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**BRAND LOVE: EXPLORING BRAND LOYALTY AND THE
LOVEMARK EXPERIENCE**

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***Abstract:** The importance of brand loyalty, for the management of marketing strategies and activities, is of particular importance to companies as competition is fierce; there is little differentiation between the branded products; consumers are constantly tempted by attractive offers on the market. These, as well as other factors, prove that it is important to keep current loyal customers of the brand and to generate new ones. The objective of the research is to explore why consumers develop a deep emotional attachment towards brands. The current paper is developed by using the concept of a “love mark” – a brand that the consumers love – and tries to offer a better understanding of this consumer-brand relationship. Moreover, the elements that influence the creation of the loyalty and the emotional attachment the consumers have towards brands are also discussed.*

***Keywords:** brand loyalty, emotional attachment, branding, lovemarks, brand love.*

1. Introduction

Under the conditions of intense competition, more and more companies become aware of the need for branding, as a process that can increase profits, make the product and/or service recognizable for customers, by building a customer-brand relationship, which is based on a metaphor that suggests consumers form relationships with brands in the same way they form relations in a social context (see McAlexander et al., 2002). In the present times there is an abundance of products and services and consumers are no longer surprised by good design, functionality, quality and/or attractive price. Nor they are impressed by fast and convenient service. Customers' expectations consist of getting exactly what they have been promised by sales consultants, advertising or internet sites – all of these being necessary conditions for the existence of a business with ambitions for long-term successful development.

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The brand in itself implies establishing a relationship between the product and the customer and suggests a set of qualities and services consumers expect (see Василева, 2014a,b, Горанова, Василева et al., 2015). The loyalty toward a certain brand is created by satisfying the expectations of consumers and even exceeding them.

2. Theoretical background

Consumer behaviour has been of great interest to marketers as it helps researchers understand how consumers think, feel and select from a multitude of branded products. Consumer behavior relates to much more than just how a customer buys certain brands. It involves understanding the set of decisions (what, why, when, how much and how often) that the specific consumer makes over time (see Reinartz et al., 2004). It is also important to know how the customer reacts towards different product features, price, communication, in order to ensure strong competitive advantage.

Despite the fact that consumers interact with numerous brands in their lives, they develop an intense emotional attachment to a few of them (see Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The possibility for customers to develop a strong emotional attachments to brands is interesting and has its roots in the attachment theory in psychology, which suggests that the degree of emotional attachment to an object predicts the nature of an individual's interaction with the object (see Bowlby, 1980). This means that individuals who are strongly attached to a specific person are more likely to be committed to, invest in, and make sacrifices for that person (Bowlby, 1980). Similarly, the emotional attachment of customers' to a certain brand may predict their commitment to the brand (brand loyalty) and/or their willingness to make financial sacrifices in order to obtain it (to pay a price premium, for example).

Scientists have for decades studied how consumers form "like-dislike" attitudes towards different brands. In recent years, however, there is a great interest – among both practitioners and academics – in consumers' "love" for brands. Among practitioners, the book *Lovemarks* by Kevin Roberts (2005) is a logical result of the increased interest in this topic. Research on brand love and related constructs has also been significant (see Thomson et al., 2005). Results show that brand love is associated with positive word-of-mouth and brand loyalty (MacInnis & Park, 2005), willingness to pay a price premium (Thomson et al., 2005), forgiveness of brand failures (Bauer et al.2009).

All of the abovementioned suggests that brand love is an interesting marketing topic. However, there is no agreement as to what brand love is. Moreover, the existing definitions of brand love suggest that it has from one (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) to eleven dimensions (Albert et al., 2008). It should also be noted that most of the papers present different conceptualizations.

3. The self expansion theory and the emotional attachment theory

In order to understand the relationship between the brand and the consumer, it is relevant to study the self-expansion theory. This theory integrates Eastern psychology's interpretation on the evolution of the self and the nature of love and emphasizes a central motive in which individuals expand their selves to be more than they are, by acquiring

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resources and identities to improve their capacity to achieve goals (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). Originally proposed by Aron and Aron (1986), the self-expansion model is a conceptual framework that attempts to describe how people think, feel and act in the context of close relationships.

