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Linking fashion consciousness with Gen Y attitude towards prestige brands

Riza Casidy
Department of Marketing, Deakin University, Burwood, Australia, and
Asti Nafia Nuryana and Sri Rahayu Hijrah Hati
Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship between fashion self-congruity (FSC), fashion consciousness (FC), and attitude towards prestige brands (ATT) among Generation Y (Gen Y) consumers. The study aims to expand the scope of fashion marketing research by validating the self-congruence theory within the context of Indonesian prestige brand market.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper opted for a descriptive study involving 210 undergraduate students from a top-ranked university in Indonesia. Data were collected using anonymous self-administered questionnaire. Structural equation modelling were employed to test the research hypotheses.

Findings – The study found that FC performs a full mediating role on the relationship between fashion self-congruence and ATT.

Research limitations/implications – The homogenous nature of the respondents have limited the generalisability of the findings. Future research could replicate this study using a sample of wider population.

Practical implications – The paper includes implications for fashion marketers to effectively target fashion-conscious consumers by developing a brand positioning strategy that is consistent with consumers’ self-concept.

Originality/value – This paper extends the empirical model of FC by incorporating fashion self-congruence as an antecedent of ATT. With limited academic research on Indonesian consumers in mind, this is the first empirical study to examine the antecedents of Indonesian consumers’ attitude towards prestige fashion brands.

Keywords
Indonesia, Self-congruity, Fashion consciousness, Fashion marketing, Luxury items, Prestige brands

Paper type
Research paper

Introduction

Generation Y (Gen Y) consumers represent an important segment with nearly $69 billion in discretionary spending every year (Wong, 2010). Studies in the past have suggested that Gen Y tend to spend excessively when it comes to prestige brands and products (Chadha and Husband, 2006; Phau, 2014). This excessive spending is likely to be driven by the need to possess prestige brands as a means to enhance their social standing (O’Cass and Choy, 2008; Piacentini and Mailer, 2004).

While Europe and America are generally considered the main market for prestige brands, the consumption of prestige brands in Asia has grown extensively over the past decade (Gao et al., 2009). Indonesia represents an attractive research context for prestige brands due to
the growth of middle classes in this region. In the year 2013 alone, the total sales of prestige designer apparel (ready-to-wear) brand reached $286 million, and is expected to grow at an accelerating rate over the next five years (Euromonitor, 2014). It is expected that by the year 2030, more people will join the affluent consuming segment in Indonesia than in any other emerging nations except China and India (McKinsey, 2013), making it the largest market for luxury in South East Asia over the next few years (Nayak, 2012).

Studies have demonstrated that an increase in discretionary income tend to lead to a shift in consumption patterns from necessity to luxury items, where consumers start experimenting with brands (Mukherjee et al., 2012). Indonesian consumers “generally do not save for their retirement but rather spend money on newly available products, especially those that confer status and serve as symbols of self-achievement” (Kapferer, 2012, p. 454). Despite the growth of prestige brand consumption in Indonesia, very limited academic research has been done in this market, particularly within the fashion context.

Studies on the topic of prestige brand consumption have been dominated by the self-congruity theory, which suggests that consumers prefer brands that best reflect their ideal or actual self (Chu et al., 2015; Klink and Ataide, 2012). Proponents of the theory suggest that the consumer decision to purchase prestige brands is not driven by quality perceptions per se, but by the inherent social meanings of the brands that convey their self-image and socio-economic status (Bao and Mandrik, 2004). While the validity of self-congruity theory has been extensively researched within the prestige brand context (Liu et al., 2012; Mazodier and Merunka, 2012), there is a gap in the literature on the effects of self-congruity within the fashion context (Casidy, 2012a, b). In addition, little is known about whether there is a significant relationship between fashion consciousness (FC) and attitude towards prestige brands (ATT).

Dubois et al. (2005) suggested the need for a further research on the roles of psychological factors in the attitude formation towards prestige brands. The present study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge through examining the relationship between fashion self-congruity (FSC), FC, and ATT among Indonesian Gen Y consumers. The main research question we seek to address is:

RQ1. Does self-congruity matter in the context of prestige fashion brands?

