

Linking Luxury Brand Experience and Brand Attachment Through Self-Brand Connections: A Role-Theory Perspective



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Abstract The importance of brand experience in the luxury context has been increasingly gaining attention recently, due to the need to provide consumer with unique moments of connection. This research builds on the growing body of literature, in an attempt to identify the brand attachment's contribution to that and how self-brand connections can be affecting the process, and also examine the influence of luxury values, national values and human personality on brand attachment. Role theory is used as an underlying theory, specifically analysing consumer's identity, role formation and role enactment. Using a questionnaire-based survey for existing luxury customers, the findings indicate that brand attachment positively impacts brand experience, through the mediating role of self-brand connections and highlight the positive influence of luxury and national values play, and the negative of human personality. The results demonstrate the importance of brand attachment as a tool to create strong experiences, and indicate managerial implications for consumers' selves' connections to luxury brands.

Keywords Cross-cultural · Luxury values · Human personality · Brand experience · Self-brand connections · Brand attachment

1 Introduction

Significant changes have been taking place in the luxury sector lately. The importance of experience has been increasingly underlined, but the way to create such moments-of-truth is still under investigation.

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The understanding of the role of attachment in affecting the experience might be of great help in that direction. However, under this scope, the individual's self will have a crucial role to play. On the one hand, self-brand connections might affect the degree of influence and on the other, the individual's identity might also affect how the experience is perceived. Since all these relationships are highly linked to the self and can be interpreted through the social psychology approach and precisely role theory.

This research aims to identify the different mechanisms through which brand experience affects brand attachment within the luxury context. We adopted the social psychology approach, which provides significant information, not only in terms of why consumers behave as they do, but also in terms of how meaning is created through interaction. Under this scope, role theory is adopted as an underlying theory to investigate how the luxury consumer's role is formed and enacted today, but also how the individual's identity within that role affects the whole process. Despite the significant information that role theory offers, it has yet to be applied in the consumer context with a holistic framework. To this end, this research aims to fill this research gap, by proposing a framework including role theory dimensions and elements from the branding literature.

Despite the performance-oriented nature of this consumption, researchers have yet to examine it from a role-perspective. This research argues that brand experience, describing any point of interaction to the brand, and brand attachment, describing the level of connection to it, offer suitable parallelization to role formation and role enactment respectively. Moreover, consumer's identity, consisting of a personal, a social and a role-specific dimension, can be parallelized with luxury values, human personality and national values. The importance of brand-self connection is also considered in the proposed framework. Hence, we specifically examine the role of luxury values, human personality and national values on brand experience and how this subsequently affects brand attachment, with the mediating role of self-brand connections.

2 Literature Review

When the individuals' needs are satisfied by providing them with subjective intangible benefits, the degree of connection to the brand becomes stronger [1]. The individual's personal characteristics and traits will affect the interaction with the brand [2].

Furthermore, the things that someone evaluates as an ideal goal in life is linked to the prevailing norms in society, which shows the connection between luxury and national values [3].

We thus argue that:

H1: luxury values positively affect brand attachment.

H2: human personality positively affects brand attachment.

H3: national values positively affect brand attachment.

Furthermore, brand attachment can interfere with the ways and levels with which consumers experience the brand. These strong points of interaction to the brand [4], will however also depend on the existing degree of connection to the brand. We thus argue that:

H4: Brand attachment positively affects brand experience, through the mediating role of self-brand connections.

3 Methodology

This study employed an online questionnaire, which was sent to luxury consumers from India, France and Greece. The countries were selected due to their different levels of economic development. The total sample of 1026, consisted of 277 Indian, 306 French and 443 Greek respondents. 61% of them had a Master's degree, 48.6% of them were in the age group of 25–34 and 51.8% were male and 38.8% were female. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for each scale was of an appropriate level. The survey instrument measured a total of 4 constructs. Since the constructs of Luxury Values, National Values, Human Personality (for the dimensions of Extraversion Conscientiousness and Openness to experience), Brand attachment, Self-brand connections and Brand experience are already established in the academic marketing literature, the choice of scales was based on previously published research. The measurement of luxury values was approached as suggested from a scale developed from Shukla and Purani [5], including 11 items. National values were approached as suggested by Singelis et al. [6] and measured with 32 items. The scale for human personality was taken from the paper by Goldberg [7] and included 27 items, while the scale for brand attachment was taken from the paper by Park et al. [8] and included 4 items. Finally, the scale for self-brand connections included 7 items also taken from (Escalas and Bettman [9]) and the scale for brand experience was taken from Brakus and Schmitt [10] and 12 included items. All items were measured on a seven point Likert scale anchored by 1 = "Strongly disagree", 7 = "Strongly agree" or 1 = "Never", 7 = "All the time". To evaluate the construct validity of the scales, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. For the luxury values scale, with a score reliability of the scale of .764, three factors emerged. The first factor, which accounted for 22% of the total variance, describes Utilitarian and Cost perceptions. The second factor, which accounted for 18.1% of the total variance, describes the Experiential/hedonic value perceptions. The third factor, which accounted for 17.8% of the total variance, describes Symbolic/expressive value perceptions. Item 4 was deleted due to high cross-loadings. For the human personality scale, with a score reliability of the scale of .675, three factors emerged. The first factor, which accounted for 20% of the total variance, describes the openness dimension in its majority. The second factor, which accounted for 14% of the total variance, is the extraversion dimension. The third factor, which accounted for 12% of the total variance, is again in its majority

