The influence of brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation on brand attachment in South African companies: A case of Gauteng Province

Dr E Chinomona
Vaal University of Technology
Department of Logistics

chakubvae@hotmail.com

Mr BA Popoola
Vaal University of Technology
Department of Cost and management Accounting

popsonbabs4real@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation on brand attachment in a South African context. Three hypotheses are posited and in order to empirically test them, a sample data set of 355 individual companies was collected from Gauteng province, South Africa. Research assistants were recruited to distribute questionnaires in the Gauteng province of South Africa. The results indicate that brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation positively influence brand attachment in a significant way. Drawing from the study's findings, managerial implications are discussed and limitations and future research directions are suggested. By and large, this study greatly adds new knowledge to the existing body of brand management literature in South Africa - a context that is often most ignored by some researchers in both developed and developing countries.

Keywords: brand character; brand familiarity; brand evaluation; brand attachment; South Africa

In recent years, in the field of branding many concepts have been developed and among the concepts that have been developed, brand attachment is one that has received significant attention (Thomson, Maclnnis, & Park 2005; Park, Maclnnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Lacobucci, 2010). The empirical literature on brands is vast and detailed, demonstrating and testing highly domain-specific effects (Schmitt, 2011). Immense brand constructs (brand association, participation, symbolism, attitude, communities, loyalty, experience, identity, equity, management, name, extension, image, leverage, awareness, trust, satisfaction, commitment, performance, personality, familiarity, evaluation, attachment and acoustic branding, amongst many others, have been generated over the decades and amassed numerous analytical studies with critical empirical findings that formed the basis of recent researches in branding.

According to Fournier (2009), Brand attachment can be referred to as an emotionally charged bonding between consumers and brands, which is an essential foundation to successful brand management. In the marketing environment nowadays, consumers are bombarded with hundreds of brands and brand-related stimuli every day; however, they become attached to a small group of brands with emotional bonds, which could be termed as brand attachment (Schmitt, 2011). The relationship between customers and brands and its strength has always been a challenge for researchers to understand and to measure (Campbell & Keller, 2003; Ha & Perks, 2005).

This study, therefore, is directed at understanding the significance of brand attachment as a concept and to further create a profound awareness of certain individual concepts that influence brand attachment. Three key factors will be considered,

described and analysed to better recognise the level of effect each concept has on brand attachment. These constructs include brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation. They can be said to play certain pivotal roles in brand attachment, whether adversely or favourably. Brand character could be referred to as traits associated with a brand; in clearer terms, it is the characterisation of a brand, which is a major component of brand image (Polyorat, 2011), while brand familiarity is borne out of trust established from the knowledge and use of a specific brand. In particular, research suggests that well-established brands act as powerful heuristic cues that influence purchase decisions (Maheswaran, Mackie & Chaiken, 1992; Manuela, Manuel, Eva & Francisco 2013). The third factor, which is brand evaluation, mainly reflects the acceptance level of consumers towards a brand and this ultimately affects their purchase intentions. This research, therefore, brings to focus the relationship between these variables, their level of significance in branding and how they affect consumer attachment to brands. In addition, the research model is very robust and one of a kind and to the best knowledge of the researchers no study has been done in South Africa using the variables like brand character, brand familiarity, brand evaluation and brand attachment and their relationship to each other.

Given this background, this study will be aimed at the influence of brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation on brand attachment in South Africa and provides the research model and hypotheses, which covers data collection, analysis and result interpretation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The main research objective of the study is to examine the influence of brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation on brand attachment of companies in the Gauteng province. The empirical objectives are:
- To investigate the relationship between brand character and brand attachment
- To investigate the relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment
- To investigate the relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Brand Character

Considering brand character as one of the underlining factors influencing consumer's attachment to specific brands, it is imperative to understand what brand character posits, its proponents and value to brand attachment. Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, Terblanche, Elliot and Klopper (2011) provided diverse concepts of brand character, which includes that, brand character is a concept within the field of relational marketing and it is defined as a set of human characteristics associated to a brand. Secondly, that according to theories of animism, brands can also have their own character and in fact, human beings aspire to personify objects to help their interactions with the intangible world. In addition, the perceptions of the brand character traits are formed through all direct or indirect contacts that consumers have with a brand. On top of this, the concept of brand character offers a major managerial advantage. It helps better understand the development and maintaining of relations between brands and consumers and explains how consumer-brand relationship influences consumer behaviour. Finally, character is an appropriate metaphor for brands based on the idea that a customer develops attraction towards brands having a character similar to his character. Therefore, a consumer can identify himself or herself in relationship to a brand based on the congruency between his own characteristics and the personality characteristics attributed to the brand.

The characterisation of a brand to create an emotional tie between it and potential consumers, therefore, is unarguably vital to a brand's success as these established concepts clearly demonstrate that humans identify more with brands that have characteristics similar to theirs and this forms some sort of bond or attachment between them. According to Bouhlel, Mzoughi, Hadiji and Slimane (2011), brands have human characteristics and these characteristics are vehicles of the consumer's self-expression, which can be significant in helping a consumer express different aspects of his or her self. These brand characteristics "provide the brand with a soul"

(Bouhlel et al., 2011:210). From this point, the emotional connection between an individual and the brand based on certain characteristics can be established.

An in-depth study of Bouhlel et al. (2011) reveals the breakdown of possible traits such as being friendly, conscientious, old-fashioned, modern, exotic and extrovert amongst other characteristics. It is further noted that a large number of variables have been mentioned in the literature as influencing brand character, which are brand name, brand symbol or logo, celebrity endorser, colour, shape, country of origin, price, music, packaging and sales promotions. As defined by Aaker (1997), brand character is the set of human characteristics associated with a brand. According to Geuens, Weijters and Wulf (2009), psychologists were able to classify human personalities into five dimensions that provide a complete description of personality, namely extraversion or surgency (talkative, assertive, energetic), agreeableness (good-natured, cooperative, trustful), conscientiousness (orderly, responsible, dependable), emotional stability versus neuroticism (calm, not neurotic, easily upset) and openness or intellect (intellectual, imaginative, independent-minded). This correlates to the well-known Big Five personality traits theory (Schermerhorn, 2015).

