

## AN ALTERNATIVE SCALE OF EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Emotional attachment (EA) is defined as the emotional bond connecting an individual with a specific target (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Recent research has stressed the importance of EA in the marketing domain (e.g. Park, and MacInnis 2006; Ariely, Huber, and Wertenbroch 2005). Marketing scholars acknowledge the importance of the study of attachment because of its relation to desirable marketing consequences. It has been shown that attachment is related to trust, commitment, and satisfaction (Rempel, Ross, and Holmes 2001; Spake, Beatty, Brockman, and Neal 2003; Thomson 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005), consumer defections (Liljander and Strandvik 1995), consumer's forgiveness (Ahluwalia, Unnava, and Burnkrant 2001), disposal choice (Walker 2006), brand loyalty and willingness to pay (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park 2005). Also, attachment has been proposed as a mediator (e.g., Novemsky and Kahneman 2005) of the effects of intentions on loss aversion, or a moderator for loss aversion (e.g., Ariely, Huber, and Wertenbroch 2005).

Despite all the research, there is no consensus on how the construct should be measured (Kleine and Baker 2004). This confusion is in part due to the confounding of emotional attachment and its antecedents or its consequences which also limits the conceptualization of the construct (Jiménez and Voss 2007). The lack of a parsimonious, reliable, valid, and generally applicable scale for measuring emotional attachment is an impediment to research that could better our understanding of how individuals create bonds with goods and services. Understanding how emotional attachment is created and its consequences is important because EA has been shown to be related to a core marketing concept: value. If marketers and academics have a valid measure of emotional attachment, it would facilitate conceptual models and empirical research aimed at better understand when and how consumers create strong EA bonds with the market offerings.

We developed an alternative, five-item, one-dimensional scale that reliably and validly captures emotional attachment to an object following procedures from Churchill (1979), Gerbin and Anderson (1988), and Mowen and Voss (2008). First, we review the literature on EA and its measures. We point out its shortcomings. Next, we carefully review the construct validity of the measure by distinguishing EA from its antecedents and consequences. After defining the construct we conducted four studies to develop the measure. Study 1 identified potential items that would tap into the construct. A five-item scale was selected and its psychometric properties were tested in Study 2. The scale showed internal consistency and unidimensionality. Study 3 supported the discriminant, convergent and criterion validity of the measure. The EA scale showed to be related to but different from satisfaction and involvement and it significantly predicted separation distress.

Finally, in Study 4 we tested the nomological validity of our measure. We show in study 4 that EA is antecedent to WTP. Further, we suggested that EA and self-concept maintenance (the degree to which an object or a brand reflects who the individual is) would interact in determining an individual's willingness to pay a price premium for a valued brand. Our data supported this conceptualization. Our findings suggest that a brand that reflects who the individual is may be valuable but not necessarily implies an emotional attachment. Specifically, when self-concept maintenance is low, WTP is predicted by emotional attachment. However, when self-concept is high, the effect of EA on WTP is not that strong.

It is important noting that a distinctive advantage of this scale is that it showed consistency across contexts. In study 2 individuals used the scale in a context of expected (pre-owned) emotional attachment to an object (i.e. gift). This context is relevant in decision making and choice where researchers may be interested to measure pre-factual attachment to objects (e.g. Dhar and Simonson 1992; Carmon, Wertenbroch, and Zeelenberg 2003; Ball and Tasaki 1992). In Study 3 individuals assessed their level of EA to an owned object (i.e. car). Emotional attachment to objects has long called for a reliable measure of attachment (Kleine and Baker 2004). Finally in Study 4, individuals assessed their level of EA to a brand. Recent research has stressed the importance on making brand connections (e.g. Thomson et al. 2005). The consistency of the EA scale across contexts supports the context generalizability of the measure. Thus, we propose this EA scale as a reliable and valid measure of emotional attachment that can be used in several contexts. In addition, we contribute to the development of a nomological network that advances our understanding of EA (Cronbach and Meel 1955; Mowen and Voss 2008) and prevents the confounding of terms and definitions (Teas and Palan 1997). The distinctions between EA and its consequences and antecedents are important to better understand the role of EA in marketing.

References Available on Request.