Review

Researches on relationship between consumers' attachments and behaviors

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The paper aims for studying the relationship between consumers' attachment styles and consumers' behaviors, especially 'ethical consumption' and 'conformity consumption'. Based on combing the previous researches, studies conclude that: "secure attachment" people and their ethical behaviors are most positively related, and "ambivalent attachment" people and their moral behaviors take second. Meanwhile, "avoidant attachment" people and their moral behaviors are most negatively related, and "fearful attachment" people and their ethical behaviors take second. And "secure attachment" people will be easier to be affected by "informational social influence" aiming at obtaining knowledge; however "insecure attachment" people will be easier to be affected by "normative social influence" aiming at obtaining social supports. Of course, those propositions need further empirical research.

Keywords: Intimate Relationship; Emotional Attachment; Ethical Consumption; Conformity Consumption

INTRODUCTION

Environmental effects always let us do some things, or force us to do things, or believe something. Psychologists call the environmental effects as social influence, which can change people's behaviors, attitudes and beliefs by some ways. Behavior's change is called acceptance, attitudes' change is called persuasion, and belief change is called the propaganda or education (Philip and Michael, 2007). Therefore, all efforts marketers do are to make various social effects on consumers, such as behavioral changes, attitudes' changes or belief changes. But, why do consumers change their behaviors, attitudes or beliefs? To some extent, whether consumers buy some goods is for some intimate relationships. According to Bowlby (1969,1980), the close relationship among adults should go back to the formation of infancy attachment relationship. The existing literature has quite a few studies that have introduced attachment theory to marketing research, especially to the relationship between the consumers and brands (Fournier 2005; Lumina et al., 2009; Jiang and Dahai, 2007). This paper tries to apply attachment theory into analyzing consumers' behaviors, such as Ethical Consumption and Conformity consumption.

Theoretical background

Adults' seeking for close relationship

The adult world in which we need caring adults is filled with stress and strangers. But for a variety of reasons, the caring adult may not respond to our desires. So regarding of whether they are out of apathy or are busy with the complexities of modern living, we will be in peril. That is to say, if we cannot enjoy close relationship, it is difficult for us to deal with stress in our lives. Because of the traditional moral lessons, we may control or intimate behaviors, and cannot help accepting the following point: even between the most close relatives, it is evil to enjoy intimate relationship. In this way, We will not meet desire for intimacy, and we will be lonely. However, Human beings are species of creative ability. If we are deprived of the things vitally needed, our creative spirits will drive us soon to seek the substitute. In other words, if we cannot enjoy close relationship between adults, we will turn to alternative modes, for example, keeping pets.

People often substitute lifeless things for real people, which is different from a live object. For instance, we smoke with habitually hands in our pockets, and sleep in the soft water bed, etc. all contacts with the material can remind us of warm arms of a mother (Oakes and Morris, 1987). In essence, intimacy means trusts. We have been long thought that people smoke because of nicotine addiction. But admittedly that doesnt work, it is not the most important factor. Why? Because Cigarette nicotine content is very low, even one in a million. So there must be other factors. According to Oakes and Morris (1987), points of view, the kinds of behavior in adults are due to seeking for intimacy.

Attachment theory and adults' attachment

In the last few decades, attachment theory has an important impact on social and development researches (Roisman et al., 2007). Attachment theory is developed by Bowlby (1969,1973.1980), who introduced and explained how infants developed attachment for their caring persons. According to Bowlby (1969), infants are born with a physiological system, which enables the infant to form a close emotional tie with his (or her) caring person not the other. The development of attachment has profound biological roots. When an infant face an possible threat and danger, he(or she) will seek his(or her) caretaker for security, which is human instinct. Attachment is emerged in infancy and will last lifelong. Bowlby thought that attachment model are individual differences and lifelong.

