



The Role of Perceived Quality and Customer Self-Incongruence on Customer-Brand Disidentification

El Rol de la Calidad Percibida y la Auto-Incongruencia del Consumidor en la Desidentificación Consumidor-Marca

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ARTICLE INFO

Received 31 October 2022,
Accepted 20 March 2023

Available online 31 May 2023

DOI: 10.5295/cdg.221836js

JEL: M31

ABSTRACT

Previous research in customer-brand relationships has found brand disidentification as one of the reasons for customers turning against brands. However, there is not much clarity on the antecedents of brand disidentification. Aligning with the balance theory, this research argues that self-incongruence and positive/negative emotions with the brand are related to brand disidentification. Taking the sample of 292 observations and using structural equation modeling (SEM), it was found that self-incongruence is the main driver of customer-brand disidentification (CBD). Similarly, perceived quality was found to be related to CBD for low level of self-incongruence. Based on our survey prompt, which asked respondents to consider brands that they have previously purchased and utilized but no longer use because they no longer align with their current identity, our data analysis suggests that the process of CBD occurs over time. Additionally, we find that CBD is not only associated with negative emotions but also encompasses positive emotions.

Keywords: Customer-Brand Disidentification, Customer Self-Incongruence, Emotions, Perceived Quality.

RESUMEN

Investigaciones previas sobre las relaciones consumidor-marca han encontrado que la desidentificación es una de las razones por las que los consumidores se vuelven contra las marcas; sin embargo, los antecedentes de la desidentificación de marca no están claros. Basándose en la teoría del equilibrio, esta investigación argumenta que la auto-incongruencia y las emociones positivas/negativas hacia la marca provocan la desidentificación de la marca. Tomando una muestra de 292 observaciones y utilizando un modelo de ecuaciones estructurales, se encontró que la auto-incongruencia es el principal impulsor de la Desidentificación Consumidor-Marca. Igualmente, se encontró que la calidad percibida influye en la Desidentificación Consumidor-Marca en el nivel más bajo de auto-incongruencia. Los resultados obtenidos de este estudio evidencian que la Desidentificación Consumidor-Marca no está relacionado a un evento en particular, sino que es un proceso continuo de desconexión con la marca donde también intervienen emociones positivas.

Palabras clave: Calidad percibida, Auto-Incongruencia del Consumidor, Desidentificación Marca-Consumidor, Emociones.

1. INTRODUCTION

Current research on customer-brand relationship emphasizes the role of brand disidentification as a reason for customers turning against brands (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021). For example, in the year 2017, the market share of Uber went down from 90% to 75% due to a broken brand identity (Forbes 2018). Customers see themselves through the image of brand characteristics and when individuals receive negative symbolic meanings attributed to the brand (Lee *et al.*, 2009), they experience incongruence and thus are less likely to maintain a relationship with the brand (Haji, 2018). In such situations, customers tend to divert their negative brand emotions by cognitively separating from the brand's identity, which is called customer-brand disidentification (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001). Customer-brand disidentification (CBD) is defined as "a customer's self-perceived cognitive dissociation from a brand based on incongruent values and identity evaluations of one's self relative to the brand's self." (Anaza *et al.*, 2021).

Research has demonstrated CBD as a process of cognitive dissociation from a brand (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). It has been shown that brand disidentification can revive customers' positive and negative emotions, which can then lead to brand opposition where the customer can engage in negative word-of-mouth, brand avoidance, and/or punishing the brand (Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021). Research has also shown that brand disidentification hampers customers' willingness to buy (Josiassen, 2011) and leads to brand patronage reduction (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). Several studies have shown CBD to have various consumer-based outcomes. However, past research does not identify the antecedents of CBD that can explain a brand's attraction and repulsion process as seen in previous research (Wolter *et al.*, 2016). Indeed, an important factor that can impact customers' response toward a brand is self-incongruence. Self-incongruence indicates the absence of fit between one's self and the brand's personality (Aaker, 1999). Though self-incongruence can lead to a reduction in customers' reactions (attitudinal, affective, and behavioral) to the brand (Garsvaite & Caruana, 2014; Grohmann 2009), past research has not studied the impact of self-incongruence on customer disidentification. It has been shown that self-incongruence can lead to negative brand associations like brand hate (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018; Islam *et al.*, 2019) and negative brand personality (Haji, 2014). Therefore, it seems meaningful to investigate if self-incongruency can also affect customer disidentification, especially since a customer who finds his/her self-image to be incongruent with the brand personality tends to withdraw from the brand (Sirgy *et al.*, 1997). This withdrawal from the brand mainly occurs due to customers' tendency to cognitively process and evaluate any inconsistency that exists between the perceptions of their self-identity and their perceptions of the brand (Haji, 2014). This argument finds support in balance theory (Heider, 1958), which suggests that customers prefer stability in their attitudes and behaviors and tend to keep away from contradictions and inconsistencies.

Additionally, past research has shown that an individual's actions are highly determined by the nature of emotions he/she has experienced before (Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006). The research

has mainly focussed on the positive consequences of emotions. For example, it has been studied that spending on efforts to connect with customers' emotions can lead to huge payoffs for an organization (Magids *et al.*, 2015) like converting the customer base to loyal customers (Chatzigeorgiou *et al.*, 2009) and satisfied customers (Kim & Smith, 2005). However, some research has been conducted on the negative consequences of the emotions like customers' complaint behavior (Svari & Olsen, 2012). Though positive and negative emotions have been shown to impact individuals' behavior, yet research on the effect of emotions on CBD is scarce. Therefore, we attempt to fill the gap in the literature by using balance theory (Heider, 1958) to study the impact of self-incongruence and positive and negative emotions on CBD. Brand disidentification can develop stress between the customer and the brand, due to which the customer will act to create a balance in ways that might bring unintended negative consequences to the brand like high patronage reduction (Anaza *et al.*, 2021).

