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DOES PERSONALITY CONGRUENCE EXPLAIN LUXURY BRAND ATTACHMENT? THE RESULTS OF AN INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This study contributes to the literature on brand personality congruence and its impact on brand attachment in the luxury context. There is a general lack of clarity regarding the self-brand congruity construct's measurement, which also calls for cross-national validation. Although previous evidence suggests a positive relationship between brand-self congruity and consumer brand associations (brand attachment here), this relationship requires a deeper investigation. This study tests and validates a personality congruence scale on an international level in the luxury sector. It also measures congruence's effect on brand attachment, based on a survey of nearly 1,500 international luxury customers. The findings confirm that personality congruence structure is based upon five dimensions: prestige, emotion, trust, anxiety and order. Results highlight the personality congruence effect and its influence upon brand attachment. Finally, similarities and differences across countries are detected with reference to personality congruence and the brand attachment relationship. Theoretical and managerial implications are also discussed.

Keywords: Brand-store-consumer personality, personality congruence, brand attachment, luxury.

1. Introduction

Luxury consumption is one of the prevalent practices that contemporary individuals use to extend their identities. According to a recent report by Bain & Company (2018), the global luxury market, including personal luxury goods, cars and gourmet food, grew to nearly €1.2 trillion in 2018, up 5% from 2017. Compared to other consumer goods industries, the luxury market has emerged in the last decades as one of the fastest-growing industries in the world.

Luxury consumption has gained increased attention from different disciplines (Sung et al. 2015), ranging from sociological to the various economic fields (e.g., Veblen, 1899). The management literature has also focused on the luxury phenomenon and its implications for consumer behavior and marketing management (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017; Ko & Megehee, 2012; Ko et al., 2019). In this regard, research suggests that one of luxury brands' most distinctive aspects is that by purchasing and consuming them, consumers express and enhance their identity and ideal personality (Sung et al., 2015; Heine et al., 2018). Vigneron and Johnson (2004) defined luxury brands as an exclusive family of brands, quite distinct from others.

One of the main features distinguishing luxury brands from others is their psychological benefits to consumers, which include social recognition and self-esteem (Vickers & Renand, 2003). A person who buys a luxury product is buying "a dream" (Dubois & Paternault, 1995; Wu et al., 2015). Moreover, the hedonic dimension (the pleasure and emotion involved) is an important motivation for consuming luxuries (Hagtvedt & Patrick, 2009). Accordingly, the literature has stressed that the brand personality concept is critically important to luxury brand management by helping the relevant stakeholders better understand how consumers express themselves by purchasing and using luxury brands. However, despite researchers and practitioners' growing interest in brand personality, studies on luxury brands are still limited (Sung et al., 2015; Heine et al., 2018; Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017).

Since the end of the Fifties (Levy, 1959), the brand personality concept has been used to interpret a brand's symbolic values and humanlike characteristics that go beyond the functional product attributes (Plummer, 1985; Blackston, 1993). Brand personality is considered an important differentiation tool (Aaker & Fournier, 1995) that may increase a brand's equity (Aaker, 1997). Scholars also affirm that brand personality plays a critical role in the "for me" choice, or in the "I see myself in that brand" choice (De Chernatony & Dall'Omo Riley, 1998). In this regard, self-congruity theory is one of the most widely used theoretical frameworks in brand personality research (Sirgy, 2018; Belk, 1988), suggesting that consumers buy those brands whose personalities are perceived to be congruent with their own self-concept.

Congruence can be defined as “the similarity (the “match” or “mismatch”) between the symbolic attributes of the product/brand and self-concept of the individual” (Parker, 2009, p. 175). The stronger the congruence (the less the mismatch) between a perceived brand personality and consumers’ own personalities, the more likely they are to buy this brand (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014; Aaker, 1997; Hogg et al., 2000; Park & Lee, 2005; Parker, 2009).

However, the self-brand congruity construct’s conceptualization and operationalization in terms of self-congruity with the brand personality seem to be inconsistent across studies (Radler, 2018). The general lack of clarity regarding the self-brand congruity construct’s measurement leaves scope for further research. Furthermore, given the prevalence of international brands, cross-national validation of this measurement also requires more research (Radler, 2018). International differences between the various measurements are a major reason for the lack of agreement on universal brand personality dimensions, making it difficult to generalize such a diverse concept. For example, studies find that consumers in different national and cultural contexts identify with different relevant brand personality traits (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2014). Although some research has theorized the role of national and culture diversities in consumer-brand relationships, this empirical research is still limited (Lam, Ahearne & Schillewaert, 2012). Moreover, most evidence is based on studies in specific countries (Bosnjak & Bochmann, 2007; Milas & Mlacic, 2007). An exception is the contribution by Hennigs et al. (2012) that shows similarities and differences regarding consumers’ perception of luxury values across different countries.

Nevertheless, scholars have also shown the explanatory power of brand personality and congruence in terms of brand outcomes (with particular reference to “brand attachment”) in specific national contexts (Sung, Park & Han, 2005; Ambroise, 2006; Gouteron, 2006, 2008). Some scholars have suggested that creating brand attachment with customers plays a key role in developing brand loyalty in today’s marketing world (Kim & Joung, 2016), since individuals who are strongly attached to a brand are generally committed to it and to preserving their relationship with it (Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005).

The initial empirical evidence suggests a positive relationship between brand-self congruity and consumer-brand relationships (i.e. brand attachment) across nations, but the strength of these relationships requires deeper investigation (e.g., Lam et al., 2012; Litvin & Kar, 2004; Sung & Choi, 2012). Again, some scholars have theorized the role that consumers’ nationality plays in their relationships with brand, but this empirical research is also very limited (Lam et al., 2012).

Based on the above premises, our research endeavored to test and validate a personality congruence scale on an international and cross-national level as well as to measure congruence's effect on brand attachment, with specific reference to the luxury sector.

Specifically, this study posits that personality congruence is the result of individual consumers' perception alignment of luxury brand personality, luxury store personality and their own personality. In addition to the human and brand personality constructs, our research also considered store personality, since stores are one of the main places where brands can create an immersive experience into the brand universe and meanings for their customers (Merrilees & Miller, 2010; Willems et al., 2011). The study findings, which are based on a sample of approximately 1,500 international luxury customers, confirm that the personality congruence structure is based on five dimensions: prestige, emotion, trust, anxiety and order. The findings also highlight the existence and importance of the link between personality congruence and brand attachment.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Personality

Personality has been defined as "the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his unique adjustments to his environment" (Allport, 1937, p. 48). Personality can therefore be seen as a configuration of an individual's cognition, emotion and motivation, which activates behavior and reflects how the individual adapts to the environment by incorporating his life experience (Huang, Mitchell & Rosenaum-Elliott, 2012; Murray, 1938; Triandis & Suh, 2002).

