**Collaboration between East and West: Influence of consumer dialectical self on attitude towards co-brand personality traits**

**Abstract**

**Purpose** – With rising globalization, Western and Eastern brands are increasingly collaborating and co-branding. Drawing on the theory of dialectical self that captures the degree of cognitive tendency to tolerate conflicts, inconsistencies, and ambiguities in self-concept, this paper investigates the effect of consumer dialectical self on co-branding that encompasses Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Two studies were conducted using Chinese participants to examine the effects of the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation under single-and dual-personality conditions and to explore the mediating role of ideal social self-congruence and the moderating role of product type (high vs. low conspicuous).

**Findings** – The findings suggest, thatcounterintuitive to the received wisdom,thedialectical self negatively influences one’s attitude toward a co-brand in the dual-personality condition only. Further, ideal social self-congruence mediates the relationship between the dialectical self and dual-personality co-brand evaluation in the high conspicuous product condition only.

**Practical implications** – Important implications are offered to international marketing managers for managing the dialectical self that lead to positive co-brand evaluations. Moreover, managers should highlight ideal social self-congruence for co-branding success for particular product types.

**Originality –** This paper examines co-branding from a novel perspective of consumer dialectical self and shows the pivotal role it plays when brands carry varying cultural traits engage in co-branding. By identifying the role of the dialectical self and the important mediator and moderator, the paper fulfils an important gap in co-branding literature and offers key implications.

**Keywords –** Co-branding, dialectical self, brand personality, congruency, China

**1. Introduction**

Co-branding is an important brand alliance strategy that involves a partnership between two brands to develop a single product or service that simultaneously uses both brand names and benefits from their brand equity (Grossman and Till, 1998). This allows companies to build unique brand images and brand awareness (Small *et al.*, 2007). Since both brands are able to transfer their positive associations to the co-branded products, co-branding offers a win-win situation for both partners (Ganesh Hariharan *et al.*, 2012) and gain greater marketplace exposure to capitalize on brand value (Leuthesser *et al.*, 2003).

 Globalization provides opportunities for collaborative partnership between brands with distinct cultural traits (Cleveland *et al.,* 2016). Such interconnectedness and interdependence have created an integrated environment where distinct cultural traits (e.g., East and West) could simultaneously co-exist in the same product (Chiu *et al.*, 2009). As the world’s second largest economy, an increasing number of global Western brands are entering the Chinese market (Nguyen *et al.,* 2016); for example, many Western automakers have entered this market in the last two decades while engaging in co-branding alliances with Chinese firms. Chevrolet, for instance, has emphasized the peaceful, mild-mannered (e.g., the Malibu vehicle version) personalities in the Chinese market. Similarly, Buick (Encore vehicle version) focused on promoting ruggedness and outdoorsy brand personality traits. Global Western brands face a strategic choice regarding how consumers perceive the co-existence of Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits in a co-brand. Such co-existence of distinct cultural brand personality traits may translate into a dialectic process, where individuals may identify with both global and local culture (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007).

Inconsistencies between two parent brands’ personality traits is often perceived as detrimental to the co-brand (Bajac *et al.*, 2018; Ahn and Sung, 2012). Research in the Western context in particular has shown that inconsistencies cause discomfort among consumers, leading them to engage in activities to directly resolve the inconsistencies (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 1999) or avoid purchases in the domain of inconsistency (Steele, 1998) to alleviate the negative state. However, East Asians do not demonstrate similar inconsistency reduction behaviour (Heine and Lehman, 1997; Mandel *et al.*, 2017). For instance, Markus and Kitayama (1991) argue that East Asians possess a holistic view of the self which involves several social hierarchy related conflicts. They further suggest that East Asians are better equipped to deal with conflicts between the needs of the group and the self through the process of restricting the expression of the individual self. East Asians are observed to be more confident in processing contradictory information (DeMotta *et al.*, 2016); and greater comfort in dealing with the tension or conflict they experience in a multicultural environment (Peng and Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2009). Such East-West cultural differences in attitude toward inconsistencies may get reflected in one’s *dialectical self,* which refers to the degree of cognitive tendency to tolerate conflicts, inconsistencies, and ambiguities in their self-concept (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2004). More importantly, the literature postulates that a simultaneous presentation of two cultures in the same product draws consumers’ attention to the stereotypical images of the respective culture hence enlarges the perceived distance between the two cultures (Chiu *et al.*, 2009).

We posit that a co-brand with dual-personality traits will trigger the consumer’s dialectical self, which will influence their attitudes toward the co-brand. We further posit that this relationship will be mediated by consumers’ ideal-social self-congruence. Our view is grounded in theories relating to attitude-behavior discrepancies (Schwartz and Tessler, 1972; Park and Lin, 2018). Existing research suggests that East Asians who define themselves in dialectical terms are sensitive to attitude-behavior discrepancy and recognize self-deficiencies (Chen *et al.*, 2013). One’s self-concept is susceptible to the social environment (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). Specifically, consumers may constantly adjust their behaviors to match how they would like others to perceive them (ideal social self) in different social settings.

Furthermore, Han and Shavitt (1994) and Zhang (2010) suggest that, in contrast to private products, public and conspicuous products provide more opportunities for East Asian and Western cultural inconsistencies to be manifested. Given the attitudinal differences between East-West toward inconsistencies in their views of selves, which is captured by the dialectical self (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2004), our research is motivated by the understanding of the boundary conditions for the effects of the dialectical self to be significant in the case of co-branding. In view of these gaps in the current international branding literature, this paper aims to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How does the dialectical self influence the evaluations of a co-brand that carries Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits among East Asian consumers?

RQ2: When a co-brand triggers East Asian consumers’ dialectical self, does ideal social self-congruence mediate the co-brand evaluation?

RQ3: How do such mediated effects differ between public and high conspicuous products and private and low conspicuous products?

Our research contributes to the international branding literature in four ways. First, it addresses an important research gap in the co-branding literature that inconsistencies between two parent brands’ personality traits may not always be perceived as detrimental to co-brands. Incorporating the novel perspective of *consumer dialectical self* (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2009), we demonstrate that the knowledge of consumer dialectical self is valuable to further understand consumers’ attitudes toward co-brands that involve varying cultural brand personality traits. Second, our research shows how *ideal social self-congruence* acts as the underlying mechanism that explains the effects of consumers’ dialectical self on co-brand evaluations. Third, our research highlights how *product type* moderates the mediating effect of ideal social self-cogruence on the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluations. Finally, our research offer important guidelines to managers regarding their partner selections and the management of communications at the product category level.

To address the research questions, we first review the pertinent literature of co-branding and the dialectical self and articulate theoretically derived hypotheses that propose the mediating role of ideal social self-congruence and the moderating role played by product type. Subsequent to that, we present two studies that capture these relationships. Finally, we discuss several key theoretical and practical implications, describe our research limitations, and propose future research directions.

