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How to develop brand attachment in various product categories?

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to identify the best interactions between sales promotion and advertisement plans as the resources of the brand attachment and its consequences in durable and fast-moving consumer goods.

Design/methodology/approach – The mixed methods research in the form of qualitative approach, using a phenomenological method and quantitative approach, using three experimental studies of factorial design types and a structural equation modeling method, have been used in this research.

Findings – The fit of plans to achieve the brand attachment is similar in both product categories. The financial gift, with the ability of liquidity and variety of shopping, fits with the advertisement messages at a high construal level and high argument strength. However, the financial gift, with the ability of purchase from particular stores, fits with the advertisement messages at the low construal level and high argument strength. Moreover, in both product categories, the brand attachment leads to the emotional and cognitive consequences.

Originality/value – This research provides experimental support with actual experiences to create a fit in marketing communication plans in order to achieve a lasting and strong relationship. Therefore, this paper offers a valuable insight relating to financial gifts and advertisement messages and their effects on consumers' behavior. It can also be used by other managers and researchers to assess their communication options.

Keywords Brand attachment, Product categories, Advertising message, Argument strength, Construal levels, Financial gifts

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Today, brand attachment is one of the areas related to the brand because of the importance of attention and the impact of interpersonal relationships on businesses (Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011). The concept of attachment arises from the deep and lasting understanding of emotional bonds in interpersonal relationships, which has gradually entered the other forms of relationship (Pedeliento *et al.*, 2016; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). In marketing science, theories and attachment styles have the potential to explain the differences in the strength and quality of relations of companies with their customers (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012). According to the brand attachment literature, some scholars have introduced the brand attachment as the strength that has originated from the emotional attachment (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Thomson, 2006; Malär *et al.*, 2011), while others believe that it is caused by cognitive and emotional attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006; Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011; Lacoëuilhe, 2000). Therefore, creating a correct understanding of this variable in a new environment with a qualitative method is one of the contributions of this research.

In general, when an attachment figure is seen as a supplement of self – in other words, when brand attachment is formed – a person possesses an appropriate motivational resource to make relationships (Park *et al.*, 2006, 2008). Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) have focused on the controllable components of marketing – in other words, marketing mix – as the prerequisites of brand attachment. Marketing communications have always been introduced as one of the most effective components of this mix in order to create value for



brands (Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2011; Tong and Hawley, 2009). The marketing communication plans considered in this research, as the sales promotion plan in the form of financial gifts, have been introduced as stimulus (Yao and Chen, 2014; Nguyen and Munch, 2011; Jin and Huang, 2014) and advertisement plan as an indication of consumer behavior (Tellis *et al.*, 2000; de Waal Malefyt, 2015; Coupland, 2005). If a consumer responds favorably toward a company's advertisements and promotions, then a relationship will begin to develop between the consumer and the brand (Ismail, 2017). Therefore, identification of the fit between these plans to achieve the brand attachment is the other contribution of this work.

According to the evidence, brand attachment influences a wide set of consumer reactions (Belaïd and Temessek Behi, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2006). Another contribution of this research is recognition of the cognitive and emotional consequences of the brand attachment in product categories. Also, one of the most important issues in customer behavior is the processing of data regarding the characteristics related to the product category (Drichoutis *et al.*, 2007). Durable goods with a high mental involvement and fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) with a low mental involvement (Gough, 2004; Harris, 1987; Malär *et al.*, 2011) are considered with the aim of recognizing the effect of product category on the fit between marketing communications plans to achieve brand attachment.

The contributions of the research are obtained by performing the mixed methods research based on the sequential transformative strategy (Creswell *et al.*, 2003), in the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods (Teddle and Tashakkori, 2006). The implementation of the phenomenological method in the qualitative approach, based on real data obtained from the direct experience of participants (Van Manen, 1990), and experimental and survey methods in the quantitative approach to examine the hypotheses based on the conceptual model, are the components of the mixed methods research and make up the sections of this research.

Theoretical background

Marketing communication plan; sales promotion plan: financial gifts

A gift is a positive tangible or intangible experience as a token of involvement and/or the relationship with a person or other people (Cheal, 1987). Giving a gift is defined as the basis of relations; therefore, any theoretical framework related to a social and economic exchange, which emphasizes different relational results, considers this point (Klein *et al.*, 2015). According to the driving role of gifts in creating and strengthening the emotional relationship, marketers have introduced this concept as a desirable tool in promotion plans to establish and strengthen consumer-brand relationships (Yao and Chen, 2014), as well as to form emotionally attached relationships (Nguyen and Munch, 2011). Previous studies demonstrated that, because of the higher economic benefits, financial gifts have a greater effect on creating motivation in customers compared to other gifts (Jin and Huang, 2014).

Two dominant forms of providing financial gifts are cash gifts and gift cards (Yao and Chen, 2014; Khouja *et al.*, 2011). In some countries, gift credit cards and gift purchase cards are the equivalents of these gifts. In addition to the purchasing of goods and services, the gift credit card can be converted into cash through ATM terminals; the gift purchase card, on the other hand, can be used to purchase goods and services in stores and shopping malls (e.g. store-specific gift cards, shopping mall gift cards). Gift purchase cards have always been favored by managers and marketers due to the higher likelihood of buying the intended goods by recipients (Yao and Chen, 2014). The mental accounting theory and goal-related mindsets theory have been used to investigate the reaction of the recipients of financial gifts. Based on the "mental accounting theory," people often classify their financial resources according to the hierarchy of spend ability (Shefrin and Thaler, 1988) and use cognitive rules to organize, evaluate and record their financial activities (Thaler, 1999).

Also, according to the “goal-related mindsets theory,” consumers have a set of stored buying instructions in their minds, that each of these instructions is activated in its specific situation and stimulates other instructions, which are identified as the results of focus of action (Xu and Wyer, 2007; Wyer and Xu, 2010). It is assumed that consumers consider cash gifts (gift credit cards) as their current assets and, consequently, their cognitive response is to spend or to save in order to answer the question of “why.” Gift purchase cards are considered expendable and consumers’ cognitive response is in the form of “how” to spend (White, 2006, 2008; Yao and Chen, 2014). The cognitive response to spending or saving funds is a general aspect in accordance with the primary mental instructions. The cognitive response to how to spend emphasizes the detailed and specific aspects of achieving the objectives in accordance with the secondary mental instructions (Khouja *et al.*, 2011). The cognitive responses determine the selective direction of individuals in decision making and, as a result, help the planners to formulate the advertising messages according to what the consumers want.

