

# Image Congruence Effects on Product Evaluations: The Role of Self-Monitoring and Public/Private Consumption

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## ABSTRACT

Past research has demonstrated that congruence between brand image and self-image is positively related to consumers' product evaluations. Results from this study support the hypothesis that increased self-monitoring is associated with a greater effect of image congruence on consumers' evaluations of publicly consumed brands, but not privately consumed brands. Results also suggest that consumers' evaluations of publicly consumed brands are more affected by the congruence between brand image and ideal self-image than actual self-image, whereas actual and ideal congruence have equal effects on consumers' evaluations of privately consumed brands. © 1996 John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

## SELF-/PRODUCT IMAGE CONGRUENCE

Self-concept (image) has been viewed as the totality of an individual's thoughts and feelings with reference to themselves as an object (Rosenberg, 1979). It involves ideas and feelings that a person has about himself in relation to others in a socially determined frame of reference (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987). Self-concept is a person's perception of his

own abilities, limitations, appearance, and characteristics, including his own personality.

According to self-concept theory, people act in ways that maintain and enhance their self-concept. One important way in which people do this is through the products they purchase and use. Gardner and Levy (1955) and Levy (1959) proposed that products are often purchased for their symbolic value. Consumers do not purchase products for only their physical attributes or functional benefits. Consumers hold images (symbolic meanings) of themselves, of products, and of the types of consumers who purchase and use certain products. Consumers "perceive products that they own, would like to own, or do not want to own in terms of the product's symbolic meaning to themselves and to others" (Kassarjian & Sheffet, 1991). Consumers' personalities and self-images can be defined, maintained, and enhanced through the products they purchase and use.

The relationship between self-image and product image can have significant effects on consumers' product evaluations and purchase behaviors. Sometimes, consumers purchase a particular brand because that brand's image is congruent with their own self-image. A brand (Marlboro) can be used to develop and promote a desired self-image (masculine). Brands (and their associated images) let consumers express who they are, what they are, where they are, and how they want to be viewed.

The idea that consumers prefer brands that have images similar to their own self-image is referred to as the *image congruence hypothesis*. According to the image congruence hypothesis, consumers' evaluations of products, as well as retail outlets, are a positive function of the degree of congruence between their self-image and the image of the product or retail outlet.

A consumer may buy a product because, among other factors, he feels that the product enhances his own self-image. Similarly, a consumer may decide not to buy a product or not to shop at a particular store if he feels that these actions are not consistent with his own perceptions of himself. (Britt, 1966)

Although most consumer attitude research has focused on theories that model the effects of beliefs about physical product features on attitudes (e.g., the Fishbein attitude model), a fair amount of research has examined predictions made from the image congruence hypothesis. The positive relationship between image congruence and product preference has been demonstrated in research concerning retail stores (Stern, Bush, & Hair, 1977) and consumer products such as automobiles, beer, magazines, and cigarettes (Birdwell, 1964; Dolich, 1969; Grubb, 1965; Grubb & Stern, 1971; Sirgy, 1985). The results from this research suggest that consumers are often more likely to prefer products and retail stores that have images similar to their own self-

image. Further, this relationship appears to hold with respect to the congruence between product/store image and actual self-image (how a consumer perceives himself), as well as ideal self-image (how a consumer would like to perceive himself; see Sirgy, 1982 for a detailed review). In fact, some studies have shown that actual self-image and ideal self-image are about equally predictive of brand preferences (Dolich, 1969; Landon, 1974; Ross, 1971).

Researchers have also examined variables that may potentially moderate the effects of image congruence on product preference. Researchers have considered the moderating effects of product conspicuousness (Dolich, 1969; Ross, 1971), social class (Munson, 1974), sex role (Gentry, Doering, & O'Brien, 1978), product personalization (Sirgy, 1981), and product ownership (Gentry et al., 1978). However, only a few researchers have examined how personality variables might moderate the image congruence hypothesis. For instance, Munson (1974) examined the moderating influence of consumer aggressiveness on the relative influence of actual self-image and ideal self-image on product evaluations. Belch (1978) examined the moderating effects of varying belief systems (Harvey, Hunt, & Schroeder, 1961) on the image congruence hypothesis. These belief systems represent varying levels of concreteness at which individuals function.

