

## Why Gen Z Loves Rucas: The Role of Self-Congruence, Brand Authenticity, and Brand Satisfaction in Building Brand Love

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** of this study is to examine the influence of self-congruence, brand authenticity, and brand satisfaction on brand love for the local fashion brand Rucas among Generation Z. **Methodology** This study employs a quantitative method with primary data collected through an online survey using Google Forms. The respondents in this research consist of Generation Z consumers aged 19–27 years who reside in Surabaya and use Rucas brand products. The study adopts a purposive sampling technique with a total sample of 205 respondents. Data analysis is conducted using the WARPLS version 7.0 software, employing both descriptive and statistical analysis approaches. **Findings** The results of the study indicate that self-congruence has a significant effect on brand love and brand satisfaction. Additionally, brand authenticity has also been shown to significantly influence both brand satisfaction and brand love. Brand satisfaction significantly affects brand love. **Suggestions** include expanding the population and sample to encompass more local fashion brands and adding other variables, such as brand loyalty, to enrich the analysis of consumers' emotional relationships with brands.

**Keywords:** Self-Congruence; Brand Authenticity; Brand Satisfaction; Brand Love; Generasi Z.

### ABSTRAK

**Tujuan** dari penelitian ini adalah untuk menguji pengaruh kesesuaian diri, keaslian merek, dan kepuasan merek terhadap kecintaan merek untuk merek fesyen lokal Rucas di kalangan Generasi Z. **Metodologi** Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kuantitatif dengan data primer yang dikumpulkan melalui survei daring menggunakan Google Forms. Responden dalam penelitian ini terdiri dari konsumen Generasi Z berusia 19–27 tahun yang berdomisili di Surabaya dan menggunakan produk merek Rucas. Penelitian ini mengadopsi teknik purposive sampling dengan total sampel sebanyak 205 responden. Analisis data dilakukan dengan menggunakan perangkat lunak WARPLS versi 7.0, yang menggunakan pendekatan analisis deskriptif dan statistik. **Temuan** Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kesesuaian diri memiliki pengaruh yang signifikan terhadap kecintaan merek dan kepuasan merek. Selain itu, keaslian merek juga terbukti secara signifikan memengaruhi kepuasan merek dan kecintaan merek. Kepuasan merek secara signifikan memengaruhi kecintaan merek. **Saran** termasuk memperluas populasi dan sampel untuk mencakup lebih banyak merek fesyen lokal dan menambahkan variabel lain, seperti loyalitas merek, untuk memperkaya analisis hubungan emosional konsumen dengan merek.

**Kata kunci:** Kesesuaian Diri; Keaslian Merek; Kepuasan Merek; Kecintaan Merek; Generasi Z.

## INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian clothing industry has experienced rapid growth due to increasing public interest in fashion products, making it a national priority sector. According to data from the Ministry of Industry, the textile and clothing industry recorded the highest growth of 18.98% in the first quarter of 2019. Through the making Indonesia 4.0 roadmap, this sector has also been designated as one of five priority manufacturing sectors in the industry 4.0 era (Ministry of Industry of the Republic of Indonesia, 2019).

However, the clothing industry faces significant challenges, primarily due to the decline in purchasing power during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has shifted consumer behavior to become more digitally oriented, as reflected increase in online shopping app usage (Polyakova et al., 2024). Consumers now tend to shop through social media, use electronic payment methods, and utilize cash-on-delivery services. These changes offer time savings for consumers and convenience for sellers, allowing them to manage their businesses without the need for large physical stores (Lailah, 2022).

In the context of apparel brand marketing, it is important to understand the factors that influence consumer brand loyalty. Based on Consumer-Brand Relationship Theory (Fournier et al., 2012) and Self-Congruity Theory (Sirgy, 1986), an emotional connection between a consumer and a brand is formed when the consumer perceives the brand as representing themselves (self-congruence), is perceived as authentic (brand authenticity), and provides satisfaction (brand satisfaction).

Self-Congruity Theory explains that consumers tend to be more loyal to brands that align with their self-concept. Meanwhile, Brand Authenticity Theory emphasizes that perceptions of a brand's authenticity and honest values play a crucial role in shaping consumer trust and emotional attachment. Brand Satisfaction, on the other hand, results from a positive evaluation of the consumer's experience interacting with the brand. According to Expectation-Confirmation Theory (Oliver, 1980), this is a key determinant of consumer loyalty.

According to Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), brand love is the intense, passionate emotion felt by satisfied consumers toward a particular brand. This concept is based on Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love, which has psychological roots (Batra et al., 2012). According to this explanation, consumer satisfaction is crucial in developing brand love. Increasingly satisfied consumers will increasingly love the product or brand.

Furthermore, Batra et al. (2012) explain that self-brand integration is reinforced by self-congruity theory. Based on this theory, self-congruence is a factor influencing brand love (Suyoto & Tannady, 2022). In fact, research by Islam et al. (2019) shows that a mismatch between a consumer's self-image and a brand's image can lead to brand hate.

