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Luxury brand attachment: Predictors, moderators and consequences

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Abstract

Although there is ample evidence that consumer attachment varies across luxury and non-luxury brands, there is a lack of research in understanding the predictors, moderators and consequences of luxury brand attachment (LBA). This paper aims to develop and test a research model for LBA (study 1), examine the moderating influence of self-consciousness on the relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and LBA (study 2) and validate the research model across privately and publicly consumed products (study 3). Data ($n = 961$) were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling with the IBM SPSS AMOS 25.0. The results show that consumers' perceived actual and ideal self-congruence have a significant positive impact on LBA. In addition, LBA results in consumer advocacy. Private (public) self-consciousness enhances the relationship between actual (ideal) self-congruence and LBA. However, social anxiety did not influence the relationship between self-congruence and LBA. Moreover, the relationship between actual self-congruence and LBA was stronger for privately consumed products. This research would provide luxury managers with an understanding of how consumers develop a bond with luxury brands based on the perceived brand self-congruence. The LBA model would also help managers segment luxury consumers and identify the segments with low, medium and high attachment. In addition, using the findings of this research, luxury managers can incorporate the relevant aspect of self-congruence into brand positioning and advertising messages.

KEYWORDS
brand self-congruence, consumer advocacy, luxury brand attachment, private/public consumption, self-consciousness

1 | INTRODUCTION

Practitioners in the luxury industry have emphasized building a strong emotional connection between the consumers and brands (Rambough, 2020; Sciarrino, 2021). The president of the luxury automobile brand Cadillac has referred to his brand's competitive advantage of having a strong emotional connection with the consumers (Naughton, 2018). Advertising campaigns such as Dior's "*The Future is Gold*" often reflect consumers' strong affection for the brand (Bain, 2016). The significance of the consumers' affective bond with the brand has also been reflected in product design. For instance, the 2018 Mercedes-Benz A-Class compact luxury hatchback includes a new media system for making the car "a mobile assistant" with the intention

for consumers to develop an emotional attachment to the brand (Campbell, 2018).

Extant research conceptualizes luxury brands as having distinctive characteristics such as extravagant, exclusive, conspicuousness, craftsmanship etc. (Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Fassnacht & Dahm, 2021; Ko et al., 2019; Wiedmann et al., 2009). Overall, the dynamics of the luxury consumer-brand relationship are different from the non-luxury counterparts (Jacob et al., 2020; Keller, 2009; Roux et al., 2017). Studies have indicated that consumers' attachment towards symbolic brands (i.e., luxury brands) deserves special attention (e.g., Donvito et al., 2020; Malär et al., 2011). Literature on consumers' affective bond to luxury brands has mainly focused on the core concepts of emotional attachments to brands and ignored luxury consumer brand interaction (Shimul et al., 2019). Thus, very little is known regarding the interplay between consumers' self-consciousness and perceived image congruence for luxury brands. Studies on brand attachment predominantly validate the impact of emotional attachments on luxury consumers' brand attitude, brand equity and purchase intention (e.g., Bian & Haque, 2020; Dwivedi et al., 2019). Current literature further supports that consumers develop brand trust, satisfaction and loyalty due to their emotional attachment to the brands (e.g., Ahmad & Akbar, 2021; Giovannini et al., 2015; Husain et al., 2022; Yoo & Park, 2016). In addition, they share their positive experiences with other consumers through word-of-mouth and consumption-related advocacy (Chelminski & Coulter, 2011; Japutra et al., 2018). In particular, consumers' emotions and involvement with the brand encourage them to get involved in consumer advocacy (Wallace et al., 2012). The importance of consumer advocacy has been evident in luxury brand research, but limited research has examined the construct with luxury brand attachment (LBA) (e.g., Bhati and Verma, 2020; Shimul & Phau, 2018). Therefore, this research examines the impact of LBA on consumer advocacy.

Marketing activities often build on the consumers' awareness of a desirable representation (i.e., self-consciousness) in front of others in society. For example, *"The Now"* – a promotional campaign by Moët & Chandon, one of LVMH's wine and spirits brands, reflects the joy and celebration of enthusiastic consumers in a public setting (Pirola, 2016; Savannah Winters, 2016). Such public displays are highly relevant to the consumers' materialism and conspicuous consumption (e.g., Dhaliwal et al., 2020; Millan & Mittal, 2017; Richins, 1994). There are three components of self-consciousness: public self-consciousness, private self-consciousness and social anxiety (Fenigstein et al., 1975). An individual's self-aspect in public displays is conceptualized as the public self-consciousness, which has received vast attention in the field of psychology and marketing since the 1970s (Carver & Glass, 1976; Froming & Carver, 1981; Hart et al., 2019). Studies have examined the role of public self-consciousness on the consumers' desirable self-representations over social media (e.g., Lee et al., 2012). The impact of public self-consciousness on the consumers' emotional attachments to brands has also been investigated in past studies (Kaufmann et al., 2016; Malär et al., 2011). It has been evident that consuming luxury brands

involves consumers' desire for self-esteem, social recognition, prestige and signalling status (e.g., Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021; Hampson et al., 2021; Bakir et al., 2020). In particular, people with high public self-consciousness are expected to care more about signalling status through luxury consumption, and so public self-consciousness influences the purchase intention for luxury brands. However, the question arises whether the other two dimensions of consumers' consciousness (i.e., private self-consciousness and social anxiety) impact LBA. To our best knowledge, no study has provided empirical support to answer whether self-consciousness moderates the relationship between consumers' self-congruence and LBA until today. Therefore, this paper aims to examine the moderating influence of self-consciousness on the relationship between consumers' perceived brand self-congruence and LBA.

The nature of a product could also impact consumer evaluations and intentions towards the product. There is an increasing consensus that the evaluations and choices for the products often depend on the private versus public context of the consumption (e.g., Cherchye et al., 2013; Krishna et al., 2019; Talukdar & Yu, 2020). Studies suggest that consumers are concerned about face-saving for publicly consumed products, and they tend to be thrifty for privately consumed products (e.g., Lin et al., 2013; Shimul et al., 2021). Literature refers to the consumers' perceived self-image, brand self-congruence and social influences in explaining the variance in the consumer behaviour for privately and publicly consumed products (Graeff, 1996; Krishna et al., 2019; Kulviwat et al., 2009). However, no study has examined the role of brand self-congruence on LBA within the private and public nature of consumption. Extant literature calls for further research on whether self-congruence motivates the purchase and consumption of privately consumed products (Bajac et al., 2018). Therefore, this research aims to validate and compare the LBA model across privately and publicly consumed luxury branded products.

Taken together, this research answers the following questions: (1) What are the predictors and outcomes of LBA? (2) Does consumers' self-consciousness influence the relationship between self-congruence and LBA? and (3) Do the relationships among LBA and its drivers and outcomes vary within the context of private and public consumptions? Specifically, this paper proposes a research model for LBA with empirically examining the predictors and outcomes of the construct (study 1). Next, the moderating influence of self-consciousness (private/public self-consciousness and social anxiety) on the relationship between consumers' perceived self-congruence and LBA is investigated (study 2). Finally, the research model is validated across privately and publicly consumed luxury branded products (study 3).

In addition to validating the impact of self-congruence on brand attachment within a luxury branding context, this research uses social identification theory to provide empirical evidence on the relationship between LBA and consumer advocacy. Underpinned with self-consciousness theory, this research further advances the relationships among self-congruence, self-consciousness and LBA. The findings of this research are expected to provide several strategic

directions to luxury branding practitioners. For example, luxury brand managers can understand which aspect of the consumers' image self-congruence (actual vs. ideal) has a stronger impact on forming LBA. Subsequently, that aspect of the self might be portrayed in the advertisements to make the appeal more relevant and create psychological proximity between consumers and brands. Moreover, luxury brand managers can segment the market based on the consumers' level of brand attachment (i.e., high, medium and low) and execute customized marketing communication programs for each group.

The following sections provide the conceptual background, review the related literature, develop the research hypotheses, describe the methodology, report the results for three studies and discuss the implications of the findings.