Geuens et al. (2009) observed that Aaker (1997) developed new traits to include gender and social class (feminine, upper class, young) and other researchers like Sung and Tinkham (2005) and Venable, Rose, Bush and Gilbert (2005:296) identified other traits as good-looking, healthy, old, new, heavy, big, cost-effective and financially stable. Companies, over time, have embedded some of these identified human characteristics into their brands and these traits have formed the basis of attraction to brands and have been able to create emotional attachments in humans towards such brands. This influences brand attachment, brand commitment, brand loyalty, brand profitability and other variables associated with branding (Vargo & Lusch, 2004; Thomson et al, 2005; Pawle & Cooper, 2006; Parish & Holloway, 2010; Malar, Krohmer, Hoyer & Nyffenegger, 2011; Zhang, Zhou, Su & Zhou 2013; Kanno, 2014).

According to Zhang, Wang and Zhao (2014), several marketing activities have been employed to entice customers through establishing certain brand characteristics as it is also found to strengthen customers' communication with brands and further enhance brand loyalty and brand equality (Govers & Schoormans, 2005). Well-established brand characteristics can assist consumers to strengthen their brand emotional ties, enhance preference, trust, and loyalty (Siguaw, Mattila & Austin, 1999). This, therefore, emphasises the need for companies to be able to identify specific characteristics that would draw the target consumers towards a brand and qualify their products with the identified traits. This will increase the level of attachment to the brands and boost their income generation. Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) espoused that companies harvest financial benefits when enduring emotional connections are developed between consumers and brands and rewards from emotionally bonded repurchases are less exposed to situations that induce switching. According to Usakli & Baloglu, (2011) and Eisend, & Stokburger-Sauer, (2013), the stronger the congruence between the perceived character of the brand and the consumer's own personality, the more likely the consumer is to purchase this brand and this has influence on brand character on purchase intentions .

Brand Familiarity

Ha and Perks (2005) defined brand familiarity in diverse ways, each definition extrapolated from studies of researchers (Baker, Hutchinson, Moore, & Nedungadi 1986; Alba & Hutchinson 1987; Hoch & Deighton 1989). They defined brand familiarity as a uni-dimensional construct that is related directly to the amount of time spent processing information about the brand, regardless of the type or content of the processing involved. It could also be referred to as the number of product-related experiences accumulated by the consumer or can be expressed as familiarity with products or services derived from the number of brand-related experiences the customer has had. A brand, therefore, is viewed as being either familiar or unfamiliar. A brand is viewed as being familiar if a consumer had some prior experience

with it, and unfamiliar, if a consumer had no prior experience with it (Hingorani, 1999).

A comprehensive aspect of Campbell and Keller's (2003) study on brand familiarity reveals that familiar and unfamiliar brands diverge in terms of the knowledge regarding the brand that a consumer has stored in memory. They asserted that consumers tend to have a variety of different types of associations for familiar brands such as consumers may have tried or may use a familiar brand. They may have family or friends who have used the brand and told them something about it, they may have seen prior ads or marketing communications for the brand and they may know how the brand is positioned, packaged, and so on (Lamb et al., 2011). Based on these assertions, they inferred that consumers lack many associations for unfamiliar brands because they have not had any of the above-mentioned types of experiences with them. Thus, consumers that associate themselves with specific brands, most likely have done so because they have familiarised themselves with such brands and familiarity pools some level of connection, passion or affection for those brands. Overall, this could be referred to as brand attachment.

Expounding the term brand familiarity brings an understanding that familiarity with a brand is a multidimensional construct connected to the various experiences relating to a brand accumulated by a consumer, as described by Korchia (2001). These multidimensional constructs contain certain elements as further explicated by Korchia (2001) based on Alba and Hutchinson (1987) and Krishnan (1996) studies, which include advertising exposures, information search, interactions with salespeople, choice and decision-making, purchasing and product usage in various situations. There are thus, three basic dimensions of brand familiarity, which encapsulate the above-stated elements. These dimensions are familiarity with brand communication, interpersonal familiarity and familiarity with products.

In retrospect, a familiar brand will tend to be favoured, as familiarity signals that it is tried and trusted. Marketers then would be keen to comprehend the development of brand-name familiarity, as this will tend to facilitate consumer choice (Holden & Vanhuele, 1999). Research evidence also shows that brand familiarity reduces the need for information search (Dawar & Lei, 2008). The consumers tend to spend less time shopping for a familiar brand than they do for an unfamiliar brand. According to Dawar and Lei (2008), marketing academics and practitioners have long recognised the important role of brand familiarity in marketing. They cited examples of familiar brands being shown to be more noticeable in advertisements, more easily recalled and better liked by consumers than unfamiliar brands and deduced that brand familiarity in itself, may act as a buffer against the adverse impact of negative information on brands. Brand familiarity, therefore, is a unique variable that very well influences consumer's attachment to specific brands.

Brand Evaluation

According to Moisescu (2007), consumer-based perspectives on brand value have featured more strongly in recent years, as it was hoped that an enhanced understanding of the determinants of the brand value from the consumer's perspective would yield key indicators for efficient brand strategic marketing planning and brand management. Moosmayer and Melan (2010) buttressed Moisescu's (2007) standpoint in their examination of consumer brand evaluation. Their hypotheses indicated that the more positive consumer's attitudes are towards certain brand features, the more positive their brand evaluation. This is advantageous as it is likely to go hand-in-hand with business success, they encapsulated that the stronger a brand evaluation is, the more unique it may be perceived and consequently the more advantageous the brand is. This brings to fore the relevance of the role of consumer's evaluation of brands to the brand success; indicating that a brand that has failed to attract consumer's to itself and is unable to create a metamorphic change from a mere brand attraction to attachment, is more likely to experience a decline in patronage.

