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Does Brand Experience Impacts Brand Love: The Role of Brand Trust

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Abstract

In today's scenario of increasing competition and dynamic business environment, achieving brand love is one of the vital objectives for brands. Considering this rising importance and applicability of brand experience and the benefits derived out of it, this study aims at examining the impact of brand experience on brand trust and brand love. A conceptual framework is tested using multiple regression analysis with responses collected through a structured questionnaire. The paper also contributes to the existing theory and results may help the brand managers in taking various decisions related to the brand.

Keywords: Brand Experience, Brand Trust, Brand Love, Multiple Regressions

1. Introduction

Today's consumers want to be satisfied with the product or brand they purchase. They have a large number of brand options available to them, as a result of which they have ample choices to switch from one brand to another rather commit to any particular brand (Shukla et al., 2016). This is why; marketers focus on planning innovative strategies that can catch customers' attention and assist in maintaining a long lasting relationship with them. With the growth in relationship, it becomes important to think beyond customer satisfaction and focus on building an emotional bond with the consumers'. Emotional attachment gives competitive advantage to the brand as it is considered to be superior when compared with other brands.

There has been lot of questioning on how to develop emotional bond with the consumers'. Numerous studies have demonstrated that an emotional bonding that progresses to feeling of love may exist for any object or a brand. Consumer's associate human characteristics to different brands (Aaker, 1997) and then look at brands as their partners to form a relationship (Fourier, 1998). Whenever a consumer gets emotionally attached to a brand and possesses loving feelings for it, moving to other brand becomes problematic. Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as "degree of passionate emotional attachment that a person has for a particular trade name". There has been a rising attention to study this evolving concept called 'Brand Love' as it is understood to be a strong source of differentiation that has favourable outcomes like repurchase intensions, brand loyalty, positive word of mouth, etc. (Batra et al., 2012; Heinrich et al., 2012).

In this study our purpose is to explore relationship between brand experience, brand trust and brand love for which, perceptions of young consumers are being

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mapped. We have considered fashion (clothing) brands as it is stated that they influence consumer's lifestyle (McColl and Moore, 2011) and are also capable of conveying about an individual's identity (Campbell, 1986).

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Brand Experience and Brand Love: Mediating role of Brand Trust

Brand experience has gained importance as, the practitioners have cautiously understood that consumer's experience with the brand plays a vital in developing a profitable marketing strategy (Brakus et al., 2009).

Brand Experience as a person's relative degree of understanding and awareness with a brand based on certain exposures (Ha, 2005). Brand Experience is a way to gather more "Brand Knowledge". In the process of gaining experience and knowledge, consumers' get to know about the quality offered by varied other brands and thereby assess their opinions about value provided by different brands (Erdem et al., 2008). Prior studies related to emerging countries indicate that brand experience results in producing positive signal about perceived price or quality (Beneke et al., 2013) or negative signals like perceived risk (Cho et al., 2015). Prior positive experiences with store brands strongly and positively affect the consumer purchase intentions (Diallo et al., 2017). As per Wu et al., (2011) purchase intention is defined as "willingness to buy a product or service in future". A strong correlation exists between purchase intentions and actual purchase behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define Brand Love as the level of emotional attachment or passion, a satisfied consumer may have for a particular trade name. Brand Love may be apparent in various forms like attachment, emotions and positive evaluations Varied studies highlight, a positive relationship between Brand Love and other psychological variables like willingness to pay premium price (Albert and Merunka, 2013), impulse buying (Sarkar, 2014), word of mouth (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), resistance to negative signals or information related to brand (Batra et al., 2012), brand loyalty (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) and purchase intentions (Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014). All these variables are said to be the outcomes of Brand Love.

The literature reviewed suggests that brand experience has an impact on purchase intention which is a consequence of brand love. Accordingly, we posit a direct link between brand experience and brand love. Therefore, we formulate:

H1: Brand Experience has a significant positive impact on brand love.

On the other hand, studies state that brand experience produces brand equity and credibility. One of the measures of brand credibility is trustworthiness (Erdem et al., 2002). It measures a firm's competence to deliver according to the assurances given to the customers. As per Hawass (2013) brand trust is defined as a 'relational chemistry which attaches the customer, emotionally or logically to a specific brand. Hiscock (2001), states that trust is the key element in creation of a passionate bond between the customer and the brand which is the ultimate goal of marketing. Moreover, brand trust has been identified as an antecedent of brand love by Albert et al. (2013).

