Consumer-brand congruence and conspicuousness: an international comparison

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to understand how congruence influences product evaluations in an international Latin culture context, as moderated by the public vs private nature of the product and user-image vs product-personality congruence.

Design/methodology/approach – Participants were recruited from two universities in Spanish-speaking, Latin cultures: Spain – Latin Europe (n = 340) and Uruguay – Latin America (n = 400). All participants were asked to indicate product-personality congruence (i.e. congruence between one’s self and the product) and user-image congruence (i.e. congruence between a product’s typical user and the product) for two private and two public products.

Findings – Two types of congruence (product-personality and user-image) positively influence brand evaluations more for publicly consumed than for privately consumed brands for consumers in both Latin cultures, with effect sizes being greater than prior research in other cultures.

Research limitations/implications – This research supports congruence theory in showing that similarity between a consumer and a brand leads to more favorable attitudes. Limitations include the sole use of student subjects and examination in only two countries of Latin culture.

Practical implications – Regardless of a brand’s personality, brands should seek consumers with similar personality traits, especially in Latin cultures.

Originality/value – This research addresses several limitations in prior research by examining both publicly and privately consumed products in one study, exploring congruence across Latin cultures, and testing products not confounded by addictive properties.

Keywords Spain, Brand image, Brand identity, Latin culture, Product-personality congruence, User-image congruence

Paper type Research paper

The relationship between a consumer and a brand is known to be multifaceted (cf. Fletcher et al., 2000; Fournier, 1998; Lin and Sung, 2014), including such components as trust, nostalgia/past experiences, perceived quality of interactions, and a consumer’s self-connection with a brand (Kim et al., 2014). In particular, a consumer’s self-connection with a brand (i.e. consumer-brand congruence) influences brand choice because consumers select brands based on functional/utilitarian characteristics as well as more symbolic meanings that contribute to a consumer’s self-concept (Elliott, 1997; Levy, 1959). This congruence has been shown to positively influence product evaluations (Dolich, 1969; Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Graeff, 1996b; Parker, 2009). However, further research is needed to examine the boundary conditions of such consumer-brand congruence, particularly in an international context. In other words, how does congruency between the self and a brand influence brand and product evaluations? Also, how do these effects...
differ based on whether a product is conspicuously consumed (i.e. consumed in a private or public setting)? Knowing the answers to these questions not only helps practitioners know when to emphasize congruence between a brand and consumer in marketing messages but also advances theories of congruence and the self in explaining the boundary conditions that inhibit the positive effects of congruence from occurring.

In addition to exploring boundary conditions, further research is needed that examines how congruency may vary by culture, specifically in Latin cultures. Prior research has examined the influence of Western (cf. Sirgy et al., 1997), Asian (cf. Kim and Hyun, 2013), and South Pacific (cf. Quester et al., 2000) cultures on self-congruity, but research has yet to adequately explore self-congruity in Latin cultures, nor has there been sufficient cross-cultural research on self-congruity. While business expansion and investment is increasing in Latin cultures, the marketing literature has remained relatively quiet about the differences between Western and Latin cultures (Fastoso and Whitelock, 2011). In fact, as Fastoso and Whitelock (2011) describe, “over the last decade only 22 papers were published in high quality journals in the marketing area based on data gathered in Latin America” (p. 435).

Additionally, Latin cultures exhibit different characteristics than cultures where self-congruence research has been conducted (i.e. Western, Asian, or South Pacific cultures). For example, Latin cultures have lower institutional collectivism and a lower performance orientation in comparison to Western, Asian, and South Pacific cultures (House et al., 2004). Prior research has shown that low values on institutional collectivism are highly associated with individualism, self-focus, and self-expression (Brewer and Venaik, 2011; Inglehart and Baker, 2000). Given that connection between a brand and a consumer is a form of self-focus and self-expression, it could be expected that cultures where institutional collectivism is low would also place more importance on connection between themselves and a brand; however, research has yet to explore this conjecture.

Thus, while some recent papers have argued that connection/similarity between consumers and brands does not actually influence brand evaluations (cf. Romaniuk and Ehrenberg, 2012; Uncles et al., 2012), we argue here that this prior research misses an important area of examination in diverse cultures (e.g. the UK) that may not place as much importance on self-expression and self-congruence. An understanding of how culture influences self-congruence, especially in Latin cultures, is necessary for global marketers to know when to reference self-congruence in marketing messages and packaging design. Further understanding in this area would also build on congruence theory (Rokeach, 1960; Rokeach and Rothman, 1965) to identify how Latin cultures, and particularly the lower emphasis placed on self-expression and self-congruence in these cultures, can help to explain different patterns of effects in congruence-based theoretical models. Stated simply, further research is needed to understand self-congruency with regard to brand evaluations using a more diverse set of cultural backgrounds.

Thus, this paper seeks to contribute to the literature in three ways: by examining the differential influence of congruence on privately and publicly consumed products from a congruity theory perspective (i.e. examining boundary conditions to congruency effects with brands), by understanding how congruence influences product evaluations in a cross-cultural context in Latin cultures (both Latin America and Latin Europe – cultures with similarities and differences in congruence-based dimensions, which will be explained further later), and by exploring the effect of on both brand attitude and purchase intentions as well as extending these findings to discuss how self-congruence reflects a company’s marketing efforts.

