



Conceptualizing Brand Antecedents and Ideal Social-Self Congruency in Egyptian Fashion Apparel Consumption

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Abstract

Background: Within fashion apparel consumption in emerging markets, clothing serves as a prominent symbolic mechanism for public identity projection and impression management. While classical self-congruity literature focuses heavily on actual and ideal self-concepts, ideal social-self congruency—the alignment between a brand's symbolic image and an individual's aspirational public image—acts as a fundamental driver in collectivistic, status-sensitive cultures like Egypt.

Aim: This paper reviews and synthesizes academic literature to examine the direct and indirect relationships between brand-level antecedents and ideal social-self congruency among Egyptian fashion apparel consumers, evaluating underlying psychological mechanisms, behavioral consequences, and measurement methodologies.

Method: A qualitative literature review and conceptual synthesis were conducted across peer-reviewed empirical and theoretical studies focusing on Self-Congruity Theory, consumer psychology, fashion marketing, and Egyptian consumer behavior.

Results: The synthesis reveals that brand personality (specifically sophistication and excitement), celebrity/endorser synergy, perceived brand globalness, and ethical/green brand image serve as major drivers of ideal social-self congruency. In Egypt, these relationships are strongly amplified by psychographic factors, including materialism, fashion consciousness, status sensitivity, and interdependent self-construal. Downstream, ideal social-self congruency generates positive brand equity outcomes (brand identification, brand love, loyalty, positive word-of-mouth), but can also trigger negative behavioral risks like status over-consumption and compulsive buying. Methodologically, direct global measurement scales—specifically the Fashion Self-Congruity (FSC) scale—demonstrate superior predictive validity over traditional Euclidean distance models.

Conclusion: Fashion brand managers targeting Egyptian consumers must craft positioning strategies that align with consumers' aspirational public identities while implementing ethical communication standards to mitigate compulsive purchasing risks. Future research should investigate the moderating effects of digital touchpoints and social commerce platforms.

Keywords: Ideal Social-Self Congruency; Brand Antecedents; Fashion Apparel; Egyptian Consumer Behavior; Self-Congruity Theory; Status Consumption; Compulsive Buying.



Introduction

In contemporary consumer research, fashion apparel serves not merely as a functional necessity, but as a symbolic medium through which individuals construct, negotiate, and project their social identities. Central to this dynamic is the concept of ideal social-self congruency—the degree of alignment between a brand's symbolic image and the aspirational persona a consumer wishes to project within their social sphere³. While foundational literature has established self-congruity as a primary driver of brand attachment and purchase intent, the strategic antecedents that cultivate this congruence remain complex and context-dependent. Specific brand factors, such as brand prestige, narrative storytelling, and perceived exclusivity, act as critical precursors that enable consumers to bridge the gap between their actual self-concept and their desired social standing. Understanding these antecedents provides valuable insight into how fashion brands build psychological resonance and status value in competitive apparel markets.

This conceptual framework takes on distinct relevance within the modern Egyptian fashion apparel sector, a rapidly evolving market marked by a unique interplay of cultural tradition, modern Western influences, and shifting socio-economic dynamics. Egyptian consumers, particularly digitally connected youth and emerging middle-to-upper classes, increasingly leverage fashion brand choices to navigate peer expectations, convey social status, and signal modernity. However, empirical research exploring how specific brand antecedents foster ideal social-self congruency within developing countries like Egypt remains limited. By conceptualizing these relationships within the Egyptian retail landscape, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature. It offers dual contributions: advancing consumer behavior theory regarding symbolic self-expression in emerging markets, and providing local and international fashion marketers with actionable strategies to align their brand positioning with the socio-cultural aspirations of Egyptian consumers.

Self-Concept in Fashion Marketing

Self-Congruity Theory, pioneered by Sirgy (1982, 1985), posits that consumer behavior is significantly determined by a cognitive matching process wherein consumers compare the perceived symbolic attributes of a product or brand with their own self-concept¹. When a high degree of congruence is perceived, positive affective and behavioral responses follow, including enhanced brand preference, emotional attachment, brand love, and purchase intention².

