

# **SELF-EXPRESSIVE VALUE AND PRODUCT PURCHASE: WHICH SELF REALLY DOMINATE?**

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## **Abstract**

People select products, brands and groups of people to express themselves and enhance themselves. A brand is perceived as attractive when it is helpful to a person to express himself or herself. Previous researches have covered some aspects of this topic, still much research is needed in the area of Marketing applications.

The problem addressed in this research was that which variants of the self concept really affects the self expressive value and thereby, brand attractiveness. So this research mainly aimed to identify, and evaluate in isolation, the variants of the self concept on the self expressive value. For this research primary data were collected by a survey using a structured questionnaire. A convenience sample of 100 was selected for the study. Data were analyzed using Minitab 14.

The finding shows that a strong ideal self of a person can have a greater impact on the self expressive value. When carefully looked at, there is a possibility to create a new ideal self and hinder the influence of the existing ideal self. Further, it can stimulate the influence of the ideal social self and hinder the influence of the existing actual social self. The empirical data strongly supported the theory that consumers of different brands of a product class would perceive themselves to have significantly different self-concepts. It is also found that majority who accompanied an important person may change their purchasing decision because of such significant person's disagreement or opinion.

Key words: self-expressive value, self-concept, situational self-image

## **1. RESEARCH BACKGROUND**

In product marketing, varieties of marketing strategies are based on the knowledge of self concept to persuade the consumers to purchase. In some advertising campaigns consumers are informed about the key benefits and elaborating more on functional values. Alternative to this utilitarian approach, a value-expressive or

symbolic appeal has been emerged. In this strategy how to build a personality for the product as well as how to create and use the image of the generalized user of the product is important to be investigated.

The meaning of social identification in social psychology that person identifies him/her self as a member of a society and these identifications

are used by people to express themselves (Hogg, & Abrams 1988, as cited in Chung, Dongchul, & Seung, 2001, Mael & Ashforth 1992,). People use products, brands and groups of people to express themselves. Sometimes they may not actually belong to that particular group or might not actually use that product or brand, but they may be aspired to be related to or belong to (Fournier, 1998).

A brand is perceived as attractive when it is helpful to a person to express him/herself and the person identifies with the brand (Belk, 1988). According to Aaker (1999) a brand is used to express self and reflect self-concept. The greater the self-expressive value and greater the distinctiveness of the brand personality people tend to identify with the brand and buy the product. Many consumers like to express themselves and enhance themselves by selecting certain brands.

Value expressiveness influence, on the other hand, happens when individual use others' norms, values, and behaviours to model their own attitudes and behaviours. Value expressiveness operates through the process of identification (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). Identification occurs when people adopts attitudes and behaviours in order to be associated with another group.

Both the above mentioned self identification and value expressiveness discusses the same concept of self expressive value. In simple terms the self expressive value refers to different ways we reveal/expose ourselves in different encounters. All ready research has covered the aspect that self has an impact on our self expressive value. But in this research we try to identify, evaluate in isolation, which factors in the self concept really affects the self expressive value.

## **2. THE OBJECTIVES**

The problem addressed in this research was that which variants of the self concept really affects the self expressive value and thereby, product purchase. So this research is mainly aimed at identifying, and evaluating in isolation, the variants of the self concept on the self expressive value. The study established several objectives. The first was to analyse the different selves based on age and gender to find out the impact variations on self expressive value, secondly, to identify the types of self that dominating most frequently in consumer minds, and finally, to identify how the expressive value is affected due to the impact of one's reference groups which is referred as significant others in this research.

## **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The image strategy is very popular in marketing specially in advertising. This is more prominent when the product which is advertised is value expressive. This is called image strategy and it involves building a personality for the product or creating an image of the product user (Ogivy, 1963 as cited by Johar and Sirgy). The advertising persuasion which is done by using value-expressive appeals occur according to a psychological process. Self-congruity is defined as the match between the product's value-expressive attributes (product-user image) and the audience self-concept (Johar and Sirgy, 1991). According to them product-user image is the stereotype the audience has about the typical user of the product.