2 | CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | Attachment theory and luxury brand attachment

Attachment is defined as the bond between an individual and any other entity (Bowlby, 1979). An attached relational interaction requires emotional comfort, reliance and the ability to deal with the negative effect in case of insecure attachments (Barbaro, 2020; Holmes, 1993). The attachment relationship further develops the sense of proximity seeking and separation distress amongst the young children at the later stage of their life (Fearon & Roisman, 2017; Morison et al., 2020). Weiss (1982) highlights three patterns and behavioural notions when a person is attached to and interacts with his/her significant others. The first pattern iterates Bowlby's (1979) idea of "proximity seeking" to a preferred figure. The second pattern is relevant to the conceptualization of a "secure base" (Ainsworth, 1982) that focuses on the ambience provided by the attachment figure to the attached person. The final notion, known as "separation protest", refers to the enduring nature of the attachment whereby the people react to the loss of or distance from the attachment figure (Bowlby, 1979; Unlubilgin et al., 2021).

Built on Bowlby's (1979) attachment theory, marketing literature conceptualizes brand attachment as the enduring and commitment-oriented bond between the consumer and the brand (e.g., Park et al., 2006). LBA is defined as the emotional bond that connects a consumer to the luxury brand and develops deep feelings within the consumer towards the luxury brand (Shimul et al., 2019). Referring to the unique traits of luxury brands, consumers' perceived benefits and the elicited emotions, recent studies have referred to the inclusion of a perceived sense of joy and exquisiteness towards a deeper understanding of the LBA (for a review, see – Shimul et al., 2019). Table 1 summarizes pertinent studies and shows how the current study adds to the existing domain of knowledge.

2.2 | Self-expansion and consumers' brand self-congruence

The process of self-expansion occurs in intimate relationships in which one person includes another into his/her concept of the self (Aron & Aron, 1986). People self-expand with a motivation to get resources that would help achieve some particular goals and provide a higher level of efficacy (Aron et al., 2001). The process of self-expansion starts with comparing a person's current state and desired state. If the person feels that the desired state will improve the person's actual self, he/she will be motivated to include others in the current self (Aron & Aron, 1986). Social psychologists also propose a self-related motive called "self-improvement" relevant to a person's desire for "self-expansion" and "self-verification" (Taylor et al., 1995). Few marketing studies on consumer brand attachment (e.g., Hung & Lu, 2018; Malär et al., 2011; Nikolinakou et al., 2021) use these theories to explain emotional connections to a brand. However, the central line of work on human attachment argues that the sense of safety is the core of attachment. Therefore, self-expansion motivation is strongly linked with the attachment model (e.g., Bowlby, 1969; Shaver & Hazan, 1993). Self-expansion is the underlying human process through which consumers connect themselves to a brand (Kaufmann et al., 2016; Malär et al., 2011). Such self-expansion results in intimacy and creates the feeling of understanding, care and the inner-most self-validation for the partners in the relationship (Reis & Shaver, 1988). As such, it can be argued that self-expansion is a key instrument of understanding the consumers' attachment to brands as it reflects the social and psychological nature of the consumers (e.g., Park et al., 2010).

Consumers' brand self-congruence is the matching between a consumer's self-concept and brand image (Sirgy, 1982). Self-image (also known as self-concept) is defined as "the totality of individual's thought and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p. 7). The duality dimension of self-concept (i.e., actual and ideal self-image) has later been advanced by Sirgy (1979), who suggests four components of the construct: actual self-image, ideal self-image, social self-image and ideal social self-image. Past studies on consumers' brand self-congruence have found that the actual and ideal-self effects are more substantial than the social and ideal social self-congruence (For a review, see – Kim & Hyun, 2013). Perhaps, therefore, the majority of the marketing studies consider actual and ideal self as the two primary components of self-concept (Hosany & Martin, 2012). Self-congruence motivates the consumers to process information, and the consumers often buy self-expressive brands to validate their image (Aaker, 1996). Thus, self-congruence explains and predicts different aspects of consumer behaviour such as brand attitude, product use and ownership, willingness to buy and retail loyalty (e.g., Sirgy, 1982; Sirgy et al., 1997). Experiential marketing connects consumers' perceived selves with the brand, provides memorable brand experience, and thus builds emotional attachments to brands (Schmitt, 2012; Thomson et al., 2005). The relevance of consumers' self-image enhancement through luxury

TABLE 1 Contribution of this research into the current domain of luxury brand attachment

Authors	Predictors	Moderators	Outcomes	Context (privately vs. publicly consumed products)
Godey et al. (2013)	Decision to purchase	NO	NO	Not specified
Sreejesh et al. (2016)	Luxury brand aspiration	NO	Intention to pay premium price	Not specified
Lin and Ku (2018)	Individual value, social influence, brand image	NO	Purchase intention	No specified
Aureliano-Silva et al. (2018)	NO	NO	Image management, consumer pride, emotional well-being	Not specified
Shimul and Phau (2018)	Brand satisfaction	NO	Brand loyalty	Public
Kessous and Valette-Florence (2019)	Status seeking, Snob behaviour, Bandwagon effect	Nostalgic connection	NO	Not specified
Shimul et al. (2019)	Brand satisfaction	NO	Brand loyalty	Public
Donvito et al. (2020)	Personality congruence	NO	NO	Not specified
Bian and Haque (2020)	NO	Brand experience	Patronage intention	Not specified
Koronaki et al. (2020)	Luxury values, human personality, national values	NO	Brand experience	Not specified
Shimul et al. (2021)	NO	Consumers' need for uniqueness	Envy (malicious envy, benign envy)	Public/private
Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021)	Personality congruence	NO	Brand love	Not specified
This research	Actual and ideal self-congruence	Private self-consciousness, private self-consciousness, social anxiety	Consumer advocacy	Public/private

consumption has been evident in the literature (e.g., Choi et al., 2020; Jacob et al., 2020; Shan et al., 2021).

Literature on brand attachment has widely established the impact of consumers' perceived actual self-congruence on brand attachment (Moussa, 2015). The conceptualization of brand attachment focuses on incorporating the brand into the consumers' self. The sense of oneness generated between the consumer and the brand develops a cognitive connection and results in the brand attachment (e.g., Park et al., 2010). Numerous studies have revealed that consumers buy products consistent with their perceived actual self-image (e.g., Malhotra, 1988; Sirgy et al., 1997). Underpinned by the self-verification motive, Malär et al. (2011) argue that consumers tend to behave in a consistent way of how they see themselves; therefore, the consumers buy the brands that match their actual self. In a similar study, Liu et al. (2012) focus on the self-congruity theory and find that user and usage imagery congruity are positively associated with attitude and loyalty in the luxury brand context. Furthermore, studies on luxury brands have argued that luxury branding experience is a critical factor in increasing the value of a product because consumers buy the luxury brand to express themselves (e.g., Han & Kim, 2020; Shan et al., 2021; Tynan et al., 2010). Existing literature highly supports that consumers buy the luxury brands that match their personality and brand image (e.g., Jacob et al., 2020; Vigneron & Johnson, 1999).

Aron and Aron's (1986, 1996) self-expansion model is considered the theoretical foundation for conceptualizing brand attachment (Moussa, 2015). Consumers attempt to attain the ideal state if there is a gap between the perceived actual self-image and ideal self-image (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). The ideal self is a motivational factor and influences consumer behaviour (Zogaj et al., 2021). Consumers buy and build strong relationships with the brands that help them achieve the desired self-image (e.g., Shan et al., 2021; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Malär et al., 2011). Based on these empirical findings and referring back to the phenomenon of self-expansion and feeling of oneness with an object, this research hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 1 *Consumers' perceived actual self-congruence has a significant positive impact on LBA.*

Hypothesis 2 *Consumers' perceived ideal self-congruence has a significant positive impact on LBA.*

2.3 | Social identity and consumer advocacy

Social identity theory (SIT) is defined as "that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel, 1974, p. 69). Social psychological theories argue that the social context is essential in analysing the application of SIT (e.g., Brown, 2020; Ellemers & Haslam, 2011). SIT postulates that people think of themselves as members of a social group. This notion of belongingness influences the individual's intergroup and social behaviour (For a review, see – Hornsey, 2008).

