Falling in Love With Brands: an Inductive Qualitative Exploration of Pathways to Emotional Attachment

Hieu Nguyen, California State University, Long Beach, USA
Doug Grisaffe, The University of Texas at Arlington, USA

The purpose of our paper is to explicate a set of underlying psychological mechanisms that consumers themselves cite as reasons for developing and exhibiting devoted emotional attachment to brands (EAB). Using inductive textual data analysis, we extract a set of “pathways” by which consumers become emotionally attached to brands – attachments that lead to consistent repurchase over long periods of time. We frame EAB specifically in light of recent work on consumer-brand relationships, and provide representative exemplars of the customer comment data from which we drew our results and interpretations.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/14551/volumes/v36/NA-36

[copyright notice]:
This work is copyrighted by The Association for Consumer Research. For permission to copy or use this work in whole or in part, please contact the Copyright Clearance Center at http://www.copyright.com/.
Do future orientation and self-control develop during program participation?

To further assess the role of program graduation in individuals’ future orientation, an OLS regression model was fit to the data using future orientation as dependent variable and the demographic, financial, program-specific, remaining psychological metrics, and the interaction terms with program graduation as independent variables. The results showed that a set of important savings predictors seemed unaffected by program graduation. We find the relationship between future orientation and self-control to be most important here. This observation may point toward the notion of a certain similarity in these psychological dispositions among those entering the IDA program, regardless of outcomes. While program graduation helped develop self-control, it did not affect future orientation, which emerged as a main effect in predicting household savings.

In conclusion, we propose that successful IDA program completion creates financial dispositions and behavior that provide long-term benefits. The program graduation variable itself provided a good predictor of household savings. The strict program structure and intensive financial training over several years time, we suggest, might succeed in building the willpower needed to achieve savings goals independently, long after leaving the care of the IDA program.

References

Falling in Love with Brands: An Inductive Qualitative Exploration of Pathways to Emotional Attachment
Doug Grisaffe, University of Texas at Arlington, USA
Hieu Nguyen, California State University, Long Beach, USA

Introduction
Emotional attachment to brands (EAB) is a relatively new construct in the consumer behavior literature and little is known about the construct except a seminal scale development paper (Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005–hereinafter referred to as TMP). The process through which EAB, as a basis of deep “brand relationships” (Park and MacInnis 2006), is developed remains far from well understood. The purpose of our paper is to explicate a set of underlying psychological mechanisms that consumers themselves cite as reasons for developing and exhibiting devoted EAB. Our paper contributes to the understanding of the EAB construct and expands the discoveries of TMP’s work by presenting the pathways through which EAB is formed. We also address some issues that TMP point out as unanswered in their research.

Method
Given the relative infancy of this line of research, we intentionally designed our study to be inductive in nature. We asked 125 respondents to explain in their own words the reasons why they feel emotionally attached to brands that they listed. We then used a thematic content analytic approach to extract a set of data-reductive codes that capture and summarize the original responses. To interpret our findings, and to provide initial support for their validity, we bridge back to broader theoretical and empirical literature in consumer research. Eighteen frequently-mentioned themes emerged from our analysis which we grouped into four “pathways” reported below.

Findings
Pathway 1: Marketing Characteristics, Value, and Satisfaction
Oliver (1989) proposes a research approach that has been extensively used in the satisfaction literature: the comparison standards paradigm. The paradigm suggests that consumers hold certain product standards prior to consumption, observe product performance, compare the actual performance with their standards, form confirmation/disconfirmation perceptions, combine these perceptions with standard levels, and form satisfaction judgments with the product. Many respondents in our study cited satisfaction with the focal brand as the main driver for their EAB. This satisfaction is derived from perceived values including pricing (better prices), product (superior quality) design), promotion (corporate image and advertising/market communication activities), and distribution (product/service availability, physical facilities). We propose that the first pathway to EAB is through customer satisfaction with superior product and service values as reflected in marketing characteristics.

Pathway 2: Utilitarian and Hedonic Benefits—What the Brand Does for Me
Fournier (1998) suggests that in close consumer-brand relationships, consumers come to identify and be involved with many of the brands they regularly consume. One important reason why people form lasting brand relationships is that such behavior helps create their personal identity and construct their own self concept (Ball and Tasaki 1992; Belk 1988). Work by Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis (1986) and Keller (1993) shows that there are three general dimensions of brand identities: functional, symbolic, and experiential. Brand functional attributes represent the utilitarian function or benefits of the product. Our data show that oftentimes consumers tried different brands but only one brand would provide the most satisfying solution to their problem, which formed the foundation of their EAB. These brands can aid consumers in fulfilling either a self-oriented goal (internally driven, e.g. having younger looking skin, softer hair, stronger teeth) or a social-oriented goal (supporting consumers’ identity and social/professional roles, e.g. expressing self identity). Enhancing consumers’ role in and out of the home is another attribute that these brands often possess.