EXPOSÉ

Influences of consumers’ social context on brand preferences:
How relationship status affects women’s self-discrepancies, cosmetic involvement and brand choice

submitted by

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Abstract

Title:

Influences of consumers’ social context on brand preferences: How the relationship status affects women’s self-discrepancies, cosmetic involvement and brand choice

Background:

Previous research indicates that the degree of consumer involvement is influenced by personal factors like beauty and self-image (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2006, p. 93) and that self-discrepancies influence purchase decisions (Dittmar, Beattie, & Friese, 1996). However, origins of involvement are not uncovered enough and especially a consumer’s social context as involvement determinant needs to be further researched (Coulter, Price, & Feick, 2003, pp. 152–153). The impact of self-discrepancies and involvement on consumer behavior have so far not been analyzed in combination with influences from the social context of a consumer, for example her relationship status.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to understand how the relationship status influences women’s self-discrepancies and cosmetic involvement and subsequently has an impact on female consumers’ brand preference for cosmetic products. The study wants to uncover to which self-image (actual self or ideal self) women relate to when choosing between different cosmetic brands and whether those choices differ according to the relationship status. It is important that companies understand the indirect effects of the influencing role of the relationship status on consumers’ self-discrepancies and involvement on brand choices in order to target consumers properly. The results of this study can lead to implications for cosmetic marketers on how to shape brand images in order to match consumers’ self-images and achieve high self-image congruence.

Method:

Existing literature presents the theoretical framework of this study and primary data will be collected by using an online questionnaire which will be distributed among women in Germany and France. In order to carry out this research, ten brands will be selected and consumers’ brand preferences and self-image congruence will be studied.

Keywords:

Cosmetics, self-discrepancy, ideal self, involvement, brand preference, brand image, self-image congruence, relationship status
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List of abbreviations

AI1 – Self-discrepancy between the actual (own) and ideal (own) self
AI1 – Self-discrepancy between the actual (own) and ideal (other) self
AI1 – Self-discrepancy between the actual (own) and ought (own) self
AI1 – Self-discrepancy between the actual (own) and ought (other) self
AMT – Amazon Mechanical Turk
CIP – Customer Involvement Profile
€ – Euro
H – Hypothesis
mn – Million
RQ – Research Question
SDT – Self-Discrepancy Theory
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1. Introduction

1.1. Background
Being dissatisfied with one’s own body is a major cause of suffering among women (Albertson, Neff, & Dill-Shackleford, 2015, p. 444). In fact, “the majority of women perceives themselves as having a body that is larger, heavier, fatter and less attractive than their ideal body” (Vartanian, 2012, p. 713). Higgins’s (1987) self-discrepancy theory (SDT) describes the principle of the consequences arising when individuals compare different states of their selves and discover discrepancies between them. An individual’s self-perception is especially relevant regarding one’s body image, since people often misperceive their personal appearance. Self-discrepancies can affect one individual’s body satisfaction as well as appearance-related behavior and can lead to negative feelings related in context of the body image (Vartanian, 2012, pp. 711–713).

In order to achieve beauty, many women modify their natural looks and appearance. Despite the fact that the standards of an ideal body mostly represent standards that only few women could ever reach, the effort in energy, time and resources to attain these standards is remarkable (Forbes, Collinsworth, Jobe, Braun, & Wise, 2007, pp. 265–266). People use cosmetic products as a way of self-enhancement by changing their looks in order to reach beauty ideals (Craik, 2003, p. 154; Kumar, Massie, & Dumonceaux, 2006, p. 285), and as long as there are people wishing to improve their beauty, the cosmetic industry’s future will be interesting to observe (Kumar et al., 2006, p. 304).

1.2. Problem statement
Cosmetic companies sell their goods based on people’s different perceptions of beauty (Kumar et al., 2006, p. 292). However, they should take into account that self-discrepancies can determine behavioral differences concerning consumers’ motivation to use cosmetics for beautifying purposes and influence purchase decisions (Pentina et al. 2009, p. 150). As a consequence, brand image is of strategic importance to businesses and thus effects on consumers’ brand preferences need to be researched (Graeff, 1996, p. 5). Since competition in the cosmetic industry is tough, companies put a lot of effort into displaying brand images in order to selling products that appeal to consumers’ hopes and dreams (Craik, 2003, p. 158). It is especially important that brand images fit a consumer’s self-image, when brands are consumed in public and people want to impress others (Graeff, 1996, p. 15).

Therefore, marketers in the cosmetic industry should consider self-discrepancies and emotional conflicts of their target groups as well as the socio-psychological processes that underlie their consumption choices (Pentina, Taylor, & Voelker, 2009, p. 150). Existing research already shows that personal factors like beauty and self-image impact the degree of consumer involvement (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 93) and that self-discrepancies influence purchase decisions (Dittmar et al., 1996). Some research even indicates the link between self-discrepancies and young females’ motivation to undergo cosmetic procedures (Pentina et al., 2009).
Unfortunately, there is still more to discover about the origins of product involvement. Social networks should be regarded as possible determinants of involvement, but there exists little empirical evidence of this (Coulter et al., 2003, pp. 152–153). In addition, future research should consider influences from consumers’ social context on perceived self-discrepancies to further improve the understanding of consumers’ motivation (Pentina et al., 2009, p. 161). Moreover, studies referencing to the social context of consumers usually consider their friends and family bonds, but not the individual’s relationship status per se. So far, the effects of self-discrepancies and involvement on brand preferences have never been analyzed in combination with the influence from consumers’ social networks, especially their relationship status.

Further research will help to expose the complexity of the relationship between self-discrepancies and behavioral outcomes (Vartanian, 2012, p. 717), such as influences of the relationship status on women’s self-discrepancies, cosmetic involvement and brand choice.

1.3. Purpose and contribution

This paper first aims to further contribute to previous research and existing literature by uncovering how consumers’ self-discrepancies and product involvement affected by their relationship status.

