

A Study To Understand The Significance Of Value Congruence: Consumer Behavior Perspective

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ABSTRACT:

Originality/Research need:

Researches on value congruence have revealed its favorable influence on an individual's behavior. Value congruence is found to be highly studied in various contexts like organizational behavior and psychology; but its impact in marketing context is not found to be extensively researched. Very few researches have been done to understand the influence of value congruence from consumer behavior perspective. Due to this gap, the current paper reviews the past literature on value congruence in various contexts and further attempts to highlight its significance from the consumer behavior point of view. Based on the evidences of positive influence of value congruence on an individual's behavior, from studies in other areas like organizational behavior and psychology, this paper proposes the importance of consumers' value congruence with brands and the impact of such congruence on their behavior like brand identification, trust and loyalty.

Objective:

The objective of this study is to undertake a systematic literature review, to explore the significance of value congruence and its impact on consumer behavior like trust, brand identification and loyalty.

Methodology:

The paper has adopted a systematic literature review, to conceptualize a model after evaluating, and analyzing the various literature on the topic under the study. The method of data collection for this study has been through various online databases, publications, whitepapers, and research articles and published reports.

Implications of the study:

This study will add to the academic literature with regards to understanding the various positive influences of value congruence and its significance from the consumer behavior perspective. It will attempt to study the impact of value congruence in various studied contexts and propose its importance in marketing context. From the practitioner perspective, the understanding of positive influences of value congruence on consumer's psychological factors like trust, brand identification and loyalty will help them devise better marketing strategies.

Key words:

Value Congruence, Customer Brand Identification, Trust, Loyalty, Consumer Behavior, Literature Review

1. Introduction:

Congruence is the extent of resemblance between the characteristics of an entity with the other entity (Kirmani and Shiv, 1998). Entity can refer to anything and can include things like product or brand, an employee, a consumer or even a value. There is an increased importance on understanding the impact of congruence of values between brands or companies and consumers, which drive their purchasing decisions. Values are the compass, which helps individuals choose the behavior (ElizurSagie, 1999). Schwartz has done a lot of research on understanding the importance of values and has defined values as abstract goals or standards, which guide peoples' interests and behaviors. Based on congruity theory, organizations or brands develop marketing strategies to help employees or consumers realize the congruity of personal values and firm or brand's values. The value congruity theories were mostly studied in organizational and psychological contexts. There was a need to understand it from consumer behavior perspective and how the evidences of positive influences of value congruence in other studied areas can be applied in understanding its impact on consumer behavior. The consumer behavior literature shows that values have an impact on consumers' purchasing decisions (Gutman, 1982). Thus, it can be seen that value congruence as a concept needs to be studied in detail, so it can be used as an effective tool by marketers in enhancing the preference of products or brands and thereby increase customer base.

The objective of this literature review is to systematically study all past researches on value congruence and evaluate its positive impact in the various contexts, under which this concept is studied. Due to the recent focus on understanding the significance of values in consumer behavior and the impact of the value congruence, between brands and consumers, on their purchase decisions, the study of value congruence is the prime focus of this study. The research on value congruence was spread across various areas of studies and no research has assembled and presented it in a coherent manner. Hence, this study attempted to understand and map the development of value congruence from various perspectives. It was revealed that value congruence was majorly covered in research areas like psychology, organizational behavior, and relationship management and consumer behavior and on the outcomes like satisfaction, trust, identification and loyalty.

Integrating results of literature from various fields like social psychology, relationship marketing and organizational behavior, models were developed by researchers, those could explain the impact of congruence of values on the important aspects of brand-customer association, like satisfaction, trust, and loyalty (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). Also, in many organizational studies, value congruence is found to be a strong factor impacting commitment, satisfaction, trust and loyalty towards organization (Arthur, Bell, Villado, & Doverspike, 2006). Yet, in marketing context, customer's value congruence, which is the similarity between the customer's internal values and brand values, is not much studied as an antecedent of various consumer behavior outcomes. There have been very few marketing studies which tried to find the effect of value congruence on behavioral aspects of consumers (Macmillan, Money, Money & Downing, 2005). However, it should be noted that this is unexplainable, as according to social

psychological studies, value congruence is such a strong personal influencer for creating and managing relationships (Gaunt, 2006). Hence, the purpose of this review is to investigate the influences of value congruence in marketing context, and understand how it affects the quality of consumer-brand relationship, like customer brand identification, trust and loyalty.