The notion of self-concept is inherently multidimensional². Early consumer behavior literature frequently operationalized self-concept as a bi-dimensional construct comprising the actual self (who an individual believes they currently are) and the ideal self (who an individual aspires to be)³. However, comprehensive operationalizations established a four-dimensional taxonomy that distinguishes between private self-concepts (actual self and ideal self) and public self-concepts (social self and ideal social self)³.

Dimension of Self-Congruity	Core Psychological Focus	Cognitive Target	Primary Consumption Motive	Application in Fashion Marketing
Actual Self-Congruity	Reality reflection and authenticity	Self as currently perceived	Self-consistency and functional validation	Everyday casual wear matching existing personality traits ² .
Ideal Self-Congruity	Private aspirational self-enhancement	Self as privately desired	Self-esteem enhancement and personal goals	Activewear or niche fashion aligning with personal developmental aspirations ² .
Social Self-Congruity	Public reality validation	Self as currently viewed by peers	Social consistency and role compliance	Professional attire conforming to current occupational expectations ² .
Ideal Social Self-Congruity	Public aspirational identity signaling	Self as desired to be viewed by society	Social recognition, status acquisition, and self-enhancement	High-end luxury, trendy, or prestige branded apparel aimed at public impression management ¹ .

In symbolic product categories such as fashion apparel, clothing serves as a visible, non-verbal communication tool⁴. Consumers purchase specific fashion brands not merely for their functional utility, such as fabric durability or thermal comfort, but for their capacity to symbolize identity, prestige, and social affiliation⁴. Ideal social-self congruency is particularly powerful in fashion consumption because apparel is inherently consumed in public settings¹². The desire to achieve social recognition, gain approval from peer networks, and project an elevated public image motivates individuals to select fashion brands whose symbolic personality matches their ideal social aspirations¹.

Brand-Level Antecedents Driving Ideal Social-Self Congruency

To elicit ideal social-self congruency, a brand must possess clearly articulated, highly visible, and culturally resonant symbolic attributes². Consumers cannot establish congruence with a brand that lacks a distinct identity or personality². Research highlights several critical brand-level antecedents that directly influence the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as matching their ideal social self.

Brand Personality and Symbolic Positioning

Brand personality—defined by Aaker (1997) as the set of human characteristics associated with a brand—serves as the primary anchor for self-congruity evaluations². Brands structured around specific dimensions such as sophistication (glamour, prestige, upper-class charm), excitement (daringness, trendiness, youthfulness), or competence (reliability, intelligence) offer distinct symbolic cues⁶. When fashion apparel brands position themselves along dimensions of sophistication and excitement, they

directly appeal to consumers' aspirational public motives³. Symbolic positioning involves crafting brand stories, visual aesthetics, and retail environments that project an elevated socio-economic lifestyle, thereby allowing consumers to utilize the brand as an identity-signaling device².

Brand Credibility and Endorser Synergy

The perceived credibility of a brand, comprising expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness, acts as a vital prerequisite for symbolic signaling¹⁹. In fashion marketing, endorser credibility plays a pivotal role in transferring symbolic meaning from the endorser to the brand, and subsequently to the consumer¹¹. When fashion brands align with high-status influencers, celebrities, or public figures who embody the target audience's ideal social persona, the brand acquires symbolic capital¹⁴. The synergy between endorser persona, brand identity, and consumer aspirational social self strengthens the perceived alignment, reinforcing the brand's capacity to deliver social status¹².

Brand Globalness and Prestige

In emerging economies, foreign and global brand origin often carries significant prestige value¹⁸. Perceived Brand Globalness serves as a proxy for modern lifestyle, global cosmopolitanism, and high quality²⁰. Fashion apparel brands that are recognized internationally carry higher symbolic prestige compared to local unbranded alternatives, making them highly attractive to consumers seeking to signal upward mobility and social sophistication¹⁸. Prestige branding leverages scarcity, price-quality associations, and exclusive distribution channels to foster an aura of high status, directly stimulating ideal social self-congruity among consumers seeking public differentiation³.

