

Brand Attachment: Affecting Factors and Consequences

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Abstract— Brand attachment is a deep emotional connection between consumer and brand and is a central part of successful brand management. The establishment of such an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand is among firms' goals as stronger bonds result in more promising results such as loyalty and reaching the highest price.

Brands, as intangible assets of firms, play a vital role. In this regard, brands are considered as the link between consumer and firm. It is possible attached and involved in brands. A brand could be one of the most valuable assets of a company. The present study is carried out under the title of "Brand attachment". The goal of the study is to investigate this construct. To this end, besides elaborating on brand attachment and its dimensions, we try to analyze the factors that have influence on brand attachment and the ones that are influenced by it. Further, a conceptual model of brand attachment will be proposed.

Index Terms— Brand Attachment, Consumer behavior, self-brand connection, Brand prominence

I. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, branding (i.e. brand creation) is the most important part of business. Success or failure of every business, no matter in what sector, is ultimately dependent on its brand. The success of a brand is inextricably interwoven with the success of the business. If a consumer were to mention his or her criteria of choosing a product, one of them would undoubtedly be the brand of the product. Brand gives identity to a product or service and distinguishes it from similar offers while creating attachment and the feeling of being different in consumers [15].

Business managers regard brands as powerful and effective tools in the process of customer decision-making. They believe that the main role of branding is differentiation [14]. Researchers and experts of marketing have recently shown high interest in studying and examining the way emotional bonds between consumers and their favorite brands emerge and what roles these bonds play in purchase and post-purchase behavior of consumers. Consumers may establish relationships with certain brands in a similar way that they make relations with other individuals throughout their lives. Such a relationship can bring about some distinct cognitive (satisfaction, loyalty) and emotional (attachment) benefits. It can also cause the creation of a strong self-brand connection [4].

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Brand attachment is an emotionally charged bonding between consumers and brands and essential foundation to successful brand management [11]. As observed by Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011), companies harvest financial benefits when enduring emotional connections are developed between consumers and brands, and rewards from emotionally bonded repurchases are less expose to situations that induce switching. Research suggests that consumers can develop attachments beyond persons to possessions [19] and brands [6 , 25]. Comprehending how to form or accentuate attachments could be the key of achieving successful marketing relationships [34]. Moreover, other positive consequences such as: increasing consumer's defensive act against the effect of negative information [2]. Recognizing the importance of studying consumers' attachment specifically within the brand management literature, some studies aimed to understand the process of forming brand attachment and its measurement. Brand attachment is one of the characteristics of the relationship between the consumer and brand that leads to their "automatic thoughts and feelings about the brand" [26]. Creating emotional bonding between consumers and brands is an objective of companies as strong bonding leads to positive outcomes, such as loyalty and achieving a price premium [23 , 35 , 27].

II. DEFINING BRAND ATTACHMENT

Brand attachment refers to "the strength of the cognitive and affective bond connecting the brand with the self" [26] in a symbolic manner [36]. When customers interact with the market environment, they create some certain links that connect them to brands [17].

Fournier (1994) has proposed brand attachment as one of the six dimensions relevant in a consumer-brand relationship. The significance of brand attachment as a key determinant in consumer consumption behavior is substantiated by several attributes inherent to the concept. Attachment expresses emotional bonds which are persistent, resist to change, impact cognition, and predict behavior [20]. Persistence reflects the degree to which an individual's attachment toward an object remains unchanged over time. Resistance represents an individual's ability to refuse shifting to competitive products [28].

Bazzo et al. (2003) state that brand attachment demonstrates an emotional bond between the consumer and a certain brand [15].

In psychology, attachment refers to a link between an individual and a specific thing which is filled with emotions [5].

Park et al.'s (2006) posit that brand attachment is more than an attitudinal construct and accounts for higher-order consumer behaviors associated with commitment to a relationship. Thus, brand attachment is a characteristic of the relationship between a consumer and a brand leading to

“automatic retrieval of thoughts and feelings about the brand” [26].

Many intellectuals such as Ling and Chunlin (2010), Yan and Dahai (2008), Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) agree on the fact that attachment is the typical emotional link between the consumer and the brand [32].