As discussed above, customer behavior, like CBD can be affected by the congruence between the self and the brand, and can also be affected by an individual's emotions. Nonetheless, perceived quality can have an impact on customer behavior (Martins & Monroe, 1994; Steenkamp, 1990) by generating a subjective judgment on the overall quality of the brand and thus creating a salient brand differentiation and taking a unique place in the customer's mind (Aaker, 1991). Despite the importance of perceived quality in changing customer behavior, what impact can it create on customer disidentification remains unknown. In the past, the concept of perceived quality has been used synonymously with perceived value (Caruana *et al.*, 2000; Snoj *et al.*, 2004), which emphasizes the importance of the construct. Quality has been considered a type of general assessment of a brand (Olshavsky, 1985) and a reasonably comprehensive value judgment (Holbrook & Corfman, 1985). Additionally, perceived quality is contemplated to have congruence with long-term attitude (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Parasuraman & Grewal, 2000; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Since, perceived quality is an important source of customer value (Steenkamp, 1990; Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003), it may help to change the behavior of a customer who disidentifies with a brand. Since CBD has negative repercussions for a brand, for example, patronage reduction (Anaza *et al.*, 2021), it is important to explore the role of perceived quality in the link between customer emotions and CBD which can change customers' level of disidentification with the brand. Therefore, the current research attempts to respond to the following research questions:

1. What is the impact of customers' self-incongruence on brand disidentification?
2. How do customers' negative and positive emotions impact their brand disidentification?
3. How does customer-brand disidentification impact patronage reduction?
4. What role does perceived quality play in the relationship between a) customers' self-incongruence and brand disidentification, b) customers' negative emotions and brand disidentification, and c) customers' positive emotions and brand disidentification?

The current research has several contributions. First, the research provides a framework in the cognitive process of disidentification by suggesting that self-incongruence has an impact on CBD. Second, the findings of this research demonstrate that self-incongruence and positive emotions affect CBD. Third, it suggests that customer-perceived quality moderates the relationship between self-incongruence and CBD, and also between negative emotions and CBD.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Customer-Brand Disidentification

Customer-Brand disidentification (CBD) is a process in which customers dissociate themselves from a brand due to perceived incongruence between their values and identity evaluations and those of the brand (Anaza *et al.*, 2021, 118). It is a cognitive disconnection process where the individuals no longer associate themselves with the brand, which they previously identified with in consonance with their beliefs or attitudes. Conceptually, CBD differs from Customer-Brand Identification (CBI). CBI is more about the cognitive overlaps of the perceiver with a brand (Popp & Woratschek, 2017; Saavedra Torres *et al.*, 2017; Stokburger-Sauer *et al.*, 2012), whereas CBD deals more with customers' detachment with a brand (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Past studies have shown that CBD can originate from adverse brand-related cognitions such as brand disrepute (Wolter *et al.*, 2016) and negative human emotions (Becker & Tausch, 2014). These negative brand-related experiences help individuals rationalize their decision to separate themselves from the brand (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004).

Although research shows CBD originating from negative emotions towards a brand, some researchers have argued that CBD is more of a "self-recognition and self-recategorization from a brand when customers fall out of sync (out of balance) with brand values and identities" rather than a signal of brand or organizational malfunction (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). Building upon this argument, we propose that customers can disidentify themselves from a brand, even when they have no (neither positive nor negative) emotions towards the brand.

2.1.1. BRAND HATE, BRAND DISIDENTIFICATION, AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

Brand hate refers to a psychological state in which an individual experiences negative emotions as a result of negative experiences with a specific brand (Yadav & Chakrabarti, 2022). This state is characterized by feelings of disgust, contempt, and anger (Fetscherin, 2019), and can be triggered by factors such as negative experiences, a mismatch between the brand's image and the individual's values, or a lack of alignment between the brand's ideology and the individual's beliefs (Pinto & Brandão, 2021). Research has shown that brand hate can lead to negative outcomes such as negative word-of-mouth, avoidance of the brand, or retaliatory behavior (Pinto & Brandão, 2021).

Brand disidentification is a concept that describes the process of consumers distancing themselves from a brand due to its perceived negative attributes (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Husnain *et al.*, 2021; Roy *et al.*, 2022). This can lead to brand hate, which is an extreme form of brand disidentification, where consumers have strong negative emotions towards a brand and may take actions to avoid it or express their dislike for it (Kohli *et al.*, 2021; Roy *et al.*, 2022). Studies have found a positive correlation between brand disidentification and brand hate (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Attiq *et al.*, 2022).

Negative emotions lead to brand disidentification when consumers experience incongruence between their own values and the values of the brand (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). This incongruence can cause dissatisfaction and brand hate, which leads to anti-brand consumer behavior such as avoiding or switching away from the brand (Rahimah *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, negative emotions such as anger, discontent, dislike, embarrassment, sadness, and worry can also contribute to brand disidentification (Romani *et al.*, 2012).

2.1.2. BRAND LOVE, BRAND DISIDENTIFICATION, AND POSITIVE EMOTIONS

Brand love is an emotional and passionate connection to a brand that can lead to strong brand loyalty (Rahman *et al.*, 2021). It is characterized by feelings of attachment, affection, and commitment toward the brand (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Research has demonstrated that brand love can have a positive impact on consumer behavior, including increased brand loyalty and a likelihood to pay higher prices for a brand (Watanuki & Akama, 2020). Consumers who experience brand love have a strong sense of identification with the brand and view it as an important part of their self-concept (Rahman *et al.*, 2021). This connection is often driven by anthropomorphic thinking, which allows consumers to project their own identity onto the brand (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2017).

Positive emotions play a crucial role in marketing, as they can influence consumer behavior and decision-making. Research has shown that positive emotions can lead to increased brand loyalty, positive word of mouth, and increased purchasing behavior (Attiq *et al.*, 2022; Kim & Sullivan, 2019). Studies have also shown that consumers who have a positive emotional response to an advertisement are more likely to have a favorable attitude toward the brand to purchase the product (Kemp *et al.*, 2012; Otamendi & Martín, 2020). Furthermore, consumers who experience positive emotions while interacting with a brand are more likely to form a personal connection with the brand (Magids *et al.*, 2015). Interestingly, studies have found that consumers who have an emotional connection to a brand are 52% more valuable than average satisfied consumers. Additionally, incorporating positive emotions into marketing strategies have been found to lead to a significant increase in customer loyalty (Temkin, 2016).

Even though there is limited research on the relationship between positive emotions and brand disidentification, we believe that some factors can explain this relationship. If the brand message does not align with the consumer's evolving values, it could result in a disconnect between the consumer's positive feelings

towards the brand and his/her values (Vredenburg *et al.*, 2020) leading to disidentification. This disconnect can manifest itself in various ways, such as consumers not feeling that their values are represented by the brand or that they are not getting value for money from the brand (Willige, 2021).