In fact, Bowlby points, infant experience with caretakers is internalized and form the internal work model which plays for a normal cognitive structure. The adult's work model will affect the adult's interaction with the other, the building of intimacy and the development of personality trait. Bowlby's internalized work model was a conceptualized 4-style attachment model by Brtholomew (Bartholomew, 1990; Bartholomew and Horowitz, 1991), positive or negative, self or others. The positivity of the self model involves the degree of self loving and self excellence. However, the positivity of others model involves the expectation of the availability and support of the close object. "secure attachment" people has positive views of self and others, but "anxious-ambivalent attachment " people that have negative views of self and positive views of others. "avoidant attachment" people who have two different styles: exclusion (positive self and negative others) and fear (negative self and negative others).

Bowlby (1973, 1980), thought that when children developed the negative model they would be prone to mental illness. The dangerous factor of attachment difficulty is inconstant and indifferent parenting (Bifulco, et al., 2002), which is related with depression   and anxiety   disorders   in   adulthood (Bifulco et al., 2002).

Separation anxiety is a negative mood,and when children and their attaching objects are separated, aloneness and sadness would come into being (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999). During growth stage, when children are separated from their caretakers, anxiety would emerge. Anxiety during their early childhood will theoretically help their survival. And according to the attachment theory, separation would cause infant' behaviors, such as crying, chasing and shouting. The purpose of this anger is to stop separation, and hope to continue keeping the intimacy. Those behaviors seeking for close relationships would increase the chance of children's survival.

Bowlby (1969), put forward that infants would learn attachment, separation and reunion during their growth. Therefore, Bowlby (1969), thought that the leading force of the development of attachment was anxiety and fear for abandonment. When an attachment relationship is under threat, Attached to the target is not always available, unsafe attachment will form. Children with contradiction attachment are often afraid of being alone and in danger, because their caretakers are often undependable when facing their needs (Bowlby, 1973; Cassidy and Shaver, 1999; Kerns et al., 2007). However, children with avoidant attachment learned to not depend on the comforts out of their caretakers, and bury their sadness into heart (Grteenberg, 1999). Because of inconsistency and conflicts, children with anxious-ambivalent attachment style are often beaten by long dream of need gratification (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999). Meanwhile, according to pathological model of anxiety, children with anxious-ambivalent attachment style will form autonomy which will be forbidden because of parents' impatience. It is due to parents' unpredictable behaviors that children will feel uncontrollability of external environment' condition. Parents' contempt is the cause of attachment avoidance, and attachment avoidance will cause negative self-appraisals between kids (Cassidy and Shaver, 1999; Rohner, 2004).

The concept intensions of consumers' attachment

It is feasible to apply attachment theory into marketing research (Schultz et al., 1989). studies have shown that consumers can develop attachment for gifts, collections, places, products, brands, humans and other special objects (Hill et al., 1990; Mick and Michelle, 1990; Slater, 2000). Although there is some differences between attachment for humans or things, basic features and effects between them are similar (Park et al., 2006). In addition,   among   researches   on   cosumer-brand relationships, Fournier (2005) gave 15 kinds of consumer-brand relationship styles. Fournier who thought attachment is the core of all brand relationships, applied independence, personal commitment, love and passion, self-relation, intimacy, Partnership quality and nostalgic

mood to describe consumer-brand relationship. Relationships between partners, private and close friends are apt to cause attachment, but not between Slavery, established and convenient intimate relationships. It is obvious that for Fournier, attachment is the higher level concept among all consumer-brand relationship.

Academic researches of attachment theory are mainly based on two views: personal differences and relationships. But Park et al. (2007), thought it was no meaning for researches on individual differences because consumer's personality is hardly affected. Accordingly, marketing research should begin with relationship in that consumer relationship can be cultivated. But, attachment is essentially a psychological phenomenon. Ball et al. (2001), indicated that consumers rely on attachment objects which consumers have had, hope to have or had to support degree of the self concept. Buttle and Adlaigan (2005), thought that attachment is a serial of mental bonds which is built on common values between consumers and organizations. Of cause, some other scholars studied consumer-brand relationship out of relationship marketing, and present the concept of brand attachment (Thach and Janeen, 2006; Park et al., 2006), thinking that brand attachment is a cognitive and emotional connection which combines consumers with brands. When the brand and self is the same, attachment is exactly "warm emotion" which will stimulate consumers' longing for some brand. Except of the characteristics of perceive and feeling, Jiangyan and Dong (2007) present that attachment has a characteristic of conation as well, namely strong motivation and behavior orientation. In marketing, consumers with strong attachments are apt to devote time, spirit and money to consumption objects, and also pay a premium, put off buying when out of stock, spread positive word of mouth, actively participate in brand community of the company and so on.

