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SELF CONCEPT AND EMOTIONAL ELEMENTS IN PRODUCT BRANDING: A CASE OF APPLE**HARUNA Naomi Andrew**

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Introduction

Understanding consumers brand relationship has become increasingly popular as a theoretical lens for understanding consumer behaviour (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). Consumers are known to form strong relationships with those products and services that have values and personality associations that are congruent with their self-concept (Sirgy, 1982). In this way, brand relationships can be viewed as expressions of consumer's identities (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). In a recent evaluation, studies have demonstrated that strong consumer-brand relationships enhances consumers' brand loyalty, durability of brands and consumers' willingness to pay a premium price. To identify how to develop strong brand relationships, scholarly literature on branding has emphasized on the emotional elements. Prior research, have recognized that emotional elements form central goals in consumer consumption experiences (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982).

More recently, scholars have paid greater attention to these emotional elements, such as feelings of connection with a brand (self-concept) (Fournier, 1998); perceptions of closeness of the self to a brand (emotional attachment) (Fournier, 1998); and feelings of love for a brand (brand love) (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Thomson et al (2005) stated that emotional elements are crucial in increasing relationship quality in that consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand exhibit greater commitment to it. In addition, consumers' strong emotions such as love towards a brand promote long-term relationship with that brand. In particular, consumers are more devoted to brands with which they feel commonalities and brands that express important aspects of their identity (Fournier, 1998). Research carried out by Malar et al (2011) has recognized that consumer purchases are somewhat driven by a desire to construct self-concepts and communicate them through branded products. As a result they tend to feel more loyal to what they feel connected with, attached to, and love (Sirgy, 1982). Therefore, having strong consumer-brand relationships creates more sustainable brands, as envisioned through increased financial value of the company (Park et al, 2009).

This study aims to investigate how self-concept plays a role in developing emotional elements of branding. However, brand mangers use emotional elements of branding as a tool for influencing consumer's life style. Despite previous study attempts, there is limited knowledge of the roles of emotional elements of branding play. However, it is not yet clear how these aspects may have effect on consumer brand loyalty. Although this phenomenon is well documented in the literature, virtually all of the researches to date, younger consumers in emerging critical segment in specific

brands, have been neglected in branding literature. Remarkably, the purchasing power of younger consumers has increased, this segment has emerged as key target for luxury brands. For them, the feeling of “iconic, cool” is an important criterion for their purchase decision, which indicates the potential of the brand growth by increasing consumer segments. However, no prior research has investigated the self-concept and emotional elements of branding in the context of consumer brand relationship with younger consumers. Therefore, this study examines this important research gap regarding the emotional elements of branding in the context of young consumers. First, this study aims to understand how the self-concept plays a role in developing emotional elements of branding contributing to loyalty to Apple brand. Second, it assesses how the emotional elements of branding can influence consumer buying behaviour towards luxury brand in the context of young consumers.

The objectives of this study is to contribute to knowledge regarding the development of emotional elements of branding. According to Hwang and Kandampully (2012), given the uniquely strong effect of self-concept play roles on emotional elements of branding..., additional research is needed on consumer’s actual purchase. Although significant roles of emotional elements of branding leads to brand loyalty are discovered and the sample of students investigated indicate purchase experiences with luxury brands. However, due to the premium price of luxury brands, younger consumers actual purchase behaviours may not be fully explained by psychological factors. Also, their findings indicated that luxury brands represent one’s social standing which means it only considers the self-expressiveness of the brands only, and did not integrate self-representation within social settings.

The findings from ten participants’ of Apple brand users will go some way to meeting Hwang and Kandampully (2012) recommendation that further research on self-concept and its effects on emotional brand elements should be establish with the inclusion of both actual purchase experience and social orientations. In this study the researcher choose branded product (Apple) for the following reasons:

- i. Young consumers buy branded goods such as (Apple) primarily for symbolic reasons to reflect their individual goals. In addition, their preference for luxury brands is closely related to their images of success.
- ii. Consumption of branded products among young people is largely determined by social function attitudes (i.e. self-expression attitude and self-presentation attitude) because they express their need for uniqueness through branded goods.

