The dynamic models of consumers' symbolic needs: in the context of restaurant brands

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Introduction

Consumers' changing lifestyles and family structures have led to growth of the restaurant industry (de Rezende and de Avelar, 2012; Hahm and Khan, 2014). As one of the fastest growing service industries, the restaurant industry has positive economic impacts, such as increased employment directly and in other related industries such as advertising, the manufacturing of ingredients and beverages (Reynolds et al., 2013). However, the growth of the restaurant sector has caused increased competition and thereby pressure for survival. As the restaurant industry becomes more competitive, restaurants are paying greater attention to branding and seeking differentiation in their trading propositions in order to overcome this hostile environment. In addition, as consumers attach greater importance to restaurant branding, branded restaurants with strong personalities and identities are expected to grow (Eversham, 2013). Interestingly, restaurants now provide symbolic benefits (e.g. status) as well as functional benefits (i.e. food quality) to consumers; it is even more critical to create symbolic imagery and meaning for the restaurant than in the past. Such meaning of symbolic consumption is particularly important in the restaurant sector because of the intangible benefits associated with such consumption. In light of these developments, this research focuses on the symbolic consumption process in the restaurant sector, in order to suggest marketing strategies and tackle the challenges faced in this sector.

The restaurant is not just a supplier of food, but also provides a symbolic value as a means to represent a consumer's identification (Chan *et al*., 2012), social status and group membership (Witt, 2010). Researchers have indicated that when selecting a restaurant, food quality, service quality, and atmosphere remain the important determinants of customer satisfaction towards the restaurant (Berry *et al*., 2002; Namkung and Jang, 2008). However, Ponnam and Balaji (2014) have argued that the restaurant experience includes multiple aspects beyond functional (food-related) perspectives. In particular, Warde and Martens (2000) approached eating out from a sociological perspective and argued that eating out has a symbolic significance, such as a social distinction and status, as well as a practical significance. They indicated that there are differences in the frequency and place of eating out according to the social group, based on age, gender, region, income, class, and so on. Consumers want a restaurant that satisfies them in terms of the psychological and social aspects in their lives (Wattanasuwan, 2005). In the restaurant industry, symbolic consumption explains the reason why consumers are willing to pay more money for certain restaurant brands (Kim *et al*., 2011). Symbolic consumption is particularly important in the global chain restaurant setting. Recently, chain restaurant brands have emphasized their symbolic meaning for their brands' positioning and differentiation (Kim *et al*., 2011). As global chain restaurants are located in many countries, it is difficult to satisfy global consumers simply with the menu. Emphasizing the brand with a symbolic image is necessary for the success of chain restaurant. Symbolic meanings of the chain restaurants give a competitive advantage by forming brand personalities (Murase and Bojanic, 2004). In

addition, in the global market, a chain restaurant's value is increased through the understanding of local culture that can offer a symbolic meaning of the restaurant (Contractor and Kundu, 1998).

Symbolic needs and symbolic consumption are emotionally and internally created (Bhat and Reddy, 1998). Symbolic consumption occurs when consumers purchase products or services to express the symbolic needs such as conformity, uniqueness (Liang and He, 2012), affiliation, and social distinction (Banister and Hogg, 2004). Thus, symbolic needs are associated with self-image and social identification (Bhat and Reddy, 1998). People consume goods/services as a means to convey messages to others (Belk *et al*., 1982). These messages will be conveyed to others successfully if the symbol of goods/services is socially admitted (Hyatt, 1992). That is, consumers choose goods/services that are socially accepted by others, in order to inform their identity (Lee, 1990). In that sense, symbolic consumption is a cultural practice that helps a consumer's social process (Elliott, 1997). Symbolic consumption is closely linked to brands, because brands' properties depend on their symbolic meaning (Ekinci *et al*., 2013). Thus, the meaning embedded in a consumer's symbolic consumption of brands can indicate the beliefs of a culture (Aaker *et al*., 2001). Moreover in today's society, the materialism motivates status consumption for anyone who has an upward ambition (O'Cass *et al*., 2013). Status consumption is the tendency to buy goods or service to improve social status or prestige (Eastman and Iyer, 2012). As the income of consumers has risen, consumers have tried to use luxury and status goods to achieve and reflect their social positions (Goldsmith *et al.,* 2012). Thus consumption attitudes that involve choosing well-known brands are related to displaying their wealth and social position. Consumers' symbolic needs are different in nature according to their socio-economic and cultural background, thus certain needs have a stronger influence on a consumer's consumption (Kim *et al*., 2002).

Although some scholars have explained the important relationship between symbolic needs and consumption (Eastman and Iyer, 2012; Goldsmith *et al.,* 2012; Kim *et al*., 2002; Millan *et al*., 2013; O'Cass *et al*., 2013), there are several gaps. First, to the best of our knowledge, no empirical studies have investigated symbolic consumption from the perspective of a consumer's symbolic needs in the restaurant sector. Thus, in the present study, we categorise three models accordingly (i.e. status needs model, social needs model, status and social needs model) to explain symbolic consumption. Second, symbolic consumption is not a simple process and involves complex underlying elements to explain the concept. Although researchers have referred to self-congruence (Hosany and Martin, 2012, Kwak and Kang, 2009), brand identification (Ekinci, 2013), and culture (Ojiako and Aleke, 2011; Douglas and Isherwood, 1996) as the underlying elements to explain symbolic consumption, we did not find studies, which have examined the dynamic relationships between these variables empirically. Third, despite that food consumption considers religion, custom and culture, which in turn, emphasizes the affective aspect of symbolic consumption (Bu *et al*., 2013), its use in explaining symbolic consumption, however, is very limited.

To address the above gaps, this study has three research aims:
(1) First, using the restaurant sector, we identify the underlying dimensions of symbolic consumption for the comparison of symbolic needs in three dynamic models. This is an essential process to evaluate the differences of symbolic consumption according to symbolic needs in greater detail.

(2) Second, we empirically examine the relationships between collectivism/individualism, brand reputation, self-congruence, brand identification, brand affect and brand loyalty, in order to compare the three models. This makes it possible to identify the complex psychological process or the path of symbolic consumption. In particular, we test the role of brand affect as a mediator on the relationship among all other variables.

(3) Third, we investigate if there is a hierarchy in the consumers' symbolic needs through the comparison of the three models. Confirming a stronger need between symbolic needs is important because individual's consumption decision is driven by a hierarchy of needs (Wilk, 2002).

By comparing the relationships between these variables (external and internal variables) in three models, the study significantly contributes to the examination of the mechanism that explains the symbolic consumption process according to various facets of symbolic needs and the existence of a hierarchy in the consumers' symbolic needs.

A Conceptual Framework of Symbolic Consumption

Bhat and Reddy (1998) suggest that symbolism is multidimensional concept and comprises of "prestige" and "personality expression". Ekinci *et al.* (2013) list three dimensions of symbolic consumption for tourism destination brands, namely, self-congruence, brand identification, and life congruence. Neither model offers an in-depth investigation of the complex processes of symbolic consumption. Hence, our research develops a comprehensive conceptual framework to explain the consumer's symbolic consumption process based on the following variables:

(a) antecedents: collectivism/individualism and brand reputation; (b) mediators: self-congruence, brand identification, brand affect; and (c) consequence: brand loyalty.

