

Brand Attachment in Consumer-Brand Relationship

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Abstract. In this research, researchers deal with the study of the antecedents and consequences model of the brand attachment in the form of CBR. In this study, consumer-brand relationships are divided into two kinds: communal and exchange ones. The statistical society totally consists of 864 students of the marketing

in Tehran City. The available relationships in the model are separately examined by using the structural equations modelling (AMOS 5.0) within each group in order to test the model and hypothesis. The results of the research show that the variables including brand experience, brand love, commitment, trust, in the communal group play a more effective role than the others in producing the brand attachment, also the variables such as brand reliability, brand satisfaction in the exchange group are among the fundamental ones for developing the brand attachment. This study is the first attempt to identify the importance of relationships aspects in young adult consumer. The current study extends branding literature by shedding lights on the roles of communal/exchange relationships factors in brand management, which also help brand managers.

Keywords: Consumer, Brand Relationship, Brand Attachment, Brand Love, Brand Experience.

1. Introduction

Today's marketers are well informed that it is crucial to form and maintain the strong and long-lasting relationships with consumers. They desire consumers to become real fans of their products which make consumer's lives more valuable, so that it is formed a kind of attachment between product and consumer. Brand attachment can be considered as a mental variable which refers to a constant and lasting reaction to a brand. The researches into attachment structure in the concept of the CBR would describe two different approaches in order to demonstrate brand attachment (Heilbrunn, 2001). The first approach by studying the concepts such as congruity between brand, brand personal self and identity, etc. represents some evidences of brand symbolic advantages which are due to the type of the communal relationship between consumer-brand in the most relationships between individuals. In the second approach, it is discussed long-term relationships including the structures like the risk understanding and the expenses of the brand choice which are caused by the kind of the exchange relationship between consumer and brand (Berman & Sperling, 1994). However, it was conducted some limited studies on brand attachment which simultaneously and comprehensively search for designing and evaluating

the structures related to the antecedents and consequences of brand attachment in the field of the consumer-brand relationships.

2. Literature review

Fournier suggested that a brand means a joint relationship with consumer. According to the Fournier's researches, brands are seen as a partner in a relationship. She describes attachment between brand and consumer as individuals' attachment in the relationships between themselves and also recognizes the factors like the past experiences of relationships, the romantic sense of relationships, the joint personality dominating relationships, and the profit earned from relationships, etc. as the components developing attachment in the consumer-brand relationships. (Fournier, 1994). Likewise, other researchers like Mark & Zanna, and Clark turned to define the exchange and communal relationships. (Clark, et al., 1989, Mark & Zanna, 2000). In the study carried out by Mark and Zanna, these relationships refer to the personality feedback of self and the maintenance of the meaning of self, while in the study conducted by Clark et al., it is dissociated the kind of the relationships according to the earned profits. They considered the communal relationships similar to the ones among close individuals, for example among family members which affection and sincerity give meaning to an individual's life. Individuals in this relationship positively evaluate themselves. The exchange relationships are further similar to the win-win ones where an individual usually takes a common value like money into account and they involve a balance between spent costs and earned benefits (Ball & Tasaki, 1992). For showing the relationship between an individual and a product or brand, the researchers generally refer to the adaptation between individual-brand or the one between individual-product (Pedeliento et al., 2015). In the early researches, it was demonstrated that the adaptation between self-brand is considered as one of the powerful factors for creating brand attachment (Malär, et al., 2011). So, we can summarize the first hypothesis of this section as the following:

H1: Brand self- congruity positively influences brand attachment

Having relationship with the brands which are available if necessary is reliable and could create the sense of security in individual

(Paulssen, 2009). On the contrary, when the considered brand is not available or cannot meet consumers' needs, it is not created attachment (Mikulincer et al., 2003). A brand validity shows the brand's qualification to provide the adequate services and properly satisfy consumers' needs (Michell, et al., 2001) which causes a consumer to have the sense of security. The validity is necessary to build up the confidence in brand or product, because when a brand has kept all his promises and is able to perfectly function, consumers would positively sense it. Therefore:

H2: Brand reliability positively influences brand attachment

Every brand functions depending on the function of the related product and each product is a means through which consumer can have access to the considered brand (Grayson & Shulman, 2000). Researchers predicted an evident relationship to be between brand attachment and product attachment, but they haven't experiment it empirically, yet. Product attachment can be conveyed to brand that leads to brand attachment (Mugge et al., 2010). Therefore, the next hypothesis is as follows:

H3: Product attachment positively influences brand attachment

According to the congruence theory, individuals (or consumers), based on their personal features, values and self-image or to the image they desire to show to others from themselves, establish a relationship with a brand (Geyer et al., 1991). Based on this hypothesis, we suggest that brands can have personality features similar to humans. Brand's personality identity, in a similar way by having contacts with other people, acts as a valuable factor for increasing brand's involvement and attachment (Gouteron, 2008).

