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The Influence of Brand Trust, Brand Familiarity and Brand Experience on Brand Attachment: A Case of Consumers in the Gauteng Province of South Africa

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Abstract: In today's post-modern era, brands significantly play an important role in consumer behaviour. This paper aimed at examining how brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience have an influence on brand attachment using a sample of consumers within the Gauteng Province of South Africa. A quantitative method using Smart PLS was employed to test the relationships among the three hypotheses. A structured questionnaire consisting of validated scales for brand trust, brand familiarity, brand experience and brand attachment was administered to a sample of 181 consumers within the Gauteng province of South Africa. The results of this study showed that brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience positively influences brand attachment in a significant and direct way. The results of this empirical study provided fruitful implications toacademicians, practitioners as well as policy makers from the perspective of academicians.This study makes a significant contribution to the brand management literature by systematically examiningthe influence of brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience on brand attachment. On the practitioners' side, this study therefore submits thatbrand managers for companies in the Gauteng province ought to concentrate on strategies that enhance brand experience because it is likely to yield the desired brand attachment when compared to other research constructs. The results which have been obtained from this study may also be used to generate new policies and revision of the existing policies. Precisely,policies or strategies which exist in numerous organizationsare there in order to make consumers remain attached to certain brands.Moreover, this study vastly add new knowledge to the present body of brand management literature in Africa - a context that is neglected by some academicians in developing countries.

Keywords: *Interpersonal Attachment Theory, Brand trust, Brand familiarity, Brand experience, Brand attachment*

1. Introduction

Being able to build a relationship with a consumer through the brand is a vital necessity for marketing (Rammile, 2015). Magnoni and Roux (2012) concurs that building and maintaining a strong consumer-brand relationship is of great importance for managers. According to Roustasekehravani and Hamid (2014) having a successful brand will result in more market share and more profitability. In addition, brand plays an extra ordinary role in companies related to services because brands which are strong increase the pace of customer's trust of the purchase that is invisible (Berry, 2000). From the perspective of a firm, building a strong brand is essential for gaining and establishing a competitive advantage over one's business rivals (Chang & Liu, 2009). Firms implement brands, in order to stand out and to develop loyal customers (Keller, 2013). According to Kotler and Armstrong (2010:242) branding allows businesses to sell their products distinctively among competitors. Branding also provides the business with distinctive legal protection, such as patents or trademarks, therefore businesses need to conceptualise their brand meaning for consumers to form a relationship with the overall brand (Sokhela, 2015:10).

According to Laforet (2010:2), individuals today are undoubtedly a generation that consumes brands, from the clothes they wear, to the food they eat and even to the toothpaste they use. To consumers buying is a form of problem solving and it is branding that makes this process significantly easier, as people first search for information, evaluate this information and then only decide to make a purchase decision (De Chernatony, McDonald & Wallace, 2011:61). In addition, Ahmed, Rizwan, Ahmad and Haq (2014) are of the view that loyal customers of specific brand are probably willing to pay any price for the product and this is due to the communication of the brand, trust of the customer as well as better service quality offered by the brand make consumer attractive to use it. The major contribution of the paper is that it suggests a framework which will make a positive input to the body of knowledge and the growing branding literature. Howeverit is not clear in

the marketing or branding literature in particular, the extent to which brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience influences brand attachment.Despite an avalanche of theoretical contributions made by many international scholars on brand attachment literature, it appears that within the South African context, there is dearth in research studies that have shed light on the influence of brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience on brand attachment. Previous researchers have examined how brands influence consumer behaviour in various contexts by focusing on consumers' preferences for private and national brand food products (Wyma, Van der Merwe, Bosman, Erasmus, Strydom, & Steyn, 2012). Brand service quality, satisfaction, trust and preference as predictors of consumer brand loyalty in the retailing industry (Chinomona, Mahlangu & Pooe, 2013);Brand recognition in television advertising: The influence of brand presence and brand introduction (Gerber, Terblanche-Smit, &Crommelin, 2014); Perceived Brand Personality of Symbolic Brands (Müller, 2014); The impact of packaging, price and brand awareness on brand loyalty (Dhurup, Mafini &Dumasi, 2014); Consumer intentions of purchasing authentic luxury brands versus counterfeits in South Africa (Shunmugam, 2015); An empirical investigation into the effectiveness of consumer generated content on the purchase intention of sports apparel brands (Venter, Chuchu& Pattison, 2016); Celebrity endorsement advertising: brand awareness, brand recall, brand loyalty as antecedence of South African young consumers' purchase behaviour (Ndlela&Chuchu, 2016). Therefore, the findings of this study will contribute a lot as branding techniques or guidelines for marketers as well as brand managers who desire that consumers should always be attached to their brands. In view of this identified research gap, the objectives of this study are centred on investigating the influence of brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience on brand attachment.