2.2. Balance Theory

This study is grounded in the balance theory of attitude change (Heider, 1958, p. 180), which posits that individuals strive for balance in their associations with other individuals or objects. The theory argues that individuals prefer balanced (i.e., consistent, articulate) cognitions such as attitudes and opinions over imbalanced (i.e., unpredictable, illogical) cognitions. In balance theory, individual cognitions (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, ideas) towards another individual or object are either positive or negative, determined by sentimental relations (e.g., liking vs. disliking) or unit relations (e.g., similarity vs. dissimilarity).

The primary unit of analysis in balance theory is a socio-cognitive grid of three nodes, united by three links, where nodes denote a focal person, another individual or object, and some other cognitive units such as attitude towards the other person or attributes of the other brand. Balance is expressed from the perspective of the focal person. The theory posits that balance occurs if the product of sign relations including the three nodes is positive, while imbalance occurs if the product of signs is negative. When individuals experience imbalance, they experience psychological stress and strive to regulate and reorganize the properties of the cognitive field to reach a balance. (Hummon & Doreian, 2003; Taylor, 1967; Zajonc, 1960). To restore balance, individuals could modify their own attitude or alter their attitude towards another entity (i.e., the brand). Some studies suggest that customers sometimes reestablish their mental sense of balance by detaching from the entity by employing a disassociation process (e.g., Fink *et al.*, 2009).

The use of balance theory in the CBD context aligns with past studies (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Baxter & Ilicic, 2015; Fink *et al.*, 2009). We apply the balance theory in our context by arguing that when customers believe a brand or attributes of a brand are no longer consistent with their actual and ideal selves (self-concept), they experience psychological stress and strive to reach a balance. To alleviate this discomfort, customers will strive to restore cognitive balance by changing their attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors. In the context of brand disidentification, customers will disapprove of the brand, avoid acquiring or consuming it and seek out alternative brands that are more consistent with their self-concept (Baxter & Ilicic, 2015).

The disidentification process occurs because customers view the brand as incompatible with their self-concept, which is the sum of their beliefs, values, and attitudes about themselves (Sirgy, 1982). This self-concept is composed of an actual self, which is a customer's perception of their current attributes, and an ideal self, which is their desired attributes (Markus & Nurius, 1986). When customers perceive that the brand does not match their actual or ideal selves, they experience self-incongruence, which leads to negative emotions and disidentification with the brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).

Therefore, we propose that the more the brand deviates from the customer's self-concept, the stronger the negative emotions and self-incongruence, and the higher the likelihood of disidentification with the brand. This is consistent with balance theory, which suggests that individuals prefer balanced cognitions (i.e., consistent beliefs, attitudes, or opinions) over imbalanced ones (Heider, 1958). The disidentification process is a way for customers to restore balance in their self-concept and brand associations.

Based on these arguments, we propose a theoretical framework to examine the impact of customer self-incongruence, negative and positive emotions on customer-brand disidentification (CBD), and the subsequent effect of CBD on brand patronage reduction (See Figure 1). The framework also includes the moderating role of customer-perceived quality on the relationships between the aforementioned variables.

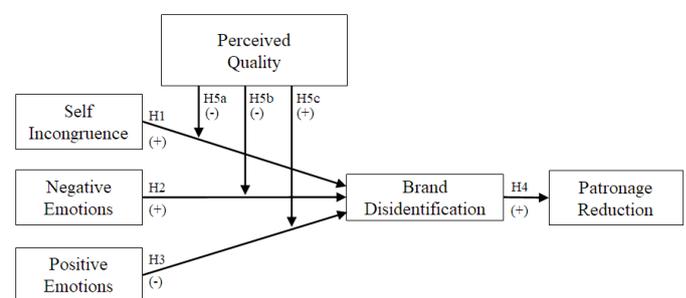


Figure 1
Theoretical Model.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

2.3. Hypothesis Development

Based on the previous literature review, CBD is theorized as the intermediary process that explains how customers' self-incongruence impacts their behavioral intentions. This study suggests that self-incongruence, rather than positive and/or negative emotions, is the stronger predictor of CBD, which in turn has a direct effect on patronage reduction. Additionally, this research proposes that perceived quality moderates the relationship between those three predictors and CBD.

2.3.1. CUSTOMER SELF-INCONGRUENCE

Customer self-incongruence is defined "as a mismatch between the customers' self and the brand's personality or image" (Aaker, 1999). Research has exhibited that self-incongruence could increase affective, attitudinal, and behavioral customer responses to the brand (e.g., Grohmann, 2009). Customers experience self-incongruence with a brand if the brand's personality no longer matches the customer's actual or ideal self.

If customers perceive that using products and services from a brand brings them closer to recognizing an idyllic idea of themselves (who and what I want to be), brands are successful in generating ideal self-congruence. Similarly, if customers perceive that the products and services of a brand correspond to how they see themselves (who and what I think I am now),

brands are successful in generating actual self-congruence (Malär *et al.*, 2011). The customer can achieve self-congruence either way. The strategy of attaining either the actual or ideal self is equally effective for brands, depending on the situation (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Sirgy, 1982). However, if customers no longer identify with the brand as to how they see themselves (i.e., actual) or to an ideal vision of themselves (i.e., ideal), they are out of sync with the brand and are self-incongruent with the brand (Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021). In this study, we argue that self-incongruence (both ideal and actual) should play a prominent role in customers' disidentification from a brand. Specifically, we argue that both ideal and actual self-incongruence will lead to a higher level of CBD.

In existing CBD literature, CBD is thought to originate from negative brand-related cognitions such as brand disrepute (Wolter *et al.*, 2016) and bad human emotions (Becker & Tausch, 2014). These unfavorable brand-related experiences help people justify their decision to distance themselves even further from the company (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004). We expand on the existing literature by arguing that CBD can originate even in the absence of positive or negative emotions toward the brand.

Our argument is in line with the balance theory of attitude change. As stated earlier, balance theory proposes that people are motivated to maintain stability in their beliefs and behaviors because contradiction generates sentiments of distastefulness and stress (Haider, 1958). Applying the theory to our context, we argue that if customers perceive that a brand is no longer congruent with their actual and ideal self, they are determined to react in ways (e.g., disapprove of, not acquire, and not consume brands with miss-matching brand personality) to strengthen their self-concept. Following the balance theory, we can also argue that the more the brand deviates from the customer's self (i.e., self-incongruence) and the greater the personal disconnection the customer feels between the self and the brand, the stronger is the CBD. Thus, we formally hypothesize that:

H1. Customer self-incongruence with the brand increases customer-brand disidentification.