**Congruence theory**

According to congruence theory, consumers evaluate products and marketing stimuli in terms of how congruent they are with one’s own values (Rokeach and Rothman, 1965). If a
consumer is deciding between two products and one portrays values closer to the consumer’s values, then the consumer is likely to evaluate the congruent product more favorably (Rokeach, 1960). In addition to congruency’s relevance in the context of value similarity between a consumer and a brand, congruency can also apply in the context of similarity between a brand and consumer’s self-concept and personality. In terms of self-concept, congruence between a consumer and a brand connects “the psychological construct of an individual’s self-concept with the symbolic value of goods purchased in the marketplace” (Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). In other words, consumer-brand congruence describes how physical products contribute to a consumer’s psychological definition of self-concept. As mentioned earlier, a brand’s symbolic meaning is communicated through the brand’s personality and related marketing efforts (Huang et al., 2012; Malär et al., 2011; Moons and de Pelsmacker, 2015; Sung and Kim, 2010). Thus, congruence between a consumer and a brand’s personality contributes to a consumer’s self-concept development, and thereby should lead to more positive product evaluations when the personality of the brand and the consumer are congruent (Lam et al., 2013; Rokeach, 1960; Roy and Rabbanee, 2015; Sung and Choi, 2012).

Consumers should act in ways that maintain their self-concept (Graeff, 1996b). In other words, consumers seek congruence between their actions and their self-concept, which can materialize in purchase of products congruent with their self-concept and personality (Elliott, 1997). Self-concept refers to the totality of a consumer’s thoughts and feelings in relation to their self as an object (Rosenberg, 1986). Or, more simply, self-concept is a consumer’s cognitive appraisal of attributes of their self (Abe et al., 1996). Prior research has distinguished between ideal and actual self-concept with most research showing that both types of self-concept are equally predictive of brand preference (Dolich, 1969; Landon, 1974; Ross, 1971). More recently, research has examined self-concept as a single construct with results showing that self-concept influences brand preference (Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Lu and Xu, 2015). Therefore, the study herein follows Govers and Schoormans’ (2005) procedure of treating self-concept as a single construct.

Combining congruence theory with the literature on self-concepts, a consumer should seek to develop relationships with and purchase brands that are congruent with their self-concept (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Solomon, 1983; Sung and Choi, 2012; Liu et al., 2012). Prior research has confirmed the importance of congruence between a product’s and a consumer’s personality across a variety of product categories, including cars (Graeff, 1996a, b; Hong and Zinkhan, 1995; Moons and de Pelsmacker, 2015), electronics (Elbedweihy et al., 2016), cosmetics (Mehta, 1999), personal hygiene products (Hong and Zinkhan, 1995), clothing choice (Graeff, 1996a; Wang and Heitmeyer, 2006; Sung and Choi, 2012), luxury products (Liu et al., 2012), services (Malär et al., 2011), evaluation of non-profit organizations (Groza and Gordon, 2016), and food choice (Atik and Ozdaman Ertekin, 2013; Graeff, 1996a). Such congruence is important because this congruence leads to improved product evaluations (Elbedweihy et al., 2016; Freling and Forbes, 2005; Graeff, 1996a, b; Hong and Zinkhan, 1995; Malär et al., 2011; Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997; Sung and Choi, 2012). See Aguirre-Rodriguez et al. (2012) or Hosany and Martin (2012) for reviews of research on self-image congruence in marketing.

Despite substantial research on brand personality (Aaker, 1997; Bao and Sweeney, 2009; d’Astous and Lévesque, 2003; Huang and Mitchell, 2014; Sung and Kim, 2010; Sweeney and Brandon, 2006), less research has examined congruence in personality between a brand and a consumer that investigates boundary conditions to such effects (Freling and Forbes, 2005; Malär et al., 2011). Specifically, more research is needed examining the differential influence of congruence on privately and publicly consumed products, particularly in a cross-cultural context (Ahn et al., 2013; Bajac and Palacios, 2013; Bjerke and Polegato, 2006; Chang and Chieng, 2006; Quester et al., 2000).
Private vs public products
Public products represent those products that are generally consumed in the presence of others (e.g. party foods, outerwear clothing), whereas private products are generally consumed in the absence of others (e.g. personal hygiene products, undergarments) (Dolich, 1969). In other words, public products are conspicuously consumed, whereas private products are not. Dolich (1969) found that consumer-brand congruence was important for products of both private and public consumption. A consumer’s importance placed on congruence may differ between privately and publicly consumed goods. Literature on conspicuous consumption describes that consumers seek to convey certain social identities, particularly when consuming publicly visible goods (O’Cass and McEwen, 2004; Berger and Ward, 2010; O’Cass and Frost, 2002). In related research, Abimbola et al. (2012) found that luxury product consumption (which could be argued as a type of conspicuous consumption) engendered generally high levels of desired congruity between a consumer and a brand. Additionally, consumption behavior that is value-expressive and publicly visible leads consumers to desire more congruence with self-values in comparison to less publicly visible consumption behavior (Auty and Elliott, 1998; Hosany and Martin, 2012). According to this prior research, self-congruity should be more important in the consumption of public goods in comparison to private goods.

More research on private and public products in relation to self-congruence is also needed because of limitations with prior research. For example, Dolich (1969) self-selected brands of private and public consumption and used two addictive products (beer and cigarettes) (CDC, 2014) to represent publicly consumed products. In other words, consumers were not involved in identifying the products as private or public. Also, given that the public products were addictive in nature, the findings may be confounded, such that congruence is important for addictive vs non-addictive products rather than public vs private products.