Significance of the Study: This study will be of significance to brand managers of various retail organizations since most of them aim to maximize profitability. Therefore, this study will help brand managers and marketing managers to identify the predictors which enhance brand attachment among consumers within the Gauteng province of South Africa. In addition, this research is of significance domain to the body of knowledge as it extends the knowledge base that currently exists in thefield of brand management. Moreover, it is anticipated that the findings will be of value to future researchers and scholars who may use the research findings of this study to carry out their own studies as well as those academicians who may also find helpful gaps in research that may spur interest in further research.

2. Literature Review

Theoretical grounding: In order to get a clear understanding of the context of this research, this study will be anchored in the framework of the Interpersonal Attachment Theory which is deemed to provide an appropriate theoretical grounding to this study. The conception of brand attachment has its roots in the Interpersonal Attachment Theory, which was pioneered by Bowlby (1979). The attachment theory describes the innate human need to form affectionate bonds (Bowlby, 1980). Additionally, this theory propounds that attachment to figures is an inborn behavioral system (Tsai, 2011). Amin &Malin (2012) points out that according to the theory; a child shows separation anxiety and distress as soon as a parent or significant other no longer is present. In this case, it would be on the attachment to brands, and if the consumer shows feelings of regret and sorrow when the object is no longer available (Amin &Malin, 2012). Conversely, Moussa and Touzani (2013:339) argue that many of attachment theory's premises are transferable to consumer-brand relationship. According to Ismail and Ali (2013:55) the basic underlying premise of attachment theory is "Separation Distress", which refers to the extent to which consumers show their emotions when exposed with real or imagined separation from an object of strong attachment. Applied to the brand attachment paradigm, the theory subjected that customers have an innate propensity to be attached to some brands (Pawle& Cooper, 2006; Parish & Holloway, 2010). Thomson (2006) suggests that the attachment theory can make a contribution to marketing because of the distinctive qualities of an attachment. Therefore, based on the authors' explanations it can be noted that if the attachment theory is taken into consideration it can assist brand managers of various retail organisations in building up consumer to brand relationships.

Brand Trust: Trust can be defined as the extent to which a consumer believes that a certain brand satisfies his or her desire (Chinomona, 2016). Brand trust is an important mediator factor on the customer behaviors before and after the purchase of the product; and it causes long term loyalty as well as strengthens the relations between two parties (Liu, Li, Mizerski, &Soh, 2012). Jin, Line and Merkebu (2015) and Geçti and

Zengin (2013) are of the view that brand trust is the customer's willingness to rely on the ability of a brand to perform its function as expected. Furthermore, brand trust is defined by Chinomona, Mahlangu and Pooe (2013) as a consumer's confident beliefs that he or she can rely on the brand to deliver promised services or products. It can be interpreted that brand trust is created and developed by direct experiences of consumers via brands (Kabadayi & Alan, 2012). According to Cakmak (2016) brand trust is described as a secure feeling which consumer feels that brand in question will meet their personal expectations. Moreover, trust can reduce the consumer's uncertainty, because the consumer not only knows that brand can be worth trusting, but also thinks that dependable, safe and honest consumption scenario is the important link of the brand trust (Soong, Kao & Juang, 2011). Drawing inference from the above descriptions of brand trust, it is arguable to elucidate that when customers have a trust to the brand, repeat purchase behaviour will be created, which leads to commitment to the brand, and the relationship between brand as well as customers can be built up.

