Brand passion and its implication on consumer behaviour

Christine D’lima
NMIMS ASMSOC,
V.L. Mehta Road,
Vile Parle (W),
Mumbai, 400 056, India
Email: dlima.christine3@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper tries to investigate the passion in literature and drives its way through theory where passion is a component of love and moves on to passion being a component of consumer behaviour in marketing, i.e., brand passion. Passion has been studied with regard to the intensity to love. This paper picks up the triangular theory of love by Sternberg (1986, 1997) to probe into the meaning of passion. While tracing this component the paper gradually progresses to how passion becomes a part of consumer behaviour and hence the passion extended to the brand. Thus, brand passion tantamount to the keenness, the fascination or even the fixation of a consumer for the beloved brand. Further, the author tries to outline a conceptual model with the antecedents to brand passion, i.e., loyalty, satisfaction and trust and the outcome of passion being word of mouth.

Keywords: passion; brand passion; trust; loyalty; word of mouth communication.


Biographical notes: Christine D’lima has a PhD degree from the School of Business Management (SBM) NMIMS in the area of Marketing Management and Human Resources Management. She has two years corporate experience and over five years in academics. Her qualifications include MMS in Marketing from the Mumbai University, a PGDHRM from the NMIMS University. Her areas of interest include organisation behaviour, brand management, and marketing communications to name a few.

1 Introduction

Passion is often cited as a component of love (Sternberg, 1997; Kernberg, 1995; Fournier, 1998; Belk et al., 2003). Along with passion comes idealisation and adoration of the beloved. The passionate component of devotion is responsible for the intensity of emotionality that comes with love however it does not reflect the intensity of love as such. Passion rather circumscribes the desire and (physical) attraction that is evoked by the object of love.
Hence, passion can be understood as an important component of love, although not equivalent to love. Authors agree that love also implies a feeling of connectedness and intimacy (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1994; Fournier, 1998; Sternberg, 1997; Wong and Merrilees, 2015; Baldus et al., 2015). Person-object relationships, therefore, are also very close and trustful, which necessitates that both partners are highly committed and dedicated to this relationship.

Passion refers to the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation and related phenomena in loving relationships. The passion component includes within its purview those sources of motivational and other forms of arousal that lead to the experience of passion in a loving relationship. It includes what Hatfield and Walster (1981) refer to as ‘a state of intense longing for union with the other’. In a loving relationship, sexual needs may well predominate in this experience. However, other needs, such as those for self-esteem, nurturance, association, dominance, compliance and self-actualisation, may also contribute to the experiencing of passion.

1.1 Origin of passion

In the psychology literature, the concept of passion is strongly related to deep interpersonal feelings. Sternberg (1986, 1997) includes passion as one major component of the triangular of love. The triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986, 1988) holds that love can be understood in terms of three components that together can be viewed as forming the vertices of a triangle. The triangle is used as a metaphor, rather than as a strict geometric model. These three components are intimacy (top vertex of the triangle), passion (left-hand vertex of the triangle) and decision/commitment (right-hand vertex of the triangle). (The assignment of components to vertices is arbitrary). These three components have appeared in various other theories of love and moreover, appear to correspond rather well to people’s implicit theories of love (Aron and Westby, 1996; Curran et al., 2015). Dedication describes the conscious decision at the beginning of the partnership to keep this love alive. Passion and dedication are fueled by transcendent experiences, which are sought after in love relationships (Belk, 1988; Kozinets, 1997, 2001; Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004; Scholes, 2004; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Vallerand, 2015). Those experiences make partners feel close to each other and uphold a certain intimacy, which is needed for love to gain substance.

Devotion as an emotional state can be described as a tripartite state of passion, intimacy and dedication, similar to Sternberg’s triangle of love. Depending on the intensity of those three components, different facets and intensities of devotion might exist (Shimp and Madden, 1988). As described by Sternberg (1997) and Lee (1973), several love styles are possible, from non-love to consummate love, which we expect to exist in person-object relationships in a similar way. Acts of devotion perpetuate and refuel the loving feelings for the loved, sacred object. As opposed to Sternberg’s eight variations of love, Lee (1973) only determines six love styles. These love styles, basically, rest upon the same underlying elements, namely passion, intimacy and decision/commitment. Lee’s three primary love styles (Eros, Ludus and Storge) find their equivalent in three of Sternberg’s types of love. While Eros, which is the combination of passion, intimacy and commitment, equals Sternberg’s consummate love, Ludus represents a state of love where commitment does not play a big role, just like Sternberg’s romantic love. The third primary form, Storge, is a mixture of intimacy and
decision/commitment in the absence of passion, equivalent to Sternberg’s companionate love.