Due to the fact that incongruences between a consumer’s self-image and the brand image do not lead to purchase motivations, improvements in marketing control and planning can be achieved by better understanding the effects of self-discrepancies on consumer behavior (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, p. 22). Thus, this paper will have an impact on companies, since the results of this study can be exploited for marketing purposes, such as customer segmentation and brand image design. This study will help marketers to understand how their target customers’ relationships influence their motivation to reach ideal self-images and subsequently have an impact on their brand preferences. Specifically, the results will indicate which type of self-image women refer to when choosing between different brands for cosmetic products. Therefore, another contribution of this paper is to examine if and how a woman’s relationship status influences her brand preference. This might enable companies to distinguish consumer segments by women’s relationship status and address them properly concerning their degree of cosmetic involvement. Subsequently, marketers will be provided with insights for shaping brand images to persuade different segments more accurately to consumers’ self-image aspirations. A high congruence between a consumer’s self-image and perceived brand image enhances the chance that one brand will be chosen over other alternatives. This could present potentials for competitive advantages, especially for industries with fierce competition, like the cosmetics sector.

1.4. Structure

After explaining the underlying models and theories that are used in this study, the research questions and hypotheses will be derived and presented. Subsequently, the methodology of this research will be explained in detail. The study will be conducted in Germany and France, using an online questionnaire to collect the
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necessary data. Subsequently the data analysis procedure will be described, the hypotheses will be tested and the research questions will be answered. A final conclusion will give theoretical and practical implications as well as display limitations of this study and give outlooks for future research.
2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Self-Discrepancies and Self-Image Congruence

In this section Higgin’s (1987) Self-Discrepancy Model and the Self-Image Congruity Hypothesis (Dolich, 1969; Sirgy, 1985) will be presented, as they present the main aspects this paper is based. In fact, the main purpose of this study is to examine the influence of the relationship status on consumers’ self-discrepancies and subsequently with regard to the self-congruity hypothesis its impact on female consumers’ choice of cosmetic brands.

2.1.1. Self-Discrepancy Theory

The Self-Discrepancy Theory is based on three different domains of one’s self or a significant other, as the table below shows (Boldero, Moretti, Bell, & Francis, 2005, p. 139; Higgins, 1987, pp. 320–321).

Table 1: Different Self Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Domains</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Actual Self</td>
<td>Represents attributes of how someone (yourself or another) actually is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideal Self</td>
<td>Represents attributes that someone (yourself or another) would ideally like you to have</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ought Self</td>
<td>Represents attributes that someone (yourself or another) believes you should / ought possess</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to these descriptions, one can see that Higgins (1987) included two different standpoints in his theory, namely the own point of view as well as the point of view of significant others. While the actual self can also be referred as to the self-concept, the ideal self and ought self can be seen as self-guides (Higgins, 1987, p. 321). Literature shows many different terms when referring to these self-domains. In this paper, the term “self-image” will be used to generally talk about any of the three different self-domains, thus including all different perceptions of oneself (Kressmann et al., 2006, p. 955; Sirgy, 1982, p. 288; Sirgy et al., 1997, p. 230).

According to literature, the self-concept comprises many aspects, and can be seen as “the sum total of all that a man can call his – his body, traits, and abilities; his material possessions his family, friends and enemies” (Hall & Lindzey, 1957, p. 467; Kassarjian, 1971, p. 413). How an individual evaluates and defines himself/herself can be reflected in actions such as buying products. People view the goods that they own, would like to own or do not like to own with reference to a symbolic meaning to themselves and to others (Kassarjian, 1971, p. 413).

Self-discrepancies occur when there is a difference between the self-concept and self-guide. Depending on whether the discrepancy between the different notions of the self is related to oneself or a significant other, four different self-discrepancies can be distinguished, leading to different outcomes, as shown in the table below (Boldero et al., 2005, pp. 139–140; Higgins, 1987, p. 321).
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Table 2: Different outcomes of different self-discrepancies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Self-discrepancy</th>
<th>Outcome of self-discrepancy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AI1</td>
<td>actual (own) self vs. ideal (own) self</td>
<td>Discrepancies represent an absence of positive outcomes, leading to dejection-related emotions like disappointment and dissatisfaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI2</td>
<td>actual (own) self vs. ideal (other) self</td>
<td>Discrepancies represent an absence of positive outcomes, leading to dejection-related emotions like shame or embarrassment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO1</td>
<td>actual (own) self vs. ought (own) self</td>
<td>Discrepancies represent a presence of negative outcomes, leading to agitation-related emotions like guilt and self-contempt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AO2</td>
<td>actual (own) self vs. ought (other) self</td>
<td>Discrepancies represent a presence of negative outcomes, leading to agitation-related emotions like being fearful or feeling threatened</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Higgins (1987) people are motivated to reach a state where the self-concept meets the self-guide that is relevant for them personally (Higgins, 1987, p. 321). Research shows, that people try to fill this gap with consumption, by taking purchase decisions to acquire goods or use services that help them to reduce the perceived gap (Dittmar et al., 1996; Pentina et al., 2009; Vartanian, 2012).

2.1.2. Self-image congruence

People tend to buy products and brands that they perceive as more aligned with themselves or with their ideal selves in order to improve their self-concept. Self-enhancement is the process describing that consumers compare their actual selves with the ideal version they want to reach and then evaluate with which brand or product they can achieve this state. This works because consumers transfer the symbolic value of a product or brand on themselves (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, pp. 14–16).

However, people can differ in the extent to which self-guides they possess and want to meet (Higgins, 1987, p. 321). While some consumers rather buy goods matching their ideal self-image, other consumers prefer buying goods matching their actual self-image (Landon, 1974, p. 50). The self-congruity theory explains that consumer behavior is partially determined by the congruence between a consumer’s self-image (e.g. actual self-image, ideal self-image) and product or brand image. Many different terms can be found in consumer behavior literature to describe this match-up concerning a consumer’s self-image, which includes different perceptions of oneself (Kressmann et al., 2006, p. 955; Sirgy et al., 1997, p. 230). Thus, in this paper the term “self-image congruence” will be used to refer to the match a consumer is trying to achieve between the actual or ideal self and the personality of a product or brand.

