Emotional Brand Attachment as a Pathway to Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement and Brand Forgiveness

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the relationships between Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA), Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, and Brand Forgiveness, focusing on their roles in consumer-brand recovery dynamics. Using Emotional Brand Attachment Theory and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the findings reveal that EBA strongly influences Brand Involvement and directly contributes to Brand Forgiveness, while Brand Involvement serves as a key mediator in restoring trust. However, Brand Nostalgia shows minimal direct impact on forgiveness, highlighting its context-dependent nature. These insights emphasize the importance of fostering emotional connections and consumer involvement in brand recovery strategies, while suggesting that the effectiveness of nostalgia may vary across scenarios. The study provides actionable recommendations for leveraging emotional attachment and involvement in post-failure brand management while encouraging further exploration of contextual influences.

Keywords: Emotional Brand Attachment, Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, Brand Forgiveness, Customer Behavior, Structural Equation Modeling
JEL Classifications: M31, D12, D91, L93

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolving landscape of branding highlights the increasing significance of emotional connections between customers and brands. Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) has been extensively recognized as a key determinant of customer loyalty and satisfaction (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). EBA refers to the deep emotional bonds customers form with brands that resonate with their values, aspirations, and identities, often resulting in stronger loyalty and advocacy (Malär et al., 2011).

Brands striving to foster strong emotional attachments often appeal to customers' personal experiences, creating associations that go beyond functional benefits (Hwang and Kandampully, 2012). This connection is particularly crucial for luxury brands and those relying on long-term customer loyalty, as emotional bonds encourage customers to perceive a brand as an integral part of their lives (Japutra et al., 2014). Nostalgia, a significant emotional driver, rekindles positive memories and enhances the sentimental value of a brand (Merchant and Rose, 2013).

In parallel, brand involvement, defined as the degree to which customers are actively engaged and invested in a brand, amplifies their propensity to forgive brands for missteps (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Together, nostalgia and involvement provide a foundation for customers to rebuild their trust and connection, fostering brand forgiveness and recovery (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Siriyota and Chokpiriyawat, 2025).

This study explores the intricate relationships between emotional brand attachment, brand nostalgia, and brand involvement, focusing on how these factors collectively influence brand

forgiveness and recovery. By integrating the Emotional Brand Attachment Theory (Thomson et al., 2005) and empirical evidence, the research provides valuable insights into the pathways through which emotional attachment fosters brand loyalty, forgiveness, and re-enchantment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) has garnered significant attention in recent years as brands increasingly recognize the importance of fostering emotional connections to drive customer loyalty and engagement. This literature review synthesizes the key theoretical frameworks, empirical studies, and constructs related to EBA and its behavioral outcomes, including Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, and Brand Forgiveness.

2.1. Theoretical Framework
The Emotional Brand Attachment Theory serves as the foundational lens for this study, highlighting the emotional bonds that consumers form with brands based on affection, connection, and passion (Thomson et al., 2005). Unlike traditional loyalty constructs driven by satisfaction or utilitarian benefits, emotional attachment delves into the affective dimensions, where brands become integral to a consumer's identity (Park et al., 2010). This theory posits that emotionally attached consumers exhibit heightened levels of involvement, nostalgia, and forgiveness, as their connection to the brand transcends transactional interactions (Malär et al., 2011). Emotional Brand Attachment, therefore, not only strengthens consumer-brand relationships but also fosters resilience during brand crises, enabling brands to recover trust and loyalty through re-enchantment strategies. This study extends the application of this theory by exploring its interplay with behavioral outcomes such as brand nostalgia, involvement, and forgiveness.

2.2. Brand Nostalgia
Brand Nostalgia refers to the sentimental longing consumers experience when associating a brand with positive memories of the past (Merchant and Rose, 2013). It is a powerful emotional driver that influences consumer behavior by evoking a sense of comfort and trust. Nostalgic associations are particularly effective in rebuilding consumer trust after brand failures, as they remind customers of the positive experiences that initially bonded them to the brand (Beverland and Farrelly, 2010).