As to self concept, there are basically four different types of self-images. Actual self-image is an image an individual has of herself. An ideal self-image is an image one aspires to have. A

social self-image involves beliefs about how one is viewed by other, and the ideal social self-image is the imagined image one aspires others to have of herself.

It is observable that personality related attributes associated with products reflects the value-expressiveness of a product. For examples a sport car with sun-roof would make a person feel that the user is attractive, modern, young, sporty, single and affluent. Use of hair gel is also evoke an image of young, modern attractive, outgoing personality. Further, "SUV" creates an image of sporty, affluent, fast, distinctive, high-class, touring personslity with frequently engaged in off-road journeys.

Brand loyalty, word of mouth reports, brand personality, brand identification, brand distinctiveness and self expressive value are terms that are widely spoken in the marketing literature. The relationship between these variables can be seen as: the greater the self expressive value and the distinctiveness of the brand personality, greater would be the attractiveness of the brand, which leads to the brand identification. The more the consumers identify themselves with a brand the more will be the consumers' positive word of mouth reports and brand loyalty (Chung, Dongchul & Seung 2001). Yet what affects self expressive value has not been widely discussed.

### **3.1 THE SELF CONCEPT**

According to Taylor 2006 the self consists of two attributes. First, it is the accurate self-knowledge a person possesses of his or her own competence. Accurate self-knowledge refers to what a person knows about him or herself that is correct. Next, the self is also the correct assessment of a

person's competence as reported by others in the contexts in which the person interacts.

General acceptance is that the self concept is a multidimensional perspective (Rosenberg 1979, Taylor 2006, & Sirgy 1982). That is having more than one component. Even under the same tradition the debate continues to occur with regard to the question, how many dimensions exactly? Some argued that the self concept must be treated as having two dimensions, the actual self and the ideal self, which others referred to as idealized or desired self concept. Sirgy (1982) was one of those who went beyond the duality dimensions. He defined the self concept under the following four dimensions; Actual self image - the way the consumers see themselves, Ideal self image - how consumers like to see themselves, Social self image - how consumers feel the others see them and

Ideal social self image - how consumers expect others to see themselves.

Hawkins (1995) in his book pointed out a sequence that leads to a relationship between the self concept and product purchase. Self concept is created through the interaction with parents, teachers, peers, and significant others. One's self concept is of value to himself/ herself. Because it is valuable, the individual tries to enhance it. Certain products serve as social symbols and communicate meaning to one's self and to the others, causing an impact on the individual's private and social self concepts. As a result, individuals often purchase or consume products, services, and media to maintain or enhance a desired self concept. He reasoned out his arguments by adding that for these concepts to be taken as marketing tools there should be a relationship between self concept and brand image as well.

### 3.2 SELF EXPRESSIVE VALUE

In social psychology, social identification means that person identifies him/her self as a member of a society and these identifications are used by people to express themselves (Mael & ashforth1992). People use products, brands and groups to express themselves. Sometimes they may not actually belong to that particular group or might not actually use that product or brand, but they may be aspired to be related to or belong to (Fournier, 1998). For an example a person may talk of the brand Nike or Reebok without actually using them, just because they want to express a self of a high class consumer. Similarly a person may buy a very expensive garment when he/she is shopping with a friend who has an expensive taste, where as if he/she had gone alone wouldn't buy.

Another two researchers who followed the same vain were Walsh and White, (2007). They stated that an individuals' self-identity comprised of a combination of enduring characteristics, such as internalized goals, values, moral concerns, and affective components, as well as externalized roles and behaviours. Self-identity is expressed by the way in which people interact with the environment, with the effect varying as easily accessible beliefs and attitudes become salient (Mael & Ashforth1992). One way in which individuals reflect their self-identity is through their ownership and use of material objects. Possessions that can be individualized and used as a means of self expression are more likely to be valued if they reflect a person's self-identity. Many mobile phone users have reported that they personalize the features (e.g., ring tone, display) on their phones to reflect their personal preferences, suggesting that mobile phones are used as a form of self expression. In addition,

many mobile phone users have reported that mobile phone use is an integral part of their lives, indicating that mobile phone use plays an important part in many mobile phone users' self-identity.

