



Man's Attachment to Objects: Mechanisms of the Link Between the Psyche and the Material

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Abstract

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nature of attachment

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Abstract

Attachment is a crucial aspect of significant and enduring interpersonal relationships. The initial attachment bonds are established between infants and their caregivers, typically parents. However, humans continue to form attachment relationships throughout their lives. This lifelong process means that individuals experience various attachment figures, which can include both people and objects in their environment. Research in psychological sciences, particularly influenced by Bowlby's work, has primarily focused on human-to-human attachment, such as the bond between mother and child. In this study, we aim to demonstrate that, in addition to forming connections with other people, humans also develop attachments to non-human entities, specifically objects.

Keywords: *Attachment to objects, nature of attachment, significance of possessions*

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies in psychology examine attachment, particularly human connections with others. Notably, the research by Spitz (1958), Bowlby (1969), Ainsworth (1973), Main and Solomon (1986), and Mbiya (2012) has concentrated on the bond between mother and child.

According to Bowlby (1969), the attachment bond is crucial for all aspects of development, especially cognitive abilities and learning. Most psychologists, psychoanalysts, psychiatrists, and advocates of mother-child attachment believe that children are inherently social and grow through interactions with important figures in their lives. Their sense of security varies, depending on how well others meet their needs. Therefore, attachment is seen as an instinctual mechanism aimed at ensuring species survival by fostering closeness among humans.

However, humans do not exist solely among other people; they are also surrounded by objects. The intricate and often subconscious relationship individuals have with these objects can be significant. For instance, organizing a familiar space or donning a cherished piece of clothing can evoke feelings of confidence and tranquility. Additionally, there are tragic instances of suicides linked to the destruction of poorly built homes, as well as family conflicts that arise during inheritance disputes (often referred to as succession wars), and crimes committed for financial gain. These actions can be understood through the lens of attachment to objects, which can evoke feelings that reflect a person's needs.

This perspective aligns with Tisseron (1999), who asserts that we form authentic connections with our possessions. Even the phenomenon of fetishism in psychopathology illustrates how deeply objects can affect an individual's mental state.

Humans are relational beings. They maintain daily connections not only with other people but also with the objects in their

environment, whether material or virtual. Objects do not have just one function; they can serve many purposes. Their relationships with individuals can take various forms.

Daily experiences lead us to observe that acquiring certain objects can create a sense of euphoria, promoting psychological tranquility and good health. Conversely, the absence of a familiar object, whether due to separation or loss, can cause anxiety. There are many cases where people have committed extreme acts against others because someone damaged or lost an important object. For these individuals, the object holds significant emotional value. As Searles (1986) points out, from birth, individuals develop a spatial reference frame based on their bodies and their environment, including both people and objects. Over time, all stimuli in their environment are internalized, forming their mental map. For example, the shirt that someone wears daily is not just an item of clothing; it is also an intimate object. Similarly, a home is not merely a neutral space defined by its size and cleanliness; it is an environment that reflects an individual's intimacy (Djaoui, 2011).

Objects serve as fields of intense social interaction with individuals. They shape how we appropriate these objects and how we establish uses and habits. In modern society, objects and images are indispensable partners in our lives. For example, advertising uses sophisticated visuals and films to sell us an ideal of happiness. It is entirely up to us to possess this ideal, provided we buy more objects.

The objects we use daily feel natural because they are part of our surroundings and integrated into our lives without much thought. Yet, when we pay attention, we see how omnipresent they are in our relationships with the world and others. This is especially true for items like mobile phones, which facilitate communication across distances. Similarly, a coffee table or a desk, where we spend hours each day, acts as a locus for connecting and separating people

in a network of emotional ties, power dynamics, professional relationships, hierarchical structures, and shared interests.

All the objects humans use daily - office desks, mobile phones, clothes - intertwine with human relationships. People uniquely keep objects and invest them with meaning beyond their functionality.

Researchers from various fields have studied the influence of objects on human relations. Degonet (1989), in "In Praise of the Object," noted that objects have been neglected by humankind. Thus, people perceive objects as commodities, viewed as "realized or fixed social labor." The author argues that objects have long been excluded from philosophical discussion because the labor they embody has been despised by philosophers. Rehabilitating the object means revaluing the labor involved in its production and recognizing the social labor in the commodity-object as non-alienated labor.