The pioneering work on attachment has been conducted by Bowlby (1980). According to Bowlby's research, an attachment is an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object. Considering this, in the current paper, a brand attachment – the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self – can be defined as a long-lasting, commitment inducing bond between the brand and the consumer. Consistent with the attachment theory this bond is illustrated by accessible memory network that involves thoughts and feelings about the certain brand and the relationship of the brand to the self (Mikulincer and Shaver, 2007). On the one hand, as a construct that describes the strength of the bond connecting the consumer with the brand, attachment is critical because it should affect behaviors that foster brand profitability and customer lifetime value (Thomson et al., 2005). Marketers, on the other hand, have long addressed the constructs of attitude and strength as key antecedents to consumer behavior. In this paper the authors define attitude as the degree of positivity or negativity with which an attitude object (e.g. a brand) is evaluated.

The *ten key insights about emotions* that aid understanding of the consumers response to marketing are, as follows: 1) Brand emotions are felt mental and/or physical experiences of arousal towards a brand. 2) Brand emotions and the feelings associated with them originate from a brand's total communication. 3) Brand emotions can be personal, private and difficult to articulate. 4) There are certain basic and universal emotions, but emotional expression is subtle and highly valuable. 5) Brand emotions generate conscious feelings and rational judgments, but are typically unconscious connections. 6) The most effective method to understand emotions is through interviewing. 7) Emotions are limited to those which are conventionally coded and understood in everyday life. 8) Two pathways in response to the emotional stimuli in brand communication are cognitive and emotional. 9) Emotional responses to brands, purchasing and consumption are also the result of time, brand differentiation and attention. 10) Emotional pathways in many product fields are usually rapid and impulsive (The Attraction of Lovemarks - Kevin Roberts; <http://www.saatchikevin.com>).

The emotional attachment of individuals' toward a specific person predicts their commitment – the degree to which an individual views the relationship from a long-term perspective and has a willingness to stay with the relationship even when things are difficult (van Lange et al., 1997) – to the relationship with this person (Drigotas & Rusbult, 1992). In the context of marketing an appropriate indicator of commitment is the extent to which the individual remains loyal to the brand (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999). Considering all of the above mentioned, a measure of emotional attachment should predict customers' commitment to a certain brand, such as their loyalty to that brand.

4. Brand loyalty

Brand loyalty has been a subject of many marketing research and a reason for discussions in scientific circles. Some of the questions, linked to this issue, relate to what loyalty is; whether it occurs as a result of a certain consumer attitude (attitudinal) toward a

branded product; whether it is a result of a repetitive behavior (behavioral) or a combination of both; whether there is only one type of loyalty; whether there is a link between the types of loyalty and the products and/or services that are sold under a certain brand. The amount of purchases of a certain brand is the basis for behavioral perspective, while consumer dispositions and preferences towards that particular brand provide the basis for attitudinal perspective of brand loyalty.

Brand loyalty can be defined as how likely a customer will be to switch to another brand, especially when that brand makes a change in price, product features, communication, or distribution programs (Aaker, 1991). Keller (2003), however, scrutinizes brand loyalty as the relationship between the customer and the brand. These definitions point out that brand loyalty is an aspect of consumer behavior that is expressed in a certain degree of attachment from the consumer to a brand, based on its real or imagined superiority, as a result of which the customer repeatedly buys this specific brand although there are many alternatives on the market.

The perception of brand loyalty represents a general concept which defines customers overall buying behavior patterns within a product class. Brand loyalty can induce a higher perceived quality, stronger associations, or increase awareness. This means that brand loyalty is both an input and an output of brand equity and it is both influenced by and influences the other dimensions of brand equity (see Василева, 2016; Горанова & Василева, 2017). It should be noted that brand loyalty is different from other brand equity dimensions. Loyalty toward a brand is conditioned by previous purchase and experience, while awareness, associations and/or perceived quality may be present even if the brand has not been previously used.

A proper understanding of the brand loyalty concept is essential for the companies that aim to build and manage their brands. The concept of brand loyalty must therefore be distinguished from other manifestations in consumer behavior and other market circumstances.