Still, there remains a void in our understanding of moderating variables that have strong conceptual relations to the attitude formation process described by the image congruence hypothesis. According to the image congruence hypothesis, product evaluations are influenced by the degree of congruence between product image and self-image. Thus, personality variables related to consumers' awareness of their own self-concept (image) and the degree to which they are influenced by maintaining and enhancing their self-concept in social situations (dealing with the purchase and use of products) should moderate the image congruence relationship. Identifying such personality variables may allow marketers to target consumers who may be particularly influenced by image appeals in advertising. The purpose of this study is to examine such a personality variable—self-monitoring.

### **Self-Monitoring**

Self-monitoring reflects the degree to which a person observes and controls his or her expressive behavior and self-presentation in accord with social cues (Gould, 1993; Snyder, 1979). High self-monitors regulate their expressive self-presentation for the sake of desired public appearances. They possess the skills to determine what others expect of them and are able to identify social cues for their own self-presentation (Snyder, 1974). High self-monitors are particularly sensitive to the expression and self-presentation of relevant others in social situations and use these cues as guidelines for monitoring (regulating and

controlling) their own verbal and nonverbal self-presentation (Snyder, 1979). In contrast, low self-monitors lack either the ability or the desire to regulate their expressive self-presentation (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). Compared to high self-monitors, low self-monitors are less likely to act in accord with social norms.

High self-monitors are identified by their high scores on the self-monitoring scale developed by Snyder (1974). High self-monitors typically agree with statements such as, "When I am uncertain how to act in a social situation, I look to the behavior of others for cues," "In different situations with different people, I often act like very different people," "I am not always the person I appear to be," and "In order to get along and be liked, I tend to be what people expect me to be rather than anything else." Low self-monitors typically agree with statements such as, "I would not change my opinions (or the way I do things) in order to please someone else or to win their favor," and "I have trouble changing my behavior to suit different people and different situations."

### **Self-Monitoring and Image Congruence**

Snyder (1989) suggests that because high self-monitors are particularly concerned with being the "right" person in the "right" situation at the "right" time, they are very sensitive to the self-images they project in social situations. In contrast, low self-monitors have less concern for the self-images they project in social situations. Compared to low self-monitors, high self-monitors should be more highly influenced by promotional messages that provide information about the images they will project by purchasing and using particular brands. In fact, the results from numerous studies suggest that high self-monitors have more favorable evaluations of image-oriented advertisements, whereas low self-monitors have more favorable evaluations of product-oriented advertisements promoting product features and functional benefits rather than product image (Snyder & Debono, 1985, 1987, 1988).

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of self-monitoring within the context of the image congruence hypothesis. Compared to low self-monitors, high self-monitors tend to be more responsive to appeals that reflect the image of the self they strive to be in social situations. High self-monitors are more aware of their own expressive behaviors and self-presentation (image) and are more influenced by maintaining and enhancing their own self-image. In general, the relationship between image congruence and brand evaluations should be stronger for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

### **Public/Private Brands**

A number of studies have examined the effects of product conspicuousness on the image congruence hypothesis. However, researchers have

not usually found significant results. For instance, Dolich (1969) and Ross (1971) expected that evaluations of publicly consumed brands would be more affected by the congruence between brand image and the consumer's ideal self-image, whereas evaluations of privately consumed brands would be more affected by the congruence between brand image and the consumer's actual self-image. The results from their research failed to support these expectations.

Although researchers have not usually found significant differences between publicly and privately consumed brands, it is likely that product conspicuousness and self-monitoring moderate the relationship between image congruence and product evaluations. Self-monitoring reflects the degree to which a person observes and controls his or her own expressive behavior and self-presentation in accord with social cues in social situations. When a product is not consumed or used in the presence of others (it is privately consumed), there are no social cues for one to monitor. For privately consumed products, there is no public self-presentation (image) that needs to be monitored and regulated for the sake of desired public appearances. As a result, the effect of image congruence on evaluations of privately consumed products may not necessarily be stronger for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors. However, for publicly consumed products, the high self-monitor's greater sensitivity to the self-image they project in social situations should result in a greater effect of image congruence on product evaluations. In social situations, the more likely one is to observe and monitor their own self-presentation (image), the greater the effect image congruence should have on their product evaluations. Thus, self-monitoring should moderate the image congruence relationship for publicly consumed brands, with image congruence having a greater effect on brand evaluations of high self-monitors compared to low self-monitors. However, self-monitoring should have little or no moderating effect on the image congruence relationship for privately consumed brands.

