



*Research Article*

# The Brand between Nostalgia and Attachment: the Case of the Moroccan Consumer

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## Abstract

Nostalgia is a variable that is increasingly discussed in consumer-brand relationships, particularly through the notion of attachment. The objective of this work is to shed light on the attachment to the nostalgic brand in the mass consumption sector in Morocco. To do this, an exploratory quantitative study was conducted on a sample of 150 people to verify the relationship between the nostalgic brand and the degree of attachment while questioning the reasons for the latter. The main conclusions drawn from the study indicate the existence of new variables - apart from memories - likely to impact attachment to the nostalgic brand. Also the study showed that considerations towards the nostalgic brand vary according to gender and age.

**Keywords:** brand - nostalgia - attachment.

## Introduction

The emotional attachment to the brand is getting more and more interesting for researchers and managers and this is mainly in the study of the relationship with

the nostalgic brand. Indeed, several studies have been conducted in this direction.

On the other hand, the consumer culture is starting to grow more and more. Consumers are referring to the meaning

and message of the product much more than to the product itself, consumer considerations and requirements are increasingly difficult to define (Ghilane, Elyamani, and Aomari 2017).

It is in this context that consumer behavior specialists have become aware of the place of nostalgic emotion and its advantages as a competitive element on which managers can rely on as a positioning tool. The ultimate goal behind it is to create an emotional bond with consumers. It is this aspect that gives the company a distinctive character compared to the past in order to guarantee the attachment of its customers to their brands (Ghilane, Elyamani, and Aomari 2017).

In relationship marketing, attachment is seen as the driving force that leads to deeper relationships over the long term such as commitment and loyalty.

Our research is among others that have addressed the subject of nostalgic brands, but to our knowledge, it is one of the few in the Moroccan context. In this study, we propose to explore the explanatory factors of attachment to a nostalgic brand.

The consumer market is becoming more and more complex, and meeting different expectations is a dilemma for managers and companies in general. This explains the importance of segmentation for a better understanding of the different needs of brands.

Thus, to answer this problem, we conducted a quantitative exploratory study on a sample of 150 people. Our main contribution is to discuss the subject of nostalgic brand attachment by integrating control variables such as age and gender. The categorization of the sample made it possible to detect new explanatory variables for the attachment to the nostalgic brand in the mass consumption sector in Morocco.

### **The Brand in the Affective Context**

The brand can be considered as a process of communication with the world, it also

represents a landmark for itself (Lacoeuille 2000). It can also be an active partner in a relationship, and even provoke some affectivity, such as a person (Fournier, 1994).

In the context of affective function, Heilbrunn, 1996 focused on the psychological process of this close relationship between the consumer and the brand. For him, attachment is "the emotional and affective bond woven by a consumer towards a given brand", (Heilbrunn, 2001). Thus, brands seek to create an emotional relationship with their customers. They then try to seduce consumers with their history and culture. "The "emotional contract" thus created will make it possible to develop an attachment to the brand.

The consumer finds in brands a commitment to continuity and trust that goes beyond the simple life of the products offered. The brand fulfills different roles in the dynamics of the consumer purchasing process. Three main functions of the brand can be identified: guarantee, identification and emotional (Géraldine Michel, 2009).

In order to enter into a more emotional relationship with the consumer, brands recall their history. The current context is rather conducive to an evocation of the roots, consumers need to be reassured.

According to the degree of consumer involvement, and according to the category of products, the importance given to brands differs. The brand's weight in the purchasing process is symbolized by the concepts of sensitivity and brand loyalty (Géraldine Michel, 2009).

### **- Brand sensitivity:**

A buyer is sensitive to brands if all other things are equal, his choice changes according to the nature of the brand, depending on whether the product is a branded product or not; a first price is an example, (Kapferer and Laurent, 1992). To say that an individual is brand sensitive means that the brand plays a significant role in his choice process. This is a general

sensitivity to brands. However, brand sensitivity depends largely on the product category and psychographic variables such as the degree of interest in the product, product involvement and product experience, etc.

#### - Brand loyalty:

Loyalty, on the other hand, reflects a favorable attitude towards a specific brand resulting in a repeated purchase of that brand over time; it is therefore a behavioral variable. Much research has focused on defining the characteristics of the typical faithful consumer (Géraldine Michel, 2009).

