A Mental Model of Sports Fan Behaviour: From a
Self-Concept Perspective

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Abstract

In making purchasing decisions, people often try to associate themselves with the brand or products that they intend to identify with. This manifestation of self is often done through the path of symbolic consumption. This type of consumption behaviour is closely linked with the assumptions of self-concept and image congruity theory. However, in the consumer behaviour literature, self-concept has often been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct owing to various levels of selves identified by researchers. At this point, to understand the linkage between the manifold of selves and sports fan purchasing behaviours is of great importance for sports marketers.

Thus, sports fan behaviour is of the main interest of this paper to apply such concept to explain their psychological affiliation with their supporting teams or sporting events. This review collecting past research will not only help to understand consumer behaviour but also acknowledge the diversified consumer trait across consumer groups. This review article scanned through 48 articles published in 10 marketing journals and one specific sports management journal within the last decade that involves the application of self-concept hypotheses and identified different types of selves in connection with the resulting behaviour of buying or not buying, from this point, a mental model has been proposed to associate these different types of selves with various sports fan behaviours for further studies.

Keywords: Self-concept; image congruity; sports fan behaviour
Introduction

Self-concept in consumer research is closely linked to the conception of symbolic consumption (Schouten, 1991). Knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally, we regard our possessions as parts of ourselves, and if we define possessions as things we call ours, then we are the sum of our possessions (Belk, 1988). The scope of possession is wider than it literally seems. Besides the touchable goods that we directly consume, participation in any events, clubs, or sports teams may also represent our sense of self. Thus, any forms of consumption activities are of importance to both the maintenance and development of a stable, harmonious self-concept (Schouten, 1991).

Particularly during world-wide sporting events, massive consumption is often seen at the sales of match tickets, team merchandise, team sponsors’ products, or even recreational services. Despite the overwhelming number of sports fans, very little research has been dedicated to understand the sports fan and sports fan behaviour (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000; End et al., 2002; Wann & Hamlet, 1995). As a way of showing who we are, exploring this relationship between possessions and sense of self (self-concept) not only helps us to understand consumer behaviour, but also helps us to learn how consumer behaviour contributes to our broader existence as human beings. It is of particular importance for sports marketers to grasp the underlying assumptions that consumers withhold when making buying or not buying decisions in order to understand how their products are being consumed.

The purpose of this review article is to scan through studies published in 11 marketing journals within the last decade that involves the application of self-concept hypothesis. Some important trend regarding the exploitation of self-concept as fundamental premises will be discussed and recommendation for future research will be identified. First, an overview on the general definition of self-concept will be given based on articles covered in this study. Second, the result of the self-concept study review over last 10 years will be presented.

Third, self-concept studies will be classified in light of consumers’ positive and negative end state consumption behaviour, which is a distinct bipolar trend identified in current research of self-concept. Forth, the measurement issue of self-concept construct will be presented with three scales measuring self-brand connections (SBC, Escalas, 2004), brand engagement in self-concept (BESC, Sprott, Czellar, & Spangenberg, 2009) and gender dimensions (masculine and feminine) of brand personality (MBP and FBP, Grohmann, 2009) that are embedded with the notion of self-concept. In addition, concept convergence analysis (CCA, Mehta, 1999) will also be introduced with those three scales. It was developed as an analytical method for examining the congruency between consumer self image and perceived brand image,
which is shown to be an important mediating variable in consumer decisions regarding the advertised brand. Finally, in sum of the resultant analysis, this paper will conclude with a mental model of sports fan behaviour and recommendations for future research.

**Literature Review**

As aforementioned, there has been a lack of studies examining sports fans and their behaviours. Among those that have studied sports fans, many have examined fan reactions toward supporting winning or losing teams. In general, studies have found that highly identified fans were not affected by group success and were still engaged in visible, expressive consumptions behaviours and predicted more future success for their team (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Murrel & Dietz, 1992). However, one study found that despite being not-so-much identified with any particular teams, female sports fans attend as much games as the male spectators (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000). The authors’ further examination suggested that women engage in sporting events mainly for social reasons, i.e., watching games with friends and family, but they are less engaged in other sports fan behaviour because it is not an identity that is especially important to them (Dietz-Uhler et al., 2000).

