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EDUCATING THE CONCEPTS OF A GROUNDED THEORY WITH THE CASE OF BRAND ATTACHMENT IN ONLINE SHOPPING BEHAVIOR

EDUCAR LOS CONCEPTOS DE UNA TEORÍA FUNDAMENTADA CON EL CASO DEL APEGO A LA MARCA EN EL COMPORTAMIENTO DE COMPRA EN LÍNEA

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ABSTRACT

The main goal of this study is to educate the theory using the case of online shopping. A grounded theory study was carried out using open, axial, and selective coding methods to analyze the data collected through interviewing. In terms of objective, the study is a fundamental study and as to data gathering method, it was used a non-experimental and a descriptive study. Study population consisted of individuals interested in online shopping who demonstrated such behavior every week. Through 20 interviews, data saturation was realized. The results were presented as a model with six aspects including verbal advertisement (word of mouth), approach, web-site infrastructure, seller's reputation, technical structure, and brand attachment. These results showed that using the method and teaching the theory of that, will increase the rate of selling.

Keywords:

Educating Grounded theory, brand attachment, online purchase behavior.

RESUMEN

El objetivo principal de este estudio es educar la teoría utilizando el caso de las compras en línea. se realizó un estudio de teoría fundamentada utilizando métodos de codificación abiertos, axiales y selectivos para analizar los datos recopilados mediante entrevistas. En términos de objetivo, el estudio es un estudio fundamental y en cuanto al método de recopilación de datos, es un estudio no experimental y descriptivo. La población de estudio consistió en individuos interesados en comprar en línea que demostraron tal comportamiento cada semana. A través de 20 entrevistas, se realizó la saturación de datos. los resultados se presentaron como un modelo con seis aspectos que incluyen publicidad verbal (boca a boca), enfoque, infraestructura del sitio web, reputación del vendedor, estructura técnica y apego a la marca. Estos resultados mostraron que usar el método y enseñar la teoría de eso aumentará la tasa de venta.

Palabras clave:

Teoría de la educación fundamentada, apego a la marca, comportamiento de compra en línea.

INTRODUCTION

Today consumers can choose among a variety of brands and winning the larger market share is one of the main issues and priorities of managers. Studies have shown that among ideas about brands and branding, customers pay more attention to brand attachment (Mohammadpour, 2013). Almost every brand has its own goals, which are beyond mere financial benefit and represent the reason that a brand exists. Yemon Sink describes this in his book "start with the why" by writing that rather than buying what companies try to sell, customers buy the reason that they should buy that product or service (Becerra & Badrinarayanan, 2013).

According to Sink, the "why" is the start point and the measure of brand attachment and credit. Successful companies communicate with customers in a way that the "why" for what they want to do for customers is transferred to the customers. In fact, the "why" is the most intrinsic and important proposition that differentiate a brand from others. Brand attachment lowers the costs and maximizes the profit. In addition, introduction and expansion of the Internet have created deep changes in purchase behavior of individuals. This is not to say that the effect of cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors is eliminated. Several studies have been conducted on customers' behavior on the Internet and along with identifying the effective factor, different models have been proposed by them about online purchase behavior. We are witnessing a surge in the growth of online purchase over the past years so that more than 70% of Dutch people in 2018 purchased their needed products and services in online space (Lee & Jung, 2018). Therefore, it is essential for online store managers to pay attention to the interests and tastes of online shoppers, provide the brands mostly sought after by the customers, and conduct more realistic analyses of the customers' behavior. Given the above introduction and the gap in the literature, one may say that because of the growing competition in online market, most of the studies have neglected brand attachment. Therefore, the main focus area of the present paper is to answer the question "what are the background factors and outcomes effective in brand attachment in online purchase behavior?" By doing this study, the authors hope to introduce a scientific model in this field of study (Marandi, et al, 2018).

The term "attachment" is a feeling of belongingness or liking or loving something or someone (Beverland, Lindgreen & Vink, 2016). Many researches have been carried out on brand attachment and a common point of the different definitions given by them is that brand attachment is a key factor in the success of marketing programs (Schmalz & Orth, 2012).

Brand attachment refers to the power to create emotional and cognitive connection to a brand, which can be a source preparation and process in individuals towards a specific brand. Through creating attachment, people see the brand as a part of themselves and create stable connections (O'Cass & Frost, 2004).

Attachment theory was jointly introduced by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth between 1991 and 1997. The concept of attachment is rooted in a deep and stable perception of emotional connections between an individual and another individual, time, or place. When there is an attachment between an individual and an object, they try hard to ensure that the connection with that object exists. Attachment theory states that people's interest needs to be aroused before they can develop attachment to a brand.

