

# A Review of Factors Influencing Brand Attachment

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**Abstract:** In the whole process of consumer purchase decision-making, not only rational factors play a role, but also irrational factors or emotional factors play a very important role, that is, consumers will be driven by their own emotions towards the brand and make a purchase, consumer brand emotion is an important part of the consumer-brand relationship, which has a very important role in brand management, and brand attachment belongs to the special emotion of consumers to the brand, which mainly describes a kind of emotion like mother-child relationship. This paper summarises the influencing factors of brand attachment in recent years, mainly including consumer perspective, brand perspective, and consumer-brand relationship perspective for classification, and puts forward the idea of future research on brand attachment based on this.

**Keywords:** Brand, Brand attachment, Attachment factors, Emotional marketing.

## 1. Introduction

In an era of brand globalization, how to manage the relationship between customers and brands directly affects the long-term development of enterprises, which has become an important issue for sustainable development. Previous studies have shown that brands which gain positive word-of-mouth and recognition from consumers, leading consumers to develop high emotional attachment, usually possess higher brand credibility, repurchase rates, and brand switching costs, thereby enabling businesses to acquire more competitive advantages and brand premiums. Brand attachment is critical for businesses to reduce consumer betrayal, gain consumer forgiveness in the face of negative information, predict brand loyalty and willingness to pay, as well as increase brand profitability and customer lifetime value. Customers are exposed to a myriad of brands online and offline, but they only develop attachments or emotional bonds with a small fraction of them [1], so it is important to understand what factors can influence brand attachment.

This study mainly reviews the research of domestic and foreign scholars on the influencing factors of brand attachment in recent years, searching databases such as China Knowledge, Wanfang Data Knowledge Service Platform, Web of Science, and Wiley Online Library, with keywords including brand, brand attachment, attachment factors. The study divides the influencing factors of brand attachment into three perspectives: the consumer perspective, the brand perspective and the brand-consumer relationship perspective, and proposes future research ideas.

## 2. Definition of Brand Attachment

Brand attachment is the expansion and application of attachment in the field of marketing. The term 'attachment' originated from the psychologists in the mother-infant relationship related research, is the emotional bond between infants and mothers [2]. Research has shown that attachments formed during infancy continue to grow in the future, even influencing subsequent friendships and romantic relationships in life. Marketing scholars believe that consumers are also attached to the things they own or the brands they use in their lives.

Thomson et al [1] believe that brand attachment consists of

three components or factors: affection, passion and connection. Affection refers to the consumer's warm feeling towards the brand; passion reflects the consumer's eagerness and positive feeling towards the brand; and connection refers to the consumer's feeling of connection between self and brand. Park et al [3] on the basis of attachment theory, directly proposed a definition of brand attachment as 'the strength of the cognitive and affective connection between an individual and a brand', which consists of two separate components: (1) the connection between the brand and the self; and (2) the cognitive and affective connection. Japutra et al. [4] argued that previous definitions of brand attachment focused on the theoretical level and neglected consumers' feelings. They applied semi-structured interviews and projective methods to investigate consumers' perceived brand attachment, and found that brand attachment consists of three dimensions: self-connection, emotions, and importance. Self-connection refers to the connection between an individual and a brand. Emotions are the positive feelings consumers have towards a brand, such as intimacy and passion. Importance refers to the salience of the connection between the brand and the self, and the degree to which the brand is easily perceived or remembered.

Scholars' definitions of brand attachment have both common and individualised elements. On the one hand, scholars agree that brand-self connection is an important component of brand attachment, and they emphasise the importance of emotional investment. On the other hand, the definition of brand attachment is individualised. For example, Thomson et al. emphasise that attachment involves passion for the brand, while Park et al. suggest that the salience of the cognitive and affective connection between the individual and the brand is an important component.

## 3. Identifying the Concept of Brand Attachment

### 3.1. Brand Attachment and Brand Love

Carroll et al. [5] first proposed the concept of brand love, and defined it as the degree of ardent emotional attachment to a specific brand by consumers whose needs are satisfied. Researchers have not reached a consensus on the connection and differences between brand attachment and brand love, and some scholars believe that brand attachment is an

important component of brand love (e.g., Carroll et al.). From Carroll and Ahuvia's definition of brand love, it can be seen that they believe that brand attachment is a component of brand love. At the same time, Carroll and Ahuvia used a questionnaire to measure brand love, which also included an item measuring brand attachment (I am very attached to the brand). Another part of scholars' view is that brand attachment and brand love are two different concepts. For example, scholars such as Su Yong [6] argue that unlike brand love, brand attachment is a special emotion that consumers feel towards a brand; and in the 15 consumer-brand relationships proposed by Fournier [7], love and attachment are distinguished. A third view of the relationship between brand attachment and brand love is that they are different terms describing the same psychological phenomenon, overlapping and interchangeable [8]. From the scholars' views on the relationship between the two, it can be seen that at the level of theoretical conceptualisation, the distinction between the concepts of brand attachment and brand love is still not clear enough. Future research needs to further clarify the relationship between brand attachment and brand love by analysing the theoretical concepts, measurement methods, influencing factors and outcome variables.