Research Context

Apple has taken the fear factor out of technology by giving it a personality. Apple is one of the few brands that genuinely inspire love (Haig, 2011). This love is a result of revolutionizing the way consumers view the technology sitting on their desks at work or at home. Apple products inspire strong emotions because the brand defines the identity of its customers (Forbes, 2011). Apple is often considered a cult brand. It offers, like all cult brands, a collective individuality. People want to be different, but they want to belong. Cult brands such as Apple manage to satisfy both impulses simultaneously (Haig, 2011). Responding to consumer anxiety about technology’s evolutionary speed, Apple managed to make its customers feel like part of its brand by making it clear the brand understands their needs (Gobe, 2001).

Besides love, the continued relevance of the brand’s emotion, and its intricate design thinking, inspire deep brand trust among its followers and account for its success today (Temporal, 2010). If Apple had built its brand purely on features, they would look just like others. Instead, they focus on

an emotional need and desire and establish a bond with buyers who share those values (Post, 2005). People who align with the Apple brand see themselves as innovative, creative and just outside convention. They own an Apple product not just to have a functional product but to reflect their lifestyle (Chritton, 2012).

Apple has also been very successful in creating a tribe of loyal customer base that think, live and act in a differentiated way (Ishrat and Khan, 2011). Apple has done the near impossible – it has acquired a loyal following. Brand loyalty has played a huge part in its global success (Forbes, 2013). Apple has also understood the power of a sensory experience. The company product design and the architecture of their stores have built an emotional connection with people that is unprecedented in the history of branding. Apple went beyond just selling functional products but it has emerged to become an eco-system that connect, engage and motivate consumers to continue to experience with the brand (Gobe, 2001). Apple becomes this new platform that offers consumers the opportunity to dream and participate in the making of new emotional experiences. The coordination of the sensory elements of the brand is particularly important for evoking an emotional connection between the self and a brand (Park, MacInnis and Priester, 2008).

Contribution to Knowledge

Theoretically, this study contributes to the knowledge of branding research by investigating unexplored but important roles of emotional elements of branding that enhanced brand relationship quality. Practical implications of this study intend to help brand managers recognize the potential of younger consumers and devise effective brand management strategies. The implications are significant because implementation of emotional elements is critical for the sustainability of the brand studied. They support Hwang and Kandampully (2012) study on emotional aspects of branding in the context of younger consumer-luxury brand relationships and take their discussion one step further by providing how these emotional aspects influences young consumers self-concept in actual purchase behavior.

Self-Concept Theory

A multitude of researchers have investigated the notion that individuals strive to create and sustain a self-identity (Belk 1988; Sirgy, 1985; Kleine III, Kleine, and Kerman, 1993; Grubb and Grathwohl, 1967). These researchers have investigated the prospect that it is paramount for human beings to possess a sense of who they are as individuals. This assumption has guided the conceptualization of self-concept theory.

Authors have proposed various definitions of one's self-concept, but are in general agreement on the basis of one's self-concept in that it helps individuals to define themselves as distinct objects or subjects. Belk (1988) is commonly referred to as the founding father of self-concept theory. He proposes that "...a person subjectively perceives who he or she is. He views consumers as possessing a core self that is expanded to include items that then become part of the extended self..." This implies that one's view of one's self extends beyond his/her personal being and includes possessions and other external elements.

Ahuvia (2007) shares Belk's sentiment and argues that discovering one's true preferences, navigating choice and representing the self, both to one-self and to others, has become a tremendous concern and a driving force in consumption. This is a concern in consumption because consumers face difficulties in developing and maintaining a lucid sense of self because of the wider choices about who they want to be and the kind of lives they want to lead. This implies that brands need to consistently communicate positive messages to their market so consumers can have

affirmative experiences of the brands (because of their link to being representative of their self-concept), which will ultimately drive consumption.

