

BRAND ATTACHMENT TOWARD FUNCTIONAL, SYMBOLIC AND HEDONIC BRANDS

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Abstract

Purpose

Fashionable brands need to develop brand attachment so that their consumers become fans and act as apostles by recommending them. But how can companies develop brand attachment? This paper aims to investigate, on the one hand, the role of four drivers of brand attachment (perceived quality, brand personality, credibility and awareness) and three effects (loyalty, buying intention and perceived risk). On the other hand, three groups of fashionable brands with different positioning strategies are compared to analyze if the brand positioning strategy moderates the proposed relationships in the analyzed country.

Design/methodology/approach

To achieve the two objectives, surveys with the same instrument were conducted twice, and a sample of 1,922 consumers from the three most populated cities of Ecuador (Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca) took part in the study. They chose fashionable brands with functional ($n = 1,066$), hedonic ($n = 463$) and symbolic ($n = 393$) positioning strategies. They mentioned, for example, functional brands such as Avon, La Lechera, Nokia or Converse; hedonic brands such as Christian Dior, Oreo, Apple or Timberland and symbolic brands such as Axe, Coca-Cola/Coke, Motorola or DBond.

Findings

The results of this study show that (1) brand positioning affects attachment, (2) a functional positioning leads to higher consumers' loyalty, (3) a hedonic positioning leads to the strongest brand personality and credibility and (4) a symbolic positioning seems to be the less useful option in terms of desired effects.

Originality/value

First, this paper considers three different subscenarios in launching a new product: hedonic, functional and symbolic brand positioning. The comparison of these three scenarios makes progress with respect to previous research since the connection between consumers' brand attachment and positioning brand strategy has been scarcely addressed to date. Second, no study has been found that assesses the simultaneous effect of four key antecedents capable of enhancing brand attachment (personality, quality, awareness and credibility), causing three major effects (loyalty, purchase intention and decrease in perceived risk).

Keywords

Brand, attachment, positioning, cross-industry

Citation

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INTRODUCTION

Knowing and predicting consumer responses to brands is essential to marketing (Park, Macinnis, & Priester, 2006). Considering that attachment from its origin had a strong connection with emotions (Bowlby, 1958), and given the importance that emotions have in our lives, it is not surprising that emotional brand attachment is a concept that has been gaining relevance in recent years (Moussa, 2015). In fact, in a competitive and changing environment, it is increasingly important that new brands excite us (Veloutsou & Moutinho, 2009). For these reasons, the emotional brand attachment can predict the commitment to the brand (Chatzopoulou & Tsogas, 2017).

In this scene, three major positioning axes can be used when launching a new fashion brand: hedonic, functional and symbolic. Namely, a fashionable brand may try to highlight different attributes in its positioning: (i) to perform optimally (functional), (ii) its ability to gratify (hedonic) or; (iii) to enrich us emotionally (symbolic) (Park et al., 2006; Vlachos, Theotokis, Pramataris, & Vrechopoulos, 2010). Consequently, from this branch of research (Kwak, Kwon, & Lim, 2015; Schuitema, Anable, Skippon, & Kinnear, 2013), it is anticipated that the positioning of a brand (functional, hedonic, or symbolic) will condition the intensity with which the different antecedents of brand attachment act and the magnitude of their effects.

In this framework, this study seeks to analyze if the brand positioning strategy that has been chosen for a new fashionable product can moderate the relationships proposed between antecedents and effects of brand attachment. To achieve these two objectives, two times of surveys with the same instrument were conducted and 1,922 consumers from the three most populated cities of Ecuador (Quito, Guayaquil and Cuenca) took part in the study. They chose brands with functional ($n = 1066$), hedonic ($n = 463$) and symbolic ($n = 393$) positioning (Annex 1). This study did not start with any specific category of product or service on which to investigate since it was intended to study the categories to which the fashionable brands that first came to the minds of our respondents belonged. The brands with the greatest recall and presence among the respondents belonged to the following four product categories: (i) personal and household care, (ii) food and beverages, (iii) technology, and (iv) clothing and footwear. Previous studies on brand attachment published in this journal have not focused on a specific product category (So, Parsons and Yap, 2013 or Shetty and Fitzsimmons 2021 among others).

We try to add value to previous studies in two main points. First, this paper considers three different sub-scenarios in launching a new fashionable product: functional, hedonic, and symbolic brand positioning. Although previous studies have investigated the role of brand attachment on fashionable luxury brands (So, Parsons and Yap, 2013), the comparison of the three positioning scenarios referred to in previous lines remains under-investigated. Following Park et al. (2006), it is key to understand the chosen positioning of a brand to explain the attachment (emotions) that the brand will be able to generate. The connection between consumers' brand attachment and positioning brand strategy has been scarcely addressed to date. Even more, previous papers analyzing the moderating role of the brand positioning strategy on brand attachment models were not found.

Second, no study has been found that assesses the simultaneous effect of four key antecedents capable of enhancing brand attachment (personality, quality, awareness and credibility), causing three major effects (loyalty, purchase intention and decrease in perceived risk). After the lack detected in the literature, a holistic model that analyzes the impact of various antecedents and effects on brand attachment is proposed, considering the moderating role of the brand positioning strategy as a novelty point.

