10. Marketing and Communication

Competitive Session

Emotional Brand Attachment:

Antecedents and Consequences for Luxury Brands

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ABSTRACT

Among the consumer-brand relationship constructs, emotional brand attachment has been vastly discussed among academics over the past 15 years. However, in the context of luxury brands, with peculiar characteristics of being high value, high involvement, and high risk, it has been largely unexplored. Luxury brands have. The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework that captures the antecedents and consequence of emotional brand attachment in the luxury products category. This framework will examine the validity of the proposition that self-expressive connection play a significant role in building customer emotional attachment towards luxury products. Findings will provide managers with guidelines to enhance comprehension of brand-customer connection constructs, which will consequently facilitate in developing relevant and effective marketing strategies.

Keywords: Brand Management, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Research, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

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INTRODUCTION

Recently, the concept of emotions toward brands and their influences on the consumer behaviour has attracted attention in several empirical and exploratory studies. Specifically, researchers have introduced different constructs to describe and investigate the role of affect and emotional connections using a variety of conceptual frameworks. Increasingly, companies seek different approaches to create a strong emotional connection with their consumers. Strong relationships bind consumers and their favourite brands (Fournier, 1998). Recent findings suggest that strong consumer-brand connections lead to higher levels of consumer loyalty (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). Thus, brand managers tend to create marketing activities and strategies around brands that make them more lovable. Apple, Harley-Davidson and Starbucks Coffee are just a few examples of brands that managed to create and maintain deep emotional bonds with their customers.

The luxury market is economically vital to many developed and developing nations, and as Tungate (2008) reports, the current luxury fashion industry has an estimated value of US$240 billion. As with other products, swift technological advancements and globalization ensures that the luxury industry provides customers with numerous brands to choose from. The global wealth report indicates that between 2009 and 2012, Asia-Pacific's share of luxury industries increased from 39% to 44%, while North America's fell from 30% to 24% (Frank, 2014). This demontrates the dynamic and emergent nature of luxury goods in Asia-Pacific region. Specifically, the Australian luxury market experiences the same expansion where brands such as Prada, Louis Vuitton and Tiffany are the dominants. According to the recent report of IBISWorld's Luxury Retailing in Australia, the luxury industry revenue in Australia is US$1.4 billion with an average annual growth of 11.1% between 2009 and 2014 (IBISWorld, 2013).

With the global economic growth, luxury brands are facing ever-intense competition to capture consumers' attention. Studies argue that classic branding strategies are becoming less

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effective, as luxury customers seek special relationships with brands and link brand value to emotional self-experiences and involvement (Choo, Moon, Kim, & Yoon, 2012). However, despite the importance of understanding the extent to which self-expressive concepts influence consumers' emotional connections with brands, this area has been neglected and remained unexplored in luxury category (So, Parsons, & Yap, 2013). In this regard, the antecedents of such emotions and the relationship between consumer-brand connection constructs and managerial outcomes such as word of mouth, willingness to pay a premium price and so on, remains insufficiently studied. This study, therefore, aims to examine the relationship between the key antecedents such as symbolic benefits, brand image, sense of community and so on, and key consequences such as willingness to pay higher price, increase in purchase intentions, increase in word of mouth and so on, of emotional brand attachment constructs for luxury brands.

Luxury Brands

In a general categorisation, scholars divide brands into two groups: *Functional Brands* and *Luxury Brands*. Nueno and Quelch (1998) define luxury brands as 'those whose ratio of functional utility to price is low while the ratio of intangible and situational utility to price is high' (p, 62). While consumers of functional brands usually give priority to products' functionality and price, luxury brand users primarily consider the brand's prestige value (Riley, Lomax, & Blunden, 2004). Another base of difference is the number of people who own or consume the brand, which is based on 'rarity principle'. This principle suggests that luxury brands have to 'sustain tightly controlled brand diffusion to enhance exclusivity' (Phau & Prendergast, 2000, p. 40).

Furthermore, recent literature has identified and conceptualised the concept of 'luxury customer value' (e.g. Choo et al., 2012; Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Scholars attempt to provide empirical examinations about the values that customers of luxury brands base their purchase decisions upon. What is generally accepted is that from a broader perspective, socially oriented motivations (to impress others) are not the only significant values. Personally oriented relationship values (such as individual status enhancement) are also becoming prominent in luxury brands marketing (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Therefore, it can be argued that different luxury consumers will

have different perceptions of the luxury value for a particular brand, based on the personal connections they form with the brand. Consequently, luxury marketing studies are moving from sales-driven schemes to a relational (bonding) schemes (Cailleux, Mignot, & Kapferer, 2009) to better focus on the importance of managing the customer-brand relationships (Choo et al., 2012; Riley et al., 2004).

Consumer-Brand Emotional Connection

Previous studies in this area share a grounded belief that a customer's sense of attachment and emotional connection towards products and brands originates from psychological behaviours based on 'self-expansion theory' (Aron et al., 2005). According to this theory, individuals reveal an integral motivation to integrate entities into their conception of 'self' and develop a positive feeling of 'oneness' (Park et al., 2010). The extent to which a brand becomes a part of self explains the depth and strength of this connection. Different aspects of self-expansion may be reflected in expressions such as 'mine', 'part of me', 'expressing me' or 'emotionally relating to me' (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2008). Based on this theory, 'self-concept connection' can be defined as the perceived identification with the brand's symbolic meanings as well as with brand image (Tsai, 2011). To illustrate using an example, buyers of luxury watches try to socially identify themselves through a self-connection with elegance and stylishness.

In a noteworthy article on consumer–brand connections, Fournier (1998) discusses the ways consumers develop personal emotional connections with brands, in order to accomplish personal goals. Mark Gobe developed the concept of 'emotional branding' as engaging consumers on intimate emotional connections with the brand through a unique exclusive experience. He suggests that such connection lead to emotional fulfilment (such as contentment and self-satisfaction) and a long lasting special bond (Gobe, 2009). Based on this concept, it is argued that modern consumers look for enjoyable emotional experiences when evaluating competing brands (Morrison & Crane, 2007). Thus, as Choo et al. (2012) infer, the degree of emotional closeness consumer feel toward each brand (rather than product's actual features) largely determine which brand consumer might select. Through the use of emotional relationship management, brands such as Mini Cooper, Apple and Harley Davidson

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(Morrison & Crane, 2007) and luxury brands including Rolex, Cartier, Louis Vuitton or Chanel (Cailleux et al., 2009), have established robust connections with their customers worldwide.

