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How Does Self-Congruity Foster Customer Engagement with Global Brands? Examining the Roles of Psychological Ownership and Global Connectedness

Abstract

Purpose – Drawing on the self-congruity theory and customer engagement literature, this research accounts for the influence of the three dimensions of customer self-congruity on customer engagement with global brands by uncovering the mediating mechanism of brand psychological ownership and moderating mechanism of global connectedness. The research framework is tested across developed and developing country contexts to highlight any cultural differences in the drivers of customer engagement with global brands.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected from developed (USA; n= 270) and developing (India; n=273) countries through two online surveys and tested, employing structural equation modeling, across the two markets to investigate cross-cultural variations.

Findings – Social self-congruity has the strongest influence on customer engagement for USA consumers, while all three forms of self-congruity are equally important in India. Psychological ownership consistently works as the mediating mechanism across both contexts. While global connectedness accentuates the relationship between self-congruity and brand psychological ownership for Indian consumers, it attenuates the relationship amongst USA consumers.

Originality/value – While prior literature mainly establishes a direct link between self-congruity and customer engagement, this study provides a deeper understanding of the self-congruity–customer engagement relationship by: a) investigating the mediating role of psychological ownership; b) examining the moderating role of global connectedness; and, c) studying all three forms of self-congruity (i.e., actual, ideal, and social) simultaneously. The

study, testing the framework in developing and developed country settings, highlights cultural nuances in forming customer engagement with global brands.

Keywords International marketing; Customer engagement; Global connectedness; Brand psychological ownership; Self-congruity theory; Global brands; Cross-cultural research.

Paper type Research paper.

Introduction

Global brands have a widespread international awareness, acceptance, accessibility, and image across markets (Özsomer, 2012; Nie and Wang, 2019). In an increasingly turbulent international marketplace (Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2022), customer engagement is emerging as key to the long-term success of global brands (Steinhoff *et al.*, 2022). However, it may be challenging for global brands to foster customer engagement because customers' choices, expectations, and behaviors have been undergoing rapid transformation across cultures and countries (Hollebeek, 2018).

Consumers purchase brands that align with their self-concept because self-congruity, or the degree of congruence consumers perceive between the brand image and their self-concept, fosters a deep connection with the brand (Sirgy, 1985). Consumers can assume multiple self-concepts — actual, ideal, or social (Malär *et al.*, 2011) and may engage with brands depending on their “self” orientations. As such, brands cater to the different needs of consumers, such as self-validation (matching actual self), self-expression (matching ideal self), or social validation (matching social self) (Sirgy, 2018). Hence, self-congruity as a driver of customer engagement has been increasingly attracting research attention (Šegota *et al.*, 2022).

However, extant research on the influence of self-congruity on consumer behavior has produced mixed results (Sirgy, 1985). For instance, Aguirre-Rodriguez *et al.* (2012) assert that self-esteem enhancement and social approval motives influence consumer behavior more strongly than self-consistency motives. In contrast, Kwak and Kang (2008) discovered actual self-congruity had stronger effects on consumer behavior than ideal self-congruity. A literature review on self-congruity—customer engagement relationship reveals possible reasons for such equivocality.

First, all three components of self-congruity have rarely been studied together, especially social self-congruity that has not received much attention in the marketing literature (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020). Since all three forms of self-congruity are important manifestations of the consumers' self-concept orientations and can occur simultaneously to affect their responses (Malär *et al.*, 2011; Sirgy, 2018), we examine the influence of all three dimensions to develop a fine-grained understanding of how each domain matters in encouraging engagement. Understanding which type of self-congruity is more influential can help managers in designing targeted interventions for enhancing customer engagement.

Second, prior research advocating the importance of self-congruity for customer engagement has mainly investigated its direct effect, thereby ignoring the underlying mechanisms that may explicate this relationship better. This study fills this gap by investigating the mediating mechanism of psychological ownership to better understand how and why different forms of self-congruity influence customer engagement with global brands. Psychological ownership may aid in translating the self-congruity orientations of customers into their engagement (Kumar, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021) as consumers tend to psychologically construe brands that help shape their identities and self-expression (Belk, 1988).

Further, more research has been called for examining the boundary conditions that may regulate the influence of the three dimensions of self-congruity (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019), particularly, with respect to individual traits as consumer dispositional variables can significantly influence how consumers respond to global brands (Hollebeek, 2018; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020). Inspired by such calls, this study investigates the unexplored moderating role of global connectedness on the effects of self-congruity on psychological ownership and, subsequently, engagement because consumers high in global connectedness

tend to have a more positive view toward globalization, which can influence their attitude and response toward global brands (Makri *et al.* 2019).

Finally, scant attention has been paid to cross-cultural research as prior studies have mainly examined self-congruity in a single-country context (e.g., Kumar, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021; Abosag *et al.*, 2020; Fu *et al.*, 2020; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020; Leckie *et al.*, 2022). Since the connection between a global brand and a consumer is a form of self-focus and self-expression, cultural differences are likely to influence consumers' connection with the brand (Bajac *et al.*, 2018). As such, the role of congruity in influencing consumer behavior in international marketing contexts needs to be clarified (Wang *et al.* 2022), which can help to “explain different patterns of effects in congruence-based theoretical models” (Bajac *et al.*, 2018, p.499). This study responds by testing the conceptual framework (see Figure.1) in both developed (the USA) and developing (India) country contexts. Due to differences in socio-economic status and cultural backgrounds, consumers in developed and developing markets differ regarding their ideologies, lifestyles, and consumption habits (Steinhoff *et al.*, 2022). Understanding cross-cultural differences may help comprehend how consumers' psychological dispositions influence their global brand engagement (Gupta *et al.*, 2018).

From a theoretical perspective, this study aims to extend research on the self-congruity-consumer engagement relationship by (i) examining all three forms of self-congruity to comprehensively understand the development of engagement; (ii) investigating the mediating mechanism of psychological ownership to explicate the relationship between self-congruity and engagement better; (iii) analyzing the moderating mechanism of global connectedness to provide insights into the individual variations in consumer engagement; and (iv) exploring how cross-cultural differences may influence the role of different forms of self-congruity in stimulating customer engagement. From a practical standpoint, this study may help multinational firms streamline their consumer engagement strategies across international

markets by providing insights into the relevance of individual and contextual variations of self-congruity with global brands.

Conceptual Foundation and Hypotheses Development

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement, which refers to “a psychological state, occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal agent/object within specific service relationships” (Brodie *et al.* 2011, p. 258); this is rapidly emerging as a key metric for measuring the success of global brands (Steinhoff *et al.*, 2022). Customer engagement is critical for customer loyalty (Srivastava and Sivaramakrishnan, 2022), which is essential for the survival of firms (Salunkhe *et al.*, 2021) and better firm performance (Hollebeek, 2018). Since 2010, the Marketing Science Institute (MSI) has included customer engagement in its list of Tier I research priorities (Marketing Science Institute, 2020), which necessitates a thorough understanding of the phenomenon in international markets and across cultures (Hollebeek, 2018).

Cross-Cultural Differences in Global Brand Consumption

A global brand is defined as “a brand that uses the same name and logo, is recognized, available, and accepted in multiple regions of the world, shares the same principles, values, strategic positioning, and marketing throughout the world, and its management is internationally coordinated, although the marketing mix can vary” (Steenkamp, 2017, p. 3). In developing markets, such as India, an individual’s material possessions indicate their societal standing. Consumption of global brands is associated with the cosmopolitan elite, which induces an aspiration to identify with the global consumer culture (Alden *et al.*, 1999). For instance, as a developing nation, India has experienced accelerated growth, influencing Indian consumer preferences and decision-making toward global brands (Sheth, 2011). Specifically, consumption of global brands boosts their self-image, prestige, and social

standing (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). Global brand consumption projects a sense of power, distinction, and success (Pino *et al.*, 2019; Boobalan *et al.*, 2022). Due to the growing global consumer culture, consumers in developing countries tend to favor global brands (Cleveland, 2018; Özsomer, 2012).

Unlike consumers in developing markets where global brand consumption has been a relatively recent trend, consumers in developed economies such as the USA, have long been predisposed to brands (Holt *et al.*, 2004). Since a multitude of global brands are primarily from the USA (Makri *et al.*, 2019; Holt *et al.*, 2004), American consumers are less concerned about the cultural value that a global brand provides; rather, they are more interested in its utilitarian value (Guo and Hong, 2018). They are more sophisticated, enjoy greater choices, and demand better-quality products than consumers in developing countries (Guo and Hong, 2018). They consider global brands as signals of quality and functionality and thus develop strong purchase intentions (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003; Strizhakova *et al.*, 2011). Thus, unlike their counterparts in developing countries who consume global brands to adopt the affluent lifestyles of the developed world, American consumers regard global brands as fundamental aspects of their lifestyle (Guo and Hong, 2018).

