

**TITRE : BRAND ATTACHMENT, CUSTOMER TRUST AND CUSTOMER
ENGAGEMENT : WHAT RANKING OF THESE LINKS IN THE RELATIONAL CHAIN?**

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**ATTACHEMENT, CONFIANCE ET ENGAGEMENT ENVERS LA MARQUE:
QUEL CLASSEMENT POUR LES MAILLONS DE LA CHAÎNE
RELATIONNELLE?**

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ABSTRACT

Brand attachment, customer trust and customer engagement have been recognized for their mandatory role to build a strong brand-customer relationship and brand loyalty. The interactions between these attitudinal variables have also been examined in different fields. However, no conceptual framework has examined at once, the interactions between the brand attachment, customer trust and the customer engagement. The present study explores the ways these marketing relational chain's links interact and in what order they form the relational chain responsible of the long term brand-customer relationship. Using a structural equation modeling, on a sample of 220 costumers, we have found that the relational chain starts with the customer trust which is linked to the brand attachment, than the emotional engagement which leads to the calculated engagement.

Key words : Brand attachment, Customer trust, Customer engagement, affective engagement, calculated engagement, brand-customer relationship.

Résumé

L'attachement à la marque, la confiance et l'engagement ont été reconnus pour leur rôle indispensable dans l'établissement d'une solide relation marque-client et dans le maintien de la fidélité à la marque. Les interactions entre ces variables attitudinales ont également été examinées dans différents domaines. Cependant, aucun cadre conceptuel n'a examiné à la fois, les interactions entre l'attachement à la marque, la confiance et l'engagement. La présente étude explore la manière dont les maillons de la chaîne du marketing relationnelle interagissent et dans quel ordre ils forment la chaîne relationnelle responsable de la relation marque-consommateur, à long terme. En utilisant une modélisation en équations structurelles, sur un échantillon de 220 consommateurs, nous avons constaté que la chaîne relationnelle commence par la confiance du client, elle mène à l'attachement à la marque, l'engagement émotionnel intervient juste après pour permettre d'établir une relation basée sur l'engagement calculé.

Mots-clés : Attachement à la marque, confiance et engagement affectif, engagement calculé, relation marque-consommateur

**TITRE : BRAND ATTACHMENT, CUSTOMER TRUST AND CUSTOMER
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Brands have become an active member in a dynamic relationship that links them with their consumers. The anthropomorphism of brands helped to explain the birth of this particular interpersonal relationship. Individuals create and maintain relationships with brands, the same way they do with other individuals. Companies through their brands are no doubt seeking to retain their customers and the efforts made by managers are considerable. In a fierce competitive context and with the multitude of the offer which certainly can be varied in appearance but ends up converging on one or more characteristics, whether functional or symbolic. The consumer is also looking for a stable relationship with brands. Based on trust resulted from satisfaction, attachment and even engagement, here the interpersonal relationship is motivated by a desire to become interdependent with the brand. This relationship is characterized by a unique history and future predictions. Brand customers can meet their functional needs as well as their emotional expectations through this relationship. Through these brand-consumer relationships, which are emotional and cognitive in nature, companies want to be sure that their consumers will remain loyal.

The relational approach makes it possible to highlight particularly interesting components in maintaining a brand-consumer relationship. Some of the variables that marketers try so hard to control and manipulate are: customer trust, brand attachment and customer engagement. These variables play a central role because they can :

- Maintain relations with all trading partners;
- Resist relationships with attractive but short-term benefits;
- Focus on the benefits of long-term relationships;
- Integrate risky choices to keep partners tempted by opportunities (Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

These three variables have demonstrated their ability to maintain a relationship between the brand and consumers. The conceptual trilogy of attachment, trust and commitment was

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defended and has proven itself, in particular by giving rise to behaviors of loyalty (Gouteron, 2008; Louis 2010).