#### - Commitment:

"Commitment is defined as the degree to which an individual sees a relationship in a long-term perspective, and the willingness to remain in that relationship even if things go wrong", (van Lange et al., 1997). Many researchers find engagement to be a measure of marketing effectiveness (Dwyer, Schurr and Oh, 1987; Moorman, Desphande and Zaltman, 1993; Morgan and Hunt, 1994).

"In marketing context, the degree to which an individual remains loyal to a brand is a relevant informer of commitment", (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). It can also be assumed that a valid measure of emotional attachment should anticipate a consumer's commitment to a brand, such as brand loyalty.

The strength of the emotional attachment behind an object can be associated with the investment in that object, that is, the willingness to give up an immediate interest to strengthen a relationship (van Lange et al., 1997). At this level, a valid measure of emotional attachment should have the ability to predict a consumer's investment in a brand, such as the willingness to pay a premium price to acquire that brand.

#### Attachment to the Brand

Bowlby (1979, 1980) was the first to do work on brand attachment in relation to parent/newborn relationships. For him, an

attachment is an emotionally charged and specifically targeted link between a person and a specific object. The strength of these bonds is different; the stronger of them are associated with more powerful feelings of connection, affection, love and passion (cf. Aron and Westbay, 1996; Bowlby, 1979; Brennan, Clark and Shaver, 1998; Collins and Read, 1990, 1994; Feeney and Noller, 1996; Fehr and Russel, 1991; Sternberg, 1987).

In marketing, there are three proposals for defining the concept of brand attachment. Two of these refer to attachment as a "psychological variable" (J. Lacoëuilhe, 2000) or a "psychological relationship" (C. Cristau, 2001), while the third definition develops attachment as a reflection of an emotional and affective bond (B. Heilbrunn, 2001). B. Heilbrunn (1996), in his definition of existential attachment, states that this emotional bond is "woven" over the years by the consumer towards a given brand, which refers to the ideas of strength and sustainability explicitly expressed in J. Lacoëuilhe's (2000) definitions.

Brand attachment is a key component of the brand's emotional function. It can be defined as a psychological variable that reflects a lasting and unalterable emotional relationship (separation is painful) with the brand and expresses a relationship of psychological closeness with it (Lacoëuilhe, 2000).

Thus, consumer attachment to brands is driven by emotions (Park and Srinivasan, 1994), the person is attached to a brand when the latter produces cultural and personal values identical to that person (Richins and Dawson, 1992). This can be explained by a congruence between the concept of self, the individual and the personality of the brand (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987). Thus, the attachment to the brand is conditioned by its ability to hold and keep the identity of the person, preserving the past and creating identity connections that can ensure the maintenance of individual character. We can therefore conclude from the literature review on the concept of attachment that the value placed on a possession and the attachment one carries to it are linked to

the existence of a link with events in the individual's life. This object can symbolize personal history, social relationships or interpersonal connections (Belk, 1988; Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Richins, 1994). The brand therefore plays a very important role in this sense, allowing the individual to remember a subject, a group of people with whom he is associated or wishes to be associated, and in this way the brand can even meet the need to belong.

Heilbronn (2001) specifies that there are two forms of attachment: functional attachment and existential attachment, and for him it is the latter that expresses sentimental and emotional bonds over time.

Other authors have developed brand attachment scales in order to operationalize the quality of the consumer-brand relationship. In 1994, Fournier developed the BRQ "Brand Relationship Quality" to highlight the different modalities of the consumer-brand relationship, based on a six-faceted construct: intimacy, love, passion, connection to the self, interdependence, commitment and partnership quality of the brand. Her work on the individual-brand relationship allows us to create a relationship with research that also addresses the topic of attachment. According to Fournier, this relationship is justified by the development of two connections: nostalgic connections and connections with the concept of self. Brand attachment is evolutionary in the sense that it is likely to be linked to a period in the consumer's life. An individual may very well be attached to an X-brand during his adolescence and then detach himself from it once he reaches adulthood insofar as the values of the brand no longer match those of the consumer. The determinants of your attachment to the brand lie in the nostalgic connections of the brand and in the perception of an image congruence with it.

The consumer thus needs to have built a story to be attached to a product or brand. This story may of course be personal, that is, accompanied by real memories and lived experiences, but it may also be collective.

The existence of a relationship between nostalgia and attachment is explained by several studies (Heilbrunn, 2001, Belk 1990 and Holbrook 1991) by demonstrating that consumers appeal to their memories before becoming attached to the brand. Thus, the greater the nostalgic connections, the greater the intensity of brand attachment (Richins, 1994; Kleines et al. 1995; Lacoëuilhe, 2000a). The brand can thus generate a nostalgic stimulus and allows the marked object to have a sentimental value that will be a source of attachment. It is therefore, in the behavioural approach, interesting to explore this relationship between nostalgia and attachment to the brand.