BRAND ATTACHMENT

Bowlby (1958) coined the term attachment (in interpersonal contexts), considering that attachment is a nexus charged with emotion that can cause much pleasure when the subject of attachment is present; or it can also cause pain with distance or rejection (Bowlby, 1969).

Several authors say that a strong emotional attachment is usually linked to feelings of strong affection, love and passion (Collins & Read, 1990). Lacoëuilhe (2000, p. 66) mentions that “brand attachment is a psychological variable that reveals itself in a lasting and unchangeable affective relationship (separation is painful) towards the brand and expresses a relationship of psychological closeness towards it”.

In the same vein, Park et al. (2006) propose a conceptual model of brand attachment, where there are three types of brand-self connectedness concerning brand attachment: (i) functional benefits, which provide an efficient performance; (ii) self-gratifying benefits, which give us pleasure through hedonic elements; and (iii) self-enrichment benefits, which satisfy symbolic needs through the ideal image we have of ourselves. Following this line of thought, next, we present our theoretical proposal. As these authors argue, that brand attachment can be conceptualized in two dimensions: self-connectedness and importance. Some years later, these authors (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci, 2010) remark two essential elements to define attachment: (i) the connection between the brand and ourselves, and (ii) the cognitive and emotional bond. In this sense, attachment denotes a psychological state of mind in which strong cognitive and affective ties connect the brand to the individual in such a way that the brand is seen as an extension of the self (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2008). Although brand attachment and brand attitude share many similarities, for example, both are psychological constructs, they are not the same. Brand attachment implicates “hot” affect from the brand's linkage to the self, while brand attitudes reflect evaluations and “cold” affect (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci, 2010). For this reason, emotions and consumer responses linked to attachment are stronger.

Even more, the attachment developed to a brand is not independent of the positioning strategy followed by this brand. In general, three main brand positioning strategies exist. First, functional brands are those that create a sense of self-efficacy, enabling consumers to pursue goals and tasks (Park et al., 2006), for example, a functional food brand such as Tropicana fruit juices. Second, hedonic brands are those that gratify us through experiences that give us pleasure (Bigné, Mattila, & Andreu, 2008). This gratification is delivered through any combination of sensory experiences, such as the point of sale atmosphere or great service (Vlachos et al., 2010); for example, a hedonic restaurant brand such as Starbucks. Finally, symbolic brands are those that enrich us by connecting us with our ideal self, whether past, present or future (Markus & Nurius, 1986); for example, a symbolic watch brand such as Rolex. Although there are brands that manage to position themselves well in all three aspects, new brands tend to be stronger in one of these alternatives (Park et al., 2006; Schuitema et al., 2013).

Additionally, the impact of the antecedents and the effects of brand attachment does not occur with the same intensity in these three described scenarios.

Brand attachment antecedents: the moderating role of brand positioning

Many brand attachment antecedents have been studied in previous works. For example, So, Parsons and Yap (2013) focused on one driver of corporate branding composed of five dimensions (corporate associations, corporate activities, corporate values, corporate personalities, and corporate benefits) to explain fashionable luxury brands attachment. The study of Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) focused on just one driver of brand attachment: brand personality congruence. So, previous literature has chosen the most interesting antecedents according to the research objectives. Based on this criterion, in our study, we have selected four antecedents, either because of the importance shown in previous studies of their relationship with brand attachment (such as with perceived quality and brand personality) or, on the contrary, due to the lack of studies on these relationships (such as with brand credibility and brand awareness). Our purpose was to integrate these transversal antecedents to compare their role in three different positioning scenarios: hedonic fashion brands, functional fashion brands, and symbolic fashion brands.

The first proposed antecedent of brand attachment, **brand personality**, is stronger for hedonic fashionable brands (Esmailpour, 2015). In fact, Eisend and Stokburger-Sauer (2013) maintain that to build strong brands with congruent personalities, one must insist on their present human characteristics, mostly in the hedonic approach. In short, the attachment-personality connection is especially powerful when it comes to new fashion brands with a hedonic positioning, since the hedonic value of a product is positively related to the affection that we feel for it (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001), expecting a greater love towards hedonic brands than functional or symbolic (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2015). From his approach, Malär, Krohmer, Hoyer and Nyffenegger (2011, p. 35) did two empirical studies of 167 brands (evaluated by 1329 and 980 consumers) to test the relationship between brand personality and brand attachment. They considered two dimensions of brand personality: perceived actual self-congruence with the brand and perceived ideal self-congruence. The authors obtained that the effect of actual self-congruence on brand attachment was higher than the ideal self-congruence. Also, they could identify diverse moderating variables (such as consumers' product involvement). In our study, we hypothesized that the poisoning strategy will moderate the relationship between brand personality and brand attachment. In this vein, Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) conclude a strong link between brand personality and brand attachment in

the case of luxury brands, as far as they are hedonic brands (i.e. Channel) as these authors explain. So, it can be stated that:

H1: The influence of brand personality on brand attachment will differ depending on the brand positioning.