In terms of the human personality construct's definition, the trait or factor approach has been one of the key approaches (Eysenck, 1970; Norman, 1963; Pervin, 2003). After decades of research, a general five-factor model (FFM or Big Five Model) has become the standard classification scheme to provide a descriptive taxonomy of the plethora of natural-language trait concepts (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1992; Norman, 1963). Despite criticisms, the Big Five theory or five-factor model (FFM) is widely accepted. Many studies have supported the generalizability of a five-factor structure of human personality, suggesting that it is generalizable and not limited to Americans or English-speaking countries (John 1990; Cortina et al. 1992; Hogan & Hogan 1992; McCrae & Costa, 1997; Schmit & Ryan 1993).

The five dimensions of human personality are often labelled OCEAN: (1) Openness to experience or intellect, (2) Conscientiousness, (3) Extraversion or surgency, (4) Agreeableness, and (5) Emotional stability versus neuroticism (John & Srivastava, 1999). In particular, the Big

Five framework is a hierarchical model of personality traits with five broad factors representing personality at the broadest level of abstraction (Gosling, Rentfrow & Swann, 2003). Several more specific facets (e.g., sociability) comprise each bipolar factor (e.g., extraversion vs. introversion), which, in turn, incorporates a large number of even more specific traits (e.g., talkative, outgoing). The Big-Five framework therefore suggests that most individual differences in human personality can be classified into these five broad factors. According to Gosling et al. (2003) and Schmitt et al. (2007), the most comprehensive instrument for measuring the Big Five or FFM is the Revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992, 1995). In all studied cultures and languages (McCrae, 2001, 2002; McCrae, Costa & Martin, 2005), the NEO-PI-R trait scale has shown satisfactory levels of internal reliability, and the NEO-PI-R structure of factors has been evaluated as robust.

2.2. Brand Personality

Previous studies suggest that people tend to anthropomorphize brands (Aggarwal & McGill, 2007; Maehle et al., 2011); that is, they regularly give inanimate objects human characteristics (Bower, 1999; Boyer, 1996). Brand personality can therefore be considered as the act of applying human characteristics or traits to a brand, inducing consumers to think of a brand as if it has human-like qualities (Aaker, 1997).

This process is very interesting for both marketing academics and managers, because their comprehension of how humans perceive products, brands and stores in terms of human features impacts their planning and execution of marketing operations. In particular, through learning and experience, brands become associated with human personality traits (Sung & Kim, 2010). Brand personality has therefore become a key strategic part of a company's marketing program, since consumers can only with difficulty perceive the differences between competitive brands' physical attributes.

According to Aaker (1997, p. 347), brand personality can be defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand". In a seminal article, Aaker (1997) provided a theoretical and empirical foundation for the brand personality construct by developing a 42-item measurement scale. This brand personality scale describes and measures the "personality" of a brand according to five core dimensions: sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication and ruggedness. Each of these dimensions is divided into a set of facets and 42 traits. When constructing the brand personality scale, Aaker (1997) started with the five core items, but complemented them with, amongst others, socio-demographic characteristics. Consequently,

whereas ‘core five’ researchers deliberately exclude gender and social class (McCrae & Costa, 1997), Aaker includes gender, age and class.

2.3. Store personality

The personality concept has also been adopted in terms of stores. Various studies have suggested that store personality is a useful tool to position and differentiate a retail store from its competitors (Ambroise et al., 2003; Merrilees & Miller, 2001; Das et al., 2012a). Moreover, particularly within competing markets where objective differentiation is difficult, store personality can be used as the basis of the customer-store relationship, as customers and retailers may both benefit from stores’ distinctive and enduring personalities. In addition, store personality is crucial in deciding consumers’ choice of retailer if their price, quality and service are similar (Martineau, 1958).

According to Martineau (1958), stores have a personality in terms of “the way in which the store is defined in the shopper’s mind, partly by its functional qualities and partly by an aura of psychological attributes” (Martineau, 1958, p. 47). Thereafter, Das et al. (2012a) defined store personality as “a consumer’s perception of the human personality traits attributed to a retail brand” (p. 98). Compared to the brand personality concept, scholars have paid less attention to the store personality (Brenngman & Willems, 2009), which could be due to “many of the results in store personality studies [having] been too general to be of use to retail managers” (Garton, 1995, p. 30).

Nevertheless, some attempts have been made in this regard. In their seminal work, d’Astous and Levesque (2003) developed a scale to measure store personality in general. Their store personality scale comprises five dimensions: enthusiasm, sophistication, genuineness, solidity and unpleasantness. In addition, many researchers have advocated format-specific store personality scales (e.g. Das et al., 2012b; Willems et al., 2011; Brenngman & Willems, 2009). For instance, a study by Willems et al. (2011) proposed a five-dimensional scale (chaos, sophistication, innovativeness, agreeableness and conspicuousness) to measure fashion stores’ personality in a Belgian context. Similarly, Das et al. (2012b) developed a scale to measure department stores’ personality, comprising five dimensions (sophistication, vibrancy, dependability, authenticity and empathy). More recently, it has been shown that store personality has a positive impact on store loyalty (Das, 2014a). Despite the increasing scholarly interest in store personality, its impact on consumer store choice behavior is still relatively unexplored (Das, 2014b; Willems & Brenngman, 2019). In this regard, it has been shown that luxury stores have the capacity to further strengthen the firm’s position as a powerful luxury

brand and can enhance a customer-brand association (Moore, 2010). The superior atmosphere of these stores and the exclusive services provided by staff have the potential to enhance the buying experiences of customers (Willems et al., 2012). Although a considerable research focused on developing retail store personality measurement tools (e.g., d'Astous and Lévesque, 2003; Das et al., 2012b; Willems et al., 2011), no empirical studies, to our knowledge, analyzed both self-congruity and store personality in the same study to explore their effect on brand attachment in the luxury context. This gap motivated us to explore the impact of both store personality and self-brand personality congruence taken together on brand attachment.

3. Research aims and hypotheses development. Personality congruence and its effect on attachment: a focus on the luxury sector

The congruence phenomenon is the mental comparison that consumers make regarding a brand and their own self-image's similarity or dissimilarity (Dolich, 1969; Gould, 1991; Graeff, 1996; Sirgy, 2018; Sutherland et al., 2004). According to Huang et al. (2012), consumers consume to enhance or reflect their self-identities so that "we are what we have" (Belk, 1988 p. 160). Levy (1959) maintains that what consumers buy has personal and social meaning that can strengthen the way they contemplate themselves. In particular, he argues that consumers are not functionally oriented and that the "symbols" used to identify goods, primarily the image that the different products and brands project, affect market behavior significantly (Levy, 1959, p. 117). Brands therefore play a role as the social congruity between a brand and its users' self-image, which scholars consider a significant motivational element in consumer choice (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982).