Marketing communication plan; advertisement plan; advertising message

Advertising plays an important role in strengthening the links between the individuals and sharing of information (Coupland, 2005). Advertising can potentially have a positive effect on social relations between people, strengthen social ties between them and strengthen the consumer-company relationship (de Waal Malefyt, 2015). One of the aspects of an advertising message is the construal level of the message. “Construal-level theory” describes how the psychological distance influences people’s thoughts and behaviors (Zhang, 2014). The change of preferences is the reflection of distance as a psychological dimension and is the central core of the construal-level theory. When dealing with a single event, people have different assessments and preferences based on their subjective preferences, which can have cognitive or emotional aspects and demonstrate the emotional distance. Information distance, as a form of psychological distance (Fiedler, 2007), justifies the construal level of advertising messages. This distance determines the high or low construal level (Shani *et al.*, 2009). People with a high psychological distance show a high construal level and attention to generality, while people with low psychological distance show a low construal level and attention to detail (Zhang, 2014). According to the construal-level theory, an event can be expressed at different levels of abstraction. An event at a high construal level refers to comprehensive, superior, general and decontextualized features. In contrast, the features of an event at a low construal level are context based, specific and detailed (Trope and Liberman, 2010; Liberman *et al.*, 2007; Ho *et al.*, 2014; Lee *et al.*, 2010; Schmeichel *et al.*, 2010).

It should be noted that financial gifts determine the amount of focus on the purchase in relation to the main target of the recipient. This means the recipient focuses on the information processing based on the purpose and subjective instructions (Xu and Wyer, 2007). Creating a fit between the focus and the levels of construal makes people feel the correctness in their reactions, and these subjective experiences affect their judgment (Lee *et al.*, 2010). Previous studies provide evidence indicating that the creation of this fit can improve the perceived value of a target (Higgins *et al.*, 2003), attitude toward a brand (Higgins *et al.*, 2003; Labroo and Lee, 2006) and willingness to pay for a specific object (Avnet and Higgins, 2003). In general, the existence of this fit is likely to be the stimuli of a more favorable assessment of an object (Lee *et al.*, 2010).

Another aspect of advertising messages is the argument strength. The argument strength refers to the persuasive power of advertising (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2006). A strong argument provides full information about the benefits and advantages of the desired product or brand. Therefore, it produces favorable responses about advertising messages (Chang *et al.*, 2015). There is considerable evidence indicating that the persuasive message influences the cognitive, motivational and emotional systems of the recipient (Chang *et al.*, 2015;

Nenkov, 2012). According to the “general attitude theory” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and the “theory of reasoned action” (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980), the attitudes are produced when a person is exposed to advertising messages (Massey *et al.*, 2013). These conditions lead to the formation of positive and negative attitudes toward the product and the brand advertised (Huang *et al.*, 2013). This view of attitudes, emphasizing the relationship between beliefs, attitudes, intent and behavior, also forms the basis of “persuasive hierarchy model” (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999). According to the persuasive hierarchy model, advertisements must inform and persuade, in order to elicit desired responses such as a sale, or intent to purchase. This model suggests that a consistent pathway exists; starting with cognitive responses, then affective and then a behavioral response in the form of purchase (Massey *et al.*, 2013).

Brand attachment and its consequences

Attachment is a multi-contextual construct characterizing the relationship between an individual and a caregiver (Bowlby, 1969), physical assets (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Belk, 1988), place (Rubinstein and Parmelee, 1992), gift (Mick and DeMoss, 1990), experiences (Arnould and Price, 1993), the types of objects of interest (Ball and Tasaki, 1992), sport team (Babad, 1987), brand (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Laccueille, 2000; Thomson *et al.*, 2005) and human brand (Thomson, 2006).

According to “self-concept theory,” people behave in ways that maintain and enhance their sense of self. One way to do this is through the use of brands (Anisimova, 2016). The research works in the marketing literature, based on the “self-expansion theory,” have defined brand attachment as the power of forming a relationship between brand and self. This relationship becomes a model through a rich and available network memory that encompasses the thoughts and feelings about brand and self. By creating an attachment, a person treats a brand as a complementary and establishes a stable and unchanging connection with it. Two fundamental aspects considered in brand attachment are brand-self connection and brand prominence, i.e., the automatic thoughts and feelings about brands. A brand that is associated with thoughts and feelings is quickly retrieved from the memory whenever the self asks. The automated brand-self connection instigates the preparation for allocation of resources for brand processing. This happens when the attachment figure is part of the self (Park *et al.*, 2006, 2008; Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011).

The results of different studies show that brand attachment affects a broad set of consumer responses, including attitude change, satisfaction, mental involvement, as well as consuming behaviors such as purchase intentions, willingness to pay, word of mouth (WOM) and forgiveness of mistakes (Park *et al.*, 2006; Whan Park *et al.*, 2010; Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2016; Bidmon, 2017). Thomson (2006) found higher levels of attachment are related to the positive outcomes of satisfaction, trust and commitment. The purpose of this research is recognition of the cognitive and emotional consequences of the brand attachment in product categories.

It should be noted that consumers use a variety of products with various brands in their lifetime. One of the main components in the consumer information processing model, when dealing with purchase, is mental involvement. Mental involvement is defined as the characteristics specific to product category (Drichoutis *et al.*, 2007). Some goods are frequently bought and used, and have the characteristic of daily consumer goods; they are perishable and are quickly replaced on store shelves (Gough, 2004). They create mental involvement and low cognitive efforts as FMCG, or non-durable goods. In contrast, durable goods create a high mental involvement and high cognitive efforts for consumers at the time of purchase (Harris, 1987; Malär *et al.*, 2011; Gough, 2004). Also, it should be noted that any durable and FMCG enters the market with a specific brand, and brand attachment which is important in both product categories.