Self-congruence is the match between a customer's self-image and the image presented by a brand (Shimul & Phau, 2023; Zannath et al., 2023). When consumers perceive a congruence between their self-identity and the image projected by a brand, they tend to feel more emotionally connected. Brands perceived as reflecting consumers' personal values or lifestyles provide a sense of belonging and pride, creating a stronger attachment.

Furthermore, strong self-congruence strengthens emotional loyalty and makes consumers feel that the brand is part of their identity, ultimately significantly

increasing brand love (Joshi & Garg, 2022; Suyoto & Tannady, 2022). Consumers who perceive a brand as aligned with their self-image and values also tend to be more satisfied with their purchase decisions. This congruence creates a positive emotional connection (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014), enhancing the overall experience with the brand. When consumers believe that a product reflects their identity, it fulfills their expectations, strengthens satisfaction, and encourages repeat purchases. Thus, strong self-congruence strengthens the sense of satisfaction that is important for long-term brand loyalty (Zannath et al., 2023).

Brand authenticity is the extent to which a brand is perceived as genuine, consistent, and true to its promised values (Harjadi et al., 2023). Authentic brands can build trust and increase consumer satisfaction by offering high-quality products that meet expectations. When there is alignment between consumers' personal values and those represented by the brand, a deeper emotional attachment is formed, ultimately strengthening brand loyalty (Zannath et al., 2023).

A study conducted by Meilawati and Ferdinand (2022) shows that brand authenticity plays a crucial role in shaping brand love through the mechanism of self-congruence. Consumers tend to love and remain loyal to brands that reflect their personal identity and values. Therefore, to strengthen brand love, companies need to ensure that the brands they manage not only maintain their authenticity and consistency but also align with consumers' expectations and values.

However, research by Panyekar and Marsasi (2024) found that brand authenticity had no significant effect on customer satisfaction. Based on this gap, this study seeks to strengthen our understanding of the relationship between brand authenticity and brand satisfaction in the context of the Indonesian apparel industry. This gap is important to further examine, given the role of brand authenticity in shaping positive consumer experiences.

Furthermore, although the influence of self-congruence and brand authenticity on brand love has been extensively researched, most previous studies have focused on the tourism sector (Yasri et al., 2022). This study expands this context to the apparel industry, which has received relatively little attention. It adds empirical evidence to sectors outside tourism, such as cosmetics, food and beverage, and automotive industries. Brand authenticity not only influences consumer satisfaction but also directly contributes to the formation of brand love. Brands perceived as authentic tend to foster emotional attachment, trust, and affection in consumers, which form the basis for long-term brand loyalty.

Brand satisfaction is the positive feeling consumers experience toward a brand after using its product or service. This satisfaction arises from the comparison between consumer expectations before purchase and actual experiences after use (Zannath et al., 2023). When consumers are satisfied with a brand's performance, it not only increases trust but also forms a strong emotional bond between the consumer and the brand.

Research conducted by Burhanudin and Febryanti (2023) shows that brand satisfaction plays a crucial role in fostering brand love. This finding aligns with a previous study by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), which emphasized that customer satisfaction is a key factor in fostering brand love. Furthermore, research by Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2018) in the retail industry context found that brand satisfaction significantly influences consumer emotional affection toward the brand, which in turn impacts long-

term loyalty. Thus, brand satisfaction serves not only as a result of consumer experience with a brand but also as an emotional bridge connecting satisfaction with stronger brand love.

## HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

### **Brand Love**

According to Gürce et al. (2022), brand love is a strong emotional attachment between consumers and a brand that increases loyalty, commitment, and positive behaviors such as recommendations and tolerance for brand mistakes. In a competitive industry, brand love creates a deep emotional connection, where consumers not only value the product but also feel a strong bond that makes the brand part of their personal identity and values. This concept encompasses passion, expressions of love, and attachment, contributing to consumer engagement and brand advocacy (Palusuk et al., 2019). Brand love helps companies build long-term relationships with consumers, increase customer loyalty, and maintain competitiveness in the market.

### **Self-Congruence**

According to Joshi & Garg (2022), self-congruence is the alignment between a consumer's self-image and the image projected by a brand, which plays a crucial role in attracting customer interest and loyalty. Consumers tend to choose brands that align with their self-identity, both in terms of actual and ideal fit (Jaolis et al., 2022). When a brand image reflects consumers' values and aspirations, they feel more emotionally connected, thus increasing loyalty, satisfaction, and a desire to recommend the product (Jang et al., 2023). Conversely, a mismatch between brand image and self-identity can lead to dissatisfaction and damage brand image. Therefore, understanding self-congruence is crucial for companies in designing relevant and emotionally engaging marketing strategies to build a strong and compelling brand image (Abbasi et al., 2023).