Most studies into luxury goods has its roots in the classic concept of 'conspicuous consumption', which sums up the proposition that the rich tend to consume highly conspicuous goods in order to display their wealth and gain social status (Nunes, Dreze, and Han, 2011). Truong (2010) examined the effects of conspicuous consumption on luxury brands. The results suggest that people purchase conspicuous goods not simply because of their functional utility but also to fulfil social needs by deliberately signaling wealth and status. As Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn (1999:310) put it, conspicuous consumption occurs when the aim of consumption is to inspire envy in others and to demonstrate one's economic position to others. Conspicuous consumption has been defined as "the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer or symbolize status for both the individual and surrounding others" (Veblen, 1899).

Coleman (1983) gives a sociological explanation that individuals who engage in conspicuous consumption often do so in order to emulate the consumption patterns of the group of people socially situated either directly or considerably above them. While, Veblen (1899) ascertains that consumers are willing to pay a premium price for a functionally equivalent product that is perceived to be more prestigious. This readiness to pay more may serve to generate considerably more status for the users than any direct utility, and a price premium may paradoxically have positive effects on consumers' decision making processes (Mason, 2001).

Swaminathan et al (2007) provides a view of the conceptualization of self-concept. The authors indicated that brands are highly symbolic entities that are intricately woven into the fabric of consumer's lives and help shape and communicate their individual identities. Swaminathan et al (2007) go on to state "The self-concept connection is based on consumers' desires to express their individuality and their self as distinct from others".

They can do this with Apple brand; for example, looking at the Apple product ranges, which represents being different from others. The consumers who wish to embody these qualities will purchase this brand as it portrays elements of their identity. This view of self-identity is arguably one of the key assumptions of identity theory. This view affirms one of Belk (1988) when he first brought together a larger body of literature to support the thesis that consumers use key possessions to extend, expand and strengthen their sense of self. In contrast, thus Apple brand is positioned to maintain status and the social position of the brand user. As we have seen, however, not every consumer practices are conspicuous consumption – some are motivated by such non-conspicuous benefits such as the quality of the product (O'cass and McEven, 2004). It has also been argued by Belk (1988) that, even deprived are attracted to and indulged in aspects of conspicuous consumption before they have adequate food, clothing and shelter. While clearly labelling this as conspicuous, the implication is that consumers at every class level have the desire to consume for social status (O'cass and McEven, 2004). In saying this, Shukla (2008) stated that it must be recognized that status symbols vary depending on social class, age and gender. Nevertheless, conspicuous consumption behaviour is not necessarily disconnected from those emotional benefits, since signalling status and prestige can be pleasurable for conspicuous consumers (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn, 1999).

Other researchers have studied the importance of one's self-concept as it relates brand love, emotional brand attachment and its influence on brand loyalty. Hwang and Kandampully (2012),

studied the impact of self-concept connection, emotional attachment, brand love and its impact on brand loyalty. The authors focus on three theories, self-concept connection and emotional attachment and brand love, as they enhance consumer brand loyalty.

Veblens (1899) study of conspicuous consumption and how it relates to the self-concept has received criticism when Bagwell and Bernheim, (1996) asserted that conspicuous consumption is based on the premise that those who put wealth in evidence are rewarded with preferential treatment by social contacts, and that such effects depend upon a comparison of the desirability of signaling through price, quantity or quality. In this study, conspicuous refers to the purchase of visually conspicuous brands that may enable consumers to reflect their social status, convey their self-image, and boost their self-esteem.

Brand Loyalty as an Antecedent of Self-concept

Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2009) identify the measurements of Brand loyalty as product involvement, perceived quality and brand awareness. Neal and Strauss (2008) both propose that brand loyalty have attitudinal and behavioral dimensions. The attitudinal dimension describes a consumer's overall satisfaction, while the behavioral dimension represents the tendency of a consumer to purchase a particular brand repeatedly over time. In a research, Starr and Robinson (1978) find a positive relationship between attitude and loyalty toward a brand. Aaker (1991) is defendant of the concept defined brand loyalty "as a consumer's repetitive and systematic purchasing behavior in relation to a given brand." The definition implies that consumers are brand loyal when both attitude and behavior are favorable. However, it does not clarify the intensity of brand loyalty, because it precludes the possibility that a consumer's attitude is unfavorable, while he/she repeats the purchases. In such case, the consumer's brand loyalty would be superficial and shallow-rooted (Ha, 1998). Aaker (1991) also noted a link between brand loyalty and brand awareness. He finds out that brand awareness contributes to brand equity.