Part I: qualitative approach*Methodology*

In this study, phenomenological method has been used with the aim of concluding based on the actual experiences of the consumers. Phenomenology is a descriptive, interpretive and reflexive method to understand the essence of people's lived experience told in their own language. This study has been implemented based on Van Manen's six main steps of phenomenology. The first step includes turning to the nature of lived experience; the second step is to examine an experience as it had lived. The third step is to analyze data using hermeneutic phenomenological considerations; the fourth step is to write the hermeneutic phenomenology; the fifth step is to maintain a continuous and strong relationship with phenomenon. And finally, the sixth step is to balance in context considering universality and its components simultaneously (Van Manen, 1990). In general, the characteristics of this sector are summarized in terms of methodology, as follows: Paradigm: construal; Approach: qualitative; Method: phenomenology; Accountability Strategy: inductive; Objective: to explore the relationship; Time Horizon: single cross-sectional; and Data collection method: in-depth interviews with protocol.

Sample and product selection. To start the phenomenological method, based on the concept of mental involvement, the product and brand were determined on each category with the pretests. The data for pretests were derived from a sample of Islamic Azad University students. According to Hauck and Stanforth (2007), university students are an important present and future market segment that are most likely to buy goods and services. Moreover, students are relatively homogeneous in terms of their age, intelligence and income (Bailey, 2005; Palazon and Delgado-Ballester, 2009; Kwok and Uncles, 2005; Buil *et al.*, 2013). The Islamic Azad University has the most share of student than other universities in Iran (www1.jamejamonline.ir). The first pretest ($n = 50$) has been done to determine the product with mental involvement (Mittal and Lee, 1989), and the second pretest ($n = 50$) has been done to determine the brand (Buil *et al.*, 2013). The researchers hold sport shoes as a durable product with the Adidas brand and ice cream as a FMCG, with the Kale brand as the product and brand which people have the most lived experience with.

Interviewees must be experts in their field who could provide a significant understanding about the phenomena (Haryanto *et al.*, 2017). They were selected based on the purposive sampling method with multiple strategies (acute and snowball sampling) in Tehran and Rasht in Iran. In this research, the researchers reached to the stage of theoretical saturation by conducting eight in-depth interviews for durable goods, and seven in-depth interviews for FMCG with protocol.

Steps of analysis. To analyze, the following steps have been performed: converting voice to text; open coding or line-by-line coding to extract concepts. In this regard, 474 concepts for durable goods and 512 concepts for FMCG were extracted in this stage; axial coding, i.e., the refining and separation of concepts obtained from open coding in the form of categories. The results show the consistent findings from this stage to the other stages in durable and FMCG, such that 37 categories were identified in both product categories; selective coding, which involves the integration of categories and determines the central and core elements that represent the main theme of this research. In total, 11 themes were identified in this stage for each product category (Straus and Corbin, 1990; Charmaz, 2002, 2008); relational content analysis based on the cognitive mapping approach, i.e., identifying the patterns of general meaning of the text that shows the relationship between themes (Carley, 1993). In this stage, the relationship between the themes for fit between sales promotion and advertising plans, in order to achieve brand attachment and its consequences, leads to the conceptual model; and validation of findings by the participants

(Lincoln and Guba, 1985), categories and themes and the relations extracted in the manner of narrative descriptions. A survey form was presented to the participants in order to show their agreement or disagreement regarding the results, with four options: strongly agree/agree/somewhat agree/do not agree. In all cases, the strongly agree and agree options were chosen.

Results and discussion

The results of the data analysis of each product category led to identifying of the same themes in both product categories (Table I).

Obtaining the same result in both product categories shows that brand attachment and its consequences are created independent of product category. Categories extracted for the variable of brand attachment indicate its emotional and cognitive nature. Categories like brand interest, favorable mental relationship, etc., express the emotional dimension and categories such as self-identification with brand, cognitive links with brand represent the cognitive dimension of the brand attachment. Next, based on cognitive mapping approach and relying on the comments of interviewees and theoretical background, the relationships between themes were identified.

It was found that when the consumer is motivated by a brand with the stimuli of gift and with the ability of liquidity and variety of purchase, the brand attachment is formed by exposing the customers to advertising messages with high construal level and high argument strength. In contrast, when the financial gift cannot be converted into cash and can only be spent in particular stores, the brand attachment is created by exposing the consumer with low construal level and high argument strength. According to the mental accounting theory and the theory of goal-related mindsets, the people affected by the motivation of financial gifts focused on certain mental instructions, while their decisions and behaviors indicate the level of abstraction; in other words, the construal level. Therefore, according to the construal-level theory, information distance which is created based on the type of gift determines the focus on general or detailed information, in other words high or low construal level.

Themes	Categories (frequency in durable and FMCG categories)
Brand attachment	Brand interest (27; 28), favorable mental relationship (27; 22), physical and emotional safe shelter (17; 7), tendency to ownership and ties (16; 7), respect to customers (12; 17), brand forgiveness (9; 10), anxiety for absence of brand (9; 16), good feelings to brand (9; 15), attention to the brand characteristics (37; 29), self-identification with brand (26; 23), cognitive links with brand (12; 8) and enthusiasm with brand (10; 9)
Gift credit card	Gift with the ability of liquidity (6; 9), gift as a motivating factor (13; 18), gift as excitement (6; 8)
Gift purchase card (shopping mall gift card)	Gift with the ability of variety of shopping (11; 7), gift as a motivating factor (7; 9), gift as excitement (10; 11)
Gift purchase card (store-specific gift card)	Gift with the ability of purchase from particular stores (8; 5), gift as a motivating factor (2; 4), gift as excitement (4; 6)
High construal level of the ad message	General information (4; 15), general assessment (17; 20), the main features (10; 14)
Low construal level of the ad message	Detailed information (13; 14), customized assessment (12; 8), the acquisition features (18; 24)
Argument strength of the ad message	The benefits and advantages of the product (19; 18)
Brand trust	Brand confidence (24; 24), honesty and integrity of brand (10; 13)
Brand satisfaction	Performance satisfaction (10; 18), emotional satisfaction (12; 8)
Brand commitment	Brand mental loyalty (11; 12), desire to maintain the relationship with brand (9; 12)
Brand loyalty	Behavioral loyalty (12; 24), frequency of purchase (17; 14), positive word of mouth (18; 9)

Table I.
Themes and categories

The participants in both categories of durable and FMCG led the consequences to brand attachment in terms of brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment and brand loyalty by describing the mentalities, attitudes and behaviors arising from these ties. To describe the cognitive and emotional consequences of brand attachment, literature is presented.