Semprini (1995) observed that the object is often treated as secondary. He conducted research to integrate it into contemporary American sociological approaches. Semprini argues that the object exists not just through an intersubjective relationship that defines it but also gives it a usable status. This intersubjective relationship and the object's existence arise from practices that create the framework for its use. Therefore, the object is shaped by the practices in which it participates. In other words, there is a constant dialectical relationship between the practices that create the object and the social facts it reflects.

Latour (cited by Blandin, 2001) reintroduced the object and the networks it connects, framing them in a binary relationship that contrasts "nature" and "culture." Latour deserves recognition for taking objects seriously and for significantly contributing, along with his collaborators, to demonstrating how objects are intertwined with our daily actions.

Tshimpaka Yanga (2006), from an ethnological perspective, places the object within the hierarchy of social values among the Bantu people. The object "Cintu" is ranked below the human being "Muntu" in the hierarchy of "Ntu." Yanga explains that "Ntu," in the noun "Muntu," signifies "one who exists with intelligence" and is related to other nouns that refer to "beings devoid of intelligence," such as "Cintu" (thing) and "Bintu" (things).

The analysis of the relationship between humans and objects reveals a shared interest among various disciplines, including anthropology, philosophy, ethnology, and sociology. These fields recognize that objects can influence human interactions and social dynamics. Objects can serve multiple roles: they may function as "social operators," "total social facts," "ethnic facts," or "mediators." Consequently, they can be examined through different lenses, such as a "social fact" (Degonet, 1989), a "mediator" (Latour, 1991), a "social operator" (Semprini, 1995), or as a "cultural value" (Tshimpaka Yanga, 2006).

From a psychoanalytic viewpoint, Tisseron (1999) posits that objects serve as mediators within the psychic realm. They facilitate connections between the individual and the external world, as well as among individuals themselves. However, for objects to effectively mediate these relationships, they must first act as "mediators of self to self." This indicates that objects play a critical role in shaping both our psychic and social lives, thereby influencing our identities.

This study specifically explores the attachment to objects, as opposed to attachment to other human beings. The objects under consideration are categorized into three types: objects of knowledge, familiar objects, and objects of memory. The objectives of this research are to elucidate the psychological mechanisms that

underlie human attachment to objects, to investigate the reasons for retaining objects beyond their practical utility, and to assess the nature of attachment in relation to the symbolism associated with these objects.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study environment

This study was conducted in Kinshasa, the capital city of the Democratic Republic of Congo. In addition to being our residence, Kinshasa is home to the administrative headquarters of telecommunications companies operating in the DRC, particularly Orange.

2.2. Participants

We included only adult participants in our study who met the following criteria: they were at least 18 years old, resided in Kinshasa, owned at least one mobile phone, knew how to use social networks, and were available to participate in the study. Our sample consisted of 637 participants, with 59.2% identifying as men and 40.3% as women. The largest age group was 18 to 25 years old (46.2%), followed by those aged 26 to 33 (32.7%) and those aged 34 and over (21.1%). The majority of participants were self-employed professionals (49.9%), followed by civil servants (27.2%) and the unemployed (22.9%). Single individuals represented a significant portion of our sample (68.4%), compared to married individuals (16.2%), widowed individuals (9.3%), and divorced individuals (6.1%).

2.3. Data Collection Tool

To gather data from participants, we developed an object attachment assessment scale. We selected two main criteria: individual criteria and collective criteria. Consequently, our instrument included six dimensions, each assessing the respondents' degree of attachment to various objects. These dimensions are:

1. **Objects of Individual Knowledge:** This dimension examines the effects of possessing or lacking certain personal information devices or tools, such as mobile phones, computers, books, and newspapers.
2. **Objects of Collective Knowledge:** This dimension assesses the instructional contribution of new information technologies to the Congolese population. The selected objects include the internet, digital television (with or without a decoder), and international news channels like RFI.
3. **Individual Familiar Objects:** This dimension evaluates the relationship individuals have with possessions linked to their personal privacy, including jewelry, clothing, vehicles, and shoes.
4. **Familiar Shared Objects:** This dimension explores the community's attitude toward shared goods, such as family plots, cooking pots, the N'djili River, and public transport buses.
5. **Individual Souvenir Items:** This dimension investigates how individuals react to certain objects, events, or facts related to their personal histories, including birthdays, childhood photos, and primary school reports.
6. **Collective Souvenir Objects:** This dimension focuses on the collective memory of the Congolese population regarding significant events or figures in the country's history, such as monuments to prominent figures, June 30th celebrations, and the achievements of the DRC national team.