H4: Brand personality has a positive impact on the brand attachment

The brand experience means consumers' mental (sensation, feelings, cognition) and behavioral response to the brand's stimulus which is considered as a part of brand's designs, identity, packaging, communications and environments (Brakus et al., 2009). By experiencing a brand, an individual could enrich their viewpoints and values and in this way, they could reach to their goals and this may lead to form brand attachment (Park et al., 2008a).

Brand experience can lead to remind the memories and to create the sense of brand-self connection. Thus, it is expected that Brand experience will result in increasing brand attachment.

H5: A more positive brand experience increases brand attachment

Brand trust is defined on the basis of the theory of the personality. The animation of brand shows that brands, similar to humans, have humanlike characteristics and as we trust others, we can trust a set of brands, too (Chernatony & Mc. Donald, 1998). The meaning of brand trust indicates that the relationship between consumer and brand originates from satisfaction. By considering the different aspects of trust (cognitive & affective nature), it is assumed that it has a relationship with brand trust. Trust is not necessarily considered as a prerequisite of brand attachment, but it plays an important role in making this relationship strong (Chinomona, 2013). Brand attachment can also strengthen trust.

H6: The higher brand attachment with one brand the greater the consumer trust in that brand

In general, the satisfaction consists of a behavioural, affective or cognitive response, which is formed based on the evaluation of product standards (according to consumer's expectations), product qualities or the experience of consuming product. The responses take place before and/or after choosing product, consumption (transactional satisfaction) or after repeating the purchase experience (relational satisfaction). The driving aspect of the satisfaction shows that there is a relational relationship between the satisfaction and brand attachment (Belaid & Behi., 2011). Anyway, brand attachment can increase one's satisfaction with that brand. When consumers attached to the brand, they are satisfied with all of their experiences of that brand; they feel about that brand positively and evaluate it favourably.

H7: The higher the attachment to one brand, the greater the consumer satisfaction for that brand

Consumer's interest in brand is revealed by choosing and purchasing that brand (Sierra & McQuitty, 2005). Furthermore, brand attachment acts as one of the components of the affective

commitment (McQueen & et al., 1993). As well, the loyalty to a brand is due to a strong commitment to that brand and can lead to repeat consumer's purchasing behaviour. Other studies demonstrated that the more commitment is, the more positive consumers' behaviours. Similarly, being committed to a brand directly and positively influences the loyalty (Johnson et al., 2006). So, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H8: The higher the attachment to one brand the greater the consumer commitment to that brand.

H9: Higher attachment to one brand leads to higher behavioural loyalty to that brand.

H10: The higher the commitment to one brand the greater the consumer loyalty to that brand.

In a large part of the marketing studies, it is investigated the relationship between consumer's satisfaction and loyalty (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011). By considering that this relationship is a nonlinear one, many researchers realized that the satisfaction further results in repeating consumer's purchasing behaviour (McDougall & Levesque, 2000).

H11: The more satisfied with a brand consumers are, the more loyalty to it they feel.

Likewise, nowadays, the relationship between the trust and the loyalty is the focus of attention of many researchers (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). The credibility and the integrity constitute two components of brand trust which can influence the prediction of customer's loyalty rate (Bansal & et al., 2004).

H12: The higher the feeling of trust in a brand the greater the consumer loyalty to that brand.

A great number of researchers supported the viewpoint that the satisfaction leads to create the trust (Gummesson, 1994). On the one hand, the confidence is due to the consumption experience as well as to the first individual's encounter with a brand and at this point, the satisfaction is also combined with the trust. On the other hand,

when consumer realizes that their considered brand keeps its promises and attaches importance to its consumers' interests and desires, they will positively evaluate it. Therefore, it can be claimed that the reliable brands make consumers satisfied.

H13: The higher the satisfaction in a brand the more the consumer trust in that brand.

