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The Effect of Corporate Association and Brand Trust on Brand Loyalty: The Mediating Role of Brand Attachment

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ABSTRACT

Aim/Purpose –The study sought to determine the impact of corporate affiliation and brand trust on brand loyalty in the setting of the luxury apparel sector, which is mediated through brand attachment. The brand resonance theory is utilized to observe the connection.

Design/methodology/approach –The research collected cross-sectional information from 245 shoppers who bought luxury brands. The partial least squares structural equation modeling analysis was directed in this investigation.

Findings –The findings confirm all of the predictions and demonstrate how important brand attachment is in fostering consumer loyalty for businesses in the apparel sector. Corporate affiliation and brand trust have a positive impact on brand attachment and loyalty. The study also found an important intermediate role of brand attachment that brings about the link between customers' brand trust, perceived association, and brand loyalty.

Research implications/limitations –The results of the paper are critical for high-end brands that desire to grow and be counted in the fashion industry by providing marketers with a guide to managing their branding tactics.

Originality/value/contribution –By developing a theoretical model that captures the impact of the brand trust and corporate association strategy on brand attachment and loyalty, this study expands on prior studies.

Keywords: Brand loyalty, Brand trust, corporate association, Brand attachment, Luxury fashion brand.

JEL Classification: M30, M31, M37.

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1.0 Introduction

The fashion business globally has grown by 4 to 5% since 2013, and the luxury sector witnessing the most significant gains. Despite the difficulty and turbulence of the worldwide environment, the positive growth of these luxury businesses persisted at around 4-5% in 2018 and 2019 and is estimated to remain at 3-5% through 2025. (BOF and McKinsey; 2020Bain and Company, 2018). Luxury products are in high demand in the U.S., Europe, and some growing economies, including India, China, Latin America, and the Middle East. These rising economies have lately seen remarkable wealth creation, income growth, and spending (Jain et al., 2021). The luxury fashion industry in Bangladesh has also been proliferating in recent years, driven by an increase in consumer demand and the country's growing reputation as a major textile and clothing exporter. One of the

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crucial driving forces of the luxury fashion industry in Bangladesh is the country's large and growing population of young, fashion-conscious consumers (Baten et al., 2018).

Besides, consumers can learn about various goods and services available in domestic and international markets via the Internet, social media platforms, and e-commerce. Since consumers now have access to local and international brands, their attitudes and opinions have evolved (Baten et al., 2018). As a result, boutique stores are opening all over Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka, the nation's capital. In practically all of Dhaka city's prominent traffic locations, expensive fashion labels can be seen. Single fashion boutiques, factory outlets, and branded retailers are present in some of the best shopping centers in Dhaka. In most situations, international brands predominate in these stores (Baten et al., 2018). Now accessible in Bangladesh are well-known global brands, including Gucci, Ralph Lauren, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Kline, Zara, Hugo Boss, Lacoste, and many more. Marketing literature has well documented the significance of brand attachment to drive sustainable loyal customers (Park et al., 2010) and trust as an important determinant of customer loyalty (Sweeney & Swait, 2008). However, the influence of trust and branding tactics such as corporate association on brand affiliation and (following) brand loyalty in luxury fashion settings is still less explored. Therefore, this study builds on former research by creating a theoretical model capturing the influence of the brand trust and corporate association strategy on attachment and loyalty. The suggested model, in specific, benefits from earlier research on luxury fashion loyalty. First of all, this model considers the impression of corporate association and trust in consumers of luxury clothing brands. Second, the model examined the effect of business association and customer trust on brand loyalty, through brand attachment as the mediating factor. Finally, The Brand Resonance Model is used in this article to explore the previously described relationship. The proposed model suggests brand attachment as "salience," corporate association and trust as "emotional and rational variables," and loyalty as "resonance."

2.0 Theoretical context

2.1 The brand resonance model

The brand resonance model has been used in various marketing literature studies across multiple industries (Moura et al., 2019; Jang et al., 2020). The brand resonance model is applicable and effective for every kind of brand whether it is a place, person, and so on (Keller, 2013). Keller (2013) used the brand resilience model to define this long-term connection. The model proposes two approaches to build long-run brand loyalty: emotionally and logically. The emotional route comprises crucial elements like images and feelings (pleasure and excitement). In contrast, the rational path includes performance (like cost, effectiveness, durability, and dependability) and judgment (like quality and reliability) (Keller, 2013). Brand trust and corporate association are rational and emotional elements backed by prior literature, and brand attachment was chosen as the mediation variable in this inquiry.

