

Measuring the love feeling to a brand with interpersonal love items

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Abstract

This manuscript focuses on efforts to measure the brand love construct. By identifying the conceptual limitations of existing consumer love scales, this research develops, tests, and validates a new scale that can measure the feeling of love toward a brand, composed of items from four interpersonal love scales. This study also compares the nomological validity of the proposed scale with that of two other brand love scales.

Keywords

Love concept, interpersonal love scales, consumer behaviour, PLS.

Measuring Love for a Brand with Interpersonal Love Items

Since pioneering work by Rubin (1970) to understand and conceptualize the love feeling, researchers have studied this concept in various settings (e.g., Hatfield, 1988; Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986; Sternberg, 1986). The importance of love for human existence (Argyle and Henderson, 1984) also makes this topic a central concern for various social science fields (e.g., neuroscience, sociology) and marketing (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

This study attempts to propose a measure of the brand love construct. In the first section, we review and discuss two currently available brand love measurement scales. In the second part, we present a new love scale, which we developed by starting with exploratory factor analyses, conducting confirmatory analyses, and computing reliability and validity indices. Finally, we provide a comparison of the nomological validity of our proposed scale with the validity of two other brand love scales.

Brand Love Scales: A Critical Review

We present two brand love scales currently available for marketing applications and note some of their limitations; this identification of the limitations relies heavily on the synthesis and analysis recently proposed by Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2008a).

Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) Brand Love Scale

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) propose a brand love scale that consists of 10 items: (1) this is a wonderful brand; (2) this brand makes me feel good; (3) this brand is totally awesome; (4) I have neutral feelings about this brand (reverse-coded item); (5) this brand makes me very happy; (6) I love this brand; (7) I have no particular feelings about this brand (reverse-coded item); (8) this brand is a pure delight; (9) I am passionate about this brand; and (10) I am very attached to this brand. From a conceptual standpoint, the uni-dimensionality of their scale seems very surprising, because most interpersonal research presents love feelings as multi-dimensional constructs (Hatfield, 1988; Sternberg, 1986). Moreover, the scale items might have different meanings (e.g., passion, happiness, attachment, well-being) and likely favour multi-dimensionality. Finally, two items (2 and 5) seem to measure consumer well-being, though well-being and love represent two completely different constructs (Kim and Hatfield, 2004).

Thomson, MacInnis, and Park's (2005) Brand Love Scale

Another prominent marketing scale for measuring a feeling of brand love comes from Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005). However, we assert that this scale deals more with the love construct than any attachment construct. The presence of a "passion" dimension (along with affection and connection) indicates that the scale measures a brand love feeling, but with a few, very rare exceptions, the attachment component of a love relationship does not tend to include a passion dimension (Baumeister and Bratslavsky, 1999; Fisher, 2006; Hatfield, 1988). Moreover, the use of the item "loved," which belongs to the affection dimension, implies that this construct may be similar to love.

Although the scale appears remarkably strong from a methodological standpoint, it suffers some issues from a conceptual perspective. Passion and affection represent key characteristics of love, but connection may represent a characteristic of affection, also called intimacy (Sternberg, 1997) or attachment (Fisher, 2006). Sternberg (1997, p. 315) defines intimacy as “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness in loving relationships” and confirms that connection is an attribute of affection. Moreover, recent findings regarding interpersonal love from the fields of neuroscience (Fisher, 2006) and social psychology (Hatfield, 1988) demonstrate that the feeling of love consists of two dimensions: affection and passion. There is no mention of a connection dimension.

These points indicate that the two main brand love scales suffer from some important limitations from conceptual and statistical points of view. We propose a novel brand love scale that consists of interpersonal items in an attempt to address these limitations of existing scales.

Methodology and Results

In the following sections, we detail our scale construction, which adopts the procedures recommended by Churchill (1979). We then present the scale structure and its reliability and validity tests. Finally, we focus on the nomological validity of the love scale by testing it in terms of affective and continuance brand commitment (Fullerton, 2005) and comparing the results with those for the two extant brand love scales.

Scale Construction

Item generation

The items for our proposed scale come from four interpersonal love scales, widely cited in love literature: the Passionate Love Scale (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986), the Triangular Theory of Love Scale (Sternberg, 1997), and the Romantic Love and Liking Scales (Rubin, 1970).