Graeff (1996b) showed that consumer-brand congruence was an important predictor for non-addictive publicly consumed products (shoes); however, this study only examined a publicly consumed product and made no comparison to privately consumed products. Similarly, Govers and Schoormans (2005) showed that consumer-brand congruence was predictive of positive product evaluations, but only examined mostly privately consumed products (e.g. screwdriver, soap dispenser), making little comparison to publicly consumed products. To increase depth of understanding, further research needs to examine, in one study, the effect of congruence on product evaluations for non-addictive private and public products as well as explore cross-cultural variation in these responses (particularly for Latin cultures that are more self-expressive; House et al., 2004).

Types of congruence: product-personality and user-image
Prior research distinguishes between type of congruence and its effect on privately and publicly consumed products (Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Hong and Zinkhan, 1995; Parker, 2009). Sirgy et al. (1997) describe two types of congruence: product-personality congruence and user-image congruence. Product-personality congruence (also known as product-user image congruence) refers to congruence between a consumer’s personality and a brand’s personality. In contrast, user-image congruence (also known as self-image congruence) refers to congruence between the personality of a typical user of a product and the personality of the product (Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Sirgy et al., 1997). Both types of congruence are more implicitly seen in perceived relationships between a consumer and a brand as well as more explicitly communicated in a company’s marketing efforts.

However, Govers and Schoormans (2005) found that both product-personality and user-image congruence significantly increased product evaluations for privately consumed products. Additionally, Govers and Schoormans’ (2005) research did not examine publicly consumed products. Parker (2009) expanded on prior research to show that
product-personality and user-image congruence significantly influenced brand attitude for both privately and publicly consumed products. However, Parker (2009) noted that some of the brands chosen to represent private consumption (e.g. Sony) offer both privately and publicly consumed products, thereby limiting construct validity. Therefore, in an effort to increase construct validity and generalizability, further research is needed to examine the influence of type of congruence on brands that are known to be exclusively privately or publicly consumed, as well as the resulting effects on brand evaluations and the influence of congruence across cultures.

Given the general significant influence of both user-image and product-personality congruence of products, regardless of type (private or public), the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H1.** Higher product-personality congruence will lead to higher product evaluations for both (a) privately consumed brands and (b) publicly consumed brands.

**H2.** Higher user-image congruence will lead to higher product evaluations for both (a) privately consumed brands and (b) publicly consumed brands.

**International differences**

Parker’s (2009) research only examined the influence of type of congruence on brand attitudes and only in the southern USA. Thus, as mentioned several times already, it is important to examine congruence in other cultures to see if congruence is important cross-culturally and in cultures with differing levels of importance placed on self-expression related values. Prior research has examined congruence in Western (cf. Parker, 2009; Sirgy et al., 1997), Asian (cf. Kim and Hyun, 2013) and South Pacific (cf. Quester et al., 2000) cultures, among others, but has inadequately examined congruence in Latin cultures. An examination in Latin cultures is especially important with companies’ continued expansion and investment in such cultures (Fastoso and Whitelock, 2011) and differing characteristics between Latin and other cultures (House et al., 2004).

To explain cultural dimensions, the categorization system identified in the GLOBE study is used. Categorization of cultural dimensions by the GLOBE study is superior to Hofstede’s dimensions because it measures culture on two dimensions: “as is” and “should be” with the first being where participants believe their country currently is (similar to Hofstede’s cultural dimensions) and the latter representing where they believe their country should be (House et al., 2004). Additionally, the GLOBE study collected data between 1994 and 1997, providing a more recent understanding of culture in comparison to Hofstede’s original study conducted within IBM and its subsidiaries between 1967 and 1973 (Hofstede, 2006). Both Hofstede and the GLOBE study examine culture in organizations as a proxy for national culture, with research extensively using the cultural dimensions identified in these studies as a representation of national culture (cf. Taras et al., 2012). In the discussion to follow, the cultural dimensions most relevant to comparing Latin cultures are reviewed.

According to the GLOBE study, there are two Latin cultures: Latin America (e.g. Uruguay) and Latin Europe (e.g. Spain) (House et al., 2004). There are many similarities between these cultures. For example, both Latin cultures report low “as is” institutional collectivism. Additionally, both cultures report moderate levels of “as is” power distance, gender egalitarianism, and assertiveness. Both Latin America and Latin Europe also report moderate levels of “should be” assertiveness and humane orientation as well as high levels of “should be” gender egalitarianism.

In addition to these similarities, there are also several differences between Latin America and Latin Europe according to the GLOBE study (House et al., 2004). First, for “as is”
in-group collectivism, Latin America is high, while Latin Europe is moderate. Second, for “as is” performance orientation, future orientation, and uncertainty avoidance, Latin Europe is moderate, while Latin America is low. In contrast, for humane orientation, Latin America is moderate, and Latin Europe is low. Third, for “should be” performance orientation, future orientation, in-group collectivism, institutional collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance, Latin America is high, and Latin Europe is moderate. Finally, for “should be” power distance, Latin Europe is moderate, and Latin America is low.

While there are many differences between Latin America and Latin Europe, as just listed, the following discussion focuses on collectivism given a relationship between collectivism and personality-based self-expression. It is also worth noting that both Latin cultures have lower institutional collectivism in comparison to Western, Asian, and South Pacific cultures (House et al., 2004) where prior research on consumer-brand congruence research has been conducted (cf. Sirgy et al., 1997; Kim and Hyun, 2013; Quester et al., 2000). Low values on institutional and in-group collectivism are highly associated with individualism, self-focus, and self-expression (Brewer and Venaik, 2011; Inglehart and Baker, 2000). Given these correlations, it is expected that product-personality and user-image congruence (both rooted in elements of self-expression) would be most important for cultures with low institutional and in-group collectivism. Thus, product-personality and user-image congruence should be less important in the more collectivist Latin American culture in comparison to the moderate collectivist Latin European culture, leading to development of the following hypothesis:

H3. The relationship between (a) product-personality congruence or (b) user-image congruence and product evaluations is stronger in a Latin European culture than a Latin American culture.