“Self-image congruence is a significant area of research in consumer behavior/marketing, because it provides the marketing manager with strategic insights concerning positioning and advertising research and may also serve as a basis for market segmentation” (Sirgy et al., 1997, p. 230). Marketing programs can be designed to address target groups more effectively and efficiently when considering the self-concept and self-congruence. Since people evaluate brands and products, perceiving them as desirable for their self-image provides a purchase incentive for them (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, pp. 14–16). Hence, a brand image that is inconsistent with
consumers’ ideal-image can lead to a significant reduction of the potential number of buyers, which is why consumers’ psychological involvement should be considered carefully for brand differentiation (Dolich, 1969, p. 84).

2.2. Involvement

Since purchase decisions and brand choices are not only influenced by self-discrepancies, this section will discuss the aspect of involvement as another important focus of this paper.

Literature provides numerous different views on involvement, many of them derived from ego involvement which centers on the importance of an object to an individual (Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 341). Also Mittal and Lee (1989) point out, that, although the many definitions of involvement are slightly different in nuances, they seem to have one common aspect: "Involvement is the perceived value of a ‘goal-object’ that manifests as interest in that goal-object” (Mittal & Lee, 1989, p. 365). Since this paper analyses involvement and self-discrepancies, the following definition of Engel and Blackwell (1982) which was adopted also by other authors, will be used for this study: “Involvement is said to reflect the extent of personal relevance of the decision to the individual in terms of her basic values, goals, and self-concept” (Mittal & Lee, 1989, p. 364; Zaichkowsky, 1985, p. 342).

Furthermore, literature shows, that not only different types of involvement exist, but also that the extent of a consumer’s involvement can differ according to different antecedents influencing the involvement (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 116; Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, pp. 41–43). Laurent and Kapferer (1985) present a good overview of the extensive literature regarding different views on this topic, such as differences between enduring and situational involvement, emotional and rational involvement, personal and ego involvement. They created the CIP (Customer Involvement Profiles) with reference to the antecedents of involvement. According to them, involvement comprises five facets: The perceived importance of a product, the perceived risk of a product purchase split into risk importance and risk probability, the symbolic or sign value an individual attributes to a product and the hedonic value of a product. They concluded that depending on those five involvement antecedents, the consequences of a consumer’s behavior differ (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, pp. 41–43). Guthrie and Kim (2009) used their CIP model and applied it in the cosmetics industry in order to identify five cosmic involvement types and their brand perceptions.

Brand choices will not be taken frivolously if the product class itself is involving (Mittal und Lee 1989, S. 365). “Depending on their level of involvement, individual consumers differ in the extent of their decision process” (Laurent & Kapferer, 1985, p. 41). Research shows that personal factors like beauty and self-image impact the degree of consumer involvement (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 93). In fact, self-image congruence leads to a positive brand relationship under high rather than low involvement of the consumer (Kressmann et al., 2006, p. 961). Cosmetics display a product class in which consumer involvement is likely to occur, due to their purpose of enhancing a person’s appearance (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 115). Moreover, buying cosmetic
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products is likely to be a high-involvement decision since it has a direct impact on the self-image and looks of a consumer (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 94). With increasing product involvement, consumers tend to look for product information more intensively and may choose the best brand by experimenting with different alternatives (Suh & Youjae, 2006, p. 147).

2.3. Social Network and Relationship Status

There is still more to discover about the reasons why a product category becomes relevant for consumers, for example social networks as determinants of product involvement (Coulter et al., 2003, p. 153; Pentina et al., 2009, p. 161). Since this paper focuses on the influence of social networks on women’s self-discrepancies, involvement and brand preferences, this topic and especially the relationship status will be briefly addressed.

Social Networks are important influences on consumers’ product and brand choices in Western cultures. As stated before, product involvement is able to motivate brand and product choices, but connections between a consumer’s social context and her brand and product involvement need to be considered. Social networks have an impact on how suitable goods (e.g. cosmetic products) are for achieving a consumer’s personal goal (e.g. attractiveness). Conversely, there is a link between social networks and how important this goal is for an individual (Coulter et al., 2003, pp. 153–155). It is possible, that an individual’s partner holds the position of the significant other in an actual:ideal self-discrepancy and the role that the partner plays in an individual’s self-discrepancy system can influence emotions in the relationships (Higgins, 1987, p. 337).

At the same time, the appearance of women is increasingly gaining importance (Coulter et al., 2003, p. 165) and body dissatisfaction can impact a woman’s relationship and self-esteem (Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006, p. 315). Reviewing previous research, Henderson-Kind and Brooks (2009) show that the importance of a person in a woman’s life (e.g. a romantic partner) together with the goal of maximizing a woman’s beauty potential can lead to feeling incomplete and being in constant need of improvement. Women therefore are motivated to use different techniques in order to achieve a status of what is perceived as feminine beauty (Henderson-Kind & Brooks, 2009, p. 134). Many women modify their natural looks and appearance in order to reach beauty ideals (Forbes et al., 2007, pp. 265–266). Research further shows, that especially younger females care about their appearance and they tend to accept the importance of appearance in public more readily in comparison to older women (Coulter et al., 2003, p. 155).

2.4. Brand Personality

Another important notion within this study is brand personality. Brand personality “refers to the set of human characteristics associated with a brand” (Aaker, 1997, p. 347). In fact, her model relates to the ‘Big Five’ human personality dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness. Sincerity refers to the dimension of agreeableness by tapping into the idea of warmth and acceptance. Excitement like extroversions captures sociability, energy and activity. Finally competence
embody security, dependability and responsibility, like conscientiousness does. Although two dimensions of sophistication and ruggedness differ from the ‘Big Five’, they still are able to tap into personality dimensions that individuals’ might not necessarily have but desire (Aaker, 1997, p. 353).

Research shows that models which measure aspects of customer-brand relationships are often related to similar human personality characteristics (Schlobohm, Zulauf, & Wagner, 2016, pp. 343–348). Therefore, the model of Aaker (1997) helps to uncover the opinion of consumers about brands by referring to human-like personality traits. Yet, brand personality is not to be confused with brand attitude, which refers to consumers’ positive or negative feelings towards a brand (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 115). Aaker (1997) developed a Brand Personality Framework that comprises five dimensions of brand personality, which are described by 15 personality characteristics, as can be seen in the figure below.