Brand trust. In the marketing literature, trust is referred to as an essential component for making a successful relationship with others (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Trust refers to positive beliefs toward a person or an object. This reduces cognitive risks and insecurity, which lead to maintaining a long-term relationship with customers (Lien *et al.*, 2015). In general terms, brand trust is introduced as the belief in the reliability, truth, ability and integrity of a product (Veloutsou, 2015). It has two dimensions simultaneously: cognitive and emotional. Cognitive dimension implies creditability, including the perceived reliability of information depended on brand, brand performance and its ability to meet the needs of consumers. The emotional dimension of trust determines the integrity and honesty of a brand that is formed through a consumer's evaluation of brand stimuli toward his/her character (Albert and Merunka, 2013).

Brand satisfaction. Satisfaction is one of the important issues in the long-term success and efficiency of companies and is considered as a prerequisite or consequence of many marketing activities (Nam *et al.*, 2011; Murshid *et al.*, 2016). From a cognitive perspective, satisfaction is the result of customers' assessment of their experiences (Zhao *et al.*, 2012). It should also be noted that the psychological and emotional results of individual experiences influence a company's success, regardless of the consistency with the initial expectations. Therefore, in addition to the cognitive dimension, satisfaction contains the emotional reactions (Nam *et al.*, 2011). The emotional dimension of satisfaction indicates the relationship between satisfaction and brand attachment, even though it may not be obvious (Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011).

Brand commitment. The concept of commitment and loyalty is related, but is also considered as two separate phenomena. In the field of brand, commitment means a strong desire to maintain a stable relationship with brands (Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011). It consists of two components: continuance commitment and affective commitment. Continuance commitment is rooted in the economics and psychological switching costs and scarcity of alternatives. Affective commitment is rooted in an identification of shared values, interests and trust (Albert and Merunka, 2013).

Brand loyalty. Brand loyalty is the systematic and frequent buying behavior in relation to a specific brand (Belaid and Temessek Behi, 2011) even after changing the price or product features (Esmaeilpour and Abdolvand, 2016). Although brand loyalty is commonly conceptualized in the form of behavior besides attitude (Fournier and Yao, 1997; Lee and Back, 2009), in present research behavioral loyalty is considered. The behavioral aspect of brand loyalty can refer to promotion by WOM and repurchase intention. In effect, a significant amount of academic research has referred to WOM as one of the most influential factors in the business (Dinh and Mai, 2016). Behavior must be attended with positive attitude to explain how various buying situations provoke buying the same brand by consumer (Chahal and Bala, 2010; Esmaeilpour and Abdolvand, 2016; Moslehpour *et al.*, 2017). Oliver (1997) has suggested that in addition to cognitive belief, affective evaluation is also an important mental process when a consumer is making a purchase decision (Fock *et al.*, 2005). Affective loyalty, the second stage of loyalty, was proposed by Oliver (1997). It was an accumulation of a customer's past favorable experiences, from which a liking or attitudinal orientation was generated toward an object or a brand (Tingchi Liu *et al.*, 2012).

In the following, some quotations from the interviewees are included:

Sina, a consumer of Adidas sport shoes: "I and many people I know, if we receive a gift from a company, we would be able to buy among the best products of that company; it is very pleasant

[...] I like that they give me enough information such that I buy a product without worrying [...] I do not like to buy with a lot of thinking [...] I am a customer of Adidas products, but because of the attention I received from this brand, this time I love it and it is my number one brand [...] Hence, I frequently visit it because the respect should be mutual and I take my friends with me [...]."

Malek Sima, a consumer of Kale ice cream: "I have always loved Kale, now I have another reason to continue the relationship with it; in my opinion, friends give gifts to each other so we are friends [...] I want to spend the gift given to me to buy its own products [...] I filled my fridge only with Kale products [...] I want to have it always and welcome to my guests by that [...]."

Elahe, another consumer of Adidas sport shoes: "I feel proud when I wear Adidas shoes, so I expect a long shelf life and durability [...] I will be very happy if I receive cash gift because I prefer not to spend my entire gift and go to the store several times, or perhaps I save it [...] In advertising, I search for the price and its longevity [...]."

Mohammad, another consumer of Kale ice cream: "In this world, when you get the attention of someone, it is very valuable. When Kale gives me a cash gift, I spend it to buy Kale products, because my interest and attachment to it will be doubled. I also have this opportunity to meet my necessities with this gift. So I am very loyal and I want see its presence in stores [...] I would like to receive the information that I want, about the price and the advantages of the product for the body [...]."

Conceptual model and hypotheses development

Based on the literature review and the results of the qualitative part of this research, the conceptual model (Figure 1) was proposed. The hypotheses were based on conceptual model. In the quantitative part, the hypotheses were evaluated through three experimental studies and a survey study:

- H1.* There is a direct relationship between gift credit card and high construal level.
H2. There is a direct relationship between gift purchase card and low construal level.