**2. Theoretical background and hypotheses**

*2.1 Co-brand personality*

The reflection of a brand image through its personality is important in international marketing strategy (Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998). Consumers often recognize a brand as having human-like personality characteristics (Aaker, 1997) as well as being carriers of cultural traits (Aaker *et al.*, 2001; Richins, 1994). Brand personality reflects the needs and values held by consumers within a culture (McCracken, 1986). Aaker (1997) identifies five universal personality dimensions across different cultures: *sincerity* (e.g., Campbell’s soup), *competence* (e.g., the Wall Street Journal), *excitement* (e.g., MTV), *sophistication* (e.g., Mercedes), and *ruggedness* (e.g., Marlboro). Furthermore, Aaker *et al.,* (2001) propose culture-specific brand personalities that resonate with the culture’s beliefs and value system. Unlike human personalities, brand personalities are not universal and robust across cultures, as they institutionalize cultural notions (Paunonen *et al.*, 1992). Hence, unique dimensions can evolve across different cultures (Supphellen and Grønhaug, 2003).

Brands can be viewed as the carriers of culture, where the brand personality exhibits the cultural meaning. According to Aaker *et al.,* (2001), peacefulness is exclusively identified with East Asian (e.g., Japanese) brands. The prevalence of Confucianism rooted in East Asian (e.g., Chinese) culture contributes to this association (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). In particular, the notion has become deeply rooted in the lives of the Chinese, influencing their ways of thinking, and a fundamental “part of being Chinese” (Hoobler and Hoobler, 2009). A review of the literature on East Asian brand personalities shows that these different personality dimensions denote similar notions associated with Confucianism (Aaker *et al.*, 2001). To elaborate, the Japanese-specific dimension of peacefulness connoted shy, peaceful, naïve, and dependent. These antecedents echo the concept of harmony, which is central to Confucianism (Hoobler and Hoobler, 2009). Similarly, Sung and Tinkham (2005) find that Korean-specific brand personalities, such as passive likableness, and ascendancy, express Confucian notions. More specifically, passive likableness, consisting of attributes such as gentleness and warmth, is related to the values of the Confucian tradition regarding family, harmony, and tradition. In contrast, ruggedness is linked to Western individualism (e.g., the US and UK) (Aaker *et al.*, 2001). Appearing in popular Western brands (e.g., Levi’s, Harley-Davison, and Marlboro), ruggedness reflects American cultural values, emphasizing strength, masculinity, and ruggedness (Solomon, 1986). Consistent with Aaker *et al.,* (2001), this research adopts peacefulness to represent the East Asian (e.g., Chinese) culture-specific brand personality and ruggedness to represent the Western (e.g., the US or UK) culture-specific brand personality.

Globalization has facilitated partnership collaborations between global Western and East Asian brands. Such collaboration is mutually beneficial, as it enhances the global brand’s *perceived localness* and improves the local brand’s *perceived globalness* (Özsomer and Altaras, 2008). As a result of the collaborative partnership between a global Western brand and an East Asian brand, a co-brand may inherit personality traits associated with one or both parent brands. Consumers often associate global brands with high perceived quality, perceived prestige, and identity-expressing capabilities (Swoboda *et al.*, 2012). However, perceived globalness in isolation does not always bring positive results; both brand globalness and localness influence consumers’ attitudes (Dimofte *et al.*, 2008). Adding local traits to a global Western brand contributes positively to the local brand prestige, subsequently enhancing the global brand image (Winit *et al.*, 2014) and increasing the likelihood of the purchase intention for the global brand (Steenkamp *et al.*, 2003). The simultaneous representations of both global and local cultural traits in a co-brand are inevitable and may well co-exist. Thus, the perceived consistency between global Western and Chinese cultural traits may determine consumers’ attitudes toward such cultural mix (He and Wang, 2017).

Consistency appears to be the key determining factor for success in the international branding literature (Czellar, 2003; Simonin and Ruth, 1998). The concept of consistency has been examined from the consumer-brand consistency, consistency between two brands, and consistency between brand and extended product perspectives. Table 1 provides an overview of the international branding empirical studies on this critical issue. Consistency between the customers’ identity and brand traits seems to guide purchase decisions and evaluations. For example, purchase choice between global vs. local brands depends on the consumers’ identity (Makri *et al.*, 2018). Global identity and local identity do not seem to be mutually exclusive in the global consumer culture (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2018); consumers are able to switch between global and local identities based on the environmental stimuli (e.g., specific instructions to activate a specific identity) (Zhang and Khare, 2009; Cleveland *et al.*, 2016). For example, activation of Thai users’ global identity (vs. local identity) leads to more (vs. less) pleasure in participating in global Social Networking Sites (Makri *et al.,* 2018). Furthermore, brands match the Chinese consumers’ cultural identity (global identity vs. local identity), and the perceived localness tends to influence purchase intentions (He and Wang, 2017).

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Notwithstanding the emphasis on consumer-brand consistency, consistency between two parent brands has also attracted attention (Xiao and Hwan Lee, 2014). A high degree of consistency between both parent brands’ images enhances the potential for brands to transfer their personality traits to a new product, thus generating a positive attitude (Bluemelhuber *et al.*, 2007). Perceived similarity in brand equity influences consumers’ attitudes toward a co-branded product (Makri *et al.*, 2018). Many scholars have argued that brand image consistency is one of the key success factors in determining consumers’ evaluation of co-branding strategy (e.g., Iversen and Hem, 2011; Martinez and Pina, 2003; Thompson and Strutton, 2012). In the context of co-branding, this paper will focus on the consistency/inconsistency between both parent brand images reflected through their personality traits. Although consistency between two brand images leads to a positive attitude, it remains unclear whether inconsistencies are less favourable for all consumers across different cultures.

Brand managers are cautioned about the inconsistencies embedded in brand images. Consumers may develop a negative brand affect or ignore a brand in favour of one that does not induce psychological tension when encountering a high level of inconsistency (Meyers-Levy and Tybout, 1989). A low degree of brand image consistency makes co-branded products less attractive, thus leading to market failure (Walchli, 2007). Furthermore, the parent brands also risk damaging their established image due to the negative spill over effect – i.e. the negative evaluation of the new products can be transferred back to the parent brand (Votola and Unnava, 2006). Both parent brands’ images can also be diluted when their collaborative partner has an incongruent brand personality (Kim *et al.*, 2018).

There is no doubt that marketers can confidently promote global Western brand images to the local market when the images associated with both parent brands are compatible. However, the negative effects of inconsistencies can be converted to positive attitudes through repeated advertisement exposure (Lane and Fastoso, 2016), or the reputation of parent brands can overcome the negative effects of inconsistencies (Chun et al., (2015). It may still be viable for international brand managers to add incompatible brand meanings to an existing brand when such brand meanings match consumers’ cultural orientation (Torelli *et al.*, 2012). Marketers often adopt this cultural matching of brand meanings with consumers’ cultural orientations by focusing on the levels of collectivism/individualism and horizontal/vertical in the local market (Torelli *et al.*, 2012; Shavitt *et al.*, 2006) or by examining the consistency between one’s self-concept and brand images (Agrawal and Maheswaran, 2005). Nevertheless, many studies have focused on matching the content of self-concepts across different cultures (i.e. interdependence and independence) (Haberstroh *et al.*, 2018), while the international branding literature has ignored the consistency of such content (Martinez and Pina, 2003).