Parker (2009, p. 175) therefore defined self-congruity as "the similarity (the "match" or "mismatch") between the symbolic attributes of the product/brand and self-concept of the individual". The self-congruity conceptualization also applies to brand personality. In other words, scholars operationalize self-brand congruity by comparing brand personality and self-personality measures as the basis of their distance (i.e. congruity indicators) scores (Hogg et al., 2000).

The measurement of the congruence between individuals and brands has taken two main directions (Kressmann et al., 2006). The traditional method of measuring congruence is based on differentials. Although the limits of this method's predictive validity have been well reported, we consider this approach first. In addition, we complete our measurement approach with insights from a line of research that aims to develop a global and direct measurement of congruence (Sirgy et al., 1997). To our knowledge, no research has been conducted on the

congruence between consumers/brands/stores with specific reference to luxury brands. Consequently, for the purposes of our study and with a specific focus on the luxury industry, we combine two types of congruence measurement (direct and differential).

In this regard, few papers dissociate congruence through the self-image and brand personality both conceptually and empirically (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004). Furthermore, although these works suggest that significant differences exist, they have not been subjected to sufficient replications to be generalizable (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1984). We therefore chose to measure personality congruence between consumers, brands and stores directly by basing the measuring process on the self/image literature.

Research aims: Given the research gaps and the peculiarities of the luxury sector already highlighted, this study aims to test and validate a personality congruence scale at an international level and to measure congruence's effect upon brand attachment, with particular reference to the luxury sector. Specifically, this paper posits that personality congruence is the result of individual consumers' perception alignment of luxury brand personality, luxury store personality and their own personality.

The literature affirms that favorable brand attitudes are a function of the congruence phenomenon (Graeff, 1996; Sutherland et al., 2004). This self-congruity hypothesis is rooted in the assumption that individuals strive to maintain cognitive consistency in their beliefs and behaviors (Sung & Choi, 2012). Consumers therefore prefer those brands whose image is congruent with their own self-image (Sirgy, 1982). The stronger the congruence between a brand's perceived personality and consumers' personalities, the more likely they are to buy this brand (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Aaker, 1997; Hogg et al., 2000; Park and Lee, 2005; Parker, 2009). Furthermore, consumers build self-brand connections by integrating brands into their self-concept in order to express, affirm, or enhance their identities (Escalas & Bettman 2003, 2005). Specifically, scholars have shown the explanatory power of brand personality in terms of brand attachment (Sung, Park & Han, 2005; Ambroise, 2006; Gouteron, 2006, 2008), defined as "the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self" (Whan Park et al., 2010, p. 2). Attachment can be very powerful in leading to satisfied, trusting and committed relationships (Thomson, 2006). Possible attachment consequences could comprise loyalty and also willingness to pay a premium price for a brand (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Brands therefore need to create a strong and lasting emotional bond with consumers. As such, attachment takes a central role in shaping the relationship between consumers and brands (Schmalz & Orth, 2012), and has become one of the cornerstones of relationship marketing

(e.g., Whan Park & MacInnis, 2006; Paulssen, 2009). Ultimately, brand attachment can be considered “a psychological variable that refers to a long-lasting and inalterable (the separation is painful) affective reaction towards the brand, expressing psychological proximity with this one [brand]” (Lacoeuilhe, 2000, p. 66). Based on this, we propose that:

H1: Personality congruence exerts a positive influence on luxury brand attachment.

Scholars have also shown brand personality and congruence’s explanatory power in terms of brand outcomes (with particular reference to brand attachment) in specific national contexts (Sung, Park, & Han, 2005; Ambroise, 2006; Gouteron, 2006, 2008). The initial empirical evidence suggests a positive relationship between brand-self congruity and consumer-brand relationships (i.e. brand attachment) across nations and cultures, but the strength of these relationships requires deeper investigation (e.g., Lam et al., 2012; Litvin & Kar, 2004; Sung & Choi, 2012). Consequently, we propose that:

H2: The influence of personality congruence on luxury brand attachment varies between countries.

As country luxury markets grow, become more mature, and wealthy customers become less brand loyal (Choo et al., 2012), luxury firms are trying to build stronger customer-brand relationships based on emotional involvement and attachment (Choo et al., 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). Based on this we posit:

H3: The influence of personality congruence on luxury brand attachment varies depending on the maturity level of the market achieved in the country; the higher the maturity level of the luxury market the higher the influence of personality congruence on brand attachment.

4. Methodology

Personality congruence measurement. Authors have developed ad-hoc scales to measure personality congruence. We therefore integrated 134 items retrieved from previously validated personality scales: McCrae Costa and Martin’s (2005) Human Personality NEO-PI-R (30 traits), Aaker’s (1997) Brand Personality scale (42 traits), Chan et al.’s (2003) adapted Aaker Brand Personality Scale (42 traits), Heine’s (2009, 2010) Luxury Brand Personality (31 traits) and d’Astous and Levesque’s (2003) Store Personality (34 traits). Based on these, we built a

structured questionnaire following the approach that Churchill and Iacobucci (2002) recommended. The questionnaire was face-validated twice by means of interviews with international experts and one pre-test on 40 respondents. The pre-test revealed that all the items adopted in the questionnaire were meaningful and semantically valid in the luxury context (at the customer, brand, and store personality levels) (Azoulay & Kapferer, 2003). We monitored the construct equivalence and measure equivalence during the international expert interviews and the pre-test. A verbal translation committee approach was specifically adopted with regard to the translation equivalence (Craig & Douglas 2005; Harkness, 2003).

Thereafter, we tested the personality congruence measurement scale on a sample of 160 international respondents. A principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation reduced the 134 items to 13 items (Upper-class, Prestigious, High priced, Upscale, Happy, Enthusiastic, Feelings, Trusting, Trustworthy, Anxious, Vulnerable to stress, Well-organized and Orderly) grouped into five dimensions (Prestige, Emotion, Trust, Anxiety and Order).

We measured congruence by calculating a distance representative of the difference between the perception that the individuals have of themselves (self-concept) and their perception of the brand and store personality. The congruence score was calculated as
$$Congr_{i=1}^n = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n |PerB_i - PerC_i| + |PerS_i - PerC_i|}{2}$$
, which represents the mean of the two types of congruences¹.