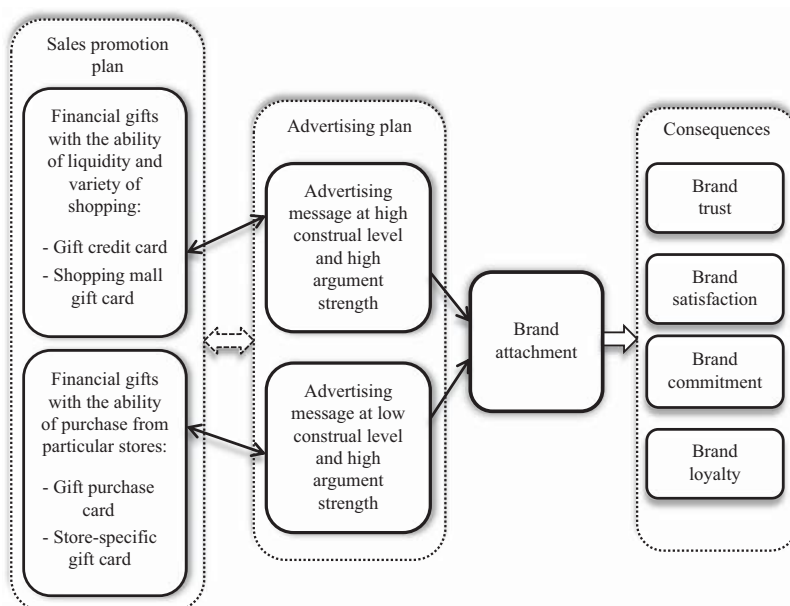


Figure 1.
The conceptual model

- H3. The fit of gift credit card, the high construal level and the high argument strength of the advertising messages develop brand attachment in durable and FMCG.
- H4. The fit of gift purchase card, the low construal level and the high argument strength of the advertising messages develop brand attachment in durable and FMCG.
- H5. The fit of shopping mall gift card, the high construal level and the high argument strength of the advertising messages develop brand attachment in durable and FMCG.
- H6. The fit of store-specific gift card, the low construal level and the high argument strength of the advertising messages develop brand attachment in durable and FMCG.
- H7. Brand attachment has a positive effect on brand trust in durable and FMCG.
- H8. Brand attachment has a positive effect on brand satisfaction in durable and FMCG.
- H9. Brand attachment has a positive effect on brand commitment in durable and FMCG.
- H10. Brand attachment has a positive effect on brand loyalty in durable and FMCG.

Part II: quantitative approach

Study 1: financial gifts and construal levels

The first experimental study was conducted to test the first and second hypotheses.

In this study, a purchase scenario puts the participants in the situation of receiving gift credit cards and/or gift purchase cards (White, 2006, 2008; Yao and Chen, 2014). Then, the participants were asked to specify their selection and purchase among the product collection introduced. The volume and the amount of products represent the role of the dependent variable. The volume and amount of people's purchases refer to the degree of abstraction in which the goal-directed actions in cognitive hierarchy occur. The lower buying volume refers to the higher abstraction; in other words, the high construal level, whereas the higher buying volume and amount of purchase refer to the low construal level (Hansen *et al.*, 2013; Trope and Liberman, 2010; Yao and Chen, 2014). First, the instruments used in all the quantitative studies were translated into Persian and localized; then, the meaning consistency of the text was assured by back-translation to English by a bilingual translator.

In the following, to verify the realism, reliability and the ease of understanding of the scenario, a manipulation check pretest (Keh and Lee, 2006) was conducted based on a five-point Likert scale ($n = 20$; realism (1 = very low, 5 = very high, $M = 4.6$), credibility (1 = very low, 5 = very high, $M = 4.45$) and ease of understanding (1 = very low, 5 = very high, $M = 4.55$)).

Methodology. The research in relation to the sales promotion activities in the marketing introduced the class students as eligible participants because of their knowledge and, more importantly, because they themselves were the consumers of the products considered. They, therefore, constituted a homogenous group in terms of age and income (Bailey, 2005; Palazon and Delgado-Ballester, 2009; Kwok and Uncles, 2005; Buil *et al.*, 2013). As students of Islamic Azad University branches involve a large number of students in Iran, to ensure an optimum geographical diversity of the experimental research, the participants were selected among the management students from the north and center branches.

The first study of experimental research was conducted to evaluate the two factorial, randomized, mixed-effects designs (gift credit card vs gift purchase card). In accordance with the central limit theorem, based on past research process, a total of 80 students (51.3 percent aged between 20 and 30 years, 57.7 percent female) participated. For each mode, 40 students took part in the first study. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used

in the experimental studies to test the hypotheses in accordance with the preconditions of independence of the groups, normal distribution of the dependent variable ($n \geq 30$, $k-S > 0.05$) and equality of the variance of dependent variable in sub-groups (with equal numbers in each mode).

Results and discussion. In the two experimental modes, the cognitive responses were calculated based on the average of two items (Yao and Chen, 2014), ($\alpha = 0.944$). The results of the ANOVA showed a significant influence of the variety of financial gifts on individuals' cognitive responses ($F(1, 80) = 129.480$, $p = 0.00$). The recipient of the scenario related to the gift credit card had the lower volume and amount of purchase (attention to generality) ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.911$) and the recipient of the scenario related to the gift purchase card had the higher volume and amount of purchase (attention to details) ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.706$). As a result, the first and second hypotheses of the research were confirmed. According to the mental accounting theory and the theory of goal-related mindsets, the people affected by the motivation of financial gifts focused on certain mental instructions, while their decisions and behaviors indicate the level of abstraction; in other words, the construal level.

Study 2: the fit between financial gifts and advertising messages

The second experimental study was conducted to test the third and fourth hypotheses.

In this study, financial gifts in the form of a text scenario put the participants in the situation of receiving a gift credit card and gift purchase card (White, 2006, 2008; Yao and Chen, 2014). Through construal levels of the advertising message, by inserting general information vs expressing details (Lee *et al.*, 2010; Trope and Liberman, 2010) and argument strength of the advertising message, by inserting enough information about the advantages of product vs the lack of information (Chang *et al.*, 2015; Nenkov, 2012) and product categories, by inserting Adidas sport shoes and Kale ice cream in the form of the advertising scenario, the independent variables were manipulated. Brand attachment is measured as the dependent variable based on a five-item scale (Lacoeuilhe, 2000) and a five-point Likert scale.

The type of product and brand in both product categories was selected based on the pretest conducted in accordance with the qualitative section. (The result of manipulation check pretest: $n = 32$; realism ($M = 4.50$), credibility ($M = 4.40$) and the ease of understanding ($M = 4.65$).

Methodology. In the second study, in order to investigate the $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ full-factorial, randomized, mixed-effects experimental design, 560 management students of the Islamic Azad University units in the north and center of Iran (58.2 percent aged between 20 and 30 years; 50.5 percent female), while 35 students for each mode participated.

Financial gifts (gift credit card vs gift purchase card), the construal levels of advertising messages (high vs low), the argument strength of advertising messages (high vs low) and product categories (durable vs FMCG) were manipulated as the independent variables in the form of scenarios vs the dependent variable, i.e., brand attachment.

