

Chapter 21

Loving and Hating Brands: Multiple Relationships Between Consumers and Brands

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ABSTRACT

Consumers develop relationships with diverse brands regarding brands as partners. Brands are viewed by customers as symbolic meanings and social and cultural value, which is beyond the utilitarian benefits. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to explore the research on Consumer-Brand Relationship (CBR) and present a theoretical model of consumer-brand relationship process, giving insights for good and bad relationships. The chapter begins with the origin and evolution of CBR. Then, an overview of main theories and the seminal models are shown. Finally, a model of consumer-brand relationship process through good and bad relationships is proposed, and insights for further research are provided.

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of customer–brand relationships (CBR) has becoming a topic of interest since late nineties of 20th Century. The marketing is shifting from a transactional marketing paradigm to the relationship marketing paradigm. Short-term orientations dominated marketing practices are no longer acceptable. Top managers realize that repeat purchase by customers is critical and necessary to foster brand loyalty (Gummesson, 1987, 2008). Therefore, firms are interested in acquiring knowledge about how consumers relate to brands, why some brands are preferred to others and even loved. On the other hand, it is also relevant understand why consumers may develop a negative bonds with brands and even hate them. Thus, these and other issues associated to the bonds established between consumers and brands, which may be associated to goods, services, organizations, celebrities, destinations, cities, and even countries, have gained prominence amongst researchers and practitioners.

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Indeed, all types of organizations, profit or non-profit, are adopting customer-centric strategies, programs, tools, and technology for efficient and effective customer relationship management. Even tourism related public entities are realizing the need for in-depth and integrated tourist knowledge in order to build close cooperative and partnering relationships with their tourists.

Fournier (1998) seminal anthropomorphic model of customer–brand relationships proposed the Brand Quality model, nevertheless, the Brand Quality model focuses on the relationship dimensions of love/passion, brand partner quality, intimacy, interdependence, commitment, self-connection, but it does not demonstrate how these dimensions are related each other, it is not a causal relational model. After that, several studies have been analyzing how these and other relational constructs are related (e.g., Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005), what are the antecedents and consequents of the relational constructs (e.g., Chang & Chieng, 2006; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010; Tsai, 2011; Loureiro, Kaufmann, & Vrontis, 2012), or how to improve the measure of each construct (e.g., Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012).

From the practitioners' perspective, we can find several evidence of the growing interest of company CEOs and brand manager on this topic. For instance, Roberts (2004), CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, proposes the theory of “Lovemarks” and alludes that brands should be about consumers and their relationship with them. For Roberts (2004), in the same way the products evolved to carry trademarks, and trademarks evolved into brands, nowadays, brands should evolve into “Lovemarks”. In this regards, “Lovemarks” are about building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers. The website “lovemarkscampus” provides information about the companies, consumer opinions, and events around the topic: from brands to lovebrands. There, in the webpage “resources”, it is also possible to find some academic literature on the topic of emotional marketing.

Another example comes from McEwen, a Global Practice Leader at The Gallup Organization, and previous senior planning and account management in several leading advertising agencies, including McCann-Erickson, FCB, and D'Arcy. McEwen launched in 2005 the book “Married to the Brand”. This book advocates the thesis that great brands are built upon strong customer relationships.

Nevertheless, CBR is still a very recent research field and so, the propose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the evolution of the concept of consumer-brand relationship, providing insight about the main proposed models and major constructs. The chapter presents models incorporating love/passion, attachment/avoidance or antecedents of relationship investment. A framework is also presented and intends to suggest a sequential causal order from identity to outcomes in the relationship between consumers and their loved brands and also the negative flow leading to a bad relationship and a bad outcome. The antecedents and consequents of love/hate for a brand are not yet properly established and so the framework, based on literature review, intends to contribute for fulfill this gap.

In this chapter the conceptual foundation of CBR is explored by examining the literature on relationship marketing and other disciplines that contribute to the knowledge of CBR. Therefore, the following sections start with the origin and evolution of consumer-brand relationship (CBR). Then, a parsimonious view is given of the various theories together with a conceptual discussion on major constructs along with existing models so far developed in various conceptual and empirical studies. In the end, the chapter presents an overview of the process behind the consumer-brand relationship and provides some insights for further research.

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