Value expressiveness influence, on the other hand, happens when individual use others' norms, values, and behaviours as the model for their own attitudes and behaviours. Value expressiveness operates through the process of identification (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). Identification occurs when people adopts attitudes and behaviours in order to be associated with another group. (Kelman, 1961 as cited in Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). Identification differs from compliance in that the expressive influence is likely to occur whether the person's behaviours are public or private.

### 3.3 INDIVIDUAL SELF CONCEPT

Current interest in the self and in self beliefs has also been characterized by renewed research in to self concept, a construct with a long ancestry. Resent definition of self concept have been informed that the self concept is an individual's representation of all of his or her knowledge. Combs (1962) argued that an individual's self concept is, in essence, 'what an individual believes he is'.

According to the psychologists the origin of the concept of self image is at the point where the child recognizes himself in the mirror, where as in previous circumstances he would have perceived it to be the image of someone else. According to psychologists, mother and the primary mothering environment mirror (or do not mirror) back to the child an image of itself with which the child can (or cannot) identify. Coopersmith (1967) later wrote that each

person's concept, to a considerable level, is a mirror reflection of how he has been seen by others who are important to him.

The ideal and actual self concepts are a psychological component of the self, partially conscious and partially unconscious, varying from individual to individual. It is both privately conceptualized and socially influenced (Boyatzis & Akrivou 2006).

Boyatzis and Akrivou (2006) defines ideal self as an evolving, motivational core within the self, focusing persons' desire and hope, aspiration and dreams, purpose and calling.

Uncovering one's ideal self involves answering the question, whom do I want to be? Although Baumeister (1998) stated that people have a certain ideal image of the person they would like to be. He added that it is not enough to merely act like that person, identity requires social validation. Thus, our relationships with others play a key role in the process of our figuring out who we want to be.

A major confusion about the ideal self comes from the "ought self." They ought self as a concept is used in various labels in the literature (Baumeister, 1998, Higgins, 1989, Markus, 1977). It explains a version of the ideal self imposed by others, or by a person's internal desire to please others (Boyatzis, Murphy, & Wheeler 2000).

Reference groups or social identity groups affect the individual by anticipatory socialization or value induction. Groups that you wish to be a part of or identify with and feel that you belong to become sources of either a person's ideal self or your ought self. Parents, teachers, respected or feared authority figures, or those with whom you

wish to be admired, respected, or loved become sources of one's ideal self or ought self.

French and Glascher(1971) used the actual self concept, the ideal self concept and the perceived reference group image of self, this latter concept was how ever have not been formally defined. In general this could be identified in the context when many people refer to their peers, family they associate more closely before taking the decision. This is a very practical concept that can be identified widely in the dependant, Asian culture more than in the independent individualistic cultures.

In 1971 Ross claimed the ideal self is "the sort of person you would most likely to be or the way in which you would like to see yourself" where as the actual self is "the sort of person you actually are or the way in which you actually see yourself". The researcher relates the self concept to the product through which he identifies that the consumption was more of similar types of brands to the self concept rather than otherwise. But he was unable to prove that the ideal self was more closely related to the consumption preference than the actual self. He used magazines and automobiles as the products to test his hypotheses while his subjects were a sample of students of the University of Perdue. Ross (1971) used the Q-sort and the likert scale as the measurement techniques for this research.

### **3.4 SOCIAL SELF CONCEPT**

Grubber and Hupper (1968) identified the social factor in the form of generalized users and significant others. Their definition for significant others was; as those who, through their perception of generalized users, influence the consumer's self perception during the interaction

process. Significant others were pointed out as parents, teachers, peers and any other who had a significant impact on once decision and perception. Grubber and Hupper (1968) stated that consumers of a specific brand have self-concepts similar to those they attribute to other consumers of the same brand and these self-concepts, moreover he emphasized that these self concepts are significantly different from those attributed to consumers of competing brands.