1. LITTÉRATURE REVIEW

1.1. CUSTOMER TRUST

Rempel et al., present customer trust as a multidimensional variable, composed of (1) predictability which corresponds to the component influenced by partner behavior, (2) reliability which reflects a higher level of abstraction and (3) faith which corresponds to the emotional component. It is about the security of taking advantage of the elements available to develop a sense of assurance. Trust is also defined by presumption, from a consumer perspective. It is an accumulation of presumptions related to the credibility, integrity and benevolence that a consumer attributes to a brand (Gurviez and Korchia, 2002). Even if trust is a central concept in marketing, it is still roughly delimited. Its structure, antecedents and consequences are also questionable. Despite the debates, there is a growing consensus regarding the view of trust as a sense of security resulting from a certainty about the behavior of the partner in the relationship, motivated by favorable intentions. By analogy, this trust corresponds to the consumer's certainty that the brand will honor all of its promises and meet all of its consumers' expectations (Delgado and Munuera, 2001). We consider the definition of Gurviez (1998) which corresponds in our sense exactly to the context of the application that we have chosen for this construct. According to the author, the customer trust is: "The presumption of the consumer that the brand, as a personified entity, is committed to taking a predictable action in accordance with its expectations and to maintain this orientation with benevolence over time". As for its structure, initially considered as a one-dimensional concept (Morgan and Hunt 1994), it is proposed as two-dimensional, integrating, on the one hand, the competence and honesty of the brand and, on the other hand, the benevolent intentions of the brand. (Sirieix and Dubois, 1999, Gutierrez et al. 2004). In a more recent study by Gurviez and Korchia (2002), the structure of customer trust has seen the addition of "credibility" as a third dimension.

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Attachment refers to the propensity of individuals to form and develop strong, emotional bonds with other people (Heilbrunn, 1996). This strong link between individuals helps explain all of the strong emotions during separation and unwanted loss situations such as grief, fear, depression and pain (Bowlby, 1969). It is also important to emphasize that attachment falls within the scope of the system of dyadic relationships found throughout the individual's daily life.

"Attachment is an emotionally charged and specifically targeted link between a person and an object", from the definition proposed by Bowlby (1979, cited by Hang le, 2012). It is clear that the concept of attachment is transposed to the realm of possessions. It is explained by its ability to be a vector of identity expression as well as to meet a need for "memory". The brand is an object that has a certain capacity for reaction. It can be described as an identity system, a means of communication but also a reference point in relation to oneself. Only emotionally charged brands can get brand attachment from their customers. Lacoeyuilhe (2000) proposed the following definition of attachment: "Attachment to the brand is a psychological variable which reflects a lasting and unalterable emotional reaction (separation is painful) towards the brand and which expresses a relationship of psychological proximity".

1.3. CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

Originally studied in the field of human resources and organizational science to explain and understand the relationships that bind people and organizations, its transition to the field of industrial marketing was intuitively appealing. In this same field, the study is still focused on interpersonal relationships; between individuals only (Terrasse, 2006). As for the transposition of the commitment to the area of the relationship with the brand, the process is more complicated simply because the brand is considered as an inert object and therefore the brand engagement can't be the same. The first limit of this transposition is triggered by the "reciprocity" of the relationship between the brand and its consumer. Once again, in the context of industrial marketing, this reciprocity is much more visible, because a company can modify or adapt one of its policies in response to a specific need of one of its customers from

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a B-to-B perspective, motivated by his decision to commit, something that cannot easily be spotted in the case of mass consumption for example. Geyer, Doston and King (1991) define engagement as a tendency to continue to use a particular brand and to feel psychologically attached to it. Engagement is defined by emotional or psychological attachment to the brand by Lastovicka and Gardner (1979), their definition was taken up by Beatty and Kahle (1988).