**Figure 1:** Brand Personality Framework (Aaker, 1997, p. 352)

Assessing the personality of a brand enables marketers to pinpoint how consumers distinguish a particular brand from the competition. In fact, people might have a propensity to buy brands that either reflect their own personality or brands that display characteristics they want to portray themselves (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, pp. 115–116). The higher the congruence between the personal traits that describe a consumers’ actual or ideal self and the traits describing a brand, the higher the brand preference (Aaker, 1997, p. 348; Schlobohm et al., 2016, pp. 343–348; Sirgy, 1982, p. 291). As a result, brand personality enables marketers to better understand how consumers perceive brands and how personal factors contribute to brand choice and preferences (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 118).
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3. Literature Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Author(s) &amp; Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Content and Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand personality</td>
<td>Aaker, J. L.</td>
<td>Dimensions of Brand Personality</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing Research 34 (3), pp. 347-356</td>
<td>Compared to the research for human personality dimensions, a parallel study for the dimensions of brand personalities is conducted. <strong>Outcome:</strong> The brand personality framework is created to measure the five brand personality dimensions (Sincerity, Excitement, Competence, Sophistication, and Ruggedness) according to 15 personality traits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Laurent, G., &amp;</td>
<td>Measuring Consumer Involvement Profiles</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing Research, 22(1), pp. 41-53</td>
<td>A different method of measuring involvement considering several facets is suggested. <strong>Outcome:</strong> The Consumer Involvement Profiles represent a new measuring of involvement in form of profiles, rather than a single involvement, based on the antecedents of involvement (e.g., the product's pleasure value, the product's sign or symbolic value, risk importance, and probability of purchase error).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Coulter, R. A.,</td>
<td>Rethinking the Origins of Involvement and Brand Commitment: Insights from Postsocialist Central Europe</td>
<td><em>Journal of Consumer Research</em>, 30(2), pp. 151–169</td>
<td>Determinants of women’s involvement regarding brand commitment of cosmetic products are investigated in Central European countries that change from socialism to capitalism. <strong>Outcome:</strong> Prominent political-cultural discourses, cultural intermediaries, social influences, and consumers’ life themes and projects collectively enhance product involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Mittal, B., &amp;</td>
<td>A causal model of consumer involvement</td>
<td><em>Journal of Economic Psychology</em>, 10(3), pp. 363–389</td>
<td>A theoretical framework is proposed in order to unify diverse approaches of the concept of involvement. <strong>Outcome:</strong> A new measurement for different forms and sources of involvement is suggested, referring separately to product and brand involvement.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement</th>
<th>Guthrie, M. F., &amp; Kim, H.-S. (2009)</th>
<th>The relationship between consumer involvement and brand perceptions of female cosmetic consumers</th>
<th><em>Journal of Brand Management, 17</em>(2), pp. 114–133</th>
<th>Using the Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) CIP, cosmetic involvement of consumers and their brand preferences are examined. <strong>Outcome:</strong> Five cosmetic consumer types are identified and their perceptions for cosmetic brands are compared.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>Zaichkowsky, J. L. (1985)</td>
<td>Measuring the Involvement Construct</td>
<td><em>Journal of Consumer Research, 12</em>(3), pp. 341</td>
<td>The aim of the study was the development of a scale to measure the construct of involvement.. <strong>Outcome:</strong> A bipolar adjective scale was designed to capture product involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discrepancy</td>
<td>Higgins, E. Tory (1987)</td>
<td>Self-discrepancy. A theory relating self and affect</td>
<td>Psychological Review 94(3), pp. 319–340</td>
<td>A theory is presented in order to show how different self-discrepancy types lead to different emotional vulnerabilities. <strong>Outcome:</strong> While a discrepancy of the actual and ideal self presents an absence positive outcomes that leads to dejection-related emotions (like disappointment, dissatisfaction, sadness), a discrepancy of the actual and ought-self displays a presence of negative outcomes that leads to agitation-related emotions (like fear, threat, restlessness).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discrepancy</td>
<td>Boldero, Jennifer M.; Moretti, Marlene M.; Bell, Richard C.; Francis, Jillian J. (2005)</td>
<td>Self-discrepancies and negative affect: A primer on when to look for specificity, and how to find it</td>
<td><em>Australian Journal of Psychology, 57</em>(3), pp. 139–147</td>
<td>Assumptions regarding the effect of specific self-discrepancy types on different types of negative emotions are examined. Different methods for measurements of self-discrepancies are considered. <strong>Outcome:</strong> Discrepancies regarding the actual:ideal-self and actual:ought-self comprise a generalized discrepancy component and thus lead to correlating negative feelings. Yet they also have specific components leading to distinct negative feelings. Discrepancies assessed by using an adjective checklist have similar predictive ability like those assessed by the idiographic Selves Questionnaire.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Self-discrepancy</th>
<th>Dittmar, H., Beattie, J., &amp; Friese, S. (1996)</th>
<th>Objects, decision considerations and self-image in men's and women's impulse purchases</th>
<th>Acta Psychologica, 93(1-3), pp. 187–206</th>
<th>A social psychological model is proposed, predicting that people take impulsive purchase decisions for goods with symbols of personal and social identity. <strong>Outcome:</strong> Some goods are more likely to be bought on impulse than others and purchase considerations refer to consumer’s actual and ideal self-perception. Self-discrepancies have an importance for determining impulse buying behavior.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-discrepancy</td>
<td>Pentina, I., Taylor, D. G., &amp; Voelker, T. A. (2009)</td>
<td>The roles of self-discrepancy and social support in young females' decisions to undergo cosmetic procedures</td>
<td>Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 8(4), pp. 149–165</td>
<td>It is examined how self-discrepancies influence young females’ motivation for cosmetic procedures and how their social context affects this decision. <strong>Outcome:</strong> Self-discrepancies enhance women’s motivation to undergo cosmetic procedures. However, support from the family reduces the effect of perceived self-discrepancies, while social support from friends enhances this effect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-discrepancy</td>
<td>Vartanian, L. R. (2012)</td>
<td>Self-Discrepancy Theory and Body Image</td>
<td>Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance (pp. 711–717)</td>
<td>The relationship between self-discrepancies and body image has been examined. <strong>Outcome:</strong> Self-discrepancies play an important role in this context and can negatively impact individuals’ body satisfaction. The can furthermore influence appearance-related behaviors (e.g., restricted food intake and cosmetic surgery).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influences of consumers’ social context on brand preferences: How relationship status affects women’s self-discrepancies, cosmetic involvement and brand choice