3.0 Literature review

3.1 Luxury branding and consumer behavior

A product meant to demonstrate one's status and dignity is considered a luxury good (Grossman & Shapiro, 1988). The price premium linked to superior quality is one of the key features that separate luxury brands (Keller, 2009). According to Khelil & Bouslama (2016), luxury brands are eminent from non-luxury brands because of their elevated ranks of hedonic, symbolic, and emotive value. They serve as markers of exclusivity, status, originality, and aristocracy. While quality and innovative design have been emphasized in the literature as essential components of consumer value propositions, luxury fashion brands also offer intangible benefits that assist consumer in portraying their own personalities and achieving a feeling of fulfillment (Okonkwo, 2016).

3.2 Conceptual framework

The entire conceptual framework that will be investigated is shown in Figure 1. As seen in Figure 1, it is theorized that corporate association and brand trust affect customer brand attachment, which consequently affects brand loyalty. This framework specifies seven sets of assumptions altogether. Theoretical evidence for the proposed relationships is presented in the subsequent sections.

3.2.1 Brand attachment and brand loyalty

Brand attachment fosters emotional closeness and creates a long-lasting bond between the customer and the brand. Few writers have hypothesized that this psychological link affects perception (Frasquet et al., 2017), is permanent over time (Pedeliento et al., 2016; Hwang et al., 2019), and is resilient to switching to rival brands. And this affects if the consumer intends to keep engaging with the brand. Therefore it is postulated that a consumer with a greater unit of brand affection to the luxury brand is ready to engage in a longstanding association with the brand.

H1. The greater a customer's brand attachment level, the higher their brand loyalty.

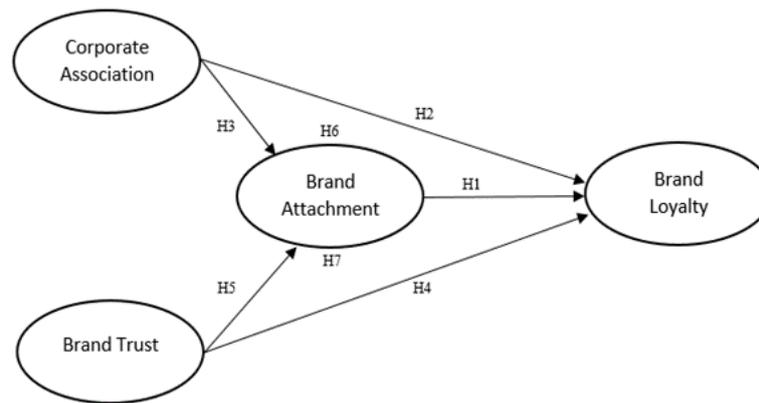


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model.

3.2.2 Corporate associations and brand loyalty

Corporate identity denotes the intentional qualities of an organization that marketers inside the company prefer to highlight to its stakeholders (Dacin & Brown, 2002). Corporate associations reflect people's beliefs and feelings about the company (Dacin & Brown, 2002). A firmly formed corporate image delivers the business a long-lasting competitive benefit fostering loyalty (Hatch and Schultz, 2003). Hence, it is proposed that the more favorably a consumer views corporate links, the better their brand loyalty will be:

H2. The greater customers perceive corporate associations positively, the superior their brand loyalty.

3.2.3 Corporate associations and brand attachment

Corporate affiliation pertains to a buyer's assessment of a brand based on information kept in their memory and previous brand-buyer encounters (Romaniuk and Gaillard 2007). By this information, company affiliation acts as a vital customer-related data indicator when determining the reputation of a firm and the perception of the quality throughout brand choice (Souiden et al., 2006). Hence, it is theorized that the more clearly a consumer perceives corporate affiliations, the superior their brand attachment will be:

H3. The higher positively consumers perceive corporate associations, the higher their brand affection.