Brand engagement is often confused with loyalty. Oliver (1997) defines loyalty as: 'the deep-rooted commitment to repurchase the product or service in the future, prompting a repeat purchase of the same brand or set of brands, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that could encourage consumers to change brands... ". Other authors have preferred not to take risks and have remained cautious of the terminology used in the definition, they have spoken of an existing connection between loyalty and commitment (Martin and Goodell, 1991). Fournier (1994) deals with the concept of engagement based on the history of interactions that arose between consumers and brands. It is a process and therefore forms gradually, it is the result of a fairly strong relationship between individuals and the brands they consume. The main idea is that research dealing with the concept of engagement can be classified according to; on the one hand the consideration of the concept as the client's desire to continue a relationship and on the other hand the commitment through its consequences. In the end, we can conclude that there are several divergences as to the nature of the concept; we retain the definition proposed by Terrasse: **"Brand engagement is a consumer attitude, which is observed for a given brand within a given product category. The commitment is a testament to the consumer's desire to continue the relationship with the brand, even if they have to make certain sacrifices to do so. "**

Allen and Meyer (1991) speak of two broad categories of brand engagement, the first is called 'affective engagement' which is explained by a general positive assessment and attachment (Geyskens et al. 1995), the second is called 'calculated engagement' which represents the cognitive attitudinal part that emanates from a neutral evaluation between the different costs generated by the purchase of a brand and the benefits derived from the act of purchase or consumption (Allen and Meyer, 1991). Affective engagement is created as a result of the

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consumer's desire to maintain a long-term relationship, based on the partner's values, regardless of material benefits. This emotional aspect of engagement has led several studies to consider it to be equivalent to attachment. It also signifies the individual's willingness to maintain a relationship with an object / brand according to his emotional attachment and identification with it (Amine, 1998).

The calculated engagement corresponds to the desire to keep a relationship with a partner (in the context of business to business relationships) or a brand, given the economic benefits derived from this partnership. In this analysis based on rational calculation, particularly in terms of the costs generated by the change, the functional side is important in the consumer's vision, he believes in the superiority of the brand compared to the competitors. Customer engagement and attachment are two very close constructs; the link between these concepts is almost systematic. Lacoeyuilhe, realizing this confusion, proposed a discriminated validity that placed attachment before engagement, thus positioning attachment as antecedent. This proposition joins that of Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2002) who adds to this model, the variable of trust while separating the two dimensions of customer engagement.

1.4. CUSTOMER TRUST, BRAND ATTACHMENT AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT: WHAT RELATIONAL INTERACTIONS?

A. TRUST AND ENGAGEMENT

Such an important role is reserved for trust in the construction of engagement, Morgan and Hunt (1994) attribute to it a moderating function between attitudes and the will to maintain the relationship. After this first research, the desire for other studies came to allow the export of this model to several product categories. The test and empirical validation of this link were made by Gurviez and Korchia (2002). To measure engagement as a consequence of trust, they opted for three items retained from the work of Le Roux, Chandon and Strazzeri (1997). Regardless of the structure of trust, the authors are unanimous and place trust as the antecedent of engagement, the link between the two concepts seems intuitively justifiable. Trust is a measure of "the state of the relationship", it is a factor that makes it possible to

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predict behavior (Chow and Holden, 1997, cited by Terrasse, 2006), unlike Amine (1998), who places trust downstream and considers engagement as an antecedent of trust as well as positive word of mouth.

B. ENGAGEMENT ET ATTACHEMENT

Several authors consider attachment and engagement to the brand as one attitude. According to this methodological position, a consumer attached to a brand is a consumer who wishes to maintain and continue the relationship which binds him to a brand. The proven link between the two concepts is almost systematic, something which feeds the confusion, attachment is considered to be an antecedent of engagement. The definition of attachment, proposed by Lacoecilhe (2000), is largely different from that formulated by Terrasse (2006) but both agree on the sustainability of the relationship between the brand and the consumer.