### **Brand Authenticity**

According to Harjadi et al. (2023), brand authenticity refers to consumers' perceptions of a brand's authenticity and sincerity, which involves the brand's consistency with its core values. An authentic brand conveys the impression that its products are not merely commercial but also possess emotional and cultural value. This authenticity is a crucial factor in consumer decision-making, with the word "authenticity" derived from the Latin "authenticus," meaning trustworthy (Assiouras et al., 2015). Authenticity is defined as consumers' subjective perceptions of a brand's authenticity, often demonstrated through product quality, brand values, and historical narrative (Napoli et al., 2014). Authentic products reflect originality and are resistant to change despite external pressures. Furthermore, brand authenticity is also considered a crucial characteristic in building deep relationships with consumers, fostering loyalty through brand integrity and credibility (Oh et al., 2019; Schallehn et al., 2014).

### **Brand Satisfaction**

According to Fauziyah (2022), brand satisfaction, or customer satisfaction, is a crucial factor that companies cannot ignore because it impacts consumer loyalty, business image, and revenue. Customer satisfaction is defined as the level of consumer pleasure

or disappointment after comparing product or service performance to their expectations. Kotler et al. (2022) add that this satisfaction encompasses consumers' feelings of joy or disappointment based on their transaction experience. Customer satisfaction can be a measure of business success, influencing loyalty, recommendations, and brand image. Dissatisfaction, on the other hand, can lead to customer loss and negative reviews that are detrimental to the brand. Several factors that influence customer satisfaction include product quality, service, competitive pricing, ease of transactions, and supporting technology. By ensuring consistency in quality and service, companies can increase customer satisfaction, which leads to loyalty and business sustainability.

### **The Relationship Between Self-Congruence and Brand Love**

Self-congruence, or the fit between a customer's self-image and the image projected by a brand, is a crucial factor in increasing brand love (Zannath et al., 2023). When consumers perceive that a brand reflects their personal values or lifestyle, this creates a strong emotional attachment, a sense of belonging, and pride. This alignment not only strengthens emotional loyalty but also makes consumers feel that the brand is part of their identity (Joshi & Garg, 2022; Suyoto & Tannady, 2022). Furthermore, research (Khan & Kashif, 2023) shows that self-congruence encourages consumers to build deep emotional bonds with brands that align with their self-image, thereby increasing brand love.

**H1:** Self-congruence has a significant effect on brand love for Rucas.

### **The Relationship Between Self-Congruence and Brand Satisfaction**

Self-congruence, or the alignment between a consumer's self-image and the image projected by a brand, significantly influences brand satisfaction. Consumers who perceive a brand as aligned with their values and identity tend to be more satisfied with their purchase decision, as this congruence creates a positive emotional connection and enhances the overall experience with the brand (Zannath et al., 2023). When a product reflects a consumer's identity, their expectations are met, which strengthens satisfaction and encourages repeat purchases. A study by Joshi & Garg (2022) also supports that self-congruence strengthens long-term brand loyalty by creating a deep emotional connection. This suggests that the greater the congruence between a brand and a consumer's identity, the more likely they are to develop satisfaction and loyalty to that brand.

**H2:** Self-congruence significantly influences brand satisfaction for the Rucas brand.

### **The Relationship Between Brand Authenticity and Brand Satisfaction**

Research (Harjadi et al., 2023) indicates the extent to which a brand is perceived as authentic, consistent, and true to its promised values. When consumers perceive a brand as authentic and consistent in its values, they are more likely to be satisfied with their experiences. Brands perceived as authentic typically offer high-quality products and meet consumer expectations. When consumers perceive a congruence between their personal values and what the brand represents, they experience stronger positive feelings, which in turn increases their level of satisfaction with the brand (Zannath et al., 2023).

**H3:** Brand authenticity has a significant effect on brand satisfaction for the Rucas brand.

## The Relationship between Brand Authenticity and Brand Love

Research by Harjadi et al. (2023) demonstrated that authentic brands with compelling stories create strong emotional connections with consumers, encouraging them to repurchase and recommend the brand to others. Brand authenticity is a crucial element in building brand love because it helps brands appear relevant, trustworthy, and consistent with consumer values. In addition to enhancing perceived quality, authenticity also strengthens brand credibility, ultimately driving loyalty and the formation of a more committed customer community (Napoli et al., 2014; Schallehn et al., 2014). This suggests that brand authenticity not only impacts short-term relationships but also forms the basis for creating lasting emotional bonds.