Regarding the second antecedent of brand attachment, **perceived quality**, is more powerful when functional brands are launched (Chandon, Wansink y Laurent, 2000), insofar as the measurement scale of perceived quality remarks (Yoo & Donthu, 2001). Also, there are many studies carried out with hedonic products in which the strength of the relationship between quality and brand attachment is confirmed (Hwang, Han, & Choo, 2015). Also, Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) found a strong relationship between quality and attachment among functional and symbolic brands. So, it could be concluded that:

H2: The influence of perceived quality on brand attachment will differ depending on the brand positioning.

About the third antecedent, **brand awareness**, its effect on brand attachment seems obvious. However, previous studies have not focused on comparing to what extent this connection is equally strong for all brands. In this case, it is to be expected that awareness will generate more attachment particularly when new symbolic fashion brands are launched, for example, certain watches or perfumes. That's because, for symbolic brands, the creation of the brand image is a priority (Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus, 2006), given that previous images permit to satisfy symbolic needs (Vlachos et al., 2010). The study by Esch et al. (2006) underlines this point, especially in the case of one product category (sports shoes) for which symbolic positioning is one of the most recurrent options (to communicate quality, price, durability, style, appearance and brand) (Gupta, Malhotra, & Dharwal, 2013). In the same line, the strong connection between awareness and liking/attachment is also noted in the launch of chocolate brands that follow a symbolic and hedonic positioning (Mo, Rozette, & Zhang, 2016). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that:

H3: The influence of brand awareness on brand attachment will differ depending on the brand positioning.

Regarding the last antecedent of brand attachment, **brand credibility**, it is to be expected that credibility will generate more attachment, particularly when new functional fashionable brands want to be promoted; for example, in the food and beverages industry. In effect, the

consumer will love more those brands which he/she believes precisely because they are good at what they do and offer, being their performance (functionality) superior (Keller, 2012). This relationship between credibility and brand attachment is also evident in hedonic products or services (Rosli, Che Ha, & Ghazali, 2019), and less common in symbolic brands. From these statements, it is asserted that,

H4: The influence of brand credibility on brand attachment will differ depending on the brand positioning.

Brand attachment effects: the moderating role of brand positioning

According to Park et al. (2006), three great effects of brand attachment cannot be ignored: loyalty, purchase intention and perceived risk (Levy & Hino, 2016), since those have been widely explored in the literature (Belaid & Behi, 2011; So, Parsons & Yap, 2013; Wook Chae & Chang Lee, 2013).

First, the relationship between brand attachment and **loyalty** is present in the work of many authors. As reported by Khan (2012), for a client to be truly loyal to a brand, she/he must not only return to the brand or want to do it but also feel so emotionally attached, that she/he feels that no other brand or company can meet her/his needs. On the other hand, Lam and Shankar (2014) verified the positive influence that brand attachment has on loyalty. However, the work of Erdoğan and Budeyri-Turan (2012) states that greater loyalty is achieved with functional fashionable brands since these brands report functional benefits that reflect the intrinsic value of the product to meet the immediate practical needs of the client (Belaid & Behi, 2011). Thus, the more positive customers perceive the functional benefits that a new brand reports, the greater the emotional attachment and the loyalty toward such brand (So et al., 2013). In this sense, we can hypothesize that:

H5: The influence of brand attachment on brand loyalty will differ depending on the brand positioning.

Second, it is noted that those consumers with higher levels of attachment have greater **purchase intention** (Proksch, Orth, & Cornwell, 2015), since the brand attachment implies an emotional response that is often reflected in the purchase intention. Previous literature has investigated the link between brand attachment and consumers' behaviors (Hwang, Baloglu &

Tanford, 2019). For example, Esch et al. (2006) show that the relationship between brand attachment and purchase intent, not only refers to purchases in the present but even in future purchases. Regarding the impact of attachment on purchase intention, it is observed that a good part of the empirical evidence argues that it is for brands with symbolic positioning for which the link attachment-purchase intention will be stronger (Shah et al., 2012; Vlachos et al., 2010) since consumers tend to buy more intensively fashionable brands that symbolize something relevant to them. In this way, we can affirm that,

H6: The influence of brand attachment on purchase intention will differ depending on the brand positioning.

Third, brand attachment (Thomson et al., 2005) should diminish or cancel out the uncertainty and negative consequences related to the **perceived risk** to brands. In fact, the work of Chiou, Hsu and Hsieh (2013) shows that even in the face of negative online information about the brand, those who have a high brand attachment show less perceived risk and less change in the evaluation of the brand, than those consumers with low brand attachment. Even more, it seems that a decrease in perceived risk, in brands for which we feel attachment, will be stronger for hedonic and symbolic brands. That's because functional products carry less social and psychological risk. On the contrary, in the case of symbolically positioned brands, used to express the image we have of ourselves (Park et al., 2006; Schuitema et al., 2013), the reduction of risk becomes a key factor in not tainting our own image. For example, in symbolic products of the clothing category, the search for information and the level of involvement are high since the perceived risk of being wrong is also high. Within this category (clothes), jeans are usually positioned based on symbolic attributes (and hedonic ones), which gives their purchase a very high perceived risk (Erdem, Swait & Louviere, 2002). Perhaps, for this reason, customers are more involved in purchases of products that are important to them because they perceive a high risk in the purchase, as is the case of fashionable brands whose positioning focuses on symbolic or hedonic attributes. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H7: The influence of brand attachment on perceived risk will differ depending on brand positioning.