Self-Congruity and Customer Engagement

Self-congruity refers to “the match between consumers’ self-concept (actual self, ideal self, and social self) and the user image (or ‘personality’) of a given product, brand, or store” (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006, p. 955). Sirgy (1985) postulates that an individual’s self-concept has distinct dimensions: the actual, ideal, and social self. Consumers’ understanding of “self,” i.e., their self-concept, is flexible and multiple self-concepts can operate simultaneously (Malär *et al.*, 2011).

Self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1985) postulates that consumers have their own beliefs (self-concept) and therefore consume brands to express themselves, thereby validating their

self-concept (Japutra *et al.*, 2019). That is, they consume brands that resonate with who they are and with a motive to verify their identity (Malär *et al.*, 2011). The stronger the congruity between consumers' self-concept and brand image, the greater the likelihood of consumers forming positive cognitive, and affective brand connections (Sirgy, 2018). Prior literature demonstrates a positive relationship between self-congruity and customer engagement (see Table I).

<Insert Table I here>

However, most studies examining this relationship have omitted either one or more of the self-congruity dimensions (e.g., Japutra *et al.*, 2019; Kumar, 2021) or examined self-congruity's overall impact (e.g., Fu *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, social self-congruity has been largely neglected in the marketing literature (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020) as studies on pro-brand behaviors have mainly focused on actual and ideal self-congruity (Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020). This limits our understanding of the relative and distinct impact of the different facets of self-congruity as all three forms can simultaneously influence consumer responses (Malär *et al.*, 2011). Given that this study aims to investigate consumer engagement with global brands, it may be prudent to investigate social self-congruity as social acknowledgment or acceptance is especially salient in status-oriented or symbolic consumption motivation (Wang *et al.* 2022), such as global brands (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008).

When perceiving congruity between the brand image and their actual self-concept, consumers may engage with the brand to affirm their actual self and attain self-consistency in their beliefs (Sirgy, 2018). Similarly, consumers favor brands congruent with their ideal selves to augment their aspirations and self-esteem (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019), strengthening their self-enhancement motive (Sirgy, 2018). Furthermore, consumers may pursue social verification and consume brands to portray a specific image to their social circle (Sirgy, 2018). Thus, consumers tend to engage with the brand to satisfy their need for social

consistency (Sirgy, 1985) and increase their social capital (Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020).

Accordingly, we posit that:

H1: *Customers' (a) actual, (b) ideal, and (c) social self-congruity positively influences their brand engagement.*

Self-Congruity and Brand Psychological Ownership

Psychological ownership is defined as “that state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership (material or immaterial in nature) or a piece of it is ‘theirs’” (Pierce *et al.*, 2001, p. 299). Consumers consider the target object as ‘mine’ and emotionally invest in it (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). Such psychological associations result in favorable brand attitudes (Morewedge *et al.*, 2021) and purchases (Fuchs *et al.*, 2010).

Consumers develop psychological ownership by exercising control over the brand, immersing oneself in the brand, or even getting to know the brand intimately (Peck and Shu, 2009).

In line with the self-congruity theory, people tend to develop deep psychological connections with brands congruent with their self-concept (Sirgy, 1985). Feelings of ownership are attributed to the extension of self-concept (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). Possessions can symbolize the self, and psychologically owned possessions become means for self-expression and self-enhancement (Sirgy, 2018). Psychological ownership with a brand helps consumers define, sustain, and reinforce a specific self-identity (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). The need for self-expression through brands engenders psychological ownership when brands match consumers' self-concepts (Pierce *et al.*, 2001). Specifically, brand psychological ownership characterized by pronouns, such as “mine” or “my,” indicates references to actual selves (Kirk *et al.*, 2018). Consumers tend to psychologically own a brand it satisfies their sense of actual, ideal, or social self. For example, when consumers consider a brand similar to their actual self, i.e., “this brand is like me” or “I am like a typical

user of this brand,” they tend to believe that “this brand is mine” (Morewedge *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, if consumers consider a brand congruent with their ideal selves, they are likely to psychologically own it, i.e., “I wish this brand were mine.” Brands closer to one’s ideal self may be unaffordable or unattainable. Therefore, we expect that consumers would psychologically own the brand that satisfies their self-expression motives without legal ownership (Morewedge *et al.*, 2021). Furthermore, consumers have an innate need for social validation and look for brands that help them present themselves to their social circle (Kirk *et al.*, 2018). In sum, when consumers perceive a brand is congruent with their self-concept (actual, ideal, or social self), they tend to psychologically own the brand to satisfy their need for self-validation, social validation, or self-enhancement. Thus, we hypothesize:

H2: Consumers’ (a) actual, (b) ideal, and (c) social self-congruity positively influence consumer brand psychological ownership.

Prior literature asserts that US consumers mainly consume brands that meet their specific requirements and are often closer to their actual selves (Wang *et al.*, 2022). This is because the USA, being a Western and individualist culture society, is characterized by individuals who tend to favor a unique identity of themselves (Hofstede, 2001). US consumers tend to be more ‘me-focused’ (Hofstede, 2001) and highly emphasize self-expression, self-accomplishment, and individuality (Wang *et al.* 2022). They take pride in themselves and pay more attention to self-expressive activities (Agrawal and Maheswaran, 2005). As such, they are concerned with maximizing their sense of personal worth and prefer brands that reinforce their conceptions of who they are, which satisfies their need for self-consistency (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019). In contrast, consumers in collectivist cultures (i.e., India) are generally more ‘we-focused’ (Hofstede, 2001) with closely knit communities and well-established social networks. They view themselves as part of an encompassing social network emphasizing connectedness and therefore tend to be other-directed. They prefer

and value global brands as their consumption enhances their social standing (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). For meeting societal standards and social acceptance (Pino *et al.*, 2019), Indian consumers purchase status-laden global brands, which may not necessarily align with their actual self-concept as consumers from interdependent self-oriented cultures (e.g., India and the East) tend to subordinate their personal goals to collective goals (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.* 2019). Therefore, we posit:

H3a: *The effect of consumers' actual self-congruity on brand psychological ownership and consumer engagement is stronger for consumers in the USA compared to those in India.*

India's strong economic growth has contributed to a surge in consumerism among Indians, which has further fueled their desire to be identified as 'global citizens' (Holt *et al.*, 2004). Indian consumers idolize and consume global brands, which gratifies their aspirations of being recognized as global citizens to enhance their self-esteem (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019). In this respect, prior studies suggest that consumers from Eastern cultures have lower self-esteem and general self-confidence than their Western counterparts (Tesser, 2000).

Hence, Indian consumers are likely to place greater importance on the values of self-esteem and self-enhancement and thus prefer global brands more than their counterparts in developed countries (Steenkamp and de Jong, 2010) as consumption of global brands boosts their self-image and prestige (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). A recent study also found that US consumers purchase symbolic goods more for self-identity verification than for self-promotion or self-enhancement purposes (Wang *et al.*, 2022). Thus, we posit:

H3b: The effect of consumers' ideal self-congruity on brand psychological ownership and consumer engagement is stronger for consumers in India than in the USA.

Indian consumers are status-conscious, i.e., stimulated by a desire to belong to a particular social group, achieve prestige among peers, and be seen as successful individuals by others.

They are highly concerned about the impression they make on others and therefore use brands to communicate meanings about themselves to their reference group (Kim *et al.*, 2019). Consumption of brands is a means of exhibiting social status seeking upward social mobility, and upgrading one's societal position (Guo, 2013). Therefore, they tend to engage in consumption behaviors promoting social conformity (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019) as they prioritize social values to make an impression on others (Pino *et al.*, 2019). While Indian consumers value social relationships (Kim *et al.*, 2019) and see the global brands they purchase as a social statement (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013), US consumers represent an individualistic society driven by self-validation motives. As consumers from independent self-oriented cultures (Western cultures) tend to focus less on social identification (Rabbane *et al.*, 2020), we hypothesize:

H3c: The effect of consumers' social self-congruity on brand psychological ownership and consumer engagement is stronger for consumers in India than in the USA.

Mediating Role of Brand Psychological Ownership

Prior literature on the self-congruity theory suggests that customers who consider the brand as a part of their extended selves are more likely to perceive the brand as "theirs" (Fuchs *et al.*, 2010). Such perceptions of psychological ownership manifest an obligation toward the object (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004). Due to a sense of psychological ownership, individuals are inclined to help the brand prosper and consider the success to be personal (Chang *et al.*, 2015). Consumers become possessive and become emotionally invested in the brand (Fuchs *et al.*, 2010) that results in positive brand-related behaviors (Peck and Shu, 2009) and brand advocacy (Kirk *et al.*, 2018). Thus, the establishment of brand psychological ownership is crucial for developing long-term customer engagement (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017). Building on this, it is suggested that customers may engage with brands they consider their own (Kumar,

2021) due to the congruence perceived between their self-concept and the brand.