**H4:** Brand authenticity has a significant effect on brand love for the Rucas brand.

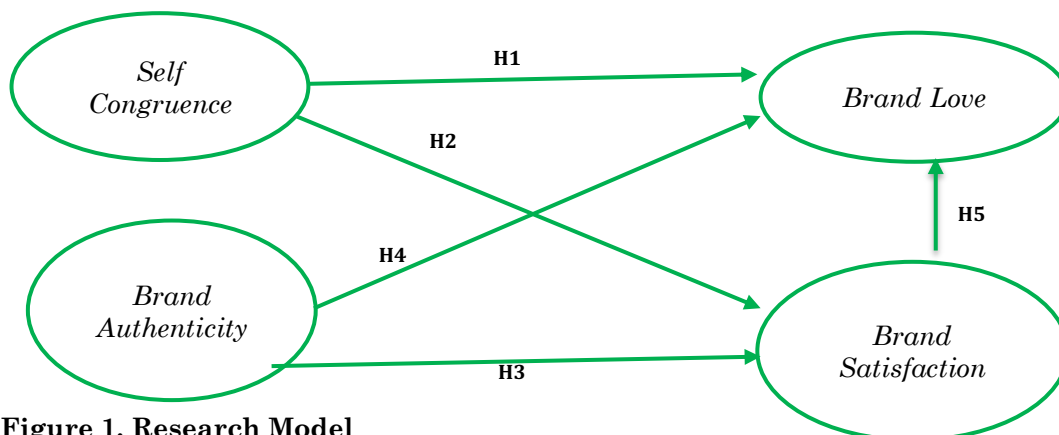
## The Relationship Between Brand Satisfaction and Brand Love

Research (Burhanudin & Febryanti, 2023) shows that brand satisfaction, which is a consumer's positive feelings after using a product or service, plays a crucial role in building brand love. Satisfaction resulting from the alignment between expectations and actual experiences creates a strong emotional bond, increases trust, and drives consumer loyalty. Consistently satisfying experiences not only strengthen emotional bonds but also encourage consumers to remain loyal and recommend the brand to others (Joshi & Garg, 2022; Zannath et al., 2023).

**H5:** Brand satisfaction has a significant effect on brand love for the Rucas brand.

## Research Model

The hypothesis development in this study is based on previous theory and research that demonstrates the relationship between self-congruence, brand authenticity, brand satisfaction, and brand love. Self-congruence influences brand love and satisfaction because the congruence between consumers' self-image and brand image creates a deep emotional attachment (Zannath et al., 2023; Joshi & Garg, 2022; Khan & Kashif, 2023). Authentic brands also play a crucial role in building strong emotional connections, which in turn increase brand satisfaction and brand love (Harjadi et al., 2023; Napoli et al., 2014; Schallehn et al., 2014). Meanwhile, brand satisfaction resulting from positive consumer experiences increases their love for the brand (Burhanudin & Febryanti, 2023; Joshi & Garg, 2022).



**Figure 1. Research Model**

Although this study follows existing theoretical lines, further testing is needed,

particularly in the Indonesian market with its unique social and cultural characteristics. In addition, testing within the local fashion sector, such as the Rucas brand, is needed because several previous studies have shown varying results. Further research can provide a deeper understanding and support more universal conclusions. The hypothesis that has been developed above can be represented in the form of a research model, as shown in Figure 2.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

This research employed a descriptive method with a quantitative approach. The survey method aimed to collect primary data through an online questionnaire distributed using Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed to RUCAS customers through various relevant digital platforms, given that RUCAS is an online store. Distribution was conducted through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter/X, with the questionnaire link shared through posts, stories, and direct messages to customers who had interacted with RUCAS. Additionally, the questionnaire was distributed via instant messaging applications like WhatsApp, Line, and Telegram, both through customer community groups and private messages to individuals who met the research criteria.

To ensure that participating respondents met the established criteria, the researcher included filtering questions at the beginning of the questionnaire. These questions covered aspects such as transaction history at RUCAS in the past six months, platforms used for shopping, and frequency of transactions. Only respondents who met these criteria were allowed to continue completing the questionnaire, ensuring that the data obtained was more relevant to the research objectives.

To achieve optimal response rates, researchers implemented effective distribution strategies, including distributing questionnaires during customer peak hours, using engaging calls to action, and explaining the benefits of participation to respondents. Furthermore, to increase participation, researchers offered incentives in the form of discount vouchers or prize draws for respondents who completed the questionnaires.

### Population and Sample

The population in this study consisted of consumers who purchased and used RUCAS products. Sampling was conducted using a non-probability purposive sampling method, where sample selection was based on specific criteria (Hair et al., 2019). The sample criteria in this study were:

1. Respondents aged 19-27 years (Generation Z).
2. Respondents had purchased Rucas products online at least once in the last 3 months.
3. Respondents had used Rucas products at least once in the last 3 months.
4. Respondents had purchased Rucas products at least 3 times or more.

The total number of respondents in this study was 205, as calculated by Ghoufur (2021). In this study, the sampling technique was based on Hair's opinion because the population size could not be precisely determined. According to Kline (2016), large

sample sizes can make even trivial model misfits appear statistically significant in goodness-of-fit tests. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula (Cochran, 1977; Taherdoost, 2017), which is widely applied for large populations with unknown proportions, with a minimum sample size of 96 respondents, with the following formula:

$$n = \frac{z^2 \cdot p \cdot q}{d^2}$$
$$n = \frac{(1,96)^2 \cdot (0,5) \cdot (0,5)}{(0,1)^2}$$

**n= 96 orang**

### Variable Measurement

The variables in this study were measured using a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. The categories on this scale consist of five levels of agreement: 1 for "Strongly Disagree," 2 for "Disagree," 3 for "Neutral," 4 for "Agree," and 5 for "Strongly Agree." This scale was used to measure respondents' perceptions or attitudes toward the variables studied.