Emotional Brand Attachment

Emotional brand attachment represents the affective commitment in consumer-brand relationships that describes the strength of the bond between the consumer and the brand, and the extent to which the consumer remains loyal to the brand (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Fournier (1998) argues that self-brand relationships consist of several dimensions including love, commitment, intimacy, and passion; however, attachment is the 'core of all strong brand relationships' (p. 363). In terms of luxury products, as Kapferer and Bastien (2009) argue, 'emotionally engaging with the customer' is a crucial factor for success. Through these emotional connections, customers not only look for high levels of product performances and perfection in details, but also demand to be emotionally involved in an unforgettable experience (Brun et al., 2008). Thus, academic researchers and practitioners have recently shown significant interest in studying consumers' attachment to brands (Chaplin & John, 2005; Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008; Park & MacInnis, 2006; Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006).

John Bowlby conducted the pioneering studies on emotional attachment in the context of psychology, discussing parent-child relationships in the early 1950s. He refers to attachment as an emotional target-specific connection between an individual and a specific object (Bowlby, 1982). Developing from this theory, other studies suggest that attachment can also develop between individuals and marketing entities including brands (e.g. Fournier, 1998; Keller, 2003; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Thus far, regardless of the increasing popularity of the concept of emotional attachment, its conceptual definition varies among different studies and even seems indefinable (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2006; Park et al., 2009). Overall, psychological and marketing studies on possessions and attachments have provided several explanation of the attachment concept. These explanations includes notions such as: (1) brand attachment is associated with willingness to allocate resources to the relationship, (2) it is related to strength of emotional bond, (3) it leads to increase in loyalty, trust and satisfaction and (4) it changes as individual grows.

Determinants and Consequence of Emotional Brand Attachment

Following the call for more studies to measure and model the determinants and outcomes of brand attachment (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2014), there is a need for conceptual work to establish the boundaries and contents of this salient construct, especially in the luxury category. Luxury brands have peculiar characteristics of being high value, high involvement, and high risk, and in most cases connect to the social as well as experiential need of consumers. Examining emotional brand attachment constructs in the context of luxury brands, therefore, is not only valid but also essential. We address this gap by conceptually exploring how Australian luxury brand consumers perceive emotional attachment towards a brand.

Existing studies have attempted to explore several prominent determinants of emotional attachment. Japutra et al. (2014) conclude that concepts such as self-congruity, reputation and trust act as antecedents of emotional attachment, whereas some variables including intention to recommend, resilience to negative information and defending the brand are considered outcomes. Ferraro, Escalas, and Bettman (2011) report parallel findings. So et al. (2013) suggest limited influences of corporate branding on customer emotional attachment and brand loyalty in the fashion market. Hwang and Kandampully (2012) survey younger consumers of luxury brands and conclude that emotional attachment is a significant result of self-brand connection.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) prove that hedonism (which characterises exciting and delightful emotion) and self-expressiveness (enforcement of self and social identities) are two salient factors for nurturing brand love and brand attachment. Consistent to their findings, Tsai (2011) ascertains self-concept connection, delight, aesthetic attractiveness and trust as substantial elements of brand attachment, with a non-negligible interrelation between brand commitment and brand attachment. However, Belaid and Behi (2011) identify trust and commitment as noticeable outcomes of brand attachment. In a retail market context, Vlachos, Theotokis, Pramatari, and Vrechopoulos (2010) introduce several concepts comprising shopping enjoyment and self-expression, place identity, place independence, trust toward the firm, trust towards employees and interpersonal likability, as the predictors of consumer-firm emotional attachment. Moreover, Park et al. (2006) detect three routes to

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strong brand-self connections and brand attachment, including gratifying the self through aesthetic/hedonic experiences, enriching the self through brand concept internalization and enabling the self through product performance.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Antecedents of Emotional Brand Attachment

Brand Symbolic Benefits: Liang and Wang (2004) describe symbolic benefits as the 'extrinsic advantages of product or service consumption', that are 'usually corresponded to non-product-related attributes, especially user imagery' (p. 58). Big and popular brands offer additional value to consumers in the form of symbolic benefits that leads to development of self-concept connection with the brand. Consumers value the prestige and uniqueness of a luxury brand based on how it relates to their self-concepts. In other words, when brands offers symbolic benefits, a sense of oneness with the brand may develop in consumer's minds, whereby they establish an emotional connection with the brand (Fournier, 1998). Thus, Park et al. (2010) suggest that when brands are deeply embedded in a customer's mind, the chances of the development of an emotional attachment are higher. Therefore, it is hypothesised that:

H1: Symbolic benefits have a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Brand Image: According to Koubaa (2008), brand image is 'the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers attach to a specific brand', which consist of brand associations (p. 141). Aaker (2009) refers to brand association as the features that are 'linked' in memory toward a specific brand. Souiden, Kassim, and Hong (2006) state that when consumers sense some favourable associations with the brand, they are more willing to trust the brand to meet their expectations. Once consumers feel a sense of trustworthiness towards the brand, they are more likely to form an emotional connection with, and dependability on, the brand (Mikulincer, 1998). Morgan and Hunt (1994) refer to this connection as a starting point for a long-term partnership (attachment bond) characterized by confidence and trust. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Brand Image has a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Brand Identification: Consumer–brand identification is a state of oneness with and identity-fulfilling meaning towards the brand (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012). Related to brand image, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) describe brand identification as 'the extent to which the consumer sees his own self-image as overlapping the brand's image' (p. 49). The construct of brand identification has been applied extensively in the context of brand management (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). Several studies have examined the relationships between interpersonal emotional connections, the construction and maintenance of identity and one's sense of self (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995). Ahuvia (2005) advocates that when a consumer identifies himself or herself with a brand, the likelihood that he or she will generate emotional connection with the brand escalates. Accordingly, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand Identification has a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Sense of Community: Similar to the concept of brand identification, the sense of self-expression toward a brand is the consumer's perception of the degree to which a specific brand improves one's inner and social status (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Using certain luxury brands gives consumers the sense of belonging to an exclusive community whose members share similar emotions towards the brand. This experience usually couples with attachment, enthusiasm and excitation (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013). Thus, it can be argued that as more social engagement with the brand occurs, the likelihood of a consumer getting emotionally attached to a brand increases. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: Sense of community has a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Consequences of Brand Attachment

Brand Passion: While passion in interpersonal relationships does appear in the early 1990s in psychological literature as a dimension or antecedent to a higher order construct, only recent studies investigate brand passion as an independent variable in brand management (Pare & Pourazad, (in press)). Hatfield, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) define passion as 'a state of intense longing for union with another' (p. 9). In Sternberg's triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1997), passion is one of the

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three components of love. In the consumption context, brand passion is 'a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand' (Bauer, Heinrich, & Martin, 2007, p. 2) and describes the 'zeal and enthusiasm features of consumer–brand relationships' (Keh, Pang, & Peng, 2007, p. 84). Previous studies detect several concepts as determinants of brand passion, including brand self-expression (Bauer et al., 2007; Swimberghe, Astakhova, & Wooldridge, 2014), brand trust and brand identification (Albert et al., 2013), extraversion (Bauer et al., 2007; Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008) and brand uniqueness, brand prestige and hedonic brand (Bauer et al., 2007).

Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, (2008) stated that brand passion consists of two components: the presence of the brand in the consumer's mind and the idealization of the brand. In addition, as discussed earlier, feeling a sense of closeness to the brand and identifying oneself with the brand positively influence one's emotional attachment to the brand. For these reasons, we propose that when a consumer is emotionally attached to a brand, the sense of self-brand connection and perceived relationship with brand image generates passionate feelings. Therefore, we hypothesise the following statement:

H5: Emotional brand attachment positively influences brand Passion

Positive Word of Mouth (WOM): Consumers can be the key spokespersons for brands (Fullerton, 2005; Harrison-Walker, 2001). Anderson, (1998) describe WOM as informal communication amongst consumers regarding their evaluations of and experience with the brands. This includes sharing positive or negative experiences and recommendations with others. Sundaram et al (1998) report product-involvement (i.e. personal interest in the product and excitement resulting from product possession and use) as a key motive for positive WOM. Thus, those consumers who perceive a brand to be of high value, show a higher degree of personal interest and develop positive feelings for a brand, which leads to increased positive WOM communication (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). This notion has received support from various studies over the past few years (see Bauer et al., 2007; Matzler et al., 2007; Japutra et al 2014). Accordingly, we propose that:

H6: Emotional brand attachment positively influences positive WOM

Purchase Intentions: According to Maxham & Netemeyer (2002), purchase intent is consumers' likelihood of purchasing a particular brand in future. Numerous studies suggest that having strong positive attitude toward a brand is an important determinant of purchase behaviour (e.g. Albrecht et al, 2011; Miniard, Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Ilicic and Webster (2011) examined consumer–celebrity attachment within multiple endorsement situations. They found that purchase intention is most likely to occur when participants are strongly attached to a celebrity endorsing a brand. Furthermore, existing literature report empirical support for a positive relationship between emotional attachment and consumers' intention to purchase (Japutra et al, 2014) and positive impact of affective attitudes on purchase intentions for luxury brands (Bian and Forsythe, 2012). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: Emotional brand attachment positively influences purchase intentions

Pay Premium Price: Previous studies imply that the extent to which a consumer associates high value with a brand determines the extent to which he/she is willing to pay a higher price for that particular brand (see Starr and Rubinson 1978; Thomson et al., 2005). Luxury brands are commonly associated with higher value. The premise is that they offer symbolic benefits which is related to the development of an emotional bond between consumer and the brand. Consumers relate high value to a brand they feel emotionally connected and are able to express themselves through it. Thus, it can be suggested that emotional bonds lead to higher assigned value for a brand. Moreover, recent empirical findings provide support for the notion that emotional affection toward a brand influences consumers' acceptance of a high price (see Bauer et al., 2007). Therefore, we propose:

H8: Emotional brand attachment positively influences the willingness to pay premium price

Devaluation of Alternatives: In psychology literature, in the context of interpersonal relationships, Lydon et al (2003) conclude that commitment encourages negative evaluations of attractive alternatives. Johnson and Rusbult (1989) conclude that individuals who are more committed to their relationships tend to view potential alternative partners in less favourable terms. For these individuals, the negative evaluation of the alternative is a matter of maintaining commitment and strengthening their relationships. In the marketing context, Fournier (1998) suggest that evaluations of

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alternatives when investigating purchase behaviour may play a significant role in maintaining commitment to current marketing entity. Furthermore, Park et al (2010) imply devaluation of alternatives as the outcomes of brand attachment and brand relationship quality. Thus:

H9: Emotional brand attachment positively influences devaluation of alternative brands

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 depicts the full conceptual framework of this study. As shown, the antecedents of emotional brand attachment including symbolic benefits, brand image, brand identification, and sense of community are hypothesised to have significant impact on emotional brand attachment. In addition, brand passion, positive WOM, purchase intentions, willingness to pay premium price and devaluation of alternatives are considered the consequences of emotional brand attachment.

Insert Figure 1 about here

METHODS

In order to gain useful and valid insights about the concepts and variables discussed above, as well as to test the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework, we would develop a self-completion questionnaire. Conceptualization and items will be developed drawing on prior research in brand management and luxury brands literature. Table 1 provides an overview of variables and scales. It also highlights the relevant literature from whichthese scales will be developed. We will use multi-item 7-point Likert scales with anchors of 1 (= strongly disagree) and 7 (= strongly agree). In terms of reliability and validity of the research scales, the coefficient alpha test for internal consistency and in-depth factor analyses for instrument content validity will be conducted. Once the scale has been finalized and tested, we will collect data through surveys. In terms of data analyses, first a descriptive analysis of gathered data will be conducted. This will help in gaining a general overview of participants' demographic information and extract any peculiar trends and patterns. Later, the research hypotheses will be examined using statistical correlation tests and structural equation modelling (SEM), via AMOS 16.0.

Insert Table 1 about here

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The extant literature emphasise on the significance of having a clear understanding about factors that influence consumers' purchase decision, specifically in luxury products (see Bian and Forsythe 2012). The luxury industry in Asia-Pacific region and particularly in Australia has an annual growth of more than 10%, and provides companies and retailers with hundreds of million dollars in profit. This demonstrates the high value of this industry and its dynamic and emergent nature, which essentially call for more in-depth investigations.

While the subject of brand-consumer relationship has drawn attention over the last 15 years among marketing scholars, the luxury and fashion category lacks a significant multi-dimensional investigation of participating concepts and variables. This study will provide a meaningful contribution to the literature by conceptualizing a framework that examines significant determinants and the consequences of emotional connection between luxury brands and their consumers. Identifying and validating the sources of emotional connections with a luxury brand as well as its substantial outcomes would have noteworthy influence in strategic decisions.

For decades, managers of luxury brands have practiced several marketing strategies that focus on establishing customer brand relationship in order to gain market share. Luxury brands generally have higher proportion of loyal customers base compared to brands in non-luxury category and these customers seem to truly trust the brand. These customers establish exceptional connections with the brands they love (Tungate 2008). They identify themselves via those brands both individually and socially. Although managers strive to work on building such connections, there is a general lack of clarity about the relationship between such emotional constructs and a need for more research , which would aid managers to better understand the relationship and support them in their marketing activities.

By incorporating several behavioural concepts as the consequences of emotional brand attachment and by addressing and investigating the mechanisms that drive a consumer's emotional attachment through self-expressive concepts, the proposed framework expands the current understanding of the determinants and outcomes of emotional connection among luxury customers. In

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addition, through understanding the underlying purchase motivations among consumers in luxury segments, marketers can appeal most effectively to those motivations in their marketing strategies. Lastly, the findings will provide managers with guidelines to enhance comprehension of brand-customer connections, which will consequently facilitate the development of operational marketing strategies.