Antecedent: Collectivism/Individualism

In the socio-cultural context, consumers' consumption behaviour is influenced by culture value because culture value is an antecedent of their internal psychological process (Triandis, 2000). Culture value refers to mental images that affect the way people are likely to behave in a particular situation (Lawan and Zanna, 2013). These values affect people's attitudes and thoughts (Banerjee, 2008). Thus, consumers' cultural context affects both their consumption decisions (Muhamad *et al.*, 2012), and their symbolic communication (Krishen *et al.*, 2014). These cultural meanings can be conveyed to products or service and are often employed as symbolic tools for the building of identity (Dworzecki and Jarosiński, 2014). In particular, culture makes an important contribution to a consumer's decision related to their consumption of food (Tian and Wang, 2010; Wood and Muñoz, 2007).

In the marketing domain, the study of culture highlights the importance of individual cultural values (Yoo and Donthu, 2002). Although the concept of culture has originated from the national level, several consumer behavioural researchers (e.g. Craig and Douglas, 2006; Laroche *et al.*, 2005) have noted that it is more important to reflect culture at the individual level and not the national level. This is because applying the same stereotypical culture to all citizens of a country would fail to reflect all behaviours and needs and would not satisfy consumers (Yoo and Donthu, 2011). For example, South Korea is characterized by its collectivistic culture (Hofstede, 2001), yet many Koreans would consider themselves as individualistically-orientated. In particular, as the selection of food is more centred towards the personal preference, reflected in

psychological and emotional meanings (Warde, 1997), applying culture at the individual level is more suitable in the restaurant industry.

Although many researchers have used Hofstede's framework for studying culture, Hofstede's work has been criticised for several reasons. Some authors have found that the reliabilities of Hofstede's dimensions are low (Blodgett *et al*., 2008; Kagitcibasi, 1994), and the construct validity of the instrument is insufficient when the instrument is applied at the individual level (Blodgett *et al*., 2008) because there is a diversity of culture among members of any country (Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). In addition, despite the fact that cultures are not bounded by borders, Hofstede equated nations with culture (Baskerville, 2003). Thus, Yoo and Donthu (2011) argued that it is necessary to develop a scale to evaluate cultural dimensions at the individual level. Their scale is helpful in research studying individual attitudes and behaviors related to the individual level cultural orientation. Thus, in this research, we apply the scale of Yoo and Donthu (2011).

We use collectivism/individualism' as cultural value. This is because the 'collectivism/individualism' dimension has been used commonly to predict human behaviour patterns (LeFebvre and Franke, 2013). Collectivists regard social approval and conformity to the group rules as an important standard when choosing a product or service (Steenkamp *et al*., 1999), whereas individualists emphasize on personal attitudes and needs (Liu *et al*., 2011). In addition, collectivists are more dependent and base their decisions in accordance to other people's opinions, while individualists express their opinions less to others (Yoo, 2009). Thus, individual culture values greatly influence the process of consumers' symbolic consumption. Magnini's (2010) study revealed that collectivists have a collective mindset emphasizing family or friends in their restaurant selection. In this study, we take the view that a consumer's cultural value forms their symbolic needs and influences the process of symbolic consumption.

Antecedent: Brand Reputation
Consumers regard status as an important consumption behaviour (Goldsmith *et al*., 2010). These consumers are interested in reputable products and services that convey symbolic meaning. We posit that symbolic consumption is related to brand reputation (Liu *et al*., 2011) because a reputable brand signals status and social class as well as the high quality (Ekinci *et al*., 2013). Consumers purchase products or service with a certain reputation in order to strengthen their social status (Shi *et al*., 2012). A consumer wants to have a connection with a brand with a high reputation, which enhances his/her social self-concept (Jinfeng *et al*., 2014). When consumers choose a highly reputed brand, it helps their status to be perceived by other people. For example, Bao and Mandrik (2004) found that consumers who try to show or improve their social status are likely to buy reputable brands. These consumers understand that brands are symbols of status and prefer reputable brands (Liao and Wang, 2009). In particular, the younger consumers pay more money to luxurious and reputable brand as a means of symbols of status (O'Cass and Siahtiri, 2013). By the same logic, consumers choose reputable cafés/restaurants for social status as well as for the high quality food or service (Kim and Jang, 2014). Thus, this study suggests brand reputation as an antecedent for status needs of symbolic consumption.

Mediators: Brand Identification, Self-congruence and Brand Affect
The present study also posits brand identification, self-congruence and brand affect as

important mediators that may enhance consumers' symbolic consumption.

Individuals have needs of acceptance by other people and can satisfy their needs of acceptance by purchasing specific brands (Ekinci *et al*., 2013). Brand identification is based on social identity theory (Kuenzel and Halliday, 2010), which suggests that people define themselves as a member of a special social group for their self-esteem or pride (Taifel and Turner, 1985). Brand identification categorizes people into members of various social groups (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003) and the consumption of a specific product or brand allows the consumer to belong or to dissociate him-/herself from the groups of individuals that constitute his/her social environment (Rio *et al*., 2001). Brand identification is an outward expression (social symbolism) of symbolic consumption (Elliot *et al.,* 2007). Thus, in the context of restaurants, consumers who visit a specific restaurant express their social identity to a social group through identification with a restaurant brand. Such brand identification is characterized by a powerful emotional connection with a brand, and it is possible for individuals to experience optimistic and positive feelings in the form of strengthened self-esteem when they identify themselves with a specific brand (Donavan *et al*., 2006). In the case of service brands like restaurant brands, building emotional relationships between consumers and brands is important (Ekinci *et al*., 2008). The role of brand identification as the driver of symbolic consumption is becoming more and more important in the restaurant industry (Lam *et al*., 2013).

Self-congruence is an inward expression (self-symbolism) of symbolic consumption (Elliot *et al*., 2007). Symbolic consumption can be explained by the self-concept, which refers to the thoughts and beliefs that individuals hold about their own characteristic traits (Wright, 2006). Rhee and Johnson (2012) suggest that consumers can preserve their self-concept through consumption. That is, consumers choose a brand that reflects their self-image matched with a brand's image, in order to express the self-concept (Sirgy *et al*., 2000). The majority of people behave in a way that strengthens or retains their self-concept and the self-concept has been used as a method of explaining product symbolism (Kwak and Kang, 2009). Product symbolism is based on the idea that consumers are drawn towards a product whose symbolic image is most similar to their self-concept (Kwak and Kang, 2009). In a competitive marketing environment, the extent of congruency between consumers' self-concept and a brand's image has a significant influence on consumers' responses to the brand (Graeff, 1996). Thus, in the restaurant industry, self-congruence is one of the main factors that influences a restaurant visit. When deciding which restaurant to visit, consumers with a higher involvement in the symbolic value of food reflect a greater self-image (Kaur, 2013). Restaurants are not only a place for dining but also for social meetings and business. Hence, the symbolic image of a restaurant must match the self-concept of its target consumers.