Two marketing experts, independent from this research project, first evaluated the items from the four scales. Their evaluation suggested the removal of items that are not applicable to a brand in a French context (e.g., some items might offend French consumers). From the 65 items culled from the four scales, 57 were retained for inclusion in the questionnaire that supported our scale construction.

First data collection: Scale construction

Respondents used a 10-point Likert scale (1 = does not apply at all to 10 = totally applies) to describe the extent to which the items applied to the brand they chose for the survey. The Internet-based survey employed four questionnaire versions that varied the order of the items randomly. We also developed a paper-and-pencil questionnaire. Across all conditions, we collected 825 fully completed questionnaires for the analysis. The final sample of respondents consists of 35.8% men (64.2% women), most of whom are young (66.3% younger than 30 years). Furthermore, 43% are students, 23% are executives, and 17.8% are employees. Most (65.6%) of these respondents are single, though 25.6% are married. Respondents could evaluate any brand they chose; they frequently mentioned popular brands such as Sony (14.1%), Apple (12.4%), adidas (11.2%), L’Oreal (10.6%), and Chanel (10%).

Second data collection: Scale construction

As recommended by Churchill (1979), we conducted a second data collection procedure to (1) confirm the scale structure and (2) test its psychological characteristics. We again posted the questionnaire on the Internet and asked consumers to evaluate their chosen brands using a 10-point Likert scale. Four different versions were available to the respondents; we received 683 questionnaires for the analysis. The respondents' mean age is approximately 30 years. Students represent 39.5% of our sample, whereas 27.4% are executives and 17.8% are employees.

Results

We first present the exploratory factor analyses, followed by the confirmatory factor analysis and the psychometric properties of the brand love scale. Finally, we focus on the nomological validity of the love scale.

Exploratory factor analyses

We conduct an exploratory factor analysis of the 57 items remaining in our collection from the four interpersonal love scales. We retain those items that fulfil the following criteria: They load strongly on the factor that they are designed to represent, they show high correlations with the others items on the same factor, and they exhibit weak correlations with other factors (Malhotra, 1981). Promax rotation supports these analyses, because of the supposed correlations between the factors that we anticipate will remain (Hendrick, Hendrick, and Adler, 1988; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005).

Confirmatory factor analyses

The confirmatory factor analyses, which employ both partial least squares (PLS) and covariance structure analysis (CSA), confirm the previously obtained scale structure: 12 items load on two dimensions. The scale reliability, calculated using Joreskog's Rho, provides satisfactory results. The two brand love scale dimensions attain a Joreskog's Rho superior to 0.7, the critical threshold. Table 1 includes the scale's factor loadings and items. In addition, the fit indices with respect to the CSA analysis are as follows: root mean squared error of approximation = 0.051; goodness-of-fit index = 0.924, and adjusted goodness-of-fit index = 0.901.

The brand love scale consists of passion and affection (for the brand) dimensions. Passion and affection represent the major characteristics of interpersonal love and appear as dimensions (Sternberg, 1986), steps (Hatfield, 1988), or kinds (Lee, 1977) of love in previous interpersonal literature. The affection dimension measures the psychological and affective proximity between the brand and the consumer; the passion dimension refers to the difficulty the consumer senses because of a separation from the brand and its omnipresence in the consumer's mind.

Factor	Items	Original scale	Loading		Joreskog's Rho
			PLS	CSA	
Affection	I experience great happiness with this brand.	Sternberg (<i>intimacy</i>)	0.802	0.835	PLS: 0.928 CSA: 0.907
	I feel emotionally close to this brand.	Sternberg (<i>intimacy</i>)	0.777	0.822	
	When I am with this brand, we are almost always in the same mood.	Rubin (<i>liking</i>)	0.778	0.837	
	I think that this brand and I are quite similar to each other.	Rubin (<i>liking</i>)	0.819	0.863	
	There is something almost 'magical' about my relationship with this brand.	Sternberg (<i>passion</i>)	0.867	0.851	
	I feel tender toward this brand.	Hatfield	0.674	0.758	
Passion	If I could never be with this brand, I would feel miserable.	Rubin (<i>love</i>)	0.890	0.887	PLS: 0.940 CSA: 0.920
	I find myself thinking about this brand frequently during the day.	Sternberg (<i>passion</i>)	0.715	0.784	
	Sometimes I feel I can't control my thoughts; they are obsessively on the brand.	Hatfield	0.703	0.785	
	If I were separated from this brand for a long time, I would feel intensely lonely.	Hatfield	0.919	0.913	
	There is nothing more important to me than my relationship with the brand.	Sternberg (<i>passion</i>)	0.769	0.833	
	I would feel deep despair if this brand left me	Hatfield	0.849	0.872	