Khan and Mahood's (2012) findings revealed that brand loyalty offer benefits like willingness to invest, cost less to serve, and increase the number of customers by attracting new ones. This corresponds with what Phau and Cheong, (2009) stated as a major determinant of brand equity. However, some aspects of this approach have also been criticized. Belaid and Behi (2011) argue that brand loyalty should be interpreted primarily as an attitude toward a given brand. Likewise Dick and Basu (1994) point out that even a relatively important repeat purchase may not reflect true loyalty to a product but may merely result from situational conditions such as brands stocked by the retailer. Oliver (1999) stated that when consumers have strong belief about the brand quality and high degree of satisfaction, they are likely to repurchase the brand.

In this study, the researcher focuses on attitudinal brand loyalty because it is an immediate outcome of customers' emotional responses and this focus is appropriate given that we are interested in how emotional aspects of brand relationship influence consumer's attitudinal commitment (that is willingness to pay a higher price premium), rather than their willingness to repeat a purchase (that is the degree to which they will buy the same brand) that necessitates an actual purchase history.

One of the aims of this study is to investigate the relationship between consumers' brand loyalty and emotional attachment. However, a prior study on emotional brand attachment has shown that individuals with strong emotional bonds to an object report greater brand loyalty and willingness to pay the price premium (Thomson et al, 2005). Luxury brand attachment can be a result of their perceived premium quality, recognizable style, reputation, and limited access. Therefore, in the

perception of these young consumers, these characteristics signify emotional, experiential and symbolic values (Berthon et al, 2009).

Because of these attributes, luxury brands like Apple are used as possessions intended to shape their identity by bridging the inner self and external world (Belk, 1988). For instance, an Apple product can be desirable to wealthy consumers who wish to mark their social status and economic power symbolically, to less wealthy but aspiring their aspirations, and to younger consumers who seek identity affirmation and a sense of belonging in owning such goods (Park et al, 2009). The process governing brand loyalty also suffers significant shortcomings. Though Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) clearly identify brand loyalty as a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes exhibited over time, and little insight into the process condition has been obtained.

Background of the Brand studied

The Apple computer company is arguably one of the most innovative technology companies to emerge in the last three decades. Apple, Inc. is responsible for bringing to market such products as the Macintosh desktop and portable computer, iPod and iTunes, and most recently, the iPhone and iPad, are design icons. The success of the company can be traced to the ingenuity of their founder and Chief Executive Officer, Steven Jobs and Steven Wozniak (Mallin, M. L. and Finkle, T. A., 2011).

Young Consumers and Status Consumption

In terms of the size, there are approximately 70 million in young consumers (Hewlett et al, 2009). These consumers as those born from 1977 to 1994 (Norum, 2003). They are considered the first high-tech generation and are perceived as consumption-oriented and sophisticated shoppers (Jackson et al, 2011). Additionally, young consumers are seen by marketers as having a high level of spending power and very socially conscious (Eastman and Liu, 2012). This trend setting consumers comes from their lifelong loyalties to certain branded products and the need to express who they are through what they have (Noble et al, 2009). In this study, Apple branded products is being tested for their ability to signify status, aiming in conforming to social setting.

Status consumption is define as “the motivational process by which individuals strive to improve their social standing through the conspicuous consumption of consumer products that confer and symbolize status both for the individual and surrounding significant others” (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn, 1999:42). O’cass and Frost (2002:82) in a study of young status conscious consumers found they “are more likely to be affected by a status brand’s symbolic characteristics, by feelings evoked by the brand and by the degree of congruency between the brand-user’s self-image and the brand image.” Another stream of research suggests that younger consumers spend more on branded products including status products (Chau and Schor, 1998). Consistent with this idea Phau and Cheong (2009) found that young status consumers may be willing to substitute other brands for branded items. Material possessions are many times used by young consumers as an expression of self and readily connect them with personal happiness and personal success (Cook, 2011).

Importantly, in regards to young consumers and luxury consumption, social comparison of goods (particularly mobile phones, laptops, iBook) among these young consumers is a very frequent occurrence – this is primarily because they are very concerned about their social self-images (Cook, 2011). Cook (2011) argued that there is an abundant amount of shopping information available for young consumers –various media; the internet, which is extremely an important source for them to seek out new and innovative products.