### **The Nostalgic Brand**

Since the early 1980s, consumer behavior research has shown a growing interest in the concept of emotions (laurenceGraillet 1998). This interest arose when researchers, particularly Holbrook and Hirshman (1982), suggested that the introduction of emotions as a particularly important subset of emotional states into research can help to better understand decision-making and consumer behavior. These brands through this aspect aim to reinforce emotions to promote action by creating a connection between the brand and the consumer knowing that when the person is under the influence of a strong emotion, he takes action in an impulsive way. (De Vergnette, 2015). The interest of researchers in this tool is becoming increasingly important thanks to the translation of the unique and irreplaceable character of the brand (Ghajbal, 2017). Its impersonal quality is also a major asset (Baker and Kennedy, 1994).

On the other hand, the human being is considered as a being of reason but also of emotions, and to make a decision, he thus appeals not only to reasoning but also and especially to his emotions, the reason why today and more than ever emotion is often at the heart of the act of purchase, it takes an increasingly important value in the field of marketing. Brands play on emotions and emotions to stimulate the act of buying. Thus the brand, by playing the card of tradition, even nostalgia, and while

remaining modern, attracts consumers who find the time of their childhood. So to make themselves loved and create an emotional relationship with consumers, brands play the nostalgia card by republishing old products.

Fournier (1994), Delgado and Escalas (2004) show that brands perform a dual identity function; enabling individuals to connect with their own past and promoting their social integration. Following their research, Kessous and Roux (2010) verify that they connect nostalgia/attachment and nostalgia/connections to the self. Nostalgia was therefore described as the main emotion that affects brand attachment.

Nostalgia is an ancient concept, introduced in 1688 in medicine, but its use in marketing is relatively recent and dates from the late twentieth century; the time when crises take different forms (economic, social, food and health) and globalize. The resulting feelings of insecurity have generated a desire to return to "true values". Consumers need reassurance and see in past reconstruction experiences the possibility of responding to a quest for security (Loveland, Smeesters and Mandel, 2010).

Nostalgic brands are defined as brands that were popular in the past and are still popular today (Loveland, Smeesters and Mandel, 2010). However, it is possible to distinguish between transgenerational brands and generational brands (Kessous and Roux, 2010). The former go beyond intergenerational differences and are aimed at a variety of consumer targets. The second, are specific to certain generations (ex: Nintendo : generation Y ; Lego : generation X ; Levis : baby boomers ; Ford : post-war generation) (Brée, 1999 ; Heilbrunn, 1999 ; Kessous and Roux, 2010).

Therefore, consumers must be reassured and see past reconstruction experiences as an opportunity to respond to a quest for security (Loveland, Smeesters and Mandel, 2010). Nostalgia thus becomes a marketing tool at the service of brands and gives them

a capital of authenticity, longevity and quality.

For Lacoëuilhe (2000), attachment to the brand can be fuelled in different ways and mainly by nostalgic links where the brand plays the role of the individual's memory. Indeed, attachment requires a minimum of prior knowledge of the brand to develop over time a set of memories associating the variable studied (Brand) with the consumer, thus creating the nostalgic effect.

In order to conclude the theoretical context, we can well retain that the brand has, among other things, as its main function: the affective function. So for a good emotional relationship with the consumer, brands use their history through nostalgia. Especially since there is a strong relationship linking nostalgia to the degree of attachment to a brand, and several authors mentioned earlier have clearly shown this. Thus, "nostalgia" emotion has been well recognized by consumer behavior specialists in the decision-making process, and thus creating an emotional bond capable of maintaining the brand/consumer relationship and thus developing attachment to the brand. And it is in this sense that we have proposed in this study to explore the explanatory factors of the attachment to a nostalgic brand for Moroccan consumers.

## **Methodology**

### ***The object of Study***

According to the literature, the link between the nostalgic brand and attachment is no longer to be demonstrated. Thus, the objective of this research is to conduct an exploratory study with reference to the Moroccan context in the context of the mass consumption sector to explore other variables likely to influence the attachment relationship to the nostalgic brand.

To achieve this, we have developed two research axes, the first referring to the degree of attachment and the second to identify the reasons for this attachment. The analysis will be developed based on an

age and gender distribution of the sample to identify the behavior of each group.