Adult attachment and intimacy

Studies have shown that adult-adult attachment is similar to mother-infant attachment (Bowlby, 1983; Hazan and Shaver, 1987). Namely, mother-infant attachment will continue to adulthood. There are three styles of attachment: compulsive care-giving, compulsive care-seeking and compulsive self-dependence. Compulsive care-giving is to obtain the acceptance of others by pleasing and satisfying the needs of others, and they often try to give supports for those who are aggressive and hostile because of attracting others' attention. Compulsive self-independence is the adverse of compulsive care-giving. According to Bowlby (1969), both the two styles of people are similar in childhood. People with compulsive self-independence move themselves from others and not connect with others because they don't trust others, always avoid approaching others and

being abandoned.

Adult attachment measurement was put forward by Hanzan and Shaver (1987) for the first time. Soon afterward, many researches applied self-report method to devote to measure adult attachment. Hanzan and Shaver (1987) found that people with safe-attachment possess romantic love and passions and Less extreme to complete dedication of love. People with avoidance attachment play the game of love and people with anxious-ambivalent attachment style correspond to occupied and reliant love. The first style often accompanies positive relationship; the second style has less satisfactory intimacy; the third shows mostly negative moods. Feeney et al. (2000), present that "secure attachment" people have absolute faith in those people with whom they have close relationship and are fully confident in themselves. "insecure attachment" people will mainly be seen avoiding intimacy or depending on emotions which are often nervous and not careful love.

Proposition:the link between attachment styles and consuming behaviors

Existing literatures showed that strong consumer-brand relationship is the top of building brand capital (Park et al., 2007; Thaeh et al., 2006). Park et al. (2006), thought attachment theory gives a new aspect to study relationship marketing. According to Bartholomew (1990), Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), the four attachment styles can be defined into two work model: the one is self work model and the other is others' work model. So this paper focuses on ethical consumption and conformity consumption.

Ethical consumption

In last decades, a new consumption--ethical consumerism is emerging worldwide. Although studies of ethical consumerism are still in infancy, ethical consumerism self offers a new direction for economy— moral market. Ethical consumerism is directed at consumers and ethical marketing is accordingly directed at marketers. Previously researches on both consumers' and marketers' moral behaviors are paralleled. In recent years researchers have put forward that both them should band together. Since immoral behaviors and beliefs will damage transactions, research on ethical behaviors is very important. Previous studies mainly focused on marketing practices and neglected consumers' ethics. But ethical beliefs and behaviors of consumers are significant for operating a perfect economic structure (e.g., Hunt and Vitell,1986; Muncy and Vitell, 1992; Vitell et al., 1991).

In marketing, what are immoral beliefs and behaviors?

The answer to this question has great differences. However it is stated that stealing is immoral behavior. There are different opinions on the other behaviors, such as privately using public resources, communicating with family or friends at work, taking office supplies for their children etc. The same is the definition of consumer ethical situation. Consumers show their ethical beliefs when they are buying products or services. Therefore it is possible to agree that shoplifting is immoral, and there is a difference in whether accepting a wrong bill which is favorable for consumers is ethical. In short, that ambiguity causes distress to marketing practices, even causes considerable economic losses sometime. Even so, few researches discuss antecedent factors of individual ethical beliefs and behaviors.

