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The Role of Self-congruity in Chinese Young Consumers' Brand Evaluation and Brand Loyalty  
towards Sportswear Brands

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Chinese market for sportswear is by far the second largest market in the world just after United States (Euromonitor International, 2013). In the Chinese sportswear market, international brands including Nike, Adidas, Kappa, Puma, and FILA dominate the high-end market. Chinese domestic brands like Li-Ning, Anta and Peak occupy the medium and low-end sportswear market (Research and Market, 2012). However, while international sportswear brands are enjoying the Chinese market, Chinese domestic brands have been experiencing collective plummeting in terms of sales and market share since the year of 2011 (Textile Updates, 2013). From the industries' perspective, high inventory level, lack of innovation and the impact of fast fashion were perceived as the main reasons behind the collective sale slipperiness for the Chinese domestic brands (King, 2013). From the perspective of consumers, this study aimed to investigate Chinese young consumers' behavior toward sportswear brands in terms of their self-congruity assessment, brand evaluation and brand loyalty.

There were two objectives of this study: 1) to investigate the role of self-congruity in Chinese young consumers' brand loyalty through its impact on perceived quality and brand association; and 2) to study the impact of country of origin on Chinese young consumers' brand perception, brand evaluation and brand loyalty.

A survey through street intercept interviews was employed to collect data for this study. The following measurements were included in the survey: consumers' brand evaluation (perceived quality and brand association), brand loyalty (attitudinal and behavioral loyalty), self-congruity (brand personality congruity and user image congruity), and demographics. The survey was conducted in July 2013 in Shanghai, China. A total of 398 surveys were collected. The surveys were checked for completeness and validity. After data screening, 333 surveys were retained for further data analysis. The data were entered into SPSS. Descriptive analyses were conducted for demographic statistics. Multiple independent T-test, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Analysis were conducted to test the proposed hypotheses.

The SEM results indicated a significant influence of user image self-congruity on Chinese young consumers' brand evaluation in terms of brand association and perceived quality, which in turn had a significant influence on consumers' attitudinal loyalty. The influence of attitudinal loyalty on behavioral loyalty was also confirmed in this study. However, no significant influence of brand personality self-congruity was found on Chinese young consumers' brand evaluation. That is, the self-congruity had a significant influence on Chinese consumers' brand loyalty through

influencing their brand evaluation. But, the influence of self-congruity was mainly based on the user image self-congruity, not the personality congruity. Therefore, in order to appeal to the Chinese young consumers, brands need to focus on developing and communicating a consistent desirable brand user image to their target market.

The multiple independent T-test results suggested a significant difference between Chinese and global brands in consumers' brand association and attitudinal brand loyalty. Chinese young consumers displayed a higher level of attitudinal brand loyalty and a more positive brand association toward global brands. However, no significant difference was found in perceived quality between domestic sportswear brands and international sportswear brands. Also, no significant difference was found between the global brand and Chinese domestic brands in consumer's behavioral brand loyalty. It is interesting to note that Chinese young consumers had a higher level of attitudinal loyalty toward global brands, but not higher level of behavioral loyalty. Some obstacles may be there to prevent consumers to convert their attitude into purchase behavior. A very possible factor is price. Further research revealed that the prices for global brands are about as 3 times high as the domestic brands. That is, consumers may have a strong attitudinal intention to own the global brands, but the high price made them have to buy the much cheaper domestic brands.

In summary, this study revealed that user imagery congruity had a significant influence on consumers' brand loyalty through its impact on brand evaluation. And significant difference was found between domestic and global brands in terms of consumers' brand evaluation and loyalty. For domestic sportswear brands, developing and presenting a desired user-image to the target market may provide a great opportunity to gain more potential customers. For international sportswear brands, a more moderate pricing may help to the company to convert those aspirational consumers into actual purchasers.

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