1.2 Conceptualisation of passion

Vallerand et al. (2003) propose a new conceptualisation of passion, where passion is defined as a strong inclination toward an activity that one finds important, likes (and even loves) and to which one devotes time and energy. This definition is in line with past research that shows that activity valuation, (e.g., Deci et al., 1994), time and energy expenditure (Emmons, 1999) and liking for the task (Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993) are all associated with engagement in activities. Vallerand et al. (2008) further propose that activities are passionate when they constitute central features of people’s identity (Schlenker, 1985) such that people with a passion for dancing or for painting, for example, do not merely dance or paint. They are ‘dancers’ or ‘artists’. Guided by philosophers’ writings, (e.g., Descartes, 1649; Lagache, 1936; Spinoza, 1953), Vallerand et al. (2003) propose a dualistic approach to passion.

1.3 Types of passion

Past research on passion supported the conceptualisation of the two types of passion. Using the Passion Scale, a bi-dimensional measure of the two types of passion, Vallerand et al. (2003) showed that the more people report high levels of passion, either obsessive or harmonious, the more they spend time on their activity, the more they value it and the more they perceive it as a passion. Furthermore, obsessive passion has been shown to be more invasive in people’s life than harmonious passion. For example, people with a more obsessive passion perceive their activity as occupying a greater part of their identity (Vallerand et al., 2003, study 1) and experience more conflicts with other life domains (Se´guin-Le´vesque et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2003, study 1). When asked to evaluate the relative importance of the passionate activity and other life domains, (e.g., family, friends, or work), people with a more obsessive passion are more inclined to value their activity above all other domains (Ratelle et al., 2007).

Two types of passion are put forward, an obsessive and a harmonious passion, which reflect the more passive and active forms of passion found in philosophers’ work (Rony, 1990). Vallerand et al. (2003) hypothesise that the two types of passion result from the way the activity is internalised in a person’s identity. In line with Self-Determination Theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000), it is proposed that activities can be internalised in either a controlled or an autonomous way. A controlled internalisation refers to an activity that is internalised as tied to various contingencies, such as the person’s perception of competence, desire for excitement, or sense of acceptance. This type of internalisation is hypothesised to result in a more obsessive and passive form of passion, where activity engagement feels mandatory and even compulsory. Obsessive passion is thus characterised by an internal pressure that pushes the person to engage in the activity. The individual feels compelled to do his or her activity because doing so may quench an uncontrollable thirst for the activity or satisfy various internal demands such as the maintenance of one’s value or sense of self-worth. As such, the activity tends to be overly valued, to be favoured above all other aspects of the person’s life and to take disproportionate space in the person’s identity (Vallerand et al., 2003).
An activity may also be internalised within a context of choice and exploration, referred to as an autonomous form of internalisation. This form of internalisation is hypothesised to result in a more active and harmonious type of passion, which is characterised by a sense of deep interest, but also of volition. Harmonious passion refers to a motivational force that leads people to choose to engage in the activity and to personally endorse the importance of their activity engagement. The activity is valued, but not overly so, which allows people to engage in other life projects. Although the activity occupies a significant space in the person’s identity, it is not overpowering, such that activity engagement remains under the person’s willful control and is in harmony with other aspects of the person’s life (Vallerand et al., 2003).

2 Passionate towards a brand

Brands help to define consumers’ lives and play a vital role in people’s consumption behaviour (Ahuvia, 2005; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988). Strong relationships facilitate a bonding between the consumers and their preferred brands (Fournier, 1998). A few Consumer brand relationship constructs such as brand trust (Hess, 1995), brand identification (Escalas and Bettman, 2003) and brand commitment (Fullerton, 2005) appear dominant to many studies on branding. The recently proposed concept of brand passion features instances and indication of consumer enthusiasm (Belk et al., 2003; Matzler et al., 2007a) and actions such as taking membership into a brand community (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995).

As Fournier (1998) has reported, consumers engage in various different forms of brand relationships among which we also find feelings of love. Such relationships require the ability to idealise an object, which is an antecedent for desire. Hence, love objects are perceived in a somewhat distorted and idealised manner. Furthermore, in order to be loved, an object must fulfil the ‘personification qualification’ criterion, which enables an object to be perceived as an active partner, who can also reciprocate in a way (Fournier, 1998; Rozanski et al., 1999).