Ethical and Sustainable Brand Image

An emerging antecedent in global and regional fashion markets is the brand's commitment to sustainability and ethical production²⁴. As environmental consciousness increases, displaying an association with sustainable fashion apparel brands enables consumers to project an ideal social self characterized by social responsibility, ethical awareness, and moral sophistication²⁴. Strategic sustainability efforts enhance brand trust and affective brand experience, building a symbolic bridge between ethical corporate practices and consumer aspirational social identity²⁶.

Brand Antecedent	Mechanism of Influence	Target Symbolic Attributes	Primary Psychological Response	Impact on Ideal Social Congruence
Brand Personality (Sophistication/Excitement)	Trait attribution and symbolic matching ²	Prestige, glamour, modern trendiness ²⁷	Aspirational identification and affective resonance ²	High; aligns brand human-like traits with public ideal image ¹⁶ .
Endorser Credibility & Synergy	Meaning transfer from endorser to brand ¹¹	Status, attractiveness, social influence ²	Increased brand trust and attitude enhancement ¹⁹	High; endorser embodies the specific ideal social persona ¹¹ .
Perceived Brand Globalness & Prestige	Quality heuristics and cosmopolitan signaling ¹⁷	Modernity, international status, exclusivity ²	Perceived status enhancement and prestige association ¹²	Very High; global recognition validates public status signals ² .
Sustainable & Green Brand Image	Value-congruence and ethical signaling ²⁴	Social responsibility, altruism, moral awareness ²⁴	Brand trust, pride, and moral satisfaction ²	Moderate to High; signals ethical awareness to public peers ²⁴ .



Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Consumer Psychographics in Egypt

The application of self-congruity frameworks requires contextualization within specific socio-cultural environments². The Egyptian fashion apparel market represents a dynamic landscape shaped by demographic, economic, and cultural transformations².

The Egyptian Fashion Apparel Landscape and Youth Culture

Egypt possesses a predominantly young demographic, with Generation Z and Millennials constituting a substantial majority of fashion consumers¹⁴. This demographic is highly educated, digitally connected, mobile, and increasingly exposed to global lifestyle trends through social media platforms and digital commerce¹⁵. The Egyptian retail fashion sector has experienced a rapid expansion of both international fashion chains and emerging domestic designers, creating an environment where brand choices are abundant and highly competitive¹⁸. For young Egyptian consumers, fashion apparel serves as a primary medium for self-expression, identity negotiation, and navigating the nuances between traditional social expectations and modern globalized lifestyles².

Key Psychographic Drivers: Materialism, Fashion Consciousness, and Status Sensitivity

Research examining Egyptian consumer behavior highlights several psychographic constructs that interact directly with self-congruity mechanisms:

- **Fashion Consciousness:** Fashion consciousness reflects an individual's degree of involvement with and awareness of fashion clothing styles and trends¹². High fashion consciousness drives consumers to actively seek fashion apparel that projects a trendy, modern image¹². Studies in emerging markets indicate that ideal self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity act as primary drivers of fashion consciousness, whereas actual self-congruity often exhibits minimal impact¹².
- **Materialism:** Materialism represents a mindset where personal success, happiness, and status are evaluated through the acquisition and ownership of material goods¹⁴. In Egypt, materialism significantly amplifies youth involvement in fashion apparel purchasing¹⁴. Materialistic consumers view branded apparel as essential tools for achieving social validation and publicly demonstrating personal accomplishment².
- **Conspicuous Consumption and Status Seeking:** Conspicuous consumption refers to the practice of purchasing visual, high-status goods to publicly display wealth, prestige, and social standing¹². In Egyptian society, where socio-economic status and public reputation play a prominent role in interpersonal relationships, displaying fashion items represents a primary path to achieving social acceptance and prestige¹⁴. Status consumption tendencies drive individuals to prioritize brands that maximize ideal social-self congruency over functional performance³.

Interdependent Self-Construal and Social Practice Theory

Cultural orientation deeply influences how self-concepts are defined and prioritized¹⁴. In Middle Eastern cultures like Egypt, individuals frequently exhibit an interdependent self-construal, wherein the self is conceptualized in relation to social contexts, family networks, and societal groups⁷. Under an interdependent self-construal, the opinion of significant others, peer groups, and broader social circles strongly regulates consumer behavior¹⁴.