Accordingly, we posit:

H4: Brand psychological ownership positively mediates the relationship between self-congruity (actual, ideal, and social) and customer engagement.

Moderating Role of Global Connectedness

Global connectedness entails an individual's overall attachment to the global world (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013). Individuals with high global connectedness incorporate a global lifestyle; they appreciate global brands (Belk, 1988; Özsomer, 2012) as they consider global brands as routes to global consumer culture (Makrides *et al.*, 2022). Since global brands appeal more to consumers with high global connectedness (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2020), they tend to be more receptive toward global brands, and react more positively by exhibiting positive attitudes toward them (Guo, 2013; Bartsch *et al.*, 2016). Given the assimilation effect produced by global connectedness, consumers high in global connectedness prefer global brands (Bartsch *et al.* 2016). As such, consumer responses to self-congruity (such as psychological ownership) in the context of global brands are likely to vary depending on their global connectedness.

Consumers with high global connectedness associate themselves with global user imagery and would be psychologically inclined to own global brands in their “real” sense because such brands symbolize a global consumer culture (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2011). Consumption of global brands would help them meet their self-consistency motive and serve as symbols of identity creation (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2011). As global brands help to validate their self-identities and endow them with much-needed individuality, the positive effect of actual self-congruity on psychological ownership is likely to be amplified.

Ideal self-congruity, which entails the propensity to consume global brands to increase self-esteem (Malär *et al.*, 2011; Sirgy, 1985), is likely to be complemented with a

sense of global connectedness that is associated with “status-focused” consumption (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013). People engage in global consumption to procure the “passport” to global citizenship (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). Hence, the positive effect of ideal self-congruity on psychological ownership is likely to be greater among consumers with high global connectedness.

Social self-congruity involves people’s propensity to engage with global brands to increase their social status (Malär *et al.*, 2011) as global brand consumption increases social value (Cleveland *et al.*, 2022). Consumers are inclined to psychologically own a global brand to augment their social prestige (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016), and achieve social validation (Sirgy, 2018). Given that it symbolizes social status (Bartsch *et al.*, 2016), global connectedness is likely to bolster the impact of social self-congruity on the psychological ownership of global brands.

Furthermore, as we develop theoretical underpinnings for the mediating effects of psychological ownership in the self-congruity–customer engagement link and the moderating effects of global connectedness on the self-congruity–psychological ownership relationship, the theoretical rationale behind these hypotheses also suggests that global connectedness will influence the strength of the indirect relationships. Hence, we hypothesize:

H5: Global connectedness positively moderates the (a) direct effects between (x) actual, (y) ideal, and (z) social self-congruity and brand psychological ownership, and (b) the indirect effects between (x) actual (y), ideal, and (z) social self-congruity and customer engagement through brand psychological ownership, such that both the effects are stronger when global connectedness is high rather than low.

The conceptual framework of the study is presented in Figure 1.

<Insert Figure 1 approximately here>

Research Method

Context and Sample

Data were collected from respondents from the USA and India, representing developed and developing countries, respectively. These two countries differ in culture, social structures, and how they select and process information and consume brands (Boobalan *et al.*, 2022). Five hundred forty-three paid Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) workers in the USA and India participated in this between-subject study through an exchange for \$0.60. MTurk samples provide data as reliable as those obtained via traditional methods (Tran and Paparoidamis, 2020). To ensure data quality, we followed prior research (Septianto *et al.*, 2021) and used two recruitment criteria: participants with 98% task completion approval and with more than 100 completed tasks. We also included two quality-control questions at the beginning and end of the survey to check participants' attention. 40 participants were dropped based on these responses. The net sample of this study comprised 543 adults from developed (USA =270) and developing (India = 273) markets. Appendix A provides the sample's demographic characteristics, which are consistent with previous international marketing studies using MTurk (Septianto *et al.*, 2021; Tran and Paparoidamis, 2020).

Measures and procedure

The participants were asked to follow the instructions carefully to respond to the questions in Qualtrics and to provide their consent to participate in the survey. First, specific instructions were provided to the respondents to recall and name their favorite global brand. Adapting from Steenkamp *et al.* (2003), the respondents were asked to select their global brand if they think (a) consumers overseas buy that brand and (b) the brand is sold in most parts of the world. Global brands invoked by the USA participants included categories such as fashion and lifestyle (Nike, Puma), electronics/technology (Apple, Samsung), automobile (Buick, Ford), and retail (e.g., Walmart and Kroger). Those evoked by the Indian participants included

electronics/technology (Apple, Samsung), fashion/lifestyle (Nike, Puma), automobile (e.g., BMW, Audi, Chevrolet), e-commerce (e.g., Amazon), and FMCG (Coca-Cola, Colgate). Appendix B provides a complete list of brands invoked by respondents with country of origin and geographic scope.

The results indicated that participants invoked two types of global brands -- foreign-owned and local-owned global brands (Winit *et al.*, 2014). Foreign-owned global brands have a different country of origin and are available in the respondents' country; this represented true perceived globalness (Özsomer, 2012). Therefore, recalled brands with origin from countries such as Germany, Korea, and France were treated to have true perceived globalness.

We conducted two post-hoc pre-tests to examine the perceived globalness of the local-owned global brands. We identified two sets of local-owned global brands: (1) 17 brands with the USA as a country of origin and invoked at least twice by USA respondents and (2) 6 brands with India as a country of origin and invoked at least twice by Indian respondents. Two sets of respondents were recruited from MTurk from their respective countries (USA, $n=56$ and India, $n=43$) to examine the perceived globalness of these brands. We showed the name and logos of the brands to the participants and asked about their familiarity with the brand. The participants with moderate to high familiarity (on a scale of 1=not at all familiar to 5= extremely familiar) were asked to assess the perceived globalness of the brand. The three-item perceived globalness scale was adopted from Steenkamp *et al.* (2003), which included if they perceived that the brand is (a) sold all over the world, (b) known to overseas consumers, and (c) available in the shops overseas. The results indicated both USA ($M > 4.32$, $p < 0.001$) and Indian ($M > 4.51$, $p < 0.001$) samples rated the perceived globalness of the respective brands significantly higher from the mid-point. Therefore, we concluded that all brands invoked in the main study had high perceived globalness and thus were suitable for the purpose of our study.

Subsequent to recall of their favorite global brand, following Malär *et al.* (2011), participants were asked to think about the kind of person who is a typical user of this brand. The brand recall to invoke the favorite global brand and the subsequent thought of a typical brand user helped the respondents retrieve their favorite brand-related information and experiences from their memory, capturing participants' cognitive responses toward the global brand (Moharana *et al.*, 2023). Next, they were asked to respond to actual, ideal, and social self-congruity scale items adapted from Sirgy *et al.* (1997) and Malär *et al.* (2011). Brand psychological ownership was measured with a three-item scale adapted from Peck and Shu (2009); customer engagement was measured with a ten-item scale adapted from Hollebeek *et al.* (2014); and global connectedness was measured with a seven-item scale adapted from Strizhakova and Coulter (2013). Table II indicates details of scale items and Cronbach's Alpha for the US, Indian, and pooled samples.

<Insert Table II approximately here>

Data Analysis

The theoretical model was empirically validated using covariance-based structural equation modeling (SEM).

Common Method Bias (CMB)

Cross-sectional data from a single source may be susceptible to common method bias (Podsakoff, 2003). We used ex-ante and ex-post testing approaches. Ex-ante measures included measuring each latent construct on a well-established scale, assuring response anonymity and confidentiality, and randomly ordering question blocks (and items within) in the online survey to prevent cognitive correlation among constructs. The ex-post remedy of unmeasured common latent factor (CLF) was used by loading all items to their theoretical construct and a CLF. In both samples, we compared the χ^2 values for both models (USA: $\Delta\chi^2=22.07$, $\Delta df =23$; India:

$\Delta\chi^2=29.87$, $\Delta df=23$) and found no significant differences indicating that CMB was not a major issue to the validity of our findings (Lowry and Gaskin, 2014).

Measurement model

The convergent and discriminant validity of the scale were tested by using a measurement model. The model fit indices of the measurement models were acceptable for both data sets (USA [$\chi^2 = 320.89$; $df = 237$; $\chi^2/df = 1.35$; $CFI = 0.980$; $RMSEA = 0.036$] and India [$\chi^2 = 322.43$; $df = 237$; $\chi^2/df = 1.3$; $CFI = 0.984$; $RMSEA = 0.036$]). For both samples, Cronbach's alpha for all constructs exceeded 0.70, composite reliabilities for all constructs were above 0.8, and all item loadings were above the threshold loading of 0.7 (Table II). Thus, the results showed acceptable convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Next, discriminant validity was assessed using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion. The AVEs for all variables exceeded 0.50 for country-specific samples. The square root of the AVE values was greater than the inter-correlation values (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), confirming discriminant validity (see Table III). We also found acceptable convergent and discriminant validity for the pooled sample, which is depicted in Table II and III.