Specifically, the result represents the mean of the distance between the brand personality and the consumer personality and between the store personality and the consumer personality. The shorter the distance between the two, the higher the congruence. Although criticized (Sirgy et al. 1997; Supphelen & Helgeson, 2004; Kressmann et al., 2006), this classical form of measurement was widely used in studies on image congruence (Sirgy & Danes, 1982) and continues to be used (Vermette, 2003, 2008).

We then tested the 13-item congruence scale internationally by means of an exploratory (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). We focused on young luxury customers due to the relevance of this segment (nearly 30% of the total personal luxury market) according to Deloitte (2017) and Altagamma & Bain&Co (2017). A sample of 1,491 international respondents (63.1% female; M_{age} 22.5) from 11 countries (Australia, China, France, Germany, India, Italy, Japan, Russia, South-Korea, the UK and the USA) participated in the study and six luxury brands (Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Hermes, Armani, Burberry and Salvatore Ferragamo) were

¹ The congruence score is in the form $\sum_{i=1}^n |PerB_i - PerC_i| + |PerS_i - PerC_i|$, where $PerB_i$ measures the score of the brand personality items, $PerS_i$ the store personality items, $PerC_i$ the individual personality items. $|PerB_i - PerC_i|$ measures the distance between the brand personality and the consumer personality and $|PerS_i - PerC_i|$ the distance between the store personality and the consumer personality.

analyzed². We chose the eleven countries based upon a number of criteria: firstly, the absolute size of their luxury markets and of their per capita spending on luxury goods - according to Euromonitor (2020), Deloitte (2019), Statista (2019), Passport, World Market for Luxury Goods (2018 and 2020), Bain & Company (2018) they represent the largest world markets; secondly, they all have large populations reflecting four different continents (www.Worldometers.info.as); thirdly, the selected countries exhibit significant cultural differences according to the cross-cultural literature (e.g. Hofstede (2001), the GLOBE Study (2004) by House et al., Schwartz (2006)); and fourthly, they represent different levels of luxury market maturity (Okonkwo 2009). Indeed, some have longstanding luxury good markets, such as Italy and France, Germany, UK and the USA whereas other countries developed their luxury good markets after WWII, such as Japan, South Korea and finally, some other countries like China, Russia and India entered the market only decades ago, but they are growing very fast both in terms of market size and in per capita spending. Based on Okonkwo's work (2009), we defined three levels of luxury market maturity (high, medium, low) classifying Italy, France, Germany, UK and the USA at the higher level, Japan, South Korea and Australia at a medium level and China, Russia and India at a lower level.

Initially, respondents were asked whether it was normal for them to perceive brands as having human characteristics (Avis, 2012; O'Guinn & Muniz, 2009; Zaltman & Zaltman, 2008). They were first asked to choose a luxury brand out of the six proposed and to rate the extent to which its personality traits best describe their personality, the specific brand personality and the store personality. Each respondent was shown pictures of the chosen brand flagship stores to allow them to evaluate the store personality.

Within an international context, past studies have shown significant differences in the way people answer to measurement scales (Harzing, 2006). If these differences between countries are not taken into account, results can be skewed leading to biased conclusions, misinterpretations of the data, or at worst rejection of the study altogether (Dolnicar & Grün, 2007). Researchers need to account for the influence of cultural response patterns not only in their interpretation of results but also in their preliminary design of statistical tools (Beuthner et al., 2018).

For this reason, and in order to limit the eventual biases associated with the cultural disparities in our sample, we conducted tests both upstream and downstream of our statistical study. During the preliminary development phase of our personality congruence and brand attachment

² This study is part of a broader international project in which many scholars participated. The authors acknowledge their contributions, with specific reference to their work during the data gathering phase.

scales, we ensured that their composite reliability indicators were strong and relatively homogeneous across countries. Thus, Cronbach's alpha's measuring internal consistency are all above the generally accepted limits (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988) and vary amongst countries, only by .213 for congruence and .211 for attachment.

In developing our model, linking congruence and attachment, we also measured congeneric reliability with Jöreskog's ρ . The results are all above the .70 limit and vary from .142 for the congruence measure and .181 for the attachment between countries.

These results suggest that the risk of response biases, referred to non-content based forms of responding (Baumgartner & Steenkamp, 2001), is moderate and therefore allow us to measure and attempt to explain differences between the countries in our sample.

Effect of personality congruence on brand attachment. Subsequently, we tested the relationship between personality congruence and brand attachment. In order to do so, we calculated a structural equation model linking the personality congruence to the brand attachment.

We measured brand attachment adopting Lacoëuilhe's attachment scale (2010), which is based on five items (I like this brand; purchasing this brand is very pleasurable; I feel comfortable buying or owning this brand; I am deeply attached to this brand; I am very attracted to this brand).

5. Results

5.1. Personality congruence scale: EFA and CFA results

Personality congruence: Scale development. We undertook a principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation³. We therefore tried to identify the underlying variables to explain the origin of the correlations in all of the observed variables. As a preliminary, we carried out tests on the data sample's suitability for factor analysis⁴. We also tested this measure's internal reliability⁵. The Cronbach's alphas ($\alpha > .700$) showed that this measurement

³ Initially, we conducted an oblique rotation (Direct Oblimin) and a correlation test between the obtained dimensions. Since the correlation coefficients (Pearson) were relatively low ($r = .195$ to $.331$), we preferred a Varimax rotation, which simplifies the interpretation. After a Varimax rotation, each original variable tends to be associated with one factor or a small number of factors, with each factor representing only a small number of variables.

⁴ To conduct a factor analysis, the KMO test must be greater than .5. This measure varies between 0 and 1, and values closer to 1 are better. The suggested minimum is a value of .6. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix and it must be significant. The two conditions (KMO = 0.811 and Bartlett test $\chi^2(78)=4029.3$, $p<0.001$) need to be verified to conduct this analysis.

⁵ The reliability or a measurement scale's internal consistency measures the results' degree of stability when again applying the instrument in identical conditions. In this phase of analysis, reliability is measured by Cronbach's α (1951), which must be greater than .60 for exploratory research and .80 for applied research (Nunnally, 1978; Peterson, 1994).

scale had good internal consistency. The initially developed factor solution with five dimensions was confirmed as explaining 70.5% of the variance.

1. The first dimension, prestige (four items, 19.8% of the variance explained), includes items related to the elitist and prestigious sides of luxury associated with its price, which is in line with the existing research on this topic.
2. The second dimension, emotion (three items, 14.6% explained variance), represents the emotional side of luxury consumption, which is also recognized as a major driver of luxury brand consumption.
3. The third dimension, trust (two items, 12.3% explained variance), corresponds to the trust items of that luxury generates in general.
4. The fourth dimension, anxiety (two items, 12.1% explained variance), identifies the stress and anxiety that consumers experience. In this regard, two conflicting interpretations are possible. On the one hand, this result could be related to the stress that consumers experience when facing a complicated and evolving decision with, for example, financial stakes. On the other, this can be due to the absence of luxury brand-attributed stress-related risk reduction and confidence.
5. The fifth dimension, order (two items, 11.7% explained variance), is representative of the seriousness through the “organization” and “order”.