Consumer behaviour literature provides ample evidence of enthusiastic and highly passionate forms of consumer-object relationships and forms of ludic activities. In an attempt to enchant their lives, consumers engage in motorcycle riding (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), in worshipping the Apple Newton Brand (Muniz and Schau, 2005), or in communing with other passionate fans, as for instance reported by Kozinets (1997), or Pimentel and Reynolds (2004). Wallendorf and Arnould (1988) contended that material objects play many important roles in the lives of consumers. They might become ‘favorite things’ and serve important psychological functions in our lives. People living in today’s almost demystified world of consumption are increasingly looking out for new opportunities to fill their lives with meaning. Consumers often satisfy this deeply rooted desire through the consumption of material products or the possession of beloved objects (Ahuvia, 2005; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Huber et al., 2015). In this context, the development of close relationships between consumers and brands are reported (Muniz and Schau, 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Apple, Harley-Davidson and Starbucks Coffee are just a few examples of brands that managed to create and maintain deep emotional bonds with their customers, driven by love and passion. In practical experience, the focus lies on generating brand passion because of its positive effects on
consumer behaviour as the willingness to pay a price premium or to spread positive word-of-mouth. Hence, during the last years a rising number of marketers have attempted to create passionate brands by using emotionally-laden advertising messages and slogans such as HYUNDAI – drive your way, McDonald’s ‘I’m loving it’ or Deutsche Bank – a passion to perform.

2.1 Implication of passion in marketing

Marketing literature shows that passion in consumer behaviour is due to some reasons and also leads to some outcomes which had added to the understanding of consumer behaviour. The authors have studies various variables along with brand passion to come up with models which can pave the way for future research. Bauer et al. (2007) studied determinants of brand passion and showed that brand passion is influenced by four characteristics related to the brand (brand uniqueness, self-expressive brand, prestige of the brand, hedonic brand). They also indicate that the consumer’s extraversion does not influence brand passion. They showed the influence of brand passion on premium price, word-of-mouth (WOM) and purchase intention, which reveals the importance of the construct from a practical point of view. Bauer et al. (2007) present brand uniqueness as an antecedent of brand passion, while from a conceptual standpoint it is better conceptualised as one of its dimensions (Vincent, 2004; Ahuvia, 2005; Albert et al., 2008a). Also, brand passion is only explained by brand characteristics. This does not take into account the fact that brand identification or brand trust influence consumers’ affect for the brand (Ashley and Brocato, 2010). Finally, Bauer et al. (2007) do not present their brand passion scale and it is unclear whether all brand passion components (cognitive, emotional and behavioural) have been measured (Hatfield, 1988).

According to Matzler et al. (2007a, 2007b), brand passion is influenced by individual factors such as consumer personality. They study the influence of consumer personality on brand passion through the Big 5 personality traits and obtained results opposite to those of Bauer et al. (2007) since consumer extraversion has been shown to significantly influence brand passion, while openness does not. Neither Bauer et al. (2007) nor Matzler et al. (2007a) have as yet studied brand relational constructs as antecedents or effects of brand passion. The scale used to measure passion is adapted from Sternberg’s love scale (1997). However, in Sternberg’s theory (1986), passion is defined as a motivational dimension and the emotional and behavioural characteristics of brand passion are not considered.

2.2 Conceptualisation of brand passion

Following interpersonal research on passion, (e.g., Baumeister and Bratslavsky, 1999; Hatfield, 1988), we consider brand passion as psychological construct and we propose the following definition:

‘Brand passion corresponds to the enthusiasm, the infatuation or even the obsession of a consumer for a brand’. Like the interpersonal passion, the brand passion construct is made of three dimensions: cognitive, emotional and behavioural (Hatfield, 1988). The emotional aspect of brand passion may include the consumer’s attraction toward the brand; his/her desire to enter in or to maintain a relationship with it. This component may also include some negatives emotion if there is an important change from the brand (like its image). The cognitive component of brand passion is characterised by the idealisation
of the brand and its presence in the consumer’s thoughts. Finally, the behavioural component may include the purchase of the brand, event in case of higher price, positive word-of-mouth, trying to convince other consumers, etc.