Despite the benefits of globalization, cultural mixtures may reinforce one’s local identity in order to avoid any potential losses of their ethnic identity (Harush *et al.*, 2016), thus generating negative emotions. Globalization processes are dialectical in nature (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2018) and comprise seemingly conflicting concepts (Levi-Strauss, 1978), such as cultural amalgamation and fragmentation (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2018). Individuals may respond differently toward the tensions that caused by the inconsistencies between one’s self-views are deeply embedded in one’s cultural identity. Cross-cultural psychologists have suggested that self-consistency is less emphasized and salient in East Asians (e.g., Korea) than in Western ones (e.g., the US) (Sung and Choi, 2012). Similarly, Chinese consumers tend to hold a set of inconsistent selves and therefore more cognitively tolerate inconsistencies, ambiguities, or conflicts than their American counterparts (Peng and Nisbett, 1999; Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2009). Such cultural differences in cognitive consistency have not been examined in the international branding literature, which may offer a unique theoretical perspective to understand how Chinese consumers perceive a co-brand that may embody traits of two dissimilar cultures. In particular, this paper aims to examine how consumers respond to a co-brand encompassing global Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits which may be inconsistent, ambiguous, or even conflicting.

*2.2 Dialectical self – an accessibility perspective*

The branding literature outlines positive and negative effects of inconsistencies as well as how to overcome the negative effects of inconsistency using a cognitive congruence theory perspective (e.g., Kumar, 2005), as illustrated in Figure 1. Cognitive congruence theory (Tannenbaum, 1967) is derived from the Western philosophy that emphasizes the Law of Non-contradiction, which suggests that contradictory propositions cannot be true at the same time and in the same sense (Peng and Nisbett 1999). However, East Asians and Westerners differ in their processing of such cognitive consistency to contradictory propositions (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Cross-cultural research has shown differences between East and West in conceptualizing the self (Heine and Lehman, 1997; Campbell *et al.*, 1996). For example, Peng and Nisbett (1999) suggest that East Asians’ philosophy emphasizes on the Principle of Contradiction, wherein everything contains contradiction, as in good and bad, old and new, strong and weak co-exist in everything. The Principle of Contradiction is also reflected in contemporary Chinese language; it is commonly expressed as “dividing one into two” (Peng *et al.,* 2006, p.254).

Spencer-Rodgers *et al.,* (2004) further propose the concept of the dialectical self, capturing one’s cognitive tendency to tolerate contradictory, inconsistent, or ambiguous self-concepts, which emerged as a dimension to account for East–West cultural differences. On the other hand, Westerners conceptualize the self on the basis of Aristotelian formal logic (Lewin, 1951), with an emphasis on coherence and stability, and resolve contradictions and conflicts through synthesis and integration (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). For Westerners, culture influences individuals to define their self clearly and coherently. Conversely, East Asians conceptualize the self on the basis of East Asian folk epistemologies and lay beliefs that emphasize the concepts of change and contradiction. Subsequently, their definition of the self is often less clearly defined and lacks cross-situational stability and internal consistencies (English and Chen, 2007). For example, masculinity and femininity, good and bad, old and new, strong and weak co-existing in the same object is regarded as normative and adaptive in Chinese culture (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). As a result, Chinese, Japanese and Koreans tend to show less self-congruence and cross-situational self-consistency than North Americans (Church *et al.*, 2008; Heine and Lehman, 1997).

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Conventional wisdom assumes that tolerating inconsistencies and ambiguities may lead to greater acceptance for contradictory propositions. However, the opposite may also hold. For instance, Chen *et al.,* (2013) find a negative relationship between the dialectical self and bicultural identity integration for bi-cultural Chinese. Thus, we opine that cognitive tendency to tolerate conflicts and ambiguities does not mean better integration of contradictory propositions. High dialectical thinkers have less desire to integrate and resolve cultural conflicts and inconsistencies, since they expect both favourable and unfavourable cultural experiences and acknowledge both positive and negative aspects of cultural interactions (Chen *et al.*, 2013). Ma-Kellams *et al.* (2011) show that when evaluating in-group members, people with high dialectical self take into account both good and bad attributes of the members, and these contradcitory propositons in turn lead to lower favouritism. In the consumer context, Chinese consumers are likely to see both the upsides and the downsides of a cultural mixture (Chiu *et al.*, 2009). The tendency to “find the bad in the good” appears to lower Chinese overall judgement about their experiences of two different cultures (Chen *et al.*, 2013). Low dialectical thinkers tend to perceive contradictions as a temporary state that can be avoided and resolved (Boucher *et al.*, 2009; Peng and Nisbett, 1999). For low dialectical thinkers, the process of finding a single “correct” solution to resolve the cultural discrepancies often results in a satisfactory solution (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010). Thus, low dialectical East Asians’ capability of finding a solution to the inconsistencies reflected in cultural brand personality traits may lead to positive evaluations.

Furthermore, Spencer-Rodgers *et al.,* (2010) suggest that the dialectical self is a domain-specific variable, that can be triggered by appropriate cultural stimuli. In the consumer context, Zhang and Khare (2009) suggest that one’s cultural self can become accessible when encountering a cultural trait. In other words, a mixture of both collectivistic and individualistic values in marketing stimuli tend to trigger one’s dialectical self (Wang and Abosag, 2019). If both parent brands have strong traits associated with the same personality dimension, then single-personality co-brands reduce the opportunity to reflect inconsistent, ambiguous, or conflicting cultural brand personalities. Parent brands that have traits associated with two distinct cultural brand personality dimensions are expected to activate East Asians’ dialectical self. Therefore, the dialectical self is not expected to play a role in the single-personality co-brand condition, but it is expected to affect one’s attitudes toward a dual-personality co-brand. Thus:

**H1:** The dialectical self negatively affects the evaluation of a dual-personality co-brand but has no effect on the evaluation of a single-personality co-brand**.**

*2.3 Ideal social self and dialectical self*

Consumers tend to have multiple self-images–including the *actual* self, *ideal* self, and *ideal social* self (Sirgy, 1982). The ideal social self refers to how consumers would like to be perceived by others (Sirgy, 1982). The impacts of the ideal social self may vary across different product types in the degree of conspicuousness. Sirgy (1982) reveals that the ideal social self determines one’s preference for conspicuous products. Luxury consumption is often conspicuous in nature, and the effects of the ideal social self are more important for luxury than non-luxury brands (Liu *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, normative influences are particularly important for the consumption of popular public luxury brands that enhance consumers’ self-images through satisfying the expectations of their significant others to achieve rewards or punishments as well as associating with their aspirational reference groups (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014; Shukla, 2011).