He further emphasizes such research is of significant value for the marketing managers. If the marketers' products are visible and is been used in the interaction process, it is important that he carefully develop the symbolic meaning of the product so that it is positioned properly in terms of competing products, users, and their significant others.

Grubb and Bruce (1971) conducted another research on the self concept and the significant others. They proved their hypothesis by using automobile product category, with Volkswagens and mustangs being the specific brands. Students and staff of a university who owned such brands were asked to identify themselves with certain specific traits of those brands of automobiles. Then they were asked to give a list of significant people to them and the same test was done on them. This was what revealed that the consumers of a specific brand perceived their self concept as similar to those of generalized users of the same brand and also that they are different from the generalized users of a competing band. They further identified and proved that consumers perceived generalized users of their brand as similar to their significant others' perception of generalized users of that brand and dissimilar to that of the generalized users of a competing brand.

As mentioned under the individual self concept Ought self has been discussed under social psychology as a version of the ideal self imposed by others, or by a person's internal desire to please others. Ought self was Reference groups or social identity groups affect the individual by anticipatory socialization or value induction. Group that you wish to be a part of or identify with and feel you belong to become sources of either a person's ideal self or the ought self. Parents, Teachers, respect or fear authority figures or those with whom you wish to be admired, respected, or loved become sources of one's ideal self or ought self. Quite simply, the ought self is someone else's version of what you think your ideal self should be. To the extent this becomes intentionally integrated into a person self, there appears to be no conflict among the various selves. But if they are somewhat different and a person works towards the ought self ,at some point on the future, they will awake and feel betrayed, but if this was integrated in to one's self with awakened mind and was accepted willingly above consequences would not occur(Markus, & Kitayama, 1991, Aaker 1999). It can therefore be identified that there concepts are inter related and doesn't have a clear cut difference from one another.

Escalas and Bettman (2003) are two other researchers who spoke much about the reference groups or the significant others. Consumers construct themselves and present themselves to others through their choices based on the congruity between brand image and self image. Therefore, it is evident that in their subconscious it is on vital importance to present themselves in a socially acceptable manner. The society emphasized here is how ever not the society at large, but it is the acceptance of the reference groups that is more important to them. Reference

groups can be redefined as social groups that are important to a consumer and against which he/she compares him/herself. Early research focused on classification systems for the reference groups to which an individual turns as a standard of behaviours. More recent research however has portrayed a reference group as a source of information for arriving at and evaluating their beliefs about the world (Escalas & Bettman 2003).

Many researchers have directly spoken of the influence of significant others on self-expressive value. They tried exploring the idea of the influence of others on once impulsive purchasing. Consumers expect others to evaluate their choice decisions, which might lead them to make choices different from once they would have made in the absence of public scrutiny (Ariely & Levavy 2000, Belk, 1988). Ratner and Khan (2002), for instance, found that consumers incorporate more variety seeking in their public versus private consumption. The authors suggest that increased variety seeking emanates from a desire to make a favourable impression on others. Ariely and Levav (2000) also found that consumers tend to incorporate more variety in the context of public consumption. This could be worded as keeping up with the social image. Their study, which focused on sequential choice decisions in a group, concluded that in the presence of others, a consumer has to balance his or her individual goals with the group goals, which may lead to different choice decisions and less personal satisfaction. In yet another research it was found that in the presence of a group/significant others, it was more embarrassing to purchase an embarrassing product. The rationale was that the embarrassment was driven by the concern of what others think about us (Dahl, Manchanda, & Argo 2001).

Xueming (2005) in his research on how shopping with others influence impulse buying suggests, that the presence of other persons in a purchasing situation is likely to have a normative influence on the decision to make a purchase.