The increasing importance of passionate brands in marketing practice necessitates the analysis of the determinants and consequences of brand passion. Brand passion is a recent construct in marketing. Bauer et al. (2007, p.2190) define brand passion as “a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioural factors”. According to Keh et al. (2007, p.84), “brand passion describes the zeal and enthusiasm features of consumer brand relationship”. For Matzler et al. (2007a, p.16), “if a consumer is passionate about a brand, he/she will engage in a much more emotional relationship with the brand and even miss the brand or feel loss when the brand is unavailable”. Finally, according to Thomson et al. (2005, p.80), passion “reflects intense and aroused positive feelings toward a brand”. Despite their contributions, these definitions present some limitations. The definition by Matzler et al. (2007a) focuses essentially on the consequences of passion and does not describe its characteristics. Bauer et al. (2007) indicate that brand passion is an attitude, yet according to Sillamy (1990), it possesses its own conceptual status. Finally, the definition proposed by Keh et al. (2007) does not underline enough the unique aspects of a (brand) passionate relationship.

3 Conceptual model

For this paper the author would like to investigate the potential antecedents and outcome of brand passion. Therefore the following hypothesis are put forth to outline to conceptual model.

In an interpersonal context, trust is linked more closely with affection than passion (Fehr, 1988); the influence of brand trust on brand passion has not yet been explored. However, according to several authors (Gurviez and Korchia, 2002; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), brand trust has both cognitive and affective dimensions, just as brand passion (Hatfield, 1988; Albert, et al., 2013). If a party has confidence in the exchange partners integrity and reliability, than trust exist (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). It is defined as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). In situations of uncertainty, trust is more useful because consumers know which brand they can rely on (Moorman et al., 1992; Doney and Cannon, 1997). Since brand trust has a positive influence on some affective constructs as brand affection (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) and brand love (Albert and Valette-Florence, 2010), the author proposes:

H1 Brand trust has a positive influence on brand passion.

In the context of branding, loyalty is one of the most widely defined words in the marketing lexicon. It is interpreted in different ways and can often be approached with greatly differing definitions by different people (Morgan, 1999). One of the oldest and perhaps the most used definition for loyalty comes from Jacoby and Kyner (1973) who described loyalty as “a biased behavioural response expressed over time by a decision making unit with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of brands and being a function of psychological processes”. Oliver (1999) has developed the definition
further by describing loyalty as “a deeply held commitment to re-buy or repatronise a preferred product or service consistently in the future, causing repetitive same brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences or marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour”. Thus loyalty can entail a passionate relation with the brand. Therefore the proposed hypothesis

H2 Brand loyalty has a positive influence on brand passion.

If the customer is highly satisfied with the brand, he/she develops a fondness or affection for the brand which can lead to passion for the brand. Fornell (1992) defined satisfaction as “an overall evaluation dependent on the total purchase and consumption experience of the target product or service performance compared with repurchase expectations over time”. Oliver (1999) and Oliver et al. (1997) reviewed satisfaction as pleasurable fulfilment which is sensed by customers in the consumption. It means that “the consumer senses that consumption fulfils some need, desire, goal, or so forth and that this fulfilment is pleasurable” [Oliver, (1999), p.34]. According to Woodruff and Gardial (1996), it has become more and more evident that it is important for the satisfaction measurement, to capture not only the perception, but also the consumer emotion. The greater the emotion (positive and negative) caused by products and services, the more motivated the consumers will be in terms of future behaviour and be passionate about the brand.

As Thomson et al. (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. Therefore the proposed hypothesis

H3 Satisfaction has a positive influence on brand passion.

Figure 1 Conceptual model: antecedents and outcome of brand passion

WOM communication, ‘informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers’ [Westbrook and Oliver, (1991), p.261], has recently received renewed attention in the
marketing literature (Anderson, 1998; Gilly et al., 1998). Positive WOM communication has been recognised as a particularly valuable vehicle for promoting a firm’s products and services. Indeed, given its non-commercial nature, WOM communication is viewed with less skepticism than firm-initiated promotional efforts (Herr et al., 1991). Consumers may become important spokespersons for brands (Dick and Basu, 2004; Fullerton, 2003; Harrison-Walker, 2001), especially if the person values and develops positive affect for the brand, prompting positive WOM (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 2003). From a conceptual standpoint, a consumer’s infatuation with or excitement about a brand leads to speaking about and experiences with the brand (Bauer et al., 2007; Matzler et al., 2007a). Thus

**H4**  Brand passion relates positively to word of mouth.

### 4 Methodology

This research study is designed to study customers’ behavioral responses to a brand construct, i.e., brand passion. The scales would be patterned after existing instruments as per the requirement of the study and measures will be subjected to reliability and validity tests.