<Insert Table III approximately here>

Measurement invariance

Three-step hierarchical procedure multigroup invariance analysis (see Table IV) was estimated to confirm that the measurement model produced an invariant structure in both countries (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). First, to establish configural invariance, we estimated the baseline measurement models and tested their goodness-of-fit for the pooled dataset (M1a) and each country sample (M1b and M1c; Cleveland *et al.*, 2022). Configural invariance was established for baseline model (M3: $\chi^2 = 643.32$, $\chi^2/df = 1.35$, $RMSEA = 0.026$, $CFI > 0.90$ and $SRMR = 0.036$). Second, we assessed metric invariance by testing a hierarchy of nested models (M4a and M4b). As Byrne (2001) suggested, we put additional constraints on each

successive model (Prince *et al.*, 2020). The fit statistics for M4a (wherein measurement weights were constrained, and inter-construct paths were freely estimated across the two samples) and M4b (wherein both measurement weights and structural covariances were constrained) were acceptable. We found M3a varied insignificantly from the baseline unconstrained model ($\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf) = 15.56 (18), $p > 0.62$). Thus, the measures used in this study exhibit (full) metric invariance (Table IV). However, M4b varied significantly from the baseline model $\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf) = 1118.39 (63), $p < 0.000$, which indicated that some parameters were not invariant across the two samples. Third, scalar invariance testing showed partial scalar invariance ($\Delta RMSEA=0.00$, $\Delta CFI=0.001$, and $\Delta SRMR=0.001$) as constraints for six items had to be released. Literature suggests full measurement variance is rarely achieved in practice (Cleveland *et al.*, 2022). Since the results showed satisfactory configural, metric invariance, and partial scalar invariance, we can meaningfully estimate the structural relations and test the hypotheses in a cross-cultural setting (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003).

<Insert Table IV approximately here>

Structural model and hypotheses testing

We tested the cross-cultural equivalence of our hypothesized model. The first step involved estimating a baseline structural model for the pooled sample (Table IV, M2c). Next, we replicated and examined the hypothesized baseline structural model for USA and Indian samples (M2a and M2b). All models achieved acceptable fit (Table IV, M2a-c). Then structural paths were estimated for pooled samples and each country sample separately. The results indicated that the actual (USA: $b = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$; India: $b = 0.21$, $p < 0.001$), ideal (USA: $b = 0.13$, $p < 0.001$; India: $b = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$), and social self-congruity (USA: $b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$; India: $b = 0.23$, $p < 0.001$) significantly influenced customer engagement supporting H1a, H1b, H1c. Similarly, the actual (USA: $b = 0.34$, $p < 0.001$; India: $b = 0.26$, $p < 0.001$), ideal (USA: $b = 0.19$, $p < 0.01$; India: $b = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$), and social self-congruity (USA: $b = 0.41$, $p <$

0.001; India: $b = 0.21$, $p < 0.01$) significantly impacted psychological ownership across both samples, thereby supporting H2a, H2b, H2c. Brand psychological ownership significantly influenced customer engagement for both the USA ($b = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$) and Indian ($b = 0.24$, $p < 0.01$) consumers. We found similar results for pooled data analysis (see Table V). The total variance explained (R^2) for customer engagement was 51% and 56%, and for brand psychological ownership was 25% and 63%, for US and Indian consumers, respectively. Figure 2 depicts the results of the structural model for each country.

<Insert Figure 2 approximately here>

<Insert Table V approximately here>

Cross-country multigroup analysis

Next, multigroup SEM was conducted using a χ^2 difference test to compare the proposed relationships between USA and Indian samples (Table V). The effect of actual self-congruity on consumer engagement ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 1.002$, $p = 0.32$) and brand psychological ownership ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 0.673$, $p = 0.41$) was not significantly different across each country. Hence, H3a was not supported. Further, the results indicated that the effect of ideal self-congruity on consumer engagement ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 0.509$, $p = 0.48$) was not significantly different across each country; however, the effect of ideal self-congruity on brand psychological ownership ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 6.277$, $p = 0.01$) was significantly stronger for India ($b = 0.42$) than USA ($b = 0.19$), indicating partial support for H3b. Similarly, the effect of social self-congruity on consumer engagement ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 2.736$, $p = 0.10$) was not significantly different across each country. However, counterintuitively, the effect of social self-congruity on brand psychological ownership ($\Delta \chi^2(1) = 4.908$, $p = 0.03$) was found to be significantly stronger for USA ($b = 0.41$) than Indian ($b = 0.21$) consumers, indicating partial support for H3c.

Mediation, moderation, and moderated mediation effects

A moderated mediation model (Model 7) in PROCESS was used to investigate the indirect and moderation effects separately for the USA, Indian, and pooled data. The indirect and moderation effects were assessed using 5000 bootstrap samples estimated with 95% CI. The proposed mediating effects of brand psychological ownership on the relationship between actual, ideal, social self-congruity, and consumer engagement were significant for both countries and pooled sample. Therefore, H4a, H4b, and H4c were supported (see Table V).

Next, results indicated the moderating effect of global connectedness on the relationship between actual self-congruity and brand psychological ownership was significant for both samples. The moderating effect of global connectedness on the relationship between ideal self-congruity and brand psychological ownership was insignificant for the USA but significant for India. Furthermore, the moderating effect of global connectedness on the relationship between social self-congruity and brand psychological ownership was significant for both the USA and India. Hence, hypotheses H5ax, and 5az were supported for the US consumers, whereas hypotheses H5ax, H5ay, and H5az were supported for Indian consumers (see Table VI).

For actual self-congruity, the index of moderated mediation was negative and significant for the USA but positive and significant for India. For ideal self-congruity, the index of moderated mediation was insignificant for both the USA and India. Furthermore, for social self-congruity, the index of moderated mediation was insignificant for the USA but positive and significant for India. Hence, hypotheses H5bx were supported for both the USA and India, H5by was not supported, and H5bz was supported for only Indian consumers (see Table VI).

<Insert Table VI approximately here>

General Discussion

This study provides a deeper understanding of the self-congruity–customer engagement relationship by investigating the underlying mediating and moderating mechanisms across

developed and developing country contexts. Consistent with the self-congruity theory, our study findings suggest that all three forms of self-congruity positively influence customers to psychologically own and engage with global brands. Interestingly, while ideal self-congruity is found to exert the strongest influence on brand psychological ownership for Indian consumers, social self-congruity emerges to be the most influential for US consumers. This demonstrates the importance Indian consumers place on their self-enhancement motive as compared to US consumers for whom seeking social validation is most important. Our findings further reveal psychological ownership as a key psychological mechanism for understanding how and why consumers' self-congruity translates into their engagement. Further, as expected, our findings demonstrate that global brands are more appealing to Indian consumers with high global connectedness. Surprisingly, global connectedness is found to negatively moderate the relationships between self-congruity orientations (actual and social) and psychological ownership for US consumers. Possibly, given the established association between global brands and developed economies, especially the USA (Makri *et al.*, 2019), US consumers believe their own domestic brands drive global integration (also see Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). As such, they do not feel a strong need to psychologically own such brands for identity creation or social approval purposes, which dampens the relationship between self-congruity and brand psychological ownership. This is further reflected in our results for moderated mediation analysis. Global connectedness is found to positively moderate the mediated relationship between actual and social self-congruity and consumer engagement through brand psychological ownership for Indian consumers; in contrast, these moderating effects are negative for US consumers.

Theoretical Implications

This study advances research on global customer engagement by responding to recent calls for investigating how congruity (Bajac *et al.*, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2022) accounts for customer

engagement across international markets (Hollebeek, 2018). In doing so, our study makes specific contributions to theory.

First, this study contributes to the literature on self-congruity by examining the relative and distinct effects of all three forms of self-congruity on engagement across developing and developed country settings. This allows us to respond to multiple calls for incorporating different components of self-congruity simultaneously (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2022), considering that social self-congruity has received limited attention in the marketing literature. Contrary to the proclamations that social self-congruity effects do not operate among Western consumers (Japutra *et al.*, 2019; Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020; Sirgy, 2018), our results demonstrate the centrality of social validation for US consumers who regard global brands as social statements (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013). However, this result could also be attributed to the fact that most global brands (Appendix B) chosen by US consumers in this research are conspicuous products since the social-type self-congruity effects are suggested to be more influential than the non-social-type self-congruity effects for conspicuous products (Kim, 2015). Another novel finding relates to ideal self-congruity. While prior studies demonstrate no significant impact of ideal self-congruity on customer engagement in either the Indian (Gonzalez-Jimenez *et al.*, 2019) or the Western (Malär *et al.*, 2011) context, our study finds ideal self-congruity to be influential in the USA, as well as in India where ideal self-congruity emerges as the most influential among the three components.