Figure 1 shows the proposed causal model.

[Figure 1]

METHODOLOGY

Sample

We collected the sample in two moments. In phase one; we gathered information in the cities of Quito and Guayaquil, the two largest cities in Ecuador, representing culturally different groups linked to their Andean origin in the case of Quito, and coastal in the case of Guayaquil. This data was collected through a market research call center.

This study did not start with any specific category of product or service on which to investigate since it was intended to study the categories to which the brands that first came to the minds of our respondents belonged. The fashionable brands with the greatest recall and presence among the respondents belonged to the following four product categories: (i) personal and household care, (ii) food and beverages, (iii) technology, and (iv) clothing and footwear. These categories coincide to a large extent with those studied by Proksch et al. (2015) in their model to untangle the influence of attachment anxiety and security in the formation of brand attachment.

Due to the importance that certain technological products have in our lives, it was decided in a second phase to contemplate the collection of additional information on a product category linked to technology: mobile phones. This has to do with the great boom that the attachment to these technological products has in the brand literature (Lam & Shankar, 2014; Yao et al., 2015). For this purpose, the information was collected in person in various locations this time in the third-largest city of Ecuador, Cuenca. Response rate in our mixed-mode of collection data (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2019) was higher with in-person surveys than with phone ones.

Thus, after a simple random sampling procedure in both phases, a global sample of 2077 individuals was reached (1420 from Quito and Guayaquil and 657 from Cuenca), and after taking out the surveys from the categories with fewer respondents (vehicles 83, services 63 and others 9), we considered 1922 valid results. Table 1 collects information about the sample finally considered. Annex 2 includes the number of responses for each product category and each positioning strategy.

[Table 1]

We measured all the constructs through scales previously defined in the literature (see table 2). Each consumer evaluated the first fashionable brand they recalled belonging to one of

the aforementioned categories (personal and household care, food and beverages, technology and clothing and footwear).

To classify each fashionable brand as symbolic, hedonic or functional, using the methodology of multiple criteria classification for nominal predefined groups (Zopounidis & Doumpos, 2002), we had the collaboration of five independent coders (experts and professors in the marketing area) who received a written description of the three types of attributes (symbolic, hedonic and functional), and a list with the participating brands (correspondent to the respondents' answers) so that the classification was made individually by each coder according to the perceived image of each brand through their marketing actions. The final categorization of each brand obeyed to the most favored answer by the coders. Functional fashionable brands were those that create in us a sense of efficiency and ability, and allow us to achieve goals and tasks (for example, Nivea). Hedonic fashionable brands were those that provide gratification (pleasure) through aesthetic or hedonic elements (for example, Lancome). Symbolic fashionable brands were those that enrich us by connecting with our ideal self, they reflect our beliefs, values and principles, and help define who we are or who we want to be (for example, Johnson & Johnson) (See Annex 1).

Prior to the hypothesis testing, we carried out a confirmatory factorial analysis (CFA) in which the goodness of fit of the model, reliability and validity of the instrument were verified. The CFA was first performed in the global sample, and then in the three samples of brands with different positioning (symbolic, hedonic and functional). In general, we obtained good fits to guarantee that the instrument is reliable and valid (Table 2 shows the global sample results). To test the discriminant validity, following Fornell and Larcker's (1981) procedures, we analyzed the variance-covariance matrix between pairs of factors (matrix Φ) in the right part of table 3 and their corresponding confidence intervals (Φ value + two standard errors) in the left part of table 3 (see Table 3). It is noted that squared covariances between factors are significantly lower than unity. Additionally, the AVE (main diagonal) for the six factors exceeds the square of the covariance (top half of the matrix shown in Table 3). In cases where this does not happen, the AVE obtains slightly lower values to the square of the correlation, which suggests discriminant validity as the confidence intervals do not include the value 1.

Given that in our model three different subsamples of fashionable brands with different positioning strategies (functional, hedonic, and symbolic) were considered, a multigroup analysis with the EQS software (Version 5.7b) was used. Two steps were performed. The first did not involve any formal analysis of the positioning differences, as for each group of

interviewees the parameters and significance of each of the proposed causal hypotheses were estimated. The second step compared the possible existence of significant differences between the three subsamples. The suitability of this method based on structural equation modeling for comparing the same model in two different scenarios can be studied in greater depth in Satorra (2000).

[Table 2] and [Table 3]

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of our model show that five of the seven hypotheses are significant ($p < 0.05$), with an acceptable model fit (Table 4). More specifically, the results allow us to accept that there is a moderating effect of brand positioning in three of the seven structural relationships: H1, H4 and H5.

[Table 4]

Brand attachment antecedents: the moderating role of brand positioning

Regarding brand attachment antecedents, two out of four antecedents differed significantly between groups of brands with different positioning strategies: brand personality and brand credibility. This result is congruent with Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) output.