**Congruence and private vs public products**

While type of congruence positively influences both privately and publicly consumed brands, Parker (2009) showed that congruence has a stronger effect on publicly consumed brands. Parker (2009) examined four publicly consumed brands that explained an average of 32.5 percent variance in brand attitude, in comparison to four privately consumed brands that explained an average variance of 24.6 percent in brand attitude. As mentioned previously, Parker (2009) noted that some of the public and private brands chosen were not exclusively known as a producer of private or public goods. Thus, future research using exclusively private and public brands should reveal this trend to a greater extent (i.e. revealing that congruence has a greater effect on publicly consumed products than privately consumed products). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4. (a) Product-personality congruence and (b) user-image congruence explain more variance in brand evaluations for publicly consumed brands in comparison to privately consumed brands, such that congruence is stronger (weaker) for publicly (privately) consumed brands.

To test these four hypotheses, a cross-cultural study is conducted with respondents from Latin cultures. Limitations from prior research are addressed by using non-addictive products that are exclusively known for being publicly or privately consumed, examining the influence of two types of congruence on privately and publicly consumed products in the same study, and utilizing a two-stage research approach that allows participants to be the identifiers of privately and publicly consumed products before continuing to evaluate congruence, brand attitude, and purchase intentions. These results are then discussed in light of contributions to marketing and research on Latin cultures. See Figure 1 for a conceptual model.
Method
In all, 740 undergraduate students (43.3 percent female, $M_{\text{age}} = 22.1$) participated in this study. A student sample was used to mimic prior research on consumer-brand congruence (cf. Parker, 2009). Additionally, prior research suggests that student samples and non-student samples lead to similar findings with relation to culture values (Keating et al., 2002), and product categories are examined that feature student-aged target markets.

Participants were recruited from two universities in Spanish-speaking countries from Latin cultures: one in Spain – Latin Europe ($n = 340$, 34.9 percent female, $M_{\text{age}} = 21.0$) and another in Uruguay – Latin America ($n = 400$, 50.1 percent female, $M_{\text{age}} = 22.9$). These countries were chosen to show the influence of consumer-brand congruence on a new consumer group (Spanish speakers in Latin cultures) that has not been previously examined. Additionally, participants were sought from two continents with different Latin cultures (South America – Latin America and Europe – Latin Europe) to show that consumer-brand congruence is consistent across cultures, specifically in Latin cultures.

Uruguay was chosen as a Latin American culture not because it is representative of all of Latin America (as any country in Latin America would have a hard time to do), but rather because Uruguay has a homogenous population unlike other Latin American countries (Sans et al., 1996). Also, Uruguay has a growing GDP and middle class, provides equal opportunity to consumers for basic services, and has a low unemployment rate in comparison to other Latin American cultures, making it a potential haven for marketers to tap into (World Bank, 2015b). This homogeneity allows selection of a sample in one area of

![Conceptual model of the influence of congruence and conspicuousness on product evaluations](image-url)
Uruguay to represent all of Uruguay. Spain was chosen to represent Latin Europe due to a similar Latin culture (World Bank, 2015a).

This study was conducted in two stages, consistent with Graeff's (1996a) methodology, whereby brands of private and public consumption are identified before participants evaluate consumer-brand congruence. In Stage 1, participants were asked to list ten brands of private and public consumption. In Stage 2, participants assessed congruence between the public and private consumption brands and the self. This two-step methodology provides benefit over prior research (e.g. Dolich, 1969) where brand selection occurred without participant input. To measure congruence, the method developed by Sirgy et al. (1997) was used whereby participants spontaneously list three personality traits associated with a brand and then rate self-image congruence with these personality traits (i.e. product-personality congruence). After rating self-image congruence, participants spontaneously list three personality traits of the typical user of the brand and then rate self-image congruence with these personality traits (i.e. user-image congruence).

A mixture of Sirgy et al.'s (1997) original items and Govers and Schoormans' (2005) adapted self-image congruence items were used in this study. All items were measured on five-point Likert scales. Both Govers and Schoormans (2005) and Sirgy et al. (1997) included measures in three categories: product-personality congruence, user-image congruence, and general product evaluations. The two congruence measures were independent variables used in predicting product evaluations, the dependent variable. To provide more detail on general product evaluations, the study herein separates these general evaluations into two separate constructs: brand attitude and purchase intentions. By doing so, this research builds on recent research examining congruence and product conspicuousness that only assesses brand attitude (Parker, 2009). As discussed earlier, product-personality congruence assesses congruence between one’s own personality and that of the brand, while user-image congruence assesses congruence between the personality of a typical user of a product and that of one’s own. See the Appendix for scale items used in this study. Questionnaires were translated and back-translated from English into Spanish and vice-versa to ensure consistency in questions and interpretation of responses.

Both Govers and Schoormans (2005) and Sirgy et al. (1997) employed a direct congruence procedure that asks participants to list personality traits of the brand and then evaluate self-image congruence with those traits. Such a direct congruence procedure reduces confusion regarding predetermined brand personality as well as eliminates the need to create discrepancy scores with pre-tested brand personality (Sirgy et al., 1997).