### 3.2. Brand Attachment and Brand Addiction

Addiction refers to an individual's physical and psychological dependence on a specific substance. Brand addiction refers to an individual's physiological and psychological dependence on a specific brand. Brand addiction is characterised by the fact that consumers perceive brands as irreplaceable, making them extremely dependent on them. For consumers, brands are like a crucial friend, affecting their sense of well-being. From the existing theoretical definitions and research results, it can be seen that brand attachment and brand addiction have both consistency and connection, as well as differences. The consistency and connection between the two are manifested in three aspects. Firstly, they both describe the relationship between consumers and brands, and both are very important relationships. Secondly, they can both effectively promote consumer behaviour. Finally, brand attachment affects brand addiction and can be regarded as an antecedent factor of brand addiction [9]. From the current definition of brand attachment and brand addiction by scholars, the key difference between the two is whether it leads to impulsive overconsumption. Brand attachment emphasises the emotional connection between consumers and brands, and in actual consumption, this emotional connection will lead to consumption preferences, but will not lead to overconsumption. Brand addiction, on the other hand, is an extreme physical and/or psychological dependence on a brand, which drives consumers to engage in unconventional overconsumption.

## 4. Brand Attachment Measurement Scale

Various scales have been proposed to measure brand attachment, among which, two scales have been relatively widely used. One is the Emotional Attachment Scale developed by Thomson et al. in 2005. The Emotional Attachment Scale (10 items) measures brand attachment in three dimensions: affection, passion, and connection. The affection dimension contains 4 items: affectionate, loved, friendly and peaceful. The Passion dimension contains 3

items: passionate, delighted, and captivated. The Connection dimension consists of three items: connected, bonded, and attached. For each item, subjects were asked to judge the extent to which the term described their feelings about the particular brand, and to express this on a 7-point Likert scale (1: not at all; 7: very much).

Another is the scale developed by Park et al [10], which measures brand attachment from two perspectives: brand-self connection and brand prominence. The scale initially consisted of 10 items and was eventually streamlined to 4 items. Two items measure brand-self connection, and the other two items measure brand prominence. Subjects responded to these four items on an 11-point scale (0: not at all; 10: completely).

## 5. Influences on Brand Attachment

### 5.1. Consumer Perspective

Bidmon [11] found that consumers' own attachment styles affect brand attachment. In addition, consumers' ideology may have an impact on brand attachment. A study found [12] that conservatism forms stronger attachment links to brands because brand attachment can appease the uncertainty of conservatism.

Researchers have also found that some negative experiences and emotions may positively influence brand attachment. For example, a study [13] found a potentially important role for fear in enhancing and facilitating brand attachment; since people cope with fear by connecting with others, when people experience fear, if others are unable to fulfil this desire for affiliation, this may increase their attachment to the brand that happens to be present in the fearful situation.

It has been found that crowded shopping experiences promote consumer brand attachment [14]. Specifically, when individuals find the presence of others in crowded environments distasteful and the environment reduces their motivation to engage in social interactions, their need for a sense of belonging may not be satisfied. As a result, they are likely to satisfy their sense of belonging by increasing their attachment to non-social goals, branding may often be one of these goals. However when crowded environments consist of familiar people and are therefore not perceived as distasteful; when individuals have an interdependent self-construal and a high tolerance for crowding; when people are accompanied by friends in crowded environments; when the brand's social function is salient; when people have never used the brand before; this effect does not occur when it is referred to as a general product rather than a specific brand.

Some scholars [16] based on the catering industry research, found that nostalgic emotion has a significant positive effect on brand trust and brand attachment; In addition, brand trust has a significant positive effect on brand attachment.

Some scholars [17], based on a study of the hotel industry, showed that consumer-perceived functional value, symbolic value, and hedonic value positively affect brand attachment; and emotional value mediates the relationship between consumer-perceived functional value, symbolic value, hedonic value, and brand attachment.

Li Xiaolin [15] analysed the secondary data collected from third-party platforms on the Internet about the push of individual user profile reports, and the study showed that recommending the profile report generated based on the user's behavioural trajectory positively affects brand attachment,

and that this process is partially mediated by positive and negative nostalgic emotion, and the mediating role of positive nostalgic emotion is greater than that of negative nostalgic emotion. The mediating effect of positive nostalgia was greater than that of negative nostalgia. Anthropomorphism played a positive moderating role in the relationship between positive nostalgic emotion and brand attachment, but the moderating role was not significant in the relationship between negative nostalgic emotion and brand attachment. This suggests that positive nostalgic emotion is more likely to stimulate consumers' brand attachment in anthropomorphic contexts, while negative nostalgic emotion does not have this effect. This study expands the scope of application of user profiles, and it is instructive for enterprises to use user profiles to carry out new type of relationship marketing.

