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using Website Usability testing with a Focus  
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# User Experience on Drugstore Webshops using Website Usability testing with a Focus on Self-congruence

By Szász Tünde<sup>‡</sup> & Erika Hlédik \*

*This research focuses on the retailer-consumer identity congruence in online drugstore webshop context. While prior studies focusing on offline settings or product-level branding, this study explores how consumers' actual and ideal self-image alignment with online retailers affects their interactions. A 2x2 experimental design with 15 participants compared user behaviour on a general drugstore site versus a beauty-oriented platform, across both simple and complex shopping tasks. The experiment utilised a multifaceted methodology, incorporating eye-tracking technology, retrospective think-aloud (RTA) interviews and survey. Participants were tasked with selecting a product that best fits with their self-image within a predetermined product category. The research assessed users' navigation patterns, filtering and search behaviours, and product attributes preferences. Findings show that when a website's brand aligned with participants' ideal self-image, users spent more time exploring options, examined product details and reviews more carefully, and favoured premium brands. In contrast, alignment with their actual self-image led to quicker decisions, a focus on familiar brands, and less engagement with detailed information. The study also revealed that product-level self-congruence significantly influenced attention and engagement. These insights emphasize the importance of matching e-commerce design and content with consumers' identity dimensions to boost engagement and inform strategic personalization in digital retail environments.*

**Keywords:** *self-congruence, eye-tracking, website usability test, online decision-making process, retail*

## Introduction

As online retail continues to expand, understanding how consumers interact with digital platforms has become increasingly important. Among the many factors influencing online shopping behavior, one particularly underexplored area is the role of self-congruence—which is, the alignment between a consumer's self-image and the perceived image of the product or brand. While self-congruity has been widely explored in traditional retail and branding contexts (Sirgy, 1985; Malär et al., 2011), its application to digital interfaces and online consumer journeys remains underdeveloped.

Drugstore webshops represent a unique category within e-commerce, as their product offerings often reflect not just functional needs but also consumers' lifestyle choices and personal values. Products such as cosmetics, personal care items, and health supplements frequently carry symbolic meanings that allow

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consumers to express both their actual self (who they believe they are) and their ideal self (who they aspire to be). Consequently, drugstore websites provide a suitable context for investigating how self-congruence influences user behavior and engagement.

Usability studies have traditionally focused on functional aspects—such as ease of navigation, layout clarity, or search efficiency—yet they often overlook the deeper psychological factors that may shape how users interact with digital interfaces (Nielsen, 1993; Palmer, 2002). Integrating identity-based constructs like self-congruity into website usability testing offers a more holistic understanding of user engagement and behavioral patterns in e-commerce contexts.

The central research questions are: (1) How does congruence between a user's self-image (actual or ideal) and a product's brand image influence online decision-making behavior? (2) How do this congruence patterns manifest in terms of navigation paths, information processing, product preferences, and filtering/search behavior?

## **Literature Review**

### *Self-congruity Theory in Online Shopping*

Consumers' attitudes and decisions regarding brands are significantly influenced by the extent to which the brand's image aligns with their self-perception (Sirgy & Samli, 1985). This alignment, referred to as self-congruity, occurs when the attributes of a brand or product resonate with the consumer's actual self-image (how they see themselves) or ideal self-image (how they would like to be) (Sirgy, 1985).

Self-congruity theory posits that consumers are more likely to develop favourable attitudes toward brands that reflect aspects of their self-concept. This alignment enhances emotional attachment, brand preference, brand loyalty and ultimately purchase behaviour (Kressmann et al., 2006; Malär et al., 2011). A consumer might, for instance, choose a product not solely for its functional utility but because it symbolically communicates traits they identify with, such as sophistication, independence, or eco-consciousness (Aaker, 1997). The concept has been extensively applied in industries where symbolic consumption is particularly salient—such as fashion, cosmetics, automobiles, and luxury goods (Liu et al., 2012; Malär et al., 2011). Ideal self-congruity was found to have a stronger impact on emotional brand attachment in luxury contexts, where aspirational values play a key role (Liu et al., 2012). This reinforces the notion that symbolic alignment with one's ideal self can be a critical driver in high-involvement product categories. Even for non-luxury or utilitarian products, consumers often use brands as a means of expressing or reinforcing identity-related values (Sirgy et al., 2000). The degree of self-brand congruence can thus act as a powerful heuristic in the decision-making process, especially when the product category carries social or emotional meaning (Graeff, 1996). This

symbolic self-expression is also visible on social media platforms by balancing individual and social influences on the self (Dinkha et al., 2008).