Prior communications, interactions and experiences with the brand leads to generation of brand trust (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). The perceived risk, a negative signal of brand experience reduces if brand credibility exists (Erdem and Swait, 1998) and the positive perceptions about the brand increases (Erdem et al., 2002) thereby influencing the purchase intensions, which in turn is an outcome of brand love.

Therefore, on the basis of literature we can state that one of the outcomes of brand experience is brand trust which is an antecedent of brand love. Therefore, we formulate that there is an indirect linkage between brand experience and brand love through brand trust. Thus, we posit that:

H2: Brand Trust mediates the relation between brand experience and brand love.

The Conceptual framework is shown below in (Figure 1):

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Method

For the purpose of data collection, survey method of descriptive research design has been used to get the primary data regarding consumer's reasons behind loving a particular apparel brand. A self-administered structured questionnaire has been used as instrument for primary data collection.

3.2 Survey Location and Target Respondents

The survey has been carried out online using convenience sampling. Individuals belonging to the age bracket of 18 to 35 years, both males and females were targeted for getting the responses.

3.3 Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire prepared consisted of items related to each factor that is under consideration in this study. The pre-test questionnaire was tested with 20 respondents. On the basis of respondents feedback unclear words and sentences were revised and the placements of certain questions were also changed. The revisions done on the basis of pre-test resulted in a structured questionnaire consisting of 15 items, wherein 5 items are related to Brand Experience, 5 are related to Brand Trust and 5 are related to Brand Love. Five point Likert Scale has been used ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree for scaling responses of these items. For determining the overall sample size, if there are 15 variables, there must be a sample of minimum 150 respondents (Bryant and Yarnold, 1995) and we had data from 160 respondents.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Sample Profile

Out of the 160 respondents surveyed, 38% were females and 61% were males. The average age of the respondents was 18.7 years with a standard deviation of 2.4 years. Majority of the respondents (51.9%) had above Rs. 10 lakhs of annual family income. "H&M" and "Zara" were found to be the favorite brands of most of the respondents with response percentages 24.4% and 23.8% respectively whereas "Globus" was found to be the least preferred one (0.6%). The distribution of respondents for various brands is exhibited in (Table 1).

Table 1. Brand-wise distribution of respondents

Brand	Response %
Globus	0.6
H&M	24.4
Lifestyle	11.9
Marks & Spencers	6.9
Max	3.8
Pantaloons	10.6
Reliance Trends	4.4
Shoppers Stop	13.8
Zara	23.8

4.2 Validity and Reliability

The items of the questionnaire were developed on the basis of pre-existing studies in the relevant literature, thus ensuring the content validity. The questionnaire was also pilot tested with a panel of academicians, researchers and young consumers, after which necessary changes were made for improving the content as well as clarity of the questionnaire. Then, a sample of respondents distinct from those included in the pilot test was asked to pre-test the questionnaire. Hence the content and face validities of the questionnaire were confirmed.

The reliability of the model constructs was examined using Cronbach's alpha coefficient (see Table 2). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were found to be greater than the minimum cut-off value of 0.7 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994), for all the constructs.

Table 2. Reliability analysis

Construct	No of Items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Brand Experience (BE)	5	0.733
Brand Trust (BT)	5	0.704
Brand Love (BL)	5	0.772

4.3 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3 indicates the descriptive statistics of items of all the theoretical constructs. The univariate normality of all the variables was ensured using skewness-kurtosis approach.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics

Construct	Overall Mean	Item Code	Mean	Std. Deviation	Kurtosis	Skewness
BE	2.3038	BE1	2.03	1.274	-1.161	.656
		BE2	2.39	1.087	-.460	.189
		BE3	2.44	1.153	-.302	.413
		BE4	2.38	1.069	-.302	.314
		BE5	2.28	1.123	-.212	.533
TR	2.1788	TR1	2.31	1.446	-1.817	.273
		TR2	2.32	1.416	-1.832	.227
		TR3	2.16	1.399	-1.612	.485
		TR4	2.08	1.203	-.785	.655
		TR5	2.03	1.264	-1.351	.596
BL	1.8375	BL1	1.55	.823	-.114	1.142
		BL2	2.10	1.240	-1.465	.430
		BL3	1.56	.822	.149	1.174
		BL4	1.66	.903	-.996	.825
		BL5	2.31	1.265	-1.037	.392

As exhibited in (Table 3), the values of skewness and kurtosis for all variables were within their recommended range of ±3 (West et al., 1995).