The self-congruence variable was adapted from research by Joshi and Garg (2022) and measured through four indicators. These indicators reflect the extent to which consumers feel the RUCAS brand reflects their identity and personal values. Measurements were made using statements such as: "The RUCAS brand reflects who I am". The brand love variable was also adapted from Joshi and Garg (2022) and measured through six indicators. These indicators reflect consumers' level of affection and emotional attachment to the RUCAS brand. Statements used included: "RUCAS is an amazing brand".

The brand authenticity variable was adapted from Zannath, Fitriadi, and Yusnita (2023) and measured using five indicators. This measurement aims to assess the extent to which consumers perceive the authenticity and consistency of the RUCAS brand. Indicators include statements such as: "I believe that RUCAS brand products are of high quality". Meanwhile, the brand satisfaction variable was also adapted from Zannath et al. (2023), using five indicators to measure consumer satisfaction with the RUCAS brand. These indicators include: "I am satisfied with the quality of the RUCAS product I purchased."

### Data Analysis Techniques

The data analysis for this study was conducted in stages. The initial stage involved descriptive analysis to provide a general profile of the respondents and the research variables. Subsequently, inferential statistical analysis was performed by applying Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) operated through WarpPLS 7.0 software. The choice of PLS-SEM as the primary analytical method was driven by several considerations. Unlike covariance-based SEM (CB-SEM), PLS-SEM is prediction-oriented and focuses on explaining the variance in the dependent variables. Other decisive advantages include its ability to handle data that does not meet the assumption of normality—a common issue in social science research—and its suitability for analyzing complex models with relatively small sample sizes. These considerations align perfectly with the nature of the data and the research objectives, establishing PLS-

SEM as the most appropriate analytical tool (Hair et al., 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016; Malhotra, 2020).

## RESULTS

### Respondent Characteristics

After the questionnaires were distributed, the responses were examined, revealing that data from 205 respondents could be processed. Table 1 presents a classification of demographic information based on the characteristics of the respondents used in this study. Based on the findings from the research activities conducted by the researcher, the following are the characteristics of the respondents:

**Table 1. Respondent Characteristics**

	Categories	Amount	Percentage
Gender	Female	100	48,8%
	Male	105	51,2%
	Total	205	100%
Age	19 - 21 years	78	38%
	22 - 24 years	77	37,6%
	25 - 27 years	50	24,4%
	Total	205	100%
employment	Students	116	56,6%
	Entrepreneurs	21	10,3%
	Civil Servants	11	5,3%
	Private Employees	57	27,8%
	Total	205	100%
Income	≤ Rp 1.000.000	29	14,1%
	Rp 1.000.000 - Rp2.000.000	58	28,3%
	Rp 2.500.001 - Rp4.000.000	50	24,5%
	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp 5.500.000	37	18%
	Rp 5.500.001 - Rp 7.000.000	23	11,2%
	≥ Rp 7.000.000	8	3,9%
	Total	205	100%
Expenses	≤ Rp 1.000.000	56	27,3%
	Rp 1.000.000 - Rp2.500.000	80	39%
	Rp 2.500.001 - Rp4.000.000	52	25,4%
	Rp. 4.000.001 - Rp 5.500.000	13	6,3%
	Rp 5.500.001 - Rp 7.000.000	3	1,5%
	≥ Rp 7.000.000	1	0,5%
	Total	205	100%

Source: 2025 data processing

In Table 1, of the total 205 respondents, the majority were male (105 people) (51.2%), while females numbered 100 people (48.8%). Based on age, the majority of respondents were in the 19–21 years age range (78 people) (38%), followed by the 22–24 years age range (77 people) (37.6%), and the 25–27 years age range (50 people) (24.4%). Most of the respondents were students, namely 116 people (56.6%), followed by private employees (57 people) (27.8%), self-employed (21 people) (10.3%), and civil servants (11 people) (5.3%). In terms of income, the majority of respondents have a monthly income in the range of Rp 1,000,000–Rp 2,000,000, as many as 58 people (28.3%), followed by respondents with income of Rp 2,500,001–Rp 4,000,000, as many as 50 people (24.5%), and ≤ Rp 1,000,000 as many as 29 people (14.1%). Respondents with higher incomes are

distributed in the range of Rp 4,000,001–Rp 5,500,000 as many as 37 people (18%), Rp 5,500,001–Rp 7,000,000 as many as 23 people (11.2%), and  $\geq$  Rp 7,000,000 as many as 8 people (3.9%). In terms of monthly expenditure, the majority of respondents allocated their expenses in the range of Rp 1,000,000–Rp 2,500,000 (80 people) (39%), followed by  $\leq$  Rp 1,000,000 (56 people) (27.3%), and Rp 2,500,001–Rp 4,000,000 (52 people) (25.4%). Expenditures in the higher range were distributed as Rp 4,000,001–Rp 5,500,000 (13 people) (6.3%), Rp 5,500,001–Rp 7,000,000 (3 people) (1.5%), and  $\geq$  Rp 7,000,000 (1 person) (0.5%).