2.3.2. POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

While disidentification is conceptualized as a cognitive construct, disidentification literature argues that specific emotions are a core cause of disidentification (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Current research points out that disidentification is explained by both positive and negative human emotions. Several psychological studies on emotions propose that individuals' actions are highly determined by the nature of emotions experienced before (Frijda *et al.*, 1989; Roseman *et al.*, 1994; Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2006). One such action could be disidentifying from a brand or a group (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Lam *et al.*, 2012). In general, if individuals possess negative emotions such as anger towards someone, they retaliate by verbally attacking or taking some similar actions towards the perpetrator. Similarly, if they possess positive emotions (e.g., love) towards someone, that too is reflected in their behavior (Roseman *et al.*, 1994). Their subsequent actions toward the other person due to different emotions are as predicted by balance theory. Similarly, positive and negative emotions

like anger and love toward a brand might also generate similar actions. Negative emotions might induce individuals to object to the brand's owners (e.g., writing negative online reviews) or engage in movements against the brand or even disidentify with the brand (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). Similarly, positive emotions might induce positive actions such as repurchase intentions, positive word of mouth, and low brand disidentification. A similar relation between emotion and identification/disidentification is found in the employee-organization context. In instances where a particular employee experiences his/her values being violated by the organization, the harmed employee will probably feel negative ingroup-directed emotions, such as resentment, aversion, and shame. Previous research has suggested that negative in-group emotions are related to a disidentification process from the group (Becker & Tausch, 2014). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed in the CBD context:

H2. Customer negative emotion increases customer-brand disidentification.

H3. Customer positive emotion reduces customer-brand disidentification.

2.3.3. CBD AND PATRONAGE REDUCTION

Patronage reduction is defined as the reduction in a customer's consumption, decline in the amount of money that the customer spends on a firm, and surge in the consumption from rival brands (De Wulf *et al.*, 2001). Past studies have shown that disidentification leads individuals to participate in actions and behaviors with negative motives such as disassociating with the idea or the group (Becker & Tausch, 2014; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001; Josiassen, 2011; Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021). From a balance theory perspective, it can be argued that CBD creates tension among the brand and the customers, and thus the customers will attempt to achieve a balance in ways that might bring unintended negative consequences to the brand like straight antagonism towards the brand (Wolter *et al.*, 2016). Research outcomes support that individuals who experience CBD will show a major propensity to evade the brand (Ruppel & Einwiller, 2021), low willingness to purchase that brand (Josiassen, 2011), and high patronage reduction (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). Consistent with these findings, we propose:

H4. Customer-brand disidentification increases brand patronage reduction.

2.3.4. MODERATING ROLE OF PERCEIVED QUALITY

Perceived quality is defined as a customer's perception of the functional attributes of a product/service as well as the abstract and global attributes of that product/service such as a brand (Dodds *et al.*, 1991; Zeithaml, 1988). Prior research shows that quality cues that individuals infer based on the brands' characteristics help them decrease their doubts about brand properties (Aaker, 1991; Erdem *et al.*, 2006; Keller, 1993). As such, perceived quality denotes a critical motivator of how much individuals associate with a brand because they consider that a brand with higher quality is necessary to achieve their functional needs (e.g., Katz, 1960). In addition, from a balance theory perspective, it can be argued that a customer's perception of the high

quality of a brand will act as a balancing factor in mitigating the disharmony between the brand and the customer explained by self-incongruence and positive and negative emotions. For example, if individuals perceived a brand with a mix of low self-incongruity and high quality, then the brand will be able to satisfy customers' self-expressive needs and diminish their uncertainty about experiencing practical benefits. Thus, the high quality of the brand mitigates the CBD caused by self-incongruence (Lam *et al.*, 2012). Additionally, individuals who perceive low levels of self-incongruity with a brand are more willing to tolerate low levels of perceived quality and still experience brand identification than individuals who perceive a high level of personality incongruity (Lam *et al.*, 2012).

Similar effects can be expected in the case of positive and negative emotions. Several research findings have assessed the positive effect of perceived quality in enhancing positive customer emotions (Chen *et al.*, 2015; Peng & Chen, 2015; Prayag *et al.*, 2017; Tsaour *et al.*, 2015). Similarly, studies have also shown that lower perceived quality arouses negative emotions in customers (Chen *et al.*, 2015; Peng & Chen, 2015). Consistent with these findings and in line with the arguments of the balance theory, we propose that perceived quality will thus weaken the positive relationship between negative customer emotion and customer-brand disidentification and strengthen the relationship between positive customer emotion and customer-brand disidentification. We formally hypothesize:

H5a. Customer perceived quality negatively moderates the relationship between customer self-incongruence and CBD, such that for customers with high (low) perceived quality, customer self-incongruence has a low (high) impact on CBD.

H5b. Customer perceived quality negatively moderates the relationship between customer negative emotion and CBD, such that for customers with high (low) perceived quality, customer negative emotion has low (high) impact on CBD.

H5c. Customer perceived quality positively moderates the relationship between customer positive emotions and CBD, such that for customers with high (low) perceived quality, customer positive emotion has high (low) impact on CBD.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Design and Sample

Two groups of tests were used to assess the theoretical model. The hypotheses H1-H4 were tested using covariate-based structural equation modeling (CB-SEM) technique to analyze the main group of hypotheses. The hypotheses H5a-H5c were analyzed using moderation tests on PROCESS Macro (Model 1). A bootstrapping method was used to drag a considerable number of sample ($N = 1,000$) from the original data. This technique was used to test how perceived quality can reduce or increase the effect of self-incongruence on CBD (Hayes, 2013). This design is coherent with the brand literature, which treats each theoretical relationship as a single hypothesis (Saavedra Torres *et al.*, 2020).

A sample of 350 individuals was contacted through Qualtrics panels. We selected Qualtrics panels because it has a strong pool

of quality respondents, providing more than 20 online sample partners, to use as a source of sampling procedure. Qualtrics panels have been widely used in marketing research (see Edmondson & Matthews, 2022; Hagtvedt, 2011). The use of Qualtrics panels involves selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to participate, which may introduce biases into the sample selection process. To mitigate those biases, we employed an online panel recruitment method, that is by invitation only, to address issues related to self-selection and professional survey taking. This approach results in a more representative cross-section of the population (increasing the diversity), which improves the generalizability of the research findings. Despite those efforts, we acknowledge the potential problems with generalizability and representativeness that may arise from using a convenience sampling method.

