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An Empirical Examination of Gender Perspective on Perceived Significance of Brand Love Towards Luxury Fashion Brands

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Abstract

Contemporary brands increasingly thrive by fostering emotional connections with their consumers, and this psychological engagement often manifests as brand love—a deep emotional attachment that consumers develop toward a brand. This study investigates the perceived significance of brand love specifically in the context of luxury fashion brands, which are known to evoke timeless sentimental value. Recognizing that emotional involvement with brands may vary across genders, the study aims to determine whether men and women differ in how they perceive the importance of brand love toward luxury fashion labels. Utilizing a cross-sectional survey method, data were collected from 217 respondents through judgment sampling, focusing on their experiences with the top ten global luxury fashion brands. Statistical analysis through an independent sample T-test revealed that there is no significant gender-based differences in the perceived significance of brand love. These findings suggest that emotional bonds with luxury fashion brands are equally relevant across genders. The study provides practical marketing implications by highlighting the need to shift traditional gender-based assumptions in brand messaging and consumer profiling. It encourages marketers to design inclusive campaigns that strengthen long-term consumer-brand relationships. This research adds originality by delving into gender-neutral aspects of emotional branding in the luxury fashion industry.

1. Introduction

Brand Love is a form of love beyond simply appreciating a brand for its functional benefits. It is profound, built on the sentimental value of what the product means for the customers and how it represents them. Customers might get there after pleasant brand experiences and strong

identification with these brands. Brand love can spur other positive emotions such as trust, attitudinal loyalty, commitment, and devotion. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) state that brands of a self-expressive nature receive greater love from consumers through loyalty and positive words about them to various other parties. A brand relishes exceptional status if the marketing strategy for that brand is successful in establishing a desire for that brand in the hearts of the consumers. Love towards brands is a recent paradigm that is rapidly emerging in the field of consumer-brand relationships. Various studies (Albert et al., 2009; Brakus et al., 2009; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Keh et al., 2007; Shimp &Madden, 1988; Thomson et al., 2005) have earlier made a generous effort to explore various antecedents and consequences of brand love, provided different kinds of conceptual framework and empirically validated scales for their measurement. Despite that, a few researchers have tried to relate demographic variables with brand love.

The gender of a person is an essential demographic variable which influences one's purchasing style and behaviour. Recently social norms are changing, and gender equality is improving. At the same time role of women is strengthened. Gender roles are shifting dramatically. Research on these developing gender roles can be highly insightful for marketers of luxury fashion brands, as this industry is susceptible to demographic shifts.

The present study aims to determine the perceived significance of brand love for both males and females. The literature will discuss the importance of gender differences relating to consumption concepts. This will follow the results of the hypotheses testing, analysis, discussion, findings, suggestions, conclusion, and future research prospects. The research will add significant new findings to the prevailing literature on consumer-brand relationships.

1.1 Brand Love

Consumers often cultivate intense emotional attachments with certain brands they use and place them close to their hearts. They consume or interact with brands and engage in long-term relationships with them. These brands have consistently honoured the promises they have made to their customers. They have earned themselves adoring brand fans, enviable market reviews, and mounting profits. Over the past few years, brand love studies have escalated among practitioners and academics. Brands that deliver intrinsic value to consumers are loved unconditionally rather than being liked. Marketers are already investing in the conception of adored brands and are through emotionally appealing brand messages to instigate consumers' love for brands. Marketing communication and positioning strategy are most significant in creating a loved brand (Sarkar,2014).