Several researchers have studied formation of emotional attachment between consumers and brands. It is notable that brand attachment is different from attitudes towards brand so that the former is the outcome of one's assessment of the interaction with a phenomenon that leads to a long-term commitment. Attachment can lead to different emotional and cognitive advantages (Kosowski & Prado, 2017). On the other hand, brand attachment can be defined as a psychological variable that refers to a long-term and stable reaction to the brand and causes strong emotions and feelings (e.g. prejudice, missing, and love) towards the brand (Chen & Sun, 2014). According to studies, the outcomes of brand attachment are brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, positive word of mouth (WOM), willingness to not substitute brand for another brand, and devaluation of alternatives (Mende, Bolton & Bitner, 2013). According to studies, the higher the brand attachment in the consumers, the higher the willingness to use their personal resources. The outcomes of brand attachment are brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment, and brand loyalty (Doherty & Ellis-Chadwick, 2006).

Doreen, Kenning & Eggers (2012), surveyed the effect of luxurious products assessment by consumers and the role of brand attachment in brand trust and intention to make an online purchase. They collected the data from online shoppers and found that brand attachment and trust in the website affected the perceived value by customers. In addition, through perceived value, quality of product affected the intention to repurchase a luxurious brand. Eng & Bogaert (2010), studied the effect of brand attachment on WOM and the role of mediator variable "brand image." He argued that in a world where people try harder to question reliability of mass production, attachment becomes a growingly important issue for them. Consumers, today,

ask brands to have honest commitment to their identities. They expect a real story, integrity, and transparency. Therefore, brands are asked to be honest about their identity, what they demonstrate, what they represent, and what they should preserve. Gierl, Plantsch & Schweidler (2008), worked on perception of brand attachment, brand value, and willingness to repeat a purchase. The study was on local restaurants and the author tried to assess the relationship between customers' perception of brand attachment.

The result revealed four aspects of brand value including brand awareness, brand connection, perceived quality, and brand loyalty that affected willingness to repeat a purchase. Significant relationships were found among these aspects.

As argued by studies, new technologies have affected the market trends so that the power has shifted from companies to customers. This shift represents the enormous effect of the Internet on businesses and customers (Japutra, Ekinici & Simkin, 2016).

Brand attachment is an indicative of personality and good performance of the brand in terms of products and services in the customer's eyes. Introduction of the Internet has added a dynamic concept to branding strategy. The majority businesses have an online presence so that online branding strategy can enable companies to differentiate their products and services for customers.

Among the features of online space are great volume of information, dynamic environment, and heavy crowded environment. These features are rooted in fast and immense flow of information and technological innovation. Given the ever-growing expansion of the Internet, extinction of traditional brand with no online presence is inevitable unless they shift their communication methods from traditional ones to web-based and online media (Hickman & Ward, 2007).

Some researchers argue that brand attachment is highly important in an information filled world. It reduces the costs of searching and time spent by customers. Accordingly, online brands in the modern age can be assessed through organizational strategy point of view and creating pleasant experience in customers' minds.

Today, brand attachment is a measure of power for companies and individuals. Managers, and stakeholders rely on brand attachment to express their perception and assessment of brand. Therefore, creating and preserving brand attachment is a concern for organizations so that they try to examine brand attachment in online shoppers and subjects of digital marketing.

Brand attachment determines the extent to which a brand is accepted. It is rooted in brand commitment. Kaskoo argued that attachment can be measured based on specific features like connection to stakeholders and credit of the company. Marketing researchers believe that brand attachment is growingly become a valuable concept in marketing and to enjoy more success and profit, brands need to create stronger attachment in their customers. When brand attachment creates a benefit for customers, they reply to that benefits by longer loyalty to the brand. Therefore, brand attachment is one of the main qualitative sources of success in companies, of which the main function is to create behavioral loyalty in customers. During uncertainties, fame of the brand eliminates any doubt in customers and preserve their trust in the company. Value of attachment is even evident in the income so that with stronger attachment, higher sale is expected. It is notable that bringing back the customers when brand attachment is lost is not easy.

METHODOLOGY

By analyzing qualitative data, the present paper proposes a novel and indigenous model of brand attachment in online purchase behavior to fill the theoretical gap in the literature. As to the objective, the study is a fundamental work and as to data gathering tool, it is a non-experimental and descriptive study based on qualitative approach (grounded theory). Given that the objective of the study is to describe and explore a phenomenon, qualitative research tools (open and in-depth interviews, library study, examining theoretical bases, observations and the like) help us to give a clearer picture of the problem and achieve a conceptual model based on experts' viewpoint.