Overall, this study aims to provide insights into the attachment individuals and the community have towards various objects and how these attachments reflect their identities and experiences.

The objects discussed can be characterized in both physical and virtual terms, assessed through a scale comprising 60 items. This scale features various degrees of agreement. “Strongly disagree” indicates a lack of awareness or concern about the object, suggesting that the respondent does not feel attached to it. “Somewhat agree” reflects a minimal connection, where the respondent acknowledges the object but does not feel particularly concerned about it, indicating a very low level of attachment.

The “Undecided” option represents the respondent’s uncertainty regarding the item in question. “Agree” signifies a moderate level of attachment, indicating that the respondent recognizes the object in their consciousness, suggesting a significant but not overwhelming concern. Finally, “Completely agree” denotes a strong attachment, where the object is highly present in the respondent’s awareness and signifies an intense connection.

2.4. Preliminary Investigation

To validate our assessment tool, we tested it with 54 participants, categorized into four groups: students (20 participants), unemployed individuals (12), civil servants (9), and self-employed workers (13). The key findings from this investigation are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability coefficients for item consistency and cohesion using Cronbach’s Alpha Test ($p > 0.01$)

Dimensions	Number of items	Cronbach’s Alpha
Objects of individual knowledge	10	0.701
Objects of collective knowledge	10	0.786
Individual familiar objects	10	0.730
Familiar, shared objects	10	0.721
Individual souvenir items	10	0.721
Collective souvenir objects	10	0.704
The entire scale	60	0.864

The value (0.864) of Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient that emerges from this table reveals the existence of a strong correlation between the items of different dimensions of the object attachment scale, guaranteeing internal consistency.

3. Field Activity and Computerized Analysis

3.1. Participant consent

The consent forms were signed by the participants before they completed the object attachment rating scale.

3.2. Einvestigation

We conducted a computerized analysis of these protocols using SPSS 20.0, a statistical data processing software. Across the entire object attachment rating scale, the minimum score was 60 and the maximum was 300.

4. Results

Table 2 shows the scores for the various categories of objects included in this study.

Table 2. Scores for the various categories of attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Object categories	$\bar{X}$	Med	Mod	σ	σ^2	Min	Max	SMD
Objects of individual knowledge	2.87	2.90	3.00	0.85	0.725	1.00	5.00	0.33
Objects of collective knowledge	3.50	3.50	3.50	0.80	0.646	1.00	5.00	0.31
Individual familiar objects	3.56	3.60	3.60	0.78	0.615	1.00	5.00	0.31
Familiar, shared objects	4.02	4.20	5.00	0.83	0.703	1.00	5.00	0.33
Individual souvenir items	3.97	4.20	5.00	0.82	0.675	1.00	5.00	0.32
Collective souvenir objects	3.52	3.50	3.50	0.81	0.659	1.00	5.00	0.32

$\bar{X}$: Average; Med: Median; Mod: Mode; σ : Standard deviation; σ^2 : Variance; Min: minimum score; Max: Maximum score; SMD: Standard error of the mean.

Table 2 indicates that objects of collective knowledge, individual familiar objects, collective familiar objects, individual memory objects, and collective memory objects each have an average score of 4. This score corresponds to the “agree” category on the scale, suggesting a minimizing attachment style. In contrast, the category of individual knowledge objects has an average score of 3, which aligns with the “undecided” response, reflecting a neutral stance.

Table 2. Specific attachment items (Continued) ($N = 637$)

Statements	$\bar{X}$	σ
Item 27: I am proud to wear my own clothes and not other people’s.	4.52	1.357
Item 33: The N’djili River is a common good that we must preserve.	4.63	2.194
Item 35: The cooking pots in the house are so useful that they are carefully guarded.	4.69	1.342
Item 37: The family plot is a common asset that no one has the right to sell alone.	4.67	1.372
Item 38: In sanitary facilities, cleanliness is mandatory for everyone in the family.	4.56	1.427
Item 43: When the DRC national team plays, Congolese people are proud to support them.	4.52	1.374
Item 44: In our country, there are names of personalities that remind us of past events in the DRC.	4.72	1.292
Item 51: I can never forget my birth date.	4.57	1.457
Item 60: I remember certain happy and unhappy events from my life.	4.57	1.408

Table 2 shows that out of 60 items in our instrument, 9 items were evaluated at level 5, corresponding to precise attachment.