The sample was formed by recruiting participants from the United States only. Three screening questions were asked at the beginning of the survey to prevent responders without qualifications and decrease the chance of response errors. Additional data security checks were applied to enhance data quality, including IP address control which has been proven to diminish dishonest or careless responses (Chandler & Paolacci, 2017). Despite all the measures to increase data quality, from the responses received, 68 cases were deleted (19.42%) due to missing values in multiple variables (24 cases, 6.85%), not writing a brand or a correct brand name (37 cases, 10.57%), and failing the attention questions (17 cases, 4.85%) (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The final sample was 292 observations reporting the following demographics: average age of 40.84; 57% female, 71% Caucasian, 74% with a college degree; and 59% with an annual income of less than \$50,000. A wide range of brands were mentioned by the respondents in different industries such as clothing and accessories (for example, Aeropostale, Nike, Reebok), technology (for example, Samsung, Apple), fast food (for example, McDonald's, Chick-Fil-A), retail (for example, Target, Walmart, Home Depot), and services (for example, Uber, Netflix).

3.2. Procedure

An online questionnaire was initiated with (1) three screening questions, then (2) participants read an abstract of the research and the consent informant. Afterward, (3) participants were asked to "Please think of any brand that you once purchased and utilized, but do not currently use because it no longer represents who you are today". To answer this question, participants were required to write the brand name in the survey. This brand was subsequently used in all the questions asked to the participants about (4) self-incongruence, (5) CBD, (6) positive emotions, (7) negative emotions, (8) brand patronage reduction, (9) brand credibility, (10) brand negative image, and (11) perceived quality.

3.3. Measurement Scales and Measure Validation

Previously established research scales were used to study the constructs. Actual and ideal self-incongruence was adapted from Malär *et al.*, (2011), for which the reliability achieved was 0.86 and 0.89 respectively. Positive and negative emotions were based

on the scale from Becker and Tausch (2014), and the reliability achieved was 0.93 and 0.94 respectively. CBD was based on the 12-item scale from Anaza *et al.* (2021), for which the reliability achieved was 0.96. Brand patronage reduction was based on the three items scale from Grégoire & Fisher (2006), for which the reliability was 0.87. Finally, perceived quality was based on the

four items scale from Taylor and Bearden (2002), and the reliability achieved was 0.93. Respondents' age and gender and the length of their relationship with the brand were included as control variables. Table 1 shows the items used exceeding the minimum acceptable criterion of 0.60 for Cronbach's alpha validity (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Table 1
Model Constructs

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	Reliability
Actual self-incongruence	The personality of this brand is not consistent with how I see myself	0.758	
	The personality of this brand is not a mirror image of me	0.767	
Ideal self-incongruence	The personality of this brand is not consistent with how I would like to be	0.807	
	The personality of this brand is a not mirror image of the person I would like to be	0.806	
Brand Disidentification	I feel detached from this brand	0.646	0.956
	The identity of this brand does not represent me	0.781	
	I do not relate to this brand	0.824	
	I feel separate from this brand	This brand does not match the way I see myself	0.813
		This brand's identity is no longer compatible with what I enjoy consuming	0.856
		I feel separate from this brand	0.797
		My identity is not represented by this brand	0.779
		This brand is no longer compatible with who I am today	0.820
		I feel that what this brand stands for is different from who I am	0.793
		There is a gap between this brand and myself	0.820
		This brand belongs to a different person other than me	0.834
		This brand's identity is no longer compatible with my identity	0.846
Negative emotions		I am angry with this brand	0.759
	I am annoyed with this brand	0.767	
	I hate this brand	0.807	
	I am disgusted by this brand	0.806	
	I feel contempt for this brand	0.815	
	I detest this brand	0.845	
Positive emotions	I admire this brand	0.877	0.929
	This brand makes me happy	0.859	
	I respect this brand	0.797	
Brand patronage reduction	I brought a significant part of my business to a competitor	0.701	0.863
	I stopped doing business with this brand	0.715	
	I reduced the frequency of interaction with this brand	0.733	
Perceived quality items	I believe this brand will be: (low quality-high quality)	0.891	0.931
	I believe this brand will be: (bad-good)	0.814	
	I believe this brand will be: (inferior-superior)	0.751	
	I believe this brand will be: (worse than most brands-better than most brands)	0.803	

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a maximum likelihood estimation was tested on the measurement model to evaluate internal consistency and discriminant validity. Outcomes showed that the measurement model had a good fit: $\chi^2 = 595.15$, $df = 299$, $\chi^2/df = 1.99$, $p < 0.000$; NFI = 0.932, CFI = 0.965, RMSEA = 0.058, and SRMR = 0.050 (Kline, 2015). Convergent validity was confirmed when all the results exceeded the

thresholds established: factor loadings > 0.7 threshold (Nunnally, 1978), the average variance extracted (AVE) > 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), and composite reliability > 0.7. Discriminant validity was established when the results showed that in all constructs analyzed, AVE was greater than the squared correlation estimates between constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 2 shows correlations among the studied constructs.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity among Constructs

	CR	AVE	MSV	MaxR(H)	ASI	NE	CBD	BPR	PE	ISI
ASI	0.884	0.793	0.787	0.890	0.892					
NE	0.969	0.737	0.619	0.972	0.708	0.859				
CBD	0.868	0.687	0.685	0.884	0.830	0.787	0.823			
BPR	0.941	0.730	0.321	0.955	0.567	0.401	0.520	0.855		
PE	0.936	0.831	0.404	0.951	-0.525	-0.511	-0.636	-0.456	0.912	
ISI	0.899	0.816	0.727	0.900	0.963	0.638	0.770	0.506	-0.465	0.903

Notes: CR = Composed reliability; AVE = average variance extracted; MSV = maximum shared variance; NE = Negative Emotions, CBD = Customer brand disidentification, BPR = Brand patronage reduction, PE = Positive emotions, a: figures in the diagonal line represent the squared root of AVE; b: figures below the diagonal represent the correlation (bivariate) along constructs.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3.4. The Self-Incongruency Construct

The construct self-incongruence was calculated based on the results of actual self-incongruence (ASI) and ideal self-incongruence (ISI) scales. A median split method was applied (Iacobucci et al., 2015) to separate participants of each condition in two groups. This procedure has been used extensively in the interactive marketing literature (i.e., Huang et al., 2022; Saavedra Torres et al., 2023). For ASI, the two groups consisted of 146 responses in the upper half, in high condition (mean = 6.14, SD = 0.86) and 146 responses in the lower half, in low condition (mean = 4.63, SD = 1.09). Similarly, for ISI, the two groups consisted of 146 responses in the upper half, in high condition (mean = 5.98, SD = 0.79) and 146 responses in the lower half, in low condition (mean = 4.28, SD = 1.32). Each subgroup was codified as 1 for results below the mean and 2 for results above the mean (Aiken et al., 1991). This coding process generated four conditions (ASI: Low vs. High x ISI: Low vs. High).