In consumer research, Thomson et al, 2005, claim that the structure of the emotional attachment contains three factors: affection, passion and connection. Hence, attachment has a structure being similar to love. The triple theory of the love conforms to the structure of attachment. This theory believes that the love for brand originates in passion, intimacy and commitment. In order to feel the love for brand, consumer must become dependent on it and feel they cannot separate from it and when they get far from it, they will miss it. Consumer's love for brand is so great that can reveal their social and internal self. Based on the above issues, it is presented the following hypotheses:

H14: Brand attachment has a positive impact on brand love feeling

By considering the results provided by the love for brand, Assael, (1987) claim that the loyalty like the commitment to brand is needed to maintain a permanent and stable relationship with brand. In the recent studies, the commitment to brand is considered as a relative aspect of the loyalty and is included as a variable at the center of the consumer-brand relationships. In the consumer-brand relationships, love/passion and commitment constitute two different aspects. A loyal consumer acts as a committed one. This shows that a consumer believing in a brand, is inclined to maintain their long-term relationship with it (to be committed) and desires to purchase the similar brands in the future and recommends to others to purchase it, too.

H15: The feeling of love for brand positively influences the commitment.

H16: The feeling of love for brand positively influences the loyalty.

Morgan & Hunt, (1994) define the trust as the feeling of certainty about the reliability and integrity of the other party. These

definitions indicate that the certainty, reliability and integrity are important because of trust. Regan et al., (1998) claim that trust is yielded by the love between the two parties in a relationship. As well, trust can determine the commitment extent in a relationship. The theories about trust and commitment show that these two structures will affect the extent of consumer's loyalty in the future (Dagger & O' Brien, 2010). The satisfied individuals who demonstrate their love for brand, are more trust in their relationships with it. Therefore:

H17: Brand love feeling has a positive impact on brand trust.

H18: Brand trust has a positive impact on commitment.

Given the above hypothesis, the conceptual model is shown in Figure 1.