First, H1 is accepted given that our results support that the influence of brand personality on the brand attachment will be stronger in the group of hedonic fashionable brands than in the rest of the brands (functional or symbolic), as the β values corroborate (Table 4). That is, for the group of hedonic fashionable brands (such as Christian Dior), the intensity of the personality-attachment relationship ($\beta = 0.647$, $p < 0.01$), is stronger than for the other two groups (functional $\beta = 0.474$, $p < 0.01$; symbolic $\beta = 0.433$, $p < 0.01$). In this vein, Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) have remarked that “luxury brands are hedonic and high-involvement purchases” so “consumers will be more motivated to invest in the cognitive effort of self-verification deeply” and this explains the strong link between brand personality and brand attachment for this kind of brands.

Second, H4 is also accepted since our results support that the influence of brand credibility on brand attachment will also be stronger in the group of hedonic fashionable brands than in functional or symbolic ones (Table 4). We found that for hedonic fashionable brands, the intensity of the credibility-attachment relationship ($\beta = 0.402$, $p < 0.05$) is stronger than for the other two groups (functional $\beta = 0.314$, $p < 0.01$; symbolic $\beta = 0.152$, $p < 0.01$). These results concur with those of Valaei and Nikhashemi (2017) in which brand credibility has a positive relationship with brand attachment in smartphone brands, most of them hedonic brands.

On the contrary, our results lead us to reject the presence of differences in the other two antecedents of brand attachment: perceived quality and brand awareness. For H2, focused on the influence of perceived quality on brand attachment, the relationship was not significant even if the difference between functional and symbolic brands was found significant, ($\chi^2=4.741$, $p < 0.05$). So, H2 was rejected. The same occurred for H3, stating a differentiated influence of brand awareness on brand attachment. Once again, the relationship was not significant for all the three groups, even if the difference between functional and symbolic brands ($\chi^2=6.129$, $p < 0.05$) and between functional and hedonic brands ($\chi^2=5.877$, $p < 0.05$) were found significant. So H3 was rejected.

Brand attachment effects: the moderating role of brand positioning

Regarding brand attachment effects, one of three effects differed significantly between groups of brands with different positioning strategies: brand loyalty.

First, we have obtained that the influence of brand attachment on brand loyalty is stronger in functional fashionable brands (such as Gingivit or HP), as far as its β value is stronger ($\beta = 0.585$, $p < 0.01$) than for the other two groups (hedonic $\beta = 0.497$, $p < 0.01$; symbolic $\beta = 0.463$, $p < 0.01$). So, H5 was accepted. This could be because functional benefits associated with a brand serve to fill the immediate practical needs of the client (Belaid & Behi, 2011). Also, Shetty and Fitzsimmons (2021) findings support our results, as far as they couldn't demonstrate a link between brand attachment and brand loyalty in the case of hedonic luxury brands.

On the contrary, differences between groups of brands with alternative positioning strategies could not be demonstrated for the influence of brand attachment on purchase intention; neither between functional and symbolic brands ($\chi^2 = 0.109$) nor between functional and hedonic brands ($\chi^2 = 0.677$), and the same occurred between hedonic and symbolic brands ($\chi^2 = 0.601$), so H6 was rejected.

Also, a moderating effect in the relationship between brand attachment and perceived risk could not be demonstrated, neither between functional and symbolic brands ($\chi^2 = 0.027$), nor between functional and hedonic brands ($\chi^2 = 0.005$), and the same occurred between hedonic and symbolic brands ($\chi^2 = 0.017$). So, H7 was rejected too.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusions

Results of this research show the importance of brand attachment in the competitive world in which we live (París, 2013). Even more, our results have supported that brand attachment antecedents and effects do not work equally for fashionable brands with different positioning strategies (functional, hedonic, and symbolic).

Regarding the moderating effect of brand positioning, two of the four antecedents of brand attachment differs significantly among fashionable brands with different positioning strategy: brand personality and brand credibility. More specifically, for hedonic brands, the impact of personality and credibility on brand attachment was stronger than for symbolic and functional brands. This could be explained because the 'ideal self' of consumers turns out to be linked to a hedonic consumption guided by a principle of pleasure, fun, fantasy, emotion, sensory stimulation, and enjoyment (Whitten, Hightower & Sayeed, 2014). Not in vain, the hedonic value of a new fashionable product can be significantly and positively related to the affection felt for it (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In none of the three scenarios analyzed (functional, hedonic, and symbolic) was possible to confirm the presence of significant differences regarding the other two antecedents of brand attachment: perceived quality and brand awareness.

Concerning the effects of brand attachment, one out of three of them, differ significantly among brands: the impact of brand attachment on brand loyalty is significantly lower for hedonic brands. This could be because for hedonic fashionable brands rational decisions are

lower, and the brain responds more according to emotions and spontaneous reactions. On the contrary, when functional and symbolic brands are considered, the desired effects of brand attachment are probably consciously caused, and their impact is stronger. So, when brands provide functional benefits that generate emotional attachment, loyalty is stronger (So et al., 2013), maybe because emotions were less expected for these brands. In addition, it has been observed that the functional value of a luxury symbolic brand is highly valued by consumers and it strongly affects brand attachment (Petravičiūtė et al., 2021). These authors also comment that even though automobiles are prominent in signaling status (symbolic value), consumers prioritize their functional value over other dimensions of luxury brand perceived value. That could be the case with brands such as BMW or Volvo where their functional usefulness is very valued by consumers.