In all, 90 participants completed Stage 1, while the full 740 participants completed Stage 2. In Stage 2, all participants answered questions regarding every brand, presented in random order to reduce fatigue effects. Arnold and Bianchi (2001) noted that gender and culture are highly important to any study of business-to-consumer relations. Thus, demographic variables of gender and country were collected along with age and marital status. Age was measured as a continuous variable. All other demographic variables were recoded using dummy codes (1 = female, 0 = male; 1 = single, 0 = married; 1 = Uruguay, 0 = Spain).

Results

Stage 1

Of the ten most frequently listed brands of public and private consumption, four internationally known brands were chosen – two of private consumption (Colgate and Dove) and two of public consumption (Levis and Nike). Some brands (e.g. Sony) were listed under both private and public consumption and were eliminated from the choice set for Stage 2 to maximize discriminant validity and minimize limitations identified in prior research (Parker, 2009).
Stage 2

In all, 89 participants had missing data. \( t \)-tests with each variable in the study were conducted between the missing data group and the no missing data group. All \( t \)-tests were non-significant. Given the already large sample size for this study (\( n = 740 \)), the participants with missing data were removed from the data set, leaving the data to 651 participants for further analysis.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 18.0 was used to confirm four constructs: product-personality congruence, user-image congruence, brand attitude, and purchase intentions. Before running the CFA, invariance testing was conducted to confirm similarity in factor structure between the two Latin cultures examined (Uruguay and Spain), which is important for cross-cultural research (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Results showed metric invariance, as evidenced by a \( \chi^2 \) difference test, \( \Delta \chi^2(12) = 10.97, p = 0.532 \), between the unconstrained, \( \chi^2(96) = 308.47 \), and fully constrained models, \( \chi^2(108) = 319.44 \).

Once confirming metric invariance, the CFA was conducted. Results show good model fit and confirmed the four construct factor structure. The \( \chi^2 \) is significant for all models, but this result is likely due to the large sample size of 651, thereby artificially inflating the \( \chi^2 \) value (Bagozzi, 2010; Steiger, 2007). Evidence of good internal consistency is provided by composite reliability and coefficient \( \alpha \). Composite reliability is an estimate of internal consistency similar to coefficient \( \alpha \) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). See Table I for CFA results and reliability statistics. Also included in Table I are average variance extracted (AVE) estimates, which serve as an evaluation of the amount of variance captured by a construct relative to measurement error, while incorporating the correlations among latent constructs in the model. AVE estimates of 0.50 or higher indicate good discriminant validity. All constructs achieved this criterion. Thus, scales were created to represent each of the four constructs; see Table II for descriptive statistics.

To examine the effect of product-personality congruence and user-image congruence on brand attitude and purchase intentions, a series of hierarchical regression models were run. For each brand, two regression models were run with the dependent variable of brand attitude and purchase intentions. Each model included three levels of hierarchy with Level 1 consisting of congruency measures (product-personality congruence, user-image congruence), Level 2 consisting of demographic variables (age, country, gender, marital status), and Level 3 consisting of interaction effects for country (country × product-personality congruence, country × user-image congruence). See Tables III and IV for full results.

High product-personality congruence and user-image congruence significantly led to higher brand attitude and purchase intentions for both publicly and privately consumed products, thereby supporting \( H1 \) and \( H2 \). Product-personality congruence and user-image congruence explained more variance in brand attitude for publicly consumed products (38.4 percent Levis, 42.9 percent Nike) in comparison to privately consumed products (21.1 percent Colgate, 34.0 percent Dove). Similarly, product-personality congruence and user-image congruence also explained more variance in purchase intentions for publicly consumed products (36.0 percent Levis, 37.2 percent Nike) in comparison to privately consumed products (21.2 percent Colgate, 31.9 percent Dove).