We performed a confirmatory factor analysis in order to a posteriori validate a measurement of the scale structure. CFA relies on a reverse process of exploratory factor analysis of the data as well as providing additional goodness-of-fit statistics of the model and its likelihood as well as the measurement reliability and validity of the indicators (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The estimation method most commonly used in structural analysis is maximum likelihood (ML), which tolerates moderate multi-normality violations. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis show that the congruence scale has a satisfactory fit with the data (TLI =0.97, CFI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.12, SRMR = 0.10; GFI: 0.98; AGFI: 0.97; RMR: 0.032; RMSEA: 0.03)⁶.

⁶ Jöreskog's ρ measures the scale's internal consistency coefficients. Convergent validity is measured using the pcv. The indicators suggest that the scale's reliability is good, since Jöreskog's ρ is above the .70 threshold (ρ Jöreskog = .742); however, its convergent validity is far below the accepted standard of .50 (pcv = .366). A low convergent validity may have an impact on the quality of our measuring instrument's prediction (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This impact may be due to the sample characteristics or its homogeneity. Without strong convergent validity, which is achieved when at least half of the total variation is trait variance, we assessed the weak convergent validity by investigating the significance of the t-values representing the relationships between the dimensions and the latent construct. All the t-values were positive and significant ($p < .001$), suggesting that weak convergent validity was at least achieved (Bagozzi & Yi, 1991). The very nature of our research and,

Personality congruence scale: Cross-national results. To assess country-specific peculiarities and commonalities of the overall personality congruence levels, we conducted a one-way Anova. The findings show significant differences between countries in terms of congruence [$F(10, 1480)=30.96; p=.000$]. We subsequently performed a Duncan post-hoc test to identify eventual subgroups of countries, but their means did not differ significantly. The findings show that countries can be grouped into two sets: the first comprising four countries (Russia, China, Germany and India) with a higher level of personality congruence (scores ranging from .386 to .558); the second set comprises six countries (the UK, Australia, France, the USA, Korea and Italy) with a lower level of personality congruence (scores ranging from -.446 to .038). Japan lies outside these two groups with an extremely low congruence score (-.752). Having verified the existence of groups of countries in terms of the intensity of their overall congruence, we again performed a one-way Anova on each dimension of congruence (Figure 1).

PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

The previous figure shows that it is only possible to find similarities between the relevant eleven countries in respect of two dimensions when analyzing prestige and anxiety. Then, to achieve a deeper analysis we ran a multiple regression (Table 1) in order to quantify the weight of congruence's component dimensions in respect of each country.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

According to the standardized coefficient values and their relative ranking (from the highest value labelled ① to the smallest one labelled ⑤ in the table 2), the first dimension, prestige, applies to four countries (Australia, China, Italy and the USA), emotion occupies the first place in another four countries (France, Germany, India and Korea), order is ranked first in three countries (Japan, Korea, and Russia), while the UK favors the trust dimension. On examining the three dimensions ranked first, emotion and prestige seem to be their main common elements, because these dimensions are present in seven of the 11 countries surveyed. The same is true of the trust dimension, even though it only occupies the first place for young UK consumers.

therefore, our sample of people tend to generate a weak convergent validity insofar as the populations' heterogeneity is rather obvious.

If we analyze the main dimensions in greater depth, this allows us to make more specific considerations:

- The prestige dimension is of less importance for consumers in France, a country with a long history of luxury, but also for those in India and Russia, two comparatively recent newcomers.
- Only Russian and Japanese consumers rank emotion lower than the third position.
- The majority of the countries ranks trust highly, the exceptions being China, France, Italy and Korea. In this case, the reasons for these four countries' low rank of the trust dimension probably differ. We surmise that in China, Italy and Korea, the high diffusion of counterfeit products creates doubts in consumers' mind when they think of luxury brands. In France, consumers of luxury products might take trust in luxury brands historically associated with the country, like Louis Vuitton and Hermès, for granted.
- Anxiety is ranked high in France and in Russia, but perhaps not for the same reasons, as we explained when illustrating the contrasting interpretation that consumers can assign to this dimension;
- Order only seems more important in Japan and in three developing markets for luxury: China, Korea and Russia. Order might be as important for Japanese consumers due to their strongly organized economic and social culture. Consumers in the other three countries, might perceive organization and order as synonymous with high quality and a stable quality over time.

Summarizing the main results by country related to personality congruence, we can observe that there are five clusters:

- French and Italian consumers are strongly linked to the emotional components of luxury.
- Australian, UK, American and German consumers are more balanced between luxury's emotional and rational components.
- Chinese, Indian and Korean consumers are more contradictory in their evaluation of luxury components.
- Japanese consumers appear to be more sensitive to luxury brands' rationale components.
- Finally, by ranking prestige and emotion in the last place, Russian consumers seem to differ greatly from those in all the other analyzed countries.

5.2. Effect of personality congruence on brand attachment: Structural equation model.

Effect of personality on brand attachment: Model development. We tested a structural equation model linking personality congruence to brand attachment for our study (see H1). The global model's (Figure 2) testing results show that the fit values of the GFI (.956), AGFI (.941), RMSEA (.050) and the normed χ^2 (.718) coefficients are better than commonly accepted standards. The CFI and TLI, which compare the tested model with a model in which all the manifest variables are independent of one another, are beyond the acceptable threshold (CFI = .955 and TLI = .947). In addition, PGFI (.721), which is based on the GFI by adjusting for the loss of degrees of freedom, is also up to standard. The results thus confirm that the model fit is good. Therefore, it is possible to analyze the structural equation modelling results, by calculating the estimates of the standardized regression weights coefficients and squared multiple correlations for the dependent variables⁷. The results suggest the relative link between personality congruence and brand attachment with a coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .213$), significant at the 0.1% level. It follows that this congruence model explains 21.3% of the brand attachment variance for the global sample, thus confirming H1.

PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Effect of personality congruence on brand attachment: Cross-national results. The results were subsequently analyzed and compared across countries (see H2). We applied the model of personality congruence to brand attachment in each country by performing a regression analysis. We checked all of the assumptions underpinning the basis of a regression analysis's performance (Janssens, De Pelsmacker & Van Kenhove, 2008): a) all of the relevant (independent) variables seem to be taken into consideration, since our examination of the residual graph did not detect any pattern. b) a linear relationship between the dependent and the independent variable is evident from the interpretation of the variables' scatterplot, and because the above-mentioned residual graph does not exhibit a pattern. c) dependent and independent variables are interval scales. d) the residuals are independent of one another, are normally distributed and have the same variance for each value of the independent variable (homoscedasticity assumption). e) there are a sufficient number of observations (five times the

⁷ The confirmatory analysis provides lambdas (λ_i), which are the standardized correlation coefficients of variables with latent variables. They are all statistically significant at the 5% significant level, since the critical ratios are all above 1.96.

estimated parameters). f) no multicollinearity is present; g) attention has been paid to outliers, and no significant deviations from the assumption have been detected.

The results show a link between personality congruence and brand attachment with a various degree of strength across countries, thus confirming H2. Specifically, Table 2 shows that the congruence between the brand, the store and the consumer's personality is higher than the aggregate measure in four mature luxury markets, namely France, the UK, Germany and the USA. Not surprisingly, the strength of the relationship in these markets is also significantly higher than in the global model. In all the other countries, congruence explains attachment below the aggregate measurement level and, in the case of India, the effect of congruence on brand attachment is completely null, thus confirming H3. However, in the case of India and Australia, the level of significance is weak - all comments should therefore be regarded cautiously.

PLEASE INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

6. General Discussion

This study aims at expanding the debate on the measurement of brand personality and congruence at the international level and specifically in respect of the luxury sector. Although the literature on brand personality and congruence is well-established, the self-brand congruity construct's conceptualization and operationalization in terms of self-congruity with brand personality still seem to be inconsistent across studies (Radler, 2018). For example, international differences are the major reason for the lack of agreement on universal brand personality dimensions, as they make it difficult to generalize such a diverse concept. Moreover, as scholars have recently highlighted, very few studies in the context of luxury brands have investigated brand personality and its effect on brand attachment (Sung et al., 2015; Gurzki & Woisetschlager, 2017; Kim & Joung, 2016). Accordingly, scholars call for more empirical investigation into the brand personality of luxury brands, which is of critical importance to understand how consumers express themselves by purchasing and using luxury brands.

Our research answers this call by testing and validating a personality congruence scale at an international level by measuring congruence's effect on brand attachment, with particular reference to the luxury sector. Our results help to clarify the conceptualization and operationalization of the self-brand congruity construct in terms of self-congruity and brand personality. Specifically, this study answers the call for international and cross-national

validation of self-brand congruity measurement (see Radler, 2018). Overall the results confirm that the personality congruence structure is based on five dimensions: prestige, emotion, trust, anxiety and order. In line with previous studies dissociating congruence conceptually and empirically in respect of self-image and brand personality (Helgeson & Supphellen, 2004), this work achieves a generalizable result and proposes a replicable method. Furthermore, the findings confirm that personality congruence exerts a positive influence on luxury brand attachment (Graeff, 1996; Sutherland et al., 2004; Sung & Choi, 2012). These results indeed show that the stronger the congruence between the brand and store perceived personality and the consumer's own personality, the higher the positive brand attachment (see previous studies by Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Aaker, 1997; Hogg et al., 2000; Park & Lee, 2005; Parker, 2009; Sung, Park, & Han, 2005; Ambroise, 2006; Gouteron, 2006, 2008).

Regarding similarities and differences across countries with reference to personality congruence and attachment relationship, our results show strong variations between the eleven analyzed countries. Particularly for what concerns personality congruence, the general conclusion from our findings is that it is questionable to group countries using their perception of congruence between a brand, a store and their individuals' personalities. Even if our framework is based on cross-national and not cross-cultural marketing research, these results are coherent with Hofstede's model on differences between national cultures (1980, 1984, 1991, 2001, 2005) since the five clusters of countries identified (Italy and France; Australia, UK, USA and Germany; China, India and Korea; Japan; Russia) are heterogeneous between them and homogeneous within them in term of Hofstede's cultural dimensions (i.e. Power Distance, Individualism, Masculinity, Uncertainty Avoidance and Long-Term Orientation) scores (<https://www.hofstede-insights.com/product/compare-countries/>). Although these similarities emerge with regard to specific components, there is strong variance in other components. The results indeed show that countries that have established luxury markets (such as Italy and France) and more recent geographical markets (such as India or Korea) cannot be split into two diverse groups. Specifically, we observe that countries where luxury consumption is a more recent phenomenon are less sensitive to elitism and prestige as components, which might be due to the luxury brands not yet having established a strong value in consumers' minds. The emotional components of luxury are instead stronger in established luxury markets like France, Italy and Germany, as well as for consumers in Japan and in Korea. Nevertheless the novelty of our findings are in line with those of Hennigs et al. (2012) on differences and commonalities between countries in terms of the perception of luxury values (financial, functional, individual and social values).

Finally, for what concerns the effect of personality congruence on brand attachment across the different countries analyzed, our research shows some surprisingly results. For instance, although Italy and Japan are considered mature markets and thus familiar with luxury brands, results show the congruence only explains brand attachment to a very limited extent. For some other countries, we explain the relative importance of personality congruence and brand attachment for newcomers to the field of luxury due to luxury brands being more linked to conspicuous consumption than to a fit between a brand and the consumer's personality.

So, the findings support a positive relationship between brand-self congruity and brand attachment across nations, as suggested by Litvin and Kar (2004) and Sung and Choi (2012), which were approaches considered in our hypotheses development, with the only notable exception of Indian consumers. Hence the results confirm the role that consumers' nationality plays in their relationships with brands as theorized by Lam et al. (2012). As emphasized earlier, results show that the personality congruence influence on brand attachment is higher than the aggregate measure in the four mature luxury markets where the strength of the relationship is also significantly higher than in the global model. In the other countries, congruence explains attachment below the aggregate measurement level (Choo et al., 2012; Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). The general conclusion from our findings is that it is hard to group countries by using their perception of congruence between a brand, a store and individuals' personalities. The level of maturity of the luxury sector does however seem to play a role in the relationship between brand-self congruity and brand attachment.

6.1. Theoretical Implications

Our research adds to the literature on personality congruence in the specific context of luxury brands in at least three ways. Firstly, answering the call by Radler (2018), we tested and validated a personality congruence scale that explains the degree of homogeneity in terms of luxury brand consumers, the brands and the store personalities at a cross-national level. In line with previous studies (Sung et al., 2015, Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017), the results confirm that the personality congruence structure is based on five dimensions (prestige, emotion, trust, anxiety and order), therefore achieving a generalizable result and allowing us to propose a replicable method. Secondly, our study enriches the literature on personality congruence by also investigating the role of the store personality, which has received little attention to date (Das, 2014b; Willems & Brengman, 2019).