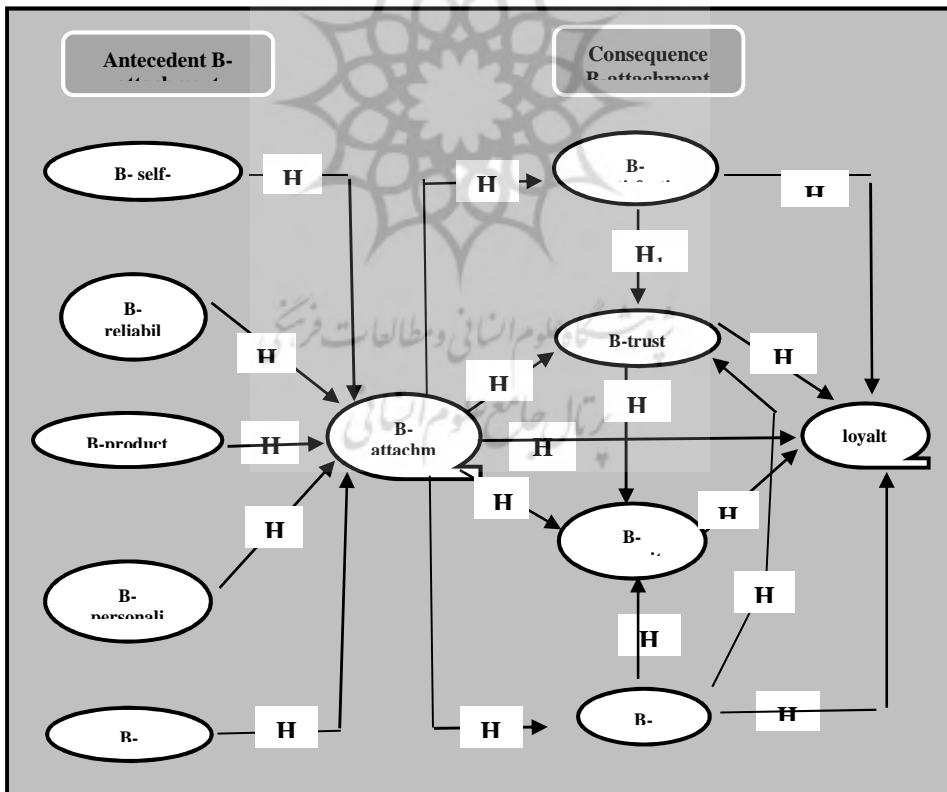


Figure 1. The Conceptual model

3. Method

The present research method would be applied, descriptive, survey. The statistical population of present study is the business management students in Tehran. This study is done in the age range of (18-35) years as (Youth adult) to observe the influencing consumer brand relationship & brand attachment from the perspective of this class. Sampling was done collected in two groups with communal relationships and exchange relationships (Equally). It was classified two groups based on the psychological studies on consumers (Clark & Milles, 1993) that according to their features, individuals were divided into two separate groups by considering their past experience and brand attachment. Consumers consisted of the ones who were repeatedly purchasing and consuming the products at least during 6 months, so that they were recommending their considered product to others and if they needed, they were purchasing it again. Within the communal groups, individuals most followed the brands and products attaching importance to social positive aspects and consumers' affections by means of their advertisements and strategies. The individuals in this group less searched for studying the profit and loss and they were most the consumers of the Iranian dairy valid brands such as Kalleh, washer series and clothing brands. Within the exchange groups, the individuals were most searching for product's function and effectiveness; the most important thing to them was the cost to be paid and they tried to balance what they give with what they receive. The individuals in this group were most the ones consuming lap top, automobile, home electric appliances with the international brands like Samsung, LG, Toyota, etc. Considering that the research models have been investigated by confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation model, therefore in the estimation of sample size, the sample size is cited for structural equation. The main model of the research is consisted of two groups, which have been studied in 30 items. Therefore, for each item, 15 observations and according to two groups for each 450 sample group, Nine hundred samples have been taken which some samples were removed and at the end 864 samples have been examined. The questionnaire tool has been used in present study. The constructs and measurement items used in this study were drawn from previous research. Brand self-congruity (2 items) was drawn from (Matzler et al.,

2011) while the items measuring brand reliability (2 items) were drawn from (Delgado – Ballester, 2004) and brand personality (2 items) were drawn from (Aaker, 1997) In the second part (sincerity and competence), brand love (2 items) was drawn from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) ,brand satisfaction (2 items) from Oliver (1981) and Day (1984), brand commitment (4 items) was drawn from Fullerton (2005) while the (3 items) measuring brand experience were drawn from (Brakus et al, 2009), brand attachment (3 items) from Lacoueilhe (2000a), brand trust (3 items) sung & kim (2010), brand loyalty(4 items) from Zeithaml et al., (1996) and Jonson et, al (2006), product attachment(3 items) from Schifferstein and Zwortkruis-Pelgrim (2008).The items in the questionnaire were first written in English, translated in to Persian and then back translated to English (Brislin, 1970). These scales were examined by several marketing experts and chosen by the Lawshe's formula. In order to decrease the number of the items and to choose the best questions to study each variables. For Lawshe, higher the agreements rate of the evaluators with advantage of a definite item, higher the content validity level too. By means of this hypothesis, Lawshe invented some formula for validity measuring of content validity which is called the content validity ratio (CVR).

$$CVR = \frac{\left(ne - \frac{N}{2}\right)}{\frac{N}{2}}$$

10 professors among the different Tehran universities were evaluators based on the Lawshe's formula. Over 0.62 is agreed with experts. In next stage to observe the reliability and validity, the evaluation of a part of the members of the statistical community has been used. In this stage, pretest was done in the sample of 40 students. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were more than 0.70 and supported by the reliability of the questionnaire.

4. Finding

Data analysis from the descriptive statistics shows among the participants in the study, 62per per cent have been women and 38 per percent men 59 per percent with master degree41 per percent with

bachelor degree, 30 per percent married and 70 per percent single. To observe the validity of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha coefficients and Dillon-Goldstein's rho coefficients have been used which is greater than 0.70 for all the structures of present study in both exchange and communal relationships communities and supported the validity of scales measurement tools (Table 1).

Table 1. Validity of scales measurement tools

Scale & Item		Communal group			Exchange group		
scale	item	AVE	Dillon Goldstein's rho	Cronbach's alpha	AVE	Dillon-Goldstein's rho	Cronbach's alpha
B .commitment	4	0.739	0.919	0.882	0.806	0.943	0.920
B .trust	3	0.821	0.932	0.891	0.766	0.908	0.848
B .loyalty	4	0.674	0.892	0.838	0.688	0.898	0.848
B .self- congruity	2	0.880	0.936	0.863	0.902	0.948	0.891
B .reliability	2	0.782	0.878	0.721	0.948	0.973	0.945
B .experience	3	0.834	0.938	0.900	0.817	0.930	0.887
Product attachment	3	0.808	0.927	0.880	0.802	0.924	0.876
B .personality	2	0.921	0.959	0.915	0.887	0.940	0.873
B .love	2	0.875	0.933	0.857	0.930	0.964	0.925
B .satisfaction	2	0.869	0.930	0.849	0.917	0.957	0.909
B .attachment	3	0.712	0.881	0.798	0.750	0.900	0.833