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-image congruence</td>
<td>Dolich, I. J. (1969)</td>
<td>Congruence Relationships between Self Images and Product Brands</td>
<td>Journal of Marketing Research, 6(1), pp. 80-84</td>
<td>It is explored if products are symbols which stand in a congruent relationship with an individual’s self-concept perceived and organized into congruent relations with the self-concept. Outcome: People have a tendency to relate brand symbols to their self-images. Brand-images that are more congruent with people’s self-images have a greater preference.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-image congruence</td>
<td>Graeff, T. R. (1996)</td>
<td>Using promotional messages to manage the effects of brand and self-image on brand evaluations</td>
<td><em>Journal of Consumer Marketing</em>, 13(3), pp. 4–18</td>
<td>The effects of brand image on consumers’ brand evaluations are analyzed. Outcome: Marketers should shape brand image as it is presented how self-image congruence with the perceived brand image display favorable advantages for the own brand.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|

Since body dissatisfaction is a main cause women are suffering from, self-compassion meditation is investigated as a useful and cost-effective means of improving body image in adult women.

**Outcome:**
Body dissatisfaction can be significantly decreased by using self-compassion mediation.
4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

4.1. Limitations of the Research Scope

This study focuses on women only since they suffer more from body dissatisfaction due to self-discrepancies between their actual and ideal self than men (Vartanian, 2012, p. 714). Moreover, since cosmetic products provide a way of self-enhancement that enables women to reach beauty ideals by modifying their appearance (Craik, 2003, p. 154), it is reasonable that this study is conducted within the cosmetics industry.

As explained before, consumers can differ in their preference for either buying goods matching their ideal or actual self-image (Higgins, 1987, p. 321; Landon, 1974, p. 50). Some authors see the ideal self as the best predictor of purchase behavior since products are used to reach individual aspirations (Onkvisit und Shaw 1987, S. 18). Also Graeff (1996) suggests that the ideal self could be considered as more important than the actual self for marketers when trying to achieve self-congruence, especially for goods that are consumed in order to impress others (Graeff, 1996, p. 15). Hence, this assumption can be applied to cosmetic products, since they are used to transmit a positive self-presentation to the outside (Craik, 2003, p. 154).

Controversially, Guthrie and Kim (2009) found in their research, that the top reasons why women use cosmetics rather refer to their inner self-awareness than needing to impress others (Guthrie / Kim 2009, p. 115). This might lead to the conclusion, that the actual:ideal (own) discrepancies are more important than actual:ideal (other) discrepancies. However, since the author of this study is interested in exploring the role of the relationship status as a social network influence on cosmetic buying behavior, actual:ideal self-discrepancies under both points of view will be considered.

In addition, it should not be forgotten that there also exists the dimension of the ought-self (Higgins, 1987, p. 321). However, it seems that if a discrepancy between two types of self-dimensions influence women’s cosmetic purchase choices with the goal to enhance their appearance, it is likely that this discrepancy involves rather the actual and ideal self than the dimension of the ought-self. The reasons for this assumption are explained below.

According to Henderson-King and Brooks (2009), women internalize the objectifying experiences of female bodies they encounter during interactions in their social network. This leads to women relating to their bodies as objects and furthermore to monitoring their appearance more closely. Hence, they are more susceptible for body shame (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009, p. 133). From the previous chapter it can be recalled that feelings of shame are dejection-related emotions, which result from actual:ideal self-discrepancies and not from actual:ought self-discrepancies (Higgins, 1987, 321; 334). Further literature also shows that feeling ashamed enhances the desire to match the personal appearance and self-identity to an ideal one (Askegaard, Gertsen, & Langer, 2002, p. 798) and that body dissatisfaction results from actual-ideal discrepancies when women perceive
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themselves as less attractive than their ideal (Vartanian, 2012, p. 713). Consumers strive to reach an ideal self in case of high social pressure, for example to conform to ideal body types, whereas aspirations to reach the ought self are due to a sense of duty and obligation (Swann & Schroeder, 1995, p. 1312). Furthermore, Pentina et al. (2009) found support for their hypotheses that actual:ideal self-discrepancies are positively associated with women’s propensity towards cosmetic procedures, while actual:ought discrepancies have negative associations towards this (Pentina et al., 2009, p. 157). Thus, it can be assumed that these findings regarding cosmetic procedures might be true for cosmetic purchase behavior as well. As a result and also due to the limited scope of this study, the focus will lie only on two out of the four self-discrepancies, namely actual:ideal (own) and actual:ideal (other) discrepancies.

4.2. Development of Research Questions and Hypotheses

In this section, the research questions and hypotheses that have been developed based on the theoretical literature background will be presented. Moreover, the expected contribution that this paper hopes to achieve by answering to those questions will be stated.

Many studies have been conducted regarding the effects of self-discrepancies on purchase behavior and health issues (Dittmar et al., 1996; Guthrie & Kim, 2009; Pentina et al., 2009; Veale, Kinderman, Riley, & Lambrou, 2003), while other studies examined the influence of product involvement on brand preferences and customer satisfaction (Guthrie & Kim, 2009; Kressmann et al., 2006; Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy, & Coote, 2007). Previous research already indicates that the degree of consumer involvement can be impacted by personal factors such as beauty and self-image (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 93). However, origins of product involvement should be further explored, considering social networks as possible determinants since so far little empirical evidence of this exists (Coulter et al., 2003, pp. 152–153).

