1: There is a positive relationship between the four types of self image congruities and shoppers' satisfaction.*

*H2: There is a positive relationship between the four types of self image congruities and attitudes towards the retail store.*

*H3: There is a positive relationship between the four types of self image congruities and purchase intentions in the retail context.*

Past studies also suggest that customers with different levels of self image congruities are likely to exhibit difference in the way they behave (Kleijnen et al., 2005). In fact, Mehta (1999) find that subjects with high self image congruity were more interested in purchasing the brand than those with low self image congruity. Graeff (1996) reported that higher customers congruence had more favourable attitudes towards advertising than those with lower self image congruity, as well as in their work, Jamal & Goode (2001) find that individuals with different levels of self image congruity exhibit different behavior in terms of their brand preference and their satisfaction with the brand.

Therefore the fourth hypothesis is as follows:

*H4: Shoppers with different levels of self image congruities will exhibit different behaviors in terms of their satisfaction, attitudes and purchase intentions.*

## 2. Research Methodology

### 2.1. Data collection and respondent's profile

A sample of patrons of discount retail stores was drawn in 2006 in Tunis. Respondents were asked to complete a self administered questionnaire. The survey began with an introductory statement that asked respondents to administer their own responses, assured them of confidentiality, and so forth.

In total 400 people were approached of which around 10% were not willing to participate or did not fit the selection criteria. After screening the questionnaire for incompleteness and abnormalities (Tabachnik & Fidell, 1996), a usable sample of 363 respondents was obtained. The sample was 63.6% female, 36.4% male. In terms of age group 64% were between 18 and 26 years, 36% were 37 above. The survey showed that 65% of subjects visited the target store more than four times in the two last months.

## 2.2. Measurement of self-image congruity

In the present study, we want to develop a scale for measuring the four levels of self image congruity for the retail store. This scale would be valid to the person context and to the store one. Thus, the respondent would agree that the same attributes could be used to define the retail store and to define himself. So, firstly the subject was presented with a list of 11 image dimensions (those items were obtained after the stay of pre-testing of the instrument subjectively by customers and by experts in the field), and asked to indicate the extent to which the image dimensions describe the retail store. Then, the respondent indicates his agreement or disagreement to the four following statements, (1) this store is consistent with how I really see myself, (2) this store is consistent with how I would like to be, (3) this store is consistent with how I feel others see me, and (4) this store is consistent with how I would like others to see me.

Now, we present the different steps of the measurement scale development.

### **STEP 1: Item Pool**

#### *STAGE 1: Collection from literature*

We have pooled 73 items which describe brand personality and store personality and had been used in 5 studies in marketing (Aaker, 1997; D'Astous et al., 2002; Ferrandi et al., 1999; Ferrandi & Valette-Florence, 2002; and Koebel & Ladwein, 1999).

#### *STAGE 2: Qualitative research*

A pilot survey contains 15 students enrolled in sections of an upper-level marketing course (66% male, 44% female) was administered to generate new items in the retail context. We can consider this sample of students as a public of experts (Koebel & Ladwein, 1999). We divide the subjects into 3 equivalent groups. Respondents were asked to describe the perceived personality of a retail store. Once it was established that the subjects understood the instructions given and there were no questions, they were given 20-30 minutes to finish the task. Finally, we can collect 39 new traits. In total, we have obtained 112 items which describe store personality.

### **STEP 2: Item selection**

#### *STAGE1: Relevancy of items to the retail store*

In order to further reduce the number of items to a more manageable number, we have submitted those 112 items to 59 shoppers (65% female, 35% male). Each adjective was rated on a 5-point scale.

Consumers have rated the relevancy of each item to the retail store (1= not at all descriptive, 5= extremely descriptive) we keep only the items that the respondents have rated a score  $\geq 4$  (Ambroise et al., 2003).

Eventually, we agreed to keep 35 items; i.e. 32% of the 112 items.

#### *STAGE 2: Item validity and test of the desirability effect*

Our aim in this step is to test the validity of the common application of items in both contexts, i.e. retail context and person context. We accomplished this by a pilot survey, 30 students (40% male, 60% female) were solicited to participate for research purposes. Each subject was interviewed lonely, he (she) judged the items based on two criteria on a 5-point scale.

- ◆ First criterion: The subject needed to feel comfortable using the adjectives in person context and in retail store context. If the item obtains a score  $\geq 4$ , we continue the selection and we go by to the second criterion.
- ◆ Second criterion: We test if the items keep the same meaning in both contexts.