3.2.4 Brand trust and brand attachment

Customer trust is crucial to promote a relationship between service providers and clients. Because of belief, customers consistently preserve loyal ties with the business (So et al., 2016b). Greatly engaged consumers tend to retain a connection with the brand (Vivek et al., 2012). Research by Furrahmi & Chan (2018) also demonstrates that a trusted brand has a favorable and note-worthy influence on brand affection. Accordingly, the next hypothesis is offered:

H5. The greater the level of a customer's brand trust, the better their brand attachment

3.2.5 Mediation effect of brand attachment

According to Thomson et al. (2005), brand love, connection, and affection support a buyer's brand affection. Such brand attachment features advise that consumers with a greater expressive connection are more expected to be brand loyalists and maintain an enduring partnership using the business (Thomson et al., 2005). The stronger the purchaser's belief in a brand, the larger the consumer's mental connection with the brand, resulting in brand loyalty. Through an emotional connection to a brand, brand belief can move brand loyalty. This assertion is supported by Widikusyanto's (2014) research, which demonstrates that brand attachment can entirely mediate brand trust on consumer loyalty.

The present study presumed that corporate association could mediate the impact of corporate association on loyalty.

Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H6: Brand attachment has a mediating effect on the relationship between corporate association and brand loyalty.

H7: Brand attachment has a mediating effect on the relationship between brand trust and brand loyalty.

4.0 Research methodology

4.1 Survey instrument

A five-section personally-administered questionnaire was created. The initial unit contained questions related to demographic variables. The later parts measured corporate associations, brand attachment, brand loyalty, and brand trust. Scale items for each dimension other than demographic variables are valued on a five-point Likert scale extending from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Most of the measuring items were drawn from earlier investigations with sufficient validity and reliability. Table 1 lists the measuring items and the literature from which they were taken for each construct. While the scales utilized in this paper were adapted from previously published re-searches, phrasing changes were made to the scale items to make them more applicable to the luxury fashion industry (Table 1 gives more measurement information).

Table 1.

Measurement and scale items.

Construct	Items	Relevant literature
Corporate association	A corporation with outstanding products Successful company Good corporate citizen Corporations at the forefront of fashion	Anisimova (2007), Chevalier and Mazzalovo (2008)
Brand attachment	Affectionate Passionate Connected Bonded Attached	Thomson et al. (2005)
Brand trust	The brand meets my expectations I feel confident in this brand The brand never disappoints me The brand guarantees satisfaction The brand is honest and sincere in addressing my concerns I rely on this brand to solve the problem This brand would make any effort to satisfy me This brand would compensate me in some way for the problem with the product	Hsteh and Hiang 2004; Caceres and Paparoidamis 2007; Ballester and Aleman- Munuera 2001; Dixon, Bridson, Evans and Morrison 2005; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001
Brand loyalty	Buy this brand in the near future. Actively search for this brand to buy it. Buy other products from this brand Buy only this brand in this product category If this brand is not available, I will buy it another time	Algesheimer et al. (2005), Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)

Source: Author's own compilation.

4.2 Common method variance

This investigation used the single factor approach developed by Harman (CMB) to assess the impact of Common Method Bias. In this situation, a single item with a more than 50% variation may impact CMB concerning the data and the empirical findings (Podsakoff et al., 2003). This test revealed that the study's first component explained 43.227 percent of the total variance. No general factor was identified by the factor analysis findings, indicating that bias was not a significant influence in the data collection (Podsakoff and Organ 1986).

4.3 Sampling and data collection

The information was collected utilizing a random systematic mall intercept from consumers of premium brands in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Dhaka was chosen for the sampling location because it is known as the capital of luxury fashion brand shopping, home to most high-end companies' flagship stores. Top premium brands are primarily located in the Gulshan area of Dhaka city, including Zaara, Vasavi, Shoppers World, and Amber Lifestyle. An aggregate of 245 responses was obtained at six high-end shopping establishments. To eliminate the

possibility of sample unit bias, data was collected on a consistent basis for a month at similar times of day and in similar places in malls.