Notably, actual self-congruity tends to influence satisfaction and brand trust, while ideal self-congruity is more closely tied to aspirational value and emotional brand attachment (Malär et al., 2011). Sirgy et al. (2000) argued that self-congruity effects tend to be stronger among shoppers with lower levels of product or store knowledge. This implies that consumers with less expertise may rely more heavily on the symbolic meanings and identity-related aspects of brands when making purchasing decisions.

The complexity of the online decision-making process

The unique characteristics of the digital environment—such as information overload, the indirect nature of interactions, and the virtually unlimited assortment—fundamentally alter the psychological nature of consumer decision-making. Russo and Leclerc (1994) divided the purchasing decision-making process into three stages: (1) browsing, (2) evaluation, and (3) verification. Each of these stages involves distinct cognitive and emotional processes and presents different challenges to users, especially when products carry personal relevance or identity-related significance.

In the first stage—browsing—consumers are initially confronted with the product assortment, which is often overwhelmingly large. According to Reutskaja et al. (2011), an abundance of choice does not necessarily lead to better decisions; rather, it can result in cognitive overload, anxiety, and decision deferral. To cope with this complexity, consumers frequently rely on heuristics (e.g., filtering by price or selecting familiar brands) (Schultz & Block, 2015). Therefore, online platforms must not only provide a wide selection but also offer tools that assist users in navigating and processing information efficiently. Intuitive search options, adaptive filtering and sorting functions, and clear categorization can reduce mental strain and help clarify preferences (Chen et al., 2010). This stage becomes especially important when consumers are consciously searching for a brand or product that reflects their identity. Intuitive website design and visual codes—such as colors, fonts, and imagery—communicate from the very first moment who the platform is intended for (Poddar et al., 2009).

In the second phase—the evaluation stage—users engage in deeper information processing. Due to the absence of physical contact and the inability to touch or try products, consumers often rely on secondary sources—product descriptions, images, videos, and other users' reviews (Gunawan et al., 2019). The reliability, clarity, and relevance of these sources become critical for decision-making (Li & Zhang, 2023). Further supporting the link between symbolic meanings and self-concept, Drosou (2019) found that Greek women attach symbolic meanings to foreign fashion brands influenced by print media images, highlighting how external representations shape consumer brand perceptions. For more complex and feature-rich products—such as technological devices or customizable services—the cognitive effort required during the evaluation phase significantly increases. Here, identity-based processing is particularly important. Consumers tend to favor products that not only meet their functional needs but also emotionally “fit”

them—for example, aligning with their values, lifestyle, or social roles (Malär et al., 2011; Belk, 1988).

In the third phase—verification—the consumer makes the final decision. At this point, integrating the information gathered, weighing risk and trust, and evaluating the transparency of payment and delivery conditions play a key role (Palmer, 2002). In the digital environment, trust is one of the most crucial factors: clear feedback, reliable design, credible logos, and positive customer reviews all contribute to reinforcing the purchase decision (Hassanein & Head, 2007).

### *The Effect of Self-Congruity on Online Evaluation and Purchase Intention of Cosmetics*

Self-congruity is a key psychological factor in consumer behavior, playing a particularly important role in the evaluation and selection of products related to personal identity and self-expression, such as cosmetics (Sirgy, 1985; Aaker, 1997). In recent years, numerous studies have examined the impact of different dimensions of self-congruity on online purchasing decisions, highlighting the roles of both actual and ideal self-images.

The study by Suh, Lee, and Kim (2018) investigated the self-congruity of collaborated characters—such as celebrities or animated figures—in both online and offline marketing strategies in relation to cosmetic product evaluations. Their findings indicate that congruence with the ideal self-image is more influential in forming positive product evaluations than similarity to the actual self-image, especially when the characters and brand's images are aligned. This suggests that consumers identify not only with their current identity but also with their ideal selves during purchase decisions, a phenomenon that marketing communication can deliberately leverage.