### **Overview of the Experiment**

The purpose of this experiment is to examine the moderating effects of self-monitoring and public/private consumption on the relationship between image congruence and product evaluations. To examine this, 132 subjects (classified as either high or low self-monitors) took part in an experiment in which they evaluated four brands (two publicly consumed brands and two privately consumed brands), described the image of these brands, and described their own actual and ideal self-images. For each subject, difference scores were calculated reflecting the degree of congruence between each brand image and their (a) actual self-image (actual congruence) and (b) ideal self-image (ideal congruence). These image congruence scores were then correlated with

a measure of overall brand evaluation. Correlations between image congruence and brand evaluations were then analyzed to determine whether the effect of image congruence on brand evaluations was stronger for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors.

## METHOD

### Subjects and Procedures

Subjects were undergraduate college students enrolled in business courses. Informal interviews with subjects were used to begin the process of selecting the products to be used in this research. The purpose of this pretesting was to identify a set of brands that were familiar to college students and were also varied with respect to public/private consumption. Pretests indicated that subjects considered cars and athletic shoes to be publicly consumed products and beer and magazines to be privately consumed products. One brand of each of these product classes was chosen for the main study (Chevy Camaro automobiles, Reebok athletic shoes, Budweiser beer, Reader's Digest magazine).

Further pretesting was conducted to examine whether these brands differed significantly with respect to subject's perceptions of public/private consumption. Seventy subjects rated each of the four brands on a scale from 1 (privately consumed) to 7 (publicly consumed). Results from a repeated-measures ANOVA revealed that subjects' ratings differed significantly across the four brands ( $F_{3,207} = 180.5$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Planned comparisons (controlling for total experimental error) revealed that Chevy Camaro (mean = 6.4) and Reebok (mean = 5.9) were both rated as significantly ( $p < .05$ ) more publicly consumed than Budweiser (mean = 4.2) and Reader's Digest (mean = 2.4). Therefore, Camaro and Reebok were accepted as the publicly consumed brands, and Budweiser and Reader's Digest were accepted as the privately consumed brands. The order of these brands in the questionnaire was counterbalanced across subjects using a Latin-square design to control for any effects of order of presentation.

The experiment was conducted during normal class periods. Questionnaires (described as consumer product surveys) containing the experimental measures were completed at each individual's own pace. Subjects took between 15 and 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. A brand name was printed at the top of the first page of the questionnaire. Subjects were instructed to take a moment to think about this brand and then indicate their evaluation of it. Subjects then described the image of this brand on 16 different image dimensions. After doing so, subjects were told to take a moment to think about the second brand, indicate their evaluation of it, and describe its image on the same 16 image dimensions. Subjects proceeded in this manner un-

til they evaluated and described the images of all four brands. Subjects then described their actual and ideal self-images on the same 16 image dimensions used to describe the brand images. All subjects described their self-images after evaluating and describing the images of all four brands. This was done so that subjects' awareness for their self-image would not be artificially increased before evaluating a brand. The last part of the questionnaire contained the self-monitoring scale. After all subjects completed the survey, they were debriefed about the true purpose of the study.

## Measures

**Brand Evaluations.** Overall brand evaluations were measured with two indicators—attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Brand attitudes were measured on three, 7-point semantic differential scales (bipolar labels = unfavorable–favorable, good–bad, dislike–like). Purchase intentions were measured by asking subjects to indicate how likely they would be to purchase the product. These intentions were measured on a 7-point scale varying from “Extremely Unlikely” to “Extremely Likely.” Because the average correlation between brand attitude and purchase intentions was 0.74, the three attitude scales and the purchase intention scale were combined to form a measure of subjects' overall evaluation of the brand. Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this four-item scale was 0.91 for Camaro, 0.89 for Reebok, 0.97 for Budweiser, and 0.89 for Reader's Digest.