1.2 Gender-Based Differences in Consumer Behavior

Gender encompasses "the range of social roles, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values,

relative power and influence that society assigns to the two sexes on a differential basis (Vlassoff, 2007). The two sexes are poles apart in their perspectives, motives, rationales, and actions. A recent survey (Parker et al., 2017) found that most Americans view men and women as fundamentally diverse in articulating their viewpoints, physical abilities and pursuits. Therefore, male and female psychological differences are expected to define predilections towards selected products and services. In the last decade, extensive enquiries have been directed at gender differences and how they impact consumer behaviour. These studies include gender differences in purchase intention, purchase decision styles, information processing, and post-purchase behaviour. Many proactive firms have altered their marketing plans to respond to these variances. Every element of the marketing mix, like promotional strategy, brand message, advertising media, product pattern, arrangement of stores, training of salesforce, and service guidelines, are intended to interest both sexes precisely. Off late, along with the personality of male and female consumers, traditional gender roles of society are changing radically. Research is required in these emerging phases of gender roles in society.

1.3 Luxury Fashion Market in India

The conceptual key to recognising luxury brands in the market is exclusivity. Luxury goods encompass highly distinct personal items that communicate the taste and status of their owners. This comprises small segments like Apparel, Footwear, Accessories, Eyewear, Watches and Jewellery, and Cosmetics. Most consumers globally buy luxury products because they express their ideals and social self. Revenue in the Luxury fashion segment amounts to US$1,585m in 2021. The market is expected to grow annually by 8.40% (CAGR 2021-2025). The market's largest segment is Luxury Apparel, with a market volume of US$1,092 Million in 2021. In global comparison, most revenue is generated in the United States (US$26,925m in 2021). India is emerging as a desirable option for luxury marketers in the world. The magnitude of the Indian luxury market is projected to escalate from the current US $30 billion to more than $200 billion in 2030. Various backing forces behind this growth include favourable demographics, the growing purchasing power of the middle class, and tech-savvy and conscious consumers. Luxury brands are recognised for their symbolic value to customers. Consumers will quickly form a psychological connection with these brands. They have provided that the aesthetic appeals promised are delivered. Thus, luxury fashion brands with symbolic and emotional values are selected to explore the concept of brand love.

1.4 Need and Significance

Socio-cultural and demographic forces though changing dramatically, yet they continue to direct consumer psychology. Old institutions are not going away but shifting forward. In such a scenario, marketers and brand managers must work strategically. In the long run, only those brands will

survive that are consumer-centric and placed in the hearts of consumers due to their thoughtful emotional appeals. The study aims to compare the perceived significance of brand love between male and female consumers. This study may help marketers understand consumers' attitudes and framing the targeting and positioning strategies for luxury fashion products.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Brand Love

Shimp and Madden (1988), in their pioneer work, adapted the interpersonal theory of love to the marketing and branding context and proposed that brand love comprises the dimensions of passion, intimacy and commitment (Shimp & Madden, 1988). Subsequently, Carrol and Ahuvia have also performed ground-breaking work on this concept over time (1993, 2005a, 2005b, 2006). According to them, it is the extent of a pleased consumer's obsessive emotional affection for a particular trade name. Thus, brand love is a much more intense sensation than mere satisfaction. Ahuvia et al. (1993) also note that an object or brand must be perceived as part of the consumer to be loved.

Consumers also use brands that shape their identity, producing more powerful emotional responses (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Moreover, the self-expressive benefits obtainable from the brand seem to induce both consumers' love and encourage suitable post-consumption behaviour. Another notable study by Batra et al. (2012) yielded a higher-order model of brand love that revealed its seven core elements: self–brand integration, passion-driven behaviours, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, positive overall attitude valence, attitude certainty, and confidence (strength), and anticipated separation distress. The consumer must experience psychic proximity to develop an affective proximity with the brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Roy et al. (2012), in their conceptual framework on brand love, state that stronger emotional bonding will likely emerge if the brand image is congruent with the consumer self-concept. Consumers love brands more when they see the brand not just as a person but also as a person like themselves. Sensory experience is the primary driver of brand love (Huang, 2017). Moreover, opinions about quality emerged as a cause of brand love and loyalty, word of mouth, and resistance to negative information as to its likely effects.