Table 3. Items of preoccupied attachment ($N = 637$)

Items and statements	$\bar{X}$	σ
Item 7: Spending a day without watching television is unbearable for me.	2.07	1.42
Item 10: Owning an iPhone X is, for me, a sign of prestige.	2.27	1.58

Table 3 reveals that the 2 items that were assessed at level 2, corresponding to preoccupied attachment, belong to the category of individual knowledge objects.

The correlations between different types of attachment objects are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Relationships between categories of attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Category	OKI	OKC	OFI	OFC
OKI	1.00			
OKC	0.461**	1.00		
OFI	0.336**	0.506**	1.00	
OFC	0.259**	0.313**	0.448**	1.00

* $P < 0.05$; ** $P < 0.01$.

Legend

- OKI: Objects of Individual Knowledge;
- OKC: Objects of Collective Knowledge;
- OFI: Individual Familiar Objects;
- OFC: Collective Familiar Objects;
- OSI: Individual Souvenirs;
- OSC: Objects of Collective Memories.

Table 5. Correlation of individual objects and collective attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Comparison	Correlation (r)
Individual items / Collective objects	0.670** ($p = 0.000$)

** $p < 0.01$.

The correlation between individual attachment objects as a whole and collective attachment objects is highly significant (Table 5).

Table 6 shows the link between the cognitive mechanism and the different attachment objects.

Table 6. Link between the cognitive mechanism and the different attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Independent Variable	OKI	OKC	OFI	OFC	OSI	OSC
Cognitive Mechanism (MC)	0.325**	0.414**	0.233**	0.435**	0.259**	0.418**
Significance (p)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.

Legend

- MC: Cognitive Mechanism;
- OKI: Individual Knowledge;
- OKC: Collective Knowledge;
- OFI: Individual Familiar;
- OFC: Collective Familiar;
- OSI: Individual Souvenirs;
- OSC: Collective Memories.

Table 7 shows the link between the affective mechanism and the different attachment objects.

Table 7. Link between the affective mechanism and the different attachment objects ($N = 637$)

Independent Variable	OKI	OKC	OFI	OFC	OSI	OSC
Affective Mechanism (MY)	0.360**	0.349**	0.463**	0.258**	0.367**	0.262**
Significance (p)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00

** $p < 0.01$. MY: Affective Mechanism; OKI: Individual Knowledge; OKC: Collective Knowledge; OFI: Individual Familiar; OFC: Collective Familiar; OSI: Individual Souvenirs; OSC: Collective Memories.

5. Discussion

5.1. The Problem of Human Attachment to Objects

Our study indicates that the positive valence ratings for items associated with psychological attachment to objects are significantly higher, at 80%, compared to the negative ratings. Most respondents rated these items at level 4, signifying a strong emotional connection to various objects in their surroundings. This finding suggests that participants are not only familiar with these items but also have a strong interest in them. The objects in question include everyday possessions such as furniture, cell phones, televisions, the internet, books, clothing, photographs, and kitchenware. These items are often purchased, earned, or received as gifts. Respondents take pride in their ownership of these objects and experience distress when they are no longer in their possession.

Therefore, regardless of socioeconomic status, ownership can be viewed as a reflection or extension of one's identity; these objects can be considered a sort of alter ego. Researchers have termed this attachment to personal possessions the "endowment effect" or "dispossession aversion" (Tisseron, 1999). Attachment is fundamentally an emotional bond between an individual and an attachment figure. This bond can be reciprocal between adults or develop between a child and their caregiver. Our findings suggest that this emotional bond can also exist between an individual (adult) and objects, whether material or virtual. In this context, objects become attachment figures for individuals.

This aligns with the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), who describe an individual's attachment to an object as an investment of psychic energy. Bergadàa (2006) emphasizes that individuals who become attached to objects believe they can transfer their sense of ownership to those objects. According to Belk (1988), this type of attachment allows individuals to extend their identity to the object.

Muanana Kalombo Nsanga (2003) argues that a person's attachment to objects, considered as artifacts, reflects their unique way of feeling, thinking, and judging. It encompasses their will to exist in the world as it is, to express themselves according to their preferences, and to communicate in their own language. This attachment influences their actions, reactions, and overall way of life in response to their environment. As a result, a genuine fusion occurs between the individual and the object. The object thus plays a significant role in shaping one's identity. Escalas and Bettman (2003) illustrate this concept by examining a beer brand as an object of consumer identification. They argue that consumers construct their personal identities and present themselves to others through their brand choices, incorporating the brand into their self-concept.