Brand Familiarity: Familiarity is defined by Saini (2015) as the number of product-related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer. Normally a well-known brand is a source of competitive advantage as familiar brands are highly salient in the minds of consumers, and the brand has the ability to differentiate itself in the clutter of competition (Lee, Conroy, & Motion, 2012). When consumers decide to buy products, they tend to be affected by brand familiarity (Chen, Chen & Wu, 2015). According to Mikhailitchenko, Javalgi, Mikhailitchenko and Laroche (2009) brand familiarity reflects the 'share of mind' of a given consumer attained to the particular brand and the extent of a consumer's direct and indirect experience with a brand. Nguyen and Gizaw (2014) points out that brand familiarity is extent of information available about the brand that makes a consumer confident to buy the product. In addition, brand familiarity deals with a consumer's prior knowledge about the brand (Huang, 2016). According to Yang, Zhang and Zou (2015) brand familiarity is the degree of understanding about the brand accumulated in the consumers' memory after contacting and experience the brand. That is, the more contact with brand, the higher the brand familiarity (Buil, De Chernatony & Martínez, 2013). Furthermore, Mikhailitchenko, Javalgi, Mikhailitchenko&Laroche (2009)argued that brand familiarity is determined by strength of associations that the brand name evokes in consumer memory, and in this way it captures the consumer's brand attitude schemata. Moverover, when consumer choices are not a matter of life or death and consumers do not see large differences among brands, consumers are unmotivated about the choice process and so will use brand familiarity as a cue to make the decision (Keller, 2008:55). Drawing from the above explanations it can be noted that brands with higher levels of familiarity enjoy higher levels of liking among both consumers and retailers.

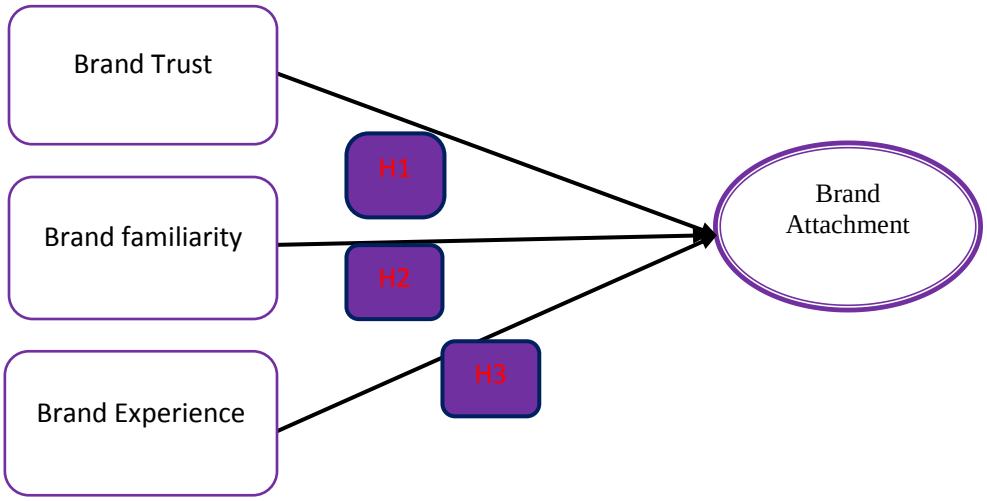
Brand Experience: Brand experience can be defined as the perception of the consumers, at every moment of contact they have with the brand, whether it is in the brand images projected in advertising, during the first personal contact, or the level of quality concerning the personal treatment they receive (Jouzaryan, Dehbini&Shekar, 2015:71). Brand experiences are defined as sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behavioral responses evoked by brand-related stimuli that are part of a brand's design and identity, packaging, communications, and environments (Evans, 2011). In addition, Akin (2016) harmonises that brand experience includes subjective, internal consumer responses (senses, emotions, and cognitions) and behavioural responses caused by brand-related stimuli that are parts of the brand's design, identity, packaging, brand communication and surroundings. Naidoo (2011:30) elucidates that brand experience deals with an individual audience as it interacts with a brand. Further Naidoo (2011:30) states every time she or he interacts with that brand bring about either a positive, negative or neutral experience. Brakus, Schmitt, and Zhang (2008) stresses that brand experience is a personal source of information that can be utilized to form the basis of future decisions, such as repurchase intention. Brand experience is created when customers use the brand, talk to others about the brand; seek out brand information, promotions, and events, and so on (Nadzri, Musa, Muda, & Hassan, 2016).From the above descriptions, it can be noted that brand experience involves theinvolvements that allow consumers to engage with and experience the true benefits of the brand.

