

# **The impact of product category, country of origin, involvement and product characteristics on brand attachment**

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Received date : 15.09.2017 & Accepted date : 24.10.2018

## **Abstract:**

The study of consumer-brand relationship has become increasingly important for companies that seek to develop long-term customer relationships and secure their position within consumer's mind. The concept of attachment represents the emotional relationship between the consumer and the brand. Moreover, this study aims to empirically investigate the impact of product category, country of origin, involvement and product characteristics on brand attachment.

Data are collected from a sample of 400 consumers in Tlemcen, Algeria. Linear regression is used to test the hypotheses. The results indicate that the variables related to the product have a different explanatory power on brand attachment. As such, while involvement toward the product exhibits a strong influence on brand attachment, it remains that the country of origin of the local brand influences negatively brand attachment intensity.

**Keywords:** Brand attachment, Involvement, Product category, Country of origin, linear regression.

**Jel classification codes :** O3 O50

**Introduction:**

The notion of brand attachment is considered as a new concept in the literature of consumer-brand relationship. Few studies have focused on the determinants that produce these emotional connections and influence their intensity. The determination of the factors that explain the intensity of brand attachment helps differentiate the ones that have positive effects from those that cause negative effects, and the ones that have the great effects from those that have no effects.

The variables most often diagnosed in the literature are the self-congruence (Malär et al., 2011), the dimension of "connexion" that captures the strength of the connection between a consumer and a brand through the examination of the impact of brand personality on the intensity of the attachment (Vanitha Swaminathan et al., 2009), and connection nostalgia (Kessous and Elyette, 2006). The latter study explains the relationship between nostalgia and brand attachment. This study identifies the categories of products and brands that can stimulate nostalgia reactions. It also highlights the importance of variables such as age and gender. These determinants have been borrowed from research on attachment to objects. Douglas B et al. (2010) in a study of "the antecedents of emotional attachment to brands", show a discriminant validity with general construction as brand attitudes, brand satisfaction, and brand involvement.

Moreover, they identified five primary antecedents of emotional brand attachment that combine traditional customer outcomes like "value, satisfaction, differentiation", superior marketing characteristics such as "product, place, Price, Promotion, Service", Sentimentality/emotional memory as "People, places, situations", Socialization "Family, social Group", and User Derived benefits "sensory pleasure, Self-oriented goals, social-oriented goals".

Smaoui (2008) led a qualitative exploratory study aiming at exploring the notion of brand attachment among Tunisian consumer to understand his emotional relationship with brands and seize explanatory variables of attachment. Results show that attachment reasons evoked are "satisfaction, confidence, self-congruence brand image, familiarity with the brand, and product involvement".

The main objective of our research is to test the impact of variables related to product on the intensity of brand attachment of the Algerian consumer. We shall pay particular attention to the effect of the variables related to the product on the emotional relationship between the brand and the consumer based on the resulting attachment.

**2. Literature review and hypotheses development:****2.1. Consumer-brand relationship:**

Most studies have noted that consumers differ not only in how they perceive brands but also in their relationship with them (Bouhlel et al., 2009). Consumer-brand relationship is largely dependent on the knowledge of brand; this brand knowledge can be built directly upon consumer experience. Therefore, it could be the crucial mediator between brand experience and consumer-brand relationship (Loureiro and Santana, 2010). A deeper understanding of consumer-brand relationship helps us make specific predictions about consumer behavior (Pankaj, 2004).

A pleasant experience can transform the consumer-brand relationship into some closer emotional ties with the brand that gives greater loyalty and profits results

(Beverland et al., 2006). It is known that the consumer has strong relationships with brands that have values and personality associations according to their self-concept. In this way, the brand relationships can be considered as expressions of the consumer identity (Swaminathan et al., 2007).

Buyers also develop relationships with the product where several attributes of a product or service can make brand-consumer relationship stronger or weaker, as for example, music, colors of the packaging and product positioning within super markets (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). Customers think about brands as if they were human characters (Li-Wei & Conti Paolo, 2008). Recently, studies concerned with the brand have focused on the relational approach between the brand and the consumer by assuming that the construction of a brand-customer relationship is essential for a profitable trade (Ghewy, 2007). This approach (Aggarwal, 2004) assumes that *“when people form relationships with brands that mirror their social relationships, norms of social relationships are used as guiding principles in their interactions with brands”*.

Consumers create ties with brands, objects or specific companies. This link forces even loyal consumers to a store to change this store when they cannot find the brand they need (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). So companies have come to evaluate the potential of the relationship with consumers and often develop appropriate strategies towards brand attachment.

## **2.2. Brand attachment:**

In (1982) Bowlby defined attachment as “emotion-laden targets-specific bond between a person and a specific object” that varies in strength; some individuals exhibit a weak link with a given object, while others show a strong relationship.