Then, we selected the items which were chosen by 70% of the sample. This process eliminated 14 items, leaving 21 items.

Finally, two experts (an academician and a practitioner) were asked to rate each item as being clearly representative or not representative of the concept as well as the social desirability was tested, and we have eventually 11 items.

***STEP 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis***

Data were collected from 363 questionnaires to obtain estimates of reliability and validity and to purify the measure by successively eliminating all the poorly affected items (communality lower than .5). In each analysis, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to assess the appropriateness of the correlation matrices of factor analysis. After having ascertained the suitability of the correlation matrices to factor analysis, a scree test of eigenvalues was used to select the number of components.

Table 2 shows the solution of the principal components for the four scales and it reveals that all items are loaded on the first factor. Cronbach's alpha for the items exceeds the minimum requirement, thereby demonstrating that all the four scale are internally consistent and have acceptable reliability values. Then, the five-item scales was examined using structural equations methodology.

Table 2

Exploratory factor analysis for the four scales

	Actual self image congruity	Ideal self image congruity	Social self image congruity	Ideal social self image congruity
	communality	communality	communality	communality
Fashionable	.532	.413	.443	.479
Modern	.585	.664	.686	.543
Organized	.568	.474	.593	.601
Creative	.549	.495	.506	.403
Interesting	.620	.595	.567	.667
Eigen value	2.854	2.640	2.797	2.693
% variance	57.089	52.803	55.901	53.865
Cronbach's Alpha	.811	.711	.800	.782

***STEP 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis***

As suggested by Anderson & Gerbing (1988), the measurement model was first tested separately to establish a better assessment of construct validity. This model employs the five items retained at the end of the exploratory phase as reflective indicators of the four latent constructs. The chi-square statistics were not significant for each model indicating a good fit. Similarly, other standard fit indices, such as the GFI (>.98), AGFI (>.95), and the RMSEA (<.078), all strongly support the measurement model (Table 3).

Table 3

Models fit index and reliabilities

	Actual self image congruity	Ideal self image congruity	Social self image congruity	Ideal social self image congruity
RMR	.015	.012	.027	.024
GFI	.988	.990	.983	.987
AGFI	.965	.969	.950	.961
RMSEA	.053	.049	.078	.065
Chi2/df	2.03	1.85	3.20	2.52
CFI	.99	.99	.97	.98
Joreskog's Rhô	.929	.937	.900	.905

**\*Convergent validity:** was examined by reviewing the t test for the factor loading. Hatcher (1994) states "if all factor loading for the indicators measuring the same construct are statistically significant (greater than twice their standard errors) this viewed as evidence supporting the convergent validity of those indicators". In the present model testing all t tests were significant ( $p < .001$ ) providing evidence to support the convergent validity of the indicators.

**\*Face validity:** According to Kaplan and Sacuzzo (1993), face validity is the mere appearance that a measure is valid. We look at the measure and see whether, on its face, it seems a good reflection of the construct.

As our measure is identified from the literature and examined by experts in the field, the face validity of the instrument was ensured.

**\*Content validity:** is the degree to which the instrument provides an adequate representation of the conceptual domain that it is designed to cover. The content validity is a type of validity for which the evidence is subjective and logical rather than statistical (Kaplan & Sacuzzo, 1993).

The present instrument has been developed based on conceptual, practitioner and empirical literature. Thus, the content validity was ensured through a thorough review by experts in the field.

**\*Discriminant validity:** was examined by testing a confirmatory factor analysis model, which included the four constructs, actual self image congruity, ideal self image congruity, social self image congruity, and ideal social self image congruity. The procedure advocated by Joreskog (1971) was used. First, this base model, where all paths between the latent constructs were freely estimated, was tested using AMOS. Then, each of the correlation parameters ( $\phi_{ij}$ ) was constrained to 1.0 separately, and the corresponding models were estimated. The chi-square differences between each constrained model and the base model were all significant at 0.001, thus demonstrating discriminant validity.

**\*Nomological validity:** Evidence of nomological validity is provided by a construct's possession of distinct antecedents, causes, consequential effects, or modifying conditions, and quantitative differences in the degree to which a construct is related to antecedents or consequences or varies across conditions in exhibiting consequential effects (Iacobucci et al., 1995). The self image congruity theory provided the framework through which we developed tests of the nomological validity of the scale. The results of the present paper support the self image congruity theory and offer first empirical results for the nomological validity of the proposed scale.