As several studies suggest, the affiliation of sports fans toward their preferred teams is closely related to the concept of identification, whether they are identified with the team or the players (Fisher & Wakefield, 1998; Hunt et al., 1999; Madrigal & Chen, 2008). However, rather than directly asking whether the fans are highly or hardly identified with their supported team or players, the adoption of self-concept hypothesis may serve as a way to guide the managers to identify which attributes of their product is more attractive to sports fans.

**Definition**

Most individuals are aware of how they are differentiated from their surroundings, and this notion is commonly referred to as an individual's sense of self (Reed, 2002). Through the self-discovering of likes and dislikes, individuals then develop patterns of living and behaving. Due to the vagueness of this sense of self, researchers attempted to seek for a more operationalizable construct, and arrived at the term ‘self-concept’.

Self-concept is broadly conceived by most scholars to represent the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings that have reference to him- or herself as an object of thought (Rosenberg, 1979). It is the person’s perception of oneself and denotes the subjective thoughts and perceptions about oneself rather than an objective evaluation of the person (Mehta, 1999). In this sense, the construct is highly subjective and thus,
dynamic in nature.

**Dimensionality**

Despite having a non-disputable definition on its concept elucidation, self-concept has been treated as a multidimensional construct that is composed of physical as well as psychological attributes and interacts with the various roles a person must take on (Mehta, 1999; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987; Reed, 2002; Sirgy, 1982).

Typical or simplified typology of self-concept involves actual and ideal self. Onkvisit and Shaw (1987) further defined self-concept as consisting four different selves: *real self* (actual or objective self) – the way the person actually is; *self-image* (subjective self) – the way a person sees herself or himself; *ideal self* (self-actualization) – the way she or he would like to be; and *looking-glass self* (social self) – the way she or he thinks others regard her or him.

In an interpersonal relationship, people often make judgments about others through observable appearances or belongings such as cars, clothes, accessories, or even skin colours and social clubs. Because inner self is hard to detect and connecting with those brands that have values and personality associations have been perceived to be an express and effective way of manifestation of individual’s identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Accordingly, consumers purchase brands for the many positive benefits they represent.

In contrast, some researchers have begun to pay attention to the reverse notion, where consumers reject specific brands in order to avoid adding undesired meaning to their life (Hogg & Banister, 2001; Hogg, Banister, & Stephenson, 2009; Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009). This reversed stream of research is still in its infancy and lacks a volume of quantitative research, and the usual approach taken by researchers to identify negative consumption experiences or attitudes is often conducted via interviews. For managerial implications, this area of research could pose some importance in the sense that, despite succeeding in attracting new customers, companies may have been unaware of and have lost customers whose expectations were unmet, having symbolic incongruity with the product or brand, or holding ideological incompatibility with the company. Before regaining customers’ favourability, managers must understand what could possibly create unhappy consumers.

Nonetheless, the proliferation of self-concept constructs has sacrificed theoretical parsimony and has presented theoretical difficulties in describing and explaining the nature of the interrelationship between these constructs (Sirgy, 1982). It is therefore, the purpose of this paper, to identify any advancement in theory or research from current research.
Methodology

Computerized research was conducted to identify required articles. Two electronic databases were utilized (EBSCO and ScienceDirect Online), using ‘self-concept’ and ‘image congruity’ as research key terms and selected journal title and abstract as main areas of inquiry.

This review primarily intended to focus on empirical research that apply self-concept premise in marketing of products and consumer behaviour literature. Thus, articles that apply self-concept in other areas of study (e.g., psychiatry studies and organizational behaviours) were excluded from this study. To avoid the omission of relevant articles from key journals in marketing, some journals have been manually explored in the electronic databases mentioned before.

Time frame was set to exclude articles published before 1999 to ensure this paper follows current development.