Degree of others' influence on a person's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors is assumed to be a function of his/her willingness to accept the mandates of the group (Kelman, 1961 as cited in Murali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). The way individuals relate to the group, however, is not only affected by individual-level differences, it is also systematically influenced by cultural and societal values and norms (Triandis, 1989 as cited in Murali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). At this regard, Markus and Kitayama (1991) describe the relationship between the individual and the collectivity as a fundamental dimension on which societies differ. Along the same line of thinking, Murali, Laroche, and Pons, (2005) speculate in their research, that while all humans show some willingness to accept the mandates of the group, different cultural groups show willingness to different degrees.

#### **4. METHODOLOGY**

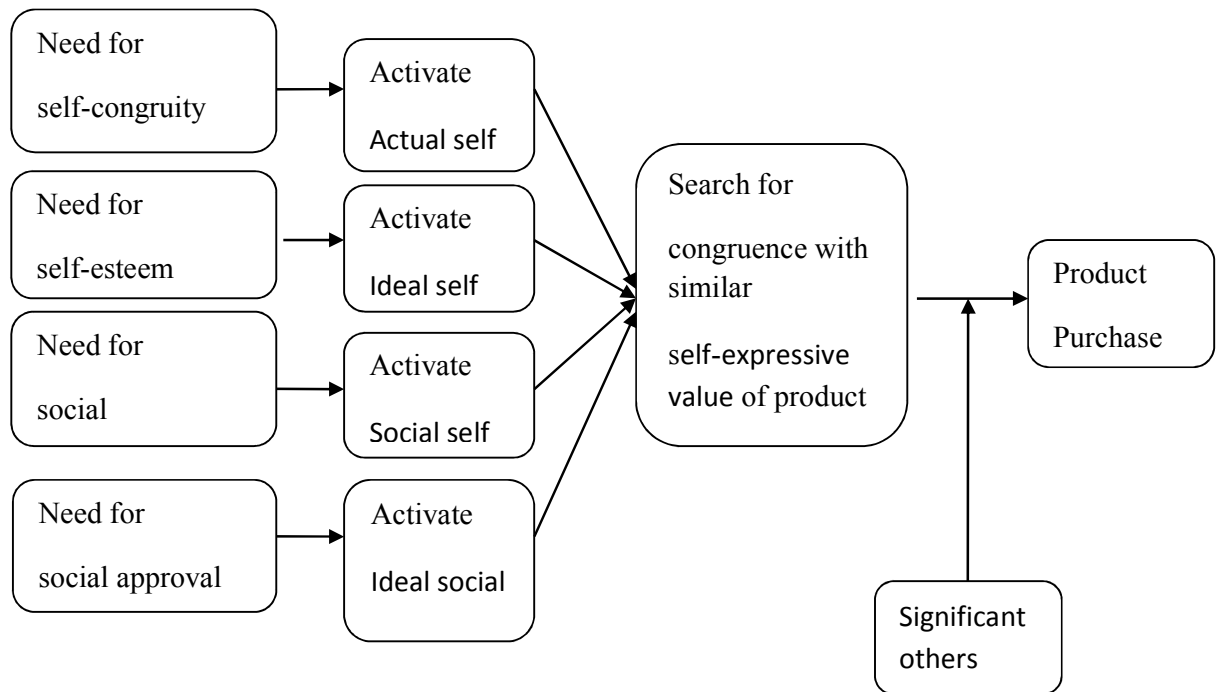
The conceptual model exhibited in figure 1 was developed after an extensive literature review for the purpose of this research. As seen in the model consumer may have different types of needs. Depending on the situation one of these needs may activate a respective self concept and it will lead to search for a product which satisfy the same need. If the activated self concept and the self expressive value of the product are congruent, the result will be the purchase of the product. However, immediately before the purchase, there will be a possibility to change the decision due to opinion of other significant person who may accompany the customer. It has

been indicated as a moderating variable in the model.

A convenience sample consisted of 100 persons who are educated, urban class, English literate men and women between the ages of 20-60

years in Colombo district. A survey was conducted to collect the data and half of the questionnaires were filled through a web survey.

statistical data analysis software of Minitab14 was used to analyze the data.