In the development of a dynamic symbolic consumption model, we posit that consumption is also governed by consumers' feelings and emotions (Zohra, 2011). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001:82) define brand affect as, "a brand's potential to elicit a positive emotional response in the average consumer as a result of its use". Evoking consumer emotions is a major factor for developing a long-term relationship between a consumer and a brand (Zohra, 2011). Consumer satisfaction and purchase intention are directly influenced by positive affect (Oliver, 1997). Thus, a brand or a company that successfully forms a positive emotional relationship with the consumer gains a competitive advantage (Nowak *et al*., 2006). We note that consumers' emotions are

influenced by stimuli (Wright, 2006), such as the product's symbolic meaning. In other words, affect influences the way in which consumers evaluate a favourable product or service guiding their desired symbolic meaning. Emotional pleasures are generated by the symbolic consumption of product or service (Soica, 2013). In particular, restaurants offer hedonic values as well as utilitarian values (Ryu *et al.*, 2010). Consumers who visit a restaurant perceive utilitarian value from food and service quality (Park, 2004), while the hedonic value is derived from a symbolic meaning of the restaurant and the emotional and affective factors (Ryu *et al.*, 2010). In the study of symbolic consumption models, brand affect is, in spite of its importance, rarely researched. Thus, in the restaurant service sector, we highlight the importance to identify the role of brand affect as a mediating variable between the relationships above.

Consequence: Brand Loyalty
Two approaches to the construct of brand loyalty include the behavioural approach and the attitudinal approach. The behavioural approach refers to the repeat purchase of a special brand, while the attitudinal approach refers to a positive attitude towards the brand (Quester and Lim, 2003). In the service industry, some researchers have explored brand loyalty from a psychological perspective (Oliver, 1997; Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2002).They have argued that mental factors are important in building brand loyalty. That is, when positive feelings and affects are added to a brand, loyalty can be shown as an attitude. In the restaurant industry, consumers prefer restaurant brands that provide a positive emotional state through symbolic elements such as self-congruence, brand identification, or brand affect. Such positive service experience in the restaurant leads to consumers' revisit intentions (e.g. Lee and Cunningham, 2001; Harris and Ezeh, 2008) and willingness to recommend a brand (e.g. Paswan *et al.*, 2007). Since the restaurant industry has intangible and variable characteristics, the emotional and psychological process of forming true brand loyalty is important. Thus, based on the above discussion, our research adopts attitudinal loyalty as a consequence of symbolic consumption in the restaurant.

The Research Models
The present study investigates the dynamic process of symbolic consumption, providing an understanding as to how symbolic messages are conveyed when consumers choose the restaurant brand. The complicated psychological process of symbolic consumption can be characterized by continual changes (i.e. the dynamic process). This dynamic process of symbolic consumption explains how the *external* motivational factors influence the *internal* elements of symbolic consumption. Thus, we identify the changes in the complicated psychological process or the path of symbolic consumption through the dynamic process. As shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3, we adopt a cultural attribute (collectivism/individualism) and brand reputation as the *external* motivational factors for status needs and social needs respectively, and self-congruence, brand identification, and brand affect as the *internal* elements of symbolic consumption, in order to describe the dynamic process of symbolic consumption psychology.

We employ status needs, social needs and status and social needs as symbolic needs that have an influence on symbolic consumption. Consumers have not only the need to distinguish themselves from the mass (status needs), but also the need to be similar with others (social needs) (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). However, the consumer's needs for symbolic consumption are complex, as the two kinds of needs sometimes operate

separately, and at other times they are combined (status and social needs) (Janssen and Jager, 2003). Thus, the study develops three dynamic models categorized according to the following symbolic attributes: status needs, social needs, and status and social needs. In addition, to compare the three models further, the study investigates if there is a hierarchy in consumers' symbolic needs. These three needs represent the consumers' complex psychological consumption process of symbolic consumption (Wright, 2006).

Figure 1 presents the attribute of status needs in symbolic consumption, referring to the need to show people's success, wealth and class (Wright 2006). This status needs model highlights brand reputation as the symbolic resource that can satisfy status needs. Thus, this needs model suggests that brand reputation has an effect on self-congruence, brand affect and brand identification, each of which has an effect on brand loyalty. Self-congruence influences on brand affect, whereas brand identification also influences on brand affect. As shown in figure 1, the effect of the brand reputation on brand loyalty is mediated by self-congruence, brand affect and brand identification.

<Insert Figure 1 About Here>

Figure 2 presents the attribute of social needs in symbolic consumption. Social needs are related to social acceptability, group membership and affiliation (Roth 1995). In terms of the consumers' social needs, this model includes collectivism/individualism as the independent variable.

<Insert Figure 2 About Here>

Figure 3 jointly considers the attributes of both social and status needs in symbolic consumption. This model suggests that collectivism/individualism has an effect on brand reputation, self-congruence and brand identification, each of which has an effect on brand affect, which in turn impacts on brand loyalty. Brand reputation has an impact on self-congruence and brand identification and brand affect. Also the effect of collectivism/individualism on brand loyalty is mediated by self-congruence, brand reputation, brand identification and brand affect.

<Insert Figure 3 About Here>

Hypothesis Development

The Influence of Brand Reputation on Self-Congruence, Brand Affect, Brand Identification
Brand reputation is regarded as the perception of quality in relation to the brand name (Aaker and Keller 1990). Researchers highlight the social facet of reputation that results from a social network in which information about a brand is transmitted to others via various media or by word-of-mouth (Granovetter 1985). In other words, reputation can be seen as social approval. Thus, a brand that is well known or has a good reputation among consumers increases their pride (Ahearne *et al.*, 2005). When a brand has good reputation, it enhances brand identification because consumers who want social approval from others cognitively identify themselves with superior traits (Lii and Lee, 2012). Thus, consumers who are satisfied with a particular brand have positive brand identification (Chou, 2013).

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In addition, brand reputation is related to the credibility of the brand's identity (Whetten and Mackey, 2002). That is, consumers tend to choose reputable brands in order to keep their self-identity, which in turn can impact on their affective commitment (Helm, 2011). Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) suggest that a good reputation reduces the uncertainty about the quality and identity of the brand, which, over time, increases trust in consumers' minds. Highly committed consumers maintain their trust based on the reputation (Bartikowski and Walsh 2011). These consumers' commitment occurs due to both their self-congruence and brand identification and their affective attachment such as a feeling of passion towards the brand (Caroll and Ahuvia 2006). Thus, consumers, who choose high reputable brands, have favourable attitude towards these brands. Based on these arguments, our study hypothesizes:

H1. Brand reputation has an effect on self-congruence.
H2. Brand reputation has an effect on brand affect.
H3. Brand reputation has an effect on brand identification.