An understanding of the importance of self-congruity within this context will guide marketers in developing effective brand appeals for their target segments.

**Literature review**

*Gen Y ATT*

Fashion products represent an ideal context to measure Gen Y ATT. Fashion apparels are regarded as a highly expressive product (Sierra and Hyman, 2011), and thus the possession of prestige-branded apparels are regarded as an important signal of status for Gen Y (Koksal, 2014). Similarly, other studies have suggested that prestige fashion brands allow consumers to express their self-concept (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 2000; Piacentini and Mailer, 2004), enhance self-confidence (Husic and Cicic, 2009), and impress their peers (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002).

While some studies asserted that wealthier Gen Y are more likely to be involved in prestige brand consumption (Piacentini and Mailer, 2004), others have suggested that consumers from any social strata could participate in prestige brand consumption (Eastman et al., 1999;
Van Kempen, 2003). Consumers with low spending power have either resorted to buy the counterfeit alternatives (Cheung and Prendergast, 2006; Fernandes, 2013) or force themselves to buy the authentic products for the sake of portraying their ideal self-image. The findings of Fernandes (2013) and Cheung and Prendergast (2006) are highly relevant for the present study as most of the respondents in this study have relatively modest disposable income while displaying strong, positive ATT.

FC
Studies on self-consciousness have dominated the psychology literature since the late 1970s. The existing literature on self-consciousness have generally divided the concept into two dimensions; private and public self-consciousness (Fenigstein, 1979). Private self-consciousness reflects latent aspects of the self that are not discernible by others (Bandura, 1991) whereas public self-consciousness reflects the way individuals portray themselves and how others perceive them (Quoquab et al., 2014).

Highly public-conscious consumers tend to be overly concerned about their appearances and fashion (Quoquab et al., 2014). Past studies have found that a strong level of public self-consciousness is significantly related to fashion opinion leadership (Gould and Barak, 1988), fashion involvement (Xu, 2008), and perceived fashion ability (Workman and Lee, 2013), providing further evidence to the notion that clothing fashion can be used to enhance social self-image. However, although an extensive number of studies have examined public self-consciousness from a psycho-sociological perspective, until recently little studies have been devoted to examine public self-consciousness with respect to consumer behaviour (Workman and Seung-Hee, 2011).

This study seeks to contribute to the body of literature through examining the role of public self-consciousness in prestige fashion brand context. More specifically, this study focuses on the construct of “FC”, a term which was coined to conceptualise public self-consciousness within the fashion consumption context (Gould and Barak, 1988; Gould and Stern, 1989). For the purpose of this study, “FC” is defined as “a person’s degree of involvement with clothing styles or fashions and implies an interest in fashion styles and someone’s appearance” (Koksal, 2014, p. 434).

Fashion clothing has long been regarded as a socially and economically important matter in many societies (Hansen, 2004; McCracken, 1986). While the role of fashion clothing has been well documented in the Western societies, few empirical studies have been done to examine its role in emerging economies (Shukla et al., 2006; Zhang and Kim, 2013). This lack of empirical studies is particularly apparent in emerging economies such as Indonesia, where the issue of branded fashion clothing is becoming a significant part of the society (Luvaas, 2013).

FSC
The self-congruity theory posits that consumers prefer brands that are congruent with their self-image (Barone et al., 1999; Sirgy, 1985). Several studies have examined the validity of self-congruity theory in the fashion context. Liu et al. (2012) found that consumer image-congruity is a strong predictor for positive attitude and loyalty towards prestige fashion brands. Close et al. (2009) found that a strong “fit” between consumer self-image and the image of a fashion event will lead to stronger persuasion of the event which in turn enhances consumers’ shopping intention. Hollenbeck and Kaikati (2012) found that consumers use brands to express their actual and ideal self-concept in social media. Phau
(2014) and Souiden et al. (2011) asserted that consumers who strive to achieve social status tend to convey a positive self-image which in turns leads to a stronger desire to purchase branded fashion products. The notion of “FSC” in this study refers to the extent to which consumers perceive their fashion style as a reflection of their self-image. Little attention has been given to the extent of which consumers see fashion products as a reflection of their self-image and how this affects their ATT and FC. This study postulates that consumers who see fashion products as a reflection of their self-concept will have a strong level of FC, as they place high importance on the way they dress. These consumers may also have a strong positive perception on prestige fashion brands, as they see these brands as a means to enhance their self-image (Liu et al., 2012):

H1. FSC is positively associated with ATT.
H2. FSC is positively associated with FC.