Brand attachment refers to the fact that bonds, relationships and identifying with the brand would be powerful predicting factors for purchasing the brand in the past and the future; thus, brand attachment has a positive impact on current and future purchase [10].

Brand attachment is defined as the extent to which self and brand are connected [27]. Brand attachment is a psychological variable that displays a stable and persistent bond with the brand which is emotional. This construct is an indication of a close mental relationship between the self and the brand [3].

Table 1. Comparison of definitions of brand attachment

Researcher	Year	Definition
Bazzo et al.	2003	Brand attachment shows an emotional relationship between consumer and brand.
Park et al. Wallendorf and Arnould	2006 1988	Strength of a cognitive-affective link between self and brand
Fournier	1994	A determining and central element in consumers’ consuming behavior
Krosnick and Petty	1995	Indicates stable, resistant-to-change, effective-on-cognition, and predictor-of-behavior bonds
Park et al.	2006	Automatic preservation of thoughts and feelings of the individual toward the brand
Ling and Chunlin Yan and Dahai	2010 2008	Attachment is the typical affective link between consumers and brands
Azizi and Shokrgozar	2014	A psychological variable that displays a stable and persistent bond with the brand which is emotional and is an indication of a close mental relationship between the self and the brand
Esch et al.	2006	Brand attachment refers to the fact that bonds, relationships and identifying with the brand would be powerful predicting factors for purchasing the brand in the past and the future

III. COMPONENTS OF BRAND ATTACHMENT

Two factors represent brand attachment: 1) the degree of the brand-self connectedness and 2) the automaticity of thoughts and feelings about a brand.

The degree of brand-self connectedness may be measured based on statements that reflect the personal relationship between a consumer and a brand. They would include statements like “emotional bonding” or “connection”, “part of

me,” or “an extension of the self”. The automaticity of thoughts (cognition) and feelings (affect) about a brand may be measured on agreement scales. Items might include “positive thoughts and feelings of (the brand) come to me automatically and naturally”, or “positive thoughts toward (the brand) are elicited automatically and unconditionally whenever I am exposed to it”.

One may suggest that brand-self connectedness and retrieval automaticity are highly correlated, the latter being the outcome of the former. While possible, we assume that the automaticity of brand retrieval may vary even at the same level of the brand-self connectedness. This is expected since the degree of retrieval automaticity should be influenced by factors other than brand-self connectedness. These factors include, for example, the length of the brand possession and the amount of brand-associated information. It would thus be useful to further discriminate the level of brand attachment at any given degree of the brand-self connectedness. We propose that automaticity and brand-self connectedness describe, represent and characterize the state of mind of those who are highly attached to a brand. The presence and degree of both better indicates brand attachment than either one alone [26].

With regard to the importance of brand attachment, an earlier study conducted Thomson et al. (2005) resulted in the fact that emotional attachment to a certain brand indicates a connection between self and brand, and the connection itself includes emotions toward the brand. Brand attachment includes three emotional components: affection, passion, and connection. In other studies, not only did attachment include emotional connections, but cognitive connections were added to the construct as well [26].

Bonds that connect the brand to the self are both cognitive and emotional. Personalized experiences and autobiographical memories of the brand evoke rich cognitive schemata (Berman and Sperling 1994), with links connecting the brand with personalized elements of the self. Because they are inherently self-relevant and have strong self-implications, the links that connect the brand to the self are also emotional. Due to its connection with the self, this emotional property implicates “hot affect”. Such hot affect induces desire for the brand, satisfaction with its acquisition, frustration at its lack of availability, fear over its potential loss, sadness over its actual loss, and hope for its future acquisition [26].

The strength of the cognitive and emotional bonds connecting the brand to the self engenders two effects. First, brand related thoughts and feelings become highly accessible and are automatically retrieved from memory whenever the self is implicated. This automaticity in cognitive and affective responses is well documented. Second, given its self-linkages, the brand become self-relevant, impacting one’s readiness to allocate processing resources to the brand. High accessibility and greater willingness to allocate processing resources for a high attachment brand, makes brand-associated information (thoughts and feelings) automatically retrieved when implicit or explicit brand-relevant cues are present [26].

Based on such notions, Park and colleagues (2010) defined brand attachment as the power of the link that connects self and brand. Brand-self connection, and brand prominence are two critical factors that their emergence demonstrates the conceptual characteristics of brand attachment.