We present in the table below, the differences related to the definition, to the conditions of observation, to the object and to the nature between the two concepts of attachment and engagement:

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Table 1: Comparison between the characteristics of engagement and attachment

	Attachement	Engagement
Definition (formulated from the literature review)	Attitude reflecting a lasting and undeniable emotional relationship with the brand	Willingness of the consumer to continue the relationship with the brand
Condition	Prior purchase	Prior purchase
Object	Any brand that enters into the knowledge of the consumer. It varies from brand to brand.	Any brand already purchased, this attitude also varies for each brand
Nature	Affective	Mainly cognitive

(Inspired by Terrasse works, 2006)

Starting from the logic that states that calculated engagement is based on an economic and rational decision, Lacoeyilhe (2000b) developed the relationship between trust and calculated engagement. The positive effect of trust on customer engagement is validated by empirical studies (Aurier et al., 2001; Morgan and Hunt 1994; Aurier and N'Goala, 2009), on the other hand, the interest was exclusively focused on trust without implication of attachment. Attachment is then inserted into conceptual models relating these relational variables, thus a three-dimensional model is proposed. Confirmation of the existence of a relationship between, on the one hand, trust and calculated engagement and, on the other hand,

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attachment and affective engagement is also made on two separate models (Valette-Florence, 2009).

The logical chain puts trust before attachment. Started from the definition of trust which specifies that it is a commitment in order to have a predictable action in line with consumer expectations, while ensuring that this orientation is maintained over time (Gurviez, 1999), Aurier et al. (2001) consider trust as the antecedent of attachment, which expresses a reaction of an affective and unalterable nature. It is also a psychological closeness relationship with the brand (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). As for the engagement to the brand, Beatty (1988), considers it an attachment of an emotional nature, it is also a person's desire to maintain a relationship with what he has based on this emotional attachment and identification with this possessed object (Amine, 1998). Engagement and attachment were considered equivalent (Kapferer and Laurent, 1992) before the arrival of Lacoeuilhe's study placing engagement as a consequence of attachment. Empirically also, the discriminant validity between the two concepts has been established, it also confirms a difference but also a proximity between the two concepts (Terrasse, 2003). The existence of interactions between these three relational variables is obvious; these interactions are also complex. After reading the results of studies proposing an analysis of these links, we thus present our hypotheses related to these variables as follows:

H1. Trust has a positive and significant impact on brand attachment.

We remind you that engagement is treated according to its two components: emotional and calculated engagement. If the first corresponds more to an affective logic based on emotional elements, the second is rather the result of an economic decision mastered by calculation, to respond to a cognitive logic, we can then assume that trust would rather explain the calculated engagement while attachment is behind the emotional one.

H2. Trust has a direct and positive impact on calculated engagement.**H3. Attachment has a direct and positive impact on emotional engagement to the brand.**

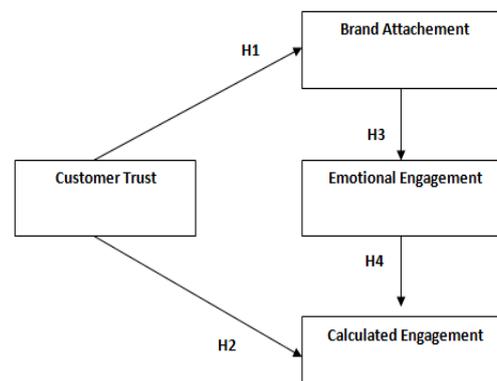
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We are also interested in the relationship between the two components of engagement, which were always treated separately, so we assume that emotional engagement comes before the calculated one:

H4. Emotional engagement has a positive impact on the calculated engagement to the brand

All of these hypothesis relating brand personality and relationship variables are consistent with the basic principle of brand personality. Considered as a central concept, brand personality provides a clear understanding of the creation and continuity of the special relationships that bind consumers to their brands.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 DATA COLLECTION

We obtained 237 questionnaires recorded on the Internet and 112 paper questionnaires. We kept only those that are duly completed and are therefore usable. total of 220 questionnaires are valid. Our convenience sample consists of 52.5% women and 47.5% men, aged 18 to 64. The introductory sentence, insists on the fact that the chosen brand must already be bought and consumed by the respondent, because we wish to validate hypotheses related to trust, attachment and engagement to the brand. The prior purchase is an essential condition for the development of these variables, specifying that we do not consider the initial confidence in our model.