5.0 Analysis and results

5.1 Survey response

A total of 270 questionnaires have been gathered, but only 245 questionnaires have been used. Few questionnaires were disregarded because they had missing information, responses that revealed the respondent could not grasp the questions or their instructions, and outliers. Demographically, the samples were predominantly females (53.5 percent). And this was to be anticipated since the high-end fashion brand is mainly aimed at feminine shoppers. The biggest cluster of participants was between 31 and 40 years of age (38.8%).

Table 2.

Demographic profile of respondents.

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	114	46.5
Female	131	53.5
<i>Age</i>		
21 years or below	11	4.5
21-30 years old	68	27.8
31-40 years old	95	38.8
41-50 years old	53	21.6
Above 50 years	18	7.3
<i>Educational Background</i>		
SSC	4	1.6
HSC	23	9.4
Honors	94	38.4
Masters	119	48.6
Others	5	2
<i>Occupation</i>		
Student	39	15.9
Businessman	54	22
Government employee	35	14.3
Private employee	97	39.6
Housewife	15	6.1
Others	5	2
<i>Monthly household income</i>		
Tk. 30000- 50000	64	26.1
Tk. 50000 – 70000	106	43.3
Tk. 70000– 100000	51	20.8
Above 100000	24	9.8

Source: Author's own compilation.

5.2 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)

The hypothesized correlations were assessed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The first phase in the two-stage process of PLS-SEM estimation is the analysis of the measurement model (validity and reliability of the measures), and the structural model is next re-viewed (Sarstedt & Cheah, 2019; Hair et al., 2017). A bootstrapping method (5000 resamples) was used to further evaluate the significance of path coefficients and loadings (Hair et al., 2017).

5.3 Measurement Model Analysis

To evaluate the measurement model, the study tested twofold validities: convergent and discriminant validity.

5.3.1 Convergent validity

The loadings, average variance derived (AVE), and composite reliability are typically used to evaluate the measurement's convergent validity (Rahman et al., 2015). The composite reliabilities were above 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017), all item loadings were above 0.6 (Truong & McColl, 2011), and the AVE of all constructs was above

0.5. (Hair et al., 2019). Figure 2 displays the outcomes of the measurement model, and Table 3 summarizes the measurements for reliability and convergence validity.

Table 3.

Convergent validity.

Constructs	Items	Loading	Cronbach	rhoA	CR	AVE
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.732	0.812	0.814	0.870	.572
	BL2	0.765				
	BL3	0.726				
	BL4	0.726				
	BL5	0.828				
Brand Trust	BT1	0.814	0.894	0.901	0.915	.576
	BT2	0.826				
	BT3	0.799				
	BT4	0.788				
	BT5	0.703				
	BT6	0.657				
	BT7	0.702				
	BT8	0.765				
Corporate Association	CA1	0.839	0.785	0.793	0.861	.609
	CA2	0.801				
	CA3	0.696				
	CA4	0.779				
Brand Attachment	BA1	0.731	0.842	0.846	0.888	.614
	BA2	0.729				
	BA3	0.765				
	BA4	0.845				
	BA5	0.840				

Source: Author’s own compilation.

5.3.2 Discriminant Validity

Using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations technique, discriminant validity was evaluated (Henseler et al. 2015). If the path model contains constructs that are conceptually quite comparable (such as affective satisfaction, cognitive satisfaction, and loyalty), Henseler et al. (2015) recommend a threshold value of 0.90. In other words, HTMT values higher than 0.90 indicate a deficiency in discriminant validity. A lower and therefore more conservative threshold value of 0.85 is justified when the route model's constructs are conceptually more different (Henseler et al., 2015). The HTMT can also be used as the foundation for a statistical discriminant validity test (Hair et al., 2017).

Table 4 presents the outcomes. When the HTMT value exceeds the HTMT0.90 value of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001), the test's discriminant validity needs to be considered. All the values show that discriminant legitimacy has been proven.

Table 4.

Discriminant validity.

	Brand Loyalty	Brand Trust	Corporate Associations	Brand Attachment
Brand Loyalty	0.869			
Brand Trust		0.601		
Corporate Associations			0.674	
Brand Attachment				0.779

Source: Author’s own compilation.