Extant branding literature has focused on examining which one of these selves should be matched in order to influence behaviors (Abimbola *et al.*, 2012). Consumers in collectivistic cultures (e.g., China and India) are often more influenced by others than those in individualistic ones (e.g., the US and the UK) (Choi *et al.*, 2005; Shukla, 2011). Herein, ideal social self-congruence refers to the perceived match/mismatch between brand image and the ideal social self-image (Sirgy, 1982). Ideal social self-congruence is more important for interdependent-self consumers as social groups and relationships are the focus (Sung and Choi, 2012), compared to individualistic-self consumers where the actual self-congruence is more important (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Additionally, ideal social self-congruence leads to satisfaction, perceived value, and loyalty in Chinese culture (Kim and Hyun, 2013); that is, Chinese consumers tend to patronize stores whose images are perceived as matching their ideal social self-image. Group harmony and social acceptance, which are deeply rooted in Chinese Confucian culture, could be the main motivations behind Chinese consumers’ shopping behavior (Lee and Haley, 2019). Confucian values encourage the Chinese to conform to the social norms and avoid feelings of guilt or shame due to cultural non-conformity (Kim and Sherman, 2007).

Recognizing the importance of the ideal social self in conspicuous consumption, people often conform to social norms. One’s social self-image is enhanced through meeting the expectations of significant others and building associations with the aspirational group (Kastanakis and Balabanis, 2014; Shukla, 2011). High dialectical thinkers are susceptible to the social environment and constantly recognize self-discrepancy (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2009). Thus, consumers may constantly adjust their behaviors to match how they would like others to perceive them (the ideal social self-congruence) in different social settings. Schwartz *et al.* (2010) posit that constantly adjusting one’s behaviour to suit the situational demand leads to reduced self-regulation (Vohs and Baumeister, 2005), greater stress (Hobfoll, 1989) and in turn poor psychological well-being. Therefore, ongoing searches for brands that allow them to build an association with the aspirational reference group may be time-consuming and psychologically taxing. The process of monitoring one’s purchasing behaviours to meet others’ expectations and adjusting consumption behaviours to enhance ideal social image may become a psychological burden and may lead to poor co-brand evaluation. High conspicuous brands are more sensitive to peer-group influences than low conspicuous brands (Kim and Lee, 2017). In particular, consumers often receive social approval through conspicuous consumption, and high conspicuous products (e.g., sports shoes) can project one’s ideal social self. Thus, high dialectical consumers are expected to be more sensitive to ideal social self-discrepancies in public rather than in private settings. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H2**: The effect of the dialectical self on dual-personality co-brand evaluation will be mediated by ideal social self-congruence in cases of the high conspicuous product type. For the low conspicuous product type, there will be no mediation effect.

 **3. Overview of the studies**

We conducted two studies to examine the effects of consumers’ dialectical self on co-brand evaluation. Study 1 explored whether the effects of the dialectical self differed depending on co-brand personality type (single-personality vs. dual-personality). Building on this, Study 2 examined the mediating role of ideal social self-congruence and the boundary condition of product type through its moderating effect.

**4. Study 1**

Study 1 examines whether the effects of the dialectical self on attitudes toward a co-brand is significant under both single- and dual-personality conditions. Specifically, we expect lower dialectical individuals to favor dual-personality co-brands more than higher dialectical individuals. We expect no significant differences under the single-personality condition.

*4.1 Selection of product- and cultural-associated brand personality traits*

Drawing on Aaker *et al.* (2001), we selected peacefulness and ruggedness to represent East Asian and Western cultural brand personality traits, respectively. The *peacefulness* and *ruggedness* brand personality dimensions are used in two single-personality conditions and one dual-personality condition. Following Aaker *et al.* (2001), we used shy, mild-mannered, peaceful, and modest to describe the peacefulness trait, and tough, ruggedness, outdoorsy and masculine to describe the ruggedness trait. We selected ‘cars’ as a product category for Study 1 because car purchases are a widely recognized example of public consumption, and they can convey East–West cultural differences in self-concepts (Zhang, 2010). For example, the Nissan Bluebird has incorporated either collectivistic or individualistic values in their advertising appeal depending on the targeted culture.

*4.2 Pre-test for Study 1*

In order to check if respondents will have a preference toward a particular brand personality trait over the other, we checked the participants’ self-identification with peacefulness and ruggedness brand personality traits. Chinese automobile enthusiasts (n = 24) from a large WeChat group were invited to be part of the pre-test. Participants were randomly exposed to either the peacefulness or ruggedness condition. In the peacefulness condition they were asked to think about an automobile brand that possessed characteristics such as: shy, mild-mannered, peaceful, and modest. Participants in the ruggedness condition were requested to imaging characteristics such as: tough, rugged, outdoorsy, and masculine. Following this, participants were exposed to statements about the self (e.g., by rating the extent to which their personality and the brand personality are similar) using items from Tuškej *et al.,* (2013). The exemplar items are, “I feel that my personality and brand personality of the car are very similar”, “I have a lot in common with other people using this car brand”. To examine these differences, a one-way ANOVA was carried out. The results revealed that the participants identified equally well with ruggedness (M=4.18; SD=0.76) and peacefulness (M=4.55; SD=0.84; p > 0.05). The pre-test, thus, confirms the relevance and suitability of the chosen brand personality traits for our setting.

*4.3 Participants*

Study 1 involved 172 Chinese participants (51% male; Mage = 27.5 years), recruited from two large WeChat groups consisting of 500 members each, through a group message with open invitation. The demographic breakdown of the sample is shown in Table 2.

*4.4 Experimental stimuli*

Following Monga and Lau-Gesk (2007), we designed a car description that conveys the peacefulness trait, ruggedness trait, and both traits combined. For the peacefulness trait condition, the car description read: *“Two leading car companies have joined forces to create a new design for a car that combines the peacefulness and modest nature of one brand with the mild-mannered and shy nature of the other. The new design of the car promises to be all the rage in one month when it is finally unveiled for everyone to see, touch, feel and drive.”* For the ruggedness condition, the car description read: *“Two leading car companies have joined forces to create a new design for a car that combines the toughness and ruggedness of one brand with the outdoorsy and masculine nature of the other. The new design of the car promises to be all the rage in one month when it is finally unveiled for everyone to see, touch, and drive.”* For the dual-personality condition, the car description read: *“Two leading car companies have joined forces to create a new design for a car that combines the peaceful and modest nature of one brand with the toughness and ruggedness of the other. The new design of the car promises to be all the rage in one month when it is finally unveiled for everyone to see, touch, feel and drive.”*

*4.5 Procedure*

Each participant randomly received a booklet related to one of these three conditions. They were asked to evaluate the car description that varied by co-brand personality and was purposely designed to pique the respondent’s interest without revealing too much about the car’s design before the launch date. Hence, to avoid any further confounds we did not include visuals and other narratives.