In explaining the development of people's social identities over personal identities, scholars point out three psychological processes: social categorization, social comparison and social identification (Hogg, 2014; Hornsey, 2008). The social identification aspect of the SIT has received vast attention in marketing research for investigating consumer-brand relationships (e.g., Kleine et al., 1993). As noted by Lam et al. (2010, p. 130), studies underpinned with the SIT show that "members of brand communities engage in collective behaviour, such as rituals, to extol the virtues of their beloved brands and to help other brand identifiers". The self-enhancement aspect of the SIT is pertinent to the scope of this research to investigate the relationship amongst consumers' perceived self-congruence, LBA and consumer advocacy.

Consumer advocacy is a consumer-level interaction whereby consumers share information and experiences to help others achieve a similar outcome (Chelminski & Coulter, 2011; Godey et al., 2016). Studies show that satisfied consumers build an attachment to the corresponding brand (Ahmad & Akbar, 2021; Shimul & Phau, 2018) and, as suggested by the SIT, they recommend the brand to the people they care about (Bhati & Verma, 2020; Fullerton, 2011). Relevant to the context of this research, attachment literature in psychology has demonstrated that commitment is a significant construct for understanding the strength and quality of the relationship (Holmes, 1993). In line with this, Park et al. (2009) have argued that brand commitment and commitment related behaviours are the key outcomes of brand attachment. Due to attachment-related commitments, consumers act as the "evangelists" of the brand and get involved in consumer advocacy (Bhati & Verma, 2020). Within the context of luxury brands, it is anticipated that potential buyers will consult existing consumers, in the niche luxury community, before buying a luxury brand because such personal recommendations are often regarded as credible and trustworthy (Klein et al., 2016; Park et al., 2021). Extant literature notes brand attachment as a critical antecedent for advocacy (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Shimul et al., 2019). Therefore, based on the aforementioned empirical findings and referring back to the SIT, this research hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 3 *LBA has a significant positive impact on consumer advocacy.*

2.4 | Consumers' self-consciousness and aspects of identity

Self-consciousness is the human tendency of direct attention to self-related aspects, either inward or outward (Doherty & Schlenker, 1991). Fenigstein et al. (1975) explain self-consciousness with three distinct dimensions: private self-consciousness, public self-consciousness and social anxiety. A number of follow-up studies on Fenigstein et al.'s (1975) conceptualization of self-consciousness have examined the impact of private and public self-consciousness on people's compliance behaviour (e.g., Cheek & Briggs, 1982; Froming & Carver, 1981). Froming and Carver (1981) interpret these

two components as the covert (i.e., private self-consciousness) and overt aspect of the self (i.e., public self-consciousness). Studies further argue that people with high private self-consciousness depend on their own perceptual experiences than on external influences (Ahadzadeh et al., 2021; Froming & Carver, 1981; Hart et al., 2019). Private (public) self involves the individual's personal (social) identity; and the dominance of the particular identity varies across people, often with an attempt of creating a balance between their privately-held beliefs and public expression (e.g., Cheek & Briggs, 1982; Newman & Nezlek, 2019). The third aspect of self-consciousness, social anxiety, relates to an individual's concern of being negatively evaluated within a social setting (Schlenker & Leary, 1982). Studies suggest that consumers' perceived social anxiety influences product usage (Caplan, 2007), consumption preference (Delacroix & Guillard, 2016; Park et al., 2019) and consumer-brand relationships (Kwon et al., 2017; Sarkar & Sreejesh, 2014).

Self-consciousness literature posits that people with high public self-consciousness conform to social norms and show a high need for affiliation, low self-esteem and low risk-taking (Tunnel, 1984). They are also anxious about their social impressions and appearances (e.g., Scheier, 1980). The aspiration for desirable social representation motivates people to consume the goods and experience the services that would facilitate them in achieving an ideal social image (Buss, 1980). Studies have investigated the impact of public self-consciousness on choices for clothing, food, intimate apparel and social network behaviour (e.g., Bushman, 1993; Lee et al., 2012; Solomon & Schopler, 1982; Vigolo & Ugolini, 2016). Relevant to the research model of this study, it is expected that consumers with high public self-consciousness would express to others whom they would like to be by consuming an ideal self-congruent luxury brand (e.g., Markus & Wurf, 1987; Turunen & Pöyry, 2019). Richins (1994) argues that consumers enhance their private and public image by consuming luxury goods with a high reputation, symbolic meaning and conspicuousness. Millan and Mittal (2017) further elaborate that consumption of luxury branded products increases the consumers' self-confidence, reduces social anxiety and provides desired ideal self-image. Studies have called for a personality-based comparison while taking the public self-consciousness into account (Chae, 2017). Referring back to personality and individual differences, Green et al. (2017) find that public self-consciousness moderates the individuals' reactions to communicating their own experience with social bias. The interplay of consumers' desire for status, public self-consciousness and luxury consumption has been evident in recent literature (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021; Hampson et al., 2021). Thus, it might be intuitively postulated that a higher level of public self-consciousness would enhance the positive relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and LBA.

On the other hand, people with high private self-consciousness have a strong internal self-attention and aspire to achieve self-directed and egocentric goals (Carver & Scheier, 1981; Cheek & Briggs, 1982). The awareness of one's internal and external self-conception has further been validated through the notion of social anxiety (Gould & Barak, 1988). If the consumers' self-consciousness

and anxiety are high, they may seek proximity to products and brands that would provide a balance between their actual and ideal self-concept. For instance, Roux et al. (2017) find a positive relationship between public self-consciousness and the refinement dimension of the luxury value. In addition, consumers' private self-consciousness that elicits an internal state of awareness, self-reflection and self-presentation (Ahadzadeh et al., 2021; Hart et al., 2019) is expected to influence consumers's aspiration for luxury brands positively.

In the same way, the impact of social anxiety on consumers' emotional connection to brands has also been evident in the extant literature (e.g., Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2017; Sreejesh, 2015). Based on this argument, within the context of this study, it is further anticipated that people with high social anxiety would care more about their actual and ideal self-representation. Therefore, to reduce social anxiety, they would build a strong attachment to the brand that would validate (enhance) their actual (ideal) self-image. Thus, this research hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 4 *(a) Public self-consciousness, (b) private self-consciousness and (c) social anxiety will enhance the relationship between actual self-congruence and LBA.*

Hypothesis 5 *(a) Public self-consciousness, (b) private self-consciousness and (c) social anxiety will enhance the relationship between ideal self-congruence and LBA.*

2.5 | Privately and publicly consumed luxury branded products

Products are often categorized based on the context of consumption. Publicly (e.g., car) and privately (e.g., pillow) consumed products have a differential effect on consumption-related behaviours (Kulviwat et al., 2009). Graeff (1996) notes that the social visibility of the consumption enhances the impact of social influence on the purchase decision. A good number of past studies on privately consumed products used intimate apparel as the stimulus of the research (e.g., Richards & Sturman, 1977; Vigolo & Ugolini, 2016). Talukdar and Yu (2020) find a differential effect of materialism on purchase intention for privately versus publicly consumed luxury products. These studies indicate that the experiential consumption of privately consumed luxury branded products is more related to the consumers' inner self rather than the concern for public display (Hume & Mills, 2013; Miller & Mills, 2012).