Brand passion items will be adapted from Albert et al. (2008a, 2008b), Vallerand et al. (2008) and Sternberg (1997). Brand satisfaction will be measured through items from Westbrook and Oliver (1981). The proposed measurement for word of mouth is from the scale of Harrison and Walker (2001). Brand loyalty will be captured using scales developed by Oliver et al. (1997), Pritchard et al. (1999), Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) Sirdeshmukh et al. (2002) and Taylor et al. (2004). Finally, items to measure brand trust will be adapted from Lewicki and Bunker (1995).

All the items will be measured using a ten-point Likert-type scale ranging from – strongly disagree to – strongly agree. The brands selected for the study are the retail chains which may be referred to as masstige or high street brands. The sample will be identified and respondents will be selected on the basis of them being users of these brands. The study will use a survey questionnaire to collect information on the identified variables for the masstige brands identified and will be filled up by the respondents themselves. The questionnaire will include questions helping the researcher to get data on the demographic information of the respondents and information relating to the brand and individual personality and their evaluation of satisfaction, trust, loyalty, brand passion and their tendency to offer recommendations.

This is done so as to investigate the hypothesis proposed in this paper. These questions will also help us identify the strength of brand passion and the behavioural antecedents and consequences via scale items. Regarding data analyses, the proposed relationships between brand passion and its antecedents and consequence will be tested using structural equation modelling (SEM) technique via AMOS 16.0. Nonetheless, the measurement will be firstly validated through a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of a pilot test, prior to estimating the full SEM. Upon establishing the model fit, the direction and significance of several structural parameters will be estimated.
5 Discussion and conclusions

In a quickly progressing competitive global marketplace where innumerable brands can fulfil consumer needs and requirements, marketing practitioners and academicians have reasoned that the creation of highly emotional consumer-brand relationships is the energetic force in consumer marketing (Fournier, 1998; Huber et al., 2015). Despite the fact that consumer passion has been recognised as the core element of brand love that is most relevant for marketing managers, previous brand passion research is limited. Brand passion is the critical emotional connection between a consumer and a brand. Consumers become personally passionate about the brand even more than their friends and relatives (McEwen, 2004; Ruane and Wallace, 2015) and this therefore is imperative for marketers to understand. From a managerial perspective, this study indicates that relationship spurs brand passion which in turn can turn to favourable word of mouth to others. Generally, relationship generated through multiple paths, (e.g., advertising, packaging, brand name, style, retail outlets) creates favourable conditions for passion for the brand. Experience with the brand brings about satisfaction, trust and loyalty and hence marketers and brand managers should ensure a good customer experience with the brand. Since brand trust, loyalty and satisfaction also influences brand passion, brand managers should guarantee the brand’s ability to deliver on promises, (e.g., superiority, service, invention, value) and work to develop the brand’s images of confidence and benevolence. Brand passion in turn affects the consumers’ chances of spreading good word about the brand. More passionate consumers are more likely to offer positive word-of-mouth, are more likely to become brand evangelists and are keener to pay a premium price for the brand. Therefore, from a strategic perspective, brand managers have indications that spending resources on a ‘brand passion strategy’ is vital for any company that plans to compete in the competitive market scenario.

The concept of brand passion remains innovative and a good understanding of the crucial causes and consequences demands more research. The present research has limitations as it does not test all potential consequences of brand passion. Models of brand passion could incorporate other constructs that likely relate to passion. Other research studies could focus on the consequences of brand passion if the customer was dissatisfied with the brand on one instance or occasionally. Thus could being passionate about the brand save the relationship with the brand? Or will it succumb to the negative event? Brand Passion again cannot be for many brands and cannot be felt by many consumers. Therefore understanding why a consumer may be passionate on what brands/products can passion arises can be studied further.

Further study can also be conducted to empirically test if behavioural variables like trust, satisfaction, loyalty in the brand can lead to a consumer being passionate about the brand. This can enable practitioners to understand what exactly makes a consumer passionate about the brand which makes them unpaid and strong advocates for the brand which is proved by Matzler et al. (2007a). For a marketer it is more than a dream comes true if the consumer himself/herself is so passionate about the product/service that he/she turns into an ambassador for promotion. To reach this ideal result the brand characteristics, consumer personality and the emotions that the brand creates need to be together studied to enable to reach at the holistic answer to this research question. Relationship building could also benefit from the understanding of these relations to ensure a loyal and committed clientele for the organisations’ offerings.
References