Next, we measured the attitude toward the co-brand by four items on a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by “good/bad”, “favorable/unfavorable,” “like/dislike,” and “positive/negative” (Monga and Lau-Gesk, 2007). The participants also answered 32 questions about the dialectical self on a 7-point scale with strongly disagree and strongly agree as anchors (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2001). The exemplar items are, “I believe my habits are hard to change”; “I sometimes believe two things that contradict each other”; “My world is full of contradictions that cannot be resolved.” Chinese culture is well-known for its interdependence (e.g., Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Ko and Megehee, 2012). Hence, to ensure the participants’ cultural identity, Singelis’s (1994)’s interdependent self-construal was measured using 12 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale. Finally, the participants answered a series of demographic questions (i.e. age, gender, nationality). The original questionnaire was written in English, except for the dialectical self-scale, where a Chinese version already existed (Spencer-Rodgers *et* *al.,* 2001). The remaining questionnaire was translated into Chinese by an English-to-Chinese translator and then back-translated into English by a Chinese-to-English translator to minimize any loss of meaning (Brislin, 1976; Zheng *et al.*, 2018). The original and the back-translated versions were checked by another bi-lingual expert who found the translation to be highly satisfactory. All measurement items are included in Appendix.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

*4.6 Results*

Descriptive statistics (i.e. mean and standard deviation) and reliability statistics (i.e. Cronbach α, loading range, and average variance extracted (AVE) are provided in Table 3. We used interdependent self-construal (α = 0.74) to provide evidence that participants in our study endorse the interdependent self-construal (Minterdependence = 5.17, SD = 0.53). We then tested H1, where the co-brand personality type combination (dual-personality vs. single-personality) offers a boundary condition for the significant effects of the dialectical self (α = 0.83) on co-brand evaluation. Specially, we expected that the effects of the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation would only be significant under the dual-personality condition. Because there were three co-brand personality groups with the categorical variable, we created two dummy-coded variables for the personality type condition, with dual-personality=1 and single-personality=0. To test this moderation, we used the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017). Using PROCESS MODEL 1, we then performed an analysis with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples.

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

The analysis revealed a significant interaction effect of personality type and the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation (β = -0.72, 95% CI [-1.21, -0.24]). No other results were significant. A specific analysis was then conducted under each condition to examine the effect of the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation. Under the dual-personality co-brand condition, similar to the single-personality condition, we conducted a linear regression analysis to examine whether the dialectical self explains the attitudinal variations of the peacefulness–ruggedness co-brand. Attitude was the dependent variable, and the dialectical self was the independent variable. As expected, the results revealed that the dialectical self negatively influences the attitude toward the dual-personality co-brand (β = -0.56; p < 0.05). For peacefulness, we submitted the attitude of a peaceful co-brand as the dependent variable and the dialectical self as the independent variable for the linear regression. As expected, the influence of the dialectical self on the attitude toward the peaceful co-brand (β = -0.06, p > 0.05) or ruggedness co-brand (β = 0.35; p > 0.05) was not significant.

The above analysis confirms our assertion that the effect of the dialectical self on attitude towards the co-brand is significant in the dual personality condition only. We find that when a consumer is exposed to a dual personality co-brand, their dialectical self is triggered, which in turn influences their attitude towards the co-brand.

**5. Study 2**

As Study 1 demonstrated that the effect of dialectical self is only significant in the dual brand personality condition, Study 2 extends that study in two ways. First, it examines the mediating effect of ideal social self-congruency on the relationship between the dialectical self and dual-personality co-brand evaluation. Second, it also tests the moderating role of product type (high vs. low conspicuous products) for the ideal social self-congruency. In examining the dual brand personality condition, it also adds a robustness check for our earlier assertion.

*5.1 Pre-test for Study 2*

To reconcile the expected results with the extant literature, we selected wristwatches and athletic shoes to represent public and high conspicuous products, and mattresses and desktop computers to represent private and low conspicuous products (Hamzaoui Essoussi and Merunka, 2007). We evaluated participants’ responses on the degree of conspicuousness on two items (“The product can signal its owner’s status”, “The product is often used in public settings”), ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Zheng *et al.*, 2018). The pre-test (n=24) on the degree of conspicuousness showed that wristwatches and athletic shoes were relatively high in conspicuousness (Mhigh = 4.72, SD = 0.86), whereas mattresses and desktop computers were observed as low in conspicuousness (Mlow = 1.32, SD = 0.22). The overall difference between product types was significant (t = 20.52; p<0.05).

*5.2 Participants*

A total of 113 individuals (53.1% male; Mage=24.7 years) in China participated in the study. All participants were recruited from different WeChat groups than the earlier study and from Sina Weibo (Chinese blogging website) through a group message with an open invitation. The demographic breakdown of the sample is shown in Table 2.

*5.3 Experimental stimuli*

Each participant was randomly assigned to a dual-personality co-brand in either a high conspicuous condition or low conspicuous condition. We followed Monga and Lau-Gesk (2007) to create descriptions for both high and low conspicuous products to reflect their brand personality traits. In particular, in the high conspicuous condition, participants were read a description that “*Two leading wristwatch companies have joined forces to create a new style of wristwatch that combines the peaceful and modest nature of one brand with the toughness and ruggedness of the other. The new style of wristwatch promises to be all the rage in one month when it is finally unveiled for everyone to see, touch, feel and use*.” In the low conspicuous products condition, the mattress description read: *“Two leading mattress companies have joined forces to create a new style of mattress that combines the peaceful and modest nature of one brand with the toughness and ruggedness of the other. The new style of the mattress promises to be all the rage in one month when it is finally unveiled for everyone to see, touch, feel and use.”*

*5.4 Procedure*

Upon exposure to the description, participants responded to four questions directed toward the co-brand using a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by “like/dislike”, “good/bad”, “favorable/unfavourable”, and “positive/negative” (Monga and Lau-Gesk, 2007). Next, participants responded to one question (e.g., “the brand personality of the wristwatch reflects how I would like others to view me”) on the ideal social self-congruency scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) adopted from Sirgy (1985). Similar to Study 1, we measured the dialectical self by 32 items on the dialectical self-scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2001). Furthermore, we also measured interdependent self-construal using 12 items on a 7-point Likert-type scale (Singelis, 1994). Lastly, demographics were captured.

*5.5 Results*

Detailed descriptive statistics (i.e. mean and standard deviation) and reliability statistics (i.e. Cronbach α, loading range, and average variance extracted (AVE)) are provided in Table 3, and a correlation matrix for key measures are demonstrated in Table 4. To ensure participants in our study identify with the interdependent self-construal associated with the Chinese culture, we first examined one’s interdependent self-construal. Participants reported a high level of interdependence (Minterdependence = 5.03, SD = 0.63). To examine the mediating effect of ideal social self-congruency on the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluation, we employed the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) model 4 with an analysis with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Co-brand evaluation (sum of wristwatches and athletic shoes or sum of mattress and desktop computer) is the dependent variable (Y), dialectical self is the independent variable (X), and ideal social self-congruence is the mediator (M).

INSERT TABLE 4 HERE

The results reveal that the dialectical self negatively influences one’s ideal social self-congruency in the high conspicuous product condition (F (1,50) = 9.29, p < 0.05; β = -0.56, 95% CI [-0.93 -0.19]). Table 5 showed the direct and indirect effects of the dialectical self in the high conspicuous condition. More importantly, the results suggest that the direct effect of dialectical self on co-brand evaluation is non-significant (p > 0.05). However, there is a significant indirect effect of the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation through social ideal self-congruence (β = -0.35, CI [-0.70 -0.11]). Furthermore, Figure 2 shows standardized regression coeffects for the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluation mediated by ideal social self-congruency in the high conspicuous condition. The results confirm that one’s ideal social self-congruency mediates the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluation in the high conspicuous condition. Lastly, there are no significant differences in attitudinal preference toward wristwatches or athletic shoes.