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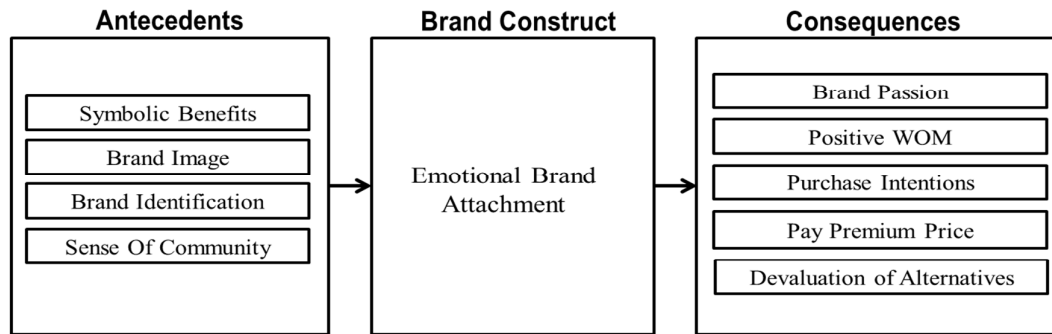
Figure 1: Study Conceptual Framework

Antecedents	Brand Construct	Consequences
Symbolic Benefits Brand Image Brand Identification Sense Of Community	Emotional Brand Attachment	Brand Passion Positive WOM Purchase Intentions Pay Premium Price Devaluation of Alternatives

Table 1. Summary of Relevant Literature for Variable Measurement

CONCEPT	VARIABLE	RELEVANT LITERATURE FOR VARIABLE MEASUREMENT
Antecedents	Symbolic Benefits	Anisimova (2007); Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008)
	Brand Image	Koubaa (2008)
	Brand Identification	Bergami and Bagozzi (2000); Escalas and Bettman (2005)
	Sense of Community	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Keller (2003)
Emotional Brand Attachment		Park et al. (2010); Thomson et al. (2005)
Consequences	Brand Passion	Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2008); Sternberg (1997)
	Positive WOM	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Ismail and Spinelli (2012)
	Purchase Intentions	Taylor and Baker (1994)
	Pay Premium Price	Thomson et al. (2005); Van Lange et al. (1997)
	Devaluation of Alternatives	Johnson and Rusbult (1989)

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10. Marketing and Communication

Competitive Session

Emotional Brand Attachment:

Antecedents and Consequences for Luxury Brands

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ABSTRACT

Among the consumer-brand relationship constructs, emotional brand attachment has been vastly discussed over the past 15 years. However, in the context of luxury brands, which have the peculiar characteristics of being high value, high involvement, and high risk, this construct has been remained unexplored. The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework that captures the antecedents and consequences of emotional brand attachment in the luxury products category and examine the validity of the proposition that the self-expressive connection between a customer and a brand plays a significant role in building a customer's emotional attachment to luxury products. Findings will provide managers with guidelines to enhance comprehension of brand-customer connection constructs and develop effective marketing strategies.

Keywords: Brand Management, Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Research, Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

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Emotional Brand Attachment:

Antecedents and Consequences for Luxury Brands

ABSTRACT

Among the consumer-brand relationship constructs, emotional brand attachment has been vastly discussed over the past 15 years. However, in the context of luxury brands, which have the peculiar characteristics of being high value, high involvement, and high risk, this construct has been remained unexplored. The purpose of this study is to develop a conceptual framework that captures the antecedents and consequences of emotional brand attachment in the luxury products category and examine the validity of the proposition that the self-expressive connection between a customer and a brand plays a significant role in building a customer's emotional attachment to luxury products. Findings will provide managers with guidelines to enhance comprehension of brand-customer connection constructs and develop effective marketing strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the concept of emotions toward brands and their influences on consumer behaviour has attracted attention in several empirical and exploratory studies. Research has introduced different constructs to describe and investigate the role of affect and emotional connections using a variety of conceptual frameworks. Increasingly, companies seek different approaches to create a strong emotional connection with their consumers. Strong relationships bind consumers and their favourite brands (Fournier, 1998). Recent findings suggest that strong consumer-brand connections lead to higher levels of consumer loyalty (Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010). Thus, brand managers tend to create marketing activities and strategies around brands that make them more lovable. Apple, Harley-Davidson and Starbucks Coffee are just a few examples of brands that managed to create and maintain deep emotional bonds with their customers.

With the global economic growth, luxury brands face ever-intense competition to capture consumers' attention. Studies argue that classic branding strategies are becoming less effective, as luxury customers seek special relationships with brands (Choo, Moon, Kim, & Yoon, 2012). While in traditional luxury brand management, companies tried to grasp consumers' attention by differentiating

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themselves using brand name, attributes, image etc., today's luxury customers seek memorable experiences of emotional closeness and involvement with the brand (Choo et al., 2012). Other studies put more emphasis on engaging luxury customers at emotional levels (Kapferer & Bastien, 2009). However, despite the importance of understanding the extent to which self-expressive concepts influence consumers' emotional connections with brands, this area has been neglected and unexplored in luxury category (So, Parsons, & Yap, 2013). In this regard, the antecedents of such emotions, the theoretical relationship between consumers and brands, and managerial outcomes such as word of mouth, willingness to pay a premium price and so on, remain insufficiently studied.

In terms of the ways in which marketers can further customer engagement with their brands, previous research acknowledges brand attachment as a concept that influences both attitudes and behaviours (Japutra, Ekinci, & Simkin, 2014; Schmalz & Orth, 2012). At an individual level, marketers emphasise understanding the special connections customers develop over time with their favourite brands as well as how and to what extent individuals express themselves through those brands. In this context, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) propose the significant role of self-expressive brands in shaping consumers' loves towards their favourite brands and developing consumers' identities. They describe this phenomenon as 'the consumer's perception of the degree to which a particular brand enhances one's social self and/or inner self' (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 82). Some researches empirically support the idea that improvement of inner self and social self could result in diverse behavioural outcomes. For instance, Wallace, Buil, and De Chernatony (2012) argue that consumers who engage with inner self-expressive brands are more likely to offer WOM for that brand; while consumers who engage with socially self-expressive brands are more likely to accept the brand and its wrongdoings. Since prior studies have paid attention to categories other than luxury, in order to generalise the results, the particular focus of this study makes it relevant for academics and marketing practitioners.

We present four aspects of the self-expressive connection between a brand and a customer, including symbolic benefits, brand image, brand self-identification and sense of community and suggest that these aspects act as determinants of emotional brand attachment. Furthermore, we propose key

consequences of emotional brand attachment including brand passion, positive word-of-mouth (WOM), purchase intention, willingness to pay higher price and devaluation of alternatives.