Self-Expansion Theory

The Theory of “self-expansion” emphasizes a central motive whereby individuals expand their selves to be more than they are, by acquiring perspective, resources and identities to enhance their ability to achieve goals (Patwardhan & Balassubramanian, 2011). This suggests that a consumer can identify himself in a relationship with a brand based on adequacy between his own personality (Didier and Cindy, 2010). In addition, the fundamental premise of the theory is that, consumers purchases are partly driven by a desire to construct self-concepts and communicate them through wearing and using branded products (Hwang and Kandampully 2012). In order to understand the long term relationship between consumer-brand, it was important to explore the self-expansion theory, which mostly explores the reasoning for purchase, but not reasoning for long-term commitment to the brand. However, relating to a brand and repurchasing a brand has not been explored in the long-term. It has been used when researching initial attraction to the brand affect exploring the long-term aspects. However, whether consumer’s behaviour through self-expansion affects loyalty and attachment, have not been conveyed in the previous studies. The theory is an important aspect when consumers purchase brands, due to the fact it affects why consumers obtain certain brands, therefore, the theory of self-expansion is relevant for this study.

Self-Congruence Theory

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Apple brand is positioned to maintain exclusively, to communicate status and the social position of the brand user. As we have seen, however, not every consumer practices conspicuous consumption – some are motivated by such non-conspicuous benefits such as the quality of the product (O’cass and McEven, 2004). It has also been argued by Belk (1988) that, even deprived are attracted to and indulged in aspects of conspicuous consumption before they have adequate food, clothing and shelter. While clearly labelling this as conspicuous, the implication is that consumers at every class level have the desire to consume for social status (O’cass and McEven, 2004). In saying this, Shukla (2008) stated that it must be recognized that status symbols vary depending on social class, age and gender. Nevertheless, conspicuous consumption behavior is not necessarily disconnected from those emotional benefits, since signaling status and prestige can be pleasurable for conspicuous consumers (Eastman, Goldsmith, and Flynn, 1999).

Veblens (1899) study received criticism when Bagwell and Bernheim (1996) asserted that, conspicuous consumption is based on the premise that those who put wealth in evidence are rewarded with preferential treatment by social contacts, and that such effects depend upon a comparison of the desirability of signaling through price, quantity or quality. In this study, conspicuous refers to the purchase of visually conspicuous brands that may enable consumers to reflect their social status, convey their self-image, and boost their self-esteem.

Research Methodology

Researchers recommended the use of qualitative methods to study processes (Ghauri and Gronhaug, 2005) as they help with two aspects: exploring phenomena about which little is known and gaining a new understanding of existing phenomena (Sekuran and Bougie, 2010). Among the many types of qualitative research methodologies, in-depth semi-structured interviews as the methodology tool was found to be most suited to this study. Non-probability sampling technique was used to identify a sample of Apple brand users/owners. Therefore, the selection of the sample will largely be dependent on the person's usage of an Apple brand. For this thesis the sampling strategy will be a theory based purposive sampling.

The participants in this study are Coventry University Advertising and Marketing students. A non-probability (i.e. convenience) was recruited over a two-week time frame. There are several reasons for the choice beyond convenience. University students represent an important present and future market segment that are most likely to buy luxury goods and services (Hauck and Stanforth, 2007). Their ages range from 21-28 and were considered to be willing to take part in the study and to be able to give useful information.

The convenience sampling technique was used to identify respondents from Coventry University students. Convenience sampling enables the researcher to gather data from as many participants as possible (Saunders et al, 2007). However, the objective of this study is focused on gathering data on Apple users and therefore the researcher's access to them was limited to only those using the Apple products.

Relevant and current academic journal articles have been used in this research, in particular, recognized business literature and peer review scholarly articles. The reliability of this thesis, therefore, also depends on the reliability of the literature chosen as source. The use of primary data obtained from Apples users, provides this paper a sense of accuracy and truthfulness. To clarify and justify the participants, profiles of the interviewees are provided in Appendix. Also, the figure below represents the construct and themes used to validate this study.