Theoretical implications

Knowing and predicting consumer responses to fashionable brands in a context of exchange is essential for marketing (Park et al., 2006), especially considering that relationships with the brand affect the cognitive systems that consumers carry about brands in their minds, but they are also part of a psycho-socio-cultural context (Fournier, 1998) that leads consumers to establish relationships with brands, similar to the intimate relationships established with people (Esch et al., 2006). In this framework, emotional brand attachment is a concept that has been gaining relevance in recent years (Moussa, 2015).

Although brand attachment relationships have been studied in previous studies, we analyze simultaneously some antecedents (brand personality, perceived quality, brand awareness and brand credibility) and effects (brand loyalty, purchase intention and perceived risk) of fashionable brand attachment. We have also contemplated the moderating effect that three major positioning axes (functional, hedonic and symbolic) have on these relationships, something that as a whole has not been done before.

This work shows that, indeed, there are significant differences in the results depending on the positioning strategy that each fashionable brand uses. This information opens up a new and vast research field.

Managerial and Practical implications

First, for new fashionable brands positioned based on **functional attributes**, it is easier to generate loyalty than to symbolic or hedonic brands. So, it is recommended, following Merrilees (2016), to increase the use of client commitment tools taking ideas from hedonic brands. For example, loyalty programs such as fidelity cards could be used to generate attachment and reinforce loyalty for house and health care products, or also with maintenance programs in the automobile category.

Second, for new fashionable brands positioned based on **hedonic attributes**, it is recommended to reinforce the personality of the brand. To this end, hedonic brand managers could give more exclusiveness to their fashionable brands through the creation of brand communities, such as HOG (Harley Davidson's Harley Owners Group), whose clients, in addition to reflecting the brand personality, contribute to strengthening the personality of the brand and its attachment. In addition, HOG-type actions build long-term relationships that turn out to be profitable and strengthen loyalty.

Third, for new fashionable brands that want to be positioned by emphasizing **symbolic** cues (such as perfumes), as they do not stand out in any of the accepted relationships, it could be recommended to bet on building the image of these brands with brand personality attributes that have been better valued by consumers, giving them a stronger and/or sophisticated orientation.

In sum, these points should be taken into consideration by managers when defining the positioning strategy of one brand to develop the communication strategy (Shetty and Fitzsimmons, 2021).

Limitations and future research

This paper focuses on the reality of a single country when it would be much richer if it could compare the markets of several latitudes, which opens the door to future studies in the area.

Another limitation is that, due to the structure of the study, other antecedents and effects of the emotional brand attachment of a secondary nature could not be included, which becomes an opportunity to continue studying this construct.

A future research line could be to further explore the use of the brand personality scale in combination with the attachment scale, to explore the possibility of adapting them culturally in a better way to the Latin American market, since this market as a whole is very interesting from a commercial point of view.

Second, the unsatisfactory results found in this paper in terms of the directionality of the relationship between perceived risk and brand attachment make this also an interesting avenue for further research.

Finally, since the moderation effect of brand positioning (functional, symbolic, or hedonic) in the relationship between attachment and purchase intention was not supported, it is necessary to know more about consumer behavior in emerging economies.

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Figure 1. Causal model – Antecedents and consequences of brand attachment