According to Berry (2000), service-branding model shows that consumer's actual experience with brands is fundamental to brand evaluation;

it suggests that the true evaluation of brands does not come into play until consumers have had first-hand experience with such brands. This reflects that consumers may evaluate brands without the actual usage of such brands. At this point, consumer's form their opinions about the brands based on their perception of certain features of the brands or on what they have seen or heard about those brands and not from their personal experience. The critical analysis of consumer associations with brands by Czellar, Luna, Voyer and Schwob (2011:997) mentioned two basic associations, which are the personal association and extra-personal association. They are of the opinion that personal associations reflect the way individual thinks or feels about an object, regardless of what the rest of society believes, while extra-personal associations reflect the individual's perception of what other people would think of any information. These extra-personal associations may be formed based on information from social interaction and the media, often reflecting stereotypic knowledge. Self-reported brand evaluations may be influenced by these extra-personal associations, which may not reflect the nature of the individual's personal attitudes.

Chi, Yeh and Yang (2009) described another dimension to consumer's brand evaluation stating two evaluation qualities, namely objective quality and the perceived quality. Breaking down the differences, they noted that while the objective quality has a pre-designed standard to a product, the perceived quality is influenced majorly by internal and external product attributes, which is an evaluation basis for consumers. Kan (2002) pointed out that in objective quality the customers use their knowledge and experience to evaluate overall product benefit, function, durability, technology and reliability when purchasing a product. To understand the notion of perceived quality, Chi et al. (2009), described it as a concept, which possesses situational, comparative, and individual attributes. It can be affected by factors such as previous education level, experience and perceived risk and situational variables such as purchase purpose, purchase situation, time pressure and social background of customers. Therefore, brands that have been evaluated

positively by consumers based on either their personal or extra-personal associations with the brands or an objective or perceived quality, are more likely to peak such consumer's interest in the brands and these create a bond between them generating the term brand attachment.

Brand Attachment

Schmitt (2011) described brand attachment as an important concept that expresses a consumer's connection with a brand. In the realm of consumer psychology, consumers can form emotional attachments to gifts, collectibles, places of residence and, in particular, brands (Thomson et al., 2005). Brand attachment, therefore, envisages customer intentions to perform behaviours that use significant resources such as time, money, and reputation, better than brand attitudes (Schmitt, 2011). Brand attachment is emotive. Zhang, et al. (2013), described how essential brand attachment is as a mediator between brand community and brand commitment; elucidating that communities may develop higher probabilities of being attached to a preferred brand, which significantly influences member's commitment to that brand positively.

The term brand attachment could simply be expressed as having an emotional bond, passion, affection or connection towards a brand (product). It could also be described as the strength of the bond that connects the brand with the customer (Kanno, 2014). Fournier (2009) defined it as an emotionally charged bonding between consumers and brands, which is an essential foundation to successful brand management. The direct implication could be that the more emotionally attached consumers become to a brand, the higher the consumption rate leading to an increased brand sale and revenue. Malar et al. (2011), Thomson et al. (2005) and Park et al (2010), show that creating emotional bonding between consumers and brands is one of the objectives of companies as strong bonding leads to positive results, such as loyalty and achieving a price premium.

Park et al. (2010) further recognised that as a construct that describes the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand, attachment is critical because it affects

behaviours that foster brand profitability and customer lifetime value. Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Kanno (2014) emphasised that customer's continuous and dynamic role in the use, maintenance, repairs and adaptation of products and services in accordance with his or her unique needs, usage situation and behaviours play an enormous part in brand profitability. Their studies support the opinion that the value created by the consumer is more essential than the value created through marketing systems for building brand relationships. Several publications have revealed that strong brand attachment and strong product attachment increase individuals' willingness to make repeated purchases of the same brand (Kressmann Sirgy, Herrmann, Huber, Huber, & Lee. 2006; Matzler, Pichler, Fuller, & Mooradian, 2011; Park et al., 2010; Thomson, et al., 2005).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, CONCEPTUAL MODEL AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Brand attachment can be traced to Bowlby (1979). The concept of brand attachment has its roots in the interpersonal attachment theory (IAT), which was originated by Bowlby (1979) but further developed by Simpson, Collins, Tran and Haydon (2007), Gillath, Shaver, Baek, and Chun (2008) and Bello (2010), among others.

This theory propounds that brand attachment, brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation is an inborn behavioural system (Tsai, 2011). According to Pawle and Cooper (2006) and Parish and Holloway (2010) the brand attachment paradigm implied that consumers have an innate tendency to be attached to some brands.

The conceptual model for this study is developed based on the reviewed literature on the four brand concepts relevant to the study. Hypothesised relationships between research variables were developed thereafter. In the conceptualised model, the predictor variables are brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation, while brand attachment is the outcome variable. The model helps explain the cause and effects the identified concepts have on each other.

Brand Character and Brand Attachment

The hypotheses developed for these concepts are based on the perceived effects brand character has on brand attachment. Studies have shown that brand character often differentiates the brand from other competitors, which enhances confidence in the brand, generates brand attachment and forms consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 2009). Based on the premise that brands can have