The Influence of Collectivism/Individualism on Self-Congruence, Brand Affect, Brand Identification and Brand Reputation
Consumers shape different types of needs and wants (Nayeem, 2012) according to their individual cultural values, which influence on their attitudes and preference of product or service. Thus, Individual culture deeply affects consumers' buying decision (de Mooij 2010). Within the particular cultural background, consumers create a self-concept and self-congruity (Phau and Lau, 2001) or build relationships with other people by consuming products or service (Lunt and Livingstone, 1992).

In this research, we employ collectivism/individualism as cultural value. Compared to individualists, collectivists have a greater burden gaining the approval of the group, as harmony with the group is very important for collectivists (Hui and Triandis, 1986). Thus, collectivists are prone to be more sensitive to social identity (Kim and Hyun, 2013). While individualists are less dependent on the group and emphasize the self-concept and characteristics (Hui and Triandis, 1986). They choose the brand that can maintain their self-image. Collectivistic consumers prefer reputable brands that represent status and prestige (Aaker and Maheswaren, 1997), while individualistic consumers focus on the functional benefit of brands (Dhar, 2007). Consumers who visit a restaurant have positive emotions when they are satisfied with not only the quality of the food and service but also symbolic benefits. However, when consumers cannot obtain satisfactory values from a restaurant, individualists are likely to break the good relationship with a brand, whereas collectivists are likely to keep the good relationship with the brand due to their need for group and relationship harmony (Yoo, 2009). A good relationship with a brand reflects greater affect with the brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001); hence collectivists tend to have a stronger brand affect than individualists. Based on these arguments, our study hypothesizes:

H4. Cultural value (collectivism/individualism) has an effect on self-congruence.
H5. Cultural value (collectivism/individualism) has an effect on brand affect.
H6. Cultural value (collectivism/individualism) has an effect on brand identification.
H7. Cultural value (collectivism/individualism) has an effect on brand reputation.

The Influence of Self-Congruence and Brand Identification on Brand Affect

Consumers are more attracted to brands, which are similar to themselves (Jamal and Adelowore 2008) and this attraction may come in the form of emotions. Emotional feelings such as love, hate, pity and anger provide the energy that stimulates and sustains a particular attitude towards a brand (Wright 2006). Brands, forming positive emotional relationship with the consumers, can maintain long-term consumer-brand relationships (Zohra 2011). In addition, in terms of the psychological aspect, consumers' identification with brands plays an important role in affective commitments (Carmeli and Freund 2002). Brand identification is characterized by a powerful emotional connection with the brand, and it is possible for individuals to experience optimistic and positive feelings in the form of strengthened self-esteem when they identify themselves with a specific brand (Donavan *et al*., 2006).

In a competitive marketing environment, successful chain restaurants have a clear brand personality. Consumers who understand the restaurant brand's concept can with more ease express their self-identity by visiting such a restaurant (Kim *et al*., 2011). Therefore, consumers who have a greater congruence with a particular restaurant brand are likely to have more brand affect. Based on these arguments, our study hypothesizes:

H8. Self-congruence has an effect on brand affect.
H9. Brand identification has an effect on brand affect.

The Influence of Self-Congruence, Brand Affect and Brand Identification on Brand Loyalty
In brand relationships, brand affect is regarded as a fundamental antecedent of brand loyalty (Matzler *et al*., 2006). Positive emotional feelings such as "happy" or "joyful" increase brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001). In the context of restaurant, several scholars have suggested the importance of consumers' emotions. This is because consumers' emotions have an effect on their behavioral intentions (Jang and Namkung, 2009; Jeon and Hyun, 2012; Chen *et al*., 2015). A diner's emotions are considered as the affective responses produced during the experiences of a restaurant (King and Meiselman, 2010). In particular, consumers with positive emotions are likely to recommend this restaurant to family or friends and have intentions to revisit.

Some researchers demonstrate that self-congruity affects brand loyalty (Kressmann *et al*. 2006; Sirgy and Samli 1985). Consumers buy brands related to their self-concept (Sirgy, 1982) and it is achieved by maintaining positive attitudes towards specific brands (Ekinci *et al*., 2013). As the consistency between consumers' self-concept and brand image becomes greater, the greater their purchase intention becomes. (Hong and Zinkhan, 1995). Thus self-congruity is very important in explaining brand loyalty.

Marketing managers and researchers are keen to examine brand identification because it affects important positive behavioural outcomes such as brand loyalty (Kim, *et al*., 2001; Kuenzel and Halliday 2010). Consumers are attracted by a brand with a distinctive identity which can accomplish their needs for uniqueness (Ruvio, 2008). As consumers can reveal their social identity by using specific brands with a strong identity (Del Rio *et al*., 2001), brands with distinctive identities obtain stronger loyalty. Thus, this study suggests:

H10. Self-congruence has an effect on brand loyalty.
H11. Brand affect has an effect on brand loyalty.
H12**.** Brand identification has an effect on brand loyalty.

Methodology

Data Collection and Sample

Using a survey approach, the study aims to scrutinise the value judgement of consumers regarding their symbolic consumption through an empirical study. Prior to our main survey study, we conducted two pilot studies, each with 30 respondents. The purpose of pilot tests was to ensure that wording, explanations and questions were understandable and organized in an appropriate format (Crouch and Louviere, 2004), and also to assess the validity and reliability of scale (Ekinci *et al*., 2008). Both pilots were performed with restaurant consumers and participants were conveniently selected through personal contacts. As some questions were obscure and difficult for participants to understand, we revised our research instrument accordingly. The main survey, conducted in the South East of England, focused on British consumers, who had experienced well-known global chain restaurant brands such as T.G.I. Friday's, Starbucks, Burger King, Pizza Hut, and so on. Using a convenience sampling method, we collected a total of 328 questionnaires, of which 15 were excluded due to the incomplete or missing items.

Demographics of the Respondents

We need to refer to the consumers' age and income, because dining out is related to social variations in terms of age and income (Warde and Martens, 1998), which in turn reflects diners' lifestyles (Foxall *et al*., 1998).

Respondent demographics showed the following: 31.4% was in the age group of 16-25, 31.4% were between 36-45 years old, 19.6% were in the age group of 26-35, and 17.3% were between 46-55. The age groups 55-65 and over 65 had the lowest proportion. In terms of the annual personal income before tax, 11.9% made over 55,000 GBP, 7.4% made between 45,000-54,999GBP, 10.2% made between 35,000-44,999 GBP, 18.6% made between 25,000-34,999 GBP, 16.1% made between 15,000-24,999 GBP, 21.1% made less than 15,000 GBP, and 14.7% of the participants were those who had no income.

Measurements

The scales used to measure the six constructs are summarized in Appendix A.