Brand Attachment: Attachment is the emotional and affective bond built by a consumer in respect of a particular brand (Smaoui&Temessek-Behi, 2011:257). Customers tend to personify a favoured brand and thus build a close affiliation with it (Halloran, 2014). Brand attachment is a critical construct in describing the strength of the bond connecting consumers to a brand because it should affect behaviours that foster brand profitability and consumer lifetime value (Gover, 2011:7). Conceptually, brand attachment is similar to possession attachment when considering the brand as a source of emotions, self-identity, and shared

personal history values (Smaoui&Temessek-Behi, 2011:257). According to Storm (2015:24) the theory of brand attachment stems from consumer behavior research, where the area of interest is in relation to brand relationships and loyalty. Cristau (2003) describes brand attachment as a strong and long-lasting psychological and emotional brand relationship resulting from concomitant feelings of friendship and dependence towards the brand. Furthermore, Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Lacobucci (2010) define brand attachment as the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self. In a similar vein, Mala¨r, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger (2011:36) view brand attachment as a construct that reflects the bond connecting a consumer with a specific brand and involves positive feelings towards the brand. The bond varies in strength, with some individual exhibiting a weak bond with an attachment object and other exhibiting strong bond (Raut, 2015:29). Brakus, Schmitt and Zarantonello (2009:54) go on further to states as with brand attachment, customer delight is characterized by arousal and positive affect; it can be considered the affective component of satisfaction. In addition, Shestakov (2012:17) mention that brand attachment also possesses marketing value since it helps consumers choose a brand from a set of available brands in a certain market as it is based on emotional bond between the consumers' self and the consumers' perceived representations of brand's personality. This research paper adopts the definition stated by Louis and Lombart (2010:118) which explains brand attachment as an "emotional link between a consumer and a brand".

Conceptual framework and hypothesis development: In order to provide a link between the research constructs under investigation, the authors embarked on a conceptual framework. Jabareen (2009) defines a conceptual framework as a network, or "a plan," of interlinked concepts that together provide a comprehensive understanding of a phenomenon or phenomena. Furthermore, drawing from the literature reviewed, the conceptual model in Figure 1 has been developed. Moreover, Maziriri and Chinomona (2016:130) point out that 'the conceptual model is a representation of the constructs and their relationships with one another'.

Figure 1: Proposed Research framework



The relationship between brand trust and brand attachment: Belaid and Temessek (2011) point out that trust is a perquisite to brand attachment and it plays a main role in enhancing this affective bond. In marketing literature, trust is regarded as a key ingredient for the development of brand attachment and has been recognized as a highly significant tool for enhancing brand performance (Chinomona 2013). Among the studies which support the positive relationship between brand trust and brand attachment is the one conducted bySorayaei and Hasanzadeh (2012) to investigate the impact of brand personality on three major relational consequences which are trust, attachment, and commitment to the brand. Their study' results indicated that trust to the brand has significant effect on attachment to the brand. In another study that was conducted by Fallahi and Nameghi (2013) in order to investigate the effects of brand personality on three Constructs which are brand trust, brand attachment, and brand commitment in Imam Khomeini Port City, using the Structural equation modelling. Their study' results revealed that there is a significant

relationship between customers' brand trust and customers' brand attachment. Additionally, a study conducted by Asadollahi and Hanzaee (2011) focused on investigating the effects of brand knowledge and brand relationships on purchase behaviour of customers. The empirical results of their study revealed that the effect of brand trust on brand attachment was significant and this effect was also positive. Moreover, previous studies have found a positive relationship between brand trust and attachment (Louis &Lombart, 2010; Chiu, Huang & Yen, 2010; Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011; Chinomona, 2013). Therefore, inferring from the literature and the empirical evidence above mentioned, the study hypothesizes that:
H1: Brand trust has a positive influence on brand attachment

The relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment: Taghipourian and Bakhsh (2015) analysed the factors that have an influence on brand attachment and the ones that are influenced by it. Taghipourian and Bakhsh (2015) identified brand familiarity as a factor that influences brand attachment. The literature and research on place attachment suggest that familiarity is one of the predictors of the bonding between people and place (Williams &Vaske, 2003). Several other researchers, developing a measurement for place attachment, considered familiarity as one of the dimensions (Raymond, Brown, & Weber, 2010; Hammitt, Backlund&Bixler, 2006, Hammitt, Backlund&Bixler, 2004).
H2: Brand familiarity has a positive influence on brand attachment

The relationship between brand experience and brand attachment: The experience that is able to touch the consumer emotional side will cause the existence of consumer attachment on the brand or specific product (Ardyan, Kurnianingsih, Rahmawan, Wibisono&Winata, 2016). According to Kang, Manthiou, Sumarjan and Tan (2016) as customer interactions with a brand increase, they develop emotional bonds through their experience; this is known as brand attachment. In addition, Belk (1989) debates to the fact those consumers are more likely to be attached to things that are significant to their past experiences, places and background. Moreover, elucidates that this relationship should exist because the positive experience a consumer has with a particular brand, is a driving factor in a consumer becoming attached to that particular brand (Mkhize, 2010). Therefore, inferring from the literature and the empirical evidence above mentioned, the study hypothesizes that:
H3: Brand experience has a positive influence on brand attachment

3. Methodology

The study utilized a quantitative research design using a structured questionnaire. The design was suitable to solicit the required information relating to brand trust, brand familiarity, brand experience and brand attachment.The approach enables to examine the causal relationships with the constructs utilised in the study.

Sample and procedure: The sample of the study comprised consumers with the Gauteng province of South Africa. A non-probability convenience sampling method was chosen for the purposes of this study since the characteristics of this method have particular appeal to financial and time constraints. Every attempt was made to ensure geographical representation of the sample.

Target population and data collection: In this study; the target population were South African consumerswithin the Gauteng province who purchased any consumer goods. The sampling unit was the individual consumer. Students from the Vaal University of Technology, Vanderbijlpark campus were recruited and trained to serve as data collectors. A total of 200 questionnaires were collected from respondents. A covering letter accompanied the questionnaire stipulating the purpose of the study. In addition, the covering letter ensured respondents anonymity and confidentiality. A total of 181 questionnaires were eventually used for the analysis as 19 were discarded due to incomplete responses on the questionnaire, resulting to 91% of the response rate.

The questionnaire layout and questions format: A five-section questionnaire was designed to collect data from the participants.Section A comprised of multiple choice questions pertaining to the respondents' demographic factors such as gender; age and marital status.Section B assessed brand trust, section C measured brand familiarity, Section D of the questionnaire comprised questions on brand experience and

Section E assessed brand attachment. All theresearch scales were designed on the basis of previous work. Proper modifications were made in order to fit the current research context and purpose" (Chinomona & Dhurup, 2016:8). Brand trust was measured using four-item scales adapted from Gecti and Zengin (2013). BT 4 was deleted and remained with 3 measurement items because the factor loadings were less than 0.5. Brand familiarity' used a four-item scale measure; all were adapted from Saini (2015). BF 4 was deleted because it did not meet the threshold. Brand experience used a four-item scale measure; all were adapted from Akin (2016). BE 1 was deleted because the factor loadings were below the cutoff point of 0.5. Brand attachment was measured using a five-item scale taken fromGover (2011). BA 4 and BA 5 were deleted because the factor loadings were below the recommended threshold of 0.5 according to Anderson and Gerbing (1988). Responses for SectionB, C, D and E were measured by a five-point Likert scale, 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree/neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree to express the degree of agreement or disagreement.

4. Data Analysis and Results

A Microsoft Excel spread sheet was used to enter all the data and in order to make inferences of the data obtained, the Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) and the Smart PLS software for Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique was used to code data and to run the statistical analysis. Smart PLS has emerged as a powerful approach to study casual models involving multiple constructs with multiple indicators (Chinomona &Dubihlela, 2014).In addition,Smart PLS supports both exploratory and confirmatory research, is robust to deviations for multivariate normal distributions and is good for small sample size (Hair, Ringle, &Sarstedt, 2013). Since the current study sample size is relatively small (181) Smart PLS was found more appropriate and befitting the purpose of the current study.