Qualitative research method: Grounded theory strategy

To develop a conceptual model, a grounded theory approach was followed. Strauss and (Kuo, Yang & Chung, 2013) suggested open, axial, and selective coding methods for analyzing qualitative data. In open coding method, researcher tries to identify concepts and ideas concealed in text data about the subject of study. Axial coding focuses on clusters and secondary categories in casual relationships to explain the phenomenon under study. Axial coding can be done along with open coding. The relationship between clusters can be either clear or concealed. In fact, axial coding categorizes the indices of open coding into the aspects of the elements and the indices.

Selective coding consists of identifying the main code or its sub-categories and finding systematic and logical relationships between the codes.

Study population, sample group, and data gathering tool

Study population of this qualitative section consisted of two parts. At first, the author selected experts in academic and industrial (Digikala and Bamilo, two Iranian online retailers) environments with extensive theoretical and practical experience in the field of brand attachment and online shopping behaviors for interview. The content of each interview was coded through consulting with the experts. Data saturation was ensured after 20 interviews and open coding was started where 152 open codes were extracted. Afterwards, axial and selective coding was performed based on the literature review. Given the explorative nature of qualitative research that needs a small number of participants, snowball sampling method (chain sampling) was used to select the participants. The required number of participants was determined based on data saturation – i.e. the point where no new indices or construct could be found through interviewing.

To examine the reliability of interviews, test-retest (stability index) and intra-subject agreement (repeatability index) were used. The results showed that retest reliability and intra-subject agreement were 84% and 77% respectively. With reliability score higher than 60%, reliability of the coding process was supported. Given the naturalistic and pluralistic approach of qualitative studies, validity of the study depends on the performance of researcher. Validity at qualitative stage and qualitative interviews in particular refers to reality and knowledge. Therefore, validity was checked step by step through the seven steps of qualitative research including determining the subject, design, condition and situation of study, taking notes, analyzing, confirming, and reporting (Marticotte, Arcand & Baudry, 2016).

FINDINGS

The following steps were taken:

- Reading the interviews texts thoroughly and extracting the key statements as the main statements of each interview.
- Determining the key points after determining the main statements for open coding.
- Extracting the key concepts using the framework of open coding.
- Determining and extracting the primary categories based on aligning the key concepts.
- Comparing categories and differentiating the main category from the secondary categories.
- Determining the relationships between categories based on Straus and Korbin's grounded theory pattern to find the main aspects and extract the research model.

- Completion of qualitative phase after extracting the final research model.

Based on a grounded theory strategy, open coding process would be started after each interview. Through this process, the extracted codes would be assigned with tags and concepts after each interview to determine the main concepts and key categories. These categories needed to be abstract enough to make the concepts and codes covered by them aggregable for further survey and more general theoretic inclusion. This method led to more than 152 reliable and major points extracted from qualitative interviews.

Axial coding

Axial coding connects categories and sub-categories based on their aspects and specifications. To uncover the relationship among categories, Straus and Korbin's analytical tool was used. The main elements of the tool are condition, actions, reactions, and consequences.

Causal conditions

Causal conditions in this model are the events that create conditions and issues pertinent to each phenomenon. They also explain why and how people and groups respond differently. The causal conditions include items and categories that directly affect brand attachment in online shopping behavior or somehow create and develop the phenomenon. The categories of causal conditions are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Categories and concepts of causal conditions.

Main category	Secondary category
Causal condition: popularity of the online store	Proper layout of products in the website
	Capability to search information about quality and price of products
	Easy access to products
	Proper technical backup to make it easier for the shoppers to trust
	Online shopping experience

Background conditions

Background conditions indicate a specific set of specifications of a phenomenon that are generally related to the place of events and also the related events. The background specifications are the factors that brand attachment in online shopping behavior is not possible without them. That is, such specifications can create the specific conditions in which approaches to better management and response to a phenomenon can be followed. These conditions are formed by a set of concepts, categories, and background variables (Table 2).

Table 2. Categories and concepts of background conditions.

Main category	Secondary category
Background condition: website infrastructure	User-friendly content
	Product information such as color, weight, material, guarantee is visible for the visitors
	Using responsive page design compatible with different browsing devices
	Routine website update

Intervening conditions

These conditions include more general conditions like time, space, and culture that simplify or create limitations among the variables in a specific field.