Second, while much research demonstrates a direct relationship in the self-congruity-engagement link (e.g., Šegota *et al.*, 2022; Fu *et al.*, 2020; France *et al.* 2018), this research uncovers the mediating mechanism of psychological ownership to explain how and why customers' self-congruity influences their engagement with global brands. Morewedge *et al.* (2021) indicated that consumer experience of psychological ownership is likely to manifest

differently across cultures. In this respect, we particularly contribute to the body of literature on brand psychological ownership (Harmeling *et al.*, 2017) by validating its role in translating self-congruity into customer engagement with global brands across different cultures.

Third, by examining the moderating role of global connectedness, this study extends the self-congruity theory, psychological ownership, and customer engagement literature, as little is known about the boundary conditions that may regulate the influence of the three dimensions of self-congruity (Rabbanee *et al.*, 2020), particularly on customer engagement. In this respect, this study further advances the stream of research that underscores the regulating role of global connectedness (Özsomer, 2012; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013) by enhancing our understanding of its novel consequences across both developed and developing country contexts. Our study is the first to reveal that high global connectedness can strengthen the effects of self-congruity on psychological ownership and, subsequently, on customer engagement with global brands in the Indian context, while it weakens these effects in the US context. Although prior literature mainly advocates that consumers with high global connectedness exhibit more positive attitudes toward global brands (Guo, 2013; Bartsch *et al.*, 2016; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2020), a key implication of our findings is that the regulating effects of global connectedness may not be straightforward. Globally connected consumers differ in the way they engage with global brands across developed and developing country contexts as culture can significantly influence the psychological processes that individuals go through due to differential processing and assessing of information (Gupta *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, by empirically testing our conceptual framework across the two countries with contrasting prototypical cultures (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2020), this study adds to the growing body of knowledge on international marketing (Wang *et al.*, 2022). By shedding light on how cultural differences influence the self-congruity – engagement relationship, this

study responds to calls for research into how the various forms of self-congruity impact consumer behavior across cultures (Wang *et al.*, 2022).

Managerial Implications

This study provides insights for global brand managers to develop nuanced and effective strategies for enhancing customer engagement with global brands across both developed and developing country contexts. Our findings suggest that global brands should focus on creating a link between brand image and consumers' self-concept and designing marketing strategies that highlight this fit. For example, while beauty brands have largely influenced consumers to pursue self-enhancement, brands, such as Unilever's Dove, are now making a significant shift towards targeting the actual selves of consumers. However, consumers may also prefer brands that do not reveal their true essence; instead, they portray an aspiration and enable social validation.

Specifically, our research demonstrates that social self-congruity has the greatest impact in the US context. Therefore, marketers in developed countries may benefit by developing advertisements that promote social dynamics, such as fostering brand communities to enhance customer engagement (Moharana *et al.*, 2023). Actual self-congruity influences engagement with global brands in both the USA and India. Hence, influencer marketing strategies could be effective because consumers connect with influencers who share their real lives (Pradhan *et al.*, 2022), which aligns with their actual selves. Besides actual self-congruity, we suggest marketers target thriving aspirational segments to enhance ideal self-congruity to stimulate customer engagement. This can be accomplished by collaborating with celebrity endorsers whose lifestyles consumers aspire to achieve. For example, brands such as American Tourister and Herbalife hire iconic global celebrities such as Cristiano Ronaldo and Virat Kohli because such celebrities reflect the power and affluence consumers idolize.

The mediating role of brand psychological ownership on the relationship between customer self-congruity and engagement provides compelling evidence for marketers to develop strategies that involve customers' investment of self. For example, brands such as Starbucks created MyStarbuckIdeas.com, and Oreo created #myoreocreations, stimulating customers to psychologically own these brands and engendering their engagement. Accordingly, we suggest that marketers of global brands may employ advertising messages or develop taglines such as "my brand", "this brand is mine" to foster customer psychological ownership and engagement with the brand. Additionally, marketers can develop brand communities because consumers' investment of self in brand communities could engender self-expression and eventually help enhance brand psychological ownership (Moharana *et al.*, 2023).

Furthermore, global marketers should carefully examine consumers' global connectedness in their segmentation and positioning strategies. Specifically, the segment characterized by high global connectedness seems to be the most attractive to global companies targeting developing countries such as India where consumers are more likely to identify themselves as "global citizens" (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2019). Marketers should use communication campaigns involving global themes and international celebrities to appeal to consumers with high global connectedness by sharing more stories about the global world. Thus, global brand managers should boost their brands' global appeal and strengthen their brand equity by categorically positioning their brands as global (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2020).

In contrast, as global connectedness negatively moderates the effects of self-congruity for US consumers, we suggest firms in developed countries emphasize their national culture for effective customer engagement. Global brands in developed countries may benefit by highlighting their origin and heritage, which may help to bolster consumers' in-group

associations. Recognizing cultural nuances in developed and developing countries can help in developing effective customer engagement strategies.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current study has some limitations. First, our study investigated consumers only from the USA and India. Future scholars should investigate the current model across other developed and developing countries with diverse cultural settings that might offer fresh insights.

Second, our study examines only three dimensions of self-congruity, i.e., the actual self, the ideal self, and the social self. We call upon future scholars to examine the impact of the ideal-social self, which may have a bearing on customer engagement. Third, we investigate the moderating role of global connectedness. Future assessment of customers' global cultural identity (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013) may be helpful as globalization entails "culture mixing", which enables individuals to assimilate foreign cultures and create "creolized" cultures (Torelli and Stoner, 2019). Furthermore, future scholars can investigate whether customers' lifestyles and brand orientations are entirely global, local, or 'glocal' (Strizhakova and Coulter, 2013) and how different consumer segments engage with global brands of different countries of origin. For instance, a comparative study of these hypothesized relationships can compare Indian global brands versus American global brands. Fourth, we had asked the participants to recall a global brand they used to which they responded by naming global brands of different countries of origin. Future research may test the proposed relationships with respect to global brands of a specific country of origin. Finally, we recognize that most participants in our studies had high educational levels (i.e., over 90% held a minimum of a bachelor's degree). While studies using crowd-sourcing platforms, such as MTurk, normally report samples with high educational levels across the USA and India (Tran and Paparoidamis, 2020), mixed findings have been reported on the relationship

between education levels and engagement with global brands (Strizhakova *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, future research should include samples with varied educational backgrounds.