The mediating role of FC
The present study extends the existing empirical framework of FC–ATT (Casidy, 2012b) by incorporating FSC in the model and treating FC as the mediating variable on the relationship between FSC and ATT. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework of the present study. To test for the mediation role of FC, there must be an established relationship between the independent (FSC), mediator (FC), and outcome (ATT) variable. (Gould and Stern, 1989) asserted that fashion conscious consumers tend to focus more on their outward appearance, and will tend to look for appearance-related reinforcement in their shopping activities. Prestige fashion brand could be seen as an appearance-related reinforcement (Workman and Seung-Hee, 2011). Highly fashion conscious consumers could have a strong, positive attitude towards prestige fashion brands as these could serve as a means to improve their outward appearance. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H3. FC is positively associated with ATT.

Past studies have examined the positive effects of product involvement on repurchase behaviour (Homburg et al., 2010; Troilo et al., 2014). FC (as a function of product involvement in fashion context), in particular, have been linked with positive ATT (Zhang and Kim, 2013). The possession of prestige brands may be more valued by those who are highly materialistic (Vigneron and Johnson, 2004) and highly fashion conscious (O’Cass and Siahtiri, 2014). This study posits that although consumers may see fashion as a reflection of who they are (FSC), it is their involvement with fashion products (FC) that explains the relationship between their self-congruity and ATT. Vieira (2009) asserted that FC is significantly related with brand knowledge. Thus, consumers who have a strong sense of FSC but low level of FC may be less inclined to have positive ATT due to their lack of brand knowledge. Less fashion-conscious consumers may engage in other consumption behaviour (i.e. purchasing non-prestige fashion brands) to express their self-concept. On the other hand, consumers with a strong sense of FSC and FC may be more likely to have positive ATT due to their strong brand knowledge. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H4. FC mediates the relationship between FSC and ATT.
Methodology

Sample selection
This study uses a sample of university students in Indonesia. University students represent a segment with a relatively strong positive ATT (Casidy, 2012b). Young people’s role as innovators within the fashion context has been extensively cited in the literature (Bakewell et al., 2006; Hourigan and Bougoure, 2012; O’ Cass and Choy, 2008). Thus, despite their relatively low disposable income young consumers are considered as an important segment within the prestige fashion brand market as they serve as influencers and transmitters of new fashion ideas across broader population (Casidy, 2012b; Erdogmuş and Büdeyri-Turan, 2012; Moore and Carpenter, 2008).
We employed convenience sampling to recruit respondents from the most exclusive university in Indonesia in terms of university ranking and student acceptance rates. The study utilised anonymous self-administered survey administered at the Faculty of Economics of the University. We sent an invitation to all undergraduate unit chairs in the Faculty of Economics of the University. Four unit chairs, out of the 40 invited, agreed to provide us with access to collect data from six lecture sessions. A total of 940 surveys were distributed with reply-paid envelopes in the six lecture sessions. A total of 210 usable responses were collected in two months period. All respondents’ Age range were between 19 and 34 years old. The majority of the respondents were female (66.19 per cent), living in the Greater Jakarta area comprising Jakarta (72.86 per cent), Bogor (1.43 per cent), Depok (18.10 per cent), Tangerang (0.48), and Bekasi city (7.14 per cent). The majority of the respondents (76.67 per cent) spent less than US$84 to buy fashion products and only 4.76 per cent respondents spent above US$210 their monthly expenditure for fashion products.

Measures
This study uses existing scales from the literature to measure the constructs. All of the scale items were translated into Indonesian and then back-translated to ensure item equivalence (Mullen, 1995). Since the adopted scales were never applied in Indonesian context, the scale...
items were pretested to be relevant to the target respondents and minor modifications were made to the wording following respondents’ feedback in the pre-testing stage.