linked with the conscientiousness dimension. Items 16 and 25 were deleted due to low loadings. For the national values scale, with a score reliability of the scale of .675, four factors emerged. The first factor, which accounted for 12.9% of the total variance, describes the horizontal individualism dimension in its majority. The second factor, which accounted for 12.8% of the total variance, refers to the vertical individualism dimension. The third factor, which accounted for 12.7% of the total variance, describes the vertical collectivism dimension. The fourth factor, which accounted for 11.4% of the total variance, describes the horizontal collectivism dimension. Items 4, 5, 8, 12, 14, 19, 21, 23, 25, 26, 27, 31, 32 were deleted due to high cross-loadings or low loadings. For the self-brand connections scale, with a score reliability of the scale of .875, two factors emerged. The first factor, which accounted for 48% of the total variance, describes self-brand connections linked to the personal connection to the brand. The second factor, which accounted for 34% of the total variance, describes self-brand connections linked to how the brand assists the individual to represent themselves to others. For the brand attachment scale, with a score reliability of the scale of .879, one factor emerged, which accounted for 73% of the total variance.

For the brand experience scale, with a score reliability of the scale of .828, four factors emerged. The first factor, which accounted for 23% of the total variance, describes affective and behavioural dimensions and precisely whether the brand is linked with physical experiences and whether it also causes emotions. The second factor, which accounted for 20% of the total variance, describes the intellectual dimension. The third factor, which accounted for 16% of the total variance, described the sensory dimension. The fourth factor, which accounted for 11% of the total variance, describes behavioural and affective dimensions and precisely whether the brand is linked with actions and causes strong emotions.

For testing hypotheses 1, 2, 3, a multiple regression was run to predict brand attachment from luxury values, human personality and national values. These variables statistically significantly predicted brand attachment, $F(3,811) = 53,073$, $p < .0005$, $R^2 = .164$. All three variables added statistically significantly to the prediction, $p < .05$. Moreover, unstandardized coefficients show how much brand attachment will vary with an independent variable when all other independent variables are held constant. For the independent variables, results indicated the following. For each one year increase in luxury values, there is an increase in brand attachment of 0.554. For each one year increase in human personality, there is a decrease in brand attachment of $-.228$. For each one year increase in national values, there is an increase in brand attachment of .211. H1 and H3 are thus confirmed and H2 is rejected, since human personality negatively affects brand attachment.

For the fourth hypothesis, we evaluated the accuracy of the mediation effect using SPSS macros (Model 4) for computing mediated effects. In step 1 of the mediation model, the regression of brand attachment on self-brand connections was significant, with $b = .1112$, $t(6, 43.768)$, $p = .00 (<.001)$. This means that according to the coefficient, a unit increase in brand attachment increases self-brand connections by .3401. In the second step, the regression of self-brand connections and brand

experience was also significant, with $b = .1202$, $t(5.2978) > 0$, $p < .001$. Thus, a unit increase in self-brand connections increases brand experience by .1202. We also controlled for brand attachment, which was still significant with $p = 0.000$, providing support for partial mediation. The final step was to test for the significance of the identified indirect effect. Since zero was not in the bootstrapping 95% confidence interval, with LLCI .0059 and ULCI .029, the indirect effect was in fact significant. H4 was thus confirmed.

4 Discussion and Conclusions

Our study examined the influence that luxury values, national values and human personality have on brand attachment. Also, we investigated the influence of brand attachment on brand experience, through the mediating role of self-brand connections. The findings indicated that luxury values positively affect brand attachment. This is in line with Loureiro and Kaufmann [11], who underlined the positive effect of luxury values on affective commitment towards a brand and also Prentice and Loureiro [12], who underlined the connection between social value and consumer engagement. National values were also positively related to brand attachment. This finding is in accordance with Hennings et al. [13] who identified the importance of culture in luxury consumption and Godey et al. [14] who identified the role of culture in perceiving luxury brand attachment. Human personality was identified to negatively influence brand attachment. This could be explained by the use of the openness, conscientiousness and extraversion dimensions of human personality and by the fact that such an individual might showcase lower levels of attachment to a brand. Furthermore, we found that brand attachment positively affects brand experience, through the mediating role of self-brand connections. This is in line with research showing connecting attachment and experience (e.g. [15]), but also how the perceived connection differs according to the perceived connection to the brand (e.g. [16–18]).

Significant managerial implications emerge from this study. First of all, through the relevance of luxury values and national values for brand attachment, it encourages brand managers to design relevant campaigns for each group. Thus, the individual's background should be taken into account for the design of effective connections, either through the use of familiar elements in their campaigns for that cultural context or through the cultivation of relevant associations. Furthermore, for the consumer to have stronger brand experiences, the degree of their attachment should be taken into account and further cultivated. This should also be tied to the fact that this relationship will be affected by the perceived degree of connection between the consumer's self and the brand.

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