Results and discussion. In the 16 experimental modes, brand attachment was calculated based on the average of five items (Lacoeuilhe, 2000), ($\alpha = 0.946$). The results of the ANOVA showed a significant effect of the interaction of financial gifts, the construal levels of advertising message, the argument strength of advertising message and the product categories on brand attachment ($F(1, 560) = 7.785$, $p = 0.05$). When the participants were given the scenario relating to the gift credit card, high construal level and high argument strength of the advertising message, they achieved the highest score in the durable goods ($M = 4.811$, $SD = 0.1604$) and FMCG ($M = 4.674$, $SD = 0.2832$), (confirmation of the third hypothesis). Also, when the participants were given the scenario relating to the interaction between gift purchase card, low construal level and high argument strength of the

In accordance with the theories proposed in the literature, for those people who receive the gift credit card, it becomes the current asset of the person because of the ability of liquidity. As a result, they are at a high level of abstraction – in other words, high construal level – and are looking for information at this stage. They are also looking for information about the benefits and advantages of the products to make a decision that represents the high argument strength. Consequently, when the advertising message is at the high construal level and high argument strength, the attachment to the relevant brand is formed. On the other hand, people who receive a gift purchase card and consider it as spendable money and are looking for a suitable situation where they can spend it, the advertising message at the low construal level and high argument strength provides this situation for them. Creating fit leads to the formation of the brand attachment. The similar conclusions regarding the durable and FMCG indicate that the condition for formation of brand attachment is created independently of the product category. The results of interactions between the independent variables are shown in Table II.

The third experimental study aims to test the fifth and sixth hypotheses.

In this study, because of the acceptance of gift purchase cards among managers and marketers, all kinds of gift purchase cards are listed in the form of a financial gift as the independent variable (Yao and Chen, 2014), while other independent and dependent variables are similar to the second study. (The result of manipulation check pretest: $n = 32$; realism ($M = 4.60$), credibility ($M = 4.50$) and ease of understanding ($M = 4.65$)).

Methodology. In the third study, in order to investigate the $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2$ full-factorial, randomized, mixed-effects experimental design, like the second study, 560 students (57.3 percent aged between 20 and 30 years; 57 percent female) participated, while 35 students participated for each mode. Financial gifts (shopping mall gift card vs store-specific gift card), construal levels of advertising message (high vs low), argument strength of advertising message (high vs low) and product categories (durable vs FMCG) were manipulated as the independent variables in the form of scenarios vs the dependent variable, i.e., brand attachment.

Results and discussion. The results of the ANOVA showed the significant effect of interaction between gift purchase cards, the construal levels of advertising messages, the argument strength of advertising messages and product categories on brand attachment ($F(1, 560) = 4.348, p = 0.038$). When the participants received the scenario relating to the interaction between the shopping mall gift card, high construal level and high argument strength of the advertising messages, the highest scores were achieved in the durable goods ($M = 4.805, SD = 0.1714$) and FMCG ($M = 4.508, SD = 0.4428$) (confirmation of the fifth hypothesis). Also, when people received the scenario related to the interactions of

Product category	Durable goods								Fast-moving consumer good							
Financial gift	Gift credit card				Gift purchase card				Gift credit card				Gift purchase card			
Construal	High		Low		High		Low		High		Low		High		Low	
Argument	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L
Mean	4/81	3/28	3/42	3/02	3/54	2/98	4/73	2/88	4/67	2/99	3/26	2/80	3/32	2/81	4/84	2/84
SD	0/16	0/52	0/38	0/35	0/55	0/43	0/29	0/30	0/28	0/28	0/20	0/23	0/27	0/31	0/16	0/31

Notes: H: high; L: low

store-specific gift card, low construal level and high argument strength of advertising messages, the highest scores were obtained in the durable goods ($M = 4.703$, $SD = 0.2716$) and FMCG ($M = 4.525$, $SD = 0.4680$) (confirmation of the sixth hypothesis).

The recipients of the shopping mall gift card are at the high abstraction or high construal level because of the extent of purchase from a variety of products in the market. Meanwhile, the recipients of the store-specific gift card given the limited conditions of shopping, seeking to take advantage of the opportunity of shopping; in other words, are at the low construal level. Both groups also tend to have enough information regarding the benefits and advantages of the product or the high argument strength. The results indicate that the fit conditions for creating brand attachment are formed independently of the product category. The results of the interactions between the independent variables are shown in Table III.

Study 4: brand attachment and its consequences

The fourth study was conducted to test the seventh to the tenth hypotheses based on the structural equation modeling (SEM) method.

Methodology. Brand attachment as the independent variable was measured based on the five-item scale (Lacoeuilhe, 2000). Based on a five-point Likert scale, brand trust was measured with three-item scale (Bansal *et al.*, 2004; Larzelere and Huston, 1980; Morgan and Hunt, 1994), brand satisfaction was measured with five-item scale (Sondoh Jr *et al.*, 2007), brand commitment was measured with three-item scale (Coulter *et al.*, 2003) and brand loyalty was measured with three-item scale (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005).

In total, 411 consumers of Adidas sport shoes (60.8 percent aged between 21 and 40 years; 40.1 percent female), and 416 consumers of Kale ice cream (59.1 percent aged between 21 and 40 years; 51.4 percent female) in the cities of Tehran and Rasht responded to the questionnaires. To test the hypotheses, SEM was used in the particular path analysis using LISREL software version 8.72.

Results

Table IV shows the results from the convergent, discriminant validity and reliability of the questionnaire. On the diagonal of this matrix, number 1 indicates that each variable has a perfect correlation with itself. The results show that all coefficients are significant at the 95% confidence level. As specified in the table, the square root value of average variance extracted variables is higher for all variables compared to the correlation of that variable with other variables, and this confirms the discriminant validity. Composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha with coefficients higher than 0.7 indicate the reliability of the measurement tool in both the product categories.

Finding the fit of model is a requirement of the path analysis. Table V indicates the indicators of the model fits and their limits in both product categories. After corrections, the model's data found a good fit with factorial structure and the theoretical underlying of research; this, then, reflects the congruence of the questions with the theoretical constructs.