To measure the six constructs, we employed seven point Likert scales, ranging from 1 = 'strongly disagree' to 7 = 'strongly agree'. The *Collectivism/Individualism* measurement consisted of six items adopted from Yoo and Donthu (2002). They developed these items to evaluate individual cultural values. Three items proposed by Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009) were used to measure *brand reputation.* We employed three items developed by Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) to measure *brand affect*. To measure *brand identification*, we adopted three items from Kuenzel and Halliday's (2008) item and Mael and Ashforth's (1992) items. *Self-congruence* was measured with three items adopted from Sirgy and Su (2000). Finally, we measured *brand loyalty* using four items from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), Tayor *et al*. (2004) and Horppu *et al*. (2008) adapted from Zeithaml *et al*. (1996).

Properties of the Scales

In order to test convergent and discriminant validity of the three measurement models, we conducted a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS 7.0. Convergent

validity is established when two different instruments measuring the same concept are highly correlated, whereas discriminant validity is established when two variables are predicted to be uncorrelated (Sekaran, 2003). The results of the CFA test, which indicated that the three measurement models provide a good model fit, are shown in table 1. As depicted in table 1, convergent validity was estimated through factor loadings' significance, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR). Factor loadings of all items in the three models are over .5. AVE and CR are greater than .5 and .6 respectively, thus satisfying the requirements for convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Appendix B shows the descriptive statistics of all three models. AVEs for each of the three models are higher than the squared correlations between constructs, thus supporting the discriminant validity of models. Additionally, we tested the scale's reliability through Cronbach's alphas, which are above the acceptable levels of .70 (Hair *et al*., 2006; Pallant 2007).

<Insert Table 1 About Here>

Results

Hypotheses Tests

We tested the three models using structural equation modelling. Results confirm a good fit to the data: In terms of the fit index, the χ^2 statistic is significant (p=.000), which could mean an inadequate fit, however, since our sample size is large, this is less meaningful (Hair *et al*., 2006). To assess goodness of fit, we thus complemented other fit indexes including RMSEA, GFI, CFI, and TLI (Lings and Greenley, 2005). Table 2 provides the results of the three models. In the specification of research Model 1, the results show an appropriate model fit. In this model, brand reputation as an exogenous construct was related to the mediating constructs of self-congruence, brand identification, and brand affect. Each of the mediators was related to brand loyalty. Also, self-congruence and brand identification were related to brand affect. As hypothesized, brand reputation is significantly related to self-congruence ($\beta = 0.47$, $t = 7.39$, $p < .001$), brand identification ($\beta = .51$, $t = 7.93$, $p < .001$), and brand affect ($\beta = .54$, $t = 7.94$, $p < .001$). Therefore, 1a, 2a, and 3a are supported. The results of the analysis also support 9a ($\beta = .30$, $t = 3.75$, $p < .001$) and confirm that brand identification has a positive effect on brand affect. Furthermore, 11a is supported ($\beta = 1.30$, $t = 8.52$, $p < .001$), indicating that brand affect has a positive influence on brand loyalty. However, 8a, 10a, and 12a were non-significant hypotheses. Accordingly, we found that self-congruence and brand identification had no direct effect on brand loyalty, and that self-congruence was not related to brand affect in the status needs model.

The validity of Model 2 shows an adequate model fit. This model employs collectivism/individualism as an exogenous construct. Results provide support for 4b, 5b, 6b demonstrating that collectivism/Individualism has positive effect on self-congruence ($\beta = .27$, $t = 3.44$, $p < .001$), brand identification ($\beta = .32$, $t = 4.91$, $p < .001$), and brand affect ($\beta = .13$, $t = 2.26$, $p < .5$). As hypothesized in 9b, brand identification is positively related to brand affect ($\beta = .44$, $t = 4.83$, $p < .001$). In addition, Self-congruence, brand identification, and brand affect have positive effect on brand loyalty. Therefore, 10b ($\beta = .14$, $t = 1.99$, $p < .5$), 11b ($\beta = .16$, $t = 2.12$, $p < .5$), and 12b ($\beta = .60$, $t = 10.10$, $p < .001$) are supported. Specifically, different from model 1, brand identification has an influence on brand loyalty. In model 2, 8b was the only insignificant hypothesis. This shows that self-congruence has no effect on brand affect,

both in the social needs model and in the status model. Model 3 provides a good fit to the data. This model includes both collectivism/individualism and brand reputation variables. As expected, brand reputation has an effect on self-congruence, brand affect, and brand identification. The results of the model testing support 1c ($\beta = .44$, $t = 6.47$, $p < .001$) 2c ($\beta = .57$, $t = 8.35$, $p < .001$) and 3c ($\beta = .44$, $t = 6.69$, $p < .001$). In addition, 9c ($\beta = .29$, $t = 3.58$, $p < .001$), which indicates that brand identification has an effect on brand affect. 11c and 12c predict that brand affect and brand identification influence on brand loyalty. The results of the analysis support that brand affect ($\beta = .35$, $t = 5.61$, $p < .001$) and brand identification ($\beta = .17$, $t = 2.51$, $p < .5$) have impact on brand loyalty. As hypothesized in 6c and 7c, collectivism/individualism has positive effect on brand identification ($\beta = .18$, $t = 2.91$, $p < .01$) and brand reputation ($\beta = .24$, $t = 4.50$, $p < .001$). Therefore, hypotheses 6c and 7c are all supported. Even though model 3 includes collectivism/individualism as antecedent on brand reputation, self-congruence has no effect on brand affect and brand loyalty similar to model 1.

<Insert Table 2 About Here>

Discussion
Theoretical Implications
This study contributes to the existing literature as the first empirical investigation on the symbolic consumption's meaning in the restaurant sector, to the best of our knowledge. The key contribution of the study lies in the development of the dynamic models of symbolic consumption to explain the consumers' complex psychological consumption process. Symbolic consumption is more important in the service industry because service products have an intangible attribute. A restaurant, which was once just a place for eating has now developed into a channel to reveal individual's self-concept, social identity, or a sense of belonging. Our study has attempted to further our understanding of the meanings of symbolic consumption in the restaurant sector with several implications to existing knowledge.

First, Hull's (1952) drive reduction theory suggests that all kinds of consumption start from the consumers' needs (write, 2006). Thus, we develop three categorized dynamic models based on the consumers' three different kinds of needs, namely, status needs, social needs, plus social and status needs. By comparing the three dynamic models of symbolic needs, we further extend our understanding of symbolic consumption's meaning on each symbolic needs. The application of those three types of symbolic needs to marketing strategies is important because each consumer has various symbolic needs. Through the results of the analyses, we confirm the major variables of the symbolic consumption. These variables are the motivations, which drive symbolic consumption. In particular, our study captures both the external motivational factors (cultural attribute; collectivism/individualism, and brand reputation) and the internal elements of symbolic consumption (self-congruence, brand identification, and brand affect) in explaining symbolic needs.