The analysis of the role of objects in providing emotional security reveals their significant impact on self-identity and expression. Familiar objects offer reassurance, forming the foundation for self-belief and hope, as well as facilitating the full expression of emotional life. Tisseron (1999) notes that some children can only eat comfortably if their food is served on a familiar plate, and adults may feel at ease in unfamiliar environments as long as they have their preferred music or screens. This illustrates how objects can create a sense of belonging and comfort.

Hall (1971), in his work on personal space, identifies four types of interpersonal distances: intimate, personal, social, and public. From this viewpoint, objects can help establish these distances between individuals. Beyond spatial considerations, the sounds and visuals from the animated machines around us heighten our familiarity with the world, reinforcing the idea that people define themselves through their possessions. Bonetti, Djaoui, and Serfaty-Garzon, as cited by Agneray et al. (2015), describe this as a way of engaging objects in the construction of self.

Among the 60 items evaluated in our study, only 9 received a rating of level 5 (positive valence), indicating strong attachment. This suggests that respondents are familiar with and attentive to the objects in question. The varying intensity of attachment can range from minimal to very strong. According to Agneray et al. (2015), clothing, like one's home, serves as an extension of intimacy and symbolizes the interface between the individual and the world. Consequently, attachment to personal clothing reflects an unconscious expression of self-affirmation in relation to others. In addition to clothing, respondents expressed a strong attachment to the N'djili River, which is one of the largest rivers in Kinshasa and serves as a primary water source for the city's only

drinking water distribution company. The respondents also highly valued shared cooking pots, communal land management, and cleanliness in sanitary facilities. These findings suggest that shared objects within families or communities play a significant role in defining individuals' identities. Society is not merely a reflection of individuals but also of the connections among its members. Shared objects reinforce a sense of community by linking spatial identity to social identity.

Similarly, items related to birthdays and significant life events were positively regarded by respondents, indicating that objects—whether physical or virtual—carry personal memories. This observation aligns with Tisseron's (1999) thesis that objects embody both joyful and painful memories. Overall, we can affirm that humans develop attachments to objects in their environment, which contribute to the formation of identity and collective memory. Attachment to an object can be viewed as an extension of the self; it fosters psychological well-being and self-affirmation. Conversely, losing an object or being separated from it can lead to distress, with the intensity of grief reflecting the depth of emotional investment in that object (Fauré, 2012). Attachment to an object represents a sense of fulfillment arising from the connection between the individual and the object. Our findings support the work of Fournier and Yao (1997), who noted that attachment bonds can extend to objects and brands as well.

It is important to distinguish attachment from addiction. While attachment relates to well-being or psychological distress associated with an object, addiction refers to a pleasure derived solely from that object. Aulagier (1979) argues that addiction involves a regression where individuals substitute themselves for the object of desire, leading to a denial of the fact that no object can fully satisfy that desire. The fundamental void created by loss cannot be permanently filled, making desire perpetual and metaphorical. In addiction, the relationship to an object becomes one of necessity and exclusivity, where the object becomes the sole source of essential pleasure. This analysis highlights the complex interplay between objects, identity, and emotional well-being, underscoring the significance of shared experiences and attachments in shaping individual and collective identities.

We would like to highlight that our respondents rated two items negatively out of the 60 in our survey, with a level 2 rating indicating preoccupied attachment. While they are familiar with these items, they express little interest in them. The items in question are item 7: "I find it unbearable to go a day without watching television," and item 10: "For me, having an iPhone X is a status symbol." The responses indicate that not watching television is not a significant concern for our respondents. In fact, traditional tools like television no longer dominate as the primary means of information or entertainment. Mobile phones, equipped with numerous applications and internet access, have become viable alternatives for obtaining information and entertainment. Consequently, while television remains useful and important, it is no longer the sole source of media consumption.

In our technologically advanced society, a variety of devices are readily available. For our respondents, owning a specific brand of phone, such as the iPhone X, does not elicit feelings of pride. Given the multitude of smartphone brands on the market, many of which may surpass the iPhone X in features, it is plausible that some respondents may not even recognize the iPhone X. How can someone desire something they are not familiar with? In many cases, the primary purpose of mobile phones is communication, making the brand less significant than the ability to connect with others.