Owning that marketing behaviors are mostly interpersonal, we expect those behaviors are partly related to the image of individual perception of others. That is to say, if someone considers the other is friendly, supportive and caring, the one has reason to protect the fair relationship between them. On the contrary, if someone considers the other as indifferent, selfish, unsympathetic, the one has reason to protect the interests of his or her own. Hence, "secure attachment and ambivalent attachment" people should show more ethical value, and the opposite to "avoidant attachment" people.

We expect moral behaviors is related to personal self-image. Positive self-image implies confidence in own beliefs and values. Therefore, "secure attachment" should theoretically show most powerful faith in others. "Secure attachment" people should firmly support their positive beliefs in others, and the opposite to "avoidant attachment" people. Namely, it seems more likely that "avoidant attachment" people (whether managers or consumers) exploit, swindle and cheat, which is in part to deal with people's negative perception of others.

Thus, we can conclude that "secure attachment" people and their ethical behaviors are most positively related, and "ambivalent attachment" people and their moral behaviors take second. Meanwhile, "avoidant attachment" people and their moral behaviors are most negatively related, and "fearful attachment" people and their ethical behaviors take second.

Conformity consumption

For most people, what others think of their own and how other treat their own is one of the most effective factors (Baumeister, 1982). It is disastrous for those children who were rejected by their peers. Peer rejection means that the child will have no way to get social ownership and social motivation which are the two basic needs. Being rejected by one's own parents or other caretakers is more terrible, and will leave a permanent mark in his or her heart. On the contrary, being included means that

children can receive the careful nurturing. So social recognition is a powerful reward and social rejection is a powerful punishment.

An unorthodox man often go cold, and therefore we always select to confirm. That is to say, when we behave according to others' opinions just for being accepted or avoiding being rejected by others, we have experienced normative social influence (Morton and Harold, 1955). Normative social influence includes seemingly adopting group norms and seeking for positive emotions from group members, such as liking, respecting and accepting and so on.

Accompanied with normative social influence is informal social influence. Anyone of us cannot get all information in anytime, and we must ask others for help getting relative news. When we are facing a new situation and not sure what we should do, we need go along with others who have abundant knowledge. According to social comparison theory, people need appraise themselves' opinions and attitudes to assure their validity. Firmly believing the validity of their behaviors and beliefs will make people control their fates and their capacity. But as far as beliefs and social behaviors, "validity" is a very subjective conception. "Validity" is defined by social realities and not objective. That is to say, opinions and behaviors of others are the norms to measure "validity". Just because of need of "validity", people begin to notice others' beliefs and behaviors—especially when people are in a new and uncertain ground.

Above all, we can conclude that "secure attachment" people will be easily affected by "informational social influence" aiming at obtaining knowledge; however "insecure attachment" people will be easier to be affected by "normative social influence" aiming at obtaining social supports.

Conclusion and future research

The treatment of Adults' intimate relationships should be dated back to mother-infant attachment, which has been internalized to a work model during growth. The work model will play a standard cognitive structure for social connections outside of the family which will influence consumer behaviors-- ethical consumption and conformity consumption. Based on the analysis of the relationships among intimacy, attachment and behaviors, the paper put forward the following propositions: The proposition "how attachment styles influence ethical consumption " and the proposition " how people with different attachment style is influenced by social influences during conformity consumption ". The first proposition conclude that: "secure attachment" people and their ethical behaviors are most positively related, and "ambivalent attachment" people and their moral behaviors take second. Meanwhile, "avoidant attachment" people and their moral behaviors are most

negatively related, and "fearful attachment" people and their ethical behaviors take second. In second proposition, "secure attachment" people will be easier to be affected by "informational social influence" aiming at obtaining knowledge; however "insecure attachment" people will be easier to be affected by "normative social influence" aiming at obtaining social supports.

Due to the following limitation, the existing literatures only discussed the attachment style, but the measurements of adult's attachment, but the measurement methods of adult's attachment are inconsistent. And secondly, the link between attachment and behaviors is uncertain. So the paper just come to some propositions, and the next step is to develop the measurement of attachment and further empirical study will be designed to prove those propositions.

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