FIGURE 1:
CONCEPTUAL MODEL
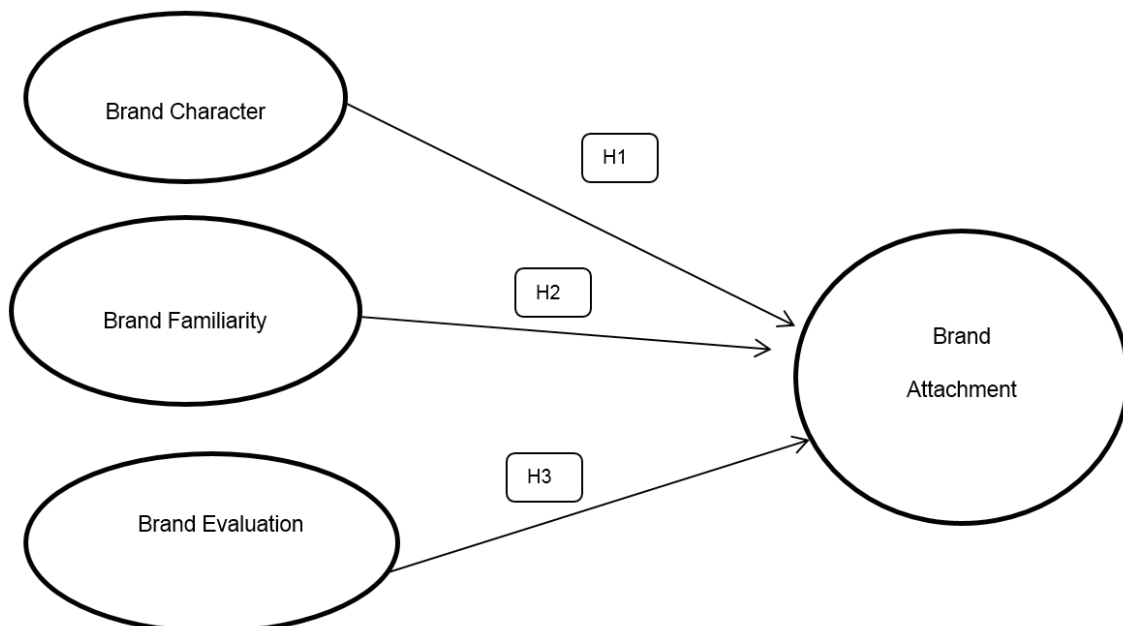
characteristics in much the same way humans have, brand character is seen as a valuable factor in increasing engagement and brand attachment, in a similar way to how people relate to and bond with other people. Therefore, brand personality consists of certain elements that appear to have a strong influence on consumer brand attachment (Bouhlel et al. 2011). Brands have become reflective symbols of one's self through their figurative character. Thus, concerning the correlation between the consumer and a brand, brand character plays an important role since it provides depth, feelings and liking to the relationship. This provides room for bonding, leading to such individuals becoming attached to the specific brands.

Well-established brand character can help consumers strengthen their brand emotional ties, enhance preference, trust, and loyalty (Siguaw et al. 1999). Zhang et al. (2014) extensively described how brand character has been shown to play a vital role in the process of a brand's success. They established that if brand character is constant, robust, distinctive and desirable, it is more likely to establish close relationships between companies and customers; this connection then becomes a vital role in building brand equity and keeping long-term relationships between customers and brands. Bouhlel et al. (2011), recognised that customers will engage in relationships with brands that have similar personalities to their own; they can transpose the attachment towards the persons into the brands (Belaid & Lacoeuilhe, 2005; Thomson, et al. 2005). This helps consumers establish a strong connection with the brand (Doyle, 1990) and as observed by Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011), companies harvest financial benefits when enduring emotional connections are developed between consumers and brands. According to the previous studies there is substantial literature that has shown a positive relationship between brand character and brand attachment and this outcome, perhaps, corresponds with Beliad and Lacoeuilhe (2005), Fournier (2009) and Bouhlel et al (2011).

Based on the above-mentioned literature, this research posits that:

H1:   There is a positive relationship between brand character and brand attachment.

Brand Familiarity and Brand Attachment

Brand familiarity is derived from the number of brand-related experiences the user has had with products or services. It therefore shows the 'share of mind' of a given customer attained to the particular brand and the extent of a customer's direct and indirectly experience with a brand (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987). According to Holden and Vanhuele (1999), a brand that is familiar will tend to be favoured, as familiarity signals that it is tied-and-trusted; marketers then would be keen to understand the development of brand-name familiarity, and this will tend to facilitate customer choice-making. This indicates that individuals that become familiar with a brand tend to develop a positive attitude towards the brand and familiarity induces a connection or an attachment to the brand; a customer-brand relationship is birthed in that process.

Mende and Bolton, (2011) revealed familiarity and responsiveness as foundations of choosing an attachment figure and proposed both as predictors of brand attachment. According to their findings, these two predictors are vital to attachment because they influence the preferences and selection processes of consumer's. The reviewed literatures on brand familiarity revealed that consumers may lack associations for unfamiliar brands; thus, consumers that associate themselves with specific brands most likely have done so because they have familiarised themselves with such brands and familiarity pools some level of connection, passion or affection for those brand. Brand familiarity has a positive influence on attitudes toward brand names, and brand attachment (Kohli, Harich, & Leuthesser, 2005). According to study of Nepomuceno, Laroche and Richard (2014), are of the opinion that as similarity of a new name to a familiar one increases, attitudes will be more favourable toward the new name, and will minimally deviate from familiar names and it will increase brand attachment. Because, a person who is familiar with a brand will be less concerned with the product's performance

likewise, by attached with the brand one perceives less financial risk when purchasing it.

Based on the above-mentioned literature, this study posits that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment.

Brand Evaluation and Brand Attachment

Using brand evaluation as one of the constructs in the study of Kleina and Dawarb (2004), concurred that brand evaluations affect consumer's purchase intentions. In other words, the authors expected brand evaluations to be positively related to purchase intentions. Moosmayer and Melan (2010) also hypothesised that the more positive consumer's attitudes are towards certain brand features, the more positive their brand evaluation; this could lead to a potential increase in their passion for the brand, connecting and getting them emotionally attached to the brand. Chi et al. (2009) expressed the relevance of consumer's evaluation of brand quality from their purchase experience. A positive brand experience will result in a positive brand evaluation resulting into brand loyalty and brand preference leading to an increased probability of purchase intentions. Chi et al. (2009) stated that customers must have positive feelings to a brand, then they will produce purchase intention. These feelings may be referred to as an emotional bond, passion, affection or connection towards a brand.