**ATT.** The scale items to measure ATT were adopted from the “brand” dimension of Prestigious Consumers (PRECON) scale (Deeter-Schmelz et al., 1995). The original PRECON scale consists of five dimensions (brand, quality, status, involvement, and store atmosphere) to assess symbolic values that could affect consumers’ preferences for prestige shopping behaviour. The PRECON scale is the most widely used construct in the marketing literature to examine consumers’ preferences for prestige brands, and has been used in fashion marketing literature to examine individual differences in prestige fashion consumption (Husic and Cicic, 2009; Mulyanegara and Tsarenko, 2009).

**FC.** This study adapted the Fashion Consciousness Scale (FCS) of Gould and Stern (1989) to measure the importance given by respondents to fashion products.

**FSC.** The survey instrument adapted one item of self-image congruity item of Sirgy et al. (1997) to measure FSC: “The way I dress reflect who I really Am”.

**Method bias**
In the present study, method bias analysis was implemented using two approaches (Malhotra et al., 2006). First, control was established by mixing non-related items in the survey to prevent respondents from guessing the relationship among sequential variables (Jap and Anderson, 2003). Second, we employed Harman’s single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) by loading all variables into the factor analysis and constraining the number of factor to “1”. An observation of the total variance explained suggests that the first component accounts for 46.51 per cent of all variables in the model, which suggests that the instrument is free from significant common method bias effects as the variance is less than 50 per cent (Podsakoff et al., 2012).

**Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)**
An EFA was employed to ensure uni-dimensionality of the factors. One item of ATT (“I consider the brand name when purchasing clothing for others”) was removed from further analysis due to low-factor loadings. The reliability of the constructs was measured using “composite reliability” (CR) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). As shown in the Appendix, the CR value of all constructs is above 0.80, indicating good construct reliability.

**Confirmatory factor analysis**
Structural equation modelling was employed to perform a confirmatory factor analysis on the proposed model. The measurement model was tested using the incremental modification approach of Segars and Grover (1993) and Cheng (2001). The model was revised by observing and potentially removing some indicators with low-factor loadings and high modification indexes (Cheng, 2001). No variables were removed following the CFA procedure. The final measurement model demonstrated good fit with the data as reflected in the fit indices including The final measurement model demonstrated good fit with the data as reflected in the fit indices including $\chi^2(33)=66.454 \,(p<0.001)$, $NC \,(2.014)$, $RMSEA \,(0.070)$, $TLI \,(0.950)$, $CFI \,(0.964)$, and $NFI \,(0.931)$.

Discriminant validity was established through an examination of the averages of variance extracted (AVE) and correlation between constructs. As shown in Table I, the AVE of each construct is greater than the correlation between any constructs, thus indicating discriminant validity.
Table 1. Correlation matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>AB</th>
<th>FC</th>
<th>FSC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attitude (AB)</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.341</td>
<td>0.757</td>
<td>0.479</td>
<td><strong>0.227</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion consciousness (FC)</td>
<td>4.667</td>
<td>1.188</td>
<td>0.479**</td>
<td>0.742</td>
<td>0.005**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fashion self-congruence (FSC)</td>
<td>5.214</td>
<td>1.386</td>
<td>0.227**</td>
<td>0.515**</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Italic indicates square root of average of variance extracted. **Correlation is significant at 0.05 and 0.001 levels, respectively (two-tailed)

Results

Structural model

A full structural model was employed to examine the study hypotheses. In this structural model, FC was incorporated as the mediating variable. The bootstrapping method was used in AMOS to estimate the standard error and calculate indirect effects. The effects were calculated at a confidence level of 95 per cent and the bootstrap was set to equal to 500. In order to examine the mediation hypothesis, we followed Baron and Kenny (1986) criteria to establish whether the conditions for mediation exist. First, we ran a structural model to determine that there is a relationship between FSC (as the antecedent) and ATT (as the outcome variables). As can be seen in Table II under: "Mediation test stage I: independent to dependent variable", FSC was found to have a statistically significant relationship with ATT (β=0.268; p<0.001) prior to the inclusion of FC as the mediator variable. Thus, the first condition of mediation is fulfilled and support was found for H1.