### Outer Model

Validity testing is categorized into two types: convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity assesses whether each research instrument aligns and converges according to predetermined criteria. This can be evaluated using two key indicators: Average Variance Extracted (AVE)  $\geq$  0.5 and factor loadings  $>$  0.5 with a significance level (p-value)  $<$  0.05 (Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 2. Outer Model Result**

Variable	Item Code	Loading Factor	AVE	P-Value	CR	CA
Self Congruence	SC1	(0.828)	0.746	<0.001	0.921	0.881
	SC2	(0.641)		<0.001		
	SC3	(0.723)		<0.001		
	SC4	(0.664)		<0.001		
Brand Love	BL1	(0.626)	0.742	<0.001	0.945	0.930
	BL2	(0.558)		<0.001		
	BL3	(0.589)		<0.001		
	BL4	(0.669)		<0.001		
	BL5	(0.574)		<0.001		
	BL6	(0.580)		<0.001		
Brand Authenticity	BA1	(0.726)	0.700	<0.001	0.921	0.891
	BA2	(0.561)		<0.001		
	BA3	(0.577)		<0.001		
	BA4	(0.645)		<0.001		
	BA5	(0.644)		<0.001		
Brand Satisfaction	BS1	(0.667)	0.736	<0.001	0.933	0.909
	BS2	(0.618)		<0.001		
	BS3	(0.697)		<0.001		
	BS4	(0.575)		<0.001		
	BS5	(0.631)		<0.001		

Source: 2025 data processing

Based on the results, all item loadings for each variable exceed 0.5 and are statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), while AVE values for every construct are above the threshold of 0.5. These results confirm that all measurement items demonstrate good convergent validity. As shown in Table 2, the tested items are valid and can be used for further statistical analysis.

Furthermore, an instrument is considered reliable if it meets the criteria of Composite Reliability (CR)  $>$  0.7 and Cronbach’s Alpha (CA)  $>$  0.6 (Hair et al., 2019). Reliability testing on the full sample for all constructs shows that both CR and CA

values meet or exceed the recommended thresholds, indicating that the measurement items are consistent and reliable.

### Structural Model Analysis

The R-squared ( $R^2$ ) value for the Brand Love variable is 0.64, indicating that 64% of the variance in Brand Love is explained by the combined effects of Self-Congruence, Brand Authenticity, and Brand Satisfaction. According to Hair et al. (2019), an  $R^2$  value of 0.64 is considered substantial in behavioral and marketing research, indicating that the model demonstrates strong explanatory power. This means that these three antecedents collectively play a major role in shaping consumers' emotional attachment to brands. However, the remaining 36% of unexplained variance indicates that other factors—such as brand experience, emotional attachment, advertising exposure, or consumer personality traits—may also influence Brand Love but were not included in the current study (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012).

Similarly, the R-squared value for Brand Satisfaction is 0.42, meaning that 42% of its variability is explained by Self-Congruence and Brand Authenticity. Based on Cohen's (2013) and Hair et al.'s (2019) guidelines, this reflects a moderate level of explanatory power, suggesting that a considerable portion of consumer satisfaction arises from how well the brand's image aligns with the consumer's self-concept and how authentic the brand is perceived to be. The remaining 58% of unexplained variance may stem from other factors such as perceived value, service quality, brand performance, or past experiences, which were not within the scope of this analysis (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

The first hypothesis (H1) examined the influence of Self-Congruence on Brand Love, yielding a path coefficient of 0.195 with a p-value of 0.002, which is below the 0.05 threshold. This confirms that Self-Congruence exerts a positive and significant effect on Brand Love. In other words, when a consumer perceives a brand as closely aligned with their self-concept, their emotional attachment and affection toward the brand increase. Therefore, H1 is supported (Sirgy, 1982; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

**Table 3. Structural Model Results**

Relation	Path Coefficient	P Value	Result
SC → BL	0.195	0.002	Support
SC → BS	0.323	<0.001	Support
BA → BS	0.441	<0.001	Support
BA → BL	0.441	<0.001	Support
BS → BL	0.304	<0.001	Support

Source: 2025 data processing

The second hypothesis (H2) explored the relationship between Self-Congruence and Brand Satisfaction, producing a path coefficient of 0.323 with a p-value < 0.001. This indicates a strong and significant positive relationship, implying that consumers who perceive greater congruence between their self-image and the brand's image are more satisfied with that brand. This supports the view that psychological congruence

enhances not only emotional attachment but also cognitive evaluations of satisfaction. Hence, H2 is accepted (Kressmann et al., 2006; Malär et al., 2011).