### 2.3. Measurement of the other concepts of consumer behavior

- ◆ *The overall consumer satisfaction:* has frequently been used by researchers to determine customer satisfaction levels. In this study respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction on two five point numeric scale. The labels were: worse than my expectations/better than my expectations, and completely dissatisfied/completely satisfied (Spreng & Mackoy, 1996). Since there were no pre-determined domains among the items measuring overall satisfaction, a factor analysis was conducted on the two individual items. The reliability of this scale was excellent (Cronbach's alpha = .8973).
- ◆ *The overall attitude:* was measured using four items five point numeric scale following Dabholkar & Bagozzi (2002). The items being good/bad, favorable/unfavorable, pleasant/unpleasant, and harmful/beneficial. The reliability was excellent (Cronbach's alpha = .7943).
- ◆ *The purchase intentions:* were measured by four items five point Likert type scales. The items being: (1) I go more often to store X in the next few weeks, (2) I consider store X as my first choice, (3) I go more often to store X in the next few weeks, and (4) In the near future I surely attend store X again (Zeithaml et al., 1996). The reliability was excellent (Cronbach's alpha = .8280).



### 3. Data analysis

In order to investigate the relationship between the different levels of self image congruity and consumer behavior a series of regression analyses was conducted.

#### *3.1. The relationship between actual self image congruity and consumer behavior*

Table 4

Summary of the linear regression predicting attitudes, purchase intentions and satisfaction

Actual self image congruity	Model 1: Attitudes	Model 2: Purchase Intentions	Model 3: Satisfaction
Multiple R	.189	.159	.340
R square	.036	.025	.115
Adjusted R square	.033	.023	.113
F	13.377	9.386	47.074
$\beta$	.189	.159	.340
t	3.658	3.064	6.861
Sig.	.000	.002	.000

As can be seen from Table 4 in the case of all OLS regression analyses, the actual self image congruity is statistically significant in estimating the attitude towards the retail store, the purchase intention and the customer satisfaction ( $p < .05$ ). The multiple R coefficient indicates that the correlation between the actual self image congruity and the three constructs is moderate (all multiple R values  $> 0.159$ ). According to the R square statistic, 11.5% of the total variance for the estimation of customer satisfaction is explained by the third model. Similarly, 3.6% and 2.5% of the total variance are explained by the first and the second regression models, which estimate the overall attitude and the purchase intention quality respectively. It seems from these results that the actual self image congruity may be a better indicator of customer satisfaction than the overall attitudes and the purchase intention.

#### *3.2. The relationship between ideal self image congruity and consumer behavior*

Table 5

Summary of the linear regression predicting attitudes, purchase intentions and satisfaction

Ideal self image congruity	Model 1: Attitudes	Model 2: Purchase Intentions	Model 3: Satisfaction
Multiple R	.172	.220	.412
R square	.029	.048	.170
Adjusted R square	.027	.046	.168
F	10.969	18.360	73.929
$\beta$	.172	.220	.412
t	3.312	4.285	8.598
Sig.	.001	.000	.000

Linear regression measurements indicate that the ideal self image congruity has a positive relationship with the overall attitude, the customer satisfaction, and the purchase intentions. The multiple R coefficient indicates that the correlation between the ideal self image congruity and the three constructs is moderate (all multiple R values  $> .172$ ). According to the R square statistic, 17% of the total variance for the estimation of customer satisfaction is explained by the third model. Similarly, 4.8% and 2.9% of the total variance is explained by the first and the second regression mod-

els, that estimate the overall attitude and the purchase intentions respectively. From these results, it seems that ideal self image congruity may be a better indicator of customer satisfaction than the overall attitude and the purchase intentions.

### 3.3. The relationship between social self image congruity and customer behavior

Table 6

Summary of the linear regression predicting attitudes, purchase intentions and satisfaction

Social self image congruity	Model 1: Attitudes	Model 2: Purchase Intentions	Model 3: Satisfaction
Multiple R	.148	.216	.392
R square	.022	.047	.153
Adjusted R square	.019	.044	.151
F	8.126	17.636	65.355
$\beta$	.148	.216	.392
t	2.851	4.200	8.084
Sig.	.005	.000	.000

Table 6 shows that the social self image congruity has a positive effect on shoppers' behavior. In fact, the multiple R coefficient indicates that the correlation between the social self image congruity and all the constructs is moderate (all multiple R values  $>.148$ ). 15.3% of the total variance for the estimation of customer satisfaction is explained by the third model. Similarly, 4.7% and 2.2% of the total variance is explained by the second and the first regression models, which estimate the overall attitude and the purchase intentions respectively. In terms of the importance of the independent variables in contributing to the estimation of the dependent variables, it can be argued that the social self image congruity makes the largest contribution in the third model of customer satisfaction ( $\beta=.392$ ) compared to the case of the first and the second models.