Product category	Durable goods								Fast-moving consumer good							
Gift purchase card	Shopping mall				Store specific				Shopping mall				Store specific			
Construal	High		Low		High		Low		High		Low		High		Low	
Argument	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L
Mean	4/80	3/31	3/61	2/97	3/50	2/90	4/70	2/85	4/50	3/01	3/53	2/96	3/52	2/85	4/52	3/23
SD	0/17	0/57	0/41	0/35	0/52	0/44	0/27	0/31	0/44	0/31	0/46	0/31	0/48	0/33	0/46	0/38

Notes. H: high; L: low

Table III.
Brand attachment as
a function of gift
purchase cards,
construal levels and
argument strength of
the ad message in
product categories

Table IV.Validity, reliability
and correlation matrix

	1	2	3	4	5	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	AVE	CR	CA
<i>Latent variable (durable goods)</i>									
Brand attachment	1					0.880	0.775	0.945	0.928
Brand trust	0.38	1				0.852	0.725	0.888	0.811
Brand satisfaction	0.381	0.314	1			0.852	0.727	0.930	0.906
Brand commitment	0.472	0.288	0.29	1		0.898	0.807	0.926	0.880
Brand loyalty	0.372	0.274	0.208	0.324	1	0.878	0.771	0.910	0.854
<i>Latent variable (FMCG)</i>									
Brand attachment	1					0.878	0.771	0.944	0.926
Brand trust	0.309	1				0.875	0.765	0.907	0.847
Brand satisfaction	0.378	0.288	1			0.876	0.768	0.943	0.925
Brand commitment	0.353	0.31	0.327	1		0.874	0.764	0.907	0.847
Brand loyalty	0.354	0.271	0.301	0.294	1	0.872	0.761	0.905	0.843

Note: All correlation coefficient are significant at the error level less than 5 percent**Table V.**
The index of
fitting model

Model fit indices	χ^2/df	GFI	AGFI	RMSEA	CFI	NFI	NNFI	IFI
Durable goods	1.317	0.95	0.94	0.028	0.99	0.98	0.99	0.99
FMCG	1.774	0.94	0.92	0.044	0.99	0.97	0.99	0.99
Limit	< 3	> 0.8	> 0.8	< 0.1	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9	> 0.9

The model has tested the measurement equations (factor loading) and structural equations (the path coefficient) in each product category using t -statistic. The calculated t -values were above 1.96 for each factor loading in both product categories. Therefore, the congruence of the questionnaire questions used to measure the concepts can be validated. To validate the structural coefficient, determinant coefficient (R^2) based on the value, and the path coefficient (β) based on algebraic symbols, were used; the results indicate the validity of the structural equations. According to the path coefficient (β) and determination coefficient (R^2) in Table VI, the seventh to tenth hypotheses of this study were confirmed.

The strategy of the sub-group includes testing the correlation coefficient of two or more sub-groups. In the sub-group approach, the differences between the power and the extent of a relationship are determined through the differences between the magnitude and the value

Table VI.Beta coefficient,
 t -value, determining
coefficient and the
results of hypotheses
testing

	β	t	R^2	Result and direction
<i>Hypothesis (durable goods)</i>				
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand trust ($H7$)	0.45	7.48	0.20	Supported; +
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand satisfaction ($H8$)	0.43	7.94	0.18	Supported; +
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand commitment ($H9$)	0.53	9.88	0.29	Supported; +
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand loyalty ($H10$)	0.42	7.58	0.18	Supported; +
<i>Hypothesis (FMCG)</i>				
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand trust ($H7$)	0.36	6.44	0.13	Supported; +
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand satisfaction ($H8$)	0.42	7.96	0.18	Supported; +
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand commitment ($H9$)	0.41	7.22	0.16	Supported; +
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand loyalty ($H10$)	0.41	7.37	0.17	Supported; +

Note: $|t| > 1.96$ significant at $p < 0.05$

of the zero-order correlation coefficient among the k sub-group. In this study, the d -statistic is within the range from -1.96 to $+1.96$; as a result, the product category does not have significant effect on the relationships (Table VII).

General discussion

In total, similar results were obtained in both the qualitative and quantitative sections, which produced stronger results. As mentioned above, according to the extracted concepts and categories in the qualitative section, the variable of brand attachment is introduced as the cognitive and emotional bonds in the environment under investigation. Although attachment has an emotional root, cognitive aspects play an important role in its creation and strengthening.

Overall, what is evident from the survey results is the impact of financial gifts in a variety of the forms defined to achieve brand attachment in both product categories. According to the opinions of interviewees and the results obtained close to the average in all designs in the first, second and third experimental studies, the strong influence of the all kinds of financial gifts is concluded as a motivating factor. Therefore, financial gifts are desirable motivating factors to create a relationship with the brand, including brand attachment. Also, any of these gifts put the customers on a certain chosen path that indicates the level of abstraction or construal. Therefore, the advertising message has been determined by specifying the type of financial gift according to the audience demand. The conditions of fit presented in the qualitative section, in accordance with the quantitative section as obtaining the best and unique result in the interaction between gift credit card (because of the ability of liquidity) and shopping mall gift card (because of the variety of purchase) with the advertising messages at high construal level (general information), as well as the store-specific gift card (due to the specific condition for shopping) with advertising message at low construal level (specific and detailed information). This means that people's choices can be affected by identifying the motivator and considering the construal-level theory. In general, customers in all cases tended to possess information about the benefits and advantages of the product; in other words, the high argument strength of the advertising message for making decision. It means that creating brand attachment requires advertising message with high argument strength in every circumstance.

After developing the brand attachment in both product categories, the brand attachment leads to consequences in terms of brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment and brand loyalty. The brand attachment is a feature of a strong brand; a strong and trusted brand cares about customers' expectations, realizing promises and valuing them, which ultimately leads to customer trust in the brand and making it reliable (Delgado-Ballester and Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2005). The positive effect of brand attachment on brand satisfaction is not in line with the results of the research conducted by Belaid and Temessek Behi (2011) in the industrial products; the customers' satisfaction in this area is further formed by the cognitive aspect and is based on meeting expectations. While, brand attachment has cognitive and emotional aspects, sometimes the emotional aspect becomes more evident.

