

Chapter 6

An Examination of Determinants and Consequences of Emotional Attachment for Low Cost and Premium Service Brands

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a parsimonious framework to show the relationship between emotional attachment, its antecedents as perceived quality and brand consciousness and its consequences as WOM, negative WOM, brand commitment, and brand purchase share in service industry. The chapter further aims to highlight the role of pricing on emotional attachment and investigates whether the relationship between emotional attachment and consumer response differ between a low cost and a premium brand. Structural equation modeling is used to test the proposed framework across three service industries, namely retail, airline and telecommunication. Theoretical and practical implications are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Consumers face with thousands of products and brands in their daily life. They pay little or no attention to most of those brands but have a liking of, use, recommend or stay loyal to only a few. The ones they really like are the ones they developed a relationship with, a relationship that is not only behavioral but

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an emotional one, similar to the one they form with their loved ones. The foundation of this relationship is based on the notion of emotional attachment.

Emotional attachment to a brand is defined as the strength of the emotional bond between a consumer and a brand (Park *et al.*, 2010). Park *et al.* (2010) describe the essential characters for brand attachment as brand self-connection, the cognitive and emotional connection between the brand and the self, and brand prominence, the positive feelings and memories about the attachment object. Marketing scholars have long been focusing on the importance of emotional components in long-term relationship of customers with brands (Fournier 1998). A number of studies identified the factors that create emotional attachment with brands and named them as; quality beliefs, long-term relationship, and self-brand integration (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), superior marketing characteristics and user-derived benefits (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2010), and self-congruity, experience, responsiveness, quality, reputation and trust (Japurta *et al.*, 2014). Others investigated the impact of brand attachment on consumer response. For instance, some studies state that emotional attachment leads to improved perceptions of product performance, devaluation of alternatives and willingness to pay a price premium. (Aaker, 1997; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Keller, 2008). Emotional attachment is also regarded as a major sign of behavioral measures such as brand share and need share (Park *et al.*, 2010; Rossiter & Bellman, 2012). Even though marketing scholars examined the construct excessively, no interest is shown for understanding the dynamics of emotional branding with respect to pricing strategies.

In marketing literature, price is defined as the indicator of the amount of sacrifice needed to purchase a product as well as an indicator of the level of quality. A premium pricing strategy, which is the practice of setting a price higher than the average market (De Chernatony & McDonald, 2003), is served as a proof of innovativeness (Kerin *et al.*, 1992), superior product/service quality (e.g. Jacobson & Aaker 1987; Zeithaml *et al.* 1996), and brand equity (Keller & Aaker, 1992). Several studies concluded that consumers are willing to pay more for the brands that they are loyal to and believe that those brands are of high quality (e.g. Aaker, 1996). This belief makes premium-priced brands also less vulnerable to competitive price cuts than low-priced brands (Blattberg & Winniewski 1989; Dodds *et al.*, 1991; Kamakura & Russell 1993; Milgrom & Roberts 1986). Low-cost pricing, on the other hand, is defined as a marketing practice to improve sales volume through lower prices compared to the rest of the market. As a result of the intensification of the level of competition in various industries, low-cost strategy is getting more popular to the point where it dominates some of these industries. However, research investigating the implications of brands adopting low-cost strategy is quite limited.

This chapter aims to contribute to the literature in this domain by exploring the differences between the nature of these relationships for low-cost and premium brands. Emotional brand attachment will be examined in a framework with various antecedents such as perceived quality and brand consciousness, and consequences such as WOM, negative WOM, brand purchase share, brand commitment for both low-cost and premium brand categories. Another contribution of this study is made through comparatively analyzing these factors and interconnections across three service industries. It is acknowledged that successful service companies are the ones that are managed to form an emotional connection with their customers (Jawahar & Maheswari 2009). According to McKenna (2005), emotional bonds that lead to true loyalty can only be created through people not products. Therefore, the role of emotional attachment becomes even more important in firms' success in service industry. However, there are only a few number of studies that search for the effect of emotional branding in service sector (e.g. banking (Aldlaigan & Buttle, 2005), grocery retail (Vlachos *et al.*, 2010), insurance (Mende & Bolton 2011)) and they focus mostly on the antecedents of emotional attachment.

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