Research has also argued that consumers' decisions on private products are influenced by the consumers' self-concept (Schlenker et al., 1996). Referring to the bandwagon and snob effects, Corneo and Jeanne (1997) add that consumers trade-off the more intrinsically valuable products with the status-seeking products to impress the public. Thus, consumers obtain the expected image by consuming public products evaluated favourably by others (Ratner & Kahn, 2002). While examining the self-concept congruence and consumption context, Dolich (1969, p. 81) posits that "self-concept congruence with socially consumed products differs from self-concept

congruence with privately consumed products". In particular, consumers have greater sensitivity to ideal self-congruence than actual self-congruence in social situations for publicly consumed products and vice versa (Graeff, 1996). Based on the aforementioned arguments, this research hypothesizes that:

Hypothesis 6a *Compared with actual self-congruence, consumers' perceived ideal self-congruence will have a stronger impact on LBA for publicly consumed luxury branded products.*

Hypothesis 6b *Compared with ideal self-congruence, consumers' perceived actual self-congruence will have a stronger impact on LBA for privately consumed luxury branded products.*

The hypothesized relationships are presented in the proposed research model (Figure 1).

3 | THE CURRENT RESEARCH

The proposed research model is validated, and postulated relationships are tested across three studies. Study 1 tests the base model (H_1, H_2 and H_3) within the context of a product category (i.e., sunglasses) for two different brands. An invariance test on the research model is conducted for two brands to assess the potential impact of "brand affect" (Moorman et al., 1992). Study 2 validates the research model within a different product category (i.e., jeans) and examines the moderating impact of self-consciousness on the relationship between self-congruence and LBA (H_4 and H_5). Finally, study 3 validates the LBA model for privately consumed luxury branded products (i.e., undergarments) and compares the research model across privately and publicly consumed luxury branded products. This study further examines the relative impact of actual and ideal self-congruence on LBA for publicly and privately consumed luxury branded products (H_6). Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) with the IBM SPSS AMOS 25.0 was used as the analytical tool. SEM in AMOS was chosen due to the theory-driven casual modelling involved in the research model

(Hair et al., 2010). In addition, compared with PLS-SEM, the CB-SEM was considered appropriate as it accounts for measurement errors while testing the relationship among constructs (Cunningham & Petzer, 2021).

4 | STUDY 1

Study 1 aims to examine the impact of consumers' actual and ideal self-congruence on LBA and test the influence of LBA on consumer advocacy. The hypothesized relationships are tested across sunglasses of two different brands (i.e., Giorgio Armani and Dolce&Gabbana).

4.1 | Method

4.1.1 | Study design

A pool of 38 product categories from 32 luxury brands was populated to select the survey stimuli of this study. First, a focus group was conducted with luxury branding researchers ($n = 3$) who selected five brands (Giorgio Armani, Dolce&Gabbana, Chanel, Prada and Gucci) and 4 product categories (sunglasses, handbags, jeans and shoes) as the appropriate and potential stimulus. Next, a pre-test was conducted among 67 luxury consumers (male = 31, female = 36, average age = 27). The results suggested sunglasses from Giorgio Armani ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.07$) and Dolce&Gabbana ($M = 5.43$, $SD = 1.20$) as the gender-neutral luxury brands to be used as the stimulus in the survey of this study. The symbolic values of the brands and products also supported the utilization of the category in this study. Moreover, past research on luxury branding has used sunglasses as the product category (e.g., Liu et al., 2012). Data were collected from a global panel (i.e., Qualtrics panel) of luxury consumers who previously used Giorgio Armani or Dolce&Gabbana sunglasses. The usage of the product was assured
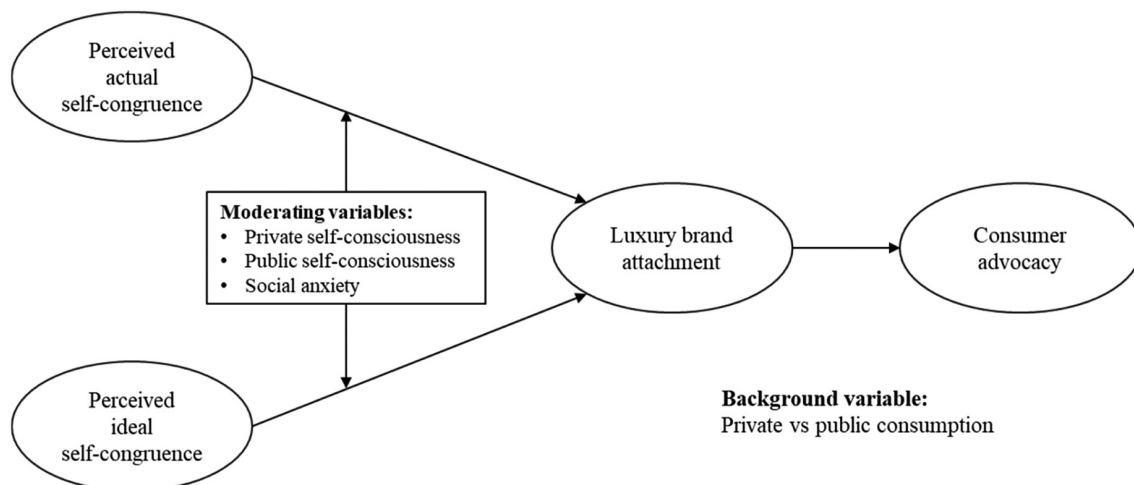

FIGURE 1 Luxury brand attachment framework

through a filter question at the beginning of the survey questionnaire. After that, the respondents were presented with an advertisement for the brand.

4.1.2 | Measures

Both actual self-congruence ($\alpha = 0.83$) and ideal self-congruence ($\alpha = 0.93$) measures were adapted from Sirgy et al. (1997). The LBA ($\alpha = 0.92$) was measured by a 7-item scale (Shimul et al., 2019). The 5-item consumer advocacy ($\alpha = 0.85$) scale was adapted from Chelminski and Coulter (2011). All items (Table 2) were measured on a 7-point Likert scale with 1 representing "strongly disagree" and 7 representing "strongly agree". The final section of the survey asked about the basic demographic characteristics – gender, age, income, education and marital status.

4.1.3 | Sample

A total of 550 consumers were contacted, and the yield resulted in 430 valid and useable responses. Of the sample collected, 50.8% were female, 80.5% were aged between 18 and 30 years age bracket, and 62.6% had an undergraduate degree or above. The majority of the sample (18–30 age group) mirrors the segment that has been recognized by past studies as the most likely demographics to purchase luxury goods and services (Sarkar, 2017).

4.2 | Results

Several underlying assumptions for the SEM were checked for the three studies. For instance, an examination on the collinearity statistics assured the absence of extreme multicollinearity as the variance inflation factors were less than 3 (Hair et al., 2010). The univariate normality assumption was satisfied because all skewness values associated with each item were within the range of ±1.96, and the absolute values of kurtosis were less than 2.

Common method bias was examined through Harman's single-factor test for all measurement items (Podsakoff et al., 2003). An exploratory factor analysis with one-factor extraction and an unrotated solution revealed the single factor accounted for less than 50% of the total variance, meeting recommended threshold of Baumgartner and Steenkamp (2001) and MacKenzie and Podsakoff (2012). Additionally, a marker variable, namely the respondents' "Intention to visit Singapore", was added as an unrelated variable into the survey instrument (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). The correlations among the marker variable and other constructs did not exceed the threshold of 0.20, as recommended by Evans (1996). Furthermore, the marker variable was included in the measurement model. The results did not show any significant impact of the marker variable on the measurement model. Therefore, common method bias was deemed non-problematic in three studies of this paper. The

two-step procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) was then applied to test the hypothesized relationship.

The measurement model resulted in good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011) with $\chi^2 = 591.75$, $df = 199$, $\chi^2/df = 2.97$; RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.06, CFI = 0.93 and TLI = 0.92 (Table 3). Composite reliabilities were above 0.83 for all the measurement constructs, and thus the internal consistencies were assured (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity was achieved as the average variance extracted (AVE) value for the constructs are above 0.50 (Malhotra, 2010). The model also achieved discriminant validity, as all the square root of the AVE values exceeded the pair-wise inter-construct correlations (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). A summary of the convergent and discriminant validity of the construct measures is presented in Table 4.