Brand-self connection: when identifying brands, customers try to match these brands with their self-images. Also,

customers show a representation of their self-concept about the actual, ideal or future self and link this representation with the traits and characteristics associated with brands such as prestige [7]. Essentially, brand-self connection is not just a cognitive connection. It has an emotional facet as well. This facet may include emotions such as sadness, happiness, anxiety, comfort and/or pride... etc [27].

Brand prominence: the idea of brand-self connection develops over time causing the thoughts and feeling associated with it to become a part of a customer's memory. The ease and the frequency with which brand-related thoughts and feelings are brought to mind are called brand prominence [27].

Table 2. Dimensions of brand attachment

Study	Dimensions	Elaboration
Park et al., 2006	Extent of brand-self connection Automaticity of thoughts and feelings toward brand	Period of brand ownership Amount of brand-relevant information
Park et al., 2006	Emotional dimension (affection, passion, and connection) Cognitive dimension	Brand is connected to personalized elements of self Personalized and routine memories of brand
Park et al., 2010	Brand-self connection Brand prominence	Matching brand and self-image Ease and frequency of thoughts and feelings relevant to the brand in mind

IV. FACTORS AFFECTING BRAND ATTACHMENT

1. Self-congruence: Based on the previous research by Malär et al. (2011), self-congruence is a crucial concept that plays a prominent role in creating and strengthening emotional brand attachment. Self-congruence is a fit between the consumers' self and the brand's image [33]. It can enhance consumers' favourable attitude towards the brand [1]. In general self-congruence was found to have positive effects on emotional brand attachment, in specific actual self-congruence generated higher levels of emotional brand attachment [23].

2. Customer satisfaction: According to Ekinci and colleagues (2008), consumer satisfaction reflects the overall emotional response of consumers to the whole service experience at the postpurchasing point for a particular transaction. Carroll and her colleague (2006) noted that consumers who feel satisfied and have greater brand love would be more loyal to the brand and also engage in a positive word of mouth. Emotional attachment, in a retail setting and when satisfaction is high, was found to be consistently stronger in positive affective environments [24]. They also found that satisfaction mediates the effects of store-evoked pleasure and arousal on brand attachment.

3. Brand familiarity: Brand familiarity refers to consumers' accumulated experiences, direct or indirect, with brands [18]. Hazan and Shaver (1994) stated that familiarity and responsiveness are two things that related to the selection of an attachment figure. They proposed that familiarity and

responsiveness are fundamental to attachment because both dictate and influence the preferences and the process of selection. Furthermore, the literature and research on place attachment suggest that familiarity is one of the predictors of the bonding between people and place [37]. Several other researchers, developing a measurement for place attachment, considered familiarity as one of the dimensions [30].

4. Brand responsiveness: Brands can be responsive if it can fulfil the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence [21]. A model examining inter-relations between maternal attachment, responsiveness, and infant attachment found that maternal responsiveness is a predictor of infant attachment .When a brand enhances consumers' feelings of autonomy and relatedness, while not suppressing feelings of competence, consumers are likely to become strongly attached to the brand [29].

V. FACTORS AFFECTED BY BRAND ATTACHMENT

1. Brand loyalty: Brand loyalty refers to a directed behavioral response and a relying on psychological processes from the individual who can make decisions over time and in relation to one or more alternative brand among a selection of brands [16].

According to Thomson et al. (2005), it is expected that strong attachments toward brands affect brand loyalty and induces a devaluation of competing alternatives and that means a higher tendency to stay in a relationship with the brand and this may enhance customer loyalty as a result. Moreover, as customers tend to repeat pleasurable outcomes, it is expected that customers will repeat these favorable experiences and recommend them to others [35].

2. Achieving premium pricing: The creation of attachment between consumers and brands is among the objectives of companies as strong connections result in positive outcomes such as loyalty and accepting highest price [23 , 35, 27].

3. Brand commitment and tendency to make financial sacrifices: Consumers' emotional attachments to a brand might predict their commitment to the brand (e.g., brand loyalty) and their willingness to make financial sacrifices in order to obtain it. Commitment is defined as the as the degree to which an individual views the relationship from a long-term perspective and has a willingness to stay with the relationship even when things are difficult [35].