Next, we ran a structural model to establish that there is a relationship between FSC (as the independent variable) and FC (as the mediator variable). FSC was found to have a significant relationship with FC (β=0.569; p<0.001). Thus, Baron and Kenny (1986) second condition of mediation is met and support was found for H2.

The third condition of mediation specifies that the mediator must have significant relationship with the dependent variable. The full structural model was run to examine the relationship between FC and ATT. The results suggest that there is a significant relationship between FC and ATT (β=0.564; p<0.001), thereby lending support to H3.

The fourth condition of mediation specifies that the direct effects between the independent variable and the dependent variable should disappear or weaken with the inclusion of the mediator. This condition was also fulfilled and discussed in more details in the following section.

The mediation effects were measured through an observation of the significance of the indirect effects. FSC was found to have significant indirect effects on ATT (β=0.349; p<0.001) through FC as the mediating variable, thereby lending support to H4. In order to determine the extent of mediation (full or partial), we examined the relationship between independent and the outcome variable prior to the inclusion of the mediating variable in the model. The analysis suggests that the direct effects between FSC and ATT was reduced and became non-significant (β=0.079; p>0.05), after the introduction of FC as the mediating variable. This indicates that FC performs a full mediating role on the relationship between FSC and ATT. Figure 2 shows the standardised coefficients of the relationship between constructs.

Discussion and implications
This study has extended the body of literature on the role of self-consciousness in fashion context through an examination of the relationship between FSC, FC, and ATT of Indonesian Gen Y consumers. First, this study found a significant relationship between FSC and FC. Consumers that see fashion as a reflection of their self-image are likely to be more involved with fashion-related products. This lends further support on the relationship between self-congruity and product involvement in fashion context (Barone et al., 1999). Second, this study found that the extent of an individual’s FC is positively associated with ATT. The analysis found that although the direct effect of FC alone is significant to predict attitude (β=0.268; p<0.001), the indirect effect is even more powerful (β=0.268; p<0.001), thereby lending further support on the important role of FC as a mediating variable in the empirical model of ATT (Bakewell et al., 2006; Casidy, 2012b; Parker et al., 2004; Zhang and Kim, 2013). This suggests that: first, highly fashion-conscious individuals place high importance on the image portrayed by prestige brands; and second, the effects of FSC on ATT are only significant if the individuals are highly fashion-conscious. The results of our study have provided further support on the argument that prestige brands are more appealing to those who are highly fashion conscious (O’Cass and Siahtiri, 2014; Vieira, 2009).

**Figure 2. Structural model.**

Consumer attitudes towards prestige brands are important concept in the marketing literature. Previous studies have demonstrated positive relationship between consumer attitude and actual purchase behaviour in prestige brand contexts (Parkvithee and Miranda, 2012; Prendergast and Wong, 2003). This study has made important theoretical contributions to the body of literature. By examining the validity of self-congruity theory in the fashion context (Close et al., 2009; Liu et al., 2012; Souiden et al., 2011) and extending the empirical model of FC – brand attitude (Casidy, 2012b) through the incorporation of FSC as an antecedent of ATT. The findings suggest that consumer FSC alone does not lead to positive ATT. Rather, it is only through consumers’ sense of FC that they eventually “transform” their FSC to positive ATT.
This study has also broadened the scope of prestige fashion brand research in marketing literature by focusing on Indonesian Gen Y consumers. Until recently, there have been very limited academic research despite the accelerating growth of prestige product consumption in this region (Dick, 1985; Lu and Lu, 2010). In doing so, this research has addressed the call for more research on prestige brands in emerging economies, particularly within the Asia Pacific region (Shukla et al., 2006).

The findings of the present study generate several practical implications for marketers. First, since consumers from developing countries (e.g. Indonesia) express similar level of interest in prestige fashion brands as those from developed countries, prestige fashion marketers should not overlook potential segments in developing regions, including BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) as well as CIVETS (Colombia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Egypt, Turkey, and South Africa) countries, as sales of prestige products in these countries are expected to grow over the next decade (Gao et al., 2009). Second, since FSC plays an important role in affecting consumer ATT, marketers should develop brands that are consistent with consumers’ dominant self-image (O’Cass and Frost, 2002). For instance, a positioning strategy focusing on how prestige brands can help consumers to connect with new people or expand their social network can be effective as this is consistent with the extraversion trait of highly brand-oriented consumers. Third, the important role of FC found in this study may suggest that consumers’ experience with the fashion industry is vital. Thus, fashion marketers targeting Indonesian market should spend more effort educating young consumers, instilling fashion awareness and brand preferences in consumer mind in the early stage of consumer socialisation (O’Cass and Lim, 2002).

