

THE IMAGE CONGRUENCE HYPOTHESIS: A META-ANALYTIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Numerous studies have explored the relationship between consumer purchase decisions as a function of the match between the consumer's self-image and perceived product image. This phenomenon has been termed "image congruence" and essentially implies that people *are* what they *buy*. The abundance of image congruence studies have produced a mixture of findings due, in part, to variations across research designs. This paper provides a meta-analysis of the empirical findings in the image congruence literature to explore the generalizability of the image congruence effect and moderators of the effect. Additionally, because of the idiosyncrasy of the research paradigm used to investigate self-image congruence, particular attention is paid to research design issues, such as type of sample used, types of traits used in image congruence measurement, data collection methods, brand name use, image congruence operationalization, and type of scale used. Combined effects across empirical studies show that the effect of image congruence across consumer outcomes, such as attitude toward the product, product preference, and purchase intention, is robust (effect correlation coefficient=.34). Recommendations for future research are discussed.