The attachment according to material possessions (Kleine and Baker 2004) is considered as “a multi-faceted property of the relationship between a specific individual or group of individuals and a specific, material object that an individual has psychologically appropriated, decommmodified, and singularized through person-object interaction (Schultz-Kleine & Menzel-Baker, 2004).

This definition shows that: (1) attachment requires an psychological appropriation than physical possession of the material object, (2) attachment to material possessions is a kind of extension of the process itself: the possessions express “who I am” and “who I was” and (3) the attachment is formed for the singular and irreplaceable possession; so the object of attachment has personal meanings and symbolic value that comes from the story of personal relationship between the person and the possession (4) There are degrees of attachment: a person may be strongly or weakly attached to the possession, (5) the attachment is multi-faceted aspects: people are attached to possessions for various reasons (6) attachment evokes deep emotional meanings regarding the possession, (7) the attachment is dynamic: the degree of attachment of possession evolves with own personal development and symbolic meanings possession change accordingly (Belaid & Temessek Behi, 2011).

According to Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) and (Oliver, 1999) The logical outcome of deep emotional attachment are extreme brand loyalty-repurchase *“against all odds and at any price,”* despite situational incentives and referred attractions inducing communication (Douglas et al., 2010).

Marketing research on individual-brand link discuss the concept of “liking brand”. Brand attachment “translates a durable and inalienable emotional reaction to the

brand and expresses a psychological relation". It is "psychological variable which explains a global indecomposable vision along attributes, taking the shape of a holistic vision and expresses an emotional psychological nearness" (Bouhleb et al., 2009).

Merabet and Benhabib (2012) found the existence of a causal relationship between brand personalities, attitudes toward the brand and purchase intention. Drawing from attachment theory, they define emotional attachment brand, as "attachment is an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object. Attachments vary in strength, and stronger attachments are associated with stronger feelings of connection, affection, love, and passion" (Thomson, Mac Innis, and Park 2005) who provide quantitative evidence for the reliability and validity of their conceptual and operational use. Their measurement shows convergent validity with the desire to maintain proximity, safety and emotional security, and distress of separation. It also shows the strong predictive validity with loyalty intentions.

Swaminathan, Stilly And Ahluwalia (2008) share that the attachment comes from the brand experience that consumers encounter, which translates to an emotional relationship and state that humanizing the brand, brand personality provides opportunities to build strong relationships between the brand and the consumer.

### **2.3. Determinants of brand attachment:**

#### **2.3.1 Product category:**

A number of academic contributions show that the perceptions of a product is often different from one individual to another and depend largely on the nature of the product and the degree of involvement of consumers. According to this work, if the products are simple, low symbolic content, expectations are slightly different because there is no interpretation by the consumers. The more complex the products, the more their symbolics are stronger and consumer perceptions different from one individual to another (Ezan, 2005):

Thomson et al. (2005) in their study on the measurement of the strength of emotional attachment to the brand, suppose that one might observe higher scores attachments for symbolic marks because the notion of attachment implies a relationship to the self and symbolic products are valued for what they say about the self. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) also assume that when the emotional elements and fun are high and positive for a product category, consumers will tend to experience more feelings of attachment to the brand consumed or used (Smaoui, 2008) From this we posit the first hypothesis.

**H1.**Product category explains the intensity of attachment. Algerian consumers attach to products more symbolic than functional attributes.

#### **2.3.1 Country of origin:**

The concepts of brand and country of origin of the brand are perceived by some researchers to be more relevant to explain consumer behavior (Samiee et al., 2005; Thakor and Kohli, 1996; Lim and O'Casey, 2001).

Thakor and Kohli (1996) define the country of origin of the brand as "as the place, region or country to which the brand is perceived to belong to by its target consumers". Reflection then moves from one country of origin "Real" production mainly identified by the "made-in" to a perceived country brand, which may not match the real origin of the brand.

The country of origin" is an indicator of quality, among other extrinsic indicators on which consumers base their evaluation of the quality of the food (Papageorgiou, 2010)

Klein, Ettenson and Morris (1998) found that even when a consumer identifies a brand like quality, the consumer may still refuse to buy the brand if it does not adequately symbolize their group membership. In addition, John and Klein (2003) propose that consumers often participate in boycotting specific brands (eg, religious organizations boycotting Disney) because it reinforces their group identity (Swaminathan et al., 2007).

Brands from a particular country can create intangible assets or liabilities in the minds of consumers, shared by other brands from the same country. For example, brands such as Toyota, Mitsubishi and Suzuki have shared some associations, such as "reliability" because of their common country of origin Japan (Pappu et al., 2007).

Knowledge of the original brand tends to be a delegated acquired information which is largely derived by consumers themselves as a result of market experiments and word-of-mouth - WOM (Zhou et al., 2010).

