Brand Love: A Conceptual Framework

Introduction

Researchers have found that only satisfaction is not enough to keep the customers loyal (Jones and Sasser, 1995). Many satisfied customers switch to competitor’s brand after some time (Reichheld, 1996). Hence, satisfaction results in loyalty when the satisfaction is sustained for a longer period of time and gets deeper. A percentage of the satisfied customers tend to love a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). They found that brand love is an antecedent to brand loyalty and satisfaction is an antecedent to brand love. Therefore, brand love mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Over a longer period of time, if an individual remains satisfied with a brand then it is likely that the satisfaction will get transformed into an emotional and passionate bonding with the brand. The nature of this bonding is very similar to the interpersonal love and attachment. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have defined brand love as a combination of emotion and passion. According to Keh et al (2007) brand love includes long-term commitment to the brand in addition to emotion and passion. Then loving a brand (and not mere satisfaction) is a step towards loyalty. So, marketers must plan how to make the satisfied customers love a brand. This study intends to identify the antecedents and consequences of brand love and put forward certain propositions related to their interrelationships.

Conceptualization of Brand Love

Shimp and Madden (1988) have conceptualized eight kinds of consumer-object relationship based on the tripartite conceptualization of interpersonal love stated by Sternberg (1986). The components of consumer-object (the object can be a brand) relationship as stated by Shimp and Madden are – liking, yearning and decision/commitment - which are the counterparts to intimacy, passion and decision/commitment components of interpersonal love relationship respectively as described by Sternberg.

According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), brand love is an emotional and passionate relationship present between a satisfied consumer and a brand. These authors are stressing on both emotion and passion while defining brand love. Whang, Allen, Sahoury and Zhang’s (2004) study has revealed that a consumer can fall in passionate and emotional love with a brand which might lead to romantic love for the brand over a period of time. According to Sternberg (1986), romantic love consists of emotion or intimacy and passion. From these findings it can be inferred that brand love is romantic in nature. Love is closely linked to loyalty (Sternberg, 1986; Shimp and Madden, 1988; Keh et al, 2007). Brand love predicts brand loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). According to Keh, Pang and Peng (2007) brand love includes intimacy, passion and commitment. If commitment is included in brand love, then it becomes difficult to distinguish between brand love and brand loyalty. Hence, in this study brand love has been conceptualized as a combination of emotion and passion. Remaining part of this article focuses on identifying relevant antecedents and consequences of brand love.
Antecedents of Brand Love

Satisfaction and brand love

Satisfaction is a post-consumption evaluative judgment (Mano and Oliver, 1993). But it is not entirely cognitive. As Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) has stated that post-consumption satisfaction is likely to lead to emotional attachment with a brand over time with multiple interactions with the brand. It implies that cumulative satisfaction over a period tends to lead to an emotional bonding between consumer and brand.

Proposition 1: Satisfaction with the brand positively influences the feeling of love towards the brand.

Individual romanticism and brand love

According to Holbrook and Olney (1995), the romantic individual is highly emotional and seeks pleasure. As brand love refers to a strong emotional bonding of an individual with a brand, it is expected that a high romantic person is more likely to fall in love with a brand compared to a low romantic person. Hence, we offer the following proposition:

Proposition 2: Individual romanticism positively influences love for a brand.

Brand experience and brand love

According to Lee (1977) love is an attitude. So, brand love is also an attitude towards the brand. According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) brand love is highly affective in nature. Hence, it is expected that favorable brand experience might lead to love towards a brand over a period of time. Hence, we offer the following proposition:

Proposition 3: Favorable brand experience positively influences brand love.

Individual Romanticism and Brand Experience

According to Holbrook (1997), romanticism enriches the experience-seeking process surrounding any consumption act through subjective personal introspection. Subjective personal introspection refers to the examination of one’s own psychic world. Hence, it is assumed that individual romanticism enriches the experiences in the context of brand consumption. Hence, our next proposition is:

Proposition 4: Individual romanticism is positively associated with brand experience.

Customer delight and brand love

Almeida and Nique (2005) showed that when a customer is delighted with a brand then he/she tends to develop an emotional bonding with the brand. Kumar (1996) also state that customer delight is an emotional level characterized by high levels of joy and surprise in connection with any consumption. Hence, it is proposed that this affective customer delight might lead to love over a period of time, as brand love has strong affective focus (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Hence the following proposition is forwarded:

Proposition 5: Customer delight positively influences brand love.
Satisfaction and Customer Delight

Satisfaction has both cognitive and affective dimensions. Affect is one dimension of customer delight also (Almeida and Nique, 2005). As satisfaction itself is a dimension of customer delight and both are post-consumption experiences, satisfaction is likely to influence customer delight positively.

Proposition 6: Satisfaction positively influences customer delight.