## 5.2. Brand Perspective

Park et al. [3] suggest that hedonic, symbolic and functional resources are closely related to the establishment of brand attachment. If a brand can satisfy individual's sensory, aesthetic and hedonic needs, i.e., satisfy the self; or if a brand provides symbolic resources for individuals to enrich the self by characterising, defining or expressing the real or ideal self; or if a brand provides functional resources to enhance individual's self-efficacy and promote the achievement of desired goals to achieve the self-realisation, the consumers will consider the brand as important, and will be closely connected with the self, thus establishing brand attachment.

Grisaffe and Nguyen[18] examined the brand attachment influences that can be controlled by brand owners or marketing managers, which are: (1) superior marketing characteristics (e.g., superior quality, strong corporate image, effective advertising, and good service) and the impact of these marketing characteristics on consumers; (2) the benefits that users derive from the product; (3) socialisation (aligning the competencies, knowledge, and attitudes embodied in product features with those of consumers) and integration effects (e.g., using the same branded product for the whole family promotes brand attachment); and (4) brand-induced affective memories.

Zhao et al [19] found that green packaging has a positive effect on perceived value and brand attitude, both of which can directly affect brand attachment and indirectly positively affect brand attachment through trust. In addition, using the bootstrap method to verify the mediating effect, it was found that perceived value and brand attitude can directly or indirectly mediate the positive relationship between green packaging and brand attachment [19].

## 5.3. Brand-consumer Relationship Perspective

In the definition of brand attachment, the connection between the consumer's self and the brand is an important component of brand attachment, and it can be inferred that the congruence between the self-concept and the brand's personality or image affects brand attachment. Malär et al [20] found the congruence between the brand's personality and consumers' actual selves increased brand attachment, while the congruence between the brand's personality and consumers' ideal selves did not significantly increase brand attachment.

Gao Fang et al. [21] found that brand attachment was significantly and positively influenced by customer engagement, and that customer-firm identification mediated the relationship between brand attachment and customer

engagement.

Deng Shijian et al. [22] conducted an empirical study on the relationship between consumer brand association, brand perception and brand attachment with 211 consumers in an automobile brand 4S shop. The results of the study show that: (1) consumer product functional association has no direct significant effect on brand attachment, but it still has a significant positive effect on brand attachment through brand relevance cognition; (2) consumer brand functional associations not only have a significant positive direct effect on brand attachment, but also have a significant positive indirect effect on brand attachment through the intermediate variables of brand relevance cognition and brand psychological location cognition respectively; (3) consumer brand cognition includes brand relevance cognition and brand psychological location cognition, which both have a significant positive direct effect on brand attachment.

## 5.4. Integration Perspective

Consumer brand attachment is affected by a number of factors, and it would be of high research value to examine the formation of consumer brand attachment from a holistic perspective, but there are fewer studies in this area. Wang Lin [23] studied brand attachment facilitators and inhibitors from the perspective of causal complexity group conditions, and identified antecedent conditions from the three levels of merchants, brands and consumers: word of mouth, affective tendency, group identification, involvement, value transfer, economic competitiveness of the country of origin and brand influence. Among them, word of mouth, emotional tendency and group identity are the connotative perception level of brand reputation, and the economic competitiveness of the source country and brand influence focus on the extensiveness perception level of brand reputation, which are just like the two sides of a coin, containing the indispensable perception elements of brand reputation, and promoting or inhibiting the synergistic value of brand reputation through the brand internal and external linkage effect; involvement and value concessions are variables at the level of value co-creation and symbiosis that promote or inhibit brand attachment through their synergistic value with brand reputation. The study found that there are four distinct pathways that lead to high levels of brand attachment, revealing that different sets of conditions can produce multiple paths to high brand attachment.

## 6. Future Research Directions

Since there is no universally accepted definition of brand attachment, further research is needed on the definition, as well as on the identification of brand attachment and brand love, which remains unclear,

In addition, it is still unclear whether the structure of brand attachment between Chinese and Western consumers is the same, and whether the expression of brand attachment by Chinese consumers is similar to that of Western consumers. In future research, scholars need to clarify the connotation and dimensions of brand attachment among Chinese consumers, and focus on accumulating the materials of Chinese consumers' descriptions of brand attachment, so as to develop suitable questionnaires for the purpose of measuring brand attachment.

Secondly, we can continue to explore whether other negative emotions (e.g., anger, anxiety) and experiences have the same positive impact on brand attachment, and if not,

what kind of impact they have, as well as their respective scope and boundary conditions. It is also possible to examine how different cultural backgrounds, ideologies and geographic factors influence consumer attachment to brands. At the theoretical level, this would facilitate the testing of existing theories, methods and conclusions in terms of cultural differences and scope of application. At the same time, in terms of marketing application, considering the cultural differences and ideologies of brand attachment can also more effectively promote domestic brands to go abroad, integrate into different cultures, and be accepted and loved by consumers in different countries and cultural backgrounds.

Finally, we hope that more scholars will focus on the complexity of the influencing factors of brand attachment and do more research on this issue from a holistic perspective.

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