INSERT TABLE 5 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE

Additionally, we performed the SPSS PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2017) model 4 with an analysis with a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples in the low conspicuous group. There is a significant impact of ideal social self-congruency on the co-brand evaluation, (t (2, 58) = 2.39, p < 0.05; β = 0.21, CI [0.03; 0.38]). Table 6 displayed the direct and indirect effects of the dialectical self in the low conspicuous condition. Figure 3 plotted the standardized regression coeffects for the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluation mediated by ideal social self-congruency in the low conspicuous condition. No other effects were found to be significant. In particular, the effect of the dialectical self on ideal social self-congruency is not significant (p > 0.05). Both direct and indirect effects of the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation are non-significant. Lastly, there are no significant differences in attitudinal preference toward mattress or desktop computer. Thus, H2 is supported.

INSERT TABLE 6 HERE

INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE

**6. General discussion**

*6.1mplications for theory*

The rapidly growing East Asian economies offer huge opportunities for East and West collaborations. However, culture remains a significant barrier. To overcome such a challenge, many Western brands employ co-branding strategies (e.g., Chevrolet Malibu version and Buick Encore version). This paper contributes to the extant co-branding literature by examining how East Asian consumers perceive co-branding encompassing Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits. Grounded in the theoretical lens of the consumer dialecticism (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2009), this research shows the varying influence of single versus dual personality co-brand evaluations and further examines the mediating role played by ideal social self-congruence. The findings further demonstrate the moderating role of product type, and in so doing offers novel theoretical and managerial insights.

A key contribution of this paper relates to the unique theoretical lens it employs in examining co-branding strategies. Incorporating a novel perspective of consumer dialectical self (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*, 2009), this paper improves our understanding of consumers’ attitudes toward co-brands involving varying cultural brand personality traits. Extant research has suggested that high dialectical thinkers are better at managing inconsistency, conflict, or ambiguity within an entity (Peng and Nisbett, 1999). In this regard, a logical extension would allow us to assume that the high dialectical consumers will thus demonstrate high tolerance and acceptance of inconsistency that emerge from co-branding involving Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits. However, contrary to the intuitive logic, the research findings highlight the *negative* effects of the dialectical self on co-brand evaluation. The findings suggest that high dialectical thinkers have less desire for synthesis and integration. Thus, it seems that a high level of cognitive tendency to tolerate does not necessarily make them good at managing inconsistent brand personality traits. We believe that inconsistent Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits trigger the consumer dialectical self. However, rather than accommodating this inconsistency, high dialectical consumers feel greater levels of contrast leading to heightened discomfort and anxiety (Mandel *et al.,* 2017). This discomfort, in turn, results in their lower overall attitudes toward a co-brand encompassing Western and East Asian cultural brand personality traits.

A notable finding of this paper demonstrates that domain specificity of the East Asians’ dialectical self (DeMotta *et al.*, 2016; Wang and Abosag, 2019; Zhang and Khare, 2009). Our findings suggest that East Asians’ dialectical self only influences one’s attitude towards the co-brand in a dual-personality condition but not in a single-personality condition. Such findings lend support to Chiu *et al.* (2009), suggesting that the joint presentation of East Asian and Western cultural brand traits (peacefulness and ruggedness) may enlarge the incompatibility and conflicts of the two cultures, thus activating one’s dialectical self. A dual-personality co-brand may remind the East Asian consumers about their fluid and inconsistent self-concepts, and the activation of such inconsistencies can lead to a negative evaluation. Single-personality (e.g., ruggedness or peacefulness) co-brand, on the other hand, does not trigger such effects.

Our findings further reveal that one’s ideal social self-congruence mediates the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluation. Ideal social self plays a pivotal role in influencing East Asians, given their tendency to express their commonality and conformity to others (Aaker and Schmitt, 2001). In contrast to low dialectical thinkers, high dialectical thinkers are more sensitive to attitude–behavior inconsistencies (Spencer-Rodgers *et al.,* 2009) and attend to contextual cues and recognize self-deficiencies (Kanagawa *et al.*, 2001). For high dialectical thinkers, recognition of the self-discrepancies and constant monitoring of one’s ideal social self to accommodate the expectations of others could prove psychologically taxing (Vivero and Jenkins, 1999). Thus, the dialectical self has both a direct and indirect impact (through the mediation of ideal social self-congruence) on the evaluation of a co-brand that embodies two dissimilar cultural brand personality traits.

Importantly, this paper highlights the product type (high vs. low conspicuous) as a moderator of the mediating effect of ideal social self-congruence on the relationship between the dialectical self and co-brand evaluation. Specifically, the effect of dialectical self on dual-personality co-brand evaluation is mediated by one’s ideal social self-congruence only in the high conspicuous condition. We add to the existing research by studying the appropriate product types that may provide opportunities for a mixture of East and West cultural traits or values to be reflected in marketing stimuli (Cleveland *et al.,* 2016; Dey *et al.,* 2019). Zhang (2010) and Wang and Abosag (2019) suggest that shared-use products provide more opportunities than personal-use products to manifest cultural differences. Additionally, we confirm with Graeff’s (1996) research, supporting the influential role of the ideal social self in conspicuous products evaluation. Products consumed in public are increasingly subject to group influences than those consumed in private settings. East Asian culture emphasizes group belongingness, interdependence, and the pursuit of common goals (Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1995). The pressure to conform to social norms and satisfy the expectations of others is much more severe in the high conspicuous context than in the low conspicuous context. Thus, the visibility of public products (e.g., wristwatch, sports shoes) encourages consumers to attain social group approval – a typical characteristic of collectivistic cultures. As a result, self-discrepancies arising from purchasing high conspicuous brands are more likely to evoke discomfort and anxiety than purchasing low conspicuous brands.

*6.2 Implications for practice*

The selection of an appropriate strategic partner remains at the centre of the co-branding debate. Many researchers highlight the dangers of incongruency between parent brands (e.g., Ma *et al.*, 2018; Makri *et al.*, 2018). However, some researchers support the benefits of inconsistencies (e.g., Lane and Fastoso, 2016; Torelli *et al.*, 2012). Still, the potential benefits and drawbacks of inconsistencies have created a dilemma for international managers.

In international markets, brand managers may not always have the choice of selecting the most aligned partners whose brand personality traits are congruent to their own. This research addresses the managerial dilemma by demonstrating the negative effects of dialectical self on dual-personality co-brand evaluations. If managers are able to identify a congruent partner brand, consumers’ attitudes toward the co-brand will not be affected by the consumer dialectical self. In the event that both brands’ personality traits are incongruent (e.g., the Malibu version of Chevrolet), we firmly recommend managers be cognizant of the consumer dialectical self. The knowledge of dialectical self can be channelled toward constructing targeted advertising for specific co-branded products. If a demographic has more high dialectical thinkers, incongruent co-brand personality traits maybe disadvantageous and lead to poor attitudes. When targeting low dialectical consumers, incongruent co-brand personality traits may not pose the same challenge.