Limitations and future research
This study has several limitations which can be addressed in future research. This study uses a single item to measure FSC. While some prominent scholars have suggested that single-item measures should be used for a “concrete singular object and a concrete attribute” (Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007, p. 175), we acknowledge that the use of single-item measure of self-congruity in this study could limit the generalisability of the research particularly in other (non-fashion context). Since there is a lack of self-congruity measure within the marketing literature, future research may benefit by incorporating few best indicators to measure self-congruity in fashion context, or by developing a multi-dimensional measure of self-congruity that could be applicable in various consumption contexts (Hayduk and Littvay, 2012).

The use of undergraduate students as the study sample is another limitation. The sample is relatively homogenous with limited spending power. Consequently, future research projects can replicate this study using a sample drawn from a broader cross-section of the wider population. Finally, the lack of measurement items for actual purchase decision is another limitation that can be addressed in future research. Yet another fruitful area for further research is to investigate the antecedents of prestige sensitivity in luxury consumption context. In particular, future research could examine the effects of personality traits, achievement orientation, and socio-economic status on prestige sensitivity. An understanding of the antecedents and consequences of prestige sensitivity could provide useful insights for marketing academics and practitioners alike. It is expected that the present study will act as a catalyst for further exploration of this important topic.
References


Appendix

Table A1. Measurements properties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Standardised loading</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>T</th>
<th>Composite reliability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATT5</td>
<td>I look my best when wearing prestige brand name clothing</td>
<td>0.784</td>
<td>0.102</td>
<td>10.915</td>
<td>0.870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT3</td>
<td>I consider the prestige brand name when purchasing clothing for myself</td>
<td>0.824</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>11.435</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT1</td>
<td>I like to wear prestige brand name clothing</td>
<td>0.745</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>10.341</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT7</td>
<td>I will pay a higher price for clothing that is made by a popular designer or manufacturer</td>
<td>0.712</td>
<td>0.114</td>
<td>9.882</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATT6</td>
<td>I usually only shop in prestige fashionable stores</td>
<td>0.710</td>
<td>0.112</td>
<td>9.849</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCS3</td>
<td>I’m very conscious of the fashion related to my own gender</td>
<td>0.853</td>
<td>0.201</td>
<td>8.134</td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCS2</td>
<td>I pay attention to the way people dressed</td>
<td>0.770</td>
<td>0.198</td>
<td>7.820</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCS1</td>
<td>I’m very involved with the clothes I wear</td>
<td>0.796</td>
<td>0.166</td>
<td>7.715</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FCS4</td>
<td>I perceive myself as a fashion leader</td>
<td>0.580</td>
<td>0.178</td>
<td>6.529</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**About the authors**

Dr Riza Casidy is a Senior Lecturer of Marketing at the Department of Marketing, Deakin Business School, Australia. He earned his PhD degree in Marketing from the Monash University as the youngest graduate in the Faculty of Business and Economics. His major research interest areas and ongoing studies are about the role of market orientation and brand orientation in the non-profit sector. He has published and served as a Reviewer in leading marketing journals, including the Journal of Brand Management, Journal of Strategic Marketing, Marketing Intelligence and Planning, amongst others. Dr Riza Casidy is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: riza.casidy@deakin.edu.au

Asti Nafia Nuryana is a Research Student at the Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Indonesia. Her research interests are in the area of brand personality and fashion marketing. She is also involved in government research projects involving Indonesian consumers.

Sri Rahayu Hijrah Hati is a Lecturer at the Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Indonesia Faculty of Economics and Business. She is also a Country Research Analyst for Indonesia at the Euromonitor International. Her research interests are in the area of branding, luxury marketing, and the impact of religiosity on consumer donation intention. She has published in Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics and other leading marketing publications in Asia Pacific region.