Thirdly, we enrich the literature on the effect of congruence on brand attachment (Japutra, Ekinci & Simkin, 2019), which has been suggested as an antecedent of brand loyalty and

willingness to pay a premium price for a brand (Thomson et al., 2005; Kim & Joung 2016) and therefore critical for creating brand-consumer relationships. In this regard, the results show that congruence between a brand, store and consumer personalities exerts a significant influence on brand attachment (H1) and that this relationship's strength varies across the analyzed countries (H2) and depending on the level of maturity of the country market (H3).

6.2. Managerial implications

The study also has interesting implication for luxury managers. Since brand personality has been recognized as a strategic differentiation tool that contributes to brand equity (Aaker & Fournier, 1995; Aaker, 1997), it is important to monitor its effect on international luxury consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards brands. Moreover, personality congruence is important for determining brand attachment. The stronger the congruence between the perceived brand's personality and the consumer's own personality, the higher the consumer's attachment to the brand (Eisend & Stokburger-Sauer, 2013; Ahmad & Thyagaraj, 2014; Aaker, 1997; Hogg et al., 2000; Park & Lee, 2005; Parker, 2009). Given the latter, this study developed a tool (i.e. the short congruence scale based on 13 traits) that luxury managers can use to develop brand strategies (Ko et al., 2016, 2019) to increase the congruence level for their luxury brands, since the greater the congruence level, the higher the brand attachment generated in the customer base (the results of this research detect the existence and relative importance of the link between personality congruence and brand attachment). However, it is also important to identify those dimensions that are more likely to represent consumers' and brands' personality (see results of Table 2). By doing so, luxury managers can focus their efforts on those dimensions that provide major benefits for both consumers and a luxury brand (i.e. "Emotion" and "Prestige" as shown in Figure 2).

6.3. Limitation and further research

The current study is not free from limitations, which therefore justify further research. Firstly, we measured personality congruence's effect on brand attachment, thus not providing a direct measure of actual behaviors. Future research is needed to include other brand outcomes (such as brand attitude; brand love) and to validate our findings with real behavioral data collected in field settings. Another limitation lies in not having explicitly considered cultural dimensions (such as Hofstede, 1984; Usunier, 1998; House et al., 2002; Ko et al., 2019) or other luxury segmentation variables that, according to the Boston Consulting Group (2017), might explain geographical diversity. In this regard, luxury goods are often considered a particular product

category whose related consumer behavior do not vary across cultures or countries (Hennigs et al., 2012). However, cultural differences often cause differences in consumer behavior within and across national borders. Accordingly, the recent literature on luxury brands calls for more empirical, cross-national evidence, which might give scholars a more complete insight into the unique values that the relevant nations ascribe to luxury consumption (Gurzki & Woisetschläger, 2017; Ko et al., 2019). Future research should therefore focus on the influence of culture on luxury consumers' behavior.

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Figure 1: Congruence dimensions: Comparison between countries and groups of countries (Oneway Anova: Mean and Duncan's post-hoc tests)

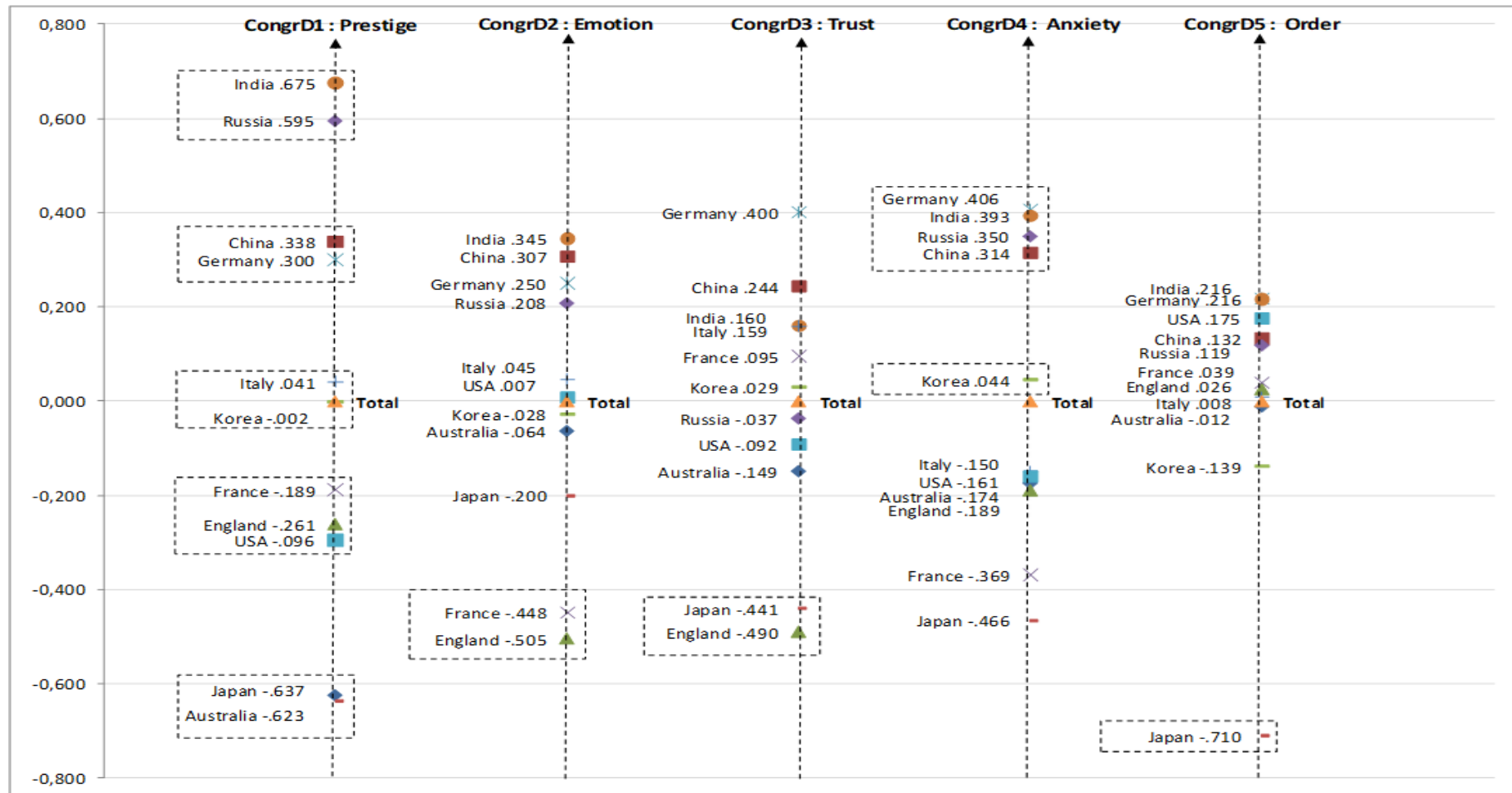


Table 1: Multiple regression “D_iCongr → Personality Congruence”: standardized coefficient (β_{eta}) and country rankings