The interactions between country and congruence type (product-personality and user-image) did not significantly increase explained variance, except in the case of Dove in predicting purchase intentions, \( \Delta F(2, 622) = 3.42, p = 0.033 \). Even with this significant difference in explained variance, neither the interaction between country and product-personality congruence, \( t(622) = 0.13, p = 0.898 \), nor the interaction between country and user-image congruence, \( t(622) = 1.71, p = 0.088 \) were significant. These results show that product-personality congruence and user-image congruence influence brand attitude and purchase intentions for both privately and publicly consumed products, regardless of cultural differences (at least in the case of Uruguay and Spain).
Covariates of age and marital status did not significantly influence brand attitudes or purchase intentions for any model. Gender had a main effect on product evaluations (both brand attitudes and purchase intentions) for all products, except Colgate. For Dove and Nike, females reported higher product evaluations, while for Levis, females reported lower product evaluations. Although not reported in Table II for brevity, the interaction between gender and type of congruence (product-personality and user-image) on product evaluations was tested in a fourth level of hierarchical regression after finding significant main effects of gender on product evaluations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Brand attitude</th>
<th>Colgate</th>
<th>Purchase intentions</th>
<th>Brand attitude</th>
<th>Dove</th>
<th>Purchase intentions</th>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Product-personality congruence (PPC)</td>
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<td>0.192***</td>
<td>0.193**</td>
<td>0.267***</td>
<td>0.233***</td>
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<td>User-image congruence (UIC)</td>
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<td>0.328***</td>
<td>0.441***</td>
<td>0.323***</td>
<td>0.363***</td>
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<td>1.14***</td>
<td>0.582***</td>
<td>0.975**</td>
<td>0.353***</td>
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<td>-0.136</td>
<td>0.074</td>
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<td>$R^2$</td>
<td>0.211</td>
<td>0.295</td>
<td>0.303</td>
<td>0.212</td>
<td>0.322</td>
<td>0.325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$F$</td>
<td>83.79***</td>
<td>43.48***</td>
<td>33.87***</td>
<td>84.58***</td>
<td>49.45***</td>
<td>37.44***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>2 (628)</td>
<td>6 (624)</td>
<td>(8, 622)</td>
<td>(2, 628)</td>
<td>(6, 624)</td>
<td>(8, 622)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
<td>1863***</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>25.33***</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>1859***</td>
<td>2.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δdf</td>
<td>(4, 624)</td>
<td>(2, 622)</td>
<td>(4, 624)</td>
<td>(2, 622)</td>
<td>(4, 624)</td>
<td>(2, 622)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** All coefficients are unstandardized coefficients. Femaleness is a dummy code with 1 = female and 0 = male. Single is a dummy code with 1 = single and 0 = married. Uruguay is a dummy code representing country of participant with 1 = Uruguay and 0 = Spain. *$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Brand attitude/Levis</th>
<th>Purchase intentions</th>
<th>Brand attitude/Nike</th>
<th>Purchase intentions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
<td>1 2 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product-personality congruence (PPC)</td>
<td>0.327*** 0.328*** 0.235*** 0.333*** 0.336*** 0.265***</td>
<td>0.389*** 0.394*** 0.453*** 0.332*** 0.340*** 0.357***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User-image congruence (UIC)</td>
<td>0.352*** 0.331*** 0.344*** 0.423*** 0.387*** 0.356***</td>
<td>0.256*** 0.273*** 0.231*** 0.282*** 0.307***</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.005 0.005</td>
<td>0.015 0.015</td>
<td>-0.013 -0.013</td>
<td>-0.005 -0.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Femaleness</td>
<td>-0.158** -0.152**</td>
<td>-0.336*** -0.325***</td>
<td>0.112* 0.110*</td>
<td>0.192** 0.192**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>0.099 0.114</td>
<td>0.091 0.107</td>
<td>-0.084 -0.086</td>
<td>-0.029 -0.033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>0.180*** -0.234</td>
<td>0.251*** -0.278</td>
<td>0.147** 0.250</td>
<td>0.183** 0.298</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPC × Uruguay</td>
<td>0.151</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>-0.087</td>
<td>-0.028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UIC × Uruguay</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>0.052</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>-0.007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>0.384 0.404 0.417</td>
<td>0.360 0.408 0.412</td>
<td>0.429 0.443 0.432</td>
<td>0.372 0.395 0.395</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>196.11*** 70.52*** 53.59***</td>
<td>176.59*** 71.75*** 54.48***</td>
<td>235.71*** 82.41*** 61.84***</td>
<td>185.63*** 67.96*** 50.87***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df</td>
<td>(2, 628) (6, 624)</td>
<td>(2, 628) (6, 624)</td>
<td>(2, 628) (6, 624)</td>
<td>(2, 628) (6, 624)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ΔF</td>
<td>5.14*** 2.06</td>
<td>12.73*** 2.00</td>
<td>3.72** 0.50</td>
<td>6.10*** 0.15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** All coefficients are unstandardized coefficients. Femaleness is a dummy code with 1 = female and 0 = male. Single is a dummy code with 1 = single and 0 = married. Uruguay is a dummy code representing country of participant with 1 = Uruguay and 0 = Spain. *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001
Addition of these interactions significantly contributed to the Nike and Dove models: $\Delta F_{\text{LevisBrandAtt}}(2, 620) = 1.89, p = 0.152$, $\Delta F_{\text{LevisPurInt}}(2, 620) = 0.74, p = 0.479$, $\Delta F_{\text{NikeBrandAtt}}(2, 620) = 4.48, p = 0.012$, $\Delta F_{\text{NikePurInt}}(2, 620) = 3.23, p = 0.040$, $\Delta F_{\text{ColgateBrandAtt}}(2, 620) = 0.77, p = 0.465$, $\Delta F_{\text{ColgatePurInt}}(2, 620) = 1.69, p = 0.185$, $\Delta F_{\text{DoveBrandAtt}}(2, 620) = 8.38, p < 0.001$, $\Delta F_{\text{DovePurInt}}(2, 620) = 4.59, p = 0.011$. For Nike, neither the interaction between country and product-personality congruence, $t_{\text{BrandAtt}}(620) = -1.41, p = 0.161$, $t_{\text{PurInt}}(620) = -0.55, p = 0.582$, nor the interaction between country and user-image congruence, $t_{\text{BrandAtt}}(620) = -0.85, p = 0.394$, $t_{\text{PurInt}}(620) = -1.35, p = 0.178$, significantly predicted product evaluations. Unlike Nike, most of the interactions between gender and type of congruence significantly influenced product evaluations for Dove: gender $\times$ product-personality congruence, $t_{\text{BrandAtt}}(620) = -2.47, p = 0.014$, $t_{\text{PurInt}}(620) = -1.31, p = 0.191$ and gender $\times$ user-image congruence, $t_{\text{BrandAtt}}(620) = 4.08, p < 0.001$, $t_{\text{PurInt}}(620) = 2.92, p = 0.004$.