Individual materialism and brand love

Satisfaction with a brand for a considerable period of time is the pre-requisite for falling in love with the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Hence, it is expected that materialistic individuals tend not to fall in deep emotional love with a brand, as they are not easily satisfied with a brand.

Proposition 7: Individual materialism negatively influences brand love.

Proposition 8: Individual materialism has negative association with satisfaction.

Individual materialism and brand experience

According to Holt (1995), a materialistic individual tends not to engage in consumption through experiencing and a non-materialist tends to engage in consumption through experiencing. Materialistic individual tends to perceive that the object has the terminal value. They purchase products to show off and enhance social status. Materialism has significant positive association with status consumption (Heaney, 2005). Hence the following proposition is forwarded:

Proposition 9: Individual materialism has negative association with brand experience.

Consequences of Brand Love

Brand love and intention to pay price premium

If an individual is emotionally attached to a brand then he/she will be willing to pay premium price for purchasing the brand (Thomson et al, 2005). Brand love is also a combination of emotion and passion for a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, if the consumer loves a brand, then he/she will be willing to pay price premium for the brand.

Proposition 10: Brand love positively influences the intention to pay price premium for the brand.

Brand love and brand loyalty

If the consumer starts loving a brand, then he/she actually becomes very emotional about and passionate for the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Because of this strong emotional bonding they are expected to purchase repeatedly the same brand ignoring other competitor brands. Thus the love will tend towards loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Proposition 11: Brand love positively influences conative brand loyalty.
Conative brand loyalty refers to the strong intention to be loyal to a brand (Oliver, 1999). Oliver has also stated that sometimes the conative loyalty does not get transformed into action loyalty due to the presence of some obstacles. The obstacles are situational factors and competitors’ marketing efforts. That implies that if the obstacles would not be there conative loyalty would lead to action loyalty.

**Proposition 12: Conative loyalty positively influences action loyalty.**

**Brand love and Positive Word-of-mouth**

If the consumer loves a brand then it is also expected that the consumer will say positive things to other about the brand. The study conducted by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) has also shown that brand love positively influences the positive word-of-mouth for the brand.

**Proposition 13: Brand love leads to positive word-of-mouth.**

**Satisfaction and Positive Word-of-mouth**

The study conducted by Ranaweera and Menon (2008) has shown that higher satisfaction leads to positive word of mouth and lower satisfaction leads to negative word of mouth. According to Ladhary (2007), satisfaction positively influences both the likelihood of word of mouth and positive word of mouth.

**Proposition 14: Satisfaction positively influences positive word of mouth.**

**Action loyalty and Positive Word-of-mouth**

Increased satisfaction leads to greater positive word-of-mouth (Ranaweera and Menon, 2008). Customer satisfaction is an antecedent to loyalty (Terblanche and Boshoff, 2010). Satisfaction gets translated into loyalty when the satisfaction is strongly held (Chandrashekar, Rotte, Tax, Grewal, 2007). Therefore, a loyal customer must be satisfied and that satisfaction will motivate the person to spread positive word-of-mouth.

**Proposition 15: Action loyalty leads to positive word-of-mouth.**

Based on the above mentioned propositions following theoretical framework has been developed.
Note: (+) sign denotes positive relationship. (-) sign denotes negative relationship. Each arrow flows from predictor to the dependent construct. The double-headed arrow represents covariance relationship between two constructs.

**Discussion**

Brand love is a rich concept recently emerged in the field of consumer behavior. If the consumers love a brand, then sales volume of the brand will increase, as the brand love gets transformed into brand loyalty. So, the marketers should formulate appropriate strategy so that the brand has a strong emotional appeal and target customers fall in love with the brand. The present study has focused on identifying the antecedents and consequences of brand love rooting itself in the psychology and marketing literature. Identification of antecedents and consequences of brand love will help the managers to focus on appropriate variables while formulating strategies intended to make the consumers love the brand. Consumer psychology is very complex. It is therefore highly important to identify the complex psychological variables which impact a consumer’s feeling for a brand. Managers should develop appropriate strategies to enhance the target customers brand love. Brand love will result in increased loyalty, intention to pay premium price and positive word-of-mouth. Strategy formulation intended to develop brand love should be done based on the antecedent variables identified.

The conceptual model in this paper needs to be empirically examined. Future researches can be done to validate the theoretical relationships empirically. It is also required to carry out separate empirical investigations for different product categories. It is likely that the level of brand love...
and its interrelationships with other variables will vary across different product categories. This study has not looked into the social identity literature which can be integrated with the present model.

References


Ranaweera, Chatura., and Menon Kalyani (), “For Better or for Worse: Moderating Effects of Relationship Age and Continuance Commitment on Service Satisfaction-Word of Mouth Relationship”, Latin American Advances in Consumer Research (Conference Proceedings), 2, 226-27.