An ANOVA analysis showed how each condition of self-incongruence had a different effect over CBD ($M_{\text{low/low}} = 4.95$, $M_{\text{low/high}} = 5.61$, $M_{\text{high/low}} = 5.90$, $M_{\text{high/high}} = 6.39$, $F_{(3,125)} = 36.09$, $p < 0.000$). Further posthoc comparisons using Tukey HSD test revealed that the four conditions fell in three groups significantly different from each other (low/low vs. low/high-high/low vs high/high). The middle group was found not significantly different within the group ($M_{\text{low/high}} = 5.61$, $M_{\text{high/low}} = 5.90$, $p = 1.77$). Based on these results, self-incongruence was coded on two conditions (1 = low/low, 2 = high/high) (Aiken et al., 1991).

3.5. Common Method and Non-Response Bias

To mitigate potential distortions related to common method bias, we followed the guidelines provided by Podsakoff et al. (2003) by including established measurement scales, conducting preliminary testing, and organizing the questionnaire into six sections (self-incongruence, negative emotions, positive emotions, perceived quality, brand disidentification,

and patronage reduction), each corresponding to one of the constructs included in our theoretical framework. Additionally, we ran Harman's one-factor test (Fuller et al., 2016) and discovered that the initial factor explained 41.8% of the variation (which was below the 50% threshold established by Fuller et al., 2016). We concluded by performing the marker variable and common factor tests but did not detect any indications of common method bias.

Concerning non-response bias, we followed the procedure delineated by Armstrong and Overton (1977). We conducted t-tests to compare age, gender, and length of the brand relationship between early and late respondents, but no statistically significant differences were detected (p-values 0.329, 0.482, and 0.108 respectively).

4. RESULTS

Before evaluating the structural model, measurement model fit was assessed. The hypothesized structural model had an acceptable data fit ($\chi^2 = 570.395$, $df = 236$, $\chi^2/df = 2.417$, $p < 0.000$; NFI = 0.924, CFI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.070, and SRMR = 0.0532) (Hair et al., 2010). Since the measurement model had an acceptable fit, a CB-SEM analysis was conducted to test H1-H4 using three independent variables (i.e., self-incongruence, positive emotions, and negative emotions), one mediator variable (i.e., CBD), and one dependent variable (i.e., brand patronage reduction). We controlled for the effect of age, gender, and length of brand relationship and did not find any significant impact on CBD.

The first hypothesis (H1) that stated self-incongruence increases CBD is supported ($\beta = 0.315$, $t = 6.607$, $p < 0.001$). However, negative emotion was found not significantly related to CBD ($\beta = 0.058$, $t = 1.558$, $p = 0.119$). Hence, H2 is not supported. Positive emotion was found negatively related to CBD ($\beta = -0.253$, $t = -5.931$, $p < 0.001$) confirming H3. Additionally, CBD was found positively related to brand patronage reduction, supporting H4 ($\beta = 0.920$, $t = 12.504$, $p < 0.001$). Table 3 shows the CB-SEM unstandardized structural parameter estimates.

Table 3
CB-SEM Unstandardized Structural Parameter Estimates

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate	S.E.	t-Value	Results
H1	TSI - CBD	0.315	0.048	6.607**	Supported
H2	NE - CBD	0.058	0.037	1.556 ^{n.s.}	Not supported
H3	PE - CBD	-0.253	0.043	-5.931**	Supported
H4	CBD - BPR	0.920	0.074	12.504**	Supported
H5a	PQ × TSI - CBD	0.076	$\Delta R^2 = 0.036$	3.926**	Supported
H5b	PQ × NE - CBD	0.033	$\Delta R^2 = 0.015$	2.275*	Supported
H5c	PQ × PE - CBD	0.023	$\Delta R^2 = 0.006$	1.528**	Not supported

Note: SI: Self-Incongruence, CBD: CBD, NBI: Negative Brand Image, BC: Brand Credibility, NE: Negative Emotions, PE: Positive Emotions, BPR: Brand Patronage Reduction, PQ: Perceived Quality, ** $p < 0.001$, * $p < 0.05$, n.s.: not significant.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

4.1. Moderation Test

Moderation tests were conducted on PROCESS Macro v.3.3 (model 1) to test how managerial strategies can reduce or increase CBD (H5a-H5c). To avoid high levels of multicollinearity in the moderation test, the moderator (i.e., customer perceived quality), which was a continuous variable, was mean-centered ($M = 5.025$, $SD = 2.294$) and two conditions (low/high) were created (Aiken *et al.*, 1991).

quality accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in CBD ($\Delta R^2 = 0.036$, $\Delta F_{(1, 288)} = 15.419$, $p < 0.001$). As expected, a significant interaction between self-incongruence and customer-perceived quality on CBD was found ($\beta = 0.076$, $t_{(288)} = 3.926$, $p < 0.001$) confirming H5a. The interaction plot shows a diminishing effect, that is, as customer perceived quality increases, CBD decreases in low self-incongruence condition, but has no effect in the high self-incongruence condition (Figure 2).

In the second moderation test, positive emotion was used as the independent variable and CBD and perceived quality were used as the dependent and moderator variables, respectively. The interaction term between positive emotion and customer perceived quality was found not significant on CBD ($\Delta R^2 = 0.006$, $\Delta F_{(1, 288)} = 2.336$, $\beta = 0.023$, $t_{(288)} = 1.528$, $p = 0.127$). Hence, H5b is not supported.