The uniqueness of this research is that, we are the oretically exploring the theory of value congruence and its impact on brand-consumer relationships, which has not been done before. The findings of this study would be pertinent to academicians and marketers. Its practical implications would be that the findings would help brand managers to create a more loyal relationship, by using value congruence as marketing strategy. Further, a proposed model is developed to show the effect of value congruity on brand identification, trust and loyalty by incorporating results from studies of sociology, organization behavior studies, and marketing research.

Thus, in this paper we try to explore four key questions:

RQ1. What has been the role of value congruence in different fields of study?

RQ2. What is the effect of value congruence on brand identification, trust and loyalty?

RQ3. Can we propose a comprehensive framework of value congruence and brand identification, trust and loyalty?

RQ4. What are further research directions in this area?

The format of the paper is as follows.

Section 1: Covers the methodology adopted to gather and sort the literature

Section 2: Provides understanding of various constructs in consumer behavior: Value Congruence, Customer Brand Identification, Trust and Loyalty

Section 3: Analyze the segmented literature and highlights the linkages between various constructs of study. It further proposes a conceptual model, show casing the influences of value congruence

Section 4: The final section draws the conclusion, with the light thrown on path for the future research in this area

2. Research Methodology

This study focus eson developing a theoretical model based on a survey of literature and thereby contributes to existing theories of value congruence and its impact on consumer behavior. Literature review serves two purposes: first, of collecting the intellectual contentin the are a of interest and second, identifying the important gaps (Tranfiel, Deneyer & Smart, 2003). Hence, a systematic literature review approach was used for the research.

Literature collection: Asystematic literature review on value congruence was undertaken in this study. Databases such as SCOPUS, Emerald and Google Scholar were searched using relevant keywords, to find suitable articles. Initially, a detailed review of the past research literatures on value congruence was done to determine the relevant search keywords. Based on this, few keywords like “value congruence”, “value congruity” and “value similarity” were identified for relevant data collection. Words like value congruity, value congruence and value similarity, were taken into conjunction, as separating them were giving unrelated articles not covering the area of interest of value congruence as a concept. To ensure that a maximum of related articles were covered, the “OR” operator was used to utilize all of the keywords. In the search from year 1966 through 2020, 1676 publications were found. The information from these publications was stored in csv format. The information saved for each publication was: the title, abstract, author name, indexed and author keywords, year, citations and publication journal.

Refinements in the Search Results

The collected 1676 publications consisted of documents like articles, book chapters, conference proceedings and literature reviews. For this study, the focus was only on academic journal articles, conference papers, and review papers. Hence, trade publications, papers from magazines, working progress, reports, books and book chapters were excluded from further considerations. It was found that most common language of collected publications was English, followed by Chinese, Japanese and Spanish. For the analysis only English papers were included. Based on these criteria, the obtained publications were further revised and 1381 publications were kept. It was seen that remaining publications had some duplications due to the presence of similar publication in both source database. For instance, the research paper by (Adkins, Russell, & Werbel, 1994) could be retrieved from two databases. Hence, the 1381 research papers were further scanned and 192 duplications were removed. The resulting 1189 articles were then reviewed for relevance criteria, based on current context of study. A total of 69 articles were not found relevant and final 1120 publications were finally shortlisted for statistical analyses.