### Sampling

Holbrook and Schindler (1989) point out that sustainable preference in cultural consumption occur in late adolescence and early adulthood. Based on these results, we limited our target to adults and seniors.

For the sample size, it is estimated at 150 using the following formula:

$$N = (z)^2 / 4d^2$$

Z = confidence level according to the normal centered reduced law (for a 95% confidence level,  $z = 1.96$ )

D = estimated tolerance of error of 8%

Based on the statistics of the report of the High Commission for Planning (HCP Morocco) published in 2016 on the demographic distribution of the population in the urban area, we used the quota method to justify our sample. The following table presents the distribution of the sample of 150 individuals:

**Table 1: Calculation of the sample according to the quota method (by the author)**

	WOMEN	%	Sample	MEN	%	Sample
25 to 35	1785831	16,637	24,956	1681662	16,041	24,062
35 to 45	1548856	14,429	21,644	1422979	13,573	20,360
45 to 55	1262832	11,764	17,647	1191484	11,365	17,048
More than 55	830574	7,737	11,606	884666	8,438	12,658
TOTAL SAMPLE	5428093	50,57	75,855	5180791	49,42	74,13
GLOBAL POPULATION	10496078	50,579	75,868	10255722	49,420	74,131

### Results

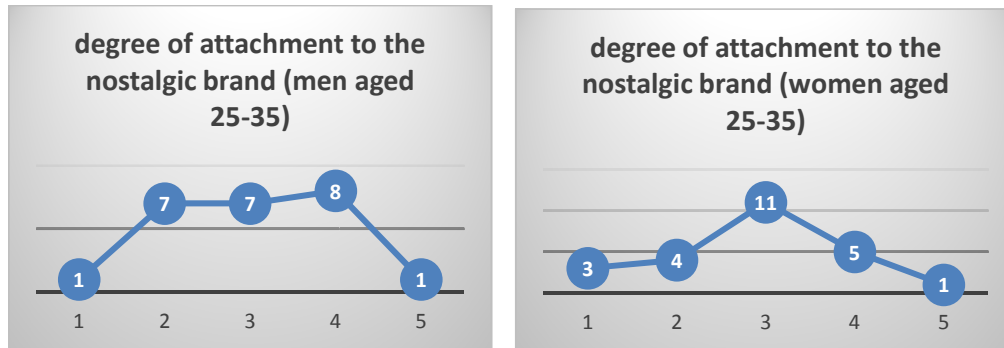
#### Consumer Behaviour of Unit 25-35

- Attachment to the brand:

According to the results obtained, the majority of respondents in the 25-35 age group currently consume their nostalgic brand with a percentage that rises for the criterion "often" to 80% for women against 58% for men.

→ The 1 represents a strong attachment to the nostalgic brand, while the 5 represents an almost null degree of attachment.

For the degree of attachment to the nostalgic mark, we notice from the graphs that for women, the peak is relative to a neutral degree of attachment of 3rd level on a scale of 5 levels, while for men the peak is relative to a low degree of 4th level as shown in the graphs below.



**Graph 1: degree of attachment to the nostalgic brand, 25-35 age group (by the author)**

For the most dominant reasons of attachment, the variables relating to memories, taste and quality are noted for women, while for men, they are quality, taste, consumption habits and memories.

#### Consumer behaviour in the 35-45 range

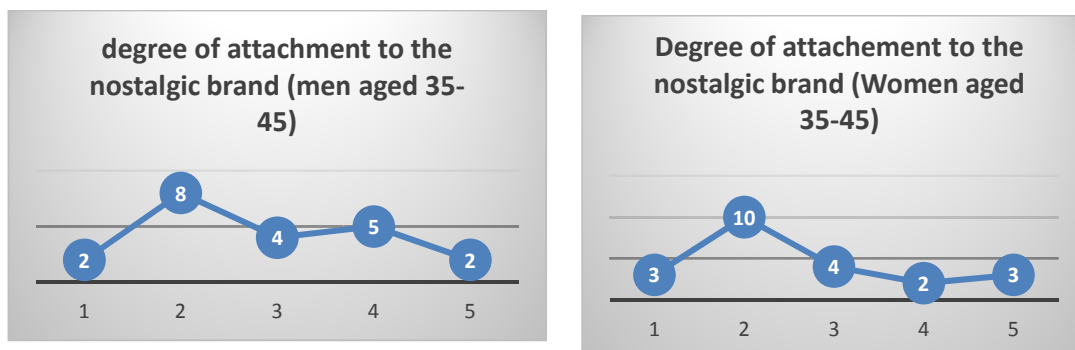
##### 1. - Attachment to the nostalgic brand

The current consumption of the nostalgic brand for women in the said bracket is negative insofar as 36% say they have never consumed their nostalgic brand,

however 32% often consume it and 27% opt for occasional consumption and only 5% who still consume it.