Until now, it has never been analyzed together how self-discrepancies and involvement affect consumers’ brand preferences, taking into account possible influences from consumer’s social network, especially the relationship status. Considering this as well as the theoretical background in the above chapter, the following research questions and hypotheses arise:

**RQ1: What role does the relationship status of consumers play for actual:ideal (own/other) self-discrepancies and product involvement?**

By answering this question, this paper wants to contribute further to existing literature by examining the effects of consumers’ social context on their self-discrepancies as well as product involvement, while explicitly focusing on the relationship status rather than friends and family bonds. As a further contribution, marketers will gain insight in the importance of their target audience’s relationship status on their self-ideals. Moreover, companies could be enabled to address different consumer segments properly, distinguished by their relationship status, according to their cosmetic involvement level.
The following hypotheses are based on the assumptions that the type of relationship influences women’s ideals and how they perceive themselves. Swann and Schroeder (1995, p. 1315) say that people who are dating believe that they must obtain their partner’s affections in order to ensure the future of a relationship, while married people do not have to date anymore and make efforts in bringing their partners to appreciate their actual selves (Swann & Schroeder, p. 1315). In other words, it seems as if for people in a committed relationship the own perspective of oneself is more important, while for singles and people who are not in a committed relationship the perspective of how oneself is seen by another has more impact. Hence, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

- **H1**: The relationship status influences whether women have higher actual:ideal (own) or actual:ideal (other) self-discrepancies.
  - **H1a**: Single women show higher actual:ideal (other) self-discrepancies than actual:ideal (own) self-discrepancies.
  - **H1b**: Women in a relationship show higher actual:ideal (own) self-discrepancies than actual:ideal (other) self-discrepancies.

However, it might be possible that for single women without a committed partner to whom they could refer to as a significant “other”, their own standpoint is more present. The reasoning underlying this personal assumption is that singles might be more aware of their own ideals than the ideals of others. As a consequence, it could be that the relationship displays a different influence status on self-discrepancies. Hence, to test the validity of H1, two further sub hypotheses are being tested as follows:

- **H1c**: Single women show higher actual:ideal (own) self-discrepancies than actual:ideal (other) self-discrepancies.
- **H1d**: Women in a relationship show higher actual:ideal (other) self-discrepancies than actual:ideal (own) self-discrepancies.

As a result, H1 can be supported, if either H1a as well as H1b are supported while H1c and H1d are rejected or H1a and H1b are rejected while H1c and H1d are supported. If there is no common support or rejection between H1a and H1b as well as respectively a controversial common rejection or support of H1c and H1d, there is no influence of the relationship status on the type of ideal self (own/other) that leads to higher discrepancies. It would rather show that there is no link between the relationship status and extent of different self-discrepancies of an individual, but that discrepancies regarding a certain standpoint (own/other) are generally higher, regardless of the relationship status.

Furthermore, it should be recalled that product involvement also influences purchase behavior and brand preference (Suh & Youjae, 2006, p. 145) and this paper wants to contribute to further reveal origins of product involvement. As stated before, unlike people in a committed relationship, dating people believe they should
obtain their partner’s affection (Swann & Schroeder, 1995, p. 1315). Therefore, the following hypothesis can be assumed:

- **H2**: Single women have a higher level of cosmetic product involvement than women in a relationship.

At the same time, involvement represents a consumer’s motivational state and centers on the importance of an object to an individual (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 115; Zaichkowsky, 1985, pp. 341–342), which can be impacted by personal factors such as self-image (Blackwell et al., 2006, p. 93). Hence, two more hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

- **H3**: The higher the gap between the consumer’s actual self and ideal (own) self, the higher the consumer’s involvement.
- **H4**: The higher the gap between the consumer’s actual self and ideal (other) self, the higher the consumer’s involvement.

Due to the purpose of this paper, interactions and relations of the results for these two hypotheses with the consumer’s relationship status will be examined when conducting the data analysis.

**RQ2: What is the moderating role of the relationship status on consumers’ brand preferences?**

Since incongruences between a consumer’s self-concept and the brand image lead to missing motivation for purchases, a better understanding of the self-concept’s influence on consumer behavior can contribute to improvements in marketing control and planning (Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, p. 22).

One of the main contributions of this study is to explore if a woman’s relationship status impacts her brand preference. The same assumptions from Swann and Schroeder (1995) that were used to formulate the hypotheses for RQ1 will be applied also in this context of brand preference (Swann & Schroeder, 1995, p. 1315), since consumers differ in their aspirations to meet certain self-images (Higgins, 1987, p. 321; Landon, 1974, p. 50).

Therefore, the following hypothesis will be tested:

- **H5**: Single women refer to a different type of self (either actual self, ideal (own) self or ideal (other self)) when choosing a brand than women in a relationship.

Subsequently, it makes sense to discover how the relationship status influences female consumers’ brand preferences. Therefore, and in order to test the validity of H5, the following sub hypotheses will be tested:

- **H5a**: Single women prefer brands that they perceive as closer to their ideal (own) self than another type of self.
- **H5b**: Women in a relationship prefer brands that they perceive as closer to their ideal (own) self than another type of self.
- **H5c**: Single women prefer brands that they perceive as closer to their ideal (other) self than another type of self.
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-F-: Women in a relationship prefer brands that they perceive as closer to their ideal (other) self than another type of self.

As stated earlier, literature shows that although the ideal self is seen as the best forecaster of product choice (Graeff, 1996, p. 15; Onkvisit & Shaw, 1987, p. 18), it is still possible that consumers choose to buy products that match their actual self (Higgins, 1987, p. 321; Landon, 1974, p. 50). Therefore, two more sub hypotheses will be tested:

  - **H5e**: Single women prefer brands that they perceive as closer to their actual self.
  - **H5f**: Women in a relationship prefer brands that they perceive as closer to their actual self.

In order for H5 to be supported, only two of the six sub hypotheses must be supported, given that there exists no common support between H5a and H5b, between H5c and H5d as well as between H5e and H5f.

The results will show whether women react differently in their brand decisions according to their relationship status. In particular, this study will show which type of self-image women refer to regarding their brand preferences for cosmetic products and how women can be distinguished in their brand choices according to their relationship status. Thus, this will help companies in their decision whether or not to consider consumers’ relationship status as a potential segmentation criterion and whether or not to address consumers of different relationship statuses differently. Moreover, this study will display the distance between female consumers’ brand perception and perceptions of their different types of selves, as well as whether this differs according to their relationship status. Hence, this study will provide marketers with a clue for shaping brand images in a way that persuades different target groups more effectively according to their aspirations, which can lead to competitive advantages in the highly competitive industry of cosmetics. The higher the match between the brand and the type of self a consumer refers to, the more likely it is that a certain brand will be chosen over its competitors.