A number of researchers view commitment as a measure of marketing effectiveness [2]. In a marketing context a relevant indicator of commitment is the extent to which the individual remains loyal to the brand [31].

Park and colleagues (2006) define loyalty as a result of attachment. Brand attachment reflects a mental state (a strong self-brand connection and automatic retention of thoughts and feelings about the brand), yet loyalty reflects a tendency to maintain relationship with the brand.

Whereas attachment leads to loyalty, the opposite direction is not possible. Attachment is much more important for marketers than loyalty. Loyalty may involve merely in a guarantee of relationship continuation that, for some reasons, has nothing to do with attachment. Individuals may become loyal to a brand simply due to the lack of competitive alternatives or a moral and contractual responsibility toward a

company or brand vendors. Loyalty is not based on attachment and does not contribute to a strong self-brand connection or automatic retention of thoughts and feelings concerning a certain brand [26].

4. Involvement: In the same way as loyalty, involvement is an outcome of attachment. Those consumers who become attached to a product may develop involvement with it. Hence, it seems that involvement with those brands to which consumers are attached has to be higher [35].

5. Consumer behavior prediction and brand purchase share: From a managerial perspective, brand attachment more accurately predicts intentions to perform behaviors that use significant consumer resources (time, money and reputation). It is also a stronger predictor of actual consumer behaviors than brand attitude strength. McInnis and Whan Park (2010) suggest that these effects are observed in terms of consumer purchase behavior, brand purchase share (i.e., choice among directly competing brands), and need share (i.e., choice among brands targeting similar needs), even after controlling for consumer inertia (i.e., past behaviors) and other potential factors. Brand attachment serves also as the ultimate destination for customer brand-relationships [27].

6. Purchase intention: Some of the strongest consumer-brand relationships occur when consumers identify with the companies that gratify one or more of their own perceived needs. Affective identification causes consumer to become psychologically attached to and care about the brand, which positively motivates their purchase intention. Since consumers identify with a brand rather than purely with its products or services, their purchase intention is likely to be immune to minor variations in product or service formulation [8].

Brand attachment also possesses marketing value since it helps consumers choose a brand from a set of available brands in a certain market. Such a benefit is based on emotional bond between the consumers' self and the consumers' perceived representations of brand's personality [31].

Brand attachment is an emotional bond that it can be anticipated that it moderates the overall feeling towards a favorite brand in crisis which results in moderated consumer behavior, specifically for the purchase intention [31].

7. Resource consumption and continuance of relationship with brand: the extent of emotional attachment to a thing can be associated with the extent of dedication of resources to that thing. In other words, there exists an inclination to sacrifice short-term profits in favor of promoting the existing relationship [31, 35].

CONCLUSION

Brand attachment creates a strong emotional bond between consumer and brand and is an essential part of the successful brand management processes. The formation of such this emotional bond between the consumer and the brand is among organizational goals. In this study, besides elaborating on brand attachment and its dimensions, we tried to investigate factors that influence it and those that are influenced by it. In Figure 1, dimensions of attachment together with factors that

affect attachment and those that are affected by it are represented.

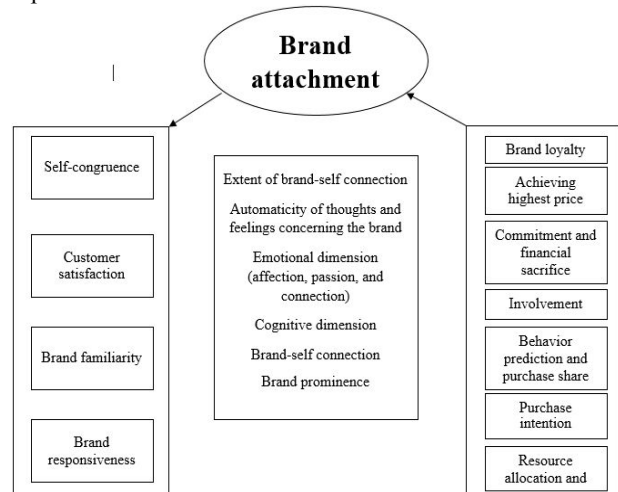


Figure 1. Conceptual model of brand attachment (dimensions, factors affecting, factors affected)

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