Table 1: Factor Loadings and Items: Interpersonal Brand Love Scale

Nomological validity

The love feeling relates to several different behaviours, emotions, and feelings in interpersonal relationship literature. Several studies (Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence, 2008b; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005) demonstrate that brand love influences brand loyalty. Brand commitment, another important construct in the brand–consumer relationship, usually represents the attitudinal portion of brand loyalty (Jacoby and Chesnut, 1978). We postulate in turn that brand love influences brand commitment. Moreover, some research indicates that brand affection, one of the dimensions of brand love, can influence brand commitment (Lacoeuilhe, 2000; Park, MacInnis, and Priester, 2006). We consider brand commitment as consisting of two dimensions (Fullerton, 2005): affective and continuance brand commitment. In addition, because no prior research compares existing brand love scales, we integrate Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) and Thomson, MacInnis, and Park's (2005) scales in our analysis. The resulting comparison should help researchers and managers select the proper brand love scale for their related studies.

The results indicate that all three brand love scales predict both continuance and affective brand commitment, though there are some important differences in their ability to influence brand commitment. Regarding continuance brand commitment, the brand love scale developed herein reveals the greatest influence (0.737). The two other brand love scales also can predict continuance brand commitment, but their influences are weaker (0.440 for Carroll and Ahuvia's brand love scale; 0.448 for Thomson, MacInnis, and Park's emotional attachment scale). Therefore, the proposed instrument better captures some cognitive aspects of love (i.e., presence of the brand in the consumer's mind), which emphasizes its nomological validity for continuance commitment.

With regard to affective brand commitment, the three scales all obtain similar results. Carroll and Ahuvia's brand love scale exhibits the highest influence on this dimension (0.736), followed by our proposed brand love scale (0.700). Finally, the emotional attachment scale has the weakest influence on affective brand commitment (0.672), which provides a surprising result, because it consists of both affection and connection, which conceptually should relate to and influence the affective aspect of the relationship. Therefore, we expected stronger links between Thomson, MacInnis, and Park's scale and brand affective commitment. We present these results in Table 2.

Scale	Continuance Brand Commitment		Affective Brand Commitment	
	R ²	Adjusted R ²	R ²	Adjusted R ²
This study	0.736	0.737	0.698	0.700
Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005	0.444	0.448	0.667	0.672
Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006	0.438	0.440	0.737	0.736

Table 2: Influences of Brand Love Scales on Continuance and Affective Brand Commitment

Discussion

Consumers may feel love toward some brands, as demonstrated by various studies. To measure the love construct, two brand love scales currently exist, but they are subject to important conceptual and/or statistical limitations. Moreover, few researchers have tried to measure brand love using only interpersonal items; those that have tend to measure brand love with a single interpersonal love scale that remains subject to criticism (e.g., Whang et al., 2004).

As its main objective, this research proposes a new brand love scale that consists of interpersonal love items derived from four different scales. The proposed instrument contains two dimensions, passion and affection, and 12 items. From a conceptual point of view, the two dimensions of interpersonal love seem applicable in a consumption context as well, which may indicate that brand love and interpersonal love are similar. From a statistical point of view, the scale psychometric characteristics appear satisfactory.

Although our brand love scale comprises interpersonal love items, the scale possesses some significant managerial implications, because it can predict continuance and affective brand commitment. Moreover, we compare the nomological capacity of our scale with that of two other brand love scales (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005). The results indicate that our scale achieves a greater influence on continuance brand commitment than do the two other scales.

More generally, the results confirm the need for managerial attention to the brand love construct, because it can influence the attitudinal loyalty of consumers toward a brand. Furthermore, the brand love scale offers a useful brand management tool. Marketers can identify consumers who feel love toward their brands, then use this identification to recognize which characteristics link the consumer to the brand (i.e., passion or affection) and thereby design appropriate communication, loyalty programs, and products launches that fit the consumers' preferences and feelings of love.

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