To validate the proposed LBA model, a multi-group analysis was conducted across two different brands. In doing so, the data were divided into two separate groups: Dolce&Gabbana sunglasses ($n = 208$) and Giorgio Armani sunglasses ($n = 222$). The measurement model for both samples achieved good fit. The convergent and discriminant validities were achieved as well (Table 4).

The structural model for both brands achieved an acceptable model fit (Table 5). The postulated three hypotheses (H_1-H_3) were supported as well (Table 6). A multi-group analysis then compared the structural models for the two brands at model level and path level. A chi-square difference test did not show any significant difference at the model level comparison ($\Delta\chi^2 = 4.99$, $\Delta df = 3$, $p = .172$). Next, the chi-square difference tests on the path level comparison also showed non-significant results: actual self-congruence to LBA ($\Delta\beta = -0.009$, $p = .105$), ideal self-congruence to LBA ($\Delta\beta = 0.004$, $p = .872$) and LBA to consumer advocacy ($\Delta\beta = -0.029$, $p = .276$). Thus, the results were consistent across full model and multi-group analyses.

Although not postulated within the hypotheses in this research, we further examined the strength of LBA toward generating consumer advocacy with ASC and ISC. Thus, we tested the mediating effect of LBA in between ASC/ISC and consumer advocacy. We used Hayes's (2012) PROCESS macro (Model 4) for testing the mediation effects. We found a significant and positive indirect effect of ASC and ISC on consumer advocacy (ASC: $\beta = 0.28$, SE = 0.03, CI: 0.21, 0.36; ISC: $\beta = 0.22$, SE = 0.04, CI: 0.15, 0.31).

4.3 | Discussion

The results suggest that consumers' perceived actual and ideal self-congruence have a significant positive impact on LBA. Consequently, LBA results in consumer advocacy. The first finding that consumers' perceived actual self-congruence has a significant positive impact on LBA (H_1) validates the argument that consumers develop a strong connection with the brand that matches with their apparent actual self. As pointed out by Malär et al. (2011), consumers are motivated to verify and maintain their overall self-concept and consume the self-congruent brand. Such perceived benefit motivates the consumers' self-expansion to the brand and generates a

TABLE 2 Item loading in measurement model

Measurement constructs	Giorgio Armani sunglasses (Study 1)	D&G sunglasses (Study 1)	Giorgio Armani jeans (Study 2)	Giorgio Armani undergarments (Study 3)
Actual self-congruence				
This brand is consistent with how I see myself.	0.67	0.67	0.90	0.78
This brand reflects who I am.	0.82	0.75	0.91	0.87
People similar to me use brand like this.	0.68	0.73	0.76	0.72
The kind of person who typically uses this brand is very much like me.	0.83	0.81	0.75	0.82
This brand is a mirror image of me.	0.91	0.89	0.84	0.88
Ideal self-congruence				
This brand is consistent with how I would like to see myself.	0.72	0.63	0.85	0.85
People who I would like to be like use this brand.	0.76	0.79	0.83	0.83
The kind of person whom I would like to be typically uses this brand.	0.96	0.92	0.90	0.90
This brand reflects who I would like to be.	0.91	0.94	0.88	0.86
This brand is a mirror image of the person I would like to be.	0.77	0.63	0.83	0.87
Luxury brand attachment				
I am deeply passionate about this luxury brand.	0.83	0.74	0.77	0.75
I am deeply in love with this luxury brand.	0.83	0.75	0.82	0.80
I have a deep emotional connection to this luxury brand.	0.83	0.72	0.83	0.84
When I think of this luxury brand, I feel a sense of joy.	0.82	0.72	0.85	0.85
I feel this luxury brand helps me achieve what I want.	0.80	0.79	0.83	0.85
I would feel a sense of loss if this brand is no longer available.	0.77	0.70	0.86	0.77
I feel a sense of exquisiteness from this luxury brand.	0.69	0.67	0.82	0.78
Consumer advocacy				
By sharing my experience with this luxury brand, I assist other people towards a similar experience.	0.67	0.66	0.80	0.77
It makes me feel good to tell others about this luxury brand.	0.85	0.86	0.86	0.85
I have responsibility to society to tell others about my experiences with this luxury brand.	0.74	0.81	0.84	0.81
I suggest others about this luxury brand.	0.91	0.66	0.83	0.82
I give suggestions to other people about the quality of this luxury brand to help them have a similar experience.	0.70	0.58	0.78	0.79
Private self-consciousness				
I am generally attentive to my inner feeling.	–	–	0.71	0.85
I am alert to changes in my mood.	–	–	0.75	0.96
I am aware of the way my mind works when I work through a problem.	–	–	0.69	0.90

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

Measurement constructs	Giorgio Armani sunglasses (Study 1)	D&G sunglasses (Study 1)	Giorgio Armani jeans (Study 2)	Giorgio Armani undergarments (Study 3)
Public self-consciousness				
I am concerned about my style of doing things.	–	–	0.79	0.85
I am concerned about the way I present myself.	–	–	0.86	0.91
I am self-conscious about the way I look.	–	–	0.65	0.68
I am usually aware of my appearance.	–	–	0.56	0.77
Social anxiety				
I have trouble working when someone is watching me.	–	–	0.64	0.60
I get embarrassed very easily.	–	–	0.82	0.71
I find it hard to talk to strangers.	–	–	0.78	0.68
I feel anxious when I speak in front of a group.	–	–	0.78	0.90
Large groups make me nervous.	–	–	0.83	0.89

TABLE 3 Measurement model fit indices

Study	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Study 1 (n = 430)	591.75	199	2.97	0.06	0.06	0.93	0.92
Giorgio Armani (n = 222)	467.95	199	2.35	0.07	0.07	0.93	0.92
D&G (n = 208)	399.71	198	2.01	0.06	0.07	0.93	0.92
Study 2 (n = 236)	1048.03	539	1.94	0.05	0.06	0.92	0.91
Study 3 (n = 295)	1138.46	506	2.25	0.05	0.06	0.92	0.91

TABLE 4 Reliability and validity (Study 1)

Study	Constructs	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4
Study 1 (n = 430)	1. Actual self-congruence	0.834	0.508	**0.713**			
	2. Ideal self-congruence	0.902	0.653	0.487***	**0.808**		
	3. Consumer advocacy	0.857	0.547	0.377***	0.487***	**0.740**	
	4. Luxury brand attachment	0.906	0.579	0.655***	0.555***	0.611***	**0.761**
Study 1 (D&G) (n = 208)	1. Actual self-congruence	0.880	0.597	**0.772**			
	2. Ideal self-congruence	0.892	0.630	0.483***	**0.794**		
	3. Consumer advocacy	0.842	0.522	0.466***	0.512***	**0.722**	
	4. Luxury brand attachment	0.886	0.528	0.444***	0.490***	0.573***	**0.726**
Study 1 (Giorgio Armani) (n = 222)	1. Actual self-congruence	0.888	0.617	**0.786**			
	2. Ideal self-congruence	0.918	0.693	0.537***	**0.832**		
	3. Consumer advocacy	0.884	0.608	0.340***	0.429***	**0.780**	
	4. Luxury brand attachment	0.925	0.638	0.666***	0.576***	0.598***	**0.799**

Note: Figures in the diagonal (values given in bold) are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE); those below the diagonal are the correlations between the constructs.

Abbreviation: CR, construct reliability.