3. Theoretical Background

From the literature review on value congruence, it was seen to be studied in various contexts. Value is a form of psychological core of the self and it represents a strong motivational construct(Wade-benzoni et al., 2002). (Brangule-vlagsma, Pieters, & Wedel, 2002) These can be important for understanding purchase choice, as they have crucial contribution in consumers’ thought process. Various marketing literature have shown that values have influenced purchasing patterns of consumers(Khare, 2015). However, prior to utilizing value congruence in its true nature, the values of consumers need to be understood and then matched to the projected values of the brand or company(Cazier & Shao, 2017).

3.1 Value Congruence in varied context:

3.1.1 In Organizational Behavior (OB) context

Value congruence has mostly appeared in OB studies, to analyze attitudes of employee, organizational and behavioral outcomes. Researches in organization behavior have revealed that value congruence has

been more associated with attitudinal outcomes of employees than to their behavioral and contextual outcomes (Bao, Dolan, & Tzafrir, 2012). (Cable & Edwards, 2004) mentioned that as it is the tendency of people to be more attracted and trusting towards people who are matching to themselves, value congruence has more impact in organizations on the behavior and attitude of its employees. The theory of similarity-attraction in social psychology (Krist of-Brown, Zimmerman & Johnson, 2005), forms the foundation for the organization's value congruity research.

3.1.2 In Social Psychology context

Similarity as a construct has always been the interest of researchers in the field of social psychology in understanding its effects to predict various relationship quality and outcomes. In psychology field, certain terms like congruity, similarity, fit, alignment, congruence, match, and shared are used interchangeably. Relationship behaviors, such as liking of partner, marriage satisfaction, commitment, stability and maintaining any relationship, are major areas where value congruence are found to be researched (Gaunt, 2006). (Aron, 2013) stated had discussed similarity-attraction theory and how people like to see others as extension of self, which becomes reason for a successful relationship. Studies have explored that spouse which are high on similarity are linked to the positive or negative affect on them (Gaunt, 2006). It is been seen that psychological similarity in characteristics helps in interaction as it reinforces the person's own beliefs and behaviors (e.g., Arthur et al. 2006). This is because people who hold values which are similar to others, also normally share common pattern of thought process and a have similar way of analyzing the experiences and events (Cable & Edwards, 2004). Thus, it can be seen that a high level of similarity between two individuals result in better interactions and long-term relations.

3.1.3 Value Congruence in Literature of Relationship Marketing

Drawing the views on value congruence from organizational behaviors and social psychology, it is assumed that value congruence play a similar role towards important aspects of relationship marketing, like trust, and loyalty. There is substantial impact of common values on trust (Macmillan et al., 2005). The study of papers on relationship marketing literature have revealed that a very limited research has studied value congruence on the certain relationships like that of firm-distributor (Macmillan et al., 2005; Morgan & Hunt, 1994), manager and salesperson's relations (Brashear, Boles, Bellenger, & Brooks, 2003), and vendor-purchase's relations (Sethi & Smith, 2015).

3.1.4 Value Congruence in the Service Industry

Value congruence's effects on service brand are of importance just like organizational, social psychology and marketing literature. In service industry, value congruence increases the satisfaction and loyalties towards the brand (Zhang & Bloemer, 2011). Service industry is characterized by less tangible measures and hence values become important because values fill the evaluation gap created by intangible attributes (Berry, 1995; Bitner, 1995). In brand management concept, consumer-brand value congruence would imply connection between consumer's internal values and his perspectives about values of the brand. By considering this we can conclude that in service industry context too, value congruence has an impactful outcome on brand-consumer relationship would be particularly important.

3.1.5 Value Congruence in Marketing Literature

Values congruity can be said as the degree of similarity between two entities, like customers, products, brands, etc. The decision making at every point depends to large extent on the characteristics of the two entities, like brand and customers (Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). The entity can be a product, brand, store, or a person. Value congruence can have direct and/or indirect impact on satisfaction, trust, affect, etc. (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). (Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013) had investigated the positive relationships between value congruence, brand identification and loyalty. Also, there were some instances of value congruence studied in green context in recent years. There has been so far only one research paper found which dealt with value congruence with respect to personal green values and values of green brand (Barbosa, 2015). This aspect of value congruence with green brands has not been studied much and hence it gives future scope of research to enhance sustainability. This gives us indication to do further research in green marketing context too in future.