### 3.4. The relationship between ideal social self image congruity and customer behavior

Table 7

Summary of the linear regression predicting attitudes, purchase intentions and satisfaction

Ideal Social self image congruity	Model 1: Attitudes	Model 2: Purchase Intentions	Model 3: Satisfaction
Multiple R	.152	.217	.378
R square	.023	.047	.143
Adjusted R square	.020	.044	.140
F	8.519	17.833	60.088
$\beta$	.152	.217	.378
t	2.919	4.223	7.752
Sig.	.004	.000	.000

As can be seen from Table 7, the three OLS regression analyses indicate that the ideal social self image congruity is statistically significant in estimating the attitude towards the retail store ( $p<.004$ ), the purchase intention ( $p<.000$ ), and the customer satisfaction ( $p<.000$ ). The correlation between the ideal social self image congruity and the three constructs is moderate. The results show that the ideal social self image congruity may be a better indicator of customer satisfaction.

**Conclusion**

These findings allow us to accept H1, H2 and H3 which dealt with the positive relationship between the different levels of self image congruities and the shoppers' satisfaction, the overall attitudes towards the retail store, and the purchase intentions, respectively.

**Test of the hypothesis H4: "The shoppers with different levels of self image congruities will exhibit different behaviors in terms of satisfaction, attitudes and purchase intentions".**

The K-Means Cluster Analysis was used to assign cases into two groups based on the levels of self image congruities. The analysis procedure began with the construction of initial cluster centers. Then, the procedure (1) assigns cases to clusters based on distances from the cluster centers, and (2) updates the locations of cluster centers based on the mean values of cases in each cluster. The steps are repeated until any reassignment of cases would make the clusters more internally variable or externally similar.

After dividing the data sets into two portions, we obtain people with similar levels of self image congruity in each group. Then, the hypothesis can be tested using the independent samples *t* test methodology (see Table 8).

Table 8

Comparison of two groups with different levels of self image congruity

		Actual self image congruity		Ideal self image congruity		Social self image congruity		Ideal social self image congruity	
		n <sub>Group 1</sub> = 174	n <sub>Group 2</sub> = 189	n <sub>Group 1</sub> = 262	n <sub>Group 2</sub> = 101	n <sub>Group 1</sub> = 237	n <sub>Group 2</sub> = 126	n <sub>Group 1</sub> = 198	n <sub>Group 2</sub> = 165
Satisfaction	t	5.298		6.338		6.302		6.468	
	Sig.	.000		.000		.000		.000	
Attitudes	t	2.571		3.682		3.766		2.588	
	Sig.	.011		.000		.000		.010	
Purchase Intentions	t	2.901		4.227		3.296		3.506	
	Sig.	.004		.000		.001		.001	

The results provide evidence for the hypothesis that individuals with different levels of self image congruities will exhibit different behaviors in terms of their satisfaction, attitudes and purchase intentions; hence the fourth hypothesis was accepted.

**4. Discussion, Implications and Limitations**

**4.1. Discussion**

The general purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of different types of self-image congruities on consumer behavior. Consistent with previous findings (Blackston, 1992; Ericksen, 1996; Ericksen & Sirgy, 1992; Hogg et al., 2000; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Johar & Sirgy, 1991; Martin & Bellizzi, 1982; Shank & Langmayer, 1994) self-image congruity seems to have a substantial effect on consumer overall attitudes, customer satisfaction, and customer purchase intentions. Consumers seek to protect their identities. They feel uncomfortable if they visit a store which does not reflect their perceptions of themselves. This tendency to drive people to act in ways consistent with their identities is called in psychology and marketing literature "the self-consistence motive" (Sirgy et al., 1992).

The present study suggests that the self-image congruity influences more the shoppers' satisfaction than the overall attitudes and the purchase intentions. Each level of self-image congruity has a

variable influence on customer behavior. These results support the findings of Malhotra (1988). In fact, the effect of the different levels of self concept on consumer behavior is moderate.