***$p < .001$.

sense of psychological proximity and emotional attachment to the brand. The relationship between actual self-congruence and emotional attachments to brands is highly relevant within the luxury branding context. Traditionally, luxury brands are well known and recognized for providing social status, uniqueness and other socio-psychological benefits. The affluent consumers who identify themselves within the luxury bracket would feel an immense desire for brands congruent with their current self-image. In turn, they not only

TABLE 5 Structural model fit indices

Study	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	SRMR	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Study 1							
Giorgio Armani ($n = 222$)	473.55	201	2.56	0.07	0.07	0.93	0.92
D&G ($n = 208$)	420.54	200	2.10	0.07	0.07	0.92	0.91
Study 2 ($n = 236$)	512.74	205	2.50	0.04	0.08	0.94	0.93
Study 3 ($n = 295$)	482.37	202	2.39	0.05	0.06	0.95	0.94

TABLE 6 Summary of hypotheses testing ($H_1 - H_3$)

Causal path	Giorgio Armani sunglasses (Study 1)		D&G sunglasses (Study 1)		Giorgio Armani jeans (Study 2)		Giorgio Armani undergarments (Study 3)	
	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value	β	t-value
H_1. Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	0.49***	6.13	0.50***	4.54	0.45***	6.74	0.63***	3.64
H_2. Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	0.32***	4.55	0.32***	3.93	0.52***	7.50	0.20***	9.23
H_3. Luxury brand attachment → Consumer advocacy	0.60***	7.42	0.63***	6.71	0.81***	11.38	0.82***	12.07

***$p < .001$.

hold an attachment and positive attitude towards the luxury brand but also purchase and use the brand (e.g., Giovannini et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2012). The finding of the H_1 is consistent with the study by Kaufmann et al. (2016) that reveal a significant positive relationship between luxury consumers' actual brand self-congruence and emotional attachments to luxury brands.

The result of the H_2 reflects that when there is a perceived difference between luxury consumers' actual and ideal self-image, they are motivated to minimize this difference through consuming ideally self-congruent luxury brands. Past studies on consumers' emotional attachments to brands argue that the discrepancy between the perceived actual and ideal self encourages consumers to improve the image through self-enhancement strategies (e.g., Malär et al., 2011). Influenced by the self-enhancement motive, consumers aspire to consume brands that would help them achieve the desired ideal state. Thus, consumers develop a sense of strong psychological closeness to and attachment with the brand (e.g., Jacob et al., 2020; Japutra et al., 2018). Kaufmann et al. (2016) find a significant positive relationship between luxury consumers' ideal brand self-congruence and emotional attachment to counterfeit luxury brands. Furthermore, consumers' perceived ideal-self congruence with the brand increases emotional reliance and reduces separation anxiety. Thus, the consumers' perceived ideal self may generate LBA through "aspirational and compensatory mechanisms" (Kaufmann et al., 2016). Overall, the findings of the H_1 and H_2 are consistent with the notion that brands can often build and maintain the consumers' self-image that might be expressed publicly or privately (e.g., Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

The results of this study also show that LBA has a significant positive impact on consumer advocacy (H_3). This finding validates the affective commitment resulting from a strong emotional connection

to the brand. In particular, the findings echo the argument that consumers' emotional connection to a brand leads to advocacy for the brand (e.g., Park et al., 2021; Shimul & Phau, 2018). Studies on the consumer-brand relationship state that consumers have an inherent motive to share their brand experience with others. Such notion of experience sharing has been identified as positive word of mouth, market mavens, brand community identification, commitment and engagement (e.g., Zhou et al., 2012). Past studies on luxury brands report that consumers' perceived self-congruence positively impacts the perceived brand value, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty (e.g., Ahmad & Akbar, 2021; Liu et al., 2012). Because luxury brands are primarily targeted towards a very niche and affluent consumer segment, it has been evident in academic research and industry reports that luxury consumers rely heavily on recommendations from other consumers (e.g., Godey et al., 2016).

5 | STUDY 2

Study 2 aims to validate the findings of study 1 within the context of a different product category. In addition to testing the three hypotheses (H_1 to H_3), the moderating role of private/public self-consciousness and social anxiety is examined in this study.

5.1 | Method

5.1.1 | Study design

A pre-test was conducted among 60 luxury consumers (male = 34, average age = 24) whereby jeans from the brand Giorgio Armani

(M = 5.30, SD = 1.39) was selected as the gender-neutral and appropriate publicly used product and luxury brand to be used as the stimulus in the survey of this study. Data were collected from a global panel of luxury consumers who previously used Giorgio Armani jeans.

5.1.2 | Measures

Past usage of the Giorgio Armani jeans was assured through a filter question at the beginning of the survey questionnaire. Respondents' also rated their brand likeability for Giorgio Armani. In addition to the four variables measured in study 1, Fenigstein et al.'s (1975) 7-item public self-consciousness (α = 0.84), 10-item private self-consciousness (α = 0.79) and 6-item social anxiety (α = 0.73) scales were also included in study 2 (Table 2). All measures were operationalized on a 7-point Likert scale. Respondents' demographic profile was also obtained at the end of the survey.

5.1.3 | Sample

A total of 236 responses collected from a consumer panel (i.e., Qualtrics panel) were considered valid and useable for this study. 52.4% of the respondents were female, 90.4% were aged between 18 and 30 years and 58.9% had an undergraduate degree or above.

5.2 | Results

The measurement model provided a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011) (Table 3) with convergent and discriminant validities (Table 7). The structural model achieved good fit (Table 5), and H_1-H_3 were supported (Table 6).

Hayes (2012) process macro (Model 1) was used to test the moderating impact of self-consciousness on the relationship between brand self-congruence and LBA. H_{4a} and H_{5a} were supported, indicating that consumers' public self-consciousness enhances the positive relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and LBA (Table 8). However, the moderating impact of consumers' private self-consciousness and social anxiety were non-significant. Our additional test demonstrated a significant and positive indirect effect of ASC and ISC on consumer advocacy. Thus, the mediating role of LBA in between ASC/ISC and consumer advocacy were evident (ASC: β = 0.32, SE = 0.07, CI: 0.18, 0.47; ISC: β = 0.35, SE = 0.08, CI: 0.19, 0.50).

5.3 | Discussion

This study validates the findings of study 1 with a new product category (i.e., jeans) as the H_1-H_3 are supported. Regarding the moderating influence, the results show that consumers' public

self-consciousness strengthens the relationship between (i) actual self-congruence and LBA and (ii) ideal self-congruence and LBA; thus, supporting H_{4a} and H_{5a}. This finding supports the notion that consumers' consciousness of desirable public self-representation creates a sense of emotional insecurity. After that, as a part of the defence mechanism and brand consciousness, consumers buy the products and brands that help them achieve the desired image in society (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021; Turunen & Pöyry, 2019). Such consumption related actions play a dual role in protecting the current self-image and attaining the ideal image. Thus, consumers' public self-consciousness enhances the relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and LBA that can be explained as the motive of authentic self-expression (Malär et al., 2011). The non-significant impact of private self-consciousness (H_{4b} and H_{5b}) might be a result of the context of this study. In particular, consumers' self-image congruence and emotional connection to the brand for the specific product category (i.e., jeans) may not be influenced by their private self-consciousness. The conceptualization of private self-consciousness is so self-centred that the covert aspect of the self does not facilitate the personality-based comparison for a publicly consumed product. This plausible explanation can further be validated while the same relationships are examined within the context of privately consumed luxury branded products in study 3. Furthermore, the non-significant impact of social anxiety (H_{4c} and H_{5c}) perhaps lies within the inherent nature of the construct itself. The measurement items (e.g., "I have trouble working when someone is watching me" or "I get embarrassed very easily") are highly related to an individual's internal worry within a specific social situation. Contrary to public self-consciousness, these aspects of social anxiety may not be minimized by luxury consumption related congruence and attachment.

6 | STUDY 3

The twofold aim of study 3 is to validate the LBA model for privately consumed luxury branded products and compare the research model across privately and publicly consumed luxury branded products. In doing so, the moderating influence of self-consciousness was examined as well. Furthermore, the relative impact of actual and ideal self-congruence on LBA was examined across publicly and privately consumed products.

6.1 | Method

6.1.1 | Study design

A pre-test was conducted among 60 luxury consumers (male = 34, average age = 24), whereby Giorgio Armani undergarments (M = 5.23, SD = 1.12) was selected as an appropriate stimulus in the survey of this study. Noteworthy, data collected in this study were compared with the data collected in study 2 of this research to test H_{6a}.