**Image Measures.** Subjects were asked to describe the image of each of the four brands on 16 different semantic differential scales. Pretesting was used to determine the image dimensions on which the brands would be described. Sirgy (1982) has pointed out that to ensure high image saliency, only those image dimensions that are related to the product being tested should be included in the image measures. General self-concept standardized scales are not recommended. Fifty pretest subjects were asked to indicate how relevant each of 50 different image dimensions was to describing the personality of the typical consumer of each of the brands. Each image dimension was rated on a 7-point scale varying from “Not at all . . .” to “Very much associated with (relevant to) describing the personality of the typical owner/user of this product.” Only 16 of these dimensions, which were consistently rated at least moderately relevant to the image of all four brands, were used in calculating the image congruence scores associated with each brand.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The image dimensions used in this study were: rugged–delicate; excitable–calm; masculine–feminine; youthful–mature; formal–informal; economical–extravagant; unsuccessful–successful; dull–interesting; modern–old-fashioned; extrovert–introvert; active–passive; tense–relaxed; unsophisticated–sophisticated; urban–rural; self-confident–not self-confident; unenthusiastic–enthusiastic.

Self-image was measured with the same 16 semantic differential scales used to measure brand images. Subjects described themselves from two different points of view: (a) as they actually are, and (b) as they would ideally like to be. Actual self-image was measured with the following question:

Describe yourself as you *actually* are. Think about how you see yourself. What kind of person are you? How would you describe your personality? On the following scales, circle the number that best represents how you see yourself.

Ideal self-image was measured with the following question:

Describe yourself as you would *ideally* like to be. Think about how you would like to see yourself. What kind of person would you like to be? How would you like to be able to describe your personality? On the following scales, circle the number that best represents how you would ideally like to see yourself.

**Self-Monitoring.** Self-monitoring was measured with the 25-item scale originally developed by Snyder (1974). The self-monitoring scale had a KR-20 reliability of 0.73. Based on a median split, subjects were classified as either high or low self-monitors.

## RESULTS

### Image Congruence Hypothesis

A generalized Euclidean distance model was used to calculate difference scores reflecting actual and ideal congruence. These difference scores were then correlated with subjects' brand evaluations. The results of these correlation analyses conducted across all subjects (without considering the effects of self-monitoring) are presented in Table 1. Because the difference scores calculated for each subject actually measure incongruence, and brand evaluations were measured on scales where larger values indicate more favorable evaluations, negative correlations between distance scores and brand evaluations indicate the hypothesized positive relationship between image congruence and brand evaluation. That is, the greater the congruence (the smaller the distance between brand and self-image), the more favorable (larger, in terms of scale values) the brand evaluation.

The statistically significant correlations displayed in Table 1 indicate that, in general, the image congruence hypothesis is supported. As expected, actual and ideal congruence are positively related to consumers' brand evaluations. Also, it appears that correlations for ideal congruence are consistently larger than those for actual congruence. Across all four brands, the average correlation (based on Fisher's  $z$

**Table 1. Correlations between Image Congruence and Brand Evaluations.**

	Public Brand				Private Brand			
	Camaro		Reebok		Budweiser		Reader's Digest	
	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC
Brand evaluation	-0.31**	-0.45**	-0.04	-0.21*	-0.50**	-0.53**	-0.31**	-0.41**

\* $p < .05$ .  
 \*\* $p < .01$ .

Note: AC = actual congruence (congruence between brand image and actual self-image), IC = ideal congruence (congruence between brand image and ideal self-image). Because the difference scores calculated for each subject actually measure incongruence, and brand evaluations were measured on scales where larger values indicate more favorable evaluations, a negative correlation indicates a positive relationship between image congruence and brand evaluations.

transformation) between ideal congruence and brand evaluation was  $-0.43$ , whereas the average correlation between actual congruence and brand evaluation was  $-0.30$ . This suggests that product evaluations might be more strongly related to ideal congruence than actual congruence.

To test for the significance of these differences, respective pairs of actual and ideal congruence correlations associated with each brand were compared with the use of individual  $t$  tests. These  $t$  tests are designed to test for significant differences in two nonindependent correlation coefficients (Howell, 1982). For the two public brands (Camaro and Reebok), correlations for ideal congruence were significantly larger than for actual congruence ( $t_{129} = 2.3$ ,  $p < .05$ ; and  $t_{129} = 2.3$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively). However, for the two private brands (Budweiser and Reader's Digest), there were no significant differences between correlations for ideal and actual congruence ( $t_{129} = 0.7$ , n.s.; and  $t_{129} = 1.6$ , n.s., respectively). This is consistent with Ross's (1971) hypothesis that product preference is more closely related to ideal congruence than actual congruence, but only for publicly consumed products. More will be said about this in the discussion section.