Indeed, researchers have provided evidence that the country of origin is an important determinant of consumer attitudes, purchase intentions, and behavior. It is easy to jump to the conclusion that the brand of origin plays an important role in the formation of consumer preference, processes well chosen, and therefore the international marketing strategies (Samiee et al., 2005). This lays the ground for the second hypothesis.

**H2.** The brand's country of origin influences the intensity of brand attachment. Algerian consumers are more attached to foreign brands.

### **2.3.1 Product involvement:**

According to Celsi and Olson (1988): "*a consumer's level of involvement with an object, situation, or action is determined by the degree to which s/he perceives that concept to be personally relevant*". Similarly, Malär et al (2011), Park and Young (1986) stated that "*most researchers agree that the level of involvement can be understood by the degree of personal relevance or importance.*", In addition, Richins and Bloch (1986) have defined the degree of involvement in terms of consumer interest or awakening for a given product. The involvement inspires the information sought and occupied by the consumers, how this information is processed, and the degree to which it influences their attitudes and behavioral intentions (Raggio and Folse, 2009).

According to Laurent and Kapferer (1985), the low involvement is more likely when the products are low in perceived importance, risk, and symbolic or hedonic value (Wernerfelt, 1991).

Moreover, the level of involvement allows consumers to take on new additional marks in the category faster than less involved consumers (Leif E. Hem, 2004). Therefore, the argument of Knowledge and risk argument are given as reasons for advocating that consumers involved will be more inclined to buy a brand extension than less involved consumers. In conformity with the theory of consumer behavior, the concept of involvement is an important domain because of the level of involvement a person has ramifications for information gathering and decision making. Thus, the third hypothesis is:

**H3.**The involvement influences the intensity of the attachment; the more the consumer involvement, the greater the strength of the brand attachment.

### **2.3.2 Product characteristics or 4 Ps:**

The central element of the marketing strategy is the way the company presents its offers on the market. This is where would intervene the basic concept “Marketing Mix” (Everaert, 2006).

The original marketing mix Borden (1964) had a total of 12 elements which are: product planning, pricing, branding, distribution channels, personal selling, advertising, promotions, packaging, service, maintenance, physical manipulation (logistics), and investigation and analysis. McCarthy (1964) refined the idea of Borden and grouped the 12 elements to four or 4Ps, namely product, price, promotion and place to meet the target. However MÖLLER (2006) noted that: (1) the mix does not consider customer behavior but it is internally oriented, (2) the mix sees the consumer as a liability; it does not allow interaction and creation of a relationship with the product or brand.

On the other hand (Fakeideas, 2008) found that: (1) the product is available singularly, but most companies do not sell a product in isolation. The marketician sells products or brands, all linked together in the mind of consumers, (2) the mix does not mention building a relationship that has become a very important marketing base, or experiences that consumers buy.

Customer chooses the product that can satisfy their needs, based on a mix of features that differentiates (Hashem et al., 2011). Each element of this mix can affect consumers in many ways (Jayaraman & Wong, 2008). And therefore since the interaction between the consumer and one of the characteristics of the product can create a relationship between them, these factors can influence the emotional relationship between the consumer and the brand through product quality, price, advertising and promotion, place and home sellers and after-sales service... This allows to posit the fourth hypothesis.

**H4.**The product characteristics influence the intensity of the attachment.

#### **1. Methodology, data analysis and results:**

For this study, we used the random selection. The reasons behind this choice are mainly the lack of a frame on Algerian consumers attached to the brand.

Our target population consists of all Algerian consumers of more than 15 years old. Our sample is composed mainly of people living in the wilaya of Tlemcen and its surroundings, in urban or rural areas. As part of the data collection, we conducted two stage-test. The first is a pre-test using a quantitative survey based on a questionnaire with a sample of 10 persons in order to correct errors, which may prevent understanding of the questions, and to see if the questions in Arabic were seen adequately concerning the technical terms in French.

The pre-test revealed that the questions were understandable as formulated by the interviewers. This then allowed us to collect actual data from 400 people.

#### **1.1. Variables and the construction of the questionnaire:**

To test the hypotheses on the effect of product category and country of origin of the brand on emotional attachment, as (Smaoui 2008), we avoid choosing one or two specific brands. We ask respondents to think of a brand to which they are attached.

The variable that explains brand attachment is measured through the 5 items scale developed by Lacoeuille (2000b) and we added the 3 items scale of Cristau (2003) reflecting consumer disappointment when the brand is absent in the market. Involvement is measured by the 6 items scale developed by Strazzieri (1994) to measure three facets of involvement: relevance, interest and attractiveness. The element that influences the consumer during the purchase is measured by a question with 8 choices. Items in the attachment and involvement scales are measured on a Likert scale to express the intensity of agreement (5) positions going from (-2) not agree to (2) all agree.