**RQ3**: – How do these results differ by country of origin and age of the consumers?

As stated earlier, especially younger females care about their appearance (Coulter et al., 2003, p. 155). Therefore, a hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

  - **H6**: Younger women show a higher involvement with cosmetic products.

Giving answers to this question will help marketers to learn how to shape and possibly differentiate brand personalities according to consumers’ origin and age. Additionally, companies can derive how to allocate marketing efforts for different target segments according to different levels of product involvement.

**RQ4**: What values should a cosmetic brand transmit to consumers to help them reach their attempted identities?

Besides testing the hypotheses from above, as side effect the results of this study will discover if consumers of different relationship statuses are looking for different brand personality traits, regardless of whether they have
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the desire to purchase brands reflecting their actual, ideal (own) or ideal (other) self. As a further result, this study will contribute to companies’ understanding of the personality traits that consumers are looking for in a brand and help them to distinguish their brands’ images accordingly.
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5. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview about the methods used within this study and to provide a better understanding of the following data analysis. It comprises a description of the research design, the sample and target profile of the respondents and the questionnaire development and subsequent measures for the data analysis.

5.1. Research Design

The main purpose of this study is to analyze how the relationship status influences women’s self-discrepancies as well as product involvement and subsequently their brand choice for cosmetic products, considering that brand preference is based on self-image congruence. Additionally, differences between consumers according to the respondents’ age and nationality will be explored and desired personality characteristics a brand should transmit to consumers will be displayed.

Since there is no secondary data available that can be used to analyze the before stated research questions, it is necessary to collect primary data. The data collection will be conducted as a quantitative study by using an online questionnaire. This survey will be designed using the software Sphinx and will be distributed online via web platforms and personal connections in Germany and France, aiming at gathering 200 responses from each country.

5.2. Sample and Target Profile of Respondents

Four main criteria are relevant for the sample and target profile of respondents, namely gender, age, nationality as well as relationship status since this will be the criteria that will divide the respondents into two different subgroups. The target segment will be composed by women from Germany and France starting from 18 years old.

As stated before, this study focuses on women only as they are affected more by self-discrepancies regarding body dissatisfaction than men (Vartanian, 2012, p. 714). Moreover, this research is carried out within the cosmetic sector and women are more likely than men to fill self-discrepancy gaps by impulsively purchasing products related to appearance and emotional aspects of the self, such as clothes and cosmetics (Dittmar et al., 1996, p. 191).

The survey aims to gather data from women starting at the age of 18 years old. Especially young women accept the importance of public appearance and thus tend to care more about their looks (Coulter et al., 2003, p. 155). Yet, females under 18 will not be considered since their purchase behavior can be influenced by their parents (Dittmar, 2005; Te'eni-Harari & Hornik, 2010, p. 499) while this study aims to discover the influence of the respondents’ relationship status.
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The importance of appearance is especially high in Western cultures and hence body dissatisfaction is more present there (Vartanian, 2012, p. 714). Since previous studies have mostly been conducted in the US, UK and some others in Asia, this study is therefore interested in exploring this topic in different countries. Germany and France are the largest markets for cosmetics and personal care products in Europe, with a retail value market size of respectively € 14.92 mn and € 12.98 mn in 2015 (Euromonitor 2016). Hence, the study will be carried out in those two countries. Respondents will be considered as “Germans” when they were either born or are living in Germany and likewise they will be considered as “French” when were either born or are living in France.

Finally, in order to test the formulated hypotheses, the respondents will be divided into two groups – those who are single and/or dating and those who are in a type of committed partnership or relationship with the possibility of a partner to whom they can refer to as a significant “other”.

5.3. Questionnaire Development

The aim of the questionnaire is to gather data about:

- the respondent’s relationship status in order to later separate them into two profile segments
- the respondent’s AI1 level (self-discrepancy between actual:ideal (own) self)
- the respondent’s AI2 level (self-discrepancy between actual:ideal (other) self)
- the respondent’s product involvement
- the personality attributes the respondent assigns to her preferred cosmetic brand(s) selected from a choice of ten different brands

The questionnaire will therefore consist of four different main parts. The first part will collect data on how respondents perceive their actual self, ideal (own) self and ideal (other self). Subsequently, the respondents’ product involvement will be assessed in a second part. A third part will be used to present the respondents with a choice of different cosmetic brands and the request to let them describe the personality of their most preferred one. The last part will be included to collect demographic data about the respondents, including their relationship status. The survey will be pretested and if necessary adapted regarding length, wording and possible other difficulties that may arise in the pretest.

5.3.1. Determining Self-Discrepancies and Brand Personalities

To measure self-disparities, Higgins (1987) originally developed the Selves Questionnaire which asks respondents to spontaneously come up with 10 attributes on their own to describe their different selves. However, studies show that self-disparities can also be assessed when using adjective rating lists and achieve similar results (Boldero et al., 2005, pp. 140–141). The first approach could result in difficulties regarding the data analysis when it comes to comparing different selves of one respondent, several respondents with each other and a comparison between respondents’ selves and brand perceptions, since it is likely that their own choice of
attributes varies considerably. Using an adjective rating list seems to solve this problem, since the respondents would use the same set of attributes to describe their different selves and hence enable a better comparison, yet usually such lists with 60 or more attributes are quite long.

As presented earlier, Aaker (1997) developed a Brand Personality Framework comprising five dimensions that refer to human-like personality traits (Aaker, 1997, p. 352; Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 115). This model is widely used to analyze self-image congruence between consumers’ self-perception of their actual and ideal selves and brand personality (Aaker, 1997, p. 348; Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 115; Sirgy, 1982, p. 291). Therefore, the Brand Personality Framework seems to be an appropriate method for the purpose of this study in collecting data regarding both, self-discrepancies as well as brand personality regarding consumers’ aspiration to achieve self-image congruence. Additionally, using the same model for assessing the different selves of the respondents and their perception of brand personalities contributes to the uniformity and simplicity of the questionnaire design and thus enables respondents to answer more easily.