In research conducted in Southeast Asia, Khalid et al. (2018a) confirmed that self-congruity also has a significant positive effect on consumers' online purchase intentions for cosmetics. Their study pointed out that congruence with both actual and ideal self-images supports customer engagement, emphasizing that reinforcing personal identity plays a central role in modern consumers' decision-making.

Lo and Tseng's (2021) study further refined this understanding by emphasizing the influence of self-congruity alongside marketing models and product conspicuousness on the behavior of predominantly university student online cosmetics buyers. Their research shows that self-congruity holds critical importance in purchase decisions, especially when products serve as social status symbols, intertwining identity and self-expression with consumer preferences. Conspicuous products—those bearing clear social messages—hold greater appeal for young consumers.

Additional research by Khalid and colleagues (2018b) also confirms that self-congruity is one of the strongest predictors of purchase intention for cosmetic merchandises. The emotional attachment arising from product alignment with consumers' self-image significantly increases customer commitment and brand loyalty. This is particularly crucial in markets where reinforcing personal identity and self-expression play a central role in product usage.

## **Methodology**

### *Eye-tracking*

The aim of this research was to compare two drugstore websites in terms of actual and ideal self-congruity, using an eye-tracking methodology. Screen-based eye-tracking lies between laboratory and field studies, simulating real-world conditions while limiting natural movement (Nordfält & Ahlbom, 2024). By tracking eye movements, it is possible to observe the users' focal points of attention, navigation patterns, and prioritization of website elements. The study analyzed participants' decision-making processes, with particular attention to their navigation patterns, filtering and search behaviors, as well as the product attributes they considered important. Eye-tracking was conducted using the Tobii T120 camera, and data were analyzed with the Tobii Pro Lab software. The experiments were displayed on a 24-inch screen, which participants viewed from a natural and comfortable distance of 60–70 cm. Participants were instructed to maintain a natural posture and minimize head movement to ensure accurate eye-tracking results, as sudden or excessive movements can interfere with the calibration and tracking accuracy of the system. Calibration followed a five-point procedure, with evenly distributed lighting (to avoid glare and eye strain) and minimal noise, in a well-insulated room.

### *Procedure and Task Definition*

In our mixed-method research, we applied a website usability test within the context of purchasing tasks of varying complexity (Gönczi & Hlédik, 2020), supplemented with a short questionnaire. This approach enabled the structured observation of participant behavior in realistic online shopping situations. We selected two drugstore websites for comparison because they offer a wide range of products and feature categories closely related to individual lifestyles and values.

Websites “A” and “B” target fundamentally different consumer groups, which is reflected in their product offerings, website design, and overall layout. Website “A” specializes primarily in beauty products, perfumes, and cosmetics, including luxury brands and niche fragrances, thus appealing to more sophisticated shoppers. Its website design is elegant and minimalist, placing significant emphasis on visual product presentation. In contrast, website “B” offers a broader product range that includes not only drugstore items but also household goods, baby A general national and international drugstore chain that also operates an online webshop. Its layout is simpler and less trendy, focusing on showcasing a wide selection of products and competitive pricing. While website “A” aims to evoke a sense of luxury and sophistication, website “B” prioritizes practicality and ease of navigation.

We employed a 2x2 design in the study, rotating two types of tasks (simple and complex) across both websites (“A” and “B”). For both simple and complex tasks, female participants were asked to choose a lipstick, and male participants