Schmitt (2011) described a consumer-psychology model of brands. He analysed the model as having five brand-related processes, namely identifying, experiencing, integrating, signalling and connecting with the brand. The term connection is referred to as forming an attitude toward the brand, becoming personally attached to it and connecting with the brand in a brand community, and this could be captured in one term − brand attachment. According to Schmitt (2011), brand attachment envisages customer intentions to perform behaviours that use significant resources such as time, money, and reputation. This study, therefore, hypothesises that such significant resources may not be expended

on a brand if the customer has a negative evaluation of such brand. According to the study conducted by Cheng, White and Chaplin (2012) findings suggest that consumers with strong brand attachment are more forgiving and benevolent in their brand evaluations.

Based on the above-mentioned literature, this study posits that:

H3: There is a positive relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

Sample and Data Collection

The target population for the study was South African consumers in Gauteng who purchased any consumer goods. The sampling unit was the individual consumer and a mall intercept survey was used. This method has the advantage of speed, is less costly, and the researcher has control over respondent type. Four shopping malls in Vanderbijlpark were selected for this survey and students from the Vaal University of Technology were recruited as research assistants to distribute and collect the questionnaires. Of the total of 400 questionnaire distributed, 355 usable questionnaires were retrieved for the final data analysis, representing a response rate of 89 percent. To eliminate differences in response patterns due to different reference points, all respondents were prompted to answer the questionnaire with reference to non-durable consumer goods. The reason for selecting this category was that consumers frequently purchase these products. In this regard, the respondents were asked to identify a product category in which they had frequently made a purchase intention decision. Respondents were then asked to name a brand in that category and they were requested to think about that brand as they completed the entire questionnaire, guided by the research assistants.

Measurement Instrument and Questionnaire

Research scales were operationalised on the basis of previous work. Proper modifications were made in order to fit the current research context

and purpose. Brand familiarity measure used a four-item scale adapted from Perks and Ha (2005), while brand attachment used a four-item scale adapted from Tsai (2011). Brand character used a four-item scale measure adapted from Aaker (1997). Finally, brand evaluation was measured using a six-item scale adapted from Parvin and Chowdhury (2006). All the measurement items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale that was anchored by 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree to express the degree of agreement.

Sample Description

The profile of the participants is presented in Table 1. The sample showed that more than 56 percent of the participating consumers in the South African companies were males and 44 percent were females. Majority of them were not married (61%) and the remainder were married, which constitutes 39 percent of the total population. Modal age groups were those between 26-33 years constituting 55 percent, followed by 18-25 age group amounting to 28 percent of the total population. Finally, the smallest group was 34 years and above contributing to 17 percent of the total population.

TABLE 1:
SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	200	56 %
Female	155	44 %
Total	355	100%

Marital status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	138	39 %
Single	217	61 %
Total	355	100%

Age	Frequency	Percentage
18-25	99	28 %
26-33	195	55 %
34 and above	61	17 %
Total	355	100%

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In accordance with the two-step procedure suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), prior to testing the hypotheses, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to examine reliability, convergent and discriminant validity of the multi-item construct measures using AMOS 7. Overall, acceptable model fit is indicated by goodness-of-fit index (GFI)   .80; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) values .08; incremental index of fit (IFI); Tucker Lewis Index (TLI) and comparative fit index (CFI) values   .90. Recommended statistics for the final overall model assessment show acceptable fit of the measurement model to the data: $\chi2/(df)$= 2.672, GFI = 0.868; IFI = 0.904; TLI=0.918; CFI = 0.905; RMSEA = 0. 060. Loadings of individual items on their respective constructs are shown in Table 2, while the scale construct correlations are presented in Table 3. The results are shown in Table 2, and descriptive statistics and correlations among the study constructs are presented in Table 3.

As recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Hair, Babin, Anderson & Tatham (2010), individual item loadings should be above 0.5. From the results presented in Table 2, all the item loadings for the research constructs are above 0.51, therefore, proving acceptable individual item reliabilities as more than 50 percent of each item's variance is shared with its respective construct. Using a formulae proposed by Fornell and Lacker (1981), the composite reliabilities (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable were computed. The composite reliabilities (CR) are all above the recommended value of 0.7 suggested by Hulland (1999); thus, indicating satisfactory internal uniformity and dependability of the respective measures. All average variance explained (AVE) values are above 0.5, thus tolerable according to the literature (Fraering & Minor 2006). These results provided evidence for acceptable levels of research scale reliability.

Discriminant validity was proven by checking if the AVE for each multi-item construct was greater than the shared variance between

TABLE 2:
ACCURACY ANALYSIS STATISTICS

Research construct		Cronbach's test		C.R. value	AVE value	Factor loading
		Item-total correlation	α value			
BF	BF1	.802				.873
	BF2	.746	.907	.907	.687	.819
	BF3	.768				.826
	BF4	.754				.790
BA	BA1	.701				.696
	BA2	.695	.802	.803	.756	.721
	BA3	.751				.744
	BA4	.707				.710
BC	BC1	.530				.608
	BC2	.722	.887	.891	.678	.785
	BC3	.757				.840
	BC4	.773				.820
BE	BE1	.540				.514
	BE2	.635				.618
	BE3	.667	.860	.863	.618	.746
	BE4	.692				.791
	BE5	.702				.798
	BE6	.676				.736

Note: BF=Brand Familiarity; BA = Brand Attachment; BC= Brand Character; BE = Brand Evaluation

TABLE 3:
SAMPLE DATA STATISTICS AND CORRELATIONS BETWEEN CONSTRUCTS

	Sample data statistics					
Variables	Mean	Standard deviation	BF	BA	BC	BE
BF	4.7635	1.02685	1.000			
BA	4.8329	1.01234	.558***	1.000		
BC	4.7868	1.01429	.500***	.576***	1.000	
BE	3.6391	.87156	.133***	.145***	.097***	1.00

Note: BF=Brand Familiarity; BA = Brand Attachment; BC= Brand Character; BE = Brand Evaluation

constructs (Fornell & Larcker 1981; Anderson & Gerbing 1988; Nunnally & Bernstein 1994; Hair et al., 2010) and if the inter-construct correlations were less than a unit. The results show that the highest SV among constructs are less than the lowest AVE value of each multi-item construct. Furthermore, the inter-construct correlation values are less than the recommended value of 0.8, revealing an adequate level of discriminant validity (see Table 3).

STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODELLING

This study used structural equation modelling (SEM) to approximate the causal relationship among the constructs based on the conceptual model in Figure 1. The maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) method was used because it has desirable asymptotic properties (e.g., minimum variance and unbiasedness) and is scale-free. The results are reported in Table 4. The model is acceptable in terms of overall goodness of fit. Acceptable model fit are indicated by χ^2 (df) values < 3; GFI and AGFI values 0.80; RMSEA values .080; IFI and CFI values 0.90. Results of this study indicate that, χ^2 (df) = 2.892; GFI (0.865); IFI (0. 901), TLI (0.851), CFI (0.850), and RMSEA (0.068) and therefore, achieved the suggested thresholds (Hair et al., 2010). This suggests that the model converged well and could be a plausible representation of underlying empirical data structures collected in South Africa.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results in Table 4 offer support for three proposed hypotheses. According to the objectives of the study, it can be deduced that the study postulated that there is a positive relationship between all the three hypotheses. The first research objective was to examine the relationship between brand character and brand attachment and the first postulated hypothesis was the relationship between brand character and brand attachment. Consistent with hypothesis one (H1), results indicate higher levels of consumers brand attachment. There is therefore a significant positive relationship between brand character and brand attachment in the companies in Gauteng province. The second research objective was to investigate the relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment and the second posited hypothesis was the relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment. Also, in support of hypothesis two (H2), the results indicate higher levels of brand familiarity associated with higher levels of brand attachment for consumers in Gauteng province. The results ultimately prove that there is a strong significant positive relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment in Gauteng province. The results indicate higher levels of brand familiarity associated with higher levels of brand attachment for consumers in Gauteng province. The third research objective was to investigate the relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment and the third

TABLE 4:
RESULTS OF STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL ANALYSIS

Path coefficients	Hypothesis	Factor loading
Brand character $\longrightarrow$ Brand attachment	H1	.701***
Brand familiarity $\longrightarrow$ Brand attachment	H2	.898***
Brand evaluation $\longrightarrow$ Brand attachment	H3	.603***

proposed hypothesis (H3) was the relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment. The standardised coefficient of brand evaluation and brand attachment is positive and significant. Of all the three hypotheses, the strongest relationship was that of brand familiarity and brand attachment, which has a standardised coefficient of 0.898, followed by brand character and brand attachment with a standardised coefficient of 0.701 and finally the relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment has the lowest coefficient of 0.603. Although the results shows there is a positive relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment, the relationship between brand evaluation and brand attachment has the lowest coefficient compared to other hypotheses.

CONCLUSION OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the influence of brand character, brand familiarity, brand evaluation on brand attachment. In particular, three hypotheses were postulated. To test the proposed hypotheses, data were collected from consumers within the Gauteng province. The empirical results supported all the speculated research hypotheses in a very significant way. Important to note about the study findings is the fact that brand familiarity has stronger effects on brand attachment (0.898) than brand character on brand attachment (0.701) and brand evaluation on brand attachment (0.603). Particularly, too, the relationship between hypothesis one and hypothesis two is robust at 95 percent confidence interval. Perhaps this could be due to the fact that customers are likely to be more attached to the brand if they are very familiar with it and have evaluated it which sounds reasonable.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

When customers or consumers are attached to a brand, it is because they are familiar with the brand, know the brand character and have evaluated it, hence contributing to a company's profitability. Therefore, in order to ensure customer brand attachment, managers ought to invest in strategies that foster brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation. The current study is an attempt to

investigate the influence of brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation, which eventually leads to brand attachment in an often most neglected context – the African context. By and large, the findings of this empirical study are expected to have provided fruitful implications to both practitioners and academicians. On the academic side, this study makes a significant contribution to the brand management literature by systematically exploring the impact of brand character, brand familiarity, brand evaluation on brand attachment in South Africa. Overall, the current study findings provide support to the proposition that brand character, brand familiarity and brand evaluation should be recognised as significant antecedents for gaining and sustaining brand attachment in South Africa. This study, therefore, submits that marketers can benefit from the implications of these findings. For instance, given the robust relationship between brand familiarity and brand attachment (0.898), between brand character and brand attachment (0.701) and also between brand evaluation and brand attachment (0.603), marketers ought to pay attention to brand familiarity, character and evaluation in order to build customer brand attachment. Eventually, the consumers will become attached to a brand that satisfies their needs, are familiar with it, have evaluated it and they perceive it to be trustworthy.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Despite the aforementioned usefulness of this study, the research has its limitations. The study can be strengthened by increasing the sample size and including participants in other geographical areas. In addition, the current study was limited to South Africa, Gauteng province. For results comparison, following researchers should contemplate replicating this study in other developing countries. In conclusion, the present study did not examine such factors as brand involvement, brand trust, brand experience, brand satisfaction and brand loyalty. Upcoming studies should focus on other precursors and their potential effects on brand attachment. All in all, these suggested

future avenues of study stand to immensely contribute new knowledge to the existing body of brand management literature in Africa – a context that is often most ignored by scholars.

REFERENCES

Aaker J.L. 1997. Dimensions of Brand Personality. Journal of Marketing Research, 34(3), 347-356.

Alba, J.W. & Hutchinson, J.W. 1987. Dimensions of consumer expertise. Journal of Consumer Research, 13(1), 411-454.

Anderson, J.C., & Gerbing, D.W. 1988. Structural equation modelling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. Psychological Bulletin 103(3), 411-423.