Furthermore, our findings provide noteworthy marketing strategy implications at the product category level. The results show that international marketing managers should employ different strategies to engage consumers with differing levels of dialectical self. For instance, when a co-brand is highly conspicuous or public in nature (e.g., luxury goods, cars, shoes, watches, fashion apparels among others), the co-brand marketing campaigns should focus on consumers with low dialectical self and market the product to their ideal self-concept to generate positive co-brand evaluations. They should avoid a similar strategy when targeting consumers with a high dialectical self as it may result in negative co-brand evaluations. Lastly, we particularly recommend that managers should aim to increase ideal social self congruency that reflect how consumers would like others to view them. Increasing the ideal social self congruency would lead to greater positive evaluation of the co-brand.

**7. Limitations and future directions**

This paper has some limitations that offer insightful directions for future research. First, the dialectical self is a typical East Asian (e.g., Chinese) individual difference variable, and the findings may not be applicable to other cultural groups, such as French Americans or Anglo-Dutch. Future research may examine the effects of other consumer characteristics such as self-complexity, as some consumers have a greater number of selves than others. However, the dialectical self may shed light on future research directions that Cleveland and Bartsch (2018) proposed, highlighting the coping mechanism potentially employed by consumers with a high degree of dialecticism in the self-concept domain, as they have less tendency to resolve potentially contradicting bi-cultural identities (combination of both global and local identities). Second, we used Spencer-Rodgers *et al.*’s (2001) 32-item dialectical self scale to measure one’s dialectical self. Future research may consider develop a shortened scale to avoid potential response fatigue. Third, although one’s dialectical self becomes accessible in the dual-personality co-brand condition, it remains unknown whether other contextual variables (e.g., level of involvement) can also trigger its activation. Thus, future research may explore whether high-involved dual-personality brands offer more opportunities than low-involved dual-personality brands to reflect conflicts, ambiguities, and inconsistencies. Fourth, we used Singelis’s (1994) interdependent self-construal as a proxy for Chinese cultural identification. Future research may consider directly measuring one’s cultural identification. Fifth, following Monga and Lau-Gesk (2007), we provided only a verbal brand personality description of the co-brand product based on the two parent brands’ personalities. Future research may consider using a real co-brand in the marketplace or other cultural traits other than cultural brand personality traits to replicate this research. Lastly, our research has examined co-brands that carry distinct cultural brand personality traits. Future research may explore whether the effect of the dialectical self still hold when two developing country brands with complementary traits collaborate.

**8. Conclusion**

Our research shows that consumers’ attitudes toward co-brands that involve varying cultural brand personality traits may differ depending on their dialectical self. The significant effects of consumer dialectical self get activated when inconsistent duel-personality co-branding strategy is used by organizations. The degree of dialecticism of the targeted consumer segment should be taken into account when collaborating with an incongruent partner. Moreover, this research also yields a greater understanding of the boundary conditions for the effects of the dialectical self to be significant, and sheds new lights on how dialectical self affects co-brand evaluation at the product category level.

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**TABLES:**

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| **Table 1. Overview of empirical studies on consumer-brand, between two brands and brand-product congruences** |
| Author | Country  | Key findings | Nature of congruence |
| Makri *et al.* (2018)  | Thailand and Austria | Global-local consumer identities as drivers of global digital brand usage. Thai consumers with local identity demonstrate less pleasure when participating in global SNS than their counterparts in Austria, and consequently are less inclined to use global SNS. | Customer-brand congruence  |
| Zhang and Khare (2009) | US | Consumers with an accessible global identity prefer a global product and consumers with an accessible local identity prefer a local product. Such effect was reversed either by an explicit instruction about accessible identities being nondiagnostic or implicitly by introducing a differentiative processing mode.  | Customer-brand congruence |
| He and Wang (2017) | China | Cultural compatibility has a direct positive effect as well as an indirect effect (through local iconness) on purchase likelihood. Meanwhile, consumer cultural identity is found to moderate the impact of brand local iconness on purchase likelihood. | Customer-brand congruence |
| Bajac *et al.,* (2018) | Spain and Uruguay | Both product-personality and user-image congruence positively influence brand evaluations more for publicly than privately consumed brands. | Customer-brand congruence |
| Xiao and Lee (2014) | Not available | Consumer-brand identification moderates the relationship between brand identity fit and consumer attitudes/loyalty toward the co-brand.  | Customer-brand and brand-brand congruence |
| Besharat (2010) | US | Consumers’ purchase intentions regarding a co-branded product by two high-equity brands are significantly greater than those for the same product produced through collaboration between a high- and low-equity brand.  | Brand-brand congruence  |
| Ahn and Sung (2012) | US | Both functional and symbolic fit (personality fit) significantly influence consumer response to co-branding. | Brand-brand and brand-product congruence  |
| Iversen and Hem (2011) | Norway | The greater the perceived similarity between the parent brand and the extension, the more positive the attitude toward the extension. | Brand-product congruence |
| Martinez *et al.,* (2008) | UK and Spain | Perceived fit has a positive effect on brand image after extension. | Brand-product congruence |
| Martinez and Pina (2003) | Spain | There is a positive relationship between perceived fit (between the extension and the parent brand) and brand image.  | Brand-product congruence |
| Thompson and Strutton (2012) | US | By partnering with brands possessing higher perceived degrees of fit in the extension category (i.e. co-brands), parent brands can achieve more favorable positions for their extensions than could be realized if firms acted independently.  | Brand-product congruence |
| Ma *et al.,* (2018) | China | Product fit and brand fit amongst partners have a positive effect on brand alliance evaluation | Brand-brand and brand-product congruence |
| This Study | China | Consumer dialectical self negatively influences one’s attitude toward a co-brand in the dual-personality condition. Ideal social self-congruence mediates the relationship between the dialectical self and dual-personality co-brand evaluation in the high conspicuous product condition only.  | Brand-brand congruence |

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| **Table 2: Demographic breakdown** |
|  | **Study 1** |  | **Study 2** |  |
|  **Variables** | **%** | **N** | **%** | **N** |
| Age 20 - 29 | 64 % | 110 | 69 % | 78 |
| 30 - 39 | 21.5 % | 37 | 16.8 % | 19 |
| 40 - 49 | 12.2 % | 21 | 11.5 % | 13 |
| ≥ 50 | 2.3 % | 4 | 2.7 % | 3 |
| Gender: Male | 51% | 88 | 53.1 % | 60 |
| Female | 49% | 84 | 46.9 % | 53 |
| Nationality | 100% | 172 | 100 % | 113 |
| Sample size | 172 | 113 |