Second, by comparing the relationships between the internal elements according to the external motivational factors, we provide a consumers' symbolic consumption process on each symbolic need. Our results indicate that brand reputation has influence on brand loyalty through brand affect and brand identification. Consumers who are interested in the high reputable brands have positive emotions towards the brands and patronize them. Our finding is consistent with the O'Cass and McEwen

(2004) study in that the brands which have a good reputation are consumed to represent a consumer's status. In particular, O'Cass and Siahtiri (2014) suggest that in China, most consumers are emotionally connected to a product or service that indicate their status, and the emotional attachment to status has influence on the consumer's buying decision. Although their researches were conducted for China, our findings give support to the views. In addition, our findings also show that collectivism/individualism is an important factor that explains the relationship between the internal elements in explaining social needs of symbolic consumption. Thus by choosing a specific brand, consumers can confirm a sense of belonging on a specific culture.

Third, our study offers empirical evidence for the existence of a hierarchy in the consumers' symbolic needs. Findings revealed that in the status needs model, self-congruence and brand identification have no direct effect on brand loyalty, but brand affect mediates the effect of brand identification on brand loyalty. Thus, the consumers who have status needs desire for brand affect in symbolic consumption. While, in the social needs model, all the three variables (self-congruence, brand identification and brand affect) have a direct effect on brand loyalty. When collectivism/individualism and brand reputation are included in the same model, like model 3, the result shows that collectivism/individualism has an influence on brand reputation. Overall, we confirm a hierarchy in the consumers' symbolic needs in that, social needs are more fundamental and basic than status needs. Our finding can be supported by Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Maslow (1943) developed a hierarchy of basic human needs, consisting of (1) physiological; (2) safety; (3) love-sense of belonging; (4) esteem; and (5) self-actualisation. He explained that after one need is fulfilled, people will try to fulfil the next higher level of needs. In our model, social needs are positioned at the same level of love-belonging needs and status needs are positioned at the same level of esteem. Thus, when consumers purchase a service brand, they consider social needs first before they consider status needs.

The hierarchy of symbolic needs may be applied to market segmentation in the chain restaurant industry. Market segmentation is identifying groups of consumers who have different needs and preferences (Hunt and Arnett, 2004). Researchers have normally divided groups according to demographic factors, including age, gender, income and education (Cleveland *et al*., 2011). However, as consumers' needs are more diversified and because of the increasing competition between companies new market segmentation using the hierarchy of consumers' symbolic needs is required alongside the demographic factors. In addition, the hierarchy of consumers' symbolic needs can be applied to micromarketing, which targets specific consumers. Therefore, finding the hierarchy and dimensions of consumers' symbolic needs in the present study contributes to providing useful knowledge for the development of market segmentation and micromarketing. In the restaurant sector, the two marketing strategies can be efficient ways to attract target consumers.

Fourth, the study makes an important contribution to the literature by confirming the significant mediating role of brand affect in symbolic consumption. Brand affect mediates the effect of brand identification on brand loyalty across all three models. In the status needs model, self-congruence and brand identification have no direct effect on brand loyalty. However, the effect of brand identification on brand loyalty is fully mediated via brand affect. This means that although a consumer has brand identification, s/he would not buy a brand when they do not feel any positive emotion. Thus, brand affect can play an essential mediating role in creating consumers'

status need. Whereas, in the social needs model, brand affect partially mediates the effects of brand identification on brand loyalty. This supports the view of Tuškel *et al.* (2013) who argued that consumers make powerful relationships with a brand in order to express their identity and generate a positive feeling with a brand. Thus, consumers who feel positive affect through identification with brand will have brand loyalty.

Brand affect is related to risk aversion. Matzler *et al.* (2008) demonstrated that consumers with higher risk aversion have more brand loyalty via brand affect. Highly risk-averse consumers who have symbolic needs are likely to choose brands which give them positive emotions through brand identification. Affect is regarded as an important component of 'consumer-brand engagement', forming an emotional connection between a consumer and a brand (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014).

Fifth, the research suggests that, self-congruence has no effect on any variables when it is related to brand reputation. However, the result of our study contrasts with Ekinci *et al.*'s (2013) study, which focused on finding the relationship between self-congruence and tourism destination brand loyalty. Our research indicates that consumers who visit a restaurant for their status needs will think more about the group that they want to belong to, more so than who they are. However, self-congruence has an impact on brand loyalty when it is related to collectivism/individualism. These two findings show that, for self-congruence to develop brand loyalty, the role of collectivism/individualism is more important than that of brand reputation. That is, self-congruence is more related to social needs than status needs. Thus, self-congruence in symbolic consumption is encouraged by cultural aspects (Solomon, 1983). The meaning of culture can be conveyed to products or service, and consumers often use products or service to construct and maintain their self-identity (Dworzecki and Jarosinski, 2014).

Managerial Implications

It is essential for marketers to understand consumers' needs and drivers of symbolic consumption. The present research provides marketers with a better understanding of the consumers' needs and drivers of symbolic consumption. In terms of *status* needs, marketers should recognize the importance of brand reputation and strengthen it. As an example, for consumers who want to reveal their social status, restaurant managers need to create a luxurious atmosphere and high quality food and reward the loyal customers by arranging events for their birthdays, wedding ceremony, etc.

In addition, managers need to understand the important role of *social* needs in symbolic consumption. This view suggests that consumption is connected to the social environment, which forms the basis of 'taste' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996), and that the social environment is influenced by cultural values that influence consumers' buying decisions (Roth 1995). It is essential to consider the effect of cultural values for retaining brand loyalty and further cultivating new markets around the world. This is because the diversity of culture causes differences in consumer behaviors. Thus, it is essential for restaurant managers to understand the role of cultural value in order to develop their marketing strategy (Hennessey and Jeannet, 2004).

The result of the present research shows that *Collectivism/individualism* has an effect on consumer's *Self-Congruence*. Therefore, for consumers with individualistic cultural value, managers should consider variety and uniqueness in the consumers' choice (Kim and Drolet, 2003) and customize goods and services more systematically. By contrast, consumers with collective cultural value show a need for conformity which

is expressed through social norms and group standards for harmony with others, thus these consumers tend to select more popular and common brands that have been recommended by their family, friends, and experts to reduce a financial, social, and psychological risk (Liang and He, 2012). Marketers need to develop a marketing strategy that strengthen word-of-mouth or brand image and emphasise how families, friends and colleagues are an integral part of a person's life (Magnini, 2010). In addition, marketers need to develop special programmes such as providing discount/buy one get one free coupons and special menus with reasonable prices just for group customers when customers visit with their families, friends and colleagues.

In terms of consumer-brand engagement, our study's results also highlight that consumers have positive emotions to brands through self-congruence and brand identification. Consumers' purchase intention is directly influenced by positive affects (Oliver *et al*. 1997). More specifically, the restaurant's food quality, menu, service quality and interior can be designed to suit the consumers' preferences in order to reinforce emotional connections between the restaurant and its consumers (Ekinci *et al*., 2008). However, consumers have various needs and it is difficult to satisfy consumers who visit a global chain restaurant. For this reason, although global chain restaurants' marketing strategies are based on standardization, the combining of strategies of standardization and customization is the most effective way to satisfy consumers. Chain restaurants meet consumers' needs by delivering a standardized service, but at the same time consumers want confirmation of their identity (Lashley, 2000). That is, from a standardization perspective, the food menu and quality, décor of restaurant, staff uniform, etc., are all the same in chain restaurants across the world, however, in light of the customization perspective, some of menu and ingredients can be changed to others depending on the consumers' identity. For example, certain religions prohibit some ingredients such as meat, pork and fish. Brands must understand consumers' cultural background. Lashley (2000) argued that the staff in a restaurant must be empowered in order to offer customized service. He explained that empowered staff accept the responsibility for a consumer's satisfaction and interpret and deliver the consumer's requirements.