**Figure 1: Conceptual frame work**

**5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*Impact of the social self concept on the expressive value*

It is evident from this analysis that in average approximately 70% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the fact that they are highly concerned about the image that they express to others. Furthermore, this analysis brought in to the lime light a very valuable finding. That is, as a person matures the extent to which they are concerned about the social self, may it be the ideal social self or actual social self may vary. In the case of the age and the effect of social self on

the self expression the Spearman Rank Correlation coefficient manifests a strong negative relationship of -0.682. This indicates that when the individuals mature in age the impact of the social self reduces.

*Impact of the actual self*

The responses revealed that the actual self had an impact on the self expressiveness, but the analysis by age shows that the extent to which they are concerned is less in the case of individuals between the age of 20 and 30 as oppose to those above 30 years of age. But this



does not show any difference in the case of the gender effect. The correlation between the two variables is a strongly positive 0.677 with the age and -0.005 with the income. This means when the age increases the impact of the actual self increases, whereas, in the case of income this is negligible.

#### *Impact of the ideal self*

As the analysis shows, age had a major impact on the recognition of the ideal self to express one's self. Those who were in the age category of 20-30 had ideal self prioritised over the others in the sample. Those above the age of 30 strongly disagreed to this statement, which reveals that as people matures in age, the lesser the impact of the ideal self concept on the self expressive value. This result is further proven with Spearman correlation coefficient value of negative - 0.447 with age and negative - 0.286 with the income. This amounted to a total of approximately 80% of the sample, including those who agreed as well as strongly agreed to the question that they would think of the ideal self when expressing themselves in a gathering. Whereas in the case of the gender, it had no different implications on the final conclusion.

#### *Impact of the actual social self*

According to the data analysis, the actual social self has little relevance to the self expressive value of majority of the participants in the sample except for those in the age category of 51-60 years. This could be a direction for future research, to identify the relationship between self actualization and maturity: in terms of the age, of an individual. However, it cannot be ignored that approximately 38% of the individuals in the age category 20-30 strongly agrees with the fact that

their actual social self do come into play in the case of social encounters.

An interesting finding was that, in the relationship between the actual social self and the gender. Despite the fact that the generally accepted norm is mostly females are the ones who are concerned about the social self, this research findings revealed that approximately 56% of the males in the sample was with the view that their actual social self was a powerful influencing factor that affects the self expressive value as oppose to the 58% of the females who disagreed to it.

#### *Impact of the ideal social self*

It is clearly visible that for those in the age category of 20-30 and 41-50 the ideal social self do play a prominent role in influencing the self expressive value, in total 50% of the total respondents agreed that there ideal social self is influencing their self expressive decisions. However, in the case of the other two categories, the results need to be backed by other analysis to ensure the accuracy of the results.

However, in the analysis between the gender and the ideal social self, it was visible that for a majority of the females, the ideal social self had a predominant influence on the self expressive value and in contrast to the actual social self and gender results, majority of the males had less influence from the ideal social self on the self expressive value.

#### *Extent to which the social self has an impact*

This research tried to identify how individuals making their purchase decisions & to what extent the social self affect their purchase intentions. Taking someone to get help for making one's own purchasing decision means that they are

bothered about how others would interpret them, or what others would think of them. Moreover, this would suggest that people are been influenced by their social selves when making purchase decisions.

The Spearman correlation coefficient value for the age and the being independent to make one's own decision took a positive value of .225 and with the income level this was also a positive moderate value of .447.

*Been open for others views*

This research also found that all those who take someone with them for shopping expect the companion to voice their opinions when making the purchase. Despite the answers given in all other situations this highlights one major finding, that is almost the 100% of the sample taken for this survey agreed that they take someone and expect them to voice their opinion.

*Impact of the social self on shopping decisions*

The individuals in the age categories of 20-30 and 41-50 are influenced by their social self to a greater degree than 51-60 and 31-40. It could be interpreted as the latter mentioned age categories do not always give into their social self when making their purchase decisions.