Addressing the relationship between the psyche and objects, we refer to Eiguer's perspective from 1987, which emphasizes affective investment. Individuals project their unconscious connections onto their relationships with others, reflecting representations of internal objects and their interactions. Eiguer distinguishes between the narcissistic link, which focuses on self-identification and shared interests, and the objectal link, which is based on identification rather than investment. The objectal link involves recognizing the unconscious other in relation to the real other. Drawing from Eiguer's insights, we can analyze the relationship between the psyche and objects through the lenses of narcissism and object relations. As noted, objects play a role in self-definition. In the process of affective investment in an object, individuals both define themselves and project their conscious and unconscious representations onto that object.

It is also essential to clarify that according to Bowlby's theory from 1973, attachment is a dimension of interpersonal bonds, particularly between a mother and child. An individual's attachment figure is someone who shares similarities with them. The findings of our study expand the concept of attachment figures, suggesting that objects can also serve as attachment figures. This attachment to objects can manifest through the personal value placed on them (the endowment effect) or through psychological distress associated with their loss (grief or aversion to dispossession).

5.2. Cognitive Factor in Object Attachment

Analysis of the results reveals a positive and highly significant correlation between the cognitive mechanism and the different categories of attachment objects. This suggests that cognition influences an individual's attachment to objects in their environment. This finding aligns with that of Quéré (cited by Diguier, Laverdiere & Gamache, 2008) who asserts that in an individual's attachment to objects, there is "the reincarnation of the spirit." This tendency is characterized, on the one hand, by the consideration of contingent elements of the situation, and on the other hand, by the reintegration of objects into cognitive processes. Thus, according to Quéré, the cognitive factor contributes, to a certain extent, to the realization of the process of human attachment to objects.

In his study on brand attachment, Helbrunn (2001) identifies six "roots" of attachment. These are psychological variables related to the individual (propensity for inertia, extraversion/introversion), objectively measurable variables related to the brand's situation in its market (awareness, market share), variables related to the consumer's psychological perception of the brand (degree of familiarity, perceived confidentiality, perceived longevity), variables related to the product category, elements related to the genesis and development in the consumer-brand relationship (context of consumer-brand encounter), and elements related to the consumer's affective situation (situation of emotional emptiness, fragility).

Cognition is found in the dimension of the consumer's psychological perception of the brand, as explored in Helbrunn's study. In other words, before a consumer can become attached to a brand, they must first know it, that is, learn about it, including all its qualities. Similarly, before an individual can become attached to a given object, they must first know it and understand everything that object represents for them. There is therefore a cognitive dimension (mental appropriation) that determines a person's attachment to the object; this is the symbolism of the object. Different objects of attachment have a specific meaning for the people who possess them, based on a particular history. Consequently, the individual who becomes attached to the object

carries within them elements of both the past and certain aspects of the future. It is at the intersection of memory and what the object represents for them (symbolism) that the immediate and unique relationship between the subject and the object can be created. This finding from Helbrunn's study aligns with our own by emphasizing that the value of the object determines the type of attachment of the psyche.

Our results show that the correlation between the cognitive mechanism and collective familiar objects ($r = 0.435$), collective memory objects ($r = 0.418$), and individual knowledge objects ($r = 0.414$) is highly significant. In other words, cognition strongly influences attachment to collective familiar objects, collective memory objects, and individual knowledge objects. Certainly, objects such as the family plot, the iron, the household cooking pots, etc., are for collective use. As such, members of the community know that these objects cannot be used exclusively for personal purposes. It is this knowledge that prevents individuals from appropriating these shared familiar objects. Following this perspective, Tisseron (1999) states that such objects (collective familiar objects) have a dual role: utilitarian and a shared history. Indeed, in addition to their simple utilitarian use, collective familiar objects refer to a fragment of the history of several people (members of a family and/or a community). Hence the important place reserved for the community, especially in African societies.

Collective memorabilia are objects that reside in the collective memory of the members of a given community. Consequently, each person within the community understands its significance. Among the collective memorabilia we have considered in this study are monuments to certain figures who have served the country, June 30th, the date dedicated to the country's independence day, the killings and massacres of Congolese people in the eastern part of the country, and so on. Thus, the knowledge that individuals have of what these various collective memorabilia represent for the country influences their attachment to them. As Tisseron (1999) states, monuments are guardians of memories. They bring together the memories of an entire community, memories that are both individual and familial, as well as official.