Sample description: The study distributed questionnaires to different consumers in the Gauteng province in South Africa. Out of 210 questionnaires which were distributed, 199 were returned and out of these 199 questionnaires, only 181 were usable. This yielded a valid response rate of about 86%. Descriptive statistics in Table 1 show the gender, marital status, and age of consumers that participated in the study. Asindicated in Table 1 below, this study shows that females participated more in the study and constitute 54% of the total target population. Male consumers who participated in the study were 46% of the total population. The most active age group in terms of purchasing brands is that below 30 years which constitute 50% of the total population, followed by those between 31 and 60 years (38%) and last those above 60 years, constituting 12% only. This shows that those who are old and mostly on their pensions do not care about buying brand products maybe because they are old and have no money. Respondents who are married constitute 38% of the total population and the remainder is single which constitute 62% of the total population. The reason might be that those who are single need to attract the opposite sex and have life partners that are why they go for branded products which are very expensive.

Table 1: Sample demographic characteristics

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	83	46%
Female	98	54%
Total	181	100%
Age	Frequency	Percentage
≦30	90	50%
31-60	70	38%
≧ 60	21	12%
Total	181	100%
Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	68	38%
Single	113	62%
Total	181	100%

Path Modeling Results: Reliability and validity of the measurement instruments proves to be good so the study proceeded to test the proposed hypotheses. In total there are three hypotheses that are tested. In the path model, Brand Trust (BT), Brand Familiarity (BF) and Brand Experience (BE) are the predictor variables. Brand Attachment (BA) is the sole outcome/dependent variable. Figure 1, below offers the proposed hypotheses and the respective path coefficients. The same results of the path coefficients are tabulated in Table 2 depicting the Item to Total correlations, Average variance extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR) and Factor Loadings.

Scale accuracy analysis: As clarified above BT 4, BF 4, BE 1, BA 4 and BA 5 were deleted due to the fact that the factor loadings were below 0.5 which is the recommended threshold according to Anderson and Gerbin (1988). Table 2, above present the research constructs, Cronbach alpha test, Composite reliability (CR), Average variance extracted (AVE) and item loadings. The lowest item to total loading is BT 3 with 0.520 and the highest is BT 1 with 0.938. On Factor loadings the lowest is BT 3 with 0.622 and the highest is 0.942 which is BT 1.This shows that the measurement instruments are valid. The lowest Cronbach alpha is 0.701 and the highest is 0.873 which shows that the constructs are very reliable and are explaining more that 50% of the variance.

Table 2: Measurement Accuracy Assessment and Descriptive Statistics

Research constructs		Descriptive statistics*		Cronbach's test		C.R.	AVE	Measurement Item Loadings
		Mean	SD	Item-total	α Value			
Brand Trust (BT)	BT1	2.50	1.117	0.938	0.873	0.873	0.799	0.942
	BT2			0.864				0.911
	BT3			0.520				0.622
Brand Familiarity (BF)	BF1	2.02	1.079	0.653	0.850	0.850	0.790	0.785
	BF2			0.540				0.632
	BF3			0.541				0.679
Brand Experience (BE)	BE2	3.01	1.027	0.707	0.701	0.700	0.666	0.817
	BE3			0.723				0.856
	BE4	3.07	1.490	0.731				0.835
	BE5			0.700				0.807
Brand Attachment	BA1	3.10	1.300	0.801	0.786	0.786	0.735	0.876
	BA2			0.888				0.911
	BA3			0.716				0.890

BT=Brand Trust; BF= Brand Familiarity; BE=Brand Experience; BA=Brand Attachment

Table 3: Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix

Variables	BA	BE	BF	BT
BA	0.600			
BE	0.545	0.555		
BF	0.539	0.438	0.509	
BT	0.473	0.443	0.565	0.590