In the next section of the study, we briefly review the previous literature on luxury brands, paying particular attention to the concept of luxury customer value. Following the discussion on luxury brands, which is the central context of this study, we provide a discussion of previous research that embraces the concept consumer-brand emotional connection, based on the theory of 'self-expansion'. We then discuss the concept of emotional brand attachment, its psychological aspects, antecedents and consequences leading to the hypotheses. In the hypothesis discussion section, we describe each aspect of self-expressive connections between brands and consumers as well as their identified consequences, and describe the theoretical groundings for the proposed relationships, leading to the development of the conceptual framework of the study. We finish the study with the proposed methodology that we plan to employ in order to test the conceptual model and address academic and managerial implications.

Luxury Brands

The global luxury market with an estimated value of US$240 billion is economically vital to many developed and developing nations (Tungate, 2008) , particularly in Asia-Pacific region. As with other products, technological advancements and globalization ensure that the luxury industry provides customers with numerous brands to choose. The global wealth report indicates that between 2009 and 2012, Asia-Pacific's share of luxury industries increased from 39% to 44%, while North America's fell from 30% to 24% (Frank, 2014), which demonstrates the dynamic and emergent nature of luxury goods in Asia-Pacific region. Specifically, the Australian luxury market is experiencing the same expansion, where brands such as Prada, Louis Vuitton and Tiffany are the dominants. According to the recent report of IBISWorld's Luxury Retailing in Australia, the luxury industry revenue in Australia is US$1.4 billion with an average annual growth of 11.1% between 2009 and 2014 (IBISWorld, 2013).

In a general categorisation, scholars divide brands into two groups: Functional Brands and Luxury Brands. Nueno and Quelch (1998) define luxury brands as 'those whose ratio of functional utility to price is low, while the ratio of intangible and situational utility to price is high' (p. 62). Consequently, whereas consumers of functional brands usually give priority to products' functionality and price, luxury brand users primarily consider the brand's prestige value (Riley, Lomax, & Blunden, 2004). Another base of difference is the number of people who own or consume the brand, which is based on the 'rarity principle'. This principle suggests that luxury brands have to 'sustain tightly controlled brand diffusion to enhance exclusivity' (Phau & Prendergast, 2000, p. 40).

Furthermore, recent literature has identified and conceptualised the concept of 'luxury customer value' (e.g. Choo et al., 2012; Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). Scholars attempt to provide empirical examinations about the values upon which customers of luxury brands base their purchase decisions such as functional value, symbolic value, experiential value and so on. What is generally accepted is that from a broader perspective, socially oriented motivations (to impress others) are not the only significant values that buyers consider; personally oriented relationship values (such as individual status development) are also of great importance in luxury brand category (Wiedmann et al., 2009). Hence, it can be argued that different luxury consumers will have different perceptions of the luxury values for a particular brand, based on the personal connections they develop with the brand. Accordingly, luxury marketing studies are moving from sales-driven schemes to relational (bonding) schemes (Cailleux, Mignot, & Kapferer, 2009) to better focus on the importance of managing customer-brand relationships (Choo et al., 2012; Riley et al., 2004). For that reason, the examination of customer-brand relationships and emotional connections in the context of luxury brand gains more significance. The connection between consumers and brands, discussed in the next section, highlights the importance of this concept and how the literature has suggested it as a strong source of favourable outcome for brands.

The Emotional Connection between Consumers and Brands

Susan Fournier, a prominent researcher in the area of emotional brand constructs and connections, developed the relationship theory in customer research (Fournier, 1998). She systematically discussed the relational phenomena in the domain of customer products, contended the validity of the relationship proposition in the customer-brand context; and provided an empirical support for the notion that brands can act as active relationship partners. She proposed that customers employ chosen brands as a powerful mean that serve to create and authenticate concepts of self, and that offer both functional and symbolic benefits to give meaning to customers' lives (Fournier, 1998). This notion can be better understood through the framework of 'self-expansion' theory (Aron & Aron, 1986; Aron, Aron, Tudor, & Nelson, 1991; Aron et al., 2005). According to this theory, individuals reveal an integral motivation to integrate entities into their conception of 'self' and develop a positive feeling of 'oneness' (Park et al., 2010). The extent to which a brand becomes a part of self explains the depth and strength of this connection. Different aspects of self-expansion may be reflected in expressions such as 'mine', 'part of me', 'expressing me' or 'emotionally relating to me' (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2008). Hence, 'self-concept connection' can be defined as the perceived identification with the brand's symbolic meanings and brand image (Tsai, 2011). For example, buyers of luxury watches try to socially identify themselves through a self-connection with elegance and stylishness. Rolex is a symbol of heroic achievement, while Tiffany is a figure of love and beauty (Arora, 2011).

The concept of customer-brand relationship and its role in exploring customer attitudes and behaviours has long been a topic of discussion among academics (Hanslin & Rindell, 2014; Hwang & Kandampully, 2012; Kemp, Jillapalli, & Becerra, 2014; Kim, Park, & Kim, 2014; Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2009; Vivek, Beatty, & Morgan, 2012). With the purpose of making the this relationship more exclusive, Gobe introduced the concept of 'emotional branding', defined as engaging customers at intimate levels of emotional connection with the brand, through a unique and elite experience (Gobe, 2009). He advocates that maintaining high quality customer-brand relationships will lead to emotional fulfilment (such as contentment and self-satisfaction). This evidence indicates that at times of evaluating modern customers look for future enjoyable emotional experiences and closeness

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(Morrison & Crane, 2007). Through the use of emotional relationship management, brands such as Mini Cooper, Apple and Harley Davidson (Morrison & Crane, 2007) and luxury brands such as Rolex, Cartier, Louis Vuitton or Chanel (Cailleux et al., 2009), have established robust connections with their customers worldwide.

Emotional Brand Attachment

In the early 1950s, John Bowlby conducted pioneering studies on emotional attachment in the context of psychology, discussing parent-child relationships. He referred to attachment as an emotional target-specific connection between an individual and a particular object (Bowlby, 1982). Grounding on his findings, other studies suggest that attachment can also develop between individuals and marketing entities including brands (e.g. Fournier, 1998; Keller, 2003; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). While the concept of emotional attachment is gaining increasing popularity, its conceptual definition varies among different studies and even seems indefinable (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2006; Park et al., 2009). However, there are agreed descriptions: (1) brand attachment is associated with willingness to allocate resources to the relationship, (2) it is related to the strength of emotional bond, (3) it leads to increase in loyalty, trust and satisfaction and (4) it changes as the individual grows. These discussions and explanations of the concept highlight the fact that if marketers manage to develop a strong emotional bond with the consumers, there are positive significant outcomes.