Cognition also influences the objects of individual knowledge. Indeed, objects such as the internet, computers, mobile phones, televisions, and radios, etc., included in this category, convey information and knowledge. By engaging with them, individuals seek to satisfy their need to learn, communicate, and/or acquire knowledge. This finding partially aligns with that of Jane Pei-Chen Chang & Chung-Chieh Hung (2012), who attest that, driven by the desire to learn, the internet has become the most popular medium used by the population. Studies have also shown that the percentage of students using the internet has increased dramatically, for example, from 24.5% to 79.5% between 1996 and 2001 in the USA (Odell et al., 2000). The number of internet users who regularly connect exceeded 1.5 billion individuals in 2009, with 19% of them in China alone (Flischer, 2010).

The results of our study also reveal that the cognitive mechanism is weakly correlated with individual familiar objects ($r = 0.233$) and individual memory objects (0.259). This suggests that cognition does not exert a significant influence on attachment to familiar objects and individual memory objects. Therefore, we can conclude that cognition may not be the sole factor explaining the psyche's attachment to objects.

5.3. Emotional Factor in Attachment to Objects

Research on human attachment to figures has primarily concentrated on the emotional aspect. Building on these findings, we

have examined affectivity, in conjunction with cognition, as a key factor influencing human attachment to objects in this study. The analysis of our results reveals a significant correlation between affective mechanisms and various categories of attachment objects, highlighting the role of emotions in object attachment. These findings are consistent with previous research, particularly by Agneray et al. (2015), who explored attachment to housing and underscored the impact of emotional factors. They noted that the bond to one's home is shaped by numerous variables, and this bond becomes apparent in experiences of burglary, which are often perceived as an "intrusion," a "violation," or a "defilement." Similarly, separation from one's home, whether voluntary or forced, is a complex experience that can be perceived very differently from one individual to another.

In our study, attachment to objects is influenced by feelings of pride or confidence associated with ownership, as well as by the grief that accompanies their loss. For instance, Item 26 ("if I had a vehicle, I wouldn't accept someone throwing a stone at the windshield") and Item 27 ("I am proud to wear my own clothes and not someone else's") received positive responses from participants, indicating a strong attachment. This suggests that our respondents have a personal connection to these objects and care deeply about them. Their unwillingness to tolerate damage to their vehicle and their pride in wearing their own clothes reflect the emotional significance these objects hold for them. It is also noteworthy to mention a positive shift in attitudes; not long ago, people often exchanged clothes without concern, indicating a change in how attachment and ownership are perceived today.

The evaluation of Item 55, which states, "I have objects at home that I find difficult to part with," revealed a positive response from our participants, particularly those with a minimizing attachment style. These findings reinforce the idea that our respondents have a strong attachment to certain objects and others hold not only practical value but also serve as important markers of personal history. As a result, individuals feel a sense of belonging and connection to these items, often experiencing guilt or psychological distress when faced with the prospect of parting with them. This attachment to objects carries significant emotional weight. Our results support our first secondary hypothesis, which suggests that retaining an object beyond its practical utility indicates that the attachment is rooted more in emotional value than in rational assessment.

Tisseron (1999) highlights the significant emotional attachment we have to objects, noting that these objects can trigger anxieties, particularly the fear of losing control over them. This is especially true for individuals who become overly identified with their possessions. Additionally, people may experience anxiety from feeling like an object themselves, struggling to recognize their own identity within the context of these objects. Conversely, some may desire to be treated as objects. However, the boundary between wishing for the autonomy of an object and fearing dehumanization is quite delicate. To address this fear, Tisseron outlines three strategies that individuals may employ. First, the desire to escape loneliness can lead someone to replace human connections with objects. Second, if the fear of being objectified by others is overwhelming, a person may objectify others in return. Lastly, some individuals may intentionally construct their identities as objects to seek validation from those around them. Tisseron reminds us that objects are dynamic, serving as "permanent instruments of mediation for the psychic assimilation of our experiences."

In the context of this study, we examine how our anxieties are linked to the elevation of both material and virtual objects to the status of libidinal objects. The separation anxiety experienced in early childhood, often related to the mother, evolves into adult anxieties concerning the loss of material objects. Just as a child invests emotionally in their primary caregiver, adults transfer this emotional investment to objects. The absence or loss of these objects can evoke significant anxiety, as they are often perceived as “good objects,” with possession providing a sense of narcissistic reinforcement. The fear of losing or being deprived of such objects leads to feelings of abandonment.