Baker, W., Hutchinson, J.W., Moore, D. & Nedungadi, P. 1986. Brand Familiarity and Advertising: Effects on the Evoked Set and Brand Preference, Advances in Consumer Research, 13:637-642.

Bell, D.C. 2010. The dynamics of connection: How evolution and biology create care-giving and Attachment. Lanham, MD: Lexington.

Berry, L.L. 2000. Cultivating service brand equity. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Sciences. 28(1), 128-137.

Belaid, S. & Lacoeuilhe, J. 2005. Une validation interculturelle de l'échelle d'attachement à la marque, Actes du XXIème Congrès de l'Association Française de Marketing, 18-20.

Bouhlel, O., Mzoughi, N., Hadiji, D., & Slimane, I.B. 2011. Brand Personality's Influence on the Purchase Intention: A Mobile Marketing Case. International Journal of Business and Management, 6(9): 210-227.

Bowlby, J. 1979. The Making and Breaking of Affectional Bonds. London: Tavistock.

Campbell, M.C. & Keller, K.L. 2003. Brand Familiarity and Advertising Repetition Effects. Journal of Consumer Research, 30: 292-304.

Cheng, S.Y.Y., White, T.B & Chaplin, L.N. 2012. The effects of self-brand connections on responses to brand failure: A new look at the consumer–brand relationship. Journal of Consumer Psychology 22: 280–288

Chi, H.K., Yeh, H.R & Yang, Y.T. 2009. The Impact of Brand Awareness on Consumer Purchase Intention: The Mediating Effect of Perceived Quality and Brand Loyalty. The Journal of International Management Studies, 4(1): 135 -144.

Chinomona. R. 2013. The influence of brand experience on brand satisfaction, trust and attachment in South Africa, International Business and Economics Research Journal, 12(10), 1303-1316.

Czellar, S., Luna, D., Voyer, B. & Schwob, A. 2011. How Personal Are Consumer Brand Evaluations? Disentangling the Role of Personal and Extra personal Associations in Consumer Judgments. Advances in Consumer Research 35: 997.

Dawar, N & Lei, J. 2008. Brand crises: The roles of brand familiarity and crisis relevance. In Determining the impact on brand evaluations. Journal of Business Research 62 (2009): 509–516.

Doyle, P. 1990. Building successful brands: the strategic options. Journal of Consumer Marketing, 7(2), 5-20.

Eisend, M., & Stokburger-Sauer, N. E. 2013. Brand personality: a metaanalytic review of antecedents and consequences. Marketing Letters, 24(3), 205-216

Fornell, C., & Larcker, V.F. 1981. Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable Variables and measurement error. Journal of Marketing Research, 18, 39–50.

Fournier, S. 1998. Consumer and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. Journal of Consumer Research, 24: 343-373.

Fournier, S. 2009. Lessons learned about consumer's relationships with their brands. In MacInnis, D.J., Park C.W., and Priester, J.R. eds., Handbook of Brand Relationships, M.E. Sharpe, 5-23.

Fraering, M., & Minor, M. S. 2006. Sense of Community: An Exploratory Study of US Consumers of Financial Services. International Journal of Bank Marketing, 24(5), 284-306.

Geuens, M., Weijters, B., & Wulf, K.D. 2009. A new measure of brand personality. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 97-107.

Gillath, O., Shaver, P. R., Baek, J-M., & Chun, D. S. 2008. Genetic correlates of adult attachment style. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 34(10), 1396-1405.

Govers, P. C. M., & Schoormans, J. P. L. 2005. Product personality and its influence on consumer preference. Journal of Consumer Marketing, 22(4), 189-197.

Grisaffe, D. B. & Nguyen, H. P. 2011. Antecedents of emotional attachment to brands. Journal of Business Research, 64, 1052-1059.

Ha, H.Y, & Perks H. 2005. Effects of consumer perceptions of brand experience on the web: Brand familiarity, satisfaction and brand trust. Academic Papers. Journal of Consumer

Behavior, 4(6), 438-452.

Hair, J. F., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., & Tatham, R. L. 2010. Multivariate Data Analysis. A Global Perspective. Seventh Edition. Prentice Hall, London.

Hingorani, A.G. 1999. The Effect of Brand Variation and Brand Familiarity and Brand

Name and Claim Recall: A Theoretical Perspective University of Technology, Sydney.

Hoch, S.J. & Deighton, J. 1989. Managing what consumers learn from experience',

Journal of Marketing, 53(1), 1–20.

Holden, S.J.S. & Vanhuele, M. 1999. Know the Name, Forget the Exposure: Brand

Familiarity versus Memory of Exposure Context Bond University Group HEC. Psychology & Marketing, 16(6), 479–496.

Hulland, J. 1999. Use of Partial Least Squares (PLS) in strategic management

research: A Review of four recent studies. Strategic Management Journal, 20(2),195-204.

Kan, W.H. 2002. The Study of Relation between Product Value, Brand Trust, Brand

Affect and Brand Loyalty. Unpublished Master Thesis, Tamkang University, Taiwan.

Kanno, S. 2014. The Effects of Self-Brand Connections on Brand Attachment. Komazawa, 2-3.

Kleina, J. & Dawarb, N. 2004. Corporate social responsibility and consumers'

attributions and brand evaluations in a product–harm crisis. International Journal of Research in Marketing, 21:203–217.

Kohli, C.S., Harich, K.R., & Leuthesser, L. 2005. Creating brand identity: a study of evaluation of new brand names. Journal of Business Research, 58(11), 1506–1515.

Korchia, M. 2001.The Dimensions of Brand Familiarity Track: Rethinking Consumer

Decision Making. Rethinking European Marketing, 1-6.

Kressmann, F., Sirgy, M. J., Herrmann, A., Huber, F., Huber, S., & Lee, D. J. 2006. Direct and indirect effects of self-image congruence on brand loyalty. Journal of Business Research, 59(9), 955–964.

Krishnan, H. 1996. Characteristics of memory associations: a consumer-based brand equity perspective, International Journal of Research in Marketing, 13(4), 389-405.

Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, Terblanche, Elliot & Klopper. 2011. Marketing. Third Edition. Southern Africa: Oxford University Press.

Maheswaran, D., Mackie D.M. & Chaiken, S. 1992. The Brand Name as a Heuristic

Cue: The Effects of Task Importance and Expectancy Confirmation on Consumer Judgments, Journal of Consumer Psychology, 1(4), 317-336.

Malar, L., Krohmer, H., Hoyer, W. D. & Nyffenegger, B. 2011. Emotional Brand

Attachment and Brand Personality: The Relative Importance of the Actual and the Ideal Self. Journal of Marketing, 75, 35-52.

Manuela, V.Z., Manuel, P.R., Eva M.M., & Francisco J.T.R. 2013. A Powerful

Word: The Influence of the Term 'Organic' on Perceptions and Beliefs Concerning Food. International Food and Agribusiness Management Review, 16 (4), 51-76.

Matzler, K., Pichler, E., Füller, J., & Mooradian, T. A. 2011. Personality, person–brand fit, and brand community: An investigation of individuals, brands, and brand communities. Journal of Marketing Management, 27(9–10), 874–890.

Mende, M. & Bolton, R.N. 2011. Why Attachment Security Matters: How Customers' Attachment Styles Influence Their Relationships With Service Firms and Service Employees. Journal of Service Research, 14, 285-301.

Moisescu, O.I. 2007. A Conceptual Analysis of Brand Evaluation. 32017, 93-98.

Moosmayer, D.C., & Melan, M. 2010. The Impact of Sound Logos on Consumer Brand Evaluation. A working paper.

Nepomuceno, N.V., Laroche, M and Richard, M.O 2014. How to reduce perceived risk when buying online: The interactions between intangibility, product knowledge, brand familiarity, privacy and security concerns. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services 21:619–629

Nunnally, J.C., & Bernstein, I.H. 1994. Psychometric Theory. Third Edition. Sydney, Australia: McGraw Hill.

Parish, J.T., & Holloway, B.B. 2010. Consumer relationship proneness: A

reexamination and extension across service exchanges. Journal of Services Marketing, 24(1), 61–73.

Park C.W., Macinnis D.J., Priester J., Eisingerich A.B. & Lacobucci D. 2010. Brand

attachments and brand attitudes strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. Journal of Marketing, 74(6), 1-17.

Parvin. N & Chowdhury. H.K. 2006. Consumer evaluations of beautification products: Effects of

extrinsic cues. Asian Academy of Management Journal, 11(2), 89-104.

Pawle, J., & Cooper, P. 2006. Measuring emotions: Lovemarks, the future beyond

 brands. Journal of Advertising Research, 46(1): 38–48.

Perks, H & Ha, H.Y. 2005. Effects of consumer perceptions of brand experience on

the web: Brand Familiarity, Satisfaction and brand trust. Journal of Consumer Behaviour, 4(6), 438-452.

Polyorat, K. 2011. The Influence of Brand Personality Dimensions on Brand

Identification and Word-of-Mouth: The Case Study of a University Brand in Thailand. Asian Journal of Business Research 1(1), 54-69.

Schermerhorn, J.R.Jr. 2015. Introduction to Management. International Student

 Version. 12th edition. John Wiley & Sons. Singapore.

Schmitt, B. 2011. The consumer psychology of brands Columbia Business School,

Columbia. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22 (2012):7–17.

Siguaw, J. A., Mattila, A., & Austin, J. R. 1999. The brand personality scale: An

application for restaurants. Cornell Hotel and Restaurant Administrative Quarterly, 40(3), 48-55.

Simpson, J. A., Collins, W. A., Tran, S., & Haydon, K. C. 2007. Attachment and the

experience and expression of emotions in romantic relationships: A developmental perspective. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 72(2), 355–367.

Sung, Y., & Tinkham, S. F. 2005. Brand personality structures in the United States and Korea: Common and culture-specific factors. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15(4), 334−350.

Thomson, M., Macinnis, D.J. & Park C.W. 2005. The Ties That Bind: Measuring the

Strength of Consumers' Attachments to Brands. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 15 (1), 77–91.

Tsai, S.P. 2011. Fostering international brand loyalty through committed and attached relationships. International Business Review, 20, 521–534.

Usakli, A., & Baloglu, S. 2011. Brand personality of tourist destinations: an application of self-congruity theory. Tourism Management, 32(1), 114-127

Vargo, L.S. & Lush, R.F. 2004. "Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing,"

Journal of Marketing, 68: 1-17.

Venable, B. T., Rose, G. M., Bush, V. D., & Gilbert, F.W. 2005. The role of brand

personality and charitable giving: An assessment and validation. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 33, 295−312.

Zhang, N., Zhou, Z., Su, C. & Zhou, N. 2013. How Do Different Types of Community

Commitment Influence Brand Commitment? The Mediation of Brand Attachment. Journal of Cyber psychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 16(11), 836-838.

Zhang, Z.K., Wang, S. & Zhao, S.J. 2014. Effect of Brand Personality on Brand

Loyalty in Companies, Microblogs, 1-17.

APPENDIX

Measurement Instruments

Brand Attachment

I am intensely passionate about the brand.
The brand prompts strong passion in me.
I long to put the brand into my ownership.
I may make necessary sacrifices to obtain the brand.

Brand familiarity

The brand gives me a feeling of goodwill.
I am always aware of the brand on the web.
The site has a good reputation.
Navigation at the site makes me feel comfortable.

Brand Character (personality)

The brand provides excitement.
The brand provides sincerity.
The brand is competent.
The brand provides sophistication.

Brand evaluation

1. I always keep this brand in my contemplation set.
2. This brand always outdoes other brands of this category.
3. This brand has exceptional features which cannot be found in other brands.
4. This brand has eye-catching attributes than other brands.
5. I am enthralled by this brand's image.
6. Owning this brand make other people jealous.