Males who were identified to have a little influence by the ideal social self had a similar impact in this situation as well. It is evident that a greater influence was placed by the social self on females in the case of shopping decision than males.

*The impact of the social self on other decisions*

In this research the majority of the participants in the survey agreed that they had often changed their decisions because of some others. Despite

the fact that they have identified their own self to be the most influencing factor in their self expressive value. It is evident through these results that there is a significant impact by the others who they consider as important to them. The fact that the respondents selected had to often change their purchase decision because of some other. It does not change with the gender too.

*Dominance of individual self , Social self or Situational self*

The reseachers carefully examined indirectly the the way the customers make decisions. So this research wanted to find out what decision the customer make when the individual self and the social self comes in to play at the same time. Basically, almost 100% of the respondents agreed that the independence of the decisions or dependency will depend on the situation itself. Therefore, it is evident that which self really influence in a particular situation is a situational decision. In other words whether it is the individual self or the social self that a person utilizes to express him/ herself will depend on the situation that he/she is faced with. (see table 1)

**Table1:** Dominance of the Situational Self by Age

Age	Disagree %	Agree %
Strongly		
Agree %		
20-30	9.52	80.95
9.52		
31-40	0.00	80.00
20.00		
41-50	0.00	80.00
20.00		
51-60	0.00	88.89
11.11		

Source: primary data

This type of customer behaviour can be explained by the situational self as discussed by Schenk and Holman (1980). Individuals choose to express a particular type of self in response to the specific characteristics of a given situation. Then the individual decides to express an appropriate self image, and as a result he or she then looks for the ways of expressing it. Thus, products that are conspicuous and well positioned might be used to express the self image that he or she wants to show in a given situation. Schenk and Holman(1980) defined this as situational self-image. Furthermore this effect has not changed with the sex of the person. (see table 2)

Table 2: Dominance of the Situational Self by Sex

Sex	Disagree %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Female	0.00	91.67	8.33
Male	12.50	68.75	18.75

Source: primary data

However, it is manifested in the table 3 that the males like to take independent decisions, where their individual self is more visibly influencing the purchase decision.

**Table: 3 Frequency in use of the individual self by Sex**

Sex	Neither %	Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Female	25.00	41.67	33.33
Male	0.00	18.75	81.25

Source: primary data

Moreover, it can be said that as the individuals mature in age the lesser would be the effect of the social self's influence on the self expressive value. The correlation between the age and the

impact of the social self is a negative 0.313 and with the income it takes a positive value of 0.545.

*Identifying the significant others who impact the ideal social self*

The results indicate that it is the society and the peers that affect the ideal social self of the sample taken for this study. However, further analysis shows that it is not the same for all age categories. In the case of 20-30 year it is their own self that has the most impact even with regard to their ideal social concept, 31-40 it is the peers that have a greater impact, 41-50 and 51-60 age categories seemed to have a greater influence by the society at large on their ideal self concept.

*Significant others who impact the actual social self*

This research identifies the significant others who influence individuals in taking their actual social self decisions. Table 4 indicates that it is peers and their own self that has the greatest impact on their actual social self.

**Table 4: Significant others who impact the actual social self**

	Count	%
Parents	1	2.50
Friends	14	35.00
Myself	10	25.00
Society	15	37.50

Source: primary data

However, the above interpretation has to be adjusted when it comes to the age category 31-40 (see table 5). For this category, a significant impact on their actual social self comes from two parties, they are peers and the society.

**Table 5: Significant others who impact the actual social self by Age**

Age	Parents %	Friends %	Myself %	Society %
20-30	9.52	66.67	23.81	0.00
31-40	0.00	40.00	20.00	40.00
41-50	0.00	0.00	100.00	0.00
51-60	0.00	22.22	66.67	11.11

Source: primary data

*Significant others who impact the actual self*

This finding dealt with the identifying those who had influenced a person's actual self. All most 88% of the individuals recognized that it was their own self that had a major impact on their actual self. Basically it means who they were, was a result of what they had wanted. It is also noteworthy that a small proportion of the 20-30 age category are influenced by their parents as well. A good implication for future research would be to identify who has the most impact on, what decisions when it comes to this age category, as they are the ones who are in line with the latest technology and fashion.