The conceptualisation of the loyalty construct may be divided into two approaches, a behavioural and an attitudinal approach (see Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978; Samuelson & Sandvik, 1997). Some researchers emphasise the role of mental processes in building brand loyalty and believe that customers engage in extensive problemsolving behaviour that involves brand and attribute comparisons and leads to strong attitudinal preference and repeat purchase behaviour (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1994). According to Dick and Basu (1994), however, a favorable attitude shaped by a positive consumption experience leads to brand loyalty, defined in terms of attitudinal and behavioral perspectives. Keller (1993) in his turn states that in terms of the attitudinal perspective, brand loyalty can evoke when customers have favorable beliefs about and attitudes towards a brand. Similarly, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) support the notion that attitudinal brand loyalty taps into commitment, reflecting willingness to keep or maintain a positive relationship with a brand. In terms of the behavioral perspective of brand loyalty, Aaker (1991) explains that brand loyalty should be measured by the number of brands purchased, percent of purchases and future purchase intentions of the consumers. The five levels of brand loyalty, identified by Aaker (1991), are shown on Figure 1.

Figure 1. The brand loyalty pyramid



Source: Aaker (1991); EURIB (www.eurib.org)

Brand loyalty should reflect the necessary and sufficient conditions that define this phenomenon (see Jacoby & Kyner, 1973): *Brand loyalty consists of both a behavioral component and an attitudinal component and making multiple brand purchases is a result of real or imaginative brand superiority.*Consumers' attitude and behavior are influenced, provoked and not accidental. If the repurchase behavior is accidental and not influenced, the studies about loyalty will have no management applications.*Multiple buying behavior as an indicator of brand loyalty. However, brand loyalty research that focus on multiple purchases, examine the outcome rather than the cause of the behavior.*Verbal buying intentions or preference claims are insignificant to brand loyalty – they must be supported by real buyback behaviour.*Brand loyalty is just a form of multiple buying. This means that observing, studying and measuring multiple buying behavior will not give information about the existence or absence of brand loyalty.*Brand loyalty includes preference of one or several brands. Loyalty toward a single brand, however, is rare. Customers usually sticks to several brands in a product category and develop a certain degree of loyalty to all of them.*Brand loyalty implies not only choosing certain brand(s), but also rejecting others. There must be a choice for the consumers, an opportunity to chose another brand, so that they are able to show that they are loyal to that specific brand.

5. Brand love and Lovemarks

Brand love is a recent marketing construct that has been the object of limited attention. However, it seems to attract a steadily growing interest among both academics and practitioners. Consistent with the notion that consumers may attribute human characteristics to brands (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998), the academic community started paying attention to the concept of love. Practitioners (Roberts, 2005, 2006) express interest in the concept as well.

Brand love can be defined as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a person has for a particular trade name” (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 5). It should be noted that, among academics, brand love attracts interest as a construct in its own right and as a dimension of broader constructs such as brand relationship quality and emotional

attachment. Fournier (1998) states that consumers develop and maintain strong relationships with brands and proposes six major categories of relationships, including love and passion, defined as a richer, deeper, more long-lasting feeling than simple preference. According to other studies of brand love (Ahuvia, 2005), it includes passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand and declarations of love for the brand. All of these studies help to better understand the construct of love in a consumer behavior context. However, they all have theoretical, methodological, and managerial limitations.

The autours of the current reserch consider that it is important to emphasise the fact that the study of love in marketing employs two main frameworks, namely: 1) the interpersonal theory of love applied to consumer situations (Ahuvia, 1993) and 2) an empirical approach that consists of a conceptualization of customers' declarations of love toward specific brand(s) (Fournier, 1998). It should be noted that the second framework is mostly theoretical, meaning interpretations based on this approach are more or less vulnerable to criticism.

Marketers have already picked up the idea of brand love. Moreover, in marketing literature, there are some hints that the emotion of love plays a major role for creating a strong bond between a customer and a brand. An example of making this idea work in practise are Roberts' (2005, 2006) "Lovemarks" - a product, service or entity that inspires loyalty beyond reason. Roberts (2005, 2006) states that the great brand journey is coming to an end: it is time to find a new concept with greater emotional potency. Just as products evolved to carry trademarks, and trademarks evolved into brands, now it is time for brands to evolve into "Lovemarks," which are "the next evolution in branding." Indeed brands are emotional stimuli and receive an emotional response, but does that qualify them as Lovemarks? Lovemarks are about building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers; specifically, encouraging the consumer to love the brand, or to have "loyalty beyond reason" (Roberts, 2005, 2006) for the brand. Table 1 summarises the difference between brands and Lovemarks.