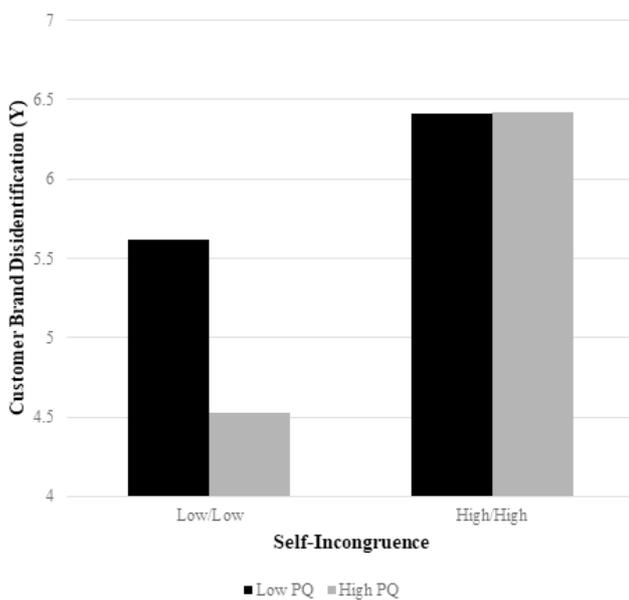


Figure 2
Perceived Quality as a Moderator of Self-Incongruence and CBD
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

In the first moderation test, self-incongruence was used as the independent variable, CBD as the dependent variable, and customer-perceived quality as the moderator variable. This model accounted for a significant amount of variance in CBD ($R^2 = 0.329$, $F_{(3, 288)} = 47.163$, $p < 0.001$). The interaction term between self-incongruence and customer-perceived

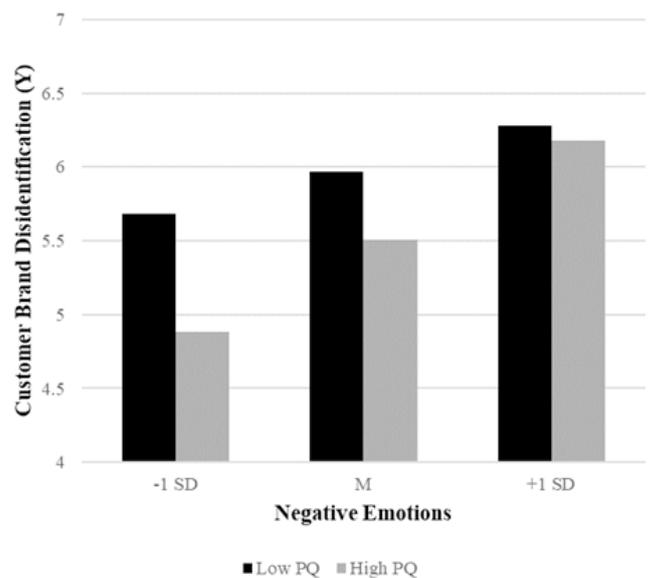


Figure 3
Perceived Quality as a Moderator of Negative Emotion and CBD
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Finally, in the third test, negative emotion was used as the independent variable and the same dependent and moderator variables as the previous two tests were used. The results showed that the model described a significant amount of variance in CBD ($R^2 = 0.171$, $F_{(3, 288)} = 19.823$, $p < 0.001$). The interaction between negative emotion and customer perceived quality also described a significant proportion of variance in CBD ($\Delta R^2 = 0.015$, $\Delta F_{(1, 288)} = 5.175$, $p < 0.05$). The outcomes confirmed H5c by showing that interaction between negative emotion and customer perceived quality has a significant positive impact on CBD ($\beta = 0.034$, $t_{(288)} = 2.275$, $p < 0.05$). The interaction plot (Figure 53 shows a diminishing effect such that as customer perceived quality increases, CBD decreases regardless of the level of negative emotion.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Existing literature argued that CBD is a process of cognitive dissociation from a brand (Anaza *et al.*, 2021), however, some antecedents remained unclear. Thus, the current research answers the latest call for a more nuanced view of the antecedents of CBD, especially those that can reflect a brand's attraction and repulsion process as observed in the previous research (Wolter *et al.*, 2016). We address this gap by analyzing the effect of self-incongruence (Malär *et al.*, 2011) and positive and negative emotions (Becker & Tausch, 2014) on CBD. Based on the outcomes of this study, numerous inferences can be drawn for the advancement of the current research and practice in branding and, more specifically, CBD. First, the findings suggest that self-incongruence is the main driver for CBD providing a framework for the cognitive process of disidentification. By incorporating the notion of actual and ideal self-incongruence, this study provides evidence that in the low levels of self-incongruence (i.e., low ASI and low ISI), customers exhibit lower CBD compared with the high levels of self-incongruence (i.e., high ASI and high ISI). These findings endorse the premise of balance theory (Heider, 1958) which argues that individuals prefer congruent cognitions (i.e., beliefs, attitudes, etc.) towards an entity (in this case a brand) over inconsistent ones. Nevertheless, if this entity starts to generate an incongruent cognition in the customer's mind, the process of disidentification starts (Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

Additionally, our findings suggest that self-incongruence and positive emotions affect CBD, but negative emotions do not have a significant impact on it. Previous research in the field has emphasized the relationship between negative emotions and CBD (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; Lee *et al.*, 2009; Wolter *et al.*, 2016). However, those studies only considered negative feelings (e.g. psychological contract breach, feeling of violation, brand disrepute) as antecedents to CBD. From a theoretical perspective, the findings of the current study provide evidence that without a negative cause (i.e., brand transgression (Aaker *et al.*, 2004), CBD is affected by self-incongruence and customer positive emotions. This confirms the notion that CBD is more about customers' identity disconnection from the brand and less about the negativity among them (Becker & Tausch, 2014; Elsbach & Bhattacharya, 2001).

This underscores the significance of CBD as an independent construct from other brand constructs related to customer negative emotions like brand hate (Bryson *et al.*, 2013; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2018) or brand dissatisfaction (Giese & Cote, 2000; Hult *et al.*, 2019; Le Tan & Trang, 2021). Also, the results provide evidence that CBD is not only associated with negative emotions (Anaza *et al.*, 2021) but also with positive emotions.