*Identifying the most important self to an individual*

This analysis was done to identify which self concept is considered as predominantly important by the people. As manifested in table 6 age groups 20-30 & 31-40 considered the ideal self concept to have the largest impact on the self expressive value, whereas age groups 41-50 & 51-60 placed the actual self as the dominant self.

In the case of the gender analysis the females placed the ideal self as the most dominant self concept to influence the self expressive value,

where as the males placed both ideal self and the ideal social self as the dominant selves (see table 7).

**Table 6: The most important self, by Age**

Age	Actual self %	Ideal self %	Ideal social self %
20-30	9.52	61.90	28.57
30-31	40.00	60.00	0.00
41-50	80.00	20.00	0.00
51-60	66.67	33.33	0.00

Source: primary data

**Table 7: The most important self by Sex**

Sex	Actual self %	Ideal self %	Ideal social self %
Female	41.67	58.33	0.00
Male	25.00	37.50	37.50

Source: primary data

**6. CONCLUSION**

The finding shows that a strong ideal self of a person can have a greater impact on the self expressive value, while hindering the impact of actual self, ideal social self and stimulating the actual social self impact, which has resulted in an increase in the influence of the social self. Due to this identification it can be assumed that ideal self is a factor that could influence all other factors and the consistency of one's self expression. When carefully looked at, one can see that there is a possibility to create a new ideal self and hinder the influence of the existing ideal self. This same factor can stimulate the influence of the ideal social self and hinder the influence of the existing actual social self. Such a factor can be hypothetically identified as the influence from the significant others.

When the impact from the social self is reduced, that self being used as a direct alternative self to be expressed in a given situation also reduces.

When fewer alternatives are available for a person to express him/ herself then, the way he expresses himself in different situations also becomes consistent.

When the individual self of a person is very strong, it can create its own expressive value, taking no notice of the social self, where as this would reduce the impact of the actual social self and the impact of the social self in general as well.

It can be assumed that strength of the individual self, significant others and number of alternative selves available for a person will have a major impact on the consistency of the self expressive value.

The empirical data strongly supported the theory that consumers of different brands of a product class would perceive themselves to have significantly different self-concepts. The results also indicated that consumers of specific brands have definite perceptions about the self-concept characteristic of others who consume their brand as well as the self-concept characteristics of those who consume competing brands.

This research tried to identify such influencing characters in the Sri Lankan context, the results of this was also consistent with the past research, as it also identified parents & peers as significant others. Grubber and Hupper (1968) stated that consumers of a specific brand have self-concepts similar to those they attribute to other consumers of the same brand and these self-concepts, moreover he emphasized that these self concepts are significantly different from those attributed to consumers of competing brands. From the above two views, this research tested the first, and this hypothesis was also proven by the test results.

Many researchers have directly spoken of the influence of significant others on self expressive value. They tried exploring the idea of the influence of others on one's impulsive purchasing. Consumers expect others to evaluate their decisions, which might lead them to make choices different from what they would have made in the absence of public scrutiny (Ariety & Levavy 2000, Belk, 1988). Ratner & Khan (2002), for instance, found that consumers incorporate more variety seeking in their public versus private consumption. It is also found that majority of both males and females who were accompanied by a person whom they consider as important to them, expected that person to view his/her opinion and usually changed their purchasing decision because of such significant person's disagreement or opinion.

#### *Managerial Implications*

This research analyses self concept in the context of Sri Lankan consumers in terms of age and gender. It reveals how many people, in respective categories try to satisfy which need; self-consistency, self-esteem, social-consistency or social-approval depending on various situations. So this research enlighten marketers how to enrich products with relevant image associations which consist of different expressive values based on size of the target segments in which they seek to maximise the profit.

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