Emotional brand attachment represents the affective commitment that describes the strength of the bond and the level of loyalty between the consumer and the brand (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Fournier (1998) argues that self-brand relationships consist of several dimensions including love, commitment, intimacy, and passion; however, attachment is the 'core of all strong brand relationships' (p. 363). For managing luxury products, as Kapferer and Bastien (2009) argue, 'emotionally engaging with the customer' is a crucial factor for success. Through these emotional connections, customers not only look for high levels of product performances and perfection in details, but also demand to be emotionally involved in an unforgettable experience (Brun et al., 2008). Thus, academic researchers and practitioners have recently shown significant interest in attachment to brands

(Chaplin & John, 2005; Fedorikhin, Park, & Thomson, 2008; Park & MacInnis, 2006; Park et al., 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Thompson, Rindfleisch, & Arsel, 2006).

Determinants and Consequence of Emotional Brand Attachment

Following the call for more studies to measure and model the determinants and outcomes of brand attachment (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Japutra et al., 2014), there is a need for conceptual work to establish the boundaries and contents of this salient construct, especially in the luxury category. Luxury brands have peculiar characteristics of being high value, high involvement, and high risk, and in most cases are able to connect with the social as well as experiential needs of consumers. Examining emotional brand attachment constructs in the context of luxury brands, therefore, is not only valid but also essential. We address this gap by conceptually exploring how Australian luxury brand consumers perceive emotional attachment towards a brand. Existing studies have explored several prominent determinants of emotional attachment. Japutra et al. (2014) conclude that self-congruity, reputation and trust act as antecedents of emotional attachment, whereas intention to recommend, resilience to negative information and defending the brand are the outcomes. Ferraro, Escalas, and Bettman (2011) report parallel findings. Similarly, Hwang and Kandampully (2012)'s survey of young luxury brands consumers reveal that emotional attachment is a significant result of self-brand connection.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) demonstrated that hedonism (which characterises exciting and delightful emotion) and self-expressiveness (enforcement of self and social identities) are two salient factors for nurturing brand love and brand attachment. Consistent to their findings, Tsai (2011) ascertains self-concept connection, delight, aesthetic attractiveness and trust as substantial elements of brand attachment, along with the non-negligible interrelation between brand commitment and brand attachment. Belaid and Behi (2011) recognize trust and commitment as noticeable outcomes of brand attachment. In a retail market context, Vlachos, Theotokis, Pramatari, and Vrechopoulos (2010) introduced predictors of consumer-firm emotional attachment, including shopping enjoyment and self-expression, place identity, place independence, trust towards the firm, trust towards employees and

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interpersonal likability. Additionally, Park et al. (2006) distinguish three routes to strong brand-self connections and brand attachment: gratifying the self through aesthetic/hedonic experiences, enriching the self through brand concept internalization and enabling the self through product performance. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that key antecedents of emotional brand attachment revolves around the concept of self-brand identification, brand's symbolic benefits, sense of oneness with the brand and community/belongingness aspects. In light of the above review, the next section provides discussion on hypothesis development.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Antecedents of Emotional Brand Attachment

Brand Symbolic Benefits: Customer brand decisions drive two types of benefit: functional and symbolic. While functional benefits are the first priority for consumption goods, for non-consumption goods, which are usually more expensive and durable, such as luxury products, symbolic benefits is more central (Vickers & Renand, 2003). Liang and Wang (2004) define symbolic benefits as the 'extrinsic advantages of product or service consumption', that are 'usually corresponded to non-product-related attributes, especially user imagery' (p. 58). They believe symbolic benefits are responsible for transferring brand meanings to the customer. Popular brands offer additional value to consumers in the form of symbolic benefits that leads to development of self-connection with the brand. In addition, Albrecht, Backhaus, Gurzki, and Woisetschläger (2013) suggest that memory associations of brands with symbolic benefits are grounded on intangible concepts and cognitive deliberating. This implies that dominating or leading luxury brands utilize this concept of symbolic associations better than their competitors do. Therefore, in the luxury brand categories, symbolic and intangible benefit plays a significant role in establishing strong emotional connection with a brand and purchase decisions.

Recent research has established that when a customer selects a brand with high symbolic benefits, the likelihood that customers could develop a sense of cohesion, oneness and emotional connection with the brand increases (Fournier, 1998; Malär et al., 2011; So et al., 2013). The more customers embed a

brand's symbolic benefits into their minds, the more likely they are to become emotionally attached to the brand (Park et al., 2010). Finally, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) suggest that by offering more symbolic benefits, marketers, especially in luxury categories, are able to establish strong emotional connection with their customers. Considering the unique characteristics of luxury brands, further examination is required. Therefore, in order to extend the scope to a different category, we hypothesise the following proposition:

H1: Symbolic benefits have a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Brand Image: Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) define brand image as largely a subjective and perceptual conception held by the consumer, that is formed through consumer's reasoned, attitudinal or emotional interpretation. A favourable brand image serves to validate the brand as an active relationship partner and develop a sense of trust in the consumer, as he or she believes that expectations could only be fulfilled via that particular brand; which results in more loyal customers (Fournier, 1998).

Aaker and Joachimsthaler (2000) and Farquhar (1989) suggest that brands use their perceived image to develop deep emotional relationships with consumers. When consumers make brand choices, they are buying not only an image, but also an emotional relationship (Sheth, Mittal, & Newman, 1999). For example, The Harlem Globetrotters (an American Baseball club) are considered among their fans to evoke fun, respect, hard work good values. They have truly succeeded in developing an emotional connection with their intended audience (Berry, 2000). Grounded on this conception, researchers deliver pragmatic examinations to assess brand image and its influence on consumer's affective reactions towards brands.

Malär et al. (2011) characterize the concept of self-congruence as the 'fit' between the consumer's 'perception of self' and 'brand image'. They reason that this 'fit' can boost consumer's affective responses to the brand. In the course of developing this 'fit', the customer becomes ever more bonded with and dependant on the brand. The extent of such dependency foretells the customer's inclination to grow an emotional connection with the brand (Park et al., 2010). Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