3.2 Brand Identification

Brands can possess personality and also values (Aaker, 1997). Extending this theory in marketing context, the brand identification of customers happens when they start to identify and link themselves with the brands those mirror and strengthen their identities (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). Customer brand identification is perceiving the commonality between the brand and the customer (Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010) mentioned that customer brand identification happens when the customer psychologically recognizes, feel, and values the belongingness with a particular brand. On the similar lines, (Kim, Han, & Lee, 2001) suggested that customer brand identification is degree with which the identity of consumer is expressed and enhanced by the brand.

Theoretical foundation for identification in marketing context can be provided, on a very basic level, by a well-established theory like, Social Identity Theory (Elbedweihy, Jayawardhena, Elsharnouby, & Elsharnouby, 2016). Based on past literatures, we can state that there are two main streams of consumer identification, namely: sociological (which deals with social identification) and psychological approaches (which deals with personal identification) (Blau, 1964; Hsu, 2019; Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008).

3.3 Trust

According to (Blau, 1964; Schurr & Ozanne, 1985), trust is based on three foundation: integrity, benevolence, and ability. Referring to (Blau, 1964), this study considered trust based on three parameters, 'an integrity: which is eagerness to trust a product on the belief from its functional performance, benevolence: extent to which a brand achieves its near-term goals and also maintains the well-being of consumers, and ability: about high quality brand performance. Past researches have thrown light on the significance of trust in purchaser–seller relationships (Cazier & Shao, 2017; Chen, 2013; Fullerton, 2003; H. He, Li, & Harris, 2012).

3.4 Loyalty

Loyalty, which is a major area of study in marketing, is a post-purchase attitude (Chen, 2013; Corley et al., 2013; Taylor & Strutton, 2010). Loyalty is a customer's positive attitude toward a business leading to positive behavior like re-purchases intentions. This has impact on his purchase decisions in future. The importance of WOM is because the product information spreads from one customer to other (Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005). Several previous studies have indicated that brand identification results in positive WOM (Blau, 1964). A stronger brand with loyal customers is important for marketers as it gives huge benefits like rise in economic and competitive advantage, less prone to competitive marketing actions, reduction in the marketing costs, higher ROI through increases in market shares, better support from increased WOM and greater extension in business opportunities (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In the pro-environmental times, to raise customers' green loyalty, companies are considering to increase customers' value, satisfaction, and trust particularly in green context (Chen, 2013).

4. Conceptual Framework

From the literature reviewed, certain relations were found between certain constructs like trust, customer brand identification and loyalty.

4.1 Brand Identification due to Value Congruence

Consumers have an innate attraction for brands which are better sync with their self-identity (Sirgy & Su 2000). Further to this, (Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008) suggested that personal identification of an individual is predominantly based on the extent of overlap between person's self-perception and the perception of the individual about the brand. This self-schema consists of various individual's inherent values. This indicates that congruence between individual's inherent values and values of the brand influences brand identification to a great extent (Larasati & Hananto, 2013). Certain well established theories like social identity theory, has proposed that value congruence is found to have favorable effect on brand identification (Raouf, 2018). The commonality of consumers' and the brand's value, has an impact on the intensity of brand identification (Larasati & Hananto, 2013). Value congruity is important antecedent of brand identification (Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). Value congruity has direct impact on brand identification and customer's level of commitment (Larasati & Hananto, 2013). (Lam & Mullins, 2013) mentioned that congruence is a symbolic influencer of identification of consumer with brand. He mentioned that the consumers, who have perception that the brand is closely related to their self-image, generally have higher level of identification with that particular brand. From this, we propose that value congruence of consumers' with brands will help them identify with those brands.