Respondents will be asked to rate the 15 brand personality trait characteristics of Aaker's (1997) framework on a five point Likert scale. The attributes will be rated four times. This is necessary to capture the respondents’ actual self, ideal (own) self, ideal (other) self as well as the personality of their preferred brand, in order to explore to which of the different selves the brand relates the most according to the respondent’s perception. The figure below displays as an example how Aaker's (1997) framework will be integrated in the questionnaire design.

*Figure 2: Questionnaire Integration of Aaker's brand personality measure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality attributes that reflect the [actual self]</th>
<th>Likert scale: 1 – Does not apply at all to 5 – Applies fully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sincerity</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down-to-earth</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesome</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheerful</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Excitement</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daring</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirited</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imaginative</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up-to-date</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Competence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliable</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sophistication</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper class</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charming</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ruggedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoorsy</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tough</td>
<td>●</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.2. Selecting of cosmetic brands

The questionnaire will present respondents with a choice of ten different cosmetic brands and then ask them to rank them according to their purchase choice preferences. In order to enhance a comparison between the two countries for the analyzing the results, one criterion for the selection of the ten brands is that consumers can purchase them in Germany as well as in France.

In order to provide respondents with an equal choice of luxury and mass-market cosmetic brands, five brands out of each group were chosen. The Euromonitor International database has been used as a basis for the brand selection as it provides a ranking according to brand shares for both, mass and luxury beauty and personal care brands. To ensure that the respondents are familiar with as many of the selected brands as possible, two different brand ranking lists have been used when choosing the five brands of each group (Brand Finance; L2, 2015). The brands that were ranked among the highest in both countries have been selected. However, high ranked brands have been excluded from the selection, if these brands focus on men as a target group or do not achieve high rankings in rating lists. The following figure displays the selected ten alternatives of cosmetic brands:

**Figure 3: Selected Cosmetic Brands for Questionnaire**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mass Cosmetic Brands</th>
<th>Luxury Cosmetic Brands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>L’Oréal Paris</td>
<td>Lancôme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nivea</td>
<td>Chanel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garnier</td>
<td>Vichy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maybelline Jade</td>
<td>Clinique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yves Rocher</td>
<td>La Roche-Possay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3.3. Determining respondents’ cosmetic involvement

To measure the product involvement, the same approach used by Guthrie and Kim (2009) can be applied. They used Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) CIP in combination with a five point Likert scale to let respondents agree or disagree with 16 different statements referring to their cosmetic involvement. The figure below displays an example of how one of the five involvement antecedents according to the CIP model will be integrated in the questionnaire design.

**Figure 4: Questionnaire Integration of the CIP** (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 121; Kapferer & Laurent, 1993, p. 349)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pleasure</th>
<th>Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 - Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I really enjoy buying cosmetics</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever I buy cosmetics, it’s like giving myself a present.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To me, cosmetics are quite a pleasure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3.4. Determining respondents’ relationship status

As stated before, it is necessary to split the respondents into two different profile groups for testing the formulated hypotheses. While one group will be composed of respondents who are single and/or dating, the other group will be composed of respondents who are in a type of committed partnership or relationship. However, since this is a sensitive topic, the formulations of the questions within the survey must be considered carefully.

According to how respondents answer the question regarding their relationship status in the survey, they will become part of one of the two groups. Respondents will be considered as “Singles” when they do not have a partner, yet also women who are dating but do not live in form of a committed partnership will also be included in this group. On the other side, respondents will be considered as “Women in a partnership” if they indicate that they are either married, in a legal partnership or similar form of committed partnership.

5.4. Data Analysis

By measuring self-discrepancies and self-image congruence based on Aaker's (1997) framework with a five point Likert scale as described before, it is possible to mathematically compute a discrepancy score for all 15 personality trait characteristics. Then an average of these scores can be calculated across all personality characteristics for each respondent and mean scores can be derived from the 15 items to measure each of the five brand personality dimensions (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, pp. 119–120; Kressmann et al., 2006, p. 959; Sirgy et al., 1997, p. 230). It is remarked, since two dimensions of the framework differ from the “Big Five” dimensions of human personality, finding support for self-image congruence effects with this model might therefore be weak. As a consequence it is important to notice that, in order to properly measure self-image congruence effects for the actual and ideal selves with Aaker's (1997) model, it is necessary to examine the five personality dimensions rather than focus on a match between all 15 personality traits (Aaker, 1997, p. 353).

In addition, according to Guthrie and Kim (2009) confirmatory factor analyses can be successfully applied to measure the respondents’ involvement along Laurent and Kapferer's (1985) CIP (Guthrie & Kim, 2009, p. 120). Splitting the respondents into the two previously described groups allows a comparison between different relationship statuses and provides the basis for testing the formulated hypotheses.

The subject’s different self-image ratings for her actual self, ideal (own) self and ideal (other) self can be compared among each other. The differences spotted will thus help to test H1, while confirmatory factor analyses will enable a testing of H2, H3 and H4. As a consequence, responses to the first research question can be provided.

As a next step, self-image ratings can further be compared with the subject’s brand personality rating and thus lead to answers for the second research question. It will be visible which of the three different self-images the
perceived personality of the subject’s preferred brand is closest to, or in other words, which of the respondent’s selves achieves the highest self-image congruence with her preferred brand.

Finally, comparing results between respondents of different age allows testing H4 and answering to the third research question, while looking at the Likert ratings for the preferred brands in general will help to respond to the fourth research question.

6. Work plan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>now – 20.10.16</td>
<td>Exposé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now – 31.10.16</td>
<td>Research design (programming in Sphinx &amp; pretest)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11.16 – 30.11.16</td>
<td>Field research – running &amp; distributing the online survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.11.16 – 30.11.16</td>
<td>Further work and define the Methodology while the survey is in the field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.12.16 – 18.12.16</td>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.12.16 – deadline</td>
<td>Writing Results and Conclusion - Finalizing the thesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Influences of consumers’ social context on brand preferences: How relationship status affects women’s self-discrepancies, cosmetic involvement and brand choice

7. References


Influences of consumers' social context on brand preferences: How relationship status affects women's self-discrepancies, cosmetic involvement and brand choice


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