The third hypothesis (H3) assessed the effect of Brand Authenticity on Brand Satisfaction, revealing a path coefficient of 0.441 with a p-value < 0.001, signifying a significant positive influence. This suggests that brands perceived as genuine, consistent, and true to their values tend to yield higher levels of consumer satisfaction. Authenticity fosters trust and credibility, which are critical in building a fulfilling brand–consumer relationship (Morhart et al., 2015; Napoli et al., 2014). Therefore, H3 is supported.

The fourth hypothesis (H4) examined the effect of Brand Authenticity on Brand Love, with results showing a path coefficient of 0.441 and a p-value < 0.001, again confirming a strong and significant positive effect. This implies that perceived brand authenticity evokes deeper emotional connections and affection, reinforcing the notion that authenticity serves as an emotional foundation for Brand Love (Azka, 2023; Raza et al., 2021). Thus, H4 is supported.

Finally, the fifth hypothesis (H5) tested the relationship between Brand Satisfaction and Brand Love. The findings show a path coefficient of 0.304 with a p-value < 0.001, confirming a significant positive relationship. This demonstrates that satisfied consumers are more likely to develop affective bonds with the brand, supporting the idea that cognitive appraisals (satisfaction) can evolve into emotional outcomes (love) (Oliver, 1980; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, H5 is supported.

In summary, the study provides strong empirical evidence that Self-Congruence, Brand Authenticity, and Brand Satisfaction are critical antecedents of Brand Love. All hypothesized paths were statistically significant, reinforcing the integrated role of both cognitive and emotional mechanisms in fostering consumer–brand relationships. These insights offer valuable implications for brand managers seeking to enhance brand authenticity, self-image congruence, and consumer satisfaction as strategies to cultivate long-term emotional loyalty.

## DISCUSSION

### Self-Congruence and Its Influence on Brand Love

One crucial factor that can increase brand love is self-congruence, or the match between a customer's self-image and the image presented by a brand (Zannath et al., 2023). When consumers perceive a match between their self-identity and the image projected by a brand, they tend to feel more emotionally connected. Brands perceived as reflecting consumers' personal values or lifestyles provide a sense of belonging and pride, creating a stronger attachment. This strengthens emotional loyalty and makes consumers feel that the brand is part of their identity, ultimately increasing brand love significantly (Joshi & Garg, 2022; Suyoto & Tannady, 2022).

According to research (Khan & Kashif, 2023), self-congruence can encourage consumers to form emotional bonds with brands they perceive as aligned with themselves, which in turn can foster brand love. The majority of respondents were aged 19-24, which is the identity-searching phase, so they tend to choose brands that reflect their values or lifestyle. With the dominance of students as the primary respondents,

and the affordable price of Rucas products for the income group of Rp 1,000,000 to Rp 2,000,000, this brand has succeeded in creating emotional closeness through value relevance and product affordability. The highest average score on the item "The Rucas brand reflects who I am" (4.06) indicates that the majority of respondents feel their identity is reflected by this brand. With an overall average of the Self-Congruence variable of 3.97 and Brand Love of 4.13, this finding confirms that self-congruence is an essential element in creating Brand Love.

### **Self-Congruence and Its Influence on Brand Satisfaction**

Consumers who perceive a brand as aligned with their self-image and values tend to be more satisfied with their purchase decisions. This congruence creates a positive emotional connection, enhancing the overall experience with the brand. When consumers believe a product reflects their identity, it meets their expectations, strengthens their satisfaction, and encourages repeat purchases.

Thus, strong self-congruence fosters a sense of satisfaction, which is essential for long-term brand loyalty (Zannath et al., 2023). Respondents felt their identity was reflected in the brand, with the highest average score for the item "The Rucas brand reflects who I am" at 4.06. This indicates that consumers not only feel emotionally connected but also satisfied with the brand's products and services. The overall average for the Brand Satisfaction variable, 3.96, reinforces the finding that congruence between consumers' self-identity and brand image increases satisfaction levels.

### **Brand Authenticity and Its Influence on Brand Satisfaction**

Brand authenticity is the extent to which a brand is perceived as authentic, consistent, and true to its promised values (Harjadi et al., 2023). When consumers perceive a brand as authentic and consistent in its values, they are more likely to be satisfied with their experiences. Brands perceived as authentic typically offer high-quality products and meet consumer expectations. When consumers perceive a congruence between their personal values and what the brand represents, they experience stronger positive feelings, which in turn increases their level of satisfaction with the brand (Zannath et al., 2023). Respondents gave the highest score to the item "I believe that Rucas products are of high quality," with an average of 4.25, indicating a positive perception of brand authenticity. The overall average for the Brand Authenticity variable (4.14) and Brand Satisfaction (3.96) indicates that the consistency of Rucas' authentic values is a significant factor influencing consumer satisfaction.

### **Brand Authenticity and Its Influence on Brand Love**

Authentic brands often have compelling and relevant stories, which add emotional depth to the brand. This emotional attachment not only encourages consumers to repurchase the product but also encourages them to recommend the brand to others. In this context, brand love is the result of an ongoing process in which brand authenticity is a key driver in creating a more loyal customer community (Harjadi et al., 2023). Brand authenticity also significantly influences Brand Love. Consumer trust in the high quality of Rucas products, as reflected in the average score of 4.25 for the product quality item, strengthens their admiration and emotional attachment to the brand. The overall average for Brand Authenticity of 4.14 and Brand Love of 4.13 indicates that positive perceptions of brand authenticity build consumers' emotional appreciation.