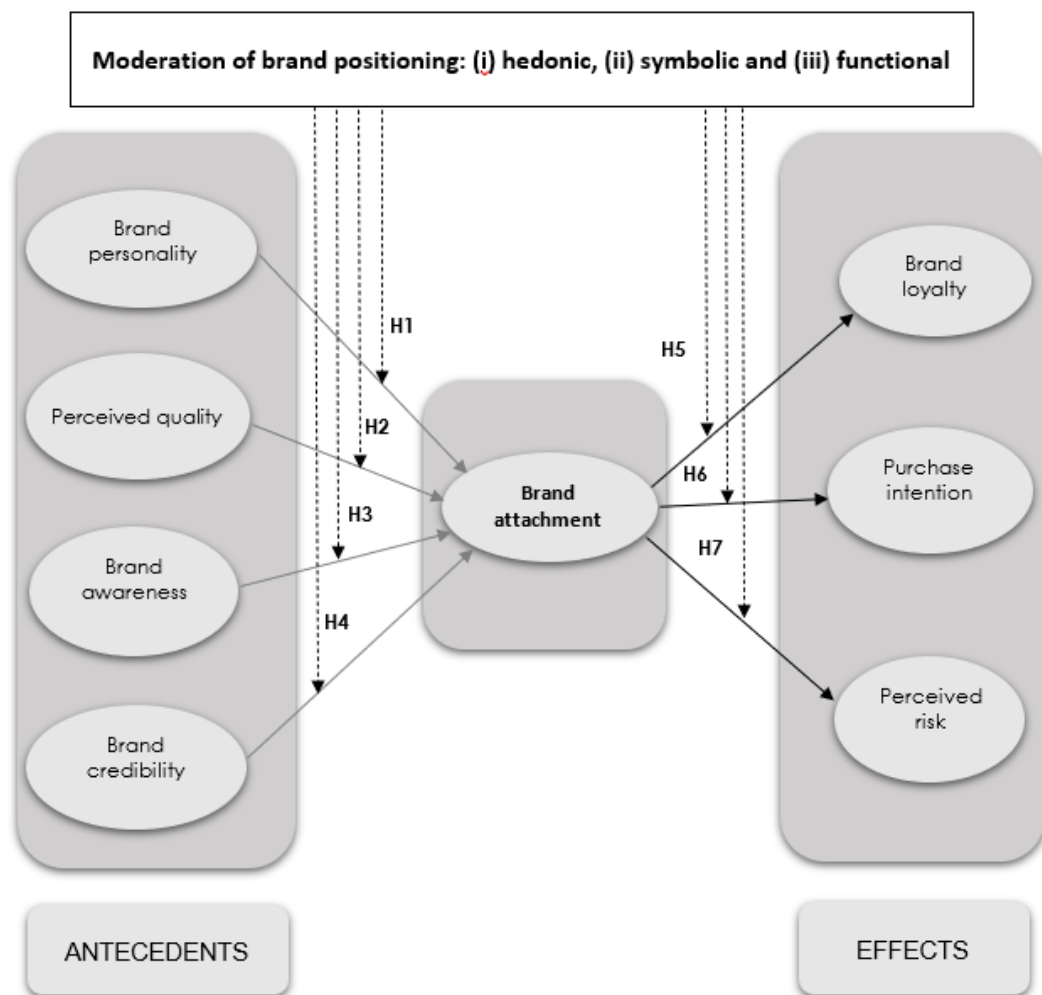


Table 1. Sample profile

Sample profile (sample 1)		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	999	70.4
Male	421	29.6
GLOBAL	1420	100
Age		
13 to 18	140	9.9
19 to 29	304	21.2
30 to 45	446	31.6
46 to 60	342	24.1
More than 61	156	10.9
N/A	32	2.3
City		
Quito	630	44.4
Guayaquil	790	55.6

Note: (n=1420). Population: 4'799 899. Sample error: 2.6%

Sample profile (sample 2, mobile phones category)		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	339	51.6
Male	318	48.4
GLOBAL	657	100
Age		
10 to 18	198	30.1
19 to 29	279	42.5
30 to 45	130	19.8
46 to 60	45	6.8
More than 61	5	0.8
N/A	0	0

Note: (n=657). Population: 505.585. Sample error: 3.8%

Table 1. Sample profile (*continuation*)

Sample profile (Functional positioning)		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	772	72.4
Male	294	27.6
Functional		
Age		
10 to 18	150	14.1
19 to 29	282	26.5
30 to 45	321	30.1
46 to 60	200	18.8
More than 61	113	10.6
N/A		

Note: $n=1066$.

Sample profile (Hedonic positioning)		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	245	52.9
Male	218	47.1
Hedonic		
Age		
10 to 18	138	29.8
19 to 29	188	40.6
30 to 45	79	17.1
46 to 60	40	8.6
More than 61	18	3.9
N/A		

Note: $n=463$

Sample profile (Symbolic positioning)		
Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Female	253	64.4
Male	140	35.6
Symbolic		
Age		
10 to 18	39	9.9
19 to 29	92	23.4
30 to 45	126	32.1
46 to 60	96	24.4
More than 61	40	10.2
N/A		

Note: $n=393$.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity

Factor	Indicator	Std. loading	t value	CA	CR	AVE
Brand attachment Thomson, MacInnis & Park (2005)	Affectionate	.67**	31.93	.87	.87	.59
	Friendly	.76**	38.50			
	Attached	.87**	46.66			
	Bonded	.84**	44.50			
Brand personality Aaker, Jennifer (1997)	Connected	.63**	29.88	.78	.79	.56
	Competence	.67**	30.44			
	Sophistication	.78**	37.58			
	Ruggedness	.77**	36.70			
Brand loyalty	I consider myself to be loyal to X.	.74**	34.50	.76	.76	.62

Yoo & Donthu (2001)	X would be my first choice.	.82**	38.35				
Perceived quality	The likely quality of X is extremely high	.80**	39.82	.80	.80	.66	
Yoo & Donthu (2001)	The likelihood that X would be functional is very high	.81**	40.60				
Brand awareness / associations	I can recognize X among other competing brands	.75**	32.41	.63	.64	.50	
Yoo & Donthu (2001)	I can quickly recall the symbol or logo of X.	.59**	25.65				
Brand credibility	Product claims from this brand are believable.	.78**	39.23	.88	.88	.60	
Baek, Kim & Yu (2010)	Over time, my experiences with this brand led me to expect it to keep its promises.	.78**	39.31				
	This brand is committed to delivering on its claims.	.74**	36.75				
	This brand has a name you can trust.	.78**	39.52				
	This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises.	.77**	38.57				
Perceived risk	I need a lot more information about this brand before I would buy it.	.80**	39.30	.85	.85	.66	
Baek, Kim & Yu (2010)	I never know how good this brand will be before I buy it.	.84**	42.30				
	To figure out what this brand is like, I would have to try it several times.	.77**	37.55				
Purchase intention	I would seriously consider purchasing this brand	.80**	32.98	.73	.73	.57	
Baek, Kim & Yu (2010)	How likely would you be to purchase this brand?	.70**	29.30				
N = 1922; X^2 (224df) = 1876.75 ($p < .01$); NFI = .92; NNFI = .91; CFI = .93; IFI = .93; RMSEA = 0.06							
Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$. CA = Cronbach's α ; CR = Composite reliability; AVE = Average variance extracted.							