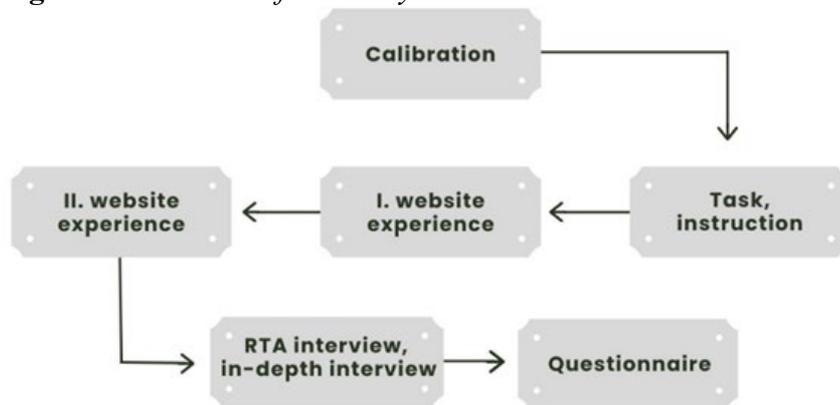
were asked to select a shower gel. For the simple, routine shopping task, participants provided two reasons for their choice, while for the more complex, detailed shopping process, they provided seven reasons, encouraging interaction with a greater number of elements (Novemsky et al., 2007). In each task, participants were asked to select a different product. Task instructions were as follows:

Explore the product offerings of Website “A”/“B”. Your task is to:

1. Choose a lipstick/shower gel that suits you and that you would be willing to purchase in real life.
2. Add the selected product to your cart.
3. Provide 2 / 7 reasons explaining why you chose this product.

After completing the tasks, participants took part in RTA (Retrospective Think-Aloud) interviews, during which we reviewed video recordings of their tasks. Participants were asked to comment on their decisions and any difficulties they encountered. We preferred RTA over CTA (Concurrent Think-Aloud) to avoid disrupting the task execution. Finally, participants completed a short questionnaire that included demographic data and online shopping habits specifically related to the relevant product category—either shower gel or lipstick (Figure 1). A pilot study was conducted to eliminate technical issues and to test the design.

**Figure 1.** *Overview of the Study Process*



Source: Created by authors

### *Participants*

The study sample consisted of 15 individuals—6 male and 9 female—ranging in age from 19 to 27 years (mean age: 22). In terms of online shopping habits, male participants were less likely to purchase shower gel online, preferring to buy it in physical stores, whereas female participants indicated a tendency to purchase lipstick online. Trials with excessive track loss or blinking were recalibrated to ensure data quality. As a result, no subjects had to be

excluded due to calibration issues. This process yielded a total of 30 observations. Each session lasted approximately one hour.

### *Analysis*

We divided participants into two groups based on whether the product they ultimately chose was more closely aligned with their actual or ideal self-image. Each participant completed two decision-making tasks and was interviewed after each, resulting in a total of 30 evaluations. Of these, in 16 cases the brand image of the selected product was more congruent with the participant's actual self-image, while in 14 cases it was more congruent with the ideal self-image.

The study examined how participants behaved in decisions where their final product choice reflected greater congruence with their actual self-image and compared these behaviors to those observed in ideal self-image congruent decisions. This segmentation allowed us to analyse distinct patterns in navigation, attention, filtering behavior, and brand evaluation across the two types of self-congruity.

Eye-tracking data were analysed using three core indicators: (1) fixation duration within an Area of Interest (AOI); (2) time to first fixation within an AOI; (3) time to first click within an AOI. The AOIs were defined as menu items, selected products, and shopping cart buttons.

The RTA interviews provided deeper insight into participants' cognitive and emotional processes during task completion. These interviews explored user behavior across three decision-making stages: (1) initial exploration, (2) narrowing down options and selecting a product, (3) collecting detailed information before adding an item to the cart.

Participants were also asked to reflect on how closely the brand image of the chosen product aligned with their self-image. While some consumers can consciously articulate the symbolic match between themselves and a brand, for others this alignment operates at a more intuitive or emotional level. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or projective techniques, are especially effective at uncovering these deeper congruity-based evaluations (Japutra et al., 2014). This assessment followed a well-established methodology in self-congruity research, where participants imagined a typical user of the brand and compared this image to their own actual and ideal selves (Sirgy et al., 1997). During the interviews, participants were asked the following open-ended question:

“Take a moment to think about the chosen product. Think about the kind of person who typically uses this product. Imagine this person in your mind and then describe this person using a few personal adjectives. Now, please describe yourself in your own words. What kind of person are you? Finally, how similar or different do you think you are from the typical user of this product? In what ways? Next, describe who you aspire to be (your ideal self). How similar or different do you think you are from the typical user of this product in terms of your ideal self-image? In what ways?”