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H2: Brand Image has a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Brand Identification: Consumer–brand identification is a state of oneness with the brand and developing an identity-fulfilling meaning of the brand (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar, & Sen, 2012). The construct of brand identification has been widely applied in the brand management context (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). Research reports significant relationship between brand identification and brand relationship quality (Fournier, 1998; Kressmann et al., 2006). As consumers identify themselves with a brand, the likelihood of developing emotional connection with the brand escalates (Ahuvia, 2005), and they find such brands more lovable (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Furthermore, some studies argue that consumers put their loved marketing entities at the central of their identity (Fournier, 1998), for the reason that developing emotional relationships with brands plays an important role in identity building, as it influences the sense of self (Aron, Paris, & Aron, 1995; Bauer, Heinrich, & Martin, 2007). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) provide empirical support for the proposition that consumers' emotions should be greater towards brands which perform a momentous role in shaping their identity. Furthermore, (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008a) argue that presence of the brand in the consumer's mind and the idealizations of the brand (because of an influenced sense of self) create passionate connections with the brand. However, most of these studies either have chosen consuming goods as the target branded products to investigate, or had a research sample of students. In addition, existing research has largely focused on other constructs (e.g. brand love and brand engagement, which are different from brand attachment). Hence, in order to generalise results of other studies and examine the proposition in Australian luxury market, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Brand Identification has a significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Sense of Community: Similar to the concept of brand identification, brand community is the sense of affiliation a customer feels with other people associated with the brand (Keller, 2009), which advances customer's social status (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Owning particular brands gives customers an

experience through which they feel the sense of belonging to an exclusive community whose members share similar attitudes towards that brand. Research suggest that this experience usually couples with emotional attachment, enthusiasm and excitement (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013). As community members actively interact with one another and share their experiential connections with the brand, it reminds them of their actual emotional connection with the brand (Jang, Olfman, Ko, Koh, & Kim, 2008).

McMillan and Chavis (1986) introduce four aspects of achieving a sense of community: membership (a feeling of belonging), influence, (a sense of mattering), integration and fulfilment of needs (a feeling that members' expectations will be met through group membership) and shared emotional experiences (the belief that members share similar emotional experiences). Also, research suggest that through the sense of community, customers not only share their passion with others, but also expect group support from other members in solving issues related to the brand (Füller, Matzler, & Hoppe, 2008). This reliance gives customers a chance to develop strong connection with the brands. Thus, it can be argued that the more customers experience the sense of community, the more likelihood of them being emotionally connected to the brand. Keller (2003) discusses that augmenting a group's sense of community results in resilient brand bonding. In addition, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) suggest that self-expression through the sense of social belonging assert positive impact on emotional connection. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: A sense of community has significant impact on emotional brand attachment

Consequences of Brand Attachment

Brand Passion: While 'passion' has been discussed among psychological research studying interpersonal relationships since early 1990s, only recent studies in consumer behaviour investigate brand passion as an independent variable. Brand passion is defined as 'a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude towards a specific brand' (Bauer et al., 2007, p. 2) and describes the 'zeal and enthusiasm features of consumer–brand relationships' (Keh, Pang, & Peng, 2007, p. 84). While previous studies have identified several concepts that result in passionate feelings for brands,

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extraversion, brand uniqueness, brand prestige, etc. (Bauer et al., 2007; Füller et al., 2008), this study for the first time examines the proposition that brand attachment can lead to brand passion.

Based on the view supported by Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2008b), customers develop passionate feelings for a marketing entity when two modules flourish: (1) the presence of the brand in the consumer's mind and (2) the idealization of the brand. We argue that feeling a sense of closeness to the brand, as a consequence of brand attachment, accompanied by identifying oneself with the brand, genuinely establish the required modules for forming passionate feelings. In addition, Hazan and Hazan and Shaver (1994) and Hatfield and Rapson (1993) theoretically consider increased attachment an essential foundation for passionate love. Therefore, we hypothesise that when a customer is emotionally attached to a brand, the sense of connection between self and brand and the perceived profound connection with brand associations generates passionate feelings. Hence:

H5: Emotional brand attachment positively influences brand Passion

Positive Word-of-mouth (WOM): Consumers can be the key spokespersons for brands (Fullerton, 2005; Harrison-Walker, 2001). Anderson (1998) describes WOM as informal communication amongst consumers regarding their evaluations of and experience with the brands. This includes sharing positive or negative experiences and recommendations with others. Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster (1998) report product-involvement (i.e. personal interest in the product and excitement resulting from product possession and use) as a key motive for positive WOM. Thus, those consumers who perceive a brand to be of high value show a higher degree of personal interest and develop positive feelings for a brand, which leads to increased positive WOM communication (Aaker, 2009; Keller, 2003). However, whereas other studies have focused on other brand constructs, such as brand affect and brand engagement, in this study, we specifically focus on brand attachment. Furthermore, with the intention of generalising and validating prior results in Australian luxury market, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6: Emotional brand attachment positively influences positive WOM

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Purchase Intentions: According to Maxham III and Netemeyer (2002), purchase intent is consumers' likelihood of purchasing a particular brand in future. Numerous studies suggest that having strong positive attitude towards a brand is an important determinant of purchase behaviour (Albrecht, Neumann, Haber, & Bauer, 2011; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Ilicic and Webster (2011) examined consumer–celebrity attachment within multiple endorsement situations. They found that purchase intention is most likely to occur when participants are strongly attached to the celebrity endorsing the brand. Furthermore, earlier research provides empirical support for positive impact of affective commitment on purchase intentions of luxury brands (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). Their findings are based on Chinese students. This needs further validation in the context of Australia and with respect to general public. Affective commitment is based on consumers' emotional attachment and resonance containing consumers' willingness to maintain the relationship with the preferred brand (Xinting, Fangyi, & Xiaofen, 2013), which denotes the non-negligible interrelation between affective commitment and brand attachment (Allen & Meyer, 1996; Tsai, 2011). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: Emotional brand attachment positively influences purchase intentions

Paying Premium Price: Prior research has established that the extent to which a consumer associates high value with a brand determines the extent to which he/she is willing to pay a higher price for that particular brand (Starr & Rubinson, 1978; Thomson et al., 2005). The higher the value of the brand, the more likely the customer is willing to maintain his or her relationship with the brand. Van Lange et al. (1997) contend that the consumer's willingness to forego immediate self-interest to promote his/her relationship with the brand is strongly related to the extent he/she is emotionally engaged with the brand. Luxury brands are commonly associated with higher value and symbolic benefits. The premise is that customer's dedication of high value to a brand is associated with a strong bond between customer and the brand. As higher value is tightly related to higher price (Keller, 2003; Thomson et al., 2005; Van Lange et al., 1997; Vazquez, Del Rio, & Iglesias, 2002; Yoo, Donthu, & Lee, 2000), topical empirical outcomes deliver support for the notion that affection towards a brand influences

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consumers' acceptance of a high price (Bauer et al., 2007). However, most of the earlier studies have been conducted in US and Europe. Considering the newly emerging of Australian luxury market and in order to generalise the existing findings, the following hypothesis is to be tested:

H8: Emotional brand attachment positively influences the willingness to pay premium price

Devaluation of Alternatives:

Previous research argue that attachment and commitment are closely related constructs, as purchase commitment could express an attachment to the brand due to affective reasons such as the feelings that have arisen from brand's symbolic or psychological attributes (Amine, 1998). Research provides evidence on how commitment could results in devaluation of alternatives. For example, in the context of interpersonal relationships, Lydon, Fitzsimons, and Naidoo (2003) deliberate that commitment encourages negative evaluations of attractive alternatives. Consequently, there is a possible link between attachment and devaluation of alternatives. Individuals who are more committed to their relationships tend to view potential alternative partners in less favourable terms (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Rusbult, 1983). They see negative evaluation of the alternative as a matter of maintaining their commitment and strengthening their relationships. In the marketing context, evaluation of alternatives in purchase decisions plays a significant role in maintaining commitment to a current marketing entity (Fournier 1998), and is suggested to be considered as the outcome of customer-brand emotional relationship (Park et al., 2010). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

H9: Emotional brand attachment positively influences devaluation of alternative brands

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 depicts the full conceptual framework of this study. As shown, the antecedents of emotional brand attachment including symbolic benefits, brand image, brand identification, and sense of community are hypothesised to have significant impact on emotional brand attachment. In addition, brand passion, positive WOM, purchase intentions, willingness to pay premium price and devaluation of alternatives are considered the consequences of emotional brand attachment.

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Insert Figure 1 about here

METHODS

In order to gain useful and valid insights about the concepts and variables discussed above, as well as to test the relationships proposed in the conceptual framework, we would develop a self-completion questionnaire. Conceptualization and items will be developed drawing on prior research in brand management and luxury brands literature. Table 1 provides an overview of variables and scales. It also highlights the relevant literature from which these scales will be developed. We will use multi-item 7-point Likert scales with anchors of 1 (= strongly disagree) and 7 (= strongly agree). In order to gain comprehensive data out of whole range of individuals, an online survey of a random sample of customers of luxury goods in Australia will be conducted. The luxury goods will include fashion such as luxury wear, electronic items such as watches, luxury bags and accessories such as jewellery. In terms of reliability and validity of the research scales, the coefficient alpha test for internal consistency and in-depth factor analyses for instrument content validity will be conducted. Once the scale has been finalised and tested, we will collect data through surveys. In terms of data analyses, first a descriptive analysis of gathered data will be administered. This will help in gaining a general overview of participants' demographic information and extract any peculiar trends and patterns. Later, the research hypotheses will be examined using statistical correlation tests and structural equation modelling (SEM), via AMOS 16.0.

Insert Table 1 about here

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The literature confirms the importance of having a clear understanding about factors that influence consumers' purchase decisions, specifically in luxury products (Bian & Forsythe, 2012). The luxury industry in Asia-Pacific region and particularly in Australia has an annual growth of more than 10%,

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and provides companies and retailers with hundreds of million dollars in profit. This demonstrates the high value of this industry and its dynamic and emergent nature, which essentially call for more in-depth investigations.

While the subject of brand-consumer relationship has drawn attention over the last 15 years among marketing scholars, the luxury and fashion category lacks a significant multi-dimensional investigation of participating concepts and variables. This study will provide a meaningful contribution to the literature by conceptualizing a framework that examines significant determinants and the consequences of emotional connection between luxury brands and their consumers. Identifying and validating the sources of emotional connection with a luxury brand as well as its substantial outcomes would have noteworthy influence in strategic decisions. For example, it will assist brand managers in decisions regarding resource allocation and portfolio management, as they will be able to allocate resources on specific attributes of brands and on specific brands based on the source of emotional connections. Similarly, it will assist in advertising and marketing decision keeping in view that emotional appeal and consumer response.

For decades, managers of luxury brands have practiced several marketing strategies that focus on establishing customer brand relationship in order to gain market share. Luxury brands generally have higher proportion of loyal customer base compared to brands in non-luxury category and these customers seem to truly trust the brand. These customers establish exceptional connections with the brands they love (Tungate, 2008). They identify themselves with and through those brands both individually and socially. Although managers strive to work on building such connections, there is still a need for generalized findings and the validity of the relationship between emotional constructs such as brand attachment and its consequence and therefore, more research in different markets, different consumers and context will be useful to managers in their marketing activities.

By incorporating several behavioural concepts as the consequences of emotional brand attachment and by addressing and investigating the mechanisms that drive a consumer's emotional attachment through self-expressive concepts, the proposed framework expands the current understanding of the

determinants and outcomes of emotional connection among luxury customers. In addition, through understanding the underlying purchase motivations among consumers in luxury segments, marketers can appeal most effectively to those motivations in their marketing strategies. Lastly, the findings will provide managers with guidelines to enhance comprehension of brand-customer connections, which will consequently facilitate the development of operational marketing strategies.

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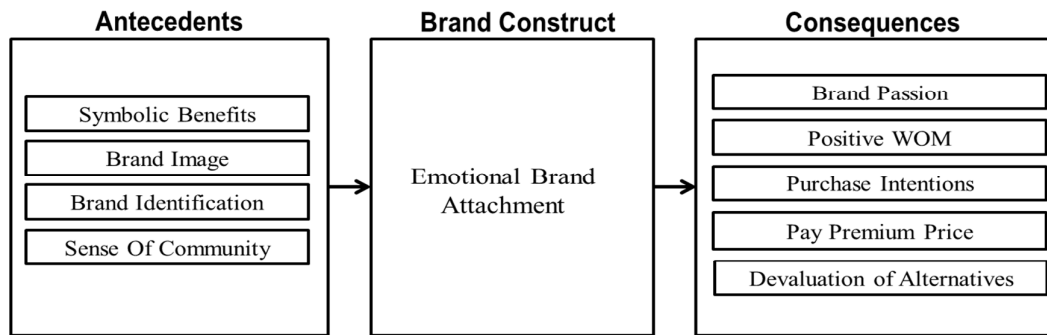
Figure 1: Study Conceptual Framework

Antecedents	Brand Construct	Consequences
Symbolic Benefits Brand Image Brand Identification Sense Of Community	Emotional Brand Attachment	Brand Passion Positive WOM Purchase Intentions Pay Premium Price Devaluation of Alternatives

Table 1. Summary of Relevant Literature for Variable Measurement

CONCEPT	VARIABLE	RELEVANT LITERATURE FOR
Antecedents	Symbolic Benefits	Anisimova (2007); Chevalier and
	Brand Image	Koubaa (2008)
	Brand Identification	Bergami and Bagozzi (2000); Escalas
	Sense of Community	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Keller
Emotional Brand Attachment		Park et al. (2010); Thomson et al. (2005)
Consequences	Brand Passion	Albert et al. (2008b); Sternberg (1997)
	Positive WOM	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Ismail and
	Purchase Intentions	Taylor and Baker (1994)
	Pay Premium Price	Thomson et al. (2005); Van Lange et al.
	Devaluation of Alternatives	Johnson and Rusbult (1989)