Nostalgia has been shown to mediate the relationship between EBA and customer forgiveness. For example, studies have demonstrated that consumers are more likely to forgive brands that evoke nostalgia through their messaging and branding strategies (Cavanaugh et al., 2015). This highlights the dual role of nostalgia in both creating and sustaining emotional connections with consumers.

2.3. Brand Involvement
Brand Involvement is the degree to which consumers engage cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally with a brand (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). High levels of brand involvement have been linked to greater customer loyalty, advocacy, and willingness to forgive brand missteps (Vivek et al., 2012). Emotional involvement amplifies the impact of EBA, as customers who are highly involved with a brand often exhibit a stronger commitment to its values and offerings (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The interplay between EBA and brand involvement creates a synergistic effect, enhancing consumers' tolerance for brand failures and increasing their likelihood of re-engaging with the brand (Brodie et al., 2011).

2.4. Brand Forgiveness
Brand forgiveness is a significant and emerging construct in branding literature, characterized by a consumer's capacity to overlook a brand's missteps and rebuild trust (Sameeni et al., 2022). This process is deeply rooted in the emotional connection consumers have with a brand, as well as the brand's proactive acknowledgment and rectification of its mistakes (Shimul et al., 2024).

Research highlights that forgiveness is shaped by both Brand Nostalgia and Brand Involvement. Nostalgia evokes positive memories associated with the brand, creating a pathway to emotional reconciliation, while involvement reflects a consumer's sense of investment in preserving the brand relationship (Fritz et al., 2017). Together, these elements foster consumer resilience, promoting forgiveness and aiding in brand recovery (Veloutsou et al., 2020).

2.5. Integration of Emotional Brand Attachment with Outcomes
Numerous studies have explored the relationships between EBA and its behavioral outcomes. Emotional Brand Attachment has been positively correlated with Brand Nostalgia (Malär et al., 2011) and Brand Involvement (Japutra et al., 2014), while both constructs are shown to mediate the pathway to Brand Forgiveness (Lin et al., 2021). This suggests that EBA serves as a foundational driver that influences customer behavior across multiple dimensions.

For example, Park et al. (2010) developed a model demonstrating that emotionally attached consumers are more likely to forgive brand failures and re-engage with the brand. This highlights the importance of leveraging emotional connections to rebuild trust and re-establish loyalty after setbacks.

2.6. Research Gaps
While existing literature has extensively covered the impact of EBA on loyalty and engagement, there remains a lack of focus on its role in the post-failure recovery process. Specifically, studies have not fully explored how nostalgia and involvement mediate the relationship between EBA and Brand Forgiveness, nor how these constructs interact across different consumer demographics. This research addresses these gaps by integrating these variables into a cohesive conceptual model (see Figure 1), providing a more nuanced understanding of how emotional branding influences consumer behavior.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the causal relationships between emotional brand attachment, brand

Table 1: Factor loading, CR, AVE, and Cronbach's alpha

| Variables and items	Factor loading
Emotional Brand Attachment CR=0.875, AVE=0.575, α = 0.856	
I feel that I love this brand	0.740
My feelings towards this brand can be characterized by affection	0.768
I am passionate about this brand	0.799
My feelings towards this brand can be characterized by delight	0.736
I feel captivated by this brand	0.756
My feelings towards this brand can be characterized by a sense of personal connection	0.727
I feel attached with this brand	0.715
Brand Nostalgia CR=0.890, AVE=0.570, α = 0.860	
This brand reminds me of a previous stage of my life	0.770
This brand reminds me of an important person in my life	0.720
I have many happy memories associated with this brand	0.700
I still feel positive about this brand today	0.780
Brand Involvement CR=0.859, AVE=0.550, α = 0.860	
This brand means a lot to me.	0.771
This brand is significant to me.	0.738
I am interested in this specific brand.	0.730
For me personally, this brand is important.	0.703
I am involved with this brand.	0.730
Brand Forgiveness CR=0.869, AVE=0.610, α = 0.863	
I will think of the brand with compassion.	0.790
If I receive a good response from the brand, I will forgive it if it makes a mistake.	0.740
I feel compassion for the brand.	0.740