Ross (1971) and Sirgy (1980) indicate that the product preference is more affected by the ideal self than the actual self. The results of Dolich (1969) show that actual and ideal self concepts have the same level of congruity with the product image. Graeff (1996) proves that conspicuous products are more influenced by the congruity between product image and ideal self image than the congruity between brand image and actual self image. Whereas if the products are consumed in private we obtain the same effect. Munson (1974) suggests that the reaction of the consumer with conspicuous products is largely moderated by his personality. Quester et al. (2000) explain this variation in results by the nature of products. So, if we are in face with a symbolic product, ideal self image will dominate. In contrast, if the product is tangible, consumers motivate their actual self image.

Despite the findings of some past researches (for instance: Maheshwari, 1974; Sirgy, 1980), the empirical results of our study suggest that customers seek the social self image congruity. These results provide support for a significant relationship between social self image congruity and retail patronage. Consumer prefers to visit a store which has an image that matches his social self image. We think that is a logical result since stores represent spaces in which many social relationships could be developed between consumers and salespersons (Reynolds & Arnold, 2000) and between the consumers. Peoples are motivated to maintain an image others have of them. They are preoccupied with the impression of the others towards them.

According to Solomon (1983) the consumption contributes to the society's structure, the self and the behavior. Customer thinks that product allows him to reach the performance of the social role. The effect of ideal social self image congruity on consumer behavior was confirmed in the context of consumer goods (Ericksen & Sigy, 1992). The ideal social self-image affects customer behavior through the "social approval motive" (Sirgy et al., 1992). Sirgy et al. (2000) assert that the hypothesis that the predictiveness of public versus private self congruity constructs is a function of product conspicuous, remains valid in retail context. A store is conspicuous when shoppers accept to be seen in which and judged by their friends, relatives or neighbors, etc.

Taken as a whole, our research corroborates the notion that consumers might prefer a brand on the basis of its symbolic properties (Leigh & Gabel, 1992; Mick, 1986). Besides, our findings confirm that customers might prefer stores that have personalities compatible with their perception of self and suggest that shoppers with different levels of self image congruities exhibit difference in the way they behave.

#### ***4.2. Managerial implications and recommendations***

The current study provides several important insights in managing retail stores. Managers can use information about the self-image of customers to improve their marketing strategies. For instance, this information might enable them to gain real differential advantage for their brands (Zandl & Leonard, 1992). Marketers benefit from understanding their consumers' priorities, from understanding what is important to consumers (Slywotzky & Morrison, 1997).

The idea of congruity measurement could be used to create a favorable service environment; consequently, positive self image enhancement would lead to purchase. In fact, researches suggest that image oriented benefits of a product or service may lead to impulsive buying (Puri, 1996).

The findings may serve segmentation purposes and targeting. For example, marketers can use the variables of high self image congruity versus low self image congruity for segmentation purposes. Hence consumers with higher self image congruence will constitute prime targets for sales promotion.

In today's highly competitive business environment, the way a brand is positioned in terms of brand images is extremely important (Park et al., 1986). So, retailers can use advertising to position their stores to give them attractive images, by emphasizing how these match the self image.

They can position their stores to enhance the likelihood of self congruity with target shoppers. Doing so, would undoubtedly attract consumers and enhance profitability.

#### 4.3. Limitations and Future Research

As previously discussed at length, the results of this study are largely in accord with our theoretical exceptions. However, like the earlier studies, the present one has its limitations that must be addressed in future researches.

There are obvious limitations to the study which limit its generalizability. In fact, the issue of external validity should be questioned, as the sample for this study is drawn from Tunis in north eastern Tunisia. Accordingly, the findings should not be generalized without caution to other sample populations. Besides, the instruments have been developed by collecting data from customers of retail store in a developing economy. Therefore, there is a possibility of a cultural bias playing a role in the outcome of the study as expectations of people in a developing economy may be different from those of a developed economy.

Another point to note is that longitudinal examination of self image congruity measures would provide rigorous test of how self image congruity affects behavior over time. We should note also, that we do not take into account some variables which may moderate the relationship between self image congruity and consumer behavior as the knowledge, the prior experience, the involvement, the time pressure (Sirgy et al., 2000) and the social approval motive (Sirgy et al., 1992). Above and beyond, self image congruity is affected by social values and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (Bearden et al., 1989). Such factors should be incorporated in future researches. The study can also be duplicated in other economies (particularly in developed ones). Then only a comprehensive picture of the importance of the various aspects of self image congruity across multiple service settings and different cultures would emerge. As well as this may reveal more or less the same scales structure with different items magnitude or different scales profiles where other items will be more salient and will better account for variation among cultures than the 5-items scales.

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