TABLE 7 Reliability and validity (Study 2 and 3)

Study	Constructs	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Study 2 (n = 236)	1. Actual self-congruence	0.920	0.698	**0.835**						
	2. Ideal self-congruence	0.935	0.741	0.799***	**0.861**					
	3. Consumer advocacy	0.914	0.681	0.778***	0.767***	**0.825**				
	4. Public self-consciousness	0.811	0.524	0.125†	0.167*	0.308***	**0.724**			
	5. Private self-consciousness	0.758	0.512	0.037	0.137†	0.191*	0.533***	**0.715**		
	6. Social anxiety	0.890	0.577	0.093	0.131†	0.141†	0.180*	0.231**	**0.760**	
	7. Luxury brand attachment	0.938	0.684	0.805***	0.819***	0.790***	0.192*	0.115	0.109	**0.827**
Study 3 (n = 295)	1. Actual self-congruence	0.909	0.667	**0.817**						
	2. Ideal self-congruence	0.935	0.741	0.539***	**0.861**					
	3. Consumer advocacy	0.904	0.653	0.665***	0.537***	**0.808**				
	4. Public self-consciousness	0.882	0.653	0.119†	0.102	0.221***	**0.808**			
	5. Private self-consciousness	0.932	0.820	0.658***	0.313***	0.514***	0.237***	**0.906**		
	6. Social anxiety	0.874	0.587	0.015	0.047	0.034	0.194**	0.170**	**0.766**	
	7. Luxury brand attachment	0.929	0.651	0.728***	0.516***	0.789***	0.150*	0.525***	0.041	**0.807**

Note: Figures in the diagonal (values given in bold) are the square root of the average variance extracted (AVE); those below the diagonal are the correlations between the constructs.

†$p < .100$

*$p < .050$; **$p < .010$; ***$p < .001$.

TABLE 8 Moderation test summary

Study	Causal path	Moderator	β	SE	t-value	p	95% CI
Study 2	Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Public self-consciousness	0.058	0.017	3.467	.001	0.025, 0.091
	Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Public self-consciousness	0.070	0.016	4.427	.000	0.039, 0.101
	Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Private self-consciousness	−0.023	0.025	−0.909	.364	0.073, 0.027
	Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Private self-consciousness	0.009	0.024	0.380	.704	0.080, 0.056
	Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Social anxiety	0.016	0.021	0.785	.433	−0.025, 0.057
	Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Social anxiety	−0.001	0.020	−0.041	.967	−0.040, 0.038
Study 3	Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Public self-consciousness	0.022	0.022	0.984	.325	−0.022, 0.066
	Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Public self-consciousness	0.006	0.021	0.275	.783	−0.036, 0.048
	Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Private self-consciousness	0.109	0.029	3.651	.000	0.050, 0.167
	Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Private self-consciousness	0.102	0.028	3.635	.000	0.046, 0.157
	Actual self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Social anxiety	−0.019	0.028	−0.686	.493	−0.073, 0.035
	Ideal self-congruence → Luxury brand attachment	Social anxiety	0.009	0.029	0.313	.754	−0.048, 0.066

6.1.2 | Measures

The respondents were presented with an advertisement of the Giorgio Armani undergarments. The measurement constructs were replicated from the survey questionnaire of study 2. Data were collected from a global panel of luxury consumers who previously used Giorgio Armani undergarments.

6.1.3 | Sample

A total of 295 responses were collected from the Qualtrics panel and analysed. Of the sample collected, 64.6% were female, 88.9% were aged between 18 and 30 years age bracket and 56.4% had an undergraduate degree or above.

6.2 | Results

The measurement model provided a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2011) (Table 3) with convergent and discriminant validities (Table 7). The structural model achieved satisfactory fit (Table 5), and H_1-H_3 were supported (Table 6).

The moderation tests showed that H_{4b} and H_{5b} were supported, indicating that consumers' private self-consciousness enhances the positive relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and

LBA. However, the moderating impact of consumers' public self-consciousness and social anxiety were non-significant in study 3 (Table 8).

A chi-square difference test between a constrained and an unconstrained model was conducted to test the relative impact of actual and ideal self-congruence on LBA (H_{6a} and H_{6b}). The path coefficients of actual self-congruence to LBA and ideal self-congruence to LBA were constrained to be equal under a constrained model. The results show that the relative impact of actual and ideal self-congruence on LBA was statistically invariant ($\beta = 0.064$, $p = .629$) for publicly consumed luxury branded products. Thus, H_{6a} is not supported. However, H_{6b} was supported compared with ideal self-congruence, actual self-congruence had a stronger effect ($\beta = 0.545$, $p = .006$) on LBA for the privately consumed luxury branded products. Finally, the mediating role of LBA on between ASC/ISC and consumer advocacy was supported in this study as well (ASC: $\beta = 0.45$, $SE = 0.05$, $CI: 0.36, 0.53$; ISC: $\beta = 0.30$, $SE = 0.04$, $CI: 0.22, 0.38$). Across three studies, our findings show that although consumers may advocate a self-congruent brand to others, the effect is stronger within the presence of the LBA. This further pronounces the power of LBA and the robustness of our proposed research model.

6.3 | Discussion

The consistent results for the hypothesized relationships (H_1, H_2 and H_3) across privately and publicly consumed products suggest the rigour of

the relevant constructs for LBA. Moreover, the generalizability of the research model is achieved through the consistent result across different product categories. Regarding moderation, the significant impact of private self-consciousness on the relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and LBA (H$_{4b}$, H$_{5b}$) explains the notion of consumers' inward attention and own perceptual experience while building an attachment towards a privately consumed luxury branded product. Consumers with high private self-consciousness, compared with those with high public self-consciousness, are more concerned about their inner personal identity while building the LBA for a privately consumed product (i.e., undergarments). Therefore, H$_{4a}$ and H$_{5a}$ were not supported in study 3. Furthermore, the non-significant impact of social anxiety has been prevalent as well. As noted in study 2, social anxiety perhaps has little to do with consumers' perceived self-congruence and attachment to a brand. Highly attached luxury consumers might have a distinct psychological state that has more desire for self-actualization than social recognition. Therefore, those consumers' emotional gratification derived from luxury consumption surpasses the concern of social anxiety.

The results further show that actual self-congruence (compared with ideal self-congruence) has a stronger impact on LBA for privately consumed luxury branded products (supporting H$_{6b}$). This finding aligns with the findings of H$_{4b}$ and H$_{5b}$ that consumers' perceived actual self-congruence is more relevant to the consumption of privately consumed products. The non-significant result of H$_{6a}$ adds to the current knowledge of self-congruence and LBA. For example, several studies have found a positive impact of ideal self-image in product evaluation and purchase intention (e.g., Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Malhotra, 1988; Vigolo & Ugolini, 2016). It is noteworthy that most of these studies have been conducted within the context of a publicly consumed non-luxury product. Thus, this study shows that both actual and ideal self-concepts are equally crucial while assessing consumers' attachment towards a publicly consumed luxury branded product.

7 | IMPLICATIONS

This research fulfils the research gaps in the current literature by providing empirical support for the understanding of luxury consumer-brand relationships by investigating the predictors, outcomes and moderators of LBA within the context of publicly (study 1 and 2) and privately (study 3) consumed luxury branded products. Studies 2 and 3 add new knowledge into the literature by examining the moderating influence of private/public self-consciousness and social anxiety on the relationship between perceived self-congruence and LBA. This also results in several theoretical and managerial implications in luxury brands and brand attachment.