CR: Composite reliability, AVE: Average variance extracted

Table 2: Model fit indices

Fit Index	Value	Recommended threshold	Assessment
Chi-square (χ^2)	371.276	Lower is better	Acceptable
Degrees of freedom (df)	165	-	-
Chi-square/df	2.250	<3	Good Fit
Goodness-of-fit index (GFI)	0.955	≥0.90	Excellent Fit
Comparative fit index (CFI)	0.973	≥0.90	Excellent Fit
Root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)	0.039	≤0.05 (close fit); ≤0.08 (acceptable)	Excellent Fit
Standardized root mean square residual (SRMR)	0.034	≤0.05	Excellent Fit

Table 3: Path analysis and model fit summary

Relationship	β	S.E.	t	Hypothesis
Emotional Brand Attachment→Brand Nostalgia	0.88***	0.08	11.00	Accepted
Emotional Brand Attachment→Brand Involvement	0.87***	0.09	10.50	Accepted
Brand Nostalgia→Brand Forgiveness	−0.07	0.10	−0.70	Not accepted
Brand Involvement→Brand Forgiveness	0.76***	0.07	10.86	Accepted
Emotional Brand Attachment→Brand Forgiveness	0.44***	0.06	7.33	Accepted

$R^2_{Brand\ Nostalgia}$=0.58, $R^2_{Brand\ Involvement}$=0.97, $R^2_{Brand\ Forgiveness}$=0.85, *P<0.05, **P<0.01, ***P<0.001

Figure 1: Conceptual framework
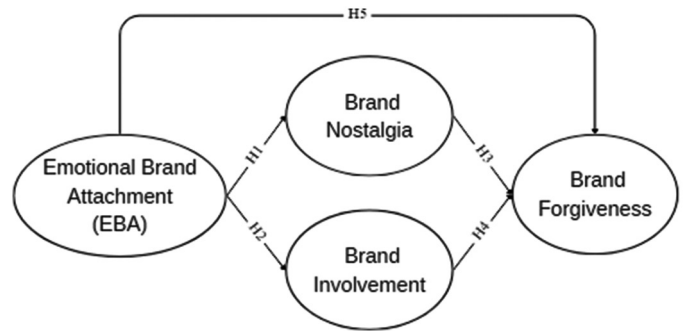
Source: Author work

nostalgia, brand involvement, and brand forgiveness. Data will be collected through an online survey, and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) will be employed to test the hypothesized relationships and validate the proposed theoretical model. SEM is particularly suitable for analyzing complex constructs and exploring direct, indirect, and mediating effects among the variables.

The target population comprises individuals who have engaged with brands and experienced perceived brand failures. The total sample size is 800 participants. Data will be collected using an online survey distributed via popular digital platforms. These platforms provide a wide reach and efficient access to the target demographic. Survey distribution includes targeted ads, community posts, and direct messaging to ensure a diverse and representative sample. The survey instrument is developed based on established scales adapted from prior research, including Emotional Brand Attachment (Thomson et al., 2005), Brand Nostalgia (Merchant and Rose, 2013), Brand Involvement (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), and Brand Forgiveness (Lin et al., 2021). The questionnaire undergoes translation and back-translation (Douglas and Craig, 2007) to ensure linguistic accuracy and consistency. Content validity is evaluated by three experts, and reliability is assessed through a Cronbach's alpha test, with values exceeding 0.7 deemed acceptable. Ethical principles guide this study, with approval granted under the ethics review protocol HE673144 from the Center for Ethics in Human Research, Khon Kaen University.