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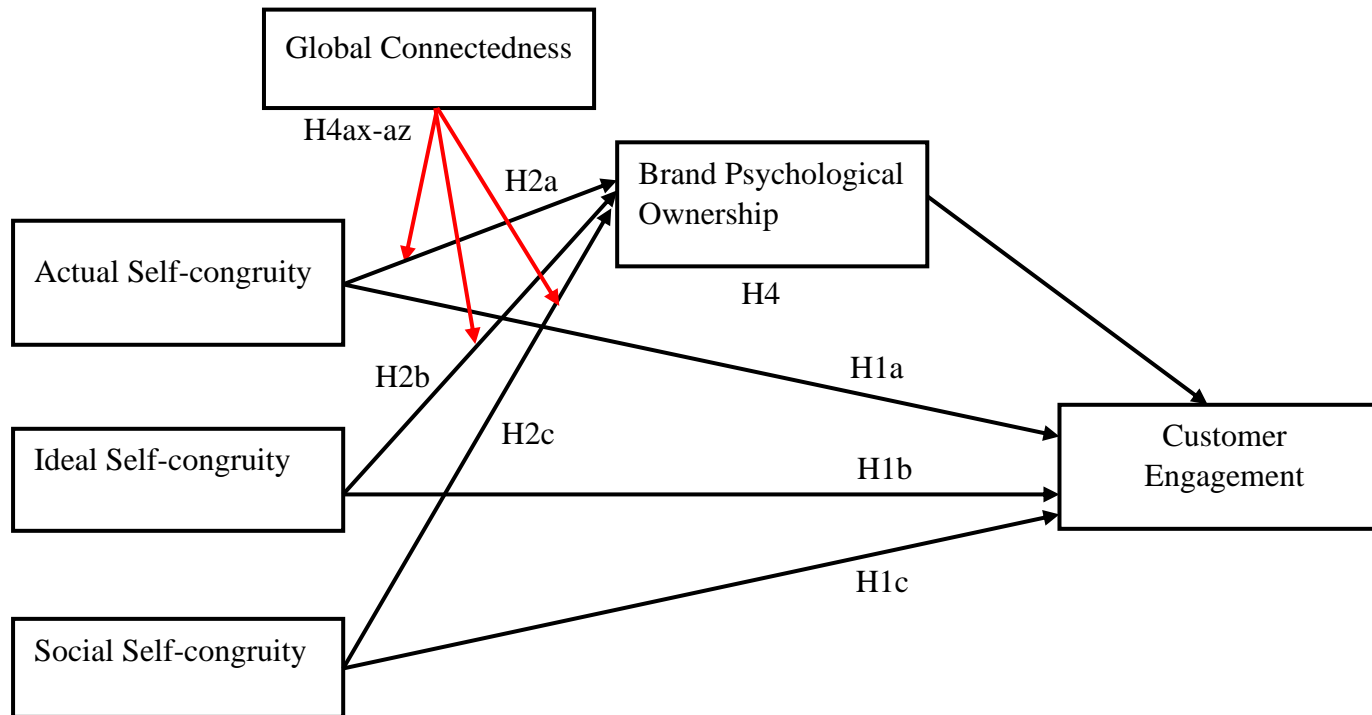
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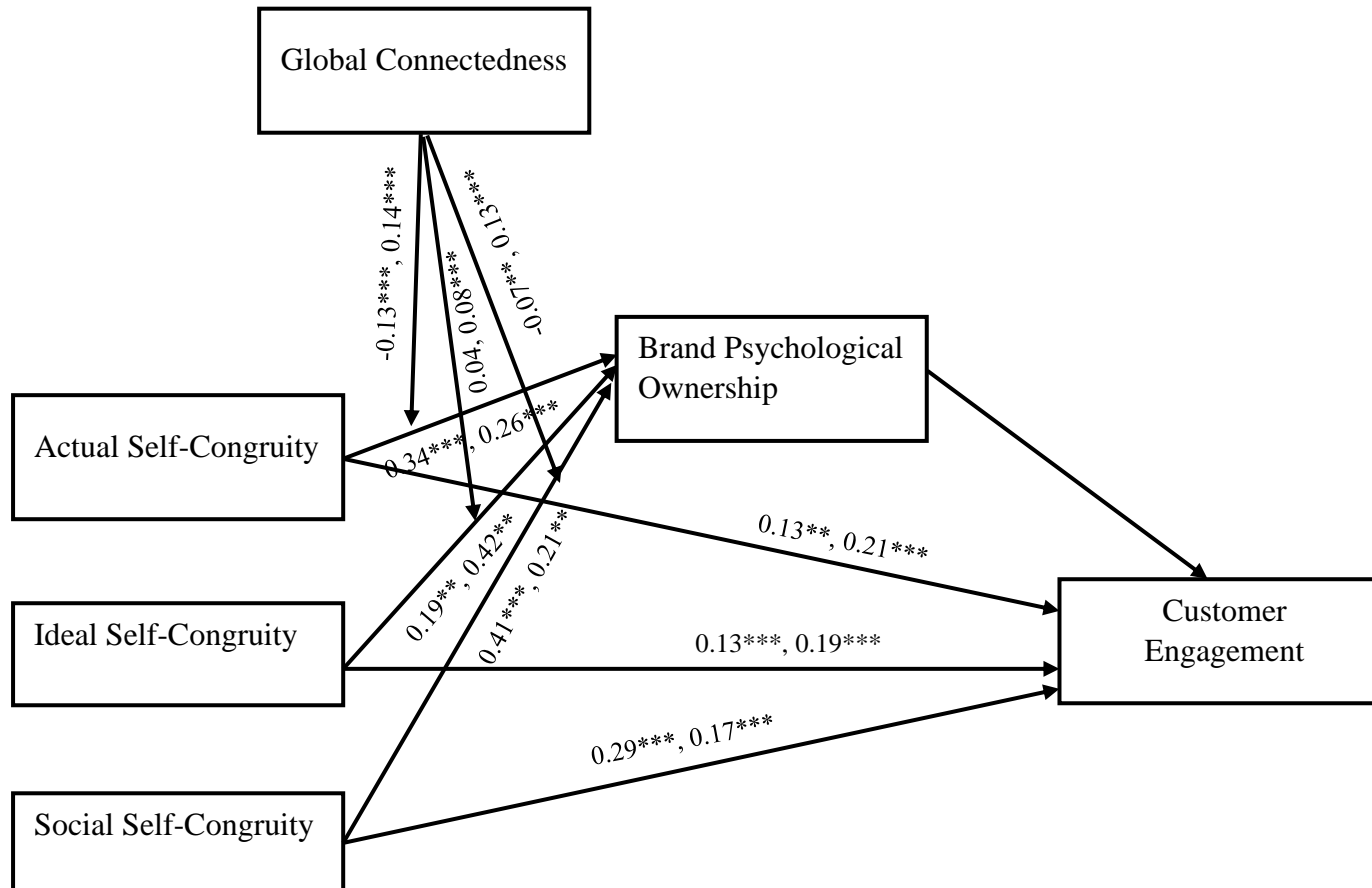
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Figure 1*Conceptual Model*

Note. The red line indicates direct moderation relationships. H4 represents the mediating hypothesis. H3a-c (indicating cross-cultural comparison) and H5a-c (indicating the moderated-mediation relationships) are not depicted in the figure to reduce its complexity.

Source: Created by authors

Figure 2*Structural Model (US and India)*

Notes: The values on each path represents the path coefficients for USA and Indian consumer, respectively; *** , $p < 0.001$; ** , $p < 0.01$

Source: Created by authors

Table I: Literature Review on Congruity-Customer Engagement (CE) relationship

Topic	Examples	Research Objectives	Theoretical Framework	Findings
Value-congruity (relatedness between the consumer and the brand in terms of shared beliefs)	Kumar (2021)	To explore the relationship between value congruity and customer engagement with the brand and brand community and to assess its impact on brand equity	Psychological Ownership Theory and Congruity Theory	Value-congruity positively impacts CE. This relationship is mediated by brand psychological ownership
Self-Image Congruity (similarity between the brand image with that of the consumer's self-concept)	Li <i>et al.</i> (2021)	To investigate the impact of self-image congruity and functional congruity on psychological ownership, social influence engagement, and knowledge-sharing engagement	Self-congruity Theory	Self-image congruity and functional congruity positively influences brand psychological ownership which drives customers' social influence engagement and knowledge sharing engagement
	France <i>et al.</i> (2018)	To understand the role of Self-congruity in co-creation behaviour	Co-creation Theory	Brand self-congruity positively influences co- creation behaviours
	Leckie <i>et al.</i> (2022)	To examines a set of drivers (i.e. social media involvement, self-brand congruence, firm image and relationship age) of consumers' social media brand engagement	Self-congruity and Self-determination Theory	Self-brand congruence is a significant driver of social media brand engagement which subsequently influences consumer satisfaction, brand trust and perceived value
Functional Congruity (similarity between the functional attributes of the brand with that of the consumer's self-concept)	Abosag <i>et al.</i> (2020)	To understand the impact of self-congruity on consumers' satisfaction with social networking sites	Self-congruity Theory	Self-congruity enhances consumers' satisfaction with social networking sites
	Fu <i>et al.</i> (2020)	To investigate the relationships among brand experience, Self-congruity, flow and brand-related outcomes	Brand Experience, Self-congruity Theory	Brand experience influenced their attitudinal and behavioural tendency about the brand through Self-congruity and flow
Actual, Ideal, Social Self-congruity	Rabbanee <i>et al.</i> (2020)	To investigate the relationships between self-congruence with a brand - which can stem from the actual, ideal, or social self, brand attachment and consumer engagement on social networking sites	Self-congruity Theory and Attachment Theory	Self-congruity is brand specific. For brand Nike, actual and social self-congruity positively influenced brand attachment. For brand Ray-Ban actual and ideal self-congruity positively influenced brand attachment
	Šegota <i>et al.</i> (2022)	To investigate the relationships between consumers' self-congruity, place satisfaction, engagement, and word-of-mouth (WOM)	-	Actual and ideal self-congruities affect place satisfaction, engagement, and expectations; which influences WOM
	This study	To understand the influence of three dimensions of customer self-congruity on customer engagement with global brands by uncovering the mediating mechanism of	Self-congruity Theory	Social self-congruity has the strongest influence on CE for US consumers, while all three forms of self-congruity are equally important in India. Psychological

brand psychological ownership and moderating role of global connectedness

ownership works as the mediating mechanism across both contexts. While global connectedness accentuates the relationship between self-congruity and brand psychological ownership for Indian consumers, it attenuates the relationship amongst US consumers