According to the calculated indices, the structural validity of questionnaire is consisted of discriminant validity and convergent validity. Convergent validity was assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE) from each construct (for two groups communal /Exchange relationships), which were also well above 0.5, there for convergent validity is according to the 11variables supported. Discriminant validity between each of the constructs was assessed as proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981) and Bagozzi and Warshaw (1990). The correlation between each constructs was less than one by an amount greater than twice its respective standard error (Bagozzi and

Warshaw 1990), which according to the results discriminant validity is supported in two groups. These statistical results are presented in table 1. Structural equation modelling (AMOS.5.0) was used to test the model and hypothesis. The model was estimated using the maximum likelihood method. The model's estimation resulted in the following fit statistics in Table 2. These fit statistics indicate a good fit of the model with the data.

Table 2. The model fit

X ²	GFI	NFI	CFI	IFI	PNFI	PGFI	RMSEA
2.933	0.807	0.825	0.919	0.920	0.715	0.655	0.063

The results obtained from the measuring and structural part of the research model are specified in the table 3 for each group (communal and exchange) in 18 paths which supported at the level of 99 percent of certainty the significance of the relationship of all of the items being related to the hypothesized construct and it was confirmed the factor fairness of the items.

Table 3. Measuring and structural part of the research model

Groups	R ²	Items loading coefficient	Critical ratio paths	Standardized coefficient	Result
communal	0.43 - 0.89	0.66 -0.94	1.96 - 9.79	0.13- 0.5	The crucial ratio > 1.96: positive and significant effect into 18 paths for both of the groups
exchange	0.46 - 0.94	0.68 -0.97	1.96 - 9.79	0.48 - 0.5	

By considering the results in each of the 2 groups, it was positively supported the hypotheses of the research and by using the comparison of the intensity of the coefficients within the 2 groups among 18 paths, it is obvious that exist some significant differences in 7 paths shown in the Table 4.

Table 4. The comparison of the intensity of the coefficients

Hypothesis	SC *(E)	SC (C)	CR**	power	
H2: BR →	BA	0.467	0.144	3.431	E>C
H7: BE →	BA	0.133	0.409	2.642	C> E
H10: BC →	Bloy	0.098	0.221	2.015	C > E
H11: BS →	Bloy	0.325	0.149	2.557	E > C
H12: Btru →	Bloy	0.117	0.332	2.059	C > E
H14: BA →	Blove	0.111	0.384	3.283	C > E
H17: Blove →	Btru	0.34	0.502	4.737	C > E

S=standardized coefficient*/E= Exchange/C= Communal/ critical ratio**

5. Conclusions

Brand attachment is a phenomenon that is currently receiving a great deal of interest .In this study we proposed a model that describes the relationships between brand attachment and some key relational constructs. It is interesting that the results show a new approach to the psychology of consumer's behaviour, so that consumers' demands within the exchange groups go beyond the domain of price and product validity and the problems such as brand personality, brand experience, brand adaptation and self would influence the dependence on product which demonstrates that these variables affect the sense of dependence on brand within this group. Moreover, it was confirmed all of the predicted relationships available in the hypotheses which made the field of the marketing in the exchange groups more extensive than in the past. It shows that these individuals similar to the communal groups, are also affected by the other variables, but there is some difference in the intensity of the relationships between them providing a discussion issue when programming the marketing strategy for this group. In this research some of the factors (brand experience, brand love) had strong effect on the communal relationships and factors (brand reliability, brand satisfaction) had strong effect on exchange relationships. These differences in relation to the variables in the two types relationship are important for brand managers and marketing. The companies and managers of the marketing should always be after creating some opportunities to build up the lasting relationships by means of producing

some attachment between consumers and their brands. The love between consumer and brand contains a long-term process, leading to the sense of confidence in that brand which is accompanied by the purchase repetition and the recommendation to others. As well, the conformity between brand and self would cause the one to shape their identity; furthermore, the increase in understanding the good experience between an individual and brand could increase brand attachment; these cases could be paid attention to in companies' marketing programs.

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