Demographic data and participants' online shopping habits were collected using a structured questionnaire.

First, the distance between each participant's self-image and the image of each website was calculated individually. Then, by averaging these distances, we obtained the overall self-congruity index for each website.

## **Results**

### *Navigation Paths and Search Behavior Patterns*

Participants whose actual self-image aligned more closely with the website's perceived image typically followed familiar navigational structures. Familiar navigation refers to a website structure that includes a top navigation bar, which users commonly encounter across various platforms. This design makes it easier and more intuitive for them to locate information and complete tasks efficiently. As a result, they were able to navigate more efficiently and locate relevant information more quickly on the traditionally structured "A" website, which utilized a conventional hierarchical menu system. As one participant noted: *"The menu was straightforward and predictable, which helped me get what I needed fast."* (male, 24).

In contrast, the "B" website—characterized by a non-traditional layout in which product categories were accessible via a dynamic sidebar rather than a conventional top navigation bar—was less conducive to decision-making based on actual self-image congruence. Users interacting with this interface experienced more difficulty in identifying relevant products, leading to a decline in user experience and an elongation of the decision-making process. One user remarked: *"I found it confusing to find categories on that sidebar; it wasn't where I expected it."* (female, 20).

Participants who ultimately selected products aligned with their actual self-image tended to use the search bar more frequently to locate familiar brands and product categories, aiming for efficiency. In contrast, those who ended up choosing products that reflected their ideal self-image were more inclined to browse through the website's top navigation bar, engaging in exploratory behavior before making a decision.

The website's information architecture and menu design played a critical role in determining navigational efficiency. In decisions aligned with the ideal self-image, users engaged in more prolonged search processes, reflecting a deeper examination of product information and greater openness to discovering new brands.

### *Product Selection and filtering Preferences*

Users who eventually added products congruent with their ideal self-image to their cart tended to rely heavily on advanced filtering options—such as by ingredients, price, or sustainability—and spent more time exploring multiple product categories. For these users, having access to detailed filtering tools appeared to be a key part of their decision-making process. One participant

mentioned, *"I like to filter by ingredients and see if the product is organic or cruelty-free, that really matters to me."* (male, 24). Another said, *"Without filters like color or customer ratings, it was hard to narrow down my options."* (female, 21) On the "B" website, the limited filtering led to confusion and increased mental effort, which made their decisions more difficult. Participants often missed features like filtering by color, surface effect (e.g., matte, glossy, satin), or sorting by customer ratings. Another problem was that filter settings were lost after changing pages, which made it harder to compare products.

By comparison, users who ultimately selected products aligned with their actual self-image tended to reach their preferred product categories more quickly and made minimal use of filters or the search bar, relying on familiar navigation paths and habitual choices. They often clicked directly on familiar product categories and rarely used the search bar or filters. One participant explained, *"I just go straight to the brand or category I know. Filters aren't really necessary when I already know what I want."* (male, 27). For them, the speed and clarity of navigation were more important than exploring new options. Familiar brands, known prices, and fast availability were key factors in their decisions. The slower loading times and less intuitive layout of the "B" website negatively impacted the user experience, particularly among actual-self-oriented shoppers who prioritized fast and efficient navigation.

When product choices showed greater congruence with participants' ideal self-image, factors such as brand prestige, premium-quality ingredients, and ethical attributes (e.g., cruelty-free certification, organic sourcing) played a central role. These consumers were generally more open to selecting products from higher price categories. One participant explained, *"I'm willing to spend more if the product feels really high quality and special."* (female, 23). In contrast, when choices reflected stronger congruence with the actual self-image, participants emphasized practicality and value. Their decisions were driven by price sensitivity, brand familiarity, and convenience. As one participant put it, *"I was looking for sales and good deals, but I have a loyalty card, so I knew the price would be discounted anyway"* (female, 21)

### *Information processing and Decision-making Mechanisms*

Consumers showed clear differences in how they processed product information and made decisions, depending on whether their final choices demonstrated greater congruence with their actual or ideal self-image. When product choices aligned more closely with the ideal self-image, visual appearance—particularly packaging, image quality, and rich product descriptions—emerged as a key influencing factor: *"There was only one photo, and it didn't show how the product looks on skin or on a model. I also missed having nicer pictures. That's not enough for me to decide."* (female, 21) They tended to read product descriptions carefully and were more likely to abandon the purchase if they found the information insufficient. In contrast, users whose final product choices showed greater congruence with their actual self-image relied more on brand

familiarity and visual cues such as packaging, price, or promotions, and were less inclined to search for additional information.