These conditions form a spectrum of effects from very far to very close. These factors are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Categories and concepts pertinent to intervening conditions.

Main category	Secondary category
Intervening conditions: online purchase technical condition	Building trust in website visitors
	Improving quality of graphic design and SEO of the site
	Receiving customers' satisfaction stars and authenticity sign
	Using SSL technology to improve security of transactions with the website

Axial category

The main phenomenon should be axial, so that all other categories should be connected to them. Axial phenomenon is the principle and axis of a process that are connected to all other main categories (Table 4).

Table 4. Concepts and categories pertinent to axial phenomenon.

Main category	Secondary category
Axial category: brand attachment	Improving brand loyalty in customers
	Paying premium price
	Brand experience
	Improving customers' satisfaction
	Customers' attitude towards brand
	Improving customers' knowledge about brand
	Improving customers' perception of the quality of product

Approaches

Approaches are models that are the outcomes of axial category and lead to results. They are a set of measures taken to manage, control, or respond to the phenomenon under study (Table 5).

Table 5. Categories and concepts pertinent to approaches.

Main category	Secondary category
Approaches	Brand trust
	Customized products
	Brand assessment
	Brand honesty
	Brand reliability

Outcomes

Outcomes are the results of actions and reactions and comprised of evident and concealed outcomes. Based on open coding, concepts pertinent to outcomes were extracted and titled based on forward-backward movement between themes and the concepts of main categories. Therefore, the outcomes were categorized into three areas of organization, customer, and society (Table 6).

Table 6. Categories and concepts pertinent to outcomes.

Main category	Secondary category
outcomes of WOM	Recommending the brand to others
	Talking about the specifications of brand
	Positive talks about the brand
	Preferability of the brand
	Encouraging others to buy products or services of the brand
	Uniqueness of the brand
	Intention to repeat the purchase

Selective coding

Selective coding uses the results of other coding steps to select the categories and connect them systematically to other themes, validate the connections, and develop categories that needed to be developed. This model demonstrates the causal condition, binding or motivating factors, and the process of brand attachment in online purchase behavior. In addition, according to the grounded theory strategy, after this stage, axial and selective coding processes were conducted to find the main aspects and

categories and extract the conceptual model of study. By combining the key points and codes, 152 main or key concepts were obtained and categorized into six main aspects. The Figure 1 illustrates a paradigm model of brand attachment in online shopping based on grounded theory strategy.

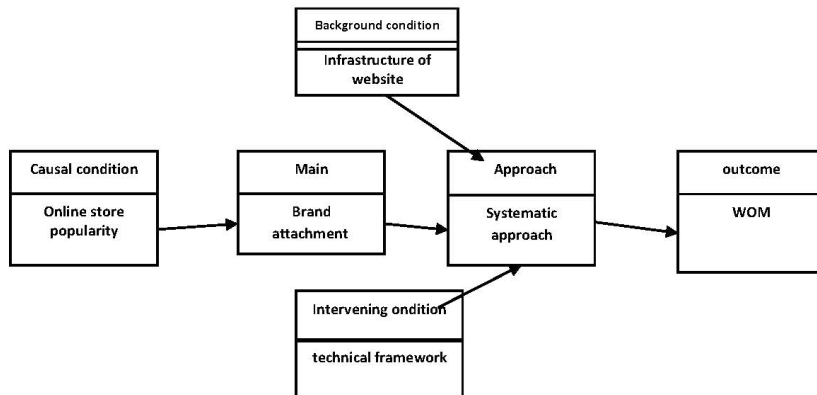


Figure 1. Paradigm model.

Concepts, categories, and all aspects were defined based on the findings of grounded theory strategy and using the results of analyzing the data obtained from interviews and surveying the semantic and conceptual relationships among the codes. The Figure 2 illustrates the findings as the proposed model of the study.