For men, 48% attest to occasionally consuming their nostalgic brand and 24% never consume it. Also, 9% still consume it and 19% often consume it.

For the degree of attachment, the shot for both women and men is at the second level, which reflects the strong degree of attachment to the nostalgic brand as shown in the graph below.



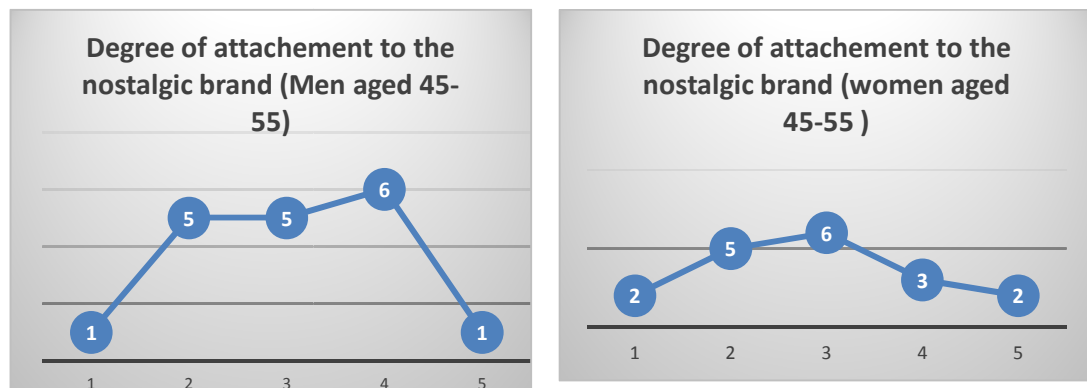
**Graph 2: degree of attachment to the nostalgic brand, 35-45 age group (by the author)**

The reasons for this attachment can be explained as well in women as in men by memories and good taste, then quality and consumption habits.

#### Consumer behavior in the 45-55 age group

##### 2. - Attachment to the brand:

According to the study of the variable of the frequency of consumption, we note that women often consume up to 44% against 39% for men. The degree of attachment to the nostalgic brand is represented in the graph below.



**Graph 3: Degree of attachment to the nostalgic brand, 45-55 years (by the author)**

According to the graphs, for men the peak is relative to a relatively low degree of attachment, while women have a peak at the third degree attachment level relative to a neutral position, followed by a second degree attachment.

Among the reasons presented to explain and justify the degree of attachment to the nostalgic brand, the majority of women link it to good taste, memories and then the quality and habit of consumption. On the other hand, men also link it to good taste, quality, consumption habits and memories.

### Discussion

According to the analysis of the attachment variable, we note that the generations most attached to their nostalgic marks are those in the 35-45 and 25-35 age groups with a high degree of attachment compared to the +55 age group who expressed a lower degree of attachment.

Based on the analysis of the four age groups, it is concluded that the reasons for attachment to the nostalgic brand differ according to age group and sex, and also according to a synthetic analysis the memory variable is cited by the different age groups and sex of respondents. However, for certain age groups, other variables explaining the attachment to the

nostalgic brand appear, we mainly cite quality and consumption habits.

Indeed, the majority of respondents still intend to continue consuming their nostalgic brand if the same level of quality is maintained, which managers must take into account. Thus, each brand, according to its objective, must know how to choose its strategy to better manage the existing sensitivity and complexity to the notion of nostalgic brand and introduce it more as a strategic element thanks to marketing techniques appropriate to each target, while taking into consideration the importance of the factors of age and sex that intervene as an indicator to decide the right variable appropriate to each category.

### Limits and Suggestions

Our study presents limitations to be exploited as new avenues of research. We cite as the first limit the study sample that was calculated with an error percentage of 8%. It will be wise to extend the sample and reduce the margin of errors. It would also be interesting to broaden the scope of the application by exploiting new sectors other than mass consumption,

It would also be important through further research to study the interactions between the two variables: quality and consumption



habit, and demonstrate their relationship and impact on brand attachment in a global model.

The results of our research focus on the Moroccan consumer, so we may wonder if the nature and attachment to brands would be the same for consumers of other cultures.

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