Love is one of the seven key dimensions that intensify the relationship quality between consumers and their brands as per the BRQ Model (Fournier, 1994). Close attachment and personal connection command loyalty from consumers. In their research, Hwang and Kandumpully (2012) demonstrate that brand love indirectly improves brand loyalty through self-brand connection and emotional attachment. Consumers have a propensity to be attitudinally loyal and deeply committed to those brands for which they feel ardent love. Brand love positively

affects post-consumption behaviour outcomes such as brand loyalty and positive word of mouth (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006). Albert et al. (2009), in developing a new scale for the measurement of love feelings towards a brand, found that a consumer who feels affection for a brand is expected to be loyal to this brand. A satisfied consumer who falls in love with a brand generally has stronger brand loyalty than those who become loyal without brand love (Roy et al., 2012). Comparing the Brand Love prototype with interpersonal love, Batra et al. (2012) conceptualise relationship stability as a typical outcome of interpersonal love and consumer brand love consequences into more significant repurchase intention.

2.2 Impact of Gender Difference

Gender differences arise from the biological, social and cultural background. Many scholars of the consumer psychology field are probing the impression that gender has on consumer actions. Biological sex differences (males versus females) have remained in research focus on various consumption activities. Apart from biological differences, certain personality traits associated with masculinity and femininity impact buying motivations (Palan et al., 2011). Both genders have diverse buying motivations. Consumers have different shopping styles due to different underlying motivations. These shopping styles transform into mental orientation and become more instrumental when consumers choose products (Sprotles & Kendall, 1986).

Consumers' decisions making is influenced by different factors like product quality, producer image, fashion or impulse to buy. All these factors work differently in male and female psychology. Pirlympou (2017) found that women are more concerned with the price and quality of products than men, while men are more affected by the brand name of a product. Mitchell and Walsh (2004) found that male and female decision-making styles vary as males were slightly less likely to be perfectionists than females, they were somewhat less novelty and fashion conscious and were less likely to be confused by information overload. In addition, six unique descriptions were identified in this research. Males are satisfying, enjoyment-variety seeking, economy seeking, fashion-sale seeking and time-restricted for males, whereas quality consciousness and recreation are sought by females (Mitchell & Walsh, 2004). Shabbir & Safwan (2014) women are generally more conscious of their hedonic values and more impulsive than men when they shop, while there was no difference in quality consciousness in males and females.

Moreover, women uniquely observe information from men as genetic, neurological, and behavioural inequalities exist between their brains. These variances, in turn, bring about a significant influence on their shopping behaviour. While men load themselves with limited information about a product or service through the internet, advertising, and reviews, women also benefit from others' experiences by asking people around them (Shabbir & Safwan, 2014). Men and women also search for different product benefits, qualities and values.

Recently researchers have extended the scope of gender differences by including the emotional element. Shabbir & Safwan (2014) argued that females have more inclination to make purchases due to hedonic values than men. Compulsion at the time of purchase encounter had a convincing outcome on the buying behaviour of women. Conversely, appreciation was a more precise cause for men to purchase. Purchases are likely to result partly because of these feelings (Monga, 2002). Women tend to be more devoted to the shopping experience on many dimensions (Ramprabha, 2017). Sahay et al. (2011) made a case that females were found to develop brand relationships more on effect than cognition, but the incidences of relationships that men have recalled were more fact-based.

Moreover, the foundation of brand relationships will change with the phase of life in both genders. Male and female consumers view brand associations from a similar angle. The degree of affective emotions will decrease for women as they start becoming cognitive in their brand relationships compared to their young age.