7.1 | Theoretical implications

The findings of the current research make three important theoretical contributions. *First*, this paper validates two previously identified

drivers (i.e., actual and ideal self-congruence) of brand attachment within a luxury branding context. Although past studies argue that ideal-self congruence does not significantly impact brand attachment (e.g., Malär et al., 2011), this research uniquely contributes to the literature that both actual and ideal self-congruence drives consumers' LBA. In line with self congruence and self-expansion theory, this research empirically demonstrates that consumers may develop a strong emotional connection to their aspirational brands reflecting the ideal self-congruence. *Second*, by accentuating the notion of SIT, the findings show that LBA generates consumer advocacy within the luxury market segment. While the majority of the past studies (e.g., Park et al., 2009, 2010) considered brand loyalty and performing difficult behaviour as the key outcomes of brand attachment, the current research adds onto new conceptual directions in understanding consumers' post-attachment behaviour with the viewpoint of in-group feeling and helping intention. *Third*, this research tested the moderating influence of three dimensions of self-consciousness on the relationship between self-congruence and LBA. In particular, private self-consciousness and social anxiety were largely overlooked in extant brand attachment literature (e.g., Kaufmann et al., 2016; Malär et al., 2011). Hence, this research reveals that consumers' public and private self-consciousness strongly impacts the relationship between self-congruence and brand attachment based on the type of product category. The corpus of luxury branding literature is mainly based on publicly consumed products. Hence, through the lens of self-consciousness theory, the current research makes an advanced understanding into the literature that privately consumed products are more relevant to the consumers' feeling of inner-self and private self-consciousness plays an important role in generating LBA.

7.2 | Managerial implications

This study also provides practical insights for luxury brand managers. *First*, the luxury managers can understand how consumers develop a bond with luxury brands based on the perceived brand self-congruence. They can investigate which aspect of self-congruence (actual vs. ideal) has a stronger impact on the attachment for a luxury brand. Moreover, it would be imperative to understand the particular aspects of LBA (e.g., love, passion, separation distress) relevant to the brand. The image-conscious consumers would maintain their perceived actual and ideal self-image by consuming self-congruent (e.g., hedonic) values (Hale & Hodges, 2013). For example, drawing inspiration from various aspirational women, the Prada Spring/Summer 2020 womenswear campaign integrated the views and perspectives that reflect women's self-concepts in various jobs, including sailing, writing, business and more (Prada, 2020). Thus, brands may provide personal affection while building a strong emotional connection between the consumers and brands.

Second, the LBA model would help managers segment the luxury consumers and identify the segments with low, medium and high attachment. As suggested by other studies, lifestyle can be used

to segment the market for privately consumed products (e.g., undergarments) (Richards & Sturman, 1977; Vigolo & Ugolini, 2016). Further initiatives can be taken over elevating the level of attachment. For instance, considering the consumers' following as well as the power of online influencers, many luxury brands (e.g., Chanel, Fendi and Miu Miu) reinforced their ties with consumers in recent years with multiple activations that elevated influencers as a part of corresponding brand's legacy (Kulke, 2021). On the other hand, consumers with strong attachment levels can be motivated to engage in consumer advocacy in online and offline communities (Bhati & Verma, 2020). As noted in the past studies, consumers display variety-seeking behaviour for the publicly consumed products (Rartner & Kahn, 2002), which might lead to brand switching. Therefore, building strong LBA is essential to reduce brand switching and increase brand loyalty. Luxury managers can also strengthen the relationship by making customized offers on the highly attached consumers' special occasions.

Next, consumers' LBA can be capitalized on when extending the brand portfolio. Attached consumers are expected to have a positive attitude, preference and purchase intention for the newly offered brands. Besides, the consumers who buy only within the affordable luxury category can further be motivated to buy intermediate luxury products through building and nurturing LBA. For instance, flanker brands like *"Miu Miu by Prada"* often target consumers who cannot afford higher-end luxury products (i.e., Prada). Thus, a better understanding and incorporation of LBA into the branding strategy would provide a sustainable competitive advantage to the luxury brand.

Using the findings of this research, luxury managers can incorporate the relevant aspect of self-congruence into brand positioning and advertising messages. For instance, women's lingerie brand Victoria's Secret promotes the consumers' ideal self in its *"Angel"* campaign, whereas Lane Bryant's *#ImNoAngel* campaign encourages the women to be confident with their actual self and thus challenges the mainstream and idealized beauty standards (e.g., McLain, 2017; Rodulfo, 2017). Luxury brand managers can also recall Balenciaga's *"No Cameras Please!"* campaign (Satenstein, 2018) that can be linked back to the target audiences' corresponding aspect(s) self-consciousness and may further be incorporated into marketing communication programs.

The emotional aspect of LBA can be incorporated into the overall brand experience. For instance, campaigns such as *"Burberry kisses"* and *"Volkswagen's SmileDrive"* emphasize the consumers' love, passion and joy to enhance the intimacy with the brand through interactive experiences (Glaser, 2014; Quinn, 2013). Luxury advertising can portray actual and ideal self-images in the advertisements. For instance, marketers may mainly emphasize the brand's performance (e.g., brand self-congruence) when consumers apply the lexicographic decision rule, the highest score on the most important attribute, in advertising appeals. In addition, this may also dictate what kind of language and images are used in the advertising message. The advertising message content may emphasize consumers' self-image to make the appeal more relevant. For instance, Burberry rebranded itself successfully by emphasizing proper image

congruence and emotional connection (e.g., Hope, 2017; Straker & Wrigley, 2016). Therefore, luxury brand managers need to incorporate these aspects into their marketing communication programs to enhance the consumers' LBA.

7.3 | Limitations and future research

There are a few limitations of this study. First, the context of the study is limited to luxury branded sunglasses, apparel and undergarments. Second, this research did not examine the temporal effect of early versus mature LBA, which might have a differential effect on consumer advocacy. Moreover, this study did not consider the impacts of consumers' social self-congruence and ideal social self-congruence on LBA.

To address the aforementioned limitations, it would be imperative to examine whether the results are consistent across cultural, religious and ethnic groups (Arli et al., 2020) as well as for masstige brands and other product categories (Barrera & Ponce, 2021; Kumar et al., 2020; Paul, 2019). Additional research may validate the results across luxury services (e.g., luxury hotel, spa), food and wine. In particular, intermediate and inaccessible luxury categories (e.g., Rolls-Royce, Bentley) need to be investigated. Future research may also examine the negative emotions related to consumers' LBA (e.g., Khatoon & Rehman, 2021). We also call for utilization of signalling theory, consumer culture theory and anthropomorphization theory in the future underpinning of LBA (Bagozzi et al., 2021). Further research is warranted on the theoretically relevant constructs such as brand authenticity (e.g., Södergren, 2021) that might indirectly affect the relationship between LBA and consumer advocacy. Future studies may also examine the interplay of brand success and scandal (Kapoor & Banerjee, 2021) as well as brand desirability and attachment style on the LBA model.

8 | CONCLUSION

This research proposes and examines a research model for LBA (Study 1, RQ1). The use of consumers' actual and ideal self-congruence provides a suitable dimension for LBA because earlier research in this domain shows that consumers want to upgrade their actual self-image to an ideal self-image through the consumption of luxury products (H_1 and H_2). Moreover, incorporating consumer advocacy as the vital outcome of LBA is a new addition to the literature. This research adds to the current body of knowledge that consumer advocacy within the domain of luxury consumer-brand relationships. The results show that consumers with a higher LBA are more willing to advocate for other consumers about the brand (H_3). Thus, this research provides empirical support in understanding the impact of LBA on consumer advocacy.

This research further examines the moderating influence of self-consciousness (private/public self-consciousness and social anxiety) on the relationship between perceived self-congruence and LBA

(Study 2, RQ2). This research shows that, in the case of the publicly consumed products, consumers with high public self-consciousness, by consuming an ideal self-congruent luxury brand, would express to others whom they would like to be (e.g., Malär et al., 2011). On the other hand, the people who build attachment with an actual self-congruent luxury brand would care less about what other people are thinking of them. So, they would not care much about showcasing themselves to the public. Therefore, the relationship between actual/ideal self-congruence and LBA was strengthened by the consumers' private self-consciousness in the case of privately consumed products. However, no significant influence of consumers' social anxiety was found on the relationship between perceived self-congruence and LBA. Study 3 compares the relative impact of actual/ideal self-congruence on LBA (RQ3). The results suggest that perceived actual self-congruence had a stronger (than ideal self-congruence) impact on LBA for the consumers with high private self-consciousness. This finding supports the theoretical expectation that the choices and consumption of intimate apparel are more consistent with the consumers' actual self-concept.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data are available on request from the authors.

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