This study also suggests that there is a hierarchy between a consumer's symbolic needs. This is the idea that different consumers have different needs with differing strengths (Wright, 2006). Thus, focusing on a stronger need of consumers for a more effective marketing strategy leads consumers to brand loyalty and offers satisfaction to them. For segmentation and micromarketing strategies, managers can categorize consumers by using a questionnaire and apply the survey result to the three dynamic models. For example, marketers can apply components of the target consumers' symbolic needs to the brand's advertisement. The topics and characters involved in the advertisement should correlate with the target consumer's image (Meenaghan, 1995). In that way, managers and marketers can improve an emotional marketing strategy, which is one of the efficient ways to attract consumers.

We acknowledge some limitations. Convenience sampling can cause problems when the results of the analysis need to be generalised to other cultures and populations. All of the respondents for the survey in this study were conveniently targeted, which raises the question of generalizability. A future study should be conducted in a variety of places, with different demographic cohorts and at different times, in order to improve the external validity of the results of the analysis (Sekaran, 2003). In addition, it would

be worth applying in-depth ethnographic study with a small sub-sample, to further explore the nuances in this area.

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Table 1: Reliability and Validity of the Constructs

Construct	Items	Model 1				Model 2				Model 3			
		Factor Loadings	t-statistics	C R	AVE	Factor Loadings	t-statistics	C R	AVE	Factor Loadings	t-statistics	C R	AVE
Brand Reputation	Item1	.765	15.556	.814	.684					.772	15.917	.814	.684
	Item2	.851								.850			
	Item3	.862	18.228							.856	18.304		
Collectivism	Item1					.715		.700	.563	.739		.682	.542
	Item2					.799	12.437			.824	12.608		
	Item3					.801	12.450			.752	11.944		
	Item4					.679	10.866			.614	9.779		
Self-Congruence	Item1	.806		.647	.549	.814		.646	.547	.806		.647	.549
	Item2	.817	12.969			.809	12.772			.817	12.963		
	Item3	.575	9.841			.570	9.753			.575	9.842		
Brand Identification	Item1	.777		.720	.632	.781		.722	.637	.777		.722	.637
	Item2	.854	14.790			.856	14.960			.858	15.011		
	Item3	.751	13.458			.754	13.549			.756	13.585		
Brand Affect	Item1	.803		.858	.759	.791		.856	.755	.796		.855	.753
	Item2	.927	19.267			.930	18.865			.927	19.177		
	Item3	.879	18.231			.880	17.901			.875	18.121		
Brand Loyalty	Item1	.893	21.822	.811	.695	.905	20.736	.810	.693	.893	21.837	.811	.695
	Item2	.885				.874				.886			
	Item3	.710	14.882			.705	14.457			.709	14.875		

$\chi^2 = 178.033$, $df = 76$, $p = .000$, GFI = .93, CFI = .95, RMSEA = .065, TLI = .95;

$\chi^2 = 188.004$, $df = 89$, $p = .000$, GFI = .93, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .059, TLI = .95,

$\chi^2 = 232.661$, $df = 127$, $p = .000$, GFI = .93, CFI = .97, RMSEA = .051, TLI = .96

Table 2: Comparison of the Structural Models

Hypothesized paths	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Standardized path coefficient	t-value	Standardized path coefficient	t-value	Standardized path coefficient	t-value
Brand Reputation→ Self-Congruence	.47	7.39***			.44	6.47***
Brand Reputation→ Brand Identification	.51	7.93***			.44	6.69***
Brand Reputation→ Brand Affect	.54	7.94***			.57	8.35***
Self-Congruence→ Brand Affect	-.09	1.14	.03	.35	-.10	32
Brand Identification→ Brand Affect	.30	3.75***	.44	4.83***	.29	3.58***
Self-Congruence→ Brand Loyalty	.08	33	.14	1.99*	.01	.19
Brand Identification → Brand Loyalty	-.14	1.24	.16	2.12*	.17	.51*
Brand Affect → Brand Loyalty	1.30	8.52***	.60	10.10***	.35	5.61***
Collectivism/Individualism → Self-Congruence			.27	3.44***	.08	.29
Collectivism /Individualism → Brand Identification			.32	4.91***	.18	2.91**
Collectivism /Individualism → Brand affect			.13	2.26*		
Collectivism/Individualism → Brand Reputation					.24	4.50***
χ^2	190.504		4.88		332.938	
Df				'		
RMSEA	.067		.054		.056	
GFI	.93		.93		.91	
CFI	.96		.97		.96	
TLI	.95		.96		.95	