Table II: *Measurement model*

Construct and items	USA		India		Pooled	
	Loadings	α	Loadings	α	Loadings	α
<i>Actual Self-congruity (ASC)</i>		0.868		0.882		0.958
The personality of this brand is consistent with how I see myself	0.856		0.889		0.953	
The personality of this brand is a mirror image of me	0.831		0.836		0.934	
People who use this brand are similar to how I see myself	0.801		0.817		0.932	
<i>Ideal Self-congruity (ISC)</i>		0.874		0.886		0.953
The personality of this brand is consistent with how I would like to be	0.897		0.876		0.951	
The personality of this brand is a mirror image of the person I would like to be	0.783		0.834		0.914	
People who use this brand are similar to how I would like to see myself	0.832		0.839		0.934	
<i>Social Self-congruity (SSC)</i>		0.886		0.909		0.898
People who use this brand are similar to how I am seen by others	0.828		0.864		0.848	
People who prefer this brand are identifiable with me as I am seen by others	0.791		0.832		0.810	
The image of this typical brand user is consistent with how I am seen by others	0.812		0.803		0.808	
This brand contributes to my image as perceived by others	0.821		0.883		0.851	
<i>Brand Psychological Ownership (BPO)</i>		0.875		0.883		0.878
I feel like this is my brand	0.892		0.830		0.864	
I feel a very high degree of personal ownership for this brand	0.775		0.878		0.824	
I feel like I own this brand	0.849		0.839		0.834	
<i>Customer Engagement (CE)</i>		0.904		0.918		0.911
Using this brand gets me to think about it	0.766		0.790		0.775	
I think about this brand a lot when I'm using it	0.754		0.789		0.771	
Using this brand stimulates my interest to learn more about the brand	0.777		0.810		0.785	
I feel very positive when I use this brand	0.778		0.808		0.797	
Using this brand makes me happy	0.797		0.830		0.816	
Whenever I'm using [category], I usually use this brand	0.823		0.817		0.823	
<i>Global Connectedness (GC)</i>		0.932		0.950		0.940
I have a strong attachment to the global world	0.857		0.907		0.882	
I feel connected to the global world	0.888		0.890		0.891	
I think of myself as a global citizen	0.864		0.903		0.880	
Thinking about my identity, I view myself as a global citizen	0.821		0.876		0.848	
I would describe myself as a global citizen	0.855		0.872		0.858	

Note: α denotes Cronbach alpha; All loadings are significant at $p < 0.001$.

Table III: Discriminant Validity Assessment- Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Inter-construct Correlations

Fornell–Larcker criterion		CR	AVE	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
(1) Ideal Self-congruity	USA	0.876	0.703	0.839					
	India	0.886	0.722	0.850					
	Pooled	0.953	0.871	0.933					
(2) Customer Engagement	USA	0.905	0.613	0.289	0.783				
	India	0.918	0.652	0.614	0.807				
	Pooled	0.911	0.632	0.320	0.795				
(3) Global Connectedness	USA	0.933	0.735	0.232	0.646	0.857			
	India	0.950	0.792	0.522	0.253	0.890			
	Pooled	0.941	0.760	0.254	0.453	0.872			
(4) Social Self-congruity	USA	0.886	0.661	0.116	0.442	0.274	0.813		
	India	0.910	0.716	0.566	0.598	0.511	0.846		
	Pooled	0.898	0.688	0.180	0.522	0.391	0.829		
(5) Brand Psychological Ownership	USA	0.878	0.706	0.236	0.609	0.680	0.298	0.840	
	India	0.886	0.721	0.704	0.671	0.625	0.626	0.849	
	Pooled	0.879	0.707	0.264	0.636	0.656	0.449	0.841	
(6) Actual Self-congruity	USA	0.869	0.688	0.282	0.255	0.165	0.210	0.285	0.830
	India	0.885	0.719	0.444	0.571	0.387	0.473	0.586	0.848
	Pooled	0.958	0.883	0.783	0.285	0.187	0.130	0.230	0.940

Note: Bold diagonal values represent square root of AVE, Off-diagonal values represent inter-construct correlations

Table IV: Table of Invariance Testing

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$
M1a: Measurement model: USA	320.89	237	1.35	0.98	0.036	0.036	na
M1b: Measurement model: India	322.43	237	1.30	0.98	0.036	0.031	na
M1c: Measurement model: Pooled	348.71	237	1.47	0.99	0.029	0.023	na
M2a: Baseline structural SEM: USA	178.27	142	1.25	0.99	0.031	0.033	na
M2b: Baseline structural SEM: India	176.03	142	1.24	0.99	0.030	0.029	na
M2c: Baseline structural SEM: Pooled	191.60	142	1.35	0.99	0.025	0.022	na
M3: Unconstrained multigroup (Configural)	643.32	474	1.357	0.982	0.026	0.0361	na
M4a: Measurement-weights- constrained (Metric)	658.88	492	1.339	0.982	0.025	0.0354	15.56(18) ^{ns}
M4b: Structural-weights- constrained (Factor variance)	1761.91	537	3.28	0.87	0/06	0.128	1118.39(63) ^{***}
M5a: Mean and intercept constrained (Scalar)	1387.564	516	2.689	0.908	0.056	0.1300	744.24(42) ^{***}
M5b: Partial scalar ^a	693.679	510	1.360	0.981	0.026	0.0354	50.36(36) ^{ns}

Note: χ^2 , Chi-square; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square of approximation; SRMR, standardised root means square residual; ^a partial scalar invariance after gradually freeing 6 items; ns, non-significant; ***p < 0.001

Table V: Table of Direct and Indirect Effects

Hypothesised Path		Path Coefficients	Standard Error	Significance	Path coefficients diff (USA vs India)	$\Delta \chi^2$
Direct effects						
H1a: ASC → CE	USA	0.13	0.05	**	0.08	$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 1.002, p=0.32$
	India	0.21	0.06	***		
	Pooled	0.10	0.03	***		
H1b: ISC → CE	USA	0.13	0.04	***	0.06	$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 0.509, p=0.48$
	India	0.19	0.06	***		
	Pooled	0.08	0.03	**		
H1c: SSC → CE	USA	0.29	0.05	***	0.06	$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 2.736, p=0.10$
	India	0.23	0.03	***		
	Pooled	0.23	0.03	***		
H2a: ASC → BPO	USA	0.34	0.08	***	0.08	$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 0.673, p=0.41$
	India	0.26	0.06	***		
	Pooled	0.21	0.04	***		
H2b: ISC → BPO	USA	0.19	0.06	**	0.23	$\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 6.277, p=0.01$
	India	0.42	0.07	**		
	Pooled	0.18	0.04	***		
H2c: SSC → BPO	USA	0.41	0.07	***	0.20	$(\Delta \chi^2 (1) = 4.908, p=0.03$
	India	0.21	0.05	**		
	Pooled	0.40	0.05	***		
Mediation Effects						
H4a: ASC → BPO → CE	USA	0.10	0.03	[0.05 to 0.17]		
	India	0.12	0.06	[0.01 to 0.28]		
	Pooled	0.08	0.03	[0.03 to 0.07]		
H4b: ISC → BPO → CE	USA	0.08	0.02	[0.03 to 0.13]		
	India	0.13	0.07	[0.01 to 0.32]		
	Pooled	0.07	0.03	[0.02 to 0.09]		
H4c: SSC → BPO → CE	USA	0.10	0.04	[0.02 to 0.21]		
	India	0.13	0.07	[0.01 to 0.30]		
	Pooled	0.15	0.04	[0.08 to 0.25]		
Variance explained		BPO			CE	
Combined R² value	USA	0.25			0.51	
	India	0.63			0.56	
	Pooled	0.24			0.50	

Note(s): ASC, Actual Self-congruity; ISC, Ideal Self-congruity; SSC, Social Self-congruity; BPO, Brand Psychological Ownership; CE, Customer Engagement; **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001 (two-tailed).

Table VI: Moderation Effects

Hypothesised Path		Path Coefficients	Standard Error	LLCI - ULCI
H5a: ASC x GC → BPO	USA	-0.13	0.03	[0.19 to -0.07]
	India	0.14	0.02	[0.09 to 0.18]
H5b: ISC x GC → BPO	USA	-0.04	0.04	[-0.12 to 0.04]
	India	0.08	0.02	[0.03 to 0.12]
H5c: SSC x GC → BPO	USA	-0.07	0.02	[-0.13 to -0.02]
	India	0.13	0.02	[0.09 to 0.18]
H6a: ASC x GC → BPO → CE	USA	-0.05	0.02	[-0.10 to -0.00]
	India	0.04	0.02	[0.00 to 0.10]
H6b: ISC x GC → BPO → CE	USA	-0.01	0.02	[-0.07 to 0.03]
	India	0.01	0.01	[0.00 to 0.06]
H6c: SSC x GC → BPO → CE	USA	-0.03	0.01	[-0.06 to 0.00]
	India	0.03	0.02	[0.00 to 0.09]

Note(s): ASC, Actual Self-congruity; ISC, Ideal Self-congruity; SSC, Social Self-congruity; GC, Global Connectedness; BPO, Brand Psychological Ownership; CE, Customer Engagement.