3. Research Methodology

In order to examine the perceived importance of brand love among customers of luxury fashion brands and how this concept manifests itself across genders, this study employed both an exploratory and a descriptive research approach. The top ten global luxury fashion brands' data was taken from Kantar's "BrandzTM Top 100 Most Valuable Global Brands 2020" study. Data from customers of premium fashion firms were gathered using the judgment sampling method. For the study, a single cross-sectional survey was undertaken. An online poll was used to contact these consumers. Email and other social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram, were used to distribute the survey. The poll was conducted for a whole month. In the beginning, a screening questionnaire was sent to find customers who regularly use premium products. A total of 232 replies were given to the researchers. 217 replies were judged to be useful for analysis after the data filtering. 111 men and 106 women out of 217 replies were counted. For the study, two questionnaires (A and B) were created. The purpose of Questionnaire A was to carefully identify respondents who were familiar with and frequently purchased from international luxury fashion companies. After receiving an affirmative response, individuals who were surveyed received Questionnaire B. A thorough examination of the literature was conducted to create questionnaire B for this study. This was broken down into three sections: a) for gathering general data on purchase frequency, location, and information source. b) The questions in this section were designed to gauge respondents' perceptions of the importance of brand love on a seven-point Likert scale. The items were adapted from established scales in literature. c) The final section discussed the respondents' demographic profile. The brand love scale's Cronbach Alpha

Value was 0.847, which is satisfactory. A two-sample Z test is used to evaluate the perceived difference in brand love in both genders.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Respondents' Demographic Profile

Table I: Demographic Features

Variable	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Gender		
Male	106	48.8
Female	111	51.2
Total	217	100.0
Age (in Years)		
18-30	192	88.5
31-40	22	10.1
41-50	3	1.4
Total	217	100.0
Educational Qualification		
Senior Secondary	3	1.4
Graduation	85	39.2
Post-Graduation	113	52.1
Other	16	7.3
Total	217	100.0
Family Income (in INR)		
12lacs and above	18	8.3
4lacs-8lacs	85	39.2
8lacs-12 lacs	22	10.1
Below 4lacs	92	42.4
Total	217	100.0

The sample's demographic details are shown in Table 1. 51.2% of respondents were female, compared to 48.8% of respondents who were male. Most responders (88.5%) are in the 18–30 age range. Additionally, the majority (52.1) have postgraduate degrees (39.2%). 42.4% of respondents had a household income of under INR 4 Lakhs. The income range of 4 to 8 lacs per household was another important segment.

4.2 Gender-Based Analysis on Perceived Significance of Brand Love

The difference between males and females regarding the perceived significance of brand love is insignificant.

Table II: Gender-Based Analysis on Perceived Significance for Brand Love

Note: Above mentioned t-values and other items have been adopted on the basis of application of Independent Samples t-Test comprising use

Items	Mean		Mean Differences	t- value	Significance
	Male	Female			
Inspires Delight	5.16	5.47	-0.31	-1.739	0.083
Confession of Love	5.17	5.33	-0.16	-0.984	0.326
Gratifying	5.22	5.42	-0.20	-1.176	0.241
Astonishing	5.17	5.39	-0.22	-1.222	0.223
Contentment	4.97	5.32	-0.35	-1.921	0.056
Pleasing	4.93	5.22	-0.29	-1.718	0.087
Intense Longing	5.01	4.83	0.18	0.992	0.323
Closeness	4.78	4.87	-0.09	-0.476	0.634
Irreplaceable	5.18	5.18	0	-0.005	0.996
Exciting	4.91	4.96	-0.05	-0.331	0.741
Worth Admiring	4.71	4.69	0.02	0.076	0.939
Long Term Relationship	4.73	4.75	-0.02	-0.119	0.905
Evocative	4.60	4.44	0.16	0.764	0.446
Anticipation Separation Distress	4.42	4.37	0.05	0.216	0.829

of F-test to examine the equality of population variance.
(Source: Authors' Compilation Based on Primary Survey)

4. Interpretation

Table 4 shows the results of the independent t-test for two different groups, namely males and females. An independent sample t-test was conducted to compare the perceived significance of brand love for male and female respondents. Equal variances were assumed for all other items of brand devotion. The significance value for all the items of brand love was tested at a significance level of 95%. The analyses show that the p-values of all the items are more than 0.05. The magnitude of the difference in the means was very small. Hence, the null hypothesis was accepted.