Proposition P1: Value Congruence has positive impact on Brand Identification

4.2 Trust due to Value Congruence

Trust has been an important element of brand's success. (Cazier, Shao, & Louis, 2017) argued that the intangible factors of value congruence has positive impact in generating trust among the customers. Various past studies have suggested the favorable impact of value congruence on behavioral factors like trust. Social identity outlook integrated the factors like brand identity and brand identification with value, trust and satisfaction in predicting brand loyalty (H. He et al., 2012). The two antecedents, brand

identification and value congruence, has positively influence on brand trust and value co-creation (J. He, Huang, & Wu, 2018). Thus, we propose that value congruence will have favorable influence on trust.

Proposition P2: Value Congruence has positive impact on Trust

4.3 Loyalty due to Value Congruence

Consumers prefer goods of businesses that have commonality with their intrinsic values (Corley, Vannoy & Cazier., 2013). The research by Chen on green values and loyalty too has demonstrated that this. He proved that value can directly and indirectly influence loyalty (Chen, 2013). (Del Rio, A. Belén & Vázquez, Rodolfo & Iglesias, 2001) suggested that greater the equilibrium between the image of consumer and brand, greater would be the evaluation of the brand by consumer and more positive would his purchase behavior for that brand. On similar lines, studies in organizational behavior have shown that magnitude of value congruence between an employee and an organization determine the magnitude of their trust and loyalty towards the organization (Corley et al., 2013). From these researches, it is very evident that there is positive connection among value congruence and loyalty. Value congruence is likely to play a very encouraging role in maintaining positive and loyal relationships of consumers with a brand (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). So, based on past theories of value congruence in different context, we propose that value congruence would positively impact loyalty of consumers.

Proposition P3: Value Congruence has positive impact on Loyalty

4.4 Loyalty due to Brand Identification

Academicians and researchers have mentioned that identification of consumer with the brand or product has a great influence on that consumer's behavior involving: purchasing decisions, trust and loyalty (Raouf, 2018). Psychological benefits associated with the brand-identification is strengthening person's self-esteem, and motivational benefits like loyalty and mouth publicity (Ahearne & Gruen, 2005). Past studies have indicated positive association of loyalty and word of mouth with brand identification (Kuenzel & Halliday, 2008). Studies on consumer behavior showed that consumers who start identifying with the companies or brands later become their promoters (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). On similar lines of Bhattacharya's findings, Caizer proposed that during the identification process, there reaches a stage of self-classification, which helps consumers to match their self-describing attributes like values with the values of the organization (Tuškej, Golob & Podnar, 2013). The psychological nature of brand identification signifies interrelationship connecting consumer and the brand (Mael & Ashforth, 1992) and hence directly influences brand loyalty. Therefore by extending these theories, determining the impact of customer brand identification on loyalties of consumers, along lines of brand identification with customers sharing the same ideologies, we propose that customer brand identification with brands would have loyalty among customers.

Proposition P4: Brand Identification has positive impact on Loyalty

4.5 Loyalty due to Trust

Trust is the most desirable qualities in the association of a company-customers and brand-consumers (Matzler, Grabner & Bidmon, 2006). (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) mentioned that trust and loyalty towards brands are the central aspects in field of brand management. Trust is a significant element that impacts consumer loyalty. Trust creates a relationship which is continued and maintained by loyalty and commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It has been seen from past researches and also empirically proven that brand trust has given rise to brand loyalty (Goh, Jiang, & Tee, 2016; Matzler et al., 2006; Taylor & Strutton, 2010). Involving the constructs like value congruence, trust, loyalty, and purchase intention, researches have provided measures of perception and behavior, indicating positive relation between value congruence and loyalty and trust (Corley et al., 2013). Customer's trust is favorably related to customer loyalty (Goh, Jiang, & Tee, 2016). Chen, in his research on green perceived valued, proposed that green trust leads to green loyalty (Chen, 2013). This leads us to propose that trust has favorable impact on brand loyalty.