## **Brand Satisfaction and Its Influence on Brand Love**

Brand satisfaction is the positive feeling consumers experience toward a brand after using its product or service. It results from a comparison between consumers' pre-purchase expectations and their actual experience after using the product (Zannath et al., 2023). Positive experiences consumers have with a brand's products or services build strong emotional bonds. When consumers are satisfied, they are more likely to develop deep positive feelings toward the brand.

This satisfaction also creates trust and loyalty, which strengthens the emotional connection between consumers and the brand. In the long term, consistent and satisfying experiences can increase brand love, encouraging customers to remain loyal and recommend the brand to others (Burhanudin & Febryanti, 2023; Joshi & Garg, 2022). Respondents who were satisfied with the quality of Rucas products, as reflected in the highest average score of 4.27 on the item "I am satisfied with the quality of Rucas products," tended to develop brand love. Although some consumers remain open to other brands, the overall average Brand Satisfaction of 3.96 and Brand Love of 4.13 indicates that positive experiences with the Rucas brand strengthen consumers' emotional connections.

## **CONCLUSION**

Based on the research findings, Self-Congruence, Brand Authenticity, and Brand Satisfaction have a significant influence on Brand Love. Self-congruence has a positive effect on Brand Love and Brand Satisfaction, which indicates that the higher the alignment between consumer self-identity and the brand, the higher the level of satisfaction and love for the brand. Brand Authenticity also has a significant influence on Brand Satisfaction and Brand Love, where the perception of brand authenticity contributes to increased consumer satisfaction and emotional attachment. In addition, Brand Satisfaction has a positive effect on Brand Love, which indicates that positive experiences with the brand play a role in strengthening consumers' emotional bonds to the brand. These findings confirm that the factors of value alignment, brand authenticity, and consumer satisfaction are key elements in building Brand Love, which ultimately can increase consumer loyalty to the brand.

## **Research implications**

This research has important implications for marketing and brand management practices. First, the results show that self-congruence is a key factor in building brand love. Therefore, companies need to pay closer attention to how their brands reflect the identities and values relevant to target consumers. In this context, marketing based on an understanding of consumers' lifestyles and emotional needs can help brands connect more easily with their audiences. This understanding of emotional aspects also aligns with the findings of Julia et al. (2022), who showed that brand love, or consumers' affection for a brand, has a significant influence on purchase intention, although this influence is indirect. Their research found that the role of brand ambassadors mediates the relationship between brand love and purchase intention, where positive perceptions of brand ambassadors strengthen consumers' desire to purchase a product. Conversely, negative external social influences can decrease consumer purchase intention. Therefore, companies need to build effective and positive communication channels to

maintain brand image and strengthen the emotional bond between the brand and its consumers (Julia et al., 2022).

Second, brand authenticity plays a crucial role in building consumer satisfaction and emotional engagement. Brands that maintain consistency in their values and quality and deliver on promises made to consumers will be more valued and trusted, which in turn can strengthen loyalty and brand love. Moreover, understanding the dynamics of brand love is essential, as it represents a strong emotional bond that influences purchasing behavior and loyalty (Gofur & Shafariah, 2024). Their study highlights that by fostering brand love, businesses can enhance consumer engagement, encourage repurchase intentions, and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Finally, brand satisfaction derived from positive consumer experiences also contributes to increased brand love. Therefore, companies must ensure that the experiences provided to consumers consistently meet or even exceed their expectations. Overall, companies must balance creating a brand identity that is relevant to consumers, maintaining brand authenticity, and ensuring consumer satisfaction to build strong and long-term relationships with customers.

### Limitations of Research and Suggestions

This study has several limitations, including the sample size, which only included Generation Z consumers, so the findings may not be fully representative of other consumer segments. Furthermore, this study focused on only one local fashion brand, Rucas, so the results cannot be generalized to other brands. The convenience sampling method used may also introduce potential bias in population representation. Future research is recommended to expand the population coverage by involving various age groups or consumers of other local fashion brands to obtain more comprehensive results. Furthermore, the addition of variables such as brand loyalty or emotional attachment can provide a more holistic picture of consumers' emotional relationships with brands. Further research could also consider using more representative sampling methods to increase the validity of the research results.

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### **Competing interests**

“The authors declare that they have no competing interests related to this study on 'Why Gen Z Loves Rucas: The Role of Self-Congruence, Brand Authenticity, and Brand Satisfaction in Building Brand Love.' This research was conducted independently and objectively, without any financial, commercial, or personal relationships that could influence the study's outcomes. Additionally, the authors affirm that they have no affiliations or connections with the Rucas brand or its representatives that could create a conflict of interest in the preparation or publication of this article.”

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