Results

A total of 48 articles have been identified from 9 marketing journals (*European Journal of Marketing, Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Business Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing Management, Journal of Marketing Research, Psychology & Marketing*) and two specific sports management journal (*Journal of Sports Management and Sport Marketing Quarterly*) during investigation year of 1999 to 2009. Table 1 provides an overview of article distribution in seven journals. As the frequency table reveals, there has been constant adoption of self-concept in consumer behaviour literature. However, it should be noted that this review paper only considers empirical research, as this review process went across, some conceptual papers which have been excluded from research actually presented with some interesting perspectives. For example, self-concept associated with negative consumption behaviour has been published mostly in conceptual forms (cf. Hogg et al., 2009; Kruger, Galak, & Burrus, 2007). Notably, four papers regarding the measurement of self-concept related construct were identified during our investigation period and are absent from the frequency table as well. In terms of empirical research, year 2006 seems to be the most proliferate year of publication in self-concept study. Journal of business research is the journal with most publications in this study.

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Self-Concept as Independent Variable

In this observation, self-concept (or self/image congruity) most often serves as a predictor, predicting brand loyalty, repurchase intention, dilution of brand affect towards parent brand, brand attitude, Internet usage behaviour, and brand preference. Although most studies have found evidence supporting relevant hypotheses, some recent studies that tested directly at self-concept and image congruity failed to find support for this relationship. For example, brand image fit was found unrelated to the dilution of brand affect towards the parent brand (Lau & Phau, 2007), and whether customers are well aware of a firm's sponsoring of the event does not enhance the positive effect of self-congruity with a sponsored event on customer brand loyalty (Sirgy et al., 2008).

Symbolic Consumption
**Positive consumption.** Products and brands have symbolic meanings and project certain images (Richins, 1994). Through consumptions of products and services, consumers’ personalities and self-images can be defined, maintained, and enhanced (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967; Graeff, 1996). The symbolic representation of products or possessions is most evident in social interaction situations (Sengupta, Dahl, & Gorn, 2002).

Occasionally, people lie about the value of his or her possessions to impress the communication recipient or to associate oneself with an aspiration group. For instance, to report a good at higher or regular price when it was actually purchased at discount may represent higher economic status of the presenter; to report a good at discounted price rather than its regular price may communicate a smart shopper image (Sengupta et al., 2002). At this point, it is confirmed again that consumers purchase products not merely based on the functionality but also based on brand meanings.

**Negative consumption.** Two studies within our scope of research focused on the negative side of consumption (cf. Hogg & Banister, 2001; Lee et al. 2009). Specifically, these studies explored the possible explanation for anti-consumption or band avoidance. Their study suggest that, in addition to consuming desirable brands, a consumer also maintains his or her self-concept by avoiding the brands perceived to be incongruent with their desired or actual self-concept. Thus, a brand that has linkage to the consumers’ undesired self and negative reference group, or has a lack of authenticity and individuality will be avoided by consumers.

**Congruity and Persuasion**

**Self- vs. functional congruity.** Considerable research suggests that congruity features prominently in consumer attitude and perception (Puccinelli, Deshpande, & Isen, 2007). Congruity refers to the matching between aspects of a given product (brand or store) and aspects of the customer (Sirgy, Grewal, & Mangleburg, 2000).

Particularly, the conceptualization of congruity draws a distinction between self-congruity and functional congruity (Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). *Self-congruity* refers to the correspondence between a customer’s identity and the customer’s perception of the identity of the typical user for a given product. In contrast, *functional congruity* refers to the correspondence between a customer and product attributes (e.g., store atmosphere and product assortment).

Self-congruity is more of a psychological attribute, which implies abstraction, intangibility, and cannot be directly observed; functional congruity is more of a functional attribute, which implies concrete, tangibility, and can be observed (Chebat, Sirgy, & St-James, 2006).
Sirgy, Lee, Johar, and Tidwell (2008) claimed that self-congruity is commonly used to mean self-image congruence. Moreover, the match between consumers’ self-concept and the image of sponsorship event’s participants will create a positive influence on consumer behaviours such as brand loyalty towards the sponsoring company. This positive relationship is strengthened through higher customer awareness of the firm sponsoring the event and customer involvement with the sponsored events. Another similar study conducted by Kressmann, Sirgy, Herrmann, Huber, Huber, and Lee (2006) also predicted brand loyalty with direct and indirect effect from both self-congruity and functional congruity. Customer involvement was also an important mediator in their study.