Table 3. Discriminant validity and value intervals

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Brand attachment	0.59	0.34	0.23	0.13	0.14	0.20	0.03	0.14
2 Brand personality	(0.54;0.62)	0.56	0.38	0.32	0.37	0.23	0.00	0.13
3. Brand loyalty	(0.43;0.52)	(0.57;0.67)	0.62	0.57	0.48	0.22	0.00	0.21
4. Perceived quality	(0.32;0.42)	(0.52;0.61)	(0.72;0.79)	0.66	0.84	0.34	0.00	0.18
5. Awareness / associations	(0.32;0.42)	(0.55;0.65)	(0.64;0.74)	(0.88;0.95)	0.50	0.32	0.00	0.15
6. Brand credibility	(0.41;0.49)	(0.44;0.52)	(0.43;0.52)	(0.55;0.63)	(0.52;0.62)	0.60	0.11	0.39
7. Perceived risk	(0.14;0.24)	(-0.08;0.03)	(-0.05;0.06)	(-0.03;0.08)	(-0.10;-0.01)	(0.29;0.39)	0.66	0.05
8. Purchase intention	(0.33;0.43)	(0.31;0.42)	(0.41;0.51)	(0.38;0.48)	(0.33;0.45)	(0.58;0.66)	(0.18;0.29)	0.57

(*) The left part of the table includes the confidence intervals.

Table 4. Moderation of brand positioning (functional, hedonic, symbolic brands)

Moderator effect accepted	χ^2 (differences)			Standardized loading (β)	t value	Standardized loading (β)	t value
				Functional brands		Symbolic brands	
x	1.781	H1	Brand personality → Brand attachment	.474**	9.322	.433**	6.134
x	4.741*	H2	Perceived quality → Brand attachment	.138	1.038	.139	1.390
x	6.129*	H3	Brand awareness → Brand attachment	-.165	-1.162	.091	0.986
x	2.465	H4	Brand credibility → Brand attachment	.314**	7.851	.152**	2.709
√	18.107**	H5	Brand attachment → Brand loyalty	.585**	15.374	.463**	7.381
x	0.109	H6	Brand attachment → Purchase intention	.461**	11.481	.388**	5.883
x	0.027	H7	Brand attachment → Perceived risk	.196**	5.561	.182**	3.171
				Hedonic brands		Symbolic brands	
√	7.797**	H1	Brand personality → Brand attachment	.647**	6.592	.433**	6.134
x	2.577	H2	Perceived quality → Brand attachment	.435	.591	.139	1.390
x	1.065	H3	Brand awareness → Brand attachment	-.818	-.929	.091	0.986
√	4.855*	H4	Brand credibility → Brand attachment	.402*	2.354	.152**	2.709
x	0.111	H5	Brand attachment → Brand loyalty	.497**	8.795	.463**	7.381
x	0.601	H6	Brand attachment → Purchase intention	.404**	6.532	.388**	5.883
x	0.017	H7	Brand attachment → Perceived risk	.233**	4.291	.182**	3.171
				Hedonic brands		Functional brands	
√	4.842*	H1	Brand personality → Brand attachment	.647**	6.592	.474**	9.322
x	0.331	H2	Perceived quality → Brand attachment	.435	.591	.138	1.038
x	5.877*	H3	Brand awareness → Brand attachment	-.818	-.929	-.165	-1.162
x	1.462	H4	Brand credibility → Brand attachment	.402*	2.354	.314**	7.851
√	3.873*	H5	Brand attachment → Brand loyalty	.497**	8.795	.585**	15.374
x	0.677	H6	Brand attachment → Purchase intention	.404**	6.532	.461**	11.481
x	0.005	H7	Brand attachment → Perceived risk	.233**	4.291	.196**	5.561

χ^2 statistical difference between groups

N = 1922; **p<.01; *p<.05; χ^2 = 3995.28

NNFI = .854; CFI = .866; IFI = .866; RMSA = .082

Annex 1. Examples of fashionable brands considered in this study

	Personal and Household care	Food and Beverages	Technology	Clothing and Footwear
Functional Positioning	Avon, Dove, Esika, Gingivit, Nivea, Pantene	Aceite Girasol, Pony Malta, La Lechera, Mr. Pollo	Nokia, LG, Samsung, HP	Converse, Pinto, Quicksilver, Totto
Hedonic Positioning	Cristhian Dior, Hugo Boss, Lancome	Don Diego, Oreo, Tony	Apple	Armani, Polo, Tomy Hilfiger, Timberland
Symbolic Positioning	Axe, Huggis, Johnson y Johnson, Ponds	Güitig, Coca Cola, Pilsener, Pingüino	Motorola, Sony	Bunky, DBond, Marathon

Annex 2. Responses for each product category and each positioning strategy

	TOTAL	Personal and Household care	Food and Beverages	Technology	Clothing and Footwear
Functional Positioning	1066	301	234	493	38
Hedonic Positioning	463	23	20	294	126
Symbolic Positioning	393	91	103	168	31