5.4 Structural Model Analysis

5.4.1 Assessment of the formative construct

The reflective-formative structure suggested by Hair et al. (2017) was applied to test the structure that this investigation revealed. Hair et al. (2017) suggested utilizing a bootstrapping method through a resample of 5,000 to identify the structural model by examining the R2 beta (β) and accompanying t-values. Additionally, Sullivan and Feinn (2012) assert that a p-value will notify the existence or absence of an impact. Therefore, statistical meaning (p-value) is an imperative finding to be stated in analyzing studies (p.279).

5.4.2 Direct and indirect effects

As recommended, Figure 2 and Table 5 show the results of structural model assessment and hypothesis testing using 5,000 bootstrap resamples. Figure 2 shows the t-values of each relationship. A complete index of the path coefficients along with their t-values are reported in Table 5. It can be noticed from the findings that all five direct association hypotheses were supported. The outcomes exhibited that brand attachment is connected to loyalty ($\beta=0.658$, $t=2.132$, $p<0.000$), corporate association is linked to brand loyalty ($\beta=0.579$, $t=2.278$, $p<0.00$), the corporate association is allied to attachment ($\beta=0.180$, $t=3.716$, $p<0.000$), brand trust associated is to brand loyalty ($\beta=0.256$, $t=7.230$, $p<0.000$), and trust is correlated to attachment ($\beta=0.171$, $t=9.301$, $p<0.017$). Figure 2 also reveals the R2 value, which represented the degree of explained variance, indicating that 55% of the variation in brand attachment was explained by corporate association and brand trust. Moreover, the R2 value of brand loyalty is 0.598, suggesting that 60% of the variance of brand loyalty can be explained by brand attachment.

Furthermore, in Smart-PLS (Hair et al., 2017), the intermediating influence of Brand Attachment was tested. The association between Corporate Association and Brand loyalty (C.A. * B.A. \rightarrow B.L.), Brand Attachment ($\beta=0.044$, $t=1.717$, $p<0.043$) and (B.T. * BA \rightarrow BL) Brand Attachment ($\beta=0.099$, $t=2.085$, $p<0.019$), the mediating conclusion was established.

Table 5 also reported the lower and upper limits of the confidence interval at 95% confidence interval (CI). If the value 0 (zero) does not fall within this interval (i.e., $0 \notin CI$), the hypothesis is accepted; otherwise (i.e., $0 \in CI$), it is rejected (Kock, 2016). As can be seen, the confidence interval for the relationship between brand attachment and brand loyalty is 0.438–0.695 and does not contain zero, supporting the hypothesis. Similarly, the CI for corporate association and brand loyalty is 0.478–0.683; corporate association and brand attachment is 0.042–0.237; brand trust and brand loyalty is 0.138–0.364; brand trust and brand attachment is 0.036–0.297; all of these don't contain zero, thus supporting the relationship. Furthermore, brand attachment mediates the relationship between corporate association and brand loyalty, and brand trust and brand loyalty, positively and significantly with a 95% CI excluding zero (CI: 0.006-0.089, 0.021-0.175, respectively).

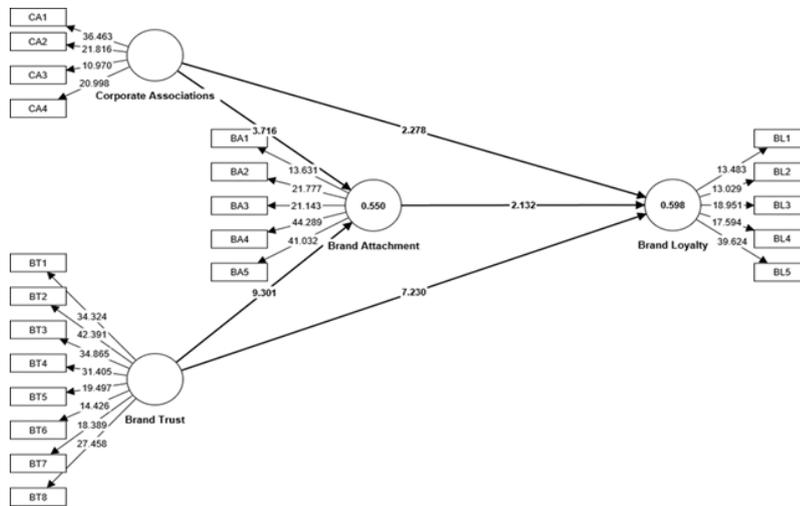


Figure 2. Bootstrapping Results.