The principle of functional congruity has been exercised to examine whether customers who found their identity matches with the mall that they go to would transfer such positive (or negative) impression towards the stores located in the mall (Chebat et al., 2006). The result gave a positive support for such proposition. Therefore, the implication for managers is to identify key target group and observe which malls they shop most often, and consider locating in the corresponding malls to enhance congruity between customers’ self-image and brand image.

**Licensing effect.** Consumers in the real world often make a series of decisions in which one choice follows another. Kahn and Dahr (2006) claimed that consumer choice research has focused mainly on isolated, or single-shot, choices. Thus, their study provides an opportunity to examine how a prior intent to perform a virtuous act (e.g., “I am a compassionate and helpful person”) licenses subsequent indulgent choices through changes in self-concept. The explanation could owe to guilt-reducing mechanisms, which is similar to the act that donating to a charity or expending more effort can increase the preference for a luxury item. Although act in the opposite manner (incongruity between psychological and functional attributes), this argument is claimed to be effective in marketing for luxury products.

**Individual Differences**

Consumers have been shown to express different aspects of the self under varying circumstances (Reed, 2004). These differences are classified into different selves in current study.

**Dependent vs. independent selves.** Individuals with an independent self-construal view themselves as separate individuals, whereas individuals with an interdependent self-construal view themselves as part of a group (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, the interdependent self-concept is linked to the motivation to adjust to the demands of others and to maintain harmony. Notably, these two self-concepts can coexist (Torelli, 2006). When both independent and
interdependent self-concepts are available, priming either self-concept increases both its accessibility in memory and that of the motivations and cognitions that are associated with it. When individuals are primed with interdependence stimuli, they are motivated to retrieve knowledge about others’ opinions.

**Agentic vs. communal selves.** As an alternative to the commonly assumed equivalence of sex and gender, Hupfer and Detlor (2007) proposed a self-concept orientation framework to explain usage rates for Internet applications with relational implications. The male or agentic gender role (self-orientation) is distinguished by personality characteristics such as independence, autonomy and self-sufficiency; male self-concepts evidence concern for the self and are defined by separation from others. In contrast, typical female or communal characteristics (other-orientation) consist of interdependence, nurture, and concern for others as well as the self. With the exception of instant messaging or chat, communal self served as a positive predictor of how often respondents reported using Internet applications with relational implications. However, in this occasion, national culture and age (young generation) have stronger influence on the usage of Internet appliances as communication tools.

**Culture.** Bjerke and Polegato (2006) examined female consumers’ ideal self-image in terms of healthy and beautiful beauty types across cultures and concluded that international advertisers need to understand the important, contemporary, cultural characteristics of an ideal beauty type in that country before developing standardized advertisements. In other words, it is not recommended that multinational companies to use standardized endorser across countries and needs to take local culture into consideration. On the one hand, Bjerke and Polegato’s (2006) study only examined five European cities to arrive at such conclusion, more countries or participants must be examined to affirm their findings; on the other hand, their study only examined female respondents, male respondents may also be examined in the future.

**Measurement Issues**

Self-concept is a broad and multidimensional construct. As a result, the particular attributes used to measure self-concept in any study have been dependent upon the specific needs of that research (Mehta, 1999). For example, many studies have employed pretest technique to identify contents of self-concept (or self-image) that are of particular relevance to their manipulation stimuli in their experiments (cf. Marshall et al., 2008); some have designed questionnaire items that are particular importance to their research questions (cf. Sirgy et al., 2008).

On the other hand, in consideration of the dynamic nature of self-concept, some researchers have adopted the view of social self, in which self-concept is believed to
remain constant in certain consumption situations, thus restrain the unmanageability of real or ideal self-concept in measurement (Aaker, 1999). Recently, some scholars have begun to discuss about public/private consumption (Graeff, 1996; Sengupta et al., 2002; Torelli, 2006). The difference between these two types of consumption depends on whether the product is consumed in public or private circumstances. In other word, to focus attention on the less volatile situation makes the measurement of self-concept easier and attainable.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

The application of self-concept is still prominent in consumer research. This can be seen from wide adoption of this concept in various field of research, for example, in sport management, it has been applied to discuss about sport spectators and sport fan attitude towards their supporting teams or sport events (Funk & James, 2001; Green, 2001).