D _i Congr → Congr	Overall		Australia		China		UK		France		Germany		India	
D ₁ Congr: Prestige	.332	①	.322	①	.384	①	.332	③	.343	④	.319	②	.291	④
D ₂ Congr: Emotion	.322	②	.298	③	.319	③	.400	②	.455	①	.345	①	.408	①
D ₃ Congr: Trust	.309	③	.309	②	.317	④	.414	①	.343	④	.311	③	.348	②
D ₄ Congr: Anxiety	.277	⑤	.246	⑤	.285	⑤	.275	④	.397	②	.170	⑤	.245	⑤
D ₅ Congr: Order	.297	④	.267	④	.325	②	.265	⑤	.362	③	.278	④	.339	③
N	1491		121		139		115		141		154		141	

D _i Congr → Congr	Overall		Italy		Japan		Korea		Russia		USA	
D ₁ Congr: Prestige	.332	①	.357	①	.312	③	.315	③	.225	⑤	.372	①
D ₂ Congr: Emotion	.322	②	.342	②	.286	⑤	.345	①	.321	④	.331	③
D ₃ Congr: Trust	.309	③	.278	⑤	.320	②	.297	⑤	.330	③	.350	②
D ₄ Congr: Anxiety	.277	⑤	.337	③	.303	④	.311	④	.333	②	.293	⑤
D ₅ Congr: Order	.297	④	.306	④	.352	①	.345	①	.349	①	.319	④
N	1491		153		156		120		125		126	

Figure 2: Personality congruence to brand attachment: Model.

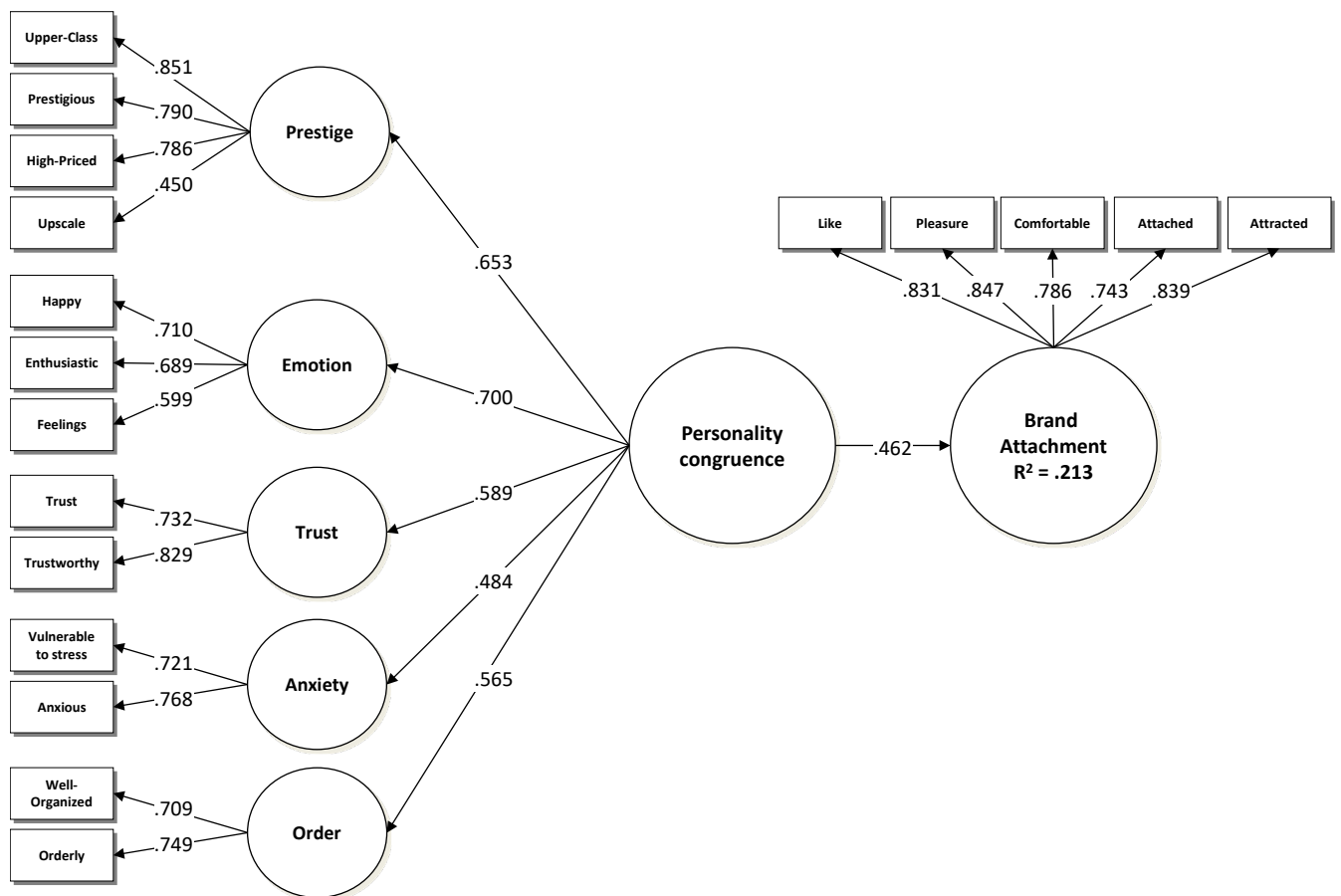


Table 2: Cross-national measure of personality congruence's influence on brand attachment

	Standardised regression weight and p-value ^a	Squared Multiple Correlation R ²
France	.636 ^{***}	.405
UK	.610 [*]	.372
Germany	.603 ^{***}	.363
USA	.567 ^{***}	.321
Korea	.369 ^{**}	.136
Italy	.338 ^{**}	.114
China	.329 ^{**}	.108
Japan	.281 [*]	.079
Russia	.266 [*]	.071
Australia	.178 ^{NS}	.032
India	.014 ^{NS}	.000
TOTAL	.462 ^{***}	.213

^aP-value : Level of significance. The regression weight of congruence in the prediction of attachment is significantly different from zero at *** p<.001, ** p<.005, and * p<.01 or NS (not significant).