4. RESULTS

The general data analysis of the respondents, comprising 812 Thai citizens aged 20-60 who have interacted with brands and experienced dissatisfaction within the past 6 months, reveals insightful demographic trends. The age distribution indicates a predominant concentration in the 31-40 age group, accounting for 78.50%, while 17.00% are aged 20-30, and only 2.50% fall in the 41-50 age range. Gender-wise, females constitute a majority at 57.64%, compared to 42.36% males. Marital status shows that 54.93% of respondents are single, 40.52% married, and 4.56% divorced. Regarding occupation, the majority (57.51%) are private company employees, with government officers and state enterprise employees making up 16.13% and 14.78%, respectively. Income distribution reflects that most respondents earn between 20,001

and 30,000 THB (33.13%) or 30,001 and 40,000 THB (32.02%), with 23.52% in higher income brackets and 11.33% earning below 20,000 THB. This demographic profile highlights a predominantly middle-income, professionally active population, offering valuable insights into their brand interactions and perceptions.

The analysis of brand failures reveals notable insights into the prevalence and impact of such incidents across smartphone and international airline brands. Among the 812 respondents, smartphone brands accounted for 405 failures (27.16%), while international airlines recorded 407 failures (25.19%). Within smartphone brands, Oppo had the highest reported failures (29.38%), followed by Vivo (5.43%) and Apple (3.95%), with other brands reporting lower frequencies. For international airlines, Thai Airways led with 30.71% of reported failures, followed by Thai Lion Air (27.16%) and AirAsia (18.43%). Regarding the significance of failures, a majority were classified as small (71.31%), with 28.69% categorized as big failures. In terms of timing, ongoing failures were most prominent (42.73%), compared to recent (28.82%) and long-past failures (28.45%). The effects of these failures were predominantly distant (45.69%) and immediate (40.15%), while societal effects accounted for 14.16%. This data underscores the diverse nature of brand failures and their varying significance, timing, and impacts on consumers.

The analysis of factor loadings, Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's Alpha (α) underscores the reliability and validity of the constructs in capturing the intended variables. These psychometric results are detailed in Table 1. Emotional Brand Attachment exhibits strong internal consistency with CR (0.875), AVE (0.575), and α (0.856), with factor loadings ranging from 0.715 to 0.799, reflecting key emotional dimensions such as love, passion, and personal connection to the brand. Brand Nostalgia, with CR (0.890), AVE (0.570), and α (0.860), effectively measures the emotional resonance tied to memories and positive associations with the brand, supported by factor loadings between 0.700 and 0.780. Brand Involvement demonstrates robust reliability with CR (0.859), AVE (0.550), and α (0.860), capturing the depth of consumer engagement and personal significance, as evidenced by factor loadings ranging from 0.703 to 0.771. Lastly, Brand Forgiveness achieves the highest AVE (0.610) among constructs, with CR (0.869) and α (0.863), supported by factor loadings between 0.740 and 0.790, highlighting its pivotal role in understanding consumers' willingness to forgive and reconcile with the brand after a failure. These metrics confirm the robustness and reliability of the constructs, offering a comprehensive framework for understanding consumer-brand dynamics.

4.1. Model Fit Indices

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) results demonstrate an excellent fit between the theoretical model and the observed data. Key goodness-of-fit indices support the model's robustness: the Chi-square value is 371.276 with 165 degrees of freedom, resulting in a Chi-square/df ratio of 2.250, which is within the acceptable range (<3). The Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI = 0.955) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.973) exceed the threshold of 0.90, indicating strong model adequacy. Furthermore, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.039) and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.034) are below the recommended cut-off of 0.05, confirming a close fit to the data. Collectively, these indices suggest that the proposed model is statistically sound and adequately represents the relationships among Emotional Brand Attachment, Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, and Brand Forgiveness. A summary of these model fit indices is provided in Table 2.