Applying Social Practice Theory to Egyptian fashion purchasing indicates that clothing consumption is a socially embedded practice governed by peer influence, social norms, and the desire for social gratification¹⁴. A hedonistic lifestyle and self-gratification needs mediate the relationship between social status goals and fashion buying behavior¹⁴. Egyptian consumers leverage branded fashion apparel to establish an ideal social self that conforms to aspirational societal norms while simultaneously granting them distinction within their peer groups¹².



Structural Mechanism Linking Brand Antecedents to Ideal Social-Self Congruency

The psychological process connecting brand antecedents to consumer outcomes via ideal social-self congruency unfolds across four sequential phases:

1. **Signal Processing:** The consumer absorbs external stimuli from brand antecedents, including brand personality cues, celebrity endorsements, perceived brand globalness, price signals, and ethical commitments². These elements coalesce into a perceived symbolic brand image¹².
2. **Cognitive Matching:** The consumer compares this perceived brand image against their ideal social self-concept—the public persona they aspire to project to significant others and society¹. This evaluation is heavily moderated by psychographic variables such as materialism, public self-consciousness, and interdependent self-construal¹³.
3. **Affective and Identity Resonance:** When the consumer perceives minimal discrepancy between the brand image and their ideal social self, high ideal social-self congruency is established¹. This congruence satisfies core psychological needs for social status, self-enhancement, and public impression management, generating strong positive affective states such as brand identification, emotional attachment, brand love, and consumer happiness².
4. **Behavioral Execution:** The affective connection translates into observable consumer behaviors, including heightened purchase intentions, willingness to pay a price premium, brand loyalty, and active word-of-mouth advocacy². Under high status sensitivity, this mechanism can also drive obsessive brand passion or compulsive buying behavior⁵.

Empirical Outcomes and Behavioral Consequences

Achieving ideal social-self congruency yields profound attitudinal, affective, and behavioral outcomes among fashion apparel consumers in Egypt⁴. These consequences can be categorized into positive brand equity drivers and potentially negative behavioral anomalies²¹.

Positive Attitudinal and Affective Outcomes

- **Brand Identification and Attachment:** Ideal social-self congruency fosters strong brand identification, wherein consumers perceive their identity as overlapping with the brand's symbolic attributes²⁸. This identification generates deep emotional brand attachment, a psychological bond characterized by passion, affection, and connection²⁷.
- **Brand Love and Brand Happiness:** When a brand successfully mirrors a consumer's aspirational public self, it triggers brand love, a passion-driven affective state⁵. Empirical studies confirm that ideal self-congruity and ideal social self-congruity represent the strongest determinants of brand love in fashion retail⁵. This emotional bond translates into elevated consumer brand happiness and subjective well-being²⁸.
- **Behavioral Loyalty and Positive Word-of-Mouth (WOM):** Consumers who experience ideal social self-congruity exhibit higher behavioral loyalty, repeat purchase intention, and resilience to competitive switching². Furthermore, because the consumption motive is rooted in public impression management, consumers actively engage in positive word-of-mouth and social media advocacy to showcase their association with the brand to their social networks⁶.

Status Consumption and Compulsive Buying Behavior

While ideal social-self congruency generates substantial positive outcomes for brand equity, increasingly highlights critical behavioral anomalies associated with extreme self-congruity mechanisms in emerging economies²¹:

- **Status Consumption and Conspicuous Over-Consumption:** Driven by the intense desire to maintain ideal social-self congruency, consumers in Egypt may over-index on status consumption, prioritizing high-priced prestige apparel beyond their financial means¹².
- **Compulsive Buying Behavior:** Compulsive buying is defined as a chronic, repetitive, and abnormal purchasing pattern utilized as a psychological coping mechanism to manage low self-esteem, anxiety,

or social insecurity⁵. Empirical research in Egypt and similar emerging markets reveals a direct structural pathway from brand personality congruence and ideal social self-congruity to brand love and attachment, which subsequently transforms into compulsive buying behavior⁵.