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As for the requirements of modeling by structural equations, it is the complexity of the model that determines the minimum threshold. It is recommended to respect a ratio of 5 to 20 observations per parameter as a minimum; this criterion is respected in our research. It should also be added that the estimation of the model is based on a statistical test penalized by a large sample size. In this sense, the most commonly used algorithm corresponds to an optimal operating range for a sample size varying between 200 and 250 observations, which correspond perfectly to the size of our sample.

2.3 MEASURES

We opted for structural equations to highlight all the links between the variables. Modeling by structural equations merges the econometric perspectives of regression analysis and the psychometric perspective of factor analysis. It makes it possible to regress latent variables on top of each other after a preliminary step of estimating these variables by factor analysis. Another advantage is that of estimating the component of the error included in any regression equation and the direct and indirect modeling between the variables. From these elements, modeling by structural equations is an extension of the methods which presents only one or the other of these characteristics:

-Factorial analysis makes it possible to estimate the latent variables which correspond to the factors from the observed variables and to correlate them. On the other hand, it does not allow them to regress one on top of the other;

-Regression analysis allows the variables to be regressed; it has the disadvantage of being limited to a single dependent variable as well as not being able to analyze the correlation relationships between the explanatory variables which are supposed to be independent of each other;

-Generalized canonical analysis corresponds to a bridge between factor analysis and regression, it allows regressing only a single dependent variable on an independent variable;

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-The "path analysis": allows to model direct and indirect regression relations and to calculate the error but does not allow the management of latent variables. (Giannelloni and Vermette, 2015).

3. RESULTATS AND DISCUSSION

Brands depend on loyal customers to survive, to sell and to stay. Engaged customers support the brand in its development, extension and existence. Likewise, consumers need these brands to meet their needs, which differ from person to person and according to the meanings sought. Creating an interpersonal relationship with the brand is a consumer need and a constant quest for companies. Through our research, we have made this relationship a reality through trust, attachment and commitment to the brand. These very similar concepts have also prompted us to wonder about the nature of the relationships that bind them. The literature review that we carried out guided us in developing the links to be tested. The figure below shows the hypotheses that we have verified:

Table 2: Research hypothesis testing results

The relational chain Customer Trust- Brand Attachment-Customer Commitment	Confidence has a positive and significant effect on attachment	Evidenced
	Confidence has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement	Rejected
	Attachment has a positive and significant effect on emotional engagement	Evidenced
	Affective commitment has a positive and significant effect on the calculated commitment	Evidenced

By the authors

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The strong relationships between brands and consumers are largely explained by trust and engagement. Among the manifestations of this relationship, which is supposed to be sustainable over time, we find the stability of brand preferences (Beatty et al., 1988). These key variables have been studied specifically in the area of trade between businesses and more specifically in the area of services. In several studies, trust is considered to be an antecedent of brand attachment (Aurier et al., 2001; Gouteron, 2008) and an antecedent of customer engagement (Geyskens et al., 1998; Morgan et al., Hunt, 1994; Frisou, 2000; Aurier and N'Goala, 2009). Trust is built when the brand undertakes to maintain a set of predictable actions that are in line with the expectations of its customers while maintaining benevolence in the achievement of these conditions and this, on the long term. This aspect of the duration in time constitutes a basis for the attachment to the brand which corresponds to an active affective reaction for a certain duration and whose separation causes pain for the parties concerned, it is a relation based on a certain psychological proximity.