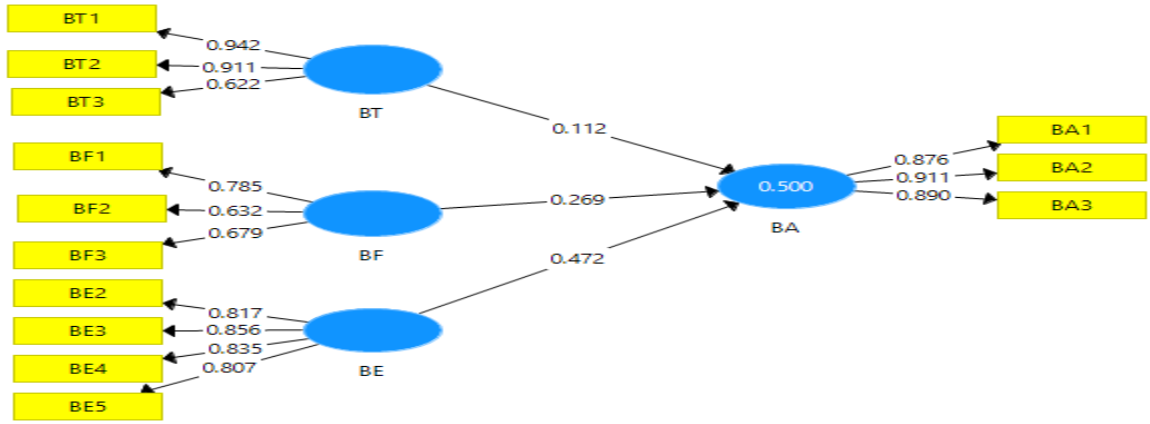
BT=Brand Trust; BE= Brand Experience; BF=Brand Familiarity; BA=Brand Attachment

Inter-Construct Correlation Matrix: Nunnally and Bernstein, (1994) proves that one of the methods used to check on the discriminant validity of the research constructs was the evaluation of whether the correlations among latent constructs were less than 0.60. "A correlation value of less than 0.60 is recommended in the empirical literature to confirm the existence of discriminant validity" (Nunnally& Bernstein, 1994:38). As can be seen all the correlations are below the standard level of 0.60 which indicate the existence of discriminant validity. The diagonal values in bold stands for the Shared Variances (SV) for the respective research constructs. The Shared Variance is expected to be greater than the correlation coefficients of the

corresponding research constructs. Table 3, above shows that the results further validate the existence of discriminant validity.

Path Model Results and Factor Loadings: Below is Figure 1, showing the path modelling results and as well as the item loadings for the research constructs.

Figure 1: Path Modeling and Factor Loading Results



BT=Brand Trust; BF= Brand Familiarity; BE=Brand Experience; BA=Brand Attachment

Table 4: Results of structural equation model analysis

Path	Hypothesis	Path coefficients (β)	T-Statistics	Decision on Hypotheses
Brand Trust (BT) →Brand Attachment (BA)	H1	0.112[a]	2.330	Accept/ Significant
Brand Familiarity (BF) →Brand Attachment (BA)	H2	0.269[a]	3.570	Accept/ Significant
Brand Experience (BE) →Brand Attachment (BA)	H3	0.473[a]	5.578	Accept/ Significant

[a]Significance Level p<.10; [b]Significance Level p<.05; [c]Significance Level p<.01.
[a]Significance Level p<.10;[b]Significance Level p<.05;[c]Significance Level p<.01.

Table 4, above present the four hypothesized relationships, path coefficients, the t-statistics and the decision criteria. The value of the t-statistic will indicate whether the relationship is significant or not. T-statistics which is above 2 is accepted and shows a significant relationship. Drawing from the results provided in Table 4, four of the hypothesized relationships (H1, H2 & H3) are significant.

Research Findings and Discussions

Hypothesis One (H1): Brand Trust (BT) →Brand Attachment (BA)**:** It can be observed in Figure 1 and Table 4 that H1, Brand Trust (BT) →Brand Attachment (BA) is supported by the hypothesis result (0.112) and is significant at t-statistics 2.330. The strength of the relationship is indicated by a path coefficient of 0.112. This implies that brand trust directly influence brand attachment in a positive significant way. The better the brand trust the higher the level of brand attachment.These results are in line with the works of Oh, Shin and Park (2016)who explored on the relationships among brand trust, brand attachment, and purchase intention.The results of the study reviewed that there is a positive linkage between brand trust and brand attachment.