### Self-Monitoring and Public/Private Consumption

It was hypothesized that image congruence would have stronger effects on brand evaluations of high self-monitors compared to low self-monitors, but only for publicly consumed brands. To examine this, separate correlations between image congruence and brand evaluations were analyzed for high and low self-monitors. These correlations are presented in Table 2. If self-monitoring and public/private consumption moderate the image congruence relationship as hypothesized, the correlations between image congruence and high self-monitors' evaluations of the two publicly consumed brands should be larger (more negative) than corresponding correlations for low self-monitors. And, the correlations between image congruence and high self-monitors'

**Table 2. Correlations between Image Congruence and Brand Evaluations, by Level of Self-Monitoring.**

	Public Brand							
	Camaro				Reebok			
	Low SM		High SM		Low SM		High SM	
	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC
Brand evaluation	-0.09	-0.27*	-0.45**	-0.57**	0.21	0.03	-0.24*	-0.37**

\* $p < .05$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ .

evaluations of the two privately consumed brands should not be significantly different than corresponding correlations for low self-monitors.

A number of interesting findings emerge in these results. Consider first the results for Reebok. When all subjects were considered together, only ideal congruence was related to evaluations of Reebok. However, when the effects of self-monitoring are considered, both actual and ideal congruence are significantly related to high self-monitors' brand evaluations. For low self-monitors, neither actual nor ideal congruence is significantly related to brand evaluations. The relationship between image congruence and evaluations of Reebok is significant for only high self-monitors. This suggests that self-monitoring moderates the image congruence relationship for Reebok as expected. Apparently, the effects of high and low self-monitors were canceled out when all subjects were considered together.

The results suggest that self-monitoring moderates the image congruence relationship for both public brands. For Camaro and Reebok, the correlations between image congruence and brand evaluations of high self-monitors are larger than the corresponding correlations for low self-monitors. However, for the two privately consumed brands, the correlations between image congruence and product evaluations of high self-monitors and low self-monitors appear similar in magnitude.

Regression analysis was used to test whether self-monitoring had the expected moderating effect on the image congruence relationship for the public brands, but not the private brands. Overall brand evaluation was regressed against image congruence (the difference score between product image and either actual or ideal self-image), level of self-monitoring (high versus low) and their interaction. Of primary interest is the interaction. A significant interaction indicates that the relationship between image congruence and product evaluation is significantly different across the two levels of self-monitoring.

The standardized regression coefficients for the interaction terms are presented in Table 3. In the regression analysis, level of self-monitoring was indicated as 0 for low self-monitors and 1 for high self-monitors. Thus, a significant negative regression coefficient indicates that

**Table 2.** (Continued from previous page.)

Private Brand							
Budweiser				Reader's Digest			
Low SM		High SM		Low SM		High SM	
AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC
-0.48**	-0.58**	-0.53**	-0.49**	-0.34**	-0.40**	-0.30**	-0.43**

**Table 3. Standardized Regression Estimates for Interaction between Image Congruence and Self-Monitoring.**

Dependent Variable	Public Brand				Private Brand			
	Camaro		Reebok		Budweiser		Reader's Digest	
	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC	AC	IC
Brand evaluation	-0.68**	-0.71**	-0.80**	-0.82*	-0.09	0.19	-0.09	-0.18

\* $p < .05$

\*\* $p < .01$ .

Note: In the regression equation, level of self-monitoring was indicated as 0 for low and 1 for high.

the relationship between image congruence and product evaluation is stronger for high self-monitors than it is for low self-monitors.

The results from the regression analysis indicate that self-monitoring had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between evaluations of Camaro and actual congruence ( $t_{128} = -2.3, p < .05$ ) and ideal congruence ( $t_{128} = -2.4, p < .05$ ). Self-monitoring also had a significant moderating effect on the relationship between evaluations of Reebok and actual congruence ( $t_{128} = -2.6, p < .01$ ) and ideal congruence ( $t_{128} = -2.2, p < .05$ ). However, for Budweiser, self-monitoring had no significant moderating effect on the relationship between brand evaluation and either actual congruence ( $t_{128} = -0.4, n.s.$ ) or ideal congruence ( $t_{128} = 0.7, n.s.$ ). Similarly, for Reader's Digest, self-monitoring had no significant moderating effect on the relationship between brand evaluation and either actual congruence ( $t_{128} = -0.3, n.s.$ ) or ideal congruence ( $t_{128} = -0.5, n.s.$ ). Thus, self-monitoring had the expected moderating effect on the relationship between image congruence and brand evaluations of the publicly consumed brands, but not the privately consumed brands.