Mixed findings emerge from analyzing the moderating role of customer-perceived quality on the studied variables. First, customer-perceived quality has a significant effect on the relationship between self-incongruence and CBD. Previous research has found mixed results on the impact of perceived quality as a predictor of CBD, where some studies have reported a medium effect (Wolter *et al.*, 2016) while others have reported a non-significant effect (Anaza *et al.*, 2021). By taking a different approach, this study provides evidence that perceived quality has an enormous impact on reducing CBD in the low level self-incongruence. At the same time, outcomes suggest that perceived quality has no impact on CBD when an individual reaches the high level of self-incongruence. Second, customer-perceived quality has a significant effect on the relationship between negative emotion and CBD. This finding is significant because as an isolated variable, negative emotion was found non-significant in its relationship with CBD. However, the effect of negative emotions combined with customer-perceived quality was found significant over CBD. Third, customer-perceived quality has no significant impact on CBD. These findings confirm the notion that CBD is not an episodic process based on a customer's emotions related to his/her experience with the brand. On the contrary, CBD is a process of customer self-recognition and self-recategorization when an individual falls out of balance (Heider, 1958) with brand values and identities (Anaza *et al.*, 2021; McGowan *et al.*, 2019). This study provides evidence that CBD is a cognitive process that involves different phases where other cognitive evaluations of the brand, like perceived quality, are involved in affecting the process.

5.2. Managerial Implications

With regards to the managerial implications of the present research, we emphasize that crafting a brand personality based on customers' values and beliefs should be a firm's one of the priority decisions during the marketing strategic planning sessions. Brand values and identity are the keys to a customer's self-congruence. If firms keep a congruent relationship between their customers and their brand values and beliefs, then a solid long-term relationship can be built. Therefore, organizations should dedicate time and resources to recognize, understand, and concentrate on the values and beliefs that customers manifest during the relationship.

Based on the previous recommendation, organizations should conduct focus groups or individual in-depth interviews every quarter with their current customers. Those sessions can allow the organizations to contrast new trends discovered by third-party associates (e.g., Spotify Advertising's Culture Next or Pew Research trending) with the current perception of customers' values and beliefs about the brand. Another possible implementation would be to develop and maintain panels of current customers as brand ambassadors (Schmidt & Baumgarth, 2018). This group can be used

by the firm in two different ways to gauge shifts in incongruency of values between the brand and the loyal customer base. First, the brand ambassadors panel can be a source from where the firm can collect data on face-to-face interaction (i.e., focus groups). Second, the firm can use the brand ambassadors' social media posts and social networking interactions as reliable sources to assess the current and future state of the alignment between customers' values and beliefs about the brand. In this way, managers can continuously update brand communications to enhance the customers' self-congruence avoiding CBD, and consequently, generating a solid source of revenue.

However, the aforementioned recommendation has a dark side: the customers can outgrow the brand on their own without any event or problem associated with the brand. It is a simple customer process of disconnection where positive emotions are also involved. For example, brands targeting teenagers or young segments (e.g. Forever 21, Hollister) face this situation constantly. Loyal customers change their values and beliefs as they become older and then they feel that their previous favorite brand no longer represents them (Kusek, 2016; Oliver, 1999). There are no hard feelings involved, and they keep positive emotions about the brand, but they disidentify from the brand. This process occurs regardless of the length of the customer's relationship with the brand (Fournier, 1998). Therefore, firms should incorporate in their strategic plans the number and the profile of customers they may lose in the next business cycle, to generate new options (e.g. a different brand) that can appeal to their new set of values and beliefs. Hence, managers can migrate customers who are disidentified with the original brand towards a new brand that provides them with new levels of cognitive congruency and subsequently, generate a new customer-brand relationship that can be profitable to the firm.

Another managerial implication of this study is that the managers need to invest in product development or service quality offering to enhance customers' perceived quality of the brand. Perceived quality works as a commodity that reduces self-incongruence and negative emotions, which then significantly decrease CBD and subsequently diminish patronage reduction. If firms use perceived quality as a safety cushion to avoid the progression of customers' self-incongruence, then the customer-brand relationship can be sustained longer than expected. Accordingly, organizations should invest permanently to improve elements associated with the quality of the product or service offered to customers. In this way, managers can use quality improvement as a brand's communication theme with the intention to enhance customers' self-congruence, thereby keeping a solid relationship with the brand.

5.3. Limitations and Additional Research Opportunities

This research is not free of limitations. First, we used a cross-sectional approach that inhibits us from extracting conclusions about causal inferences. In order to accomplish that, longitudinal data would be required to perceive the changes in customer self-incongruence over time. Customer self-incongruence may change over time due to changes in the quality of the product or the service, and the introduction of new versions of the offering. Hence, further research could investigate a set of customers for a long period of time to identify the triggers of their self-inconformity and to establish its effects on CBD.

Second, this study did not take into consideration the variable 'time' in the process of CBD. In our theoretical model, we assume that both dimensions of self-incongruency (i.e., actual and ideal) are developed at the same time and we measured the intensity of each one. However, an underlying factor could be the time that it takes a customer to go from lower to higher levels of actual or ideal self-incongruence. Again, a longitudinal study that takes into consideration not just the time of the progression of the self-incongruence but also the length of the customer-brand relationship could shed light on this process.

Third, perceived quality has traditionally been viewed as a critical motivator for consumer behavior, as it represents a customer's perception of the functional and abstract attributes of a product or service, such as the brand. This perception helps individuals to reduce doubts about brand properties and to meet their functional needs. However, perceived quality may not be the only dimension of value that is relevant in the context of CBD. While this study did not explicitly measure the dimensions of value, we acknowledge that the inclusion of dimensions such as status, esteem, or aesthetics, could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the overall perceived value of CBD products. The focus on perceived quality as a source of value may have overlooked other factors that could impact consumer perceptions of value and their decision-making processes. Thus, future research could explore incorporating measures of these dimensions to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the overall perceived value of CBD products.

Fourth, previous research has associated both dimensions of self-incongruency (i.e., actual and ideal) and brand personality with different customer behaviors like brand passion (Astakhova *et al.*, 2017; Khan, 2010). Given that customer self-congruence is a predictor of brand personality, this last construct could mediate the impact of self-congruence over CBD.

Fifth, our study has a broad focus on brands rather than a specific product category. By focusing on a specific product category, this study would have been able to provide more detailed and accurate insights into how customers identify or disidentify with brands within that category.

Finally, we call for further examination of the impact of self-incongruency over customer identification (CBI) and CBD simultaneously, to clarify the relationship between CBD and CBI. To the best of our knowledge, only one study has attempted to measure CBD and CBI at the same time (Wolter *et al.*, 2016). However, using customers' self-incongruency as antecedents of both cognitive processes could reveal clear paths of development for each one. Theoretically, it is possible to observe both CBD and CBI with both, high and low, levels of development.

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