Hypothesis	Durable goods ($n = 411$)		FMCG ($n = 416$)		d
	R1	T1	R2	T2	
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand trust	0.45	7.48	0.36	6.44	-0.281
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand satisfaction	0.43	7.94	0.42	7.96	-0.031
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand commitment	0.53	9.88	0.41	7.22	-0.367
Brand attachment \rightarrow brand loyalty	0.42	7.58	0.41	7.37	-0.031

Table VII.
The results of the
sub-group approach

Brand commitment introduced as one of the consequences of brand attachment in the form of maintaining the relationship with brand. And brand loyalty, in terms of behavioral outcomes in the form of current and future buying behavior introduced as another of the consequences of brand attachment. Experiencing any of the introduced emotional-cognitive consequences has been considered a precious advantage for the brands. This advantage can also be achieved in the light of the strong bond and lasting attachment to the brand, i.e., brand attachment, which has been investigated in the model presented in this study. The conclusion of the survey also suggests that the relationship between brand and its consequences is created independently of the product categories, while mental involvement caused by the product categories does not affect the prerequisites and the consequences of brand attachment.

Managerial implications

The current research offers experimental support in accordance with the actual data from phenomenology to achieve a strong and lasting link between the consumer and the brand as brand attachment in product categories. The results show that the conditions for creating fit between marketing communication plans are formed independently of the product category and focus on these plans. Therefore, due to the acceptance of various kinds of financial gifts in promotion plans, managers and marketers are advised to use this tool as a driver in order to achieve brand attachment, and then to periodically diversify financial gifts to benefit from the desirability of variability of consumers. As a result, this change can periodically strengthen the short-term impact of promotional stimuli and make it durable.

Considering that each financial gift has its cognitive responses, formulating an advertising message compatible with the gift is suggested. In other words, when a financial gift with the ability of liquidity and variety of purchase is used, an advertising message with high construal level and high argument strength is formed. Also, when a financial gift with the ability of purchase from particular stores is used, an advertising message with low construal level and high argument strength is developed. Given the tendency of companies to use the gift purchase cards due to the greater possibility of purchasing the companies' products, attention to the conditions of fit for gift purchase cards offers enough trust to succeed in using them. In addition, this research provides favorable support in order to achieve the desired cognitive and emotional outcomes in terms of the brand trust, brand satisfaction, brand commitment and brand loyalty in both durable and FMCG. According to the literature review, brand trust implies an acceptance of the brand's honesty. Brand satisfaction means that the brand acts in accordance with the audience demand. Brand commitment and brand loyalty mean the individual intention and practical measures to continue the relationship with the brand, respectively. Each of these results can be obtained when a person creates an emotional and cognitive connection with the brand as a type of brand attachment. Achieving each of these outcomes from the directions introduced is a competitive advantage for the relative brand and company in today's changing world.

Limitations and further research

The findings of the qualitative section of this research have shown that a new measure can be extracted by promoting the dimensions of the variable of brand attachment compared with what is available. Therefore, the opportunity of extracting this criterion based on the grounded theory in the qualitative approach and its practicality were introduced. Furthermore, in the advertising plan, the research has focused on the aspects of the advertising message in print. Future researchers can consider TV ads or other ad aspects, for example, the design and aesthetic in a new study, or examine another category of product, or even in regard to services because of its growth and desirability.

Attention to the other components of marketing mix as the controllable items, and introducing a new fit among them in order to achieve brand attachment, will be a new topic and a supplement for the results. Although, in the present study, no control has been taken on the demographic factors of the sample, these factors can lead to new results. Due to a wide range of demographic factors and the existence of controlled conditions for them, considering them besides environmental and cultural components in the various location areas is a research opportunity for the future.

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Appendix 1

(1) Interview protocol

- What is your perception of the concept of brand?
- When and how to become a customer of the brand of _____?
- Define a good and memorable experience when you were the customer of the brand.
- What is your opinion about corporate gifts?
- What information you are looking for about the product in advertising of the brand?
- What is your feeling when you take a gift from the company? Describe exactly.
- What is your feeling when you watch the advertising of the brand? Describe exactly.
- What intentions, decisions and behaviors these feelings create for you? Describe exactly.

Appendix 2

- Text scenario sample (receiving gift purchase card)

Today, you went to the Kale store to buy ice cream; the seller cheerfully came to you and said “Today, you are our selected customer” and gave you a gift purchase card to the value of 500,000 RLS. You were happy because you could buy Kale products from the Kale store. You were walking into the store, when another vendor came up to you and gave you a printed ad for Kale ice cream. You considered it and then continued your buying.
- Advertising scenario samples (advertising message with high construal level and low argument strength (Figure A1); and advertising message with low construal level and high argument strength (Figure A2)).



Figure A1.
Advertising
scenario samples

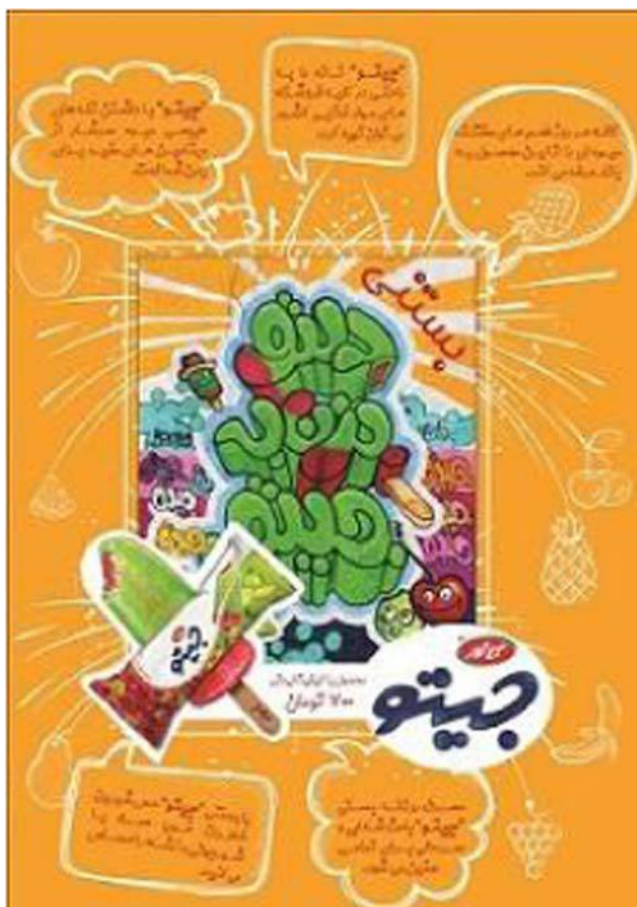


Figure A2.
Advertising scenario
samples

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