5. Findings

Previous studies have shown that females are more expressive in emotions than their male counterparts (Fournier,1994; Monga, 2002; Gawda, 2008; Kolyesnikova et al.,2009; Bakshi, 2012;). The circumstances are no longer like that as consumers increasingly defy traditional gender stereotypes. Therefore, fluidity between typical gender behaviours and definitions is underway (Caterall & Maclaran, 2001). Culture has begun to shift away from binary notions of gender. Research (AMA, 2019) found that a person's gender is irrelevant to their personality, intellect and leadership capabilities.

The proposed hypothesis results in this research also validate no significant difference between the significance of brand love between male and female consumers. The mean rating on almost all the items included in the brand love scale emphasises similitude between male and female outlooks. Both groups are even in their feelings of intimacy, passion and attachment. Besides, in the absence of brands mutually feel separation distress at par. Blurring gender differences and transforming societal norms governing gender roles can be a force behind this. Brands must reflect and be active evidence of the shift to stay with the times.

6. Suggestions

The responses of each group of respondents on various dimensions show that the perceived significance of brand love is satisfactory. To further elevate this significance in the future, marketers can look to the following suggestions in some areas.

- The most innovative brands can achieve decades-long success and growth by embracing change and devoting most of their time to designing pleasing and delightful experiences for their apostle customers. Apostle customers constitute a tiny fraction of the customer base. They alone can push massive sales and profits since they love the brand, call the reason for their existence, and openly confess their love.
- Personalized product experiences can be more conducive to driving the feeling of gratification in brand lovers. Consumers yearn for brands to understand them and reflect their true identities.
- Marketers should communicate functional and emotional capabilities through their products that target the emotional zones of consumers (self-concept, social recognition, nostalgia, aspiration). This will make brands the true ideal of their loyal consumers.

- Marketers should embrace their consumers' dissatisfaction and anger politely. When relationships are destroyed and customers feel deceived, the resulting reaction can be enough to undermine and eventually kill a company. They should be ready to change accordingly. This will save them and consumers by preserving them from distress caused by the absence of their favourite brands.
- To be loved by consumers, brands should work to induce strong passion in consumers' hearts. Passionate feelings can be aroused by being a one-stop solution for every need of consumers and by delivering more than promised. Consumers are keen on new offerings of such brands.
- Brand purpose can facilitate driving customer engagement. Brand should envision a purpose that consumers can associate with. Properly delivering such brand purpose is crucial in making brands worth admiring. With increased social awareness, consumers want to associate with brands that have meaningful purposes.
- Brand managers can devote time to listening to customer feedback. They should also closely observe the changing trends of society. All this knowledge can explain what consumers want from their offerings and what emotions they need to trigger.
- Today, social media exerts a meaningful force in the decision-making process of luxury buyers. Considering its importance in the luxury consumers' purchase journey, it is more than ever mandatory for brands to grasp the behaviour of social-media-savvy luxury customers. Strategic brand managers can take advantage of the upheaval brought by influencer marketing. They should scan the blooming groups that get along with their brand and engage with them through influencers with large audiences. Likewise, nano and micro-influencers can contribute to them with better results in nominal outgoings. This will be propitious for long-term relationships with consumers.

7. Conclusion

Consumers love to love brands and talk about them. A place in the heart of consumers does not come overnight. It is earned with constant efforts every single day. The study provides a considerable finding for marketers that both male and female consumer groups of luxury fashion brands have the same perception of brand love. Given constraints emerging from a lack of financial and human resources, the present study is confined to small sample size. Future studies can explore the perceived significance of brand love based on other demographic variables like age, income and occupation. Maintaining an emotional attachment with consumers is more crucial than ever for marketers. In the long run, only loved brands will hit the mark of infinite growth.

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