Consumers whose purchases reflected greater congruence with their actual self-image typically skimmed product pages quickly, spent less time analyzing content, and were highly influenced by discounts and special offers: *"I don't like overthinking it. I usually stick to what I know works"* (male, 21). Conversely, consumers with greater congruence to their ideal self-image placed more emphasis on long-term value and brand image when making decisions. Visual preferences also varied depending on the self-image congruence reflected in consumers' final choices: those whose decisions showed congruence with their actual self-image were satisfied with standard product photos, while those with congruence to their ideal self-image preferred lifestyle-oriented, inspirational visuals that aligned with their aspirational identity.

A negative factor in the user experience was that the "B" website often displayed only a single product image, and product variants were not always shown with consistent visuals. Product naming conventions also influenced preferences differently depending on self-image congruence in purchase decisions: consumers whose product choices more aligned with their ideal self-image favored emotionally engaging, narrative-based product names, whereas those congruent with their actual self-image preferred clear, function-oriented labels. *"That product name sounds nice but tells me nothing. Is it for dry skin or not?"* (male, 20).

Customer reviews held particular importance for consumers whose purchase decisions were more closely aligned with their ideal self-image. These users were more likely to consult external sources before making a decision and tended to avoid products with negative reviews. A lack of customer feedback created uncertainty, which often resulted in abandoning the purchase altogether. *"If there are no reviews, I don't risk it—I'll pick something else"* (female, 24), explained a participant.

Consumers whose final brand choices were more congruent with their actual self-image made faster decisions, averaging 39.47 seconds, whereas those whose choices aligned with their ideal self-image took significantly longer—an average of 76.21 seconds—to evaluate their options. While those whose choices aligned more closely with their ideal self-image took more time to decide. If a product or brand did not meet their expectations—such as lacking prestige, ethical certification, or premium ingredients—they often abandoned the purchase and searched for alternatives. For this group, long-term value and brand image were more important than price or temporary discounts.

#### *The role of brands in the purchase process*

For consumers whose chosen products were more congruent with their actual self-image habits and quick decision-making played a dominant role. In these types of decisions, users tended to rely on familiar and trusted brands, drawing on past experiences and a sense of security. As a result, they were less open to trying new or innovative brands.

In contrast, consumers whose selected products demonstrated greater congruence with their ideal self-image approached brand selection in a more

aspirational manner. They tended to prefer brands that reflected the lifestyle or values they aimed to embody. Premium, sustainable, or trend-driven products and brands were more appealing to them, even if they had not previously used those brands.

For consumers whose choices were more congruent with their actual self-image, brand selection primarily served as a low-risk, time-saving strategy to reduce uncertainty. In contrast, those whose choices aligned more closely with their ideal self-image viewed brands as tools for self-expression and identity building, placing greater emphasis on brand values, sustainability, and innovation in their decision-making.

## **Discussion**

This research contributes to the theory of consumer behavior by providing deeper insight into what activities lead to actual or ideal self-image congruence. While previous studies have primarily focused on factors influenced by self-image congruence, the current study demonstrates how actual and ideal self-image congruences occur through individual stages of the purchase decision process (see Table 2).