Discussion

Both product-personality congruence and user-image congruence are important constructs to consider in examining consumers’ evaluation of brands as well as for marketers to incorporate into advertising and other branding efforts. Additionally, results from this study show that these factors are influential on consumer evaluations for both Latin American and Latin European cultures, thereby fulfilling calls for further research on marketing in Latin cultures (Fastoso and Whitelock, 2011). More interesting and novel than merely confirmatory effects in another culture is the finding that congruence seems to be more important in Latin cultures in comparison to prior research examining congruence in North American cultures (cf. Parker, 2009), which is fitting with the expectation that more self-expressive cultures should place greater importance on self-congruence with respect to brand choice (Brewer and Venaik, 2011; Inglehart and Baker, 2000). These findings also provide reasoning why prior research has suggested that there is no effect of self-congruence with other cultural samples (e.g. the UK; Romaniuk and Ehrenberg, 2012; Uncles et al., 2012) that score lower on self-expressive dimensions (House et al., 2004).

These findings support congruence theory in stating that similarity between a consumer and a brand leads to more favorable attitudes (Rokeach, 1960; Rokeach and Rothman, 1965). Additionally, the results from the study herein showed that the more congruence a consumer perceives between their personality and that of the brand (i.e. product-personality congruence), the more likely they are to positively evaluate and purchase a brand, regardless of whether the brand is privately or publicly consumed, thereby supporting $H1a$ and $H1b$. Similarly, the more congruence a consumer perceives between their personality and that of the typical user of a brand (i.e. user-image congruence), the higher their product evaluations, regardless of whether the brand is privately or publicly consumed, thereby supporting $H2a$ and $H2b$. Therefore, we build on congruence theory to show that the private/public nature of a product is not an important moderator to consider, but rather culture is an important moderator of consideration, specifically Latin culture. We argue that culture cannot be treated as a homogenous variable, with researchers assuming that if two or three cultures are examined, a full understanding of culture’s influence on a theory or dependent variable of interest is explained. Instead, Latin cultures feature unique characteristics (e.g. with regard to institutional collectivism) that need to be considered as an important moderator to understanding how congruency theory influences consumption behavior.

In addition to theoretical contributions, this research highlights the prominent influence of self-congruity in Latin cultures. Specifically, the percent of variance explained by both types of congruence was greater in the study herein in comparison to Parker’s (2009) study (Parker: 24.6 percent variance explained in privately consumed products, 32.5 percent in
publicly consumed products, and 7.6 percent variance difference between privately and publicly consumed products; study herein: 27.6 percent variance explained in privately consumed products, 40.7 percent in publicly consumed products, and 13.1 percent variance difference between privately and publicly consumed products). These results suggest that Latin American consumers are more brand oriented than consumers in North America. In practical terms, this implies that the proportion of a company’s marketing and advertising budget devoted to building a brand’s personality should be larger in Latin America (e.g. Uruguay) than in North America (e.g. USA). Of course, future research conducting cross-cultural research with consumers from both Latin America and North America is needed to verify these differences as well as with the same products across both studies.

This research also builds on prior studies that do not examine brands that are privately and publicly consumed together in one study (Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Graeff, 1996b). The research herein examined, in one study, both brands that are privately consumed and brands that are publicly consumed to find that congruence positively affects product evaluations for both privately and publicly consumed brands. However, the influence of both types of congruence is greatest for brands of public consumption. Together, type of congruence explains 13.1 percent more variance in product evaluations for brands of public consumption in comparison to brands of private consumption. In comparison to Parker’s (2009) research where some brands were known for being both privately and publicly consumed (e.g. Sony), the research herein used brands that were exclusively either privately or publicly consumed. As mentioned earlier, the percent of variance explained by both types of congruence was greater in the study herein in comparison to Parker’s (2009) study, thereby supporting H4a and H4b. In other words, congruence is more important for publicly consumed brands in comparison to privately consumed brands.

The differing percent of variance explained between studies is likely due to culture. Parker’s (2009) study was conducted in a large southern university in the USA, while the data for the study herein were collected using a cross-cultural methodology of Latin cultures using participants from Uruguay (Latin America) and Spain (Latin Europe). According to the GLOBE study, both Latin cultures are relatively high on institutional collectivism, while Anglo cultures (e.g. the USA, Europe) are very low on such collectivism (House et al., 2004). Results from this study show a negative interaction between Uruguay (a Latin American culture) and user-image congruence for brand attitude for a private product, thereby providing partial support for H3b. In other words, cultures higher in collectivism report a lower importance of congruence in making product evaluations. A lack of significance for H3a (product-personality congruence is greater for the more collectivist, Latin European cultures) may be due to the sole use of student subjects who are likely more identity conscious than older adults. Fitting with this finding, a recent review paper shows that age can play an important influence in self-congruity research, in addition to influences of culture (Gonzalez-Jimenez, 2017). Gonzalez-Jimenez mentions a need for further research specifically examining the effects of age on consumer-brand congruence as well as related investigations into family status (e.g. child, single adult, married adult, adult with kids) on consumer-brand congruence. Future studies need to address these research areas.

Interestingly, a significant interaction was found between gender and both product-personality and user-image congruence for Dove but not for any of the other brands. For Dove, males (as opposed to females) with higher product-personality congruence reported higher product evaluations. In contrast, females (as opposed to males) with higher user-image congruence reported higher product evaluations. Possibly, females perceive user-image congruence as more important given the more relational focus of user-image congruence (i.e. asking how the consumer perceives their relation to the typical user of the product). Arnold and Bianchi (2001) described that females seek relational aspects in marketing, especially with brands with feminine components. The Dove brand...
may also draw female, relational consumers more given their recent campaigns to increase self-esteem specifically among women (Dove, 2014). Further research is needed to explore the influence of gender on congruence across a wider variety of product categories, both in the domain of public and private consumption.