Constructs and Themes

Brand Love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, (2012)	Passion-Driven Behaviours	Investment of time and money
	Positive Emotional Connection	Emotional Attachment
Emotional Brand Attachment		Affection
		Passion
		Connection

Brand Loyalty		Product Involvement
		Perceived Quality
		Brand Awareness

Results

Characteristics of Respondents

Respondents of this in-depth interview consist of 5 males and 5 females, which mean the participants, were equally chosen from both genders. The age trend of the participants is 23-27 years old and the respondent's highest education level is Master's Degree. This research examines the construct self-concept as an antecedent to brand love, emotional brand attachment and brand loyalty. The construct was examined with sample students of Apple users. Apple products mentioned in this study can be classified as high involvement as a big economic or psychological loss is at stake. The research aims to find out answers to the objective stated below:

RQ1: How self-concept plays a role in developing emotional elements of branding contributing to loyalty to the Apple brand.

RQ2: What elements of self-concept affect consumers to develop brand loyalty towards a luxury brand?

The Effect of Self-Concept on Emotional Brand Attachment

Affection

Past research Bowlby, (1979) states that the more strongly consumers are attached to a brand, the more willing they are to forsake personal resources to maintain an on-going relationship with that brand. Sam says: "I am a die-hard follower of Apple. I won't buy anything else.....apple is always my first option if it is in that category. Apple is my first preference [smile]". Similar comment is made by Shawn: "I will replace my phone with Apple ...if something happens to it." However, Emily shares a different a view stating the brand personality of the Apple product are the reasons why she is connected to the brand : "The gadgets are simple, intuitive and easy to use...it helps me do more and more." Likewise Alfie: "I like the design, it is perfect. I do not intend to switch to another brand." Eight out of the ten respondent show positive affection towards their Apple products. While two of the respondents pointed out the importance of brand personality in contributing to their emotional connection with the brand.

Passion

Respondents show an apparent high level of emotional attachment to the Apple brand (Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005). This is to say brand attachment is link to word of mouth form through brand loyalty. Joseph states: "Apple is a very good brand and I will go about recommending it to people. I have been using it and I feel it's very good." Similarly, Emily says: "I'm trying my hardest to get my friends to change their PC to Apple." While Tony states "I think I'm behind the reason why my dad purchased it...then my younger brother follows." On the other hand Sonny shares a different sentiment: "I am not really committed to Apple. This illustrates that the level of passion towards a brand depends solely on the length of time with the product. Since Sonny has just started using the Apple products less than a year. Overall, all the respondents shows strong passion towards the Apple brand while Sonny shares a different sentiment mentioned above.

Connection

This study reveals a strong positive relationship between self-concept and brand attachment (Malar et al 2011). When consumers fall for certain brands such as Apple, it reveals a link between the brands and how they perceive themselves or how they would like to be perceived by others. Sam illustrates: "This is going to sound really cheek [laugh]....but is about quality of life....i deserve the

best and Apple does the best.” Similarly, Nancy said that: “Apple reminds me of the type of person I want to be. In future I want to be seen as a recognizable person when I step out.” Nonetheless, Apple’s brand image has an effect on the sense of connection they have with their products, illustrated in the following remarks. Shawn says “Apple is the first brand to introduce the Mackintosh....that’s remind me of they are the market leader.” While Emily says: The first thing that comes to my mind when someone talks about is Steve Jobs. I think he came synonymous with the brand. He is great and one which reflected the brand attributes.” This implies that Apple products serve as a communication tool that consumers use to speak to others and even to themselves of the type of person they are or would like to be (Park et al 2010). This connection that the brand has forged with the subconscious of consumers often results from brand attachment.

The Effect of Self-Concept on Brand Loyalty:

Product involvement

Consistent with previous findings, the pattern of results reported here suggest that brand attachment is a direct determinant of brand loyalty (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). Alfie states that: “Based on my experience with Apple. I think its fits well with my lifestyle”. Likewise, Nancy says that: “I’m planning to update my laptop and I already have Apple on my mind”. The case of Alfie and Nancy confirms Khan and Mahood (2012) findings that brand loyalty offer benefits like willingness to invest. In this case Apple has to manage these establish consumers as they cost less to serve, and can also increase the number of consumers through attracting new ones. All respondents equally stated the same. Sam says: “I will definitely by Apple again if a new one comes out”. While Shawn put it this way: “I have decided that any product I buy will be Apple” Similarly, Emily: “I will never buy any other brand apart from Apple.”