The results of our research validate the positive influence of trust on brand attachment, they agree with the results of the studies cited above. So in order to be able to build a feeling of attachment to the brand, the passage through trust is essential. As for the link between trust and the computational component of engagement, we have not validated the causal relationship

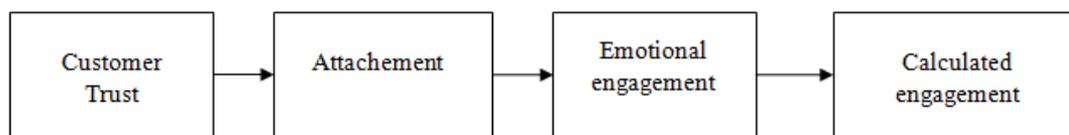
Brand attachment is seen as the antecedent of brand engagement and as a mediator in the relationship between trust and engagement. In this research, commitment is considered with its two components, the results allow us to comment on the positive and significant effect of attachment on emotional commitment. These two affective components are linked.

The attached consumer is considered to be a consumer who exclusively purchases the same brand. Brand attachment is at the root of brand loyalty and engagement to it. Attachment and customer engagement have demonstrated in several studies a strong interacting relationship, even in models that have viewed them as two parallel and independent concepts (Cristau, 2001).

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Our results are largely consistent with several studies on relational logic. Aurier et al. (2001) placed trust as the antecedent of attachment and attachment in connection with commitment but also trust with commitment. Gouteron (2008) proposes the same path as us, Lacoueilhe (1999) also validated this same order, separately, he validated the relationship of trust and attachment then of attachment and trust.

Figure 2: The validated chain of links between customer trust, brand attachment and customer engagement



Our results are largely consistent with several studies on relational logic. Aurier et al. (2001) put trust as an antecedent of attachment and attachment in connection with engagement but also trust with commitment. Gouteron (2008) proposes the same links ranking, Lacoueilhe (1999) also validated this same order, separately, he validated the relationship of trust and attachment then of attachment and trust. The brand-consumer relationship is a dynamic and complex relationship; it varies according to many moderating variables. The brand-consumer relationship is a dynamic and complex relationship; it varies according to many moderating variables.

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APPENDICES

APPENDICE 1: VARIABLES SCALES USED IN THE RESEARCH

Table 1 : PCA results applied to the brand attachment measurement scale

Axes	Variables	Relative Contribution	Own Value	Total variance explained	Alpha de Cronbach
Attachement	I am very attracted to this brand	,839	4,027	67,123	,901
	It's a brand that I enjoy using	,803			
	It would pity me to have to give up buying this brand	,840			
	I'd be upset if I couldn't find this brand	,799			
	when I need it I would be desperate if this brand were taken off the market	,781			
	Buying this brand gives me a lot of joy and pleasure	,852			

From Lacoecilhe and Belaïd (2007)

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Table 2: Results of the PCA applied to the brand confidence measurement scale

Axes	Variables	Relative Contribution	Own Valeurs	Total variance explained	Alpha de Cronbach
Customer Trust	I have confidence in the quality of the products of this brand	,798	4,472	63,892	,905
	Buying products from this brand is a guarantee	,819			
	This brand is sincere towards its consumers	,845			
	This brand is honest with its customers	,863			
	This brand shows interest in its customers	,831			
	I think this brand renews its products based on scientific and technical research progress	,695			
	I think this brand is continually looking to improve its responses to consumer needs	,731			

from Gurviev et Korchia, 2002

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Table 3: PCA results applied to the brand engagement measurement scale

Axes	Variables	Relative Contribution	Own Value	total variance explained	Alpha de Cronbach
Emotional Engagement	I feel emotionally attached to this brand	,929	2,672	89,060	,939
	This brand has a lot of personal meanings to me	,953			
	I feel I have a strong sense of identification with this brand	,949			
Calculated Engagement	Now it is very difficult for me to move away from this brand even if I wanted to	,888	2,390	79,651	,871
	My life would be disrupted if I had to give up this mark	,899			
	From now on, it would cost me too much if I moved away from this brand	,890			
	For this product category, the brand is not important	,892			

From Fullerton customer engagement Scale, 2005

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