Additionally, this study builds on prior research examining congruence and product conspicuousness (Dolich, 1969; Parker, 2009; Govers and Schoormans, 2005; Graeff, 1996b) to show that congruence is important cross-culturally and for non-addictive products. Dolich (1969) used beer and cigarettes as publicly consumed products and bar soap and toothpaste as privately consumed products. While soap and toothpaste are not addictive, beer and cigarettes can be highly addictive (CDC, 2014), thereby altering the importance of congruence. For example, congruence may be important to generate initial interest in a product, but once addiction occurs, the need for congruence likely diminishes. The study herein tested participant-generated brands of private (Colgate, Dove) and public (Levis, Nike) consumption, none of which are chemically addictive.

This research is limited by the sole use of student subjects, examination in only two countries of Latin culture (Uruguay – Latin America and Spain – Latin Europe), examining only consumers’ actual (rather than ideal) self, and testing of only two privately consumed brands (Colgate, Dove) and two publicly consumed brands (Levis, Nike). The study herein provides a starting point for further research on marketing in Latin cultures, which is a much needed area of further research (Pastoso and Whitelock, 2011). To strengthen this type of research, future studies need to use participant populations other than students, measure individual-level cultural variables as a control to reduce ecological fallacies, use other methods to develop personality fit besides Graeff’s (1996a) procedure used in the study herein, and assess prior brand usage as a moderator to congruency effects between a brand and a consumer. Specifically in regard to individual-level cultural variables, further research should consider exploring individual measures for the GLOBE study dimensions, such as power distance (House et al., 2004; Engelen and Brettel, 2011; Grinstein, 2008), and identify how differences in “as is” vs “should be” values influence consumer-brand congruence. Other research could explore individual-level factors, such as self-construal or ethnocentrism, which have been studied in general cultural research, but have lacked adequate investigation in self-congruency research (Steenkamp et al., 1999; Vaidyanathan et al., 2013; De Mooij, 2015). Additionally, this research is limited by allowing consumers to self-report brands of private and public nature. Further research should use other methodologies for identifying personality-congruent brands and assess potential differences with regard to implications for marketers in defining target markets.

Further research may also consider differences in low vs high involvement products for both privately and publicly consumed brands. Following this line of thinking, the research herein treated self-congruence between a brand and a consumer as a uni-dimensional construct because this is the methodological procedure used in similar research in other cultures (cf. Govers and Schoormans, 2005), but given the examination of public products, further research would benefit from exploring how social dimensions of one’s self-concept interact with self-congruence for public vs private products. Additionally, further research could explore how congruence influences other typologies of products besides public/private, such as hedonic/utilitarian or luxury/necessity (Saenger et al., 2013).

Marketers can benefit from these findings as well, especially those involved with marketing publicly consumed goods and services. The similarity between a brand and their target market should be made clear in marketing, of course, after market research to identify general consensus in the factors underlying consumer-brand congruence. Along this same line of thinking, marketers need to carefully define their target market psychographically (e.g. personality, attitudes, interests) so as to enhance congruency between the target market and the brand as well as knowledge of how to express this congruency in marketing efforts.
**Conclusion**

Congruence between a consumer’s and a brand’s personality is critical for both privately and publicly consumed brands as well as for associated marketing efforts in both Latin America and Latin Europe. Both of these Latin cultures generally showed a strong, positive relationship between congruence and product evaluations, with a greater brand orientation than has been found in prior research on congruence among North American consumers (Parker, 2009). While congruence is more important for publicly consumed brands, this research exposes new findings that congruence is also important for privately consumed brands. Whether a brand has an environmental focus, supports fun and enjoyment in life, or is known for long-lasting quality, a brand should seek consumers with similar personality traits. Seeking and communicating this congruence through marketing should lead to more positive attitudes toward a brand as well as increased purchase intentions. In sum, congruence differentially influences consumer evaluations of both privately and publicly consumed brands in Latin cultures, thereby informing marketing efforts in these locations.

**References**


Appendix

Stage 2: items assessing consumer-brand congruence
Brand: _______ (Colgate, Dove, Levis, Nike).

Take a moment to think of the personality of this brand. If this brand was a person, how would you describe its personality? Please write down three words that you would use to describe the personality of this brand.

Taking this description into consideration, evaluate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

(1) I identify with the description of this brand.
(2) This brand is consistent with the way I am.
(3) My own personality and the one just described are very similar.

Now please take a moment to think about the type of person that uses this brand. How would you describe this person? Please write down three word that you would use to describe him/her.

Taking this description into consideration, evaluate the following statements on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

(1) Thinking about this type of person, I think I am like him/her.
(2) Thinking about this type of person, I see myself as very similar to him/her.
(3) In general, the personality of this typical user is similar to mine.

Now please answer the following questions regarding the brand in general on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree):

(1) I like this brand.
(2) I have a positive attitude toward this brand.
(3) In general, this is a brand I prefer.
(4) I would like to own a product of this brand.
(5) When I buy a product like this, this is a brand I consider buying.
(6) The next time I buy a product like this, I intend to buy this brand.

Finally, please answer the following demographic questions: gender, age, marital status.

Note: This survey was administered in Spanish, but the survey has been translated to English for the purposes of this paper.

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