## DISCUSSION

In general, the image congruence hypothesis was supported. The greater the degree of congruence between brand image and self-image, the more favorable were subjects' brand evaluations. The only exception to this was the lack of a significant relationship between actual congruence and brand evaluations of Reebok athletic shoes. However, when the effects of self-monitoring were considered, image congruence (both actual and ideal) was significantly related to high self-monitors' evaluations of all four brands, including Reebok.

The primary purpose of this study was to examine the moderating effects of self-monitoring and public/private consumption on the image congruence hypothesis. The general hypothesis that self-monitoring moderates the relationship between image congruence and evaluations of publicly consumed brands, but not privately consumed brands, was supported. For the two publicly consumed brands (Camaro and Reebok), the relationship between image congruence and brand evaluations was significantly stronger for high self-monitors than for low self-monitors. Alternatively, for the two privately consumed brands (Budweiser and Reader's Digest), the relationship between image congruence and brand evaluations was not significantly different across the two levels of self-monitoring.

Snyder (1974) originally defined self-monitoring as a personality variable reflecting the relative influence of internal versus external cues on an individual's behavior. High self-monitors strive to be the type of person called for by each situation in which they find

themselves. They tailor their behavior to fit social and interpersonal considerations of situational appropriateness. In contrast, low self-monitors typically do not strive to fit their behavior to situational considerations. Their behavior tends to be guided more by information from inner sources, such as attitudes, feelings, and dispositions (Snyder & Tanke, 1976).

This definition and characterization of the differences between high and low self-monitors may seem problematic. If low self-monitors are more likely to consistently and accurately behave in accordance with their personal attitudes and dispositions, and if self-image (actual and ideal) is considered to be an inner belief or disposition, this suggests that personal/brand image congruence should be more influential for low rather than high self-monitors.

Further reading into the self-monitoring literature, and particularly Snyder's research, reveals what is meant by inner attitudes and dispositions. For example, in researching the effects of self-monitoring on personnel decisions (hiring candidates for jobs), Snyder, Berscheid, and Matwychuk (1988) found that high self-monitors were willing to forego suitable personal dispositions for a pleasing physical appearance; whereas low self-monitors were willing to select a physically unattractive candidate in order to choose someone who possessed suitable personal dispositions for the position. In their experiment, personal dispositions referred to the candidate's job skills and suitability to the position (e.g., organization ability, leadership ability). As such, dispositions had more to do with the decision maker's beliefs or attitudes about the quality of the job applicant (ability to perform the job), and less to do with personal image. As it relates to marketing and product evaluations, Snyder has conducted numerous studies demonstrating that low self-monitors are particularly responsive to advertisements that feature product attributes and functional benefits (demonstrating the quality of the product), whereas high self-monitors are particularly responsive to image-oriented advertisements (Snyder & Debono, 1985, 1987, 1988). Thus, it does not appear in Snyder's conception of self-monitoring that self-image is considered to be an inner attitude or disposition.

This difference between the concern for personal attitudes and dispositions versus image maintenance is also reflected in the extended Fishbein model (the theory of reasoned action, Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). In his extended attitude model, Fishbein proposed that behavioral intentions can have both attitudinal and normative influences. Attitudinal influences are a function of one's inner beliefs about the quality of the product itself—its physical attributes and functional benefits ("Is this a good product?"). This is analogous to Snyder's conception of inner attitudes and dispositions. Normative influences are the result of external social pressures ("How will others view me or think of me as a result of purchasing this product?"). This is analogous

to Snyder's conception of regulating behaviors for the sake of desired public appearances. As such, low self-monitors' concern with inner attitudes and dispositions appears to relate more to beliefs about the quality of products, or the suitability (based on skills) of job applicants than to the desire to regulate and maintain self-images.

Although no process measures were taken, it is likely that subjects in the current study evaluated the brands by considering product usage situations. It is likely that when evaluating Chevy and Reebok, subjects considered public usage situations; and when evaluating Budweiser and Reader's Digest, subjects considered private usage situations. High self-monitors' greater concern for presenting and maintaining a desired self-image in public usage situations resulted in greater effects of image congruence on their evaluations of the publicly consumed brands.