4.4 Hypothesis Testing

Multiple regression analysis was used to test the proposed hypotheses. Before applying multiple regression analysis, we checked the correlations among the model constructs. As shown in (Table 4), the correlation coefficients among all the constructs were found to be significant ($p<0.05$) and less than 0.5 indicating that multi-collinearity among the variables was not a concern.

Table 4. Correlation coefficients

Construct	BE	TR	BL
BE	**1**		
TR	0.150*	1	
BL	0.315	0.480*	**1**

*p<0.05

First, we checked the impact of both BE and TR on BL. The overall model was found to be significant ($F=32.107$, $p<0.05$). Table 5 indicates that both BE and TR carry a significant impact on BL ($p<0.05$). However, the impact of TR on BL ($\beta = 0.248$) is stronger than that of BE ($\beta = 0.442$). Further, both BE and TR explained 28.1% variation in BL.

Table 5. Regression results for impact of BE and TR on BL

Variable B		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p-value
		Std. Error	Beta			
	BE	.283	.077	.248	3.653	.000
	TR	.393	.060	.442	6.505	.000

Then, for examining the mediating effect of TR in the relationship between BE and BL, we conducted three regressions: by taking BE as independent variable and TR as dependent variable; by taking TR as independent variable and BL as dependent variable; and by taking BE as independent variable and BL as dependent variable. All the regression models were found to be significant with $F = 3.624$ ($p < 0.05$); $F = 47.183$ ($p < 0.05$); and $F = 17.36$ ($p < 0.05$) respectively. Fig. 2 indicates the regression results. BE was found to have a significant impact on BL ($t = 4.167$, $p < 0.05$) with $\beta = 0.315$. Hence the hypothesis H1 was supported. Further, BE was found to have a significant impact on BT ($t = 7.189$, $p < 0.05$) with $\beta = 0.150$; and BT was found to carry a significant impact on BL ($t = 6.869$, $p < 0.05$) with $\beta = 0.480$. Hence it can be concluded that BT partially mediates the relationship between BE and BL. Therefore the hypothesis H2 was supported.

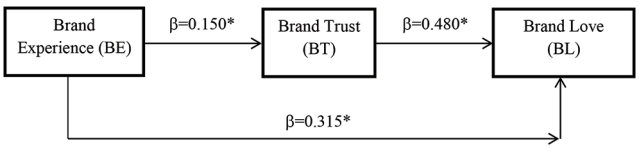

Figure 2. Regression Results (*p<0.05).

5. Suggestions

The study reveals that brand love is a positive feeling which definitely has positive consequences. It is clear that brand love is developed using various other factors thereby directs the marketers to have a well drafted marketing strategy in place to achieve it. Brand experience is having a significant direct impact on brand love therefore it becomes a vital factor as it is a part of every encounter that a customer has with the brand. It is important for brand managers to keep looking for innovative ways to improvise on every point of contact. In the area of services, a pleasant customer experience is of utmost importance as it acts as a strong differentiator. Trust seem to have a higher impact on brand love suggests that managers should focus on the aspects like consistency and competence in their offerings. Consistency in their communication and competence in terms of the functionality of their product will help them gain more trust of their customers.

6. Conclusion

Any brand or business not only wishes to satisfy their consumers through their products or offerings but it always is willing to retain them. As per the current scenario, it is hereby important to create Brand Love, as it has many other favourable consequences as discussed above in literature. Important here is to understand that various factors contribute to create brand love in customers. In this study the effect of brand experience and brand trust is being examined and the impact is found to be significant. This further implies that it is imperative for the managers of the brands to focus on providing delightful experiences to their customers not only by focusing on the product offered but also on the services associated with it, as everything together contributes to experiences.

7. Future Scope

In future various other factors like brand passion, brand ethicality etc., can be considered as many studies have established their effect on the variables like brand experience, trust and love, which were under consideration in this study.

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