Participants whose ideal self-image aligned more closely with the product's brand image paid greater attention to its aesthetic design, interactive features, and the richness of information. In contrast, those whose actual self-image was more congruent prioritized fast navigation, simplified search functions, and shorter decision-making processes. When it comes to information seeking and decision-making, participants whose chosen products were more congruent with their ideal self-image tended to examine product descriptions, ingredients, and customer reviews in greater detail. In contrast, when the selected product aligned more closely with their actual self-image, decisions were more strongly shaped by habit and prior experience, resulting in faster choices. Regarding product features and visual presentation, consumers aligned with their actual self-image focus on functionality and practicality, while those aligned with their ideal self-image value aesthetics, luxury, and brand image. This is consistent with Malär et al. (2011), who show ideal self-congruity's strong influence on emotional attachment and detailed brand engagement versus actual self-congruity's link to satisfaction and trust.

Participants whose chosen products showed greater congruence with their actual self-image tended to prefer well-known, trusted brands, as a way to reduce decision time and minimize uncertainty. Supporting Sirgy et al.'s (2000) proposition, more knowledgeable consumers tend to focus on functional attributes and make quicker decisions. In contrast, consumers whose selected products aligned more closely with their ideal self-image tended to make more aspirational choices and were more open to premium or unfamiliar brands that reflected their desired identity. These consumers were also more willing to pay higher prices for features such as prestige, innovation, or ethical values (e.g., sustainability, organic ingredients). This finding resonates with Liu et al. (2012),

emphasizing aspirational values driving luxury brand preferences and willingness to pay more. On the other hand, consumers guided by their actual self-image are more price-sensitive, focusing on value for money and are more likely to respond to promotions.

**Table 2.** *Differences in Website usage between Actual and Ideal Self-congruence*

<b>Aspect examined</b>	<b>Actual self-congruence</b>	<b>Ideal self-congruence</b>
<b>Website usage habits</b>	Fast navigation, simple search, efficient shopping	Aesthetic appearance, interactive features, detailed information
<b>Information seeking and decision-making</b>	Rely on prior experiences and habits, quick decisions	Look for detailed product descriptions, ingredients, and reviews; slower process
<b>Product features and visuals</b>	Focus on functionality and practicality	Emphasis on aesthetics, luxury feel, and brand image
<b>Brand preference</b>	Loyal to well-known, reliable brands to facilitate faster decisions	Choose aspirationally, open to premium or new brands aligning with identity
<b>Price sensitivity and value perception</b>	Value for money is key; promotions have strong influence	Willing to pay more for prestige, innovation, or ethical values (e.g., sustainability)

*Source: Created by the authors*

## Conclusions

The results highlight that actual and ideal self-image leads to differences in shopping decisions and the overall online experience. Participants whose choices showed greater congruence with their actual self-image tended to make faster, more habitual, routine-based decisions, whereas those whose choices aligned more with their ideal self-image engaged in more reflective and information-rich decision-making processes. For e-commerce platforms, delivering an optimal shopping experience requires aligning navigation structure, visual and informational content, and promotional strategies with users' self-image profiles. Self-image-based segmentation can thus serve as a powerful tool for enhancing customer engagement and improving conversion rates.

To optimize e-commerce platforms, it is essential to tailor both functionality and content to different self-image profiles. For consumers whose choices show congruence with their actual self-image, fast and intuitive navigation, minimalist visuals, concise product details, and quick page loading enhance efficiency and support quick decision-making. In contrast, consumers whose choices align with their ideal self-image respond better to rich content—such as lifestyle imagery, detailed product descriptions, and advanced search filters that emphasize values like sustainability or brand prestige. Emphasizing trustworthy user reviews builds credibility, especially for aspirational shoppers. Promotional strategies should

also differ price-driven offers appeal to actual self-guided buyers, while brand value and long-term benefits attract ideal self-guided consumers.

This study is exploratory in nature and, as such, involves a relatively small sample size, which limits the generalizability of the findings. However, the modest number of participants is consistent with the methodological standards of qualitative, eye-tracking-based research, where the emphasis lies in depth of insight rather than statistical representativeness. The study was designed to uncover nuanced behavioral patterns and decision-making strategies rather than to produce broadly generalizable conclusions.

Future research should aim to replicate and extend these findings across broader populations and in different product categories. Examining self-image congruence in purchasing processes across various demographic groups and with other types of consumer goods would help validate the patterns observed here and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the activities and decision-making processes that lead to greater congruence between the chosen product and either the consumer's actual or ideal self-image.

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