To process the information collected using SPSS V 12 and Excel in order to establish a database with easy to use software for data analysis SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) we transformed information collected in the form of numerical codes.

Calculating Cronbach's alpha shows that the scales are reliable with homogeneity of 80.2%.

**1.2. Results of the regression**

We use a regression analysis to measure the effect of variables related to product attachment to test our hypotheses.

As far as involvement towards the product category is concerned, results are shown in the following table:

Table 1. results of the regression analysis.

**Model Summary<sup>b</sup>**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
<b>1</b>	<b>0.700<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>0.490</b>	<b>0.484</b>	<b>0.71860643</b>	<b>1.845</b>

a. Predictors : (Constant), Product category, Implication, Product characteristics, Country of origin

b. Dependent Variable : Attachment

Source: SPSS output.

Table 2. Table of regression ANOVA.

**ANOVA<sup>b</sup>**

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
<b>1</b>	<b>Regression</b>	<b>165.040</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>41.260</b>	<b>79.2</b>	<b>0.000<sup>a</sup></b>
	<b>Residual</b>	<b>171.960</b>	<b>333</b>	<b>0.516</b>		
	<b>total</b>	<b>337.000</b>	<b>337</b>			

a. Predictors : (Constant), Product category, Implication, Product characteristics, Country of origin

b. Dependent Variable : Attachment

Source: SPSS output.

Table . 3. Table of regression coefficients.

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
	(Constant)	0.577	0.256		2.250	0.025	
Country of origin	-0.256	0.124	-0.082	-2.072	0.039	0.977	1.023
Product characteristics	0.007	0.022	0.012	0.305	0.760	0.987	1.013
Implication	0.694	0.039	0.694	17.704	0.000	0.998	1.002

Product category	-0.035	0.018	-0.078	-1.959	0.051	0.971	1.030
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a. Dependent Variable: Attachment

Source: SPSS output.

✓ **Regression Comments:**

The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value is 0,484 indicating that 48.4% of the information attachment is explained by variables related to the product. We notice that the model's explanatory power is accepted on average. The Durbin-Watson statistic is 1,845 close to 2 indicating the absence of residuals autocorrelation.

It can be seen from the table that ANOVA test value of global significance (sig = 0 <5%) and the F value obtained (F = 79,900) is greater than the critical value of F table, then we deduce that the model is globally significant. Therefore our results confirm that "the variables related to product positively influence the intensity of attachment."

The third table shows (column VIF) values collinearity tests that are very close to 1, indicating that collinearity tests do not reveal any problems of multicollinearity.

It can be seen from the table 3, (column t) shows that only the absolute values of t "country brand" and the variable "involvement" is greater than the value of t the Student table (t = 1.965), and the meaning column gives the value of the test of significance of each individual variable. We see that the involvement and country of origin of the brand are significant (sig = 0000, 0,039 <5%). Therefore, Non-significant variables that could be removed from the current model are characteristics of the product (sig = 0,760 > 5%) and product category (sig = 0.051 > 5%).

According to the standardized coefficient (beta), the involvement in the product that has the most effect on the attachment, positively influences brand attachment. The country of origin of the brand has a negative effect on attachment; the Algerian characteristic of the brand negatively influences brand attachment.

Accordingly, our results argue that among the variables related to the product, only the involvement influences positively the intensity of the attachment. Indeed the country of origin of the brand negatively influences the intensity of attachment. Consequently only hypothesis (H3) and (H2) is in conformity with the results that is to say;

- ✓ The more the consumer involvement, the greater the strength of the brand attachment
- ✓ Consumers are attached to foreign brands.

**Conclusion:**

Results show that variables related to product have greater power to explain brand attachment with a coefficient of determination R<sup>2</sup> of 48.4%. Our results do not suit SMAOUI's (2008) for Tunisia, who found that relational variable "self-brand" have the highest power and explains 73% of the information.

Among the variables related to the product, only the involvement influences positively the intensity of the attachment and the country of origin of the brand influences negatively the intensity of the attachment. This result confirms that involvement in the product has the greatest effect on the attachment which explains 47.7% in our case, which is confirmed by Douglas et al (2010). The country of origin of the brand has a negative effect on the attachment, the Algerian character of the brand negatively influences the attachment to this brand. In terms of product category, more than 50% of our population are attached to clothing and cosmetics,



but this variable has no significant effect on attachment. Product characteristics also does not affect attachment.

So it is important to Algerian companies to know why Algerians prefer foreign products to domestic. This has a great importance in terms of policy option in the way that Algerian firms should improve the consumer's involvement towards local products in order to strengthen their competitiveness within local market.

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