Appendix A

Demographic Profile

Demographics	Category	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
		USA		India	
Gender	Male	146	54.07	187	68.50
	Female	124	45.93	86	31.50
Education	High School or Less	11	4.07	0	
	Intermediate or Trade School	5	1.85	4	1.47
	Graduate or Bachelor's Degree	169	62.59	176	64.47
	Postgraduate or Master's Degree	57	21.11	57	20.88
	Professional Degree	26	9.63	36	13.19
	Ph.D. or Higher	2	0.74	0	
Employment Status	Student	3	1.11	1	0.37
	Private Service	145	53.70	129	47.25
	Government Service	10	3.70	13	4.76
	Self-Employed	106	39.26	126	46.15
	Retired	4	1.48	1	0.37
	Unemployed	2	0.74	3	1.10

Appendix B

Type of Brands Invoked by US Participants

Country of Origin: USA			
Brand Name	Frequency	Product Category	Tangibility
Adidas^a	14	Footwear	Lifestyle
Amazon^a	21	e-Commerce	Online Retailer
Apple^a	39	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Bill's Khakis^a	2	Apparel	Lifestyle
Buick^a	3	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Calvin Klein^a	1	Apparel and Accessories	Lifestyle
Carters^a	1	Children's Apparel	Lifestyle
Chilly^a	2	Apparel	Lifestyle
Coca-Cola^a	2	Beverage	FMCG
Colgate^a	4	Personal Care	FMCG
Columbia^a	1	Apparel and Sport Equipment	Lifestyle
Dawn^a	1	Home cleaning	FMCG
Dell^a	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Disney^a	1	Media Production House and Entertainment	Media and Entertainment
Dottie Couture^a	1	Boutique	Fashion
Dove^a	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Dr. Pepper^a	1	Beverage	FMCG
Exxon^a	1	Oil and Natural Gas	Energy
Fitbit^a	1	Technology/ Electronics and Fitness	Lifestyle
Ford^a	2	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Forever21^a	1	Apparel	Fashion And Lifestyle
Freeman^a	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Google^a	2	Technology	Digital and Social Media
Happy^a	1	Toys and Children's Apparel	Children's fashion and Lifestyle
Heinz^a	1	Food and Merchandise	Food
Hewlett Packard^a	4	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Joi^a	1	Vegan food and beverages	Food
Keystone^a	1	Dental and Cosmetics	Fashion and Lifestyle
King^a	1	Health and Wellness	Healthcare
Kirks^a	1	Soaps and Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Kite Hill^a	1	Plant-based only Food	Food
Kroger^a	1	Supermarket	Retail Chain
Levi's^a	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Lincoln^a	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Maybelline^a	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Maytag^a	1	Electronic Appliances	Consumer Durable
McDonald's^a	2	Fast Food	Food Retailer
Necco Wafer^a	1	Candy, Wafer	Food Confectionary
New Balance^a	1	Footwear	Lifestyle
Nicek^a	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Nike^a	63	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Ocean Sea^a	1	Design Studio	Lifestyle
Omega^a	1	Wristwatches	Lifestyle
Patagonia^a	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Quora^a	1	Website	Social Media
Random House^a	1	Books	Publishing

Reebok^a	3	Apparel and Footwear	Fashion and Lifestyle
Roxy^a	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Sketchers^a	1	Footwear	Lifestyle
Starbucks^a	1	Coffee and Beverages	Food and Beverage Chain
Sting^a	1	Music Band	Entertainment
Tesla^a	1	Electric Vehicles	Consumer Durable
The Martenero Edgemere^a	1	Wristwatches	Lifestyle
Under Armour^a	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
US Polo^a	2	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Victoria's Secret^a	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Vivid^a	2	Eyewear	Lifestyle
Walmart^a	4	Supermarket	Retail Chain
Whole Foods^a	1	Supermarket	Retail Chain
Country of Origin: Germany			
Audi^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Benz^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Nevea^b	2	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Puma^b	3	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Country of Origin: India			
Bru^b	1	Coffee	FMCG
Dollar^b	2	Apparel and Hosiery	Lifestyle
Fastrack^b	1	Fashion Accessory	Accessory
Fogg^b	1	Personal Care	FMCG
Lakme^b	2	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Sonata^b	1	Wristwatches	Lifestyle
Titan^b	1	Watches and Fashion Accessories	Fashion and Lifestyle
Zomato^b	1	Food Delivery	Delivery Service
Country of Origin: China			
Dermasil^b	1	Personal Care	Skincare and Personal Care
Lenovo^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
OnePlus^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Country of Origin: Japan			
Honda^b	3	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Nintendo^b	1	Video Games	Technology and Entertainment
Sonic^b	1	Video Games	Technology and Entertainment
Sony^b	2	Technology/Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Subaru^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Toyota^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Country of Origin: Others, including, Canada, Finland, France, Italy, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, UK			
Ferrari^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Gucci^b	2	Apparel and Accessories	Lifestyle
H&M^b	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
LG^b	3	Technology/ Electronics	Consumer Durable
L'oreal^b	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Lululemon^b	2	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Nokia^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	Telecommunications
Roots^b	1	Apparel and Home Furnishing	Fashion and Lifestyle
Samsung^b	13	Technology/Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Sephora^b	1	Beauty and Personal Care	Fashion and Lifestyle
Yes^b	1	Rock Brand	Entertainment
Zara^b	1	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle

Note: "a" indicates US origin global brands; "b" indicates foreign owned global brands.

Type of Brands Invoked by Indian Participants

Country of Origin: USA			
Brand Name	Frequency	Product Category	Tangibility
Adidas^b	21	Footwear	Lifestyle
Amazon^b	20	e-Commerce	Online Retailer
Amway^b	1	Personal Care	FMCG
Apple^b	55	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Chevrolet^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Coca-Cola^b	10	Beverage	FMCG
Colgate^b	2	Personal Care	FMCG
Dell^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Dove^b	10	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Estee Lauder^b	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Ford^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Hanes^b	1	Apparel	Clothing
Hewlett-Packard^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Johnson and Johnson^b	4	Personal Care	Pharmaceutical and Consumer Packaged Goods
Lee^b	2	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Levi's^b	9	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Mac^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Nike^b	21	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Reebok^b	2	Apparel and Footwear	Fashion and Lifestyle
Sensodyne^b	1	Oral Care	Personal Care
Tesla^b	2	Electric Vehicles	Consumer Durable
Thomas Pink^b	2	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Toys R US^b	1	Toys and Children's Apparel	Children's Play
Whirlpool^b	1	Electronic Appliances	Consumer Durable
Country of Origin: Germany			
Audi^b	4	Automobile	Consumer Durable
BMW^b	9	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Mercedes Benz^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Puma^b	6	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Country of Origin: India			
Britannia^a	1	Food Processing	FMCG
Cinthol^a	1	Personal Care	FMCG
Fast Track^a	1	Fashion Accessory	Accessory
Flipkart^a	3	e-Commerce	Online Retailer
Fogg^a	2	Personal Care	FMCG
Himalaya^a	2	Personal Care and Wellness	Pharmaceutical and Consumer Packaged Goods
Hindustan Lever^a	1	Personal Care and Wellness	FMCG
Jockey^a	1	Apparel	Clothing
Lakme^a	4	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare

Louis Philippe^a	2	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Lux^a	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Myntra^a	1	Fashion and Lifestyle	Online Retailer
Patanjali^a	1	Personal Care and Wellness	FMCG
Raymond^a	1	Apparel and Personal Care	Fashion and Lifestyle
Tata^a	2	Conglomerate	Conglomerate
VKC^a	1	Footwear	Lifestyle
Country of Origin: China			
Lenovo^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
OnePlus^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Realme^b	1	Technology/Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Redmi^b	2	Technology/Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Country of Origin: Others, including France, Italy, Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, UK			
ASUS^b	1	Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Burberry^b	7	Clothing	Fashion and Lifestyle
Gucci^b	6	Luxury Fashion and Lifestyle	Beauty, Skincare
Kia^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Louis Vuitton^b	2	Apparel	Fashion and Lifestyle
Maggi^b	1	Food Processing	FMCG
Mango^b	8	Apparel and Sporting Equipment	Clothing
Nestle^b	1	Food Processing	FMCG
Oriflame^b	1	Personal Care	Beauty, Skincare
Pears^b	2	Personal Care	FMCG
Pepe Jeans^b	1	Apparel	Clothing and Lifestyle
Phillips^b	1	Technology/Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Prada^b	1	Apparel and Accessories	Fashion and Lifestyle
Rolex^b	2	Wristwatches	Lifestyle
Rolls Royce^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable
Samsung^b	13	Technology/Technology/ Electronics	High Technology
Volvo^b	1	Automobile	Consumer Durable

Note: "a" indicates Indian origin global brands; "b" indicates foreign owned global brands.