- **Psychological Drivers of Compulsive Apparel Purchasing:** Consumers seeking to repair discrepancies in their self-concept or fulfill extreme ideal social expectations rely on continuous fashion purchases to temporarily elevate their social standing⁵. Materialistic attitudes, brand consciousness, and vanity further accelerate this compulsion, creating chronic purchasing cycles that present welfare risks for young consumers²¹.

The Fashion Self-Congruity Scale Development

Recognizing that general self-congruity scales often fail to capture domain-specific nuances in fashion clothing, scholars developed and validated dedicated fashion scales⁸. The Fashion Self-Congruity (FSC) scale explicitly operationalizes self-congruity as a multidimensional construct comprising actual FSC, ideal FSC, and ideal social FSC⁸. The ideal social FSC subscale directly measures the degree to which a consumer perceives a fashion brand's style as reflecting how they aspire to be seen by significant others⁹. Validated using rigorous Structural Equation Modeling across emerging market cohorts, the scale employs 7-point Likert indicators anchored from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7)¹³.

Measurement Approach	Scale Structure / Method	Operational Mechanism	Advantages	Methodological Limitations
Generalized Euclidean Distance Model	Indirect calculation; difference scores across <i>N</i> attributes ¹⁴	$D =$ across trait batteries ¹⁴	Provides granular attribute-by-attribute diagnostic data ¹⁴	Low predictive validity; assumes equal attribute salience; mathematical artifact risks ²¹ .
Direct Global Congruity Scale (Sirgy et al., 1997)	Direct single/multi-item holistic matching prompts ²¹	Invocations of brand user image vs. holistic self-concept ²¹	High predictive validity; captures psychological gestalt; widely validated ¹⁵	Lacks detailed diagnostic insights on specific product attributes ²¹ .
Fashion Self-Congruity (FSC) Scale	Domain-specific, 3-dimension scale (Actual, Ideal, Ideal Social) ⁹	Multi-item Likert scales targeting apparel symbolic fit ⁹	Tailored to fashion apparel; highly reliable in emerging markets ⁸	Requires context-specific adaptation for non-apparel categories ⁸ .

Recommendations and Future Directions

After reviewing previous literature, we can conclude that ideal social-self congruency acts as a pivotal psychological engine driving fashion apparel consumption in Egypt¹². Driven by brand personality traits (sophistication, excitement), endorser credibility, global prestige, and ethical positioning, brands that offer strong symbolic value enable Egyptian consumers—particularly young, fashion-conscious, and materialistic demographics—to fulfill critical social status and impression management goals¹².



Practical Managerial Implications

- **Align Brand Personality with Public Aspirational Cues:** Fashion brand managers operating in Egypt must design positioning strategies that emphasize ideal social self-congruity over mere functional benefits². Promotional communications should highlight lifestyle imagery, social recognition, and aspirational peer contexts that resonate with the target audience's desired public identity².
- **Leverage Credible, High-Status Endorsers:** Given the high collectivism and status sensitivity in Egyptian culture, utilizing local and regional influencers who epitomize modern, sophisticated, and successful lifestyles creates strong symbolic synergy, enhancing ideal social congruence¹².
- **Balance Prestige with Sustainable Brand Value:** As sustainability becomes a key component of modern prestige signaling, fashion brands should integrate visible eco-friendly and ethical practices into their brand narratives, allowing consumers to project an ethically conscious ideal social self²⁶.
- **Implement Responsible Marketing Communication:** Brand managers and policymakers must recognize the psychological risks associated with hyper-aspirational positioning²¹. Marketers should mitigate appeals that trigger extreme vanity or social inadequacy, which can drive compulsive buying and consumer financial distress, favoring instead campaign narratives rooted in authentic self-enhancement and mutual brand-consumer welfare²¹.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future empirical research should investigate the moderating effects of digital touchpoints, such as social commerce platforms and virtual reality fitting environments, on ideal social self-congruity in the Middle East²⁷. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining how macroeconomic shifts in Egypt influence the balance between functional brand utility and symbolic ideal social self-congruity will further enrich the consumer behavior literature in emerging markets².

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