Hypothesis Two (H2): Brand Familiarity (BF) →Brand Attachment (BA): Figure 1 and Table 4 above, indicate that H2, Brand Familiarity (BF) →Brand Attachment (BA) is supported by the hypothesis finding (0.269) and is significant at t-statistics 3.570. Again, the strength of the association is indicated by a path coefficient of 0.269. This implies that brand familiarity (BF) is positively related to brand attachment (BA) in a significant way. Thus higher levels of brand familiarity will lead to higher levels of brand attachment.These findings are consistent with the works of Taghipourian and Bakhsh (2015) who revealed that brand familiaritypositively influences brand attachment.

Hypothesis Three (H3): Brand Experience (BE) →Brand Attachment (BA): It is depicted in Figure 1 and Table 4 that H3, Brand Experience (BE) →Brand Attachment (BA) is supported significantly. The t-statistics is 5.578. The strength of the relationship is indicated by the path coefficient of 0.473. This finding suggests that brand experiencehas a direct strong positive effect on brand attachment. So the more effective the brand experience, the more brand attachment.Moreover; these findings are in line with a recent study conducted by Kang, Manthiou,Sumarjan, and Tang (2016) which focused on an investigation of brand experience on brand attachment, knowledge, and trust in the lodging industry.The results show the significant, positive relationship between brand experience and brand attachment.

Academic, **practical and policy Iimplications for the study:** The present study offers implications for academicians. An investigation of the research findings indicate that Brand Experience (BE) →Brand Attachment (BA) has the strongest influence on each other asindicated by a path coefficient of (0.473) when compared to other research constructs. Therefore for academicians in the field of brand management this finding enhances their understanding of the relationship between brand experienceand brand attachments as this is a useful contribution to existing literature on these two variables. On the practitioners 'side, the important influence of brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience on brand attachment among consumers in the Gauteng province of South Africa. This study therefore submits that marketers can benefit from the implications of these findings. For example, given the robust relationship between brand experience and brand attachment (0.473), brand managers ought to pay attention and theyshould put more emphasis on advertisements and promotions such that the customers experience the brands and therefore become attached to them. Consumers can also spread through word of mouth to families and friends thereby boosting their production and profits. Moreover; drawing from the results, the findings indicate that brand managers for companies in the Gauteng province ought to put more focus on strategies that enhance brand experience because it is likely to yield the desired brand attachment when compared to other research constructs. Moreover; the present studyoffers implications forpolicy makers who have been developing brand strategies to improve the performance of brands. Precisely; policies or strategies which exist in their respective organizations in order to make their consumers remain attached to their brands Thus, the results which have been obtained from this study may be used to generate new policies and revision of the existing policies.

Limitations and Future Research Suggestions: Limitations were observed during this research. First, the study was restricted to four factors only; namely brand trust, brand familiarity, brand experience and brand attachment. Future research could also include factors that influence brand attachment such as brand innovation and brand love. In addition, the results are based on a sample of 181 respondents which is not a bigger sample. This makes it difficult to generalize the results to other contexts in South Africa since South Africa has 9 provinces. Other researchers could make use of large sample sizes in order to get more representative views. This study focused on a purely quantitative research approach, other researchers could also try to use a mixed method approach or qualitative research so that in depth views of consumers in the Gauteng province of South Africa can also be taken into consideration.

5. Conclusion and Managerial Inferences

The study authenticates those factors such as brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experienceare instrumental in stimulating brand attachment in South Africa. In addition, brand experience has a stronger impact on brand attachment when compared to brand trust and brand familiarity. Theoretical and managerial implications are both observed in this study. Theoretically, this study makes a noteworthy progression in marketing management theory and consumer behavior by methodically examining the interplay between brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience on brand attachment. In this manner,

the study is an important contributor to the existing literature on this subject.On the practical front, brand trust, brand familiarity and brand experience were exerted as having a strong positive influence on brand attachment; improvements in each of these three factors could stimulate higher brand attachment to consumers in the Gauteng province of South Africa. Brand trust can be improved by, making sure that the brands are genuine and not fake. In addition, brand familiarity could be improved by making sure that the consumers know that the brand exists and this can be done through promotions. To increase brand experience managers should invest a lot of money on advertisements. Doing these things in a more articulate way could certainly result in strong brand attachment.

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