Table 5. Results of the hypothesis testing.

General framework	Confidence interval						
	Std. Beta	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Lower (5%)	Upper (95%)	Results
Direct effect							
H1: Brand Attachment -> Brand	0.658	0.058	2.132	0.000	0.438	0.695	Supported

Loyalty							
H2: Corporate Associations -> Brand Loyalty	0.579	0.062	2.278	0.000	0.478	0.683	Supported
H3: Corporate Associations -> Brand Attachment	0.18	0.061	3.718	0.002	0.042	0.237	Supported
H4: Brand Trust -> Brand Loyalty	0.256	0.069	7.230	0.000	0.138	0.364	Supported
H5: Brand Trust -> Brand Attachment	0.171	0.08	9.301	0.017	0.036	0.297	Supported
Indirect effect							
H6: Corporate Associations -> Brand Attachment -> Brand Loyalty	0.044	0.025	1.717	0.043	0.006	0.089	Supported
H7: Brand Trust -> Brand Attachment -> Brand Loyalty	0.099	0.047	2.085	0.019	0.021	0.175	Supported

Source: Author's own compilation.

6.0 Discussion

Firstly, the results show the progressive associations between attachment and loyalty, supporting the first hypothesis. This finding supports an earlier study (Cheng et al., 2012) that claims that customers' emotive connections to brands will lead to positive actions. Companies should start creating marketing strategies that encourage these connections (Japutra et al., 2018). The current study discovered a favorable and noteworthy relationship between brand loyalty and trust. The outcomes are thus in track with other investigations by Awal and Astuti (2021) and Dewi (2019); which found a weighty association between brand loyalty and brand trust. The paper also revealed trust has an affirmative and significant weight on attachment. The conclusions are similar to the study of Barijan et al. (2021), evidencing that buyers have a higher degree of brand trust leads to an increase in consumers' attachment.

The sixth hypothesis that corporate association positively affects brand loyalty through brand attachment was supported. The positive outcome of this paper suggests that in the course of luxury fashion branding, brand attachment reinforces brand information and long-run sustainable connection, which is a pivotal share of the corporate association. And this association genuinely and directly affects brand loyalty. The seventh and final hypothesis that brand trust positively affects brand loyalty through emotional attachment to the brand was also found favorable. This phenomenon evidences that consumers who trust luxury fashion brands have a high emotive attachment to the brand, so brand loyalty to luxury fashion brands is also high.

7.0 Theoretical and managerial implications

According to Keller's (2013) "brand resonance model," there are both rational and emotional ways to achieve brand resonance. By outlining the significance of brand trust (rational) and corporate association (emotional) on loyalty, particularly in luxury fashion businesses, this paper establishes the viability of the brand resonance concept. Brand attachment as an intermediary of brand loyalty was investigated in the study. Accordingly, this investigation significantly enriches the body of literature on brands by incorporating modeling and studying the straight and indirect links between corporate association, brand trust, brand attachment, and brand loyalty. Besides, this paper proposes crucial information for brand-loyalty-building marketers. Consumers of high-end clothing are exceptionally loyal to luxury labels because of their emotional connections to those brands. The direction of consumer confidence in brand quality and corporate affiliation must be positive when fostering this attachment and loyalty. To strengthen emotional attachment, this paper suggests that high-end shops must invest resources in improving customers' views of corporate linkages and brand trust. Therefore, managers should focus on creating premium luxury items to enhance brand loyalty among consumers.

8.0 Conclusion

Even though this study has produced insightful conclusions on the connections between corporate association, brand trust, brand attachment, and loyalty, some limits must be acknowledged, and they offer recommendations for further research. First, merely samples from Dhaka city buyers were used in this investigation. The selection of participants may accurately reflect Bangladesh's population of luxury buyers, but it does not include the total population. Second, results from this investigation might not apply to luxury consumers in different nations. And finally, not all factors influencing a customer's emotional attachment are

addressed here. Future research may consider additional factors like customer experience, brand love, customer relationships, and engagement.

Disclosure statement

There is no conflict of interest. The author has no relevant financial or non-financial interests to disclose.

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