Perceived Quality

This study confirms Oliver’s (1999) argument about development of a Brand Loyalty process. Results support the finding about a customer’s strong beliefs about brand quality and high degree of satisfaction. In turn, results indicate a positive intention or commitment to repurchase. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of self-concept and its effect on brand loyalty and to better understand their repurchasing intentions on the Apple brand. Sam says: “It is brilliant and it is the best brand in the world right now.” Similarly, Tony says: “Apple gives me confidence besides functionality...that is what I think”.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study shows that when young consumers show love for a brand and emotional attachment, it enhances their loyalty towards that brand. By using a sample of Coventry University students who are a representative group of young consumers and an importance group for luxury brands.

The major findings of this study are as follows:

- I. Brand attachment has a significant positive effect on brand love feeling.
- II. The feeling of love toward a brand can reinforce trust, the interest in continuing the relationship and faith in the future regarding the brand.
- III. Brand love feeling is influenced nearly equally by self-expressive brand and brand attachment.
- IV. Finally, loyalty intensions are less influenced by brand attachment than by brand love.

These results corroborate the findings of Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) because self-expressive brand is an important antecedent to brand love feeling with loyalty intentions an outcome. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) suggest that self-expressive brands like Apple brand tend to be loved; therefore Apple may find that enhancing these aspects of their offerings increases this intense emotional

response in consumers'. Nevertheless, this paper suggests that Apple build a relationship with customers and has created an identity that leads them to self-identification and social-identification with the products offered.

The results of this study show that self-concept is an important antecedent of emotional attachment and brand love. This finding is in line with Kleine et al (1993) argument that the self-schema is tied to attachment. From this perspective, the degree to which young consumers feel that their self-concept match with their luxury brand are based on the hedonic aspects (Belk, 1988) is enough to build emotional relationship. The study reveals that young consumers form brand love as they perceive that a brand expresses an important part of their selves. This results support the assertion that brand-elicited affect exert significant influence on the development of consumer brand relationships (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) and the same view applies to these Apple consumers investigated.

Another important finding concerns the differing effects of self-concept on the emotional elements of branding. The findings show that brand love, emotional attachment and brand loyalty encourages loyalty in an attitudinal manner but consumer's strong attachment towards their objects elicits greater feeling of loyalty towards the brand. That is to say, when brands elicit feelings of emotional bond in the minds of the consumers', the brands are more likely to prompt consumer's desires to maintain a relationship (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006).

From a marketing perspective, the findings of this research show that integrating emotional elements of branding into marketing luxury is critical for the survival of the Apple brand, with respect of retaining these Apple users. These findings are meaningful because as noted, these consumers studied are influential group for luxury brand consumption. This study shows that these consumers are likely to continue to use Apple because they perceived commonalities with their respective self-concepts and that they feel emotionally attached to Apple brand which they feel passionate love for.

Thus, it is very important for marketing managers to focus on the emotional elements of branding for retaining these valuable consumers. It also suggests that brand managers need to communicate their brand identity effectively in order to accomplish such emotional elements, rather than solely depend on marketing tactics. By doing so, brands like Apple can differentiate themselves in the market and increase their customer base.

Based on the above findings, the theme has shown direct effects of self-concept and brand loyalty. In general, the reliability and validity of the results presented in this study is considered in line with the literature. However, validity to the constructs, measures, sample and the Apple brand studied. Thus, the data of the study comes from a single product category (Apple product users), the present constructs should be validated in other product categories (more utilitarian in nature). In future, researchers could investigate how emotional elements of branding impact on actual purchase behaviours also (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). Another suggestion is to extend the present study to consider the role of self-expressiveness goals, self-presentation goals and social goals and its impact on other luxury brands. Using wider samples containing greater representation of University Students is also recommended.

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