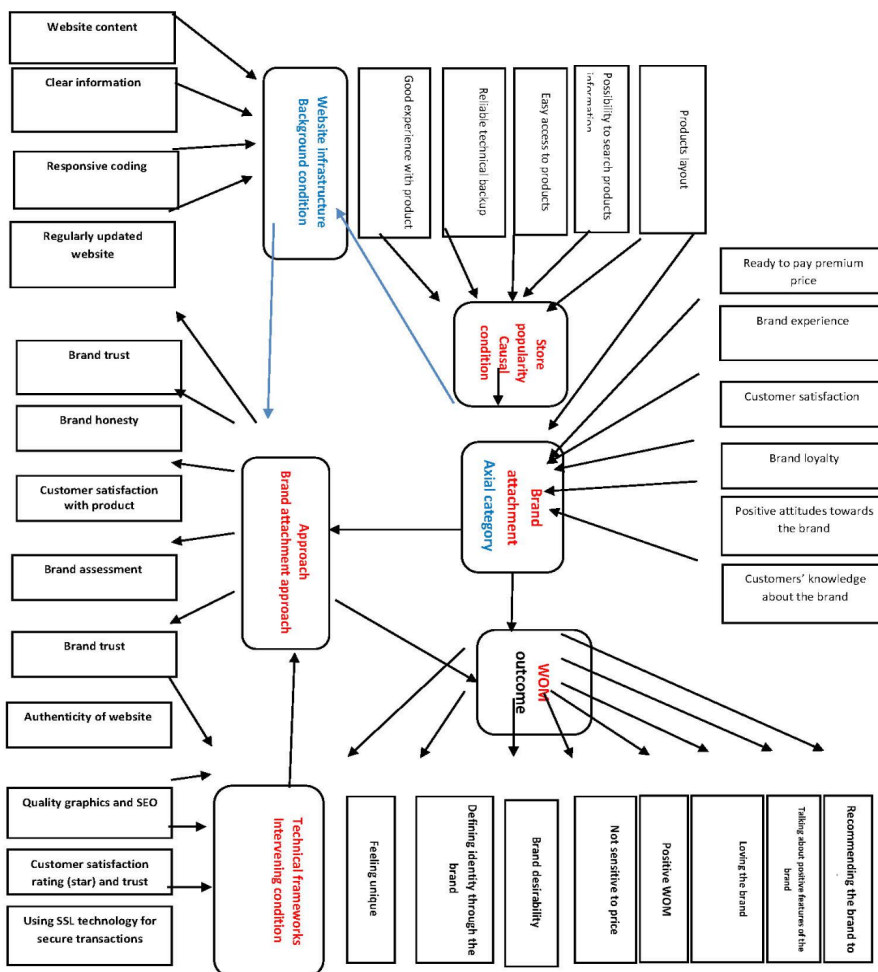


Figure 2. Paradigm model.

As the results of grounded theory strategy showed, brand attachment in online shopping had six main aspects each with their own elements. The first aspect was “brand attachment,” which according to grounded theory model, was an axial theme. To elaborate on this theme, different elements were identified and defined. Six key categories were identified that are illustrated in the conceptual model including customers’ knowledge of the brand, customers’ attitudes towards the brand, customers’ satisfaction with the brand, brand experience, and brand loyalty. The second aspect was “approach” with five key categories viz. brand trust, brand honesty, customers’ satisfaction with performance, brand assessment, and brand liability. The third aspect was “causal condition” with five key categories. These categories are customer’s experience with online shopping, good technical backup, easy access to products, ease of finding information about products, and proper layout of products. The fourth aspect, according to grounded theory model, was background condition with key categories including website content, information about specifications of the products, responsive page design, and regular website update. The fifth aspect was “WOM,” which was part of the outcomes of grounded theory model with seven key elements including recommending brand to other, talking about the brand with others, saying positive things about the brand, preferability of the brand, encouraging others to buy products of the brand, uniqueness of the brand, and intention to buy. The interviews also showed some of the factors that affected brand attachment in online shopping, which were called as ‘intervening variables.’ Among these variables are hardware security, money back guarantee, website design, and online customer services.

CONCLUSIONS

The growing correlation between brand attachment and other concepts of marketing and consumer behavior has been emphasized by many studies. Brand and products attachment have become one of the main pillars of contemporary marketing so that brand attachment can differentiate a business from the competitors. Brand attachment model in online shopping behavior was designed and elaborated. Comparing the proposed model with models of other studies indicates that the present model uses a multiple approach and covers the causal relationships among variables in an attempt to cover weaknesses of previous researchers.

Based on the comparisons, brand trust and honesty and ability to keep the quality of products were the aspects of brand attachment that influence perceived quality of customer-brand relationship in online shopping experience.

This is consistent with Rajnesh, Chiranji, and Mooner’s study. In addition, men and women had different behaviors in terms of their shopping decisions; a finding that merits the attention of managers.

In addition, women tended to pay more attention to content and brand attachment than men so that women engage more in the purchase process. This finding is consistent with Verhalen. Prestige-based pricing of luxurious brand increases mental engagement in customers, which leads to better perception of brand attachment. This finding is also consistent with Verhalen.

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