The results from this research offer insight into possible explanations for insignificant findings in past research dealing with public/private consumption and the image congruence hypothesis. Dolich (1969) did not find any moderating effects of public/private consumption on the image congruence hypothesis. This may have resulted from the particular products chosen for his study. In his study he used beer and cigarettes as publicly consumed products, and bar soap and toothpaste as privately consumed products. However, these products were chosen by the researcher. He gave no indication that these products were pretested in any way to determine if the subjects in his study actually consumed beer in predominantly public situations and considered it a publicly consumed product. As the pretest in this research indicated, it is possible that most of the beer purchased by undergraduate college students (subjects in both Dolich's and the present research) is intended for home consumption, in relative privacy. Beer and cigarettes may not be as publicly consumed as Dolich anticipated.

This raises a potential limitation of the current study. The 70 pretest subjects drawn from the same population as in the main experiment rated Chevy Camaro and Reebok as significantly more publicly consumed than Budweiser and Reader's Digest. However, there was no manipulation check of the public/private dimension in the main experiment. Future research should include such manipulation checks.

Another interesting finding from the current research is that when the data were analyzed across subjects (without the effects of self-monitoring), brand evaluations were more strongly related to ideal congruence than actual congruence, but for only the publicly consumed brands. For the privately consumed brands, there were no differences in the relationship between brand evaluations and either actual congruence or ideal congruence. Dolich (1969) and Ross (1971) hypothesized that evaluations of publicly consumed products would be more affected by ideal congruence, whereas evaluations of privately consumed products would be more affected by actual congruence. They

hypothesized that when a brand is consumed publicly, consumers are interested in impressing others by their act of consumption. However, there is no need of impressing others when the brand is consumed in relative privacy.

Although neither Dolich nor Ross found support for their hypotheses, the results from the current study do support the proposition that evaluations of a publicly consumed product are more affected by ideal congruence than by actual congruence. However, the current results do not support the other half of the Dolich and Ross hypothesis regarding a privately consumed product. Their general hypothesis might need to be modified. Perhaps, evaluations of publicly consumed products are more affected by ideal congruence than actual congruence, and evaluations of privately consumed products are equally affected by ideal and actual congruence.

### **Future Research**

Marketers and consumer researchers should investigate the possibility of augmenting the self-monitoring of consumers in situations where the likely fit between self-image and brand image is strong, and/or decreasing the self-monitoring of consumers when the likely fit between self-image and brand image is relatively weak (when the brand image is incongruent with the consumer's self-image). Advertisements are often used to provide consumers with decision rules and evaluative criteria to consider when making decisions. For example, if consumers are using a lexicographic decision rule, a marketer might emphasize their brand's performance on the attribute that is most important to consumers ("Remember, when buying a new computer, compatibility is the most important consideration and Brand X is the most compatible computer on the market"). When there is a likely fit between brand image and self-image, marketers can stress not only the image of their brand, but also that the fit between brand image and self-image is an important consideration in evaluating the product. Future research should investigate how advertising language can be used to increase (decrease) consumers' level of self-monitoring with respect to a particular purchase situation in which there is congruence (incongruence) between brand image and self-image.

Another avenue for future research is to examine the role of self-monitoring in the image congruence hypothesis as measured by the modified self-monitoring scale developed by Lennox and Wolfe (1984). Their scale is designed to measure the ability to modify self-presentation and sensitivity to the expressive behaviors of others. They argue that this more narrow definition of self-monitoring is more reflective of the forte of the high self-monitor.

In conclusion, the current results support the importance of studying consumers' self-concept (image). The degree of congruence between

brand and self-image has significant effects on consumers' brand evaluations. Further, the results from this research suggest that the more consumers are aware of their own self-image and are influenced by maintaining and enhancing their self-image in social situations, the greater the effect that image congruence has on their brand evaluations. However, this moderating effect is evident for only publicly consumed brands for which there is a public self-presentation (image) that can be monitored and regulated for the sake of desired public appearances.

We have much to learn about the relationship between consumers' self-images, brand images, and brand evaluations. This research provides a useful first step in understanding how a consumer personality variable moderates this relationship. Future research should continue to examine the effects of personality variables related to consumers' awareness of self-concept and the degree to which they are influenced by self-concept in making purchase decisions. Future research should also extend these findings by examining a greater variety of brands to discover other product-related dimensions that might moderate the image congruence hypothesis.

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