In practical terms, marketers are well aware that the attractiveness of product/brand image could catch consumers’ eyes and heart if that message does get across consumers’ mind, noticeably or unnoticeably. Therefore, it is definite useful to understand the mechanisms behind such act of consuming or not consuming certain brands. Some researchers have noticed the impulsive buying behaviour exhibited by consumers from different culture (Kacen & Lee, 2002), and this has something to do with independent/dependent self-concept.

On one hand, in practical research, although some researchers have tried to develop scales in measuring self-concept to ensure comparability across studies, further empirical research is still required. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier, there has been a trend on anti-consumption research, yet it may be time to put forth some empirical research to test on the theory.
References


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A Mental Model of Sports Fan Purchasing Behavior: From a Self-Concept Perspective

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Heart-capturing (kandoh) Scene in Sports – Development of a Measurement Scale and its Application to the Model

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Background
Harada (2008) pointed out the following with respect to clubs in professional sports. “In the management of professional sports team, it is important not only to offer a product and game as a service but also to provide Kandoh or euphoria.” “Kandoh is a special Japanese expression, which means, “to be deeply impressed by certain things that move the heart.” Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how a Kandoh experience influences the intentions of repeat purchase (i.e. watching the game) with the goal of increasing the number of spectators.

Theoretical Background
Some studies have focused on the emotions in sports consumer behavior. For example, Kuenzel & Yassin (2007) paid attention to the feelings so-called “Joy” in cricket spectators, Madrigal (1995) and Sumino (2005) focused on various feelings in sport spectators. Kao et al. (2007) inspected the feelings of basketball spectators and investigated how emotions influenced satisfaction, intentions of repeat purchase, and word-of-mouth intention on match. However, no empirical literatures in sports marketing field exist hitherto, which address the study of Kandoh even in Japan. Therefore, a study on sport spectators was conducted during the JLeague 2009 season to observe the influence of Kandoh in spectators.

Method
Each item was taken from Oshimi (2010) to measure Kandoh scene. This scale comprises of 8 factors and 28 items (sympathy/togetherness, spectating in stadium, dramatic scenes, prominent plays, strenuous figures, humanity, success from overcoming obstacles, and added elements) that can investigate what kind of scene actually moved (Kandoh) sports spectators. The study used the scale to investigate how Kandoh scene influence satisfaction and the intentions of repeat purchase with the goal of increasing the number of spectators. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to confirm the validity and reliability of the Kandoh scene scale, and the average variance extracted (AVE) and cronbach α were calculated. Subsequently, Amos 5.0 was used to conduct a simultaneous multivariate analysis to investigate the differences between the supporters of the two teams in terms of the Kandoh scene, their satisfaction, and their intention to watch the match again. Questionnaires were distributed to the spectators in the stadium, and the data was collected through mail. The survey was conducted during the Japanese professional soccer league on November 3, 2009, and the object spectators were the fans of F.C. Tokyo and Kawasaki Frontale. They evaluated the Kandoh scene, their satisfaction, and their intentions of watching the match of the day again and posted their responses by mail from outside the stadium in less than a week after a match. Totally, 369 usable questionnaires were collected. Of the usable questionnaires, 211 belonged to the F.C. Tokyo supporters, while the rest of the 158 questionnaires belonged to Kawasaki Frontale supporters.

Results & Conclusion
After confirming that the Kandoh scene scale was a good fit ($\chi^2/df = 2.528$, $GFI = .917$, $AGFI = .884$, $CFI = .959$, $RMSEA = .064$), the differences between the supporters of the two teams in terms of Kandoh scene, their satisfaction, and their intentions to watch the match again became clear through simultaneous multivariate analysis ($\chi^2/df = 2.042$, $GFI = .841$, $AGFI = .791$, $CFI = .914$, $RMSEA = .053$). It is believed that the change of the feeling of the spectators is affected by the victory or defeat of player or team (Sloan, 1989).

The implications of the results are as follows. As “sympathy/togetherness” influence satisfaction, as indicated by Kuenzel and Yassin (2007), it is important to ensure that a friend or family spends joyous times with other spectators in a stadium. In addition, as “spectating in stadium” influence the intentions of repeat purchase, it becomes clear that the acquisition of star player seems to be important for the teams. It is also necessary for team to educate or promote a player to be a favorite player among fans and so on.