Aulagrier (1979) further explores the nature of objects by categorizing them within the realm of pleasure. He identifies three prototypes of relationships between subjects and objects: the relationship of a drug addict to their drug, the bond between a gambler and their game, and the connection one has with the self-image of another, typically observed in romantic passion. In these scenarios, the object of pleasure becomes intertwined with the objects of need, positioning pleasure as something that is imposed and necessary, rather than a matter of choice. Moreover, transforming the object of pleasure into a need alleviates the individual from the burden of responsibility in decision-making. Aulagrier asserts that whether these needs are physical or psychological, their fulfillment is always accompanied by pleasure; without this, individuals would be reluctant to engage in the actions necessary for satisfaction. This results in a baseline level of pleasure that is essential for the psyche and body to function and cope with the inevitable suffering of life. This foundational pleasure emerges as a primary need that must be met for the individual to thrive and continue living.

Agneray et al. (2015) define “heritage” as the emotional connection individuals have to their homes, which are viewed as shared objects among family members. The authors suggest that inheritance can manifest in various ways, including the genetic or biological transfer of material goods, as well as the passing down of values, skills, and rituals. Inheritance also encompasses emotional legacies, conveying feelings of pride, shame, or guilt tied to family histories. The question of inheritance fundamentally shapes our identities, as individuals must navigate their psychological, physical, and material memories in relation to this heritage, whether through acceptance, rejection, or adaptation. Interviewees recognize that shared family objects form part of the heritage handed down by previous generations, such as parents and grandparents, fostering a sense of connection through commonality. This attachment to objects is inherently social.

Research on human attachment, as highlighted by Silvestro-Teissonniere (2011), shows that separation from caregivers can lead to significant emotional distress and impact later life. Spitz’s work on mother-child relationships introduced the term “hospitalism” to describe the negative effects of maternal separation on infants. Similarly, detachment from familiar objects can cause psychological and emotional instability. This is reflected in our findings, where respondents expressed strong agreement with the statement regarding the secrecy of personal belongings, such as a land registry booklet. They resist revealing its location to strangers, recognizing its value and the significance it holds for family members, representing parental sacrifices and heritage. In Kinshasa, the importance of land ownership is well understood. Moreover, our analysis indicates a weak correlation ($r = 0.262$) between affectivity and attachment to individual knowledge objects. This suggests that emotional connections have limited influence on attachment to these items. Instead, cognitive factors play a more

significant role, as individual knowledge objects, as defined in this study, primarily reside within the cognitive domain.

6. Conclusion

This study explores the mechanisms behind human attachment to non-human figures, particularly the objects in our environment. It highlights how our possessions reflect and shape our identity. In this context, individuals often define themselves not by “being” (who they are) but by “having” (what they own), whether those are material or virtual objects. The human psyche, through its cognitive and emotional processes, plays a crucial role in fostering this attachment. Cognition enables individuals to perceive objects within a utilitarian framework, effectively transforming them into meaningful possessions. The emotional bond that develops between a person and an object is influenced by personal experiences and societal context.

The initial attachment bonds are established between infants and their caregivers, typically parents. This lifelong process means that individuals experience various attachment figures, which can include both people and objects in their environment. Therefore, attachment is seen as an instinctual mechanism aimed at ensuring species survival by fostering closeness among humans.

However, humans do not exist solely among other people; they are also surrounded by objects. The intricate and often subconscious relationship individuals have with these objects can be significant. For instance, organizing a familiar space or donning a cherished piece of clothing can evoke feelings of confidence and tranquility. Objects serve as fields of intense social interaction with individuals. They shape how we appropriate these objects and how we establish uses and habits. In modern society, objects and images are indispensable partners in our lives.

Overall, we can affirm that humans develop attachments to objects in their environment, which contribute to the formation of identity and collective memory. Attachment to an object can be viewed as an extension of the self; it fosters psychological well-being and self-affirmation. Conversely, losing an object or being separated from it can lead to distress, with the intensity of grief reflecting the depth of emotional investment in that object.

This study specifically explores the attachment to objects, as opposed to attachment to other human beings. The results show that the cognitive mechanism strongly influences attachment to collective familiar objects, collective memory objects, and individual knowledge objects. Cognition also influences the objects of individual knowledge, satisfying the need to learn, communicate, and acquire knowledge.

In conclusion, our study underscores the complex interplay between objects, identity, and emotional well-being. It highlights how shared experiences and attachments shape individual and collective identities, contributing to a deeper understanding of the link between the psyche and the material world.

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