

# A 'brand' new world: Attachment runs thicker than money

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Can you forge an emotional bond with a brand so strong that, if forced to buy a competitor's product, you suffer separation anxiety? According to a new study from the USC Marshall School of Business, the answer is yes. In fact, that bond can be strong enough that consumers are willing to sacrifice time, money, energy and reputation to maintain their attachment to that brand.

"Brand Attachment and Brand Attitude Strength: Conceptual and Empirical Differentiation of Two Critical Brand Equity Drivers," a study published in the November issue of the [Journal of Marketing](#), is co-authored by USC Marshall's C. Whan Park, Joseph A. DeBell Professor of Marketing; Deborah J. MacInnis, Vice Dean of Research and Charles L. and Ramona I. Hilliard Professor of Business Administration; and Joseph Priester, Associate Professor of Marketing; along with Andreas B. Eisingerich, Assistant Professor of Marketing, Imperial College (London) Business School; and Dawn Iacobucci, E. Bronson Ingram Professor in Marketing, Owen Graduate School of Management, Vanderbilt University, indicates that brand attachment has much stronger impact on [consumers](#) than previously believed. In fact, the study suggests, brand attachment can even be strong enough to induce separation anxiety when favorite brands are replaced.

The study advances existing brand research in consumer psychology and goes beyond the existing paradigm, indicating that traditional measurements such as brand attitude strength do not adequately explain consumers' intense loyalties to the brands they love—that they fail to

explain how brands capture "consumers' hearts and minds." Brand attachment, the authors claim, does exist, is predicated on a brand/self-relationship and can better explain what drives consumer behavior and their loyalty and commitment to the brands.

It is brand attachment that explains consumers' devotion to the iPod, fans' intense reaction at celebrity deaths and the torment of teenagers who are denied their favorite brand of jeans. Through brand attachment, the USC Marshall study suggests, consumers see the brands as an extension of themselves.

The authors first developed a two-factor brand attachment scale that examines brand-self connection and brand prominence, groundbreaking distinctions made by the study. The authors then tested the scale by surveying consumers of several prominent brands: Quaker Oats oatmeal, iPod, and a university. Using the results to fine-tune the scale, the authors tested their hypotheses through a series of four studies: the impact of brand attachment on consumers' purchase behavior, their likelihood to engage in "difficult-to-enact" behavior, brand purchase share (or the real estate the brand has within the consumer's heart and mind compared to competitive brands), and brand need share (the use of the brand compared to brands in other product categories that could be substituted).

Overall, the research suggests, the greater the attachment, the greater sacrifices a consumer will make to connect with or remain connected to the brand.

The study's key findings include:

- The more strongly a consumer's attachment to a brand, the more willing they are to forsake personal resources to maintain an

ongoing relationship with the brand. They are willing to engage in difficult behaviors — "those that require investments of time, money and energy, so as to maintain or deepen a brand relationship."

- Highly attached consumers are more motivated to devote their own resources in the process of self-expansion, including paying more, defending the brand, derogating alternatives, and devoting more time to the brand through brand communities and brand promotion through social media.
- Attachment represented by both brand-self-connection and prominence is a significantly better predictor than brand attitude strength of actual behaviors.

Based on their research, the authors suggest that managers have much to gain through efforts aimed at building stronger brand attachment. In addition, managers should incorporate brand attachment in brand-evaluation matrices, which would provide a more detailed picture of how current brand-management efforts relate to future sales.

**More information:** To view the study, please visit:  
[www.marshall.usc.edu/assets/135/22824.pdf](http://www.marshall.usc.edu/assets/135/22824.pdf)

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