*p<.05 level   ** p<.01 level   *** p<.001 level

Figure 1. Status Needs
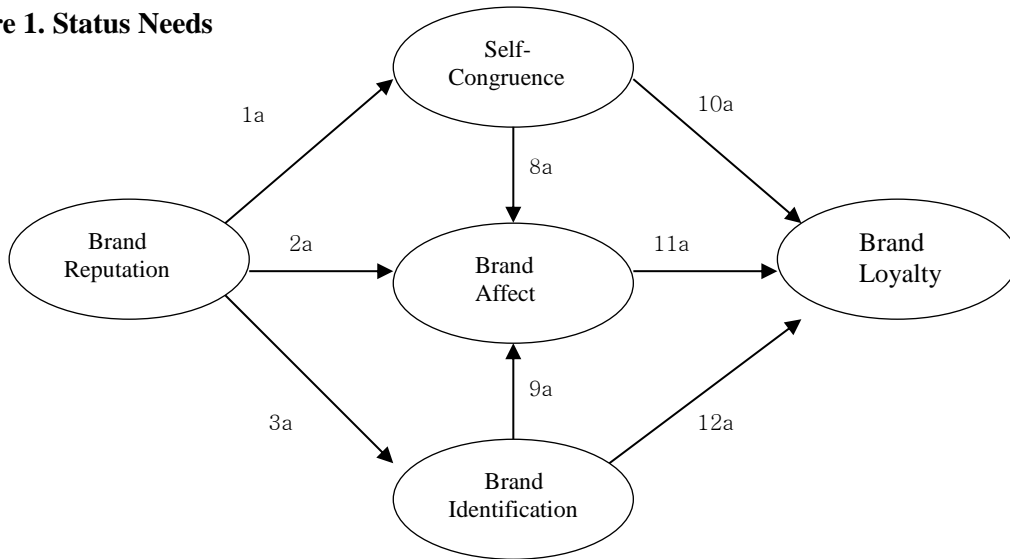
Figure 2. Social Needs
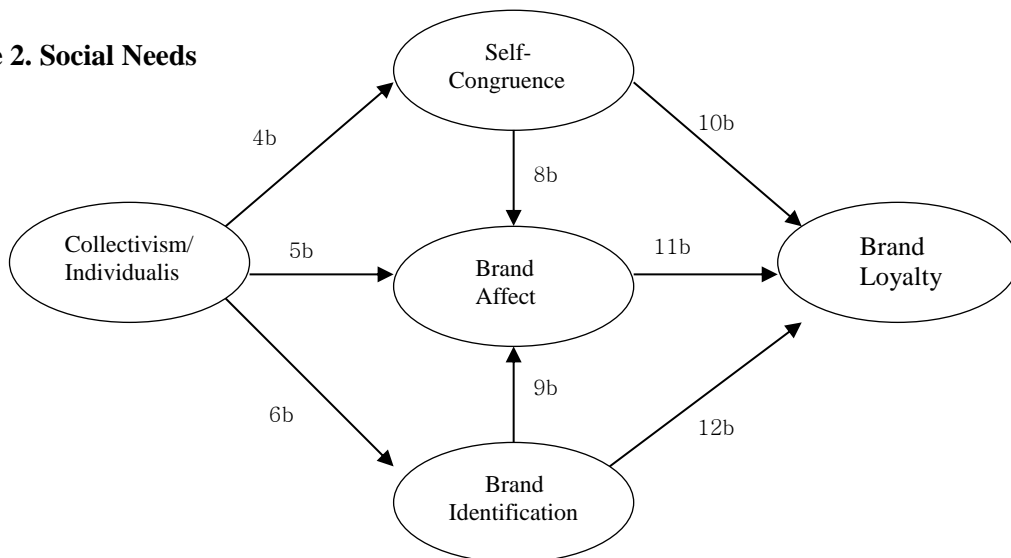
Figure 3. Social and Status Needs
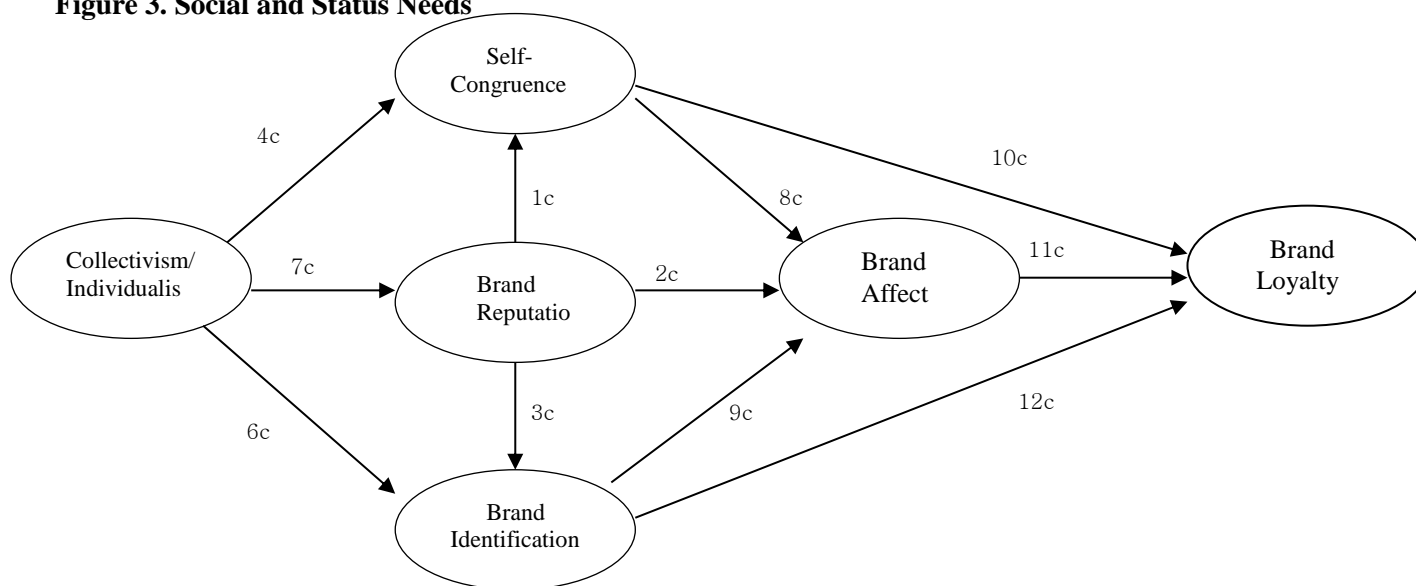
Appendix A.   Measures

Construct		Items
Brand Reputation	Item1	This brand makes honest claims
	Item2	This brand is trustworthy.
	Item3	This brand is reputable.
Collectivism/ Individualism	Item1	Group loyalty should be encouraged even if individual goals suffer.
	Item2	Group success is more important than individual success.
	Item3	Group welfare is more important than individual rewards
	Item4	Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group that they belong to.
Self-Congruence	Item1	The customers who dine in this brand are very much like the person I admire.
	Item2	The customers who dine in this brand reflect the type of person I would like to be.
	Item3	The customers who dine in this brand are very much like me.
Brand Identification	Item1	When someone praises this brand, it feels like a personal compliment
	Item2	I am interested in what others think about this brand
	Item3	I feel good when I see a positive report in the media about this brand.
Brand Affect	Item1	I feel good when I dine in this restaurant brand.
	Item2	This restaurant brand makes me happy.
	Item3	This restaurant brand gives me pleasure.
Brand Loyalty	Item1	I will recommend this restaurant brand to anyone who seeks my advice.
	Item2	I say positive things about this restaurant brand to other people.
	Item3	I will revisit this restaurant brand next time.

Appendix B.   Descriptive Statistics

Model-1

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Brand Reputation	4.55	1.32	1				
2.Self-Congruence	2.69	1.40	0.484	1			
3.Brand Affect	4.18	1.58	0.653	0.372	1		
4.Brand Identification	3.15	1.37	0.519	0.656	0.520	1	
5.Brand Loyalty	4.24	1.55	0.809	0.466	0.734	0.571	1

Model-2

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Collectivism/ Individualism	4.17	1.27	1				
2.Self-Congruence	2.69	1.40	0.192	1			
3.Brand Affect	4.18	1.58	0.237	0.370	1		
4.Brand Identification	3.15	1.37	0.291	0.655	0.517	1	
5.Brand Loyalty	4.24	1.55	0.249	0.468	0.730	0.563	1

Model-3

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Collectivism/ Individualism	4.17	1.58	1					
2.Brand Reputation	4.55	1.32	0.324	1				
3.Self-Congruence	2.69	1.40	0.210	0.487	1			
4.Brand Identification	3.15	1.37	0.305	0.523	0.653	1		
5.Brand Affect	4.18	1.58	0.243	0.675	0.377	0.521	1	
6.Brand Loyalty	4.17	1.27	0.266	0.809	0.466	0.571	0.734	1