Proposition P5: Loyalty is positively impacted by Trust

Based on the above propositions, we can propose following conceptual framework:

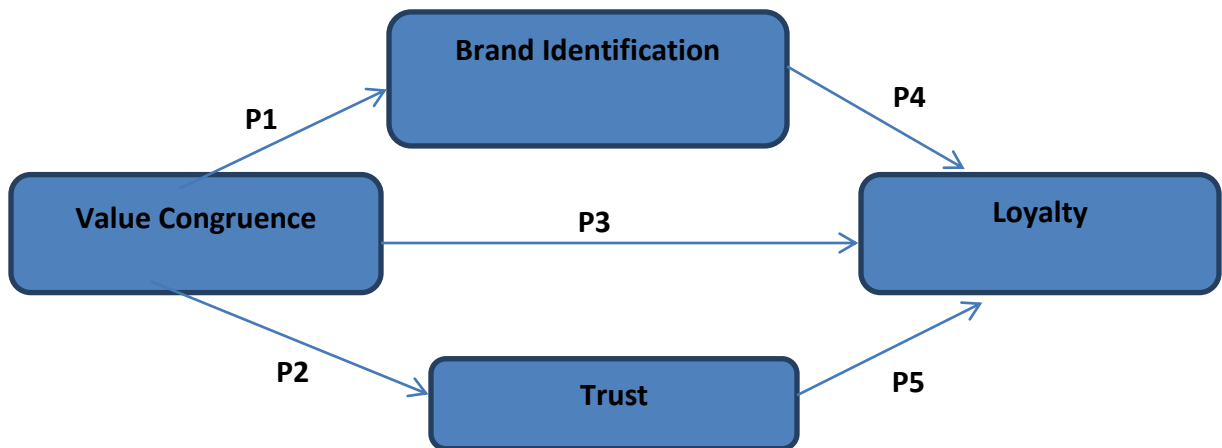


Figure 1: Representation of Conceptual Model

5. Implications of the Study

This study is a literature review, with the intention to understand how businesses can incorporate values into their marketing strategies and make it in sync with the values of customers to have more loyal customers. This offers new perspectives of value congruence in devising marketing strategies. Brands can be considered as an umbrella for incorporating and promoting new values and hence are much more than just a product or service. This article aims to highlight importance of successful incorporation of value congruence into brand management and its leading role in branding. Loyal consumers are the assets, as they are the main force for driving success of brands. Loyalty of customers in-turn act as a stimulator and trigger increasing the group of consumers, who will further apply and be ambassador for their brands.

Towards the academic contribution, the present study contributes towards deeper understanding of the impact of value congruence towards consumer behavior like brand identification, trust, and loyalty. Loyalty of consumers is a very significant factor to study in consumer behavior. This article can be considered as the first of kind of literature study providing a comprehensive view on value congruence researches. The findings of this study can be helpful to academicians in determining future research opportunities in value congruence, especially in terms of applying the proposed model in consumer behavior context. The proposed model can assist other academic researchers to understand the various researches done in the area of value congruence and their recent developments. The results can provide significant insights to marketers and help them apply such analysis in their marketing strategies and decision making.

6. Conclusion

This literature review explored the importance of value congruence in brand-consumer relationships. Consumers follow the brands that they can identify with and which share their values. It was seen and also proposed in the model, that value congruence is antecedent of various constructs in building customer brand relationship. It should be understood, that to have successful business in future, greater thrust has to be given in understanding the values of consumers and creating the values of brands congruent with those of consumers in inspiring wider audience. This has been the endeavor of this study and to test the proposed model can be a great opportunity for the future research.

Future Research Areas:

There are still not enough researches done on understanding and utilizing the environmental values of society and businesses and incorporating the effects of their congruence. The environmental impact of the individual's actions has become recent trend in researches related to values and value congruence. Studies on green behavior was done with respect to consumers, to understand how green self-identity has a positive impact due to value congruence which further leads to green purchase behavior (Confente, Scarpi, & Russo, 2020). In future, the proposed model can be applied to study value congruence in context of green behavior.

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