The hypothesis testing results reveal significant insights into the relationships among Emotional Brand Attachment, Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, and Brand Forgiveness. Emotional Brand Attachment demonstrates strong and significant positive effects on both Brand Nostalgia (0.88) and Brand Involvement (0.87), supporting hypotheses H1 and H2. Brand Involvement significantly influences Brand Forgiveness (0.76), confirming H4, while Emotional Brand Attachment also directly impacts Brand Forgiveness (0.44), supporting H5. However, the relationship between Brand Nostalgia and Brand Forgiveness (-0.07) is weak and non-significant, indicating that H3 is not supported. These findings highlight the critical mediating role of Brand Involvement in facilitating forgiveness and the importance of emotional attachment in driving consumer-brand relationships. Conversely, Brand Nostalgia's limited direct influence suggests its impact may be indirect or context-dependent. Details of the path coefficients and hypothesis outcomes are summarized in Table 3.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide insights into the relationships among Emotional Brand Attachment, Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, and Brand Forgiveness, offering opportunities for comparison with existing literature. The role of Emotional Brand Attachment as a driver of Brand Nostalgia ($\beta = 0.88$) and Brand Involvement ($\beta = 0.87$) aligns with prior research by Dwivedi et al. (2019), which emphasized emotional attachment as a significant predictor of consumer engagement and loyalty. Furthermore, this study extends the understanding of Emotional Brand Attachment by identifying its direct positive influence on Brand Forgiveness ($\beta = 0.44$). This contrasts with prior research that has primarily focused on attachment's role in fostering brand loyalty rather than its impact on forgiveness behaviors (Fetscherin and Sampedro, 2019).

Brand Nostalgia, while traditionally viewed as a critical factor in fostering positive consumer behaviors, demonstrated no significant relationship with Brand Forgiveness ($\beta = -0.07$). This result diverges from studies such as those by Holbrook and Schindler (1994), which highlighted nostalgia as a potent emotional tool in building trust and reconciliation. A possible explanation for this inconsistency could lie in the nature of the studied context or the varying emotional resonance of nostalgia across different consumer segments. Banerjee and Shaikh (2022) suggested that nostalgia's effectiveness might depend on the intensity and positivity of associated memories, which may not always mitigate the negative perceptions arising from brand failures.

Brand Involvement emerged as a significant mediator, with a strong positive relationship with Brand Forgiveness ($\beta = 0.76$).

This finding aligns with the work of Gligor and Bozkurt (2022), who demonstrated that higher involvement levels facilitate trust restoration after brand disruptions. The results further emphasize the importance of consumer engagement as a mechanism for overcoming negative brand experiences, highlighting the multifaceted role of Brand Involvement in the recovery process.

The findings on Brand Forgiveness align with Sameeni et al. (2022), who emphasized forgiveness as a pivotal element in restoring consumer-brand relationships following instances of brand betrayal. However, the minimal influence of Brand Nostalgia on direct forgiveness diverges from (Veloutsou et al., 2020), who underscored nostalgia's efficacy in rebuilding trust and brand equity. This inconsistency suggests that the impact of nostalgia may vary across contexts, highlighting the need for further research to uncover its conditional effects in different scenarios.

In practical terms, these findings emphasize the importance of Emotional Brand Attachment and Brand Involvement in navigating post-failure recovery strategies. While prior studies have acknowledged the role of emotional engagement, this study highlights its influence on both forgiveness and re-engagement behaviors, providing actionable insights for brand managers. Moreover, the non-significant impact of Brand Nostalgia on forgiveness suggests that its efficacy may be contingent on the context of its application, warranting further investigation.

In conclusion, these findings contribute to the growing body of literature on consumer-brand relationships by validating and extending existing theories. The study identifies critical pathways for fostering forgiveness and involvement, while challenging assumptions about the universal effectiveness of nostalgia. Future research should further explore the contextual factors influencing these constructs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of their role in brand recovery and consumer loyalty.

6. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of Emotional Brand Attachment in fostering Brand Nostalgia, Brand Involvement, and Brand Forgiveness, emphasizing its importance in building and recovering consumer trust. Brand Involvement emerged as a key mediator, facilitating forgiveness, while the direct impact of Brand Nostalgia on forgiveness was found to be minimal, suggesting its influence may be context-dependent. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis demonstrated a robust model fit, validating the theoretical framework and reinforcing its practical relevance.

These findings provide actionable insights for brand managers, emphasizing the need to prioritize emotional attachment and active consumer involvement in recovery strategies. However, the limited role of nostalgia highlights the need for context-specific approaches to brand recovery. Future research should explore how contextual factors shape these relationships, advancing the understanding of consumer-brand recovery dynamics.

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