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| Table 3: Descriptive statistics  |
|  | **Construct** | **Mean** | **Standard Deviation** | **Cronbach’s**α | **Loading range** | **AVE** |
| Study 1 | Customer identification with peacefulness/ruggednessDegree of conspicuous | M peacefulness = 4.55M ruggedness = 4.18M high conspicuous = 4.72M low conspicuous = 1.32 | S.D. peacefulness = 0.84S.D. ruggedness = 0.76S.D. high conspicuous = 0.86S.D. low conspicuous = 0.22 | 0.780.853 | 0.68-0.860.82-0.91 | 0.630.77 |
| Interdependent self-construal | M interdependent = 5.17 | S.D. interdependent = 0.53 | 0.74 | 0.65-0.77 | 0.50 |
| Dialectical self | M = 4.51 | S.D.= 0.92 | 0.83 | 0.77-0.95 | 0.84 |
| Study 2 | Interdependent self-construal | Minterdependent(high) = 5.01Minterdependent(low)= 5.03 | S.D.interdependent(high) = 0.42S.D. interdependent(low) = 0.63 | 0.70 (high)0.78 (low) | 0.63-0.76 (high)0.62-0.82 (low) | 0.51 (high)0.57 (low) |
| Ideal social self-congruence | M = 4.33 | S.D.= 0.42 |  |  |  |
| Dialectical self | Mhigh conspicuous = 4.01Mlow conspicuous = 4.13 | S.D. high conspicuous = 0.72S.D.low conspicuous = 0.93 | 0.82 (high)0.70 (low) | 0.61-0.82 (high)0.68-0.90 (low) | 0.50 (high)0.67 (low) |
| Note: Minterdependent(high) represents mean value in high conspicuous condition; S.D.interdependent(high) represents standard deviation in high conspicuous condition; M interdependent(low)represents mean value in low conspicuous condition; S.D.interdependent(low) represents the standard deviation in low conspicuous condition. |

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| **Table 4: Correlation results between attitude and dialectical self (Study 2).** |
| Constructs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 1. Attitudes2. Dialectical self4. Gender5. Nationality6. Age | 1.00-.26\*-.06.10.00 | 1.00.14.19.06 | 1.00.12-.08 | 1.00-.14 | 1.00 |
| \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed). |

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| **Table 5: Direct and indirect effects in high conspicuous condition** |
| *Direct effects* | β |  SE |
| Dialectical self Ideal social self-congruence | -0.56\*\* |  0.18 |
| Dialectical self Dual personality co-brand evaluationIdeal social self-congruence Dual personality co-brand evaluation | -0.300.62\*\* |  0.20 0.14 |
| *Indirect effects of dialectical self on dual persoality cobrand evaluation* |
| Bootstrapping (95%) CI |
| Hypothesis | Mediator | β | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
| H2 | Ideal social self-congruence | -0.35\*\* | 0.15 | -0.70 | -0.11 |
| **Notes:** SE, Standard error; LLCI, lower level (2.5 per cent) confidence interval; ULCI, upper level (2.5 per cent) confidence interval. \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01. |

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| **Table 6: Direct and indirect effects in low conspicuous condition** |
| *Direct effects* | β |  SE |
| Dialectical self Ideal social self-congruence | 0.08 | 0.15 |
| Dialectical self Dual personality co-brand evaluationIdeal social self-congruence Dual personality co-brand evaluation | -0.070.21\* | 0.100.09 |
| *Indirect effects of dialectical self on dual persoality cobrand evaluation* |
| Bootstrapping (95%) CI |
| Hypothesis | Mediator | β | SE | LLCI | ULCI |
| H2 | Ideal social self-congruence | 0.02 | 0.04 | -0.06 | 0.11 |
| **Notes:** SE, Standard error; LLCI, lower level (2.5 per cent) confidence interval; ULCI, upper level (2.5 per cent) confidence interval. \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01. |

**FIGURES:**

Positive effects

For example: Makri et al., (2018);

Zhang and Khare (2009); He and Wang (2017); Thompson and Strutton (2012)

How to manage the effects

For example:

Lane and Fastoso (2016);

Chun et al., (2015);

Torelli *et al.* (2012)

Negative effects

For example: Meyers-Levy and Tybout (1989); Walchli (2007); Votola and Unnava (2006); Kim *et al.*, (2018).

Why inconsistency is always bad?

Figure 1. Summary of the debate on the issue of consistency in the branding literature

**High conspicuous condition**

Ideal social

self-congruency

Dialectical self

Co-brand evaluation

-0.56\*\*

0.62\*\*

-0.30 (-0.35\*\* indirect effect, CI [-0.70, -0.11]

\*P < 0.05; \*\*P < 0.01.

Figure 2. Standardized regression coeffects for the relationship between dialectical self and cobrand evaluation mediated by ideal social self-congruency in high conspicuous condition

**Low conspicuous condition**

Ideal social

self-congruency

Dialectical self

Co-brand evaluation

0.08

0.21\*

-0.07 (0.02 indirect effect, CI [-0.06, 0.11])

\*P < 0.05

Figure 3. Standardized regression coeffects for the relationship between dialectical self and cobrand evaluation mediated by ideal social self-congruency in low conspicuous condition

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| **Appendix** |
| Customer identification with peacefulness/ruggedness (Tuskej et al., 2013)1. I feel that my personality and brand personality of the car are very similar.2. I have a lot in common with other people using this car brand.3. I feel that my values and the values of the car brand are very similar. |
| Degree of conspicuous (Zheng et al., 2018)1.The product is often used in public settings.2.The product can signal its owners’ status. |
| Interdependent self-construal (Singelis 1994)1. I have respect for the authority figures with whom I interact 2. It is important for me to maintain harmony within my group 3. My happiness depends on the happiness of those around me 4. I would offer my seat in a bus to my professor 5. I respect people who are modest about themselves 6. I will sacrifice my self-interest for the benefit of the group 7. I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments 8. I should take into consideration my parents’ advice when making education/career plans 9. It is important to me to respect decisions made by the group 10. I will stay in a group if they need me, even when I’m not happy with the group 11. If my brother or sister fails, I feel responsible 12. Even when I strongly disagree with group members, I avoid an argument. |
| Dialectical self (Spencer-Rodgers et al., 2010)1. I am the same around my family as I am around my friends2. When I hear two sides of an argument, I often agree with both3. I believe my habits are hard to change4. I believe my personality will stay the same all of my life5. I often change the way I am, depending on who I am with6. I often find that things contradict each other7. If I’ve made up my mind about something, I stick to it8. I have a definite set of beliefs, which guide my behaviour at all times9. I have a strong sense of who I am and don’t change my views when others disagree with me10.The way I behave usually has more to do with immediate circumstances than with my personal preferences11. My outward behaviours reflect my true thoughts and feelings12. I sometimes believe two things that contradict each other13. I often find that my beliefs and attitudes will change under different contexts14. I find that my values and beliefs will change depending on who I am with15. My world is full of contradictions that cannot be resolved16. I am constantly changing and am different from one time to the next17. I usually behave according to my principles18. I prefer to compromise than to hold on to a set of beliefs19. I can never know for certain that any one thing is true20. If there are two opposing sides to an argument they cannot both be right21. My core beliefs don’t change much over time22. Believing two things which contradict each other is illogical23. I sometimes find that I am a different person by the evening than I was in the morning24. I find that if I look hard enough, I can figure out which side of a controversial issue is right25. For the most important issues there is one right answer26. I find that my world is relatively stable and consistent27. When two sides disagree, the truth is always somewhere in the middle28. When I am solving a problem I focus on finding the truth29. If I think I am right I am willing to fight to the end30. I have a hard time making up my mind about controversial issues31. When two of my friends disagree I usually have a hard time deciding which of them is right32. There are always two sides to everything, depending on how you look at it. |