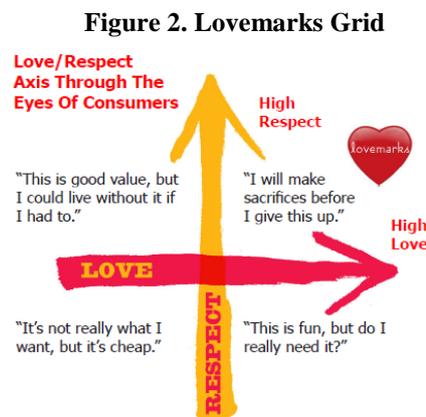
Table 1. The difference between brands and Lovemarks

Brands	Lovemarks
Information	Relationship
Recognized by consumers	Loved by people
Generic	Personal
Presents a narrative	Creates a love story
The promise of quality	The touch of sensuality
Symbolic	Iconic
Defined	Infused
Statement	Story
Defined attributes	Wrapped in mystery
Values	Spirit
Professional	Passionately creative
Advertising agency	Ideas company

Source: Roberts (2005)

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Lovemarks concept is based on the idea that brands are tired, conservative, and cannot understand new customers. According to Roberts (2005, 2006) people are driven by emotions rather than by their rational senses. Thus brands cannot connect with them unless they follow this new trail. The model, developed by Roberts (2005, 2006) is the Lovemark grid (see Figure 2). According to this model any product or service can be assessed by its location on a love/respect axis. Goods and services with low love, low respect ratings are commodities; those with low respect and high love are fads, and those with high respect and low love are brands. But a product that is high in love and high in respect has the status of Lovemark (Roberts, 2005, 2006).



Source: Roberts (2009)

Lovemarks: give birth to great stories; bring the past, present, and future together; tap into people's dreams; celebrate myths and icons and inspire. In order to create a Lovemark marketers have to build not just respect, but to a close relationship. The core component of the Lovemark, however, is "respect" without which there is no chance for a love relationship. Lovemarks high love is infused by this three intangible ingredients that are difficult to imitate. These are as follows "mystery, sensuality and intimacy". The three combined clarify why consumers develop deep emotional attachment towards a brand. Mystery keeps you going back for more and "keeps you guessing" (Roberts, 2005, 2006). Sensuality is "the fast track to human emotions" and the sensual design elements of objects, scent, texture and flavour, overtly exaggerated beyond the use aspects of the object, will influence response over and above the more "rational" product arguments (better, stronger, newer, cheaper...). Intimacy consists of commitment, empathy and passion.

Packaging, colors, smell, among others brand elements, are important in branding (see Василева, 2015). Although not all brands consider all of the senses in order to engage consumers, Lovemarks do include these senses in their branding strategy. Roberts (2005, 2006) explains that consumers are driven by emotion and not by reason and that this, including the all of different senses, is important for forming a Lovemark. Roberts also states that consumers make 80% of their decisions based on emotions and that those emotions lead to strong brand loyalty, as well as brand attachment (Roberts, 2005, 2006).

6. About the relationships between brand loyalty and the Lovemark experience

It should be noted that the existing marketing literature does not adequately distinguish between the love emotion and the love relationship. In accordance with Richins' paper (1997), the authors of the research consider that the love emotion is a single, specific feeling, akin to affection, which, like all emotions, is short term and episodic. Contrary to this statement, the love relationship can last longer and involves different affective, cognitive and behavioral experiences (Fournier, 1998). Some research of brand love study the love emotion and others – the love relationship. This distinction, however, is rarely acknowledged.

As it has already been discussed in this paper one way to define loyalty is through attachment. Thus if a consumer is loyal to a brand (consistently purchases and chooses the brand over competitors) – attachment is evident – the customer has an affinity for the brand and that affinity can be discussed in terms of self-concept. In relation to the previous is the definition of Tasaki et al. (1992), according to whom attachment relates to how an object “is used by that individual to maintain his or her self-concept” (p. 158). Consequently if the consumer associates a brand with who they are, the loyalty toward that brand should be stronger.

Marketing research have empirically support Dick and Basu's (1994) conceptual model of consequences of brand loyalty. In their papers Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) and Taylor et al. (2004) state that brand affect (positive emotional responses toward a brand) influences brand trust, which consists of beliefs of reliability, quality, willingness to rely on, dependence, trustworthiness, security, and honesty. Based on the definitions for brand affect and trust, it can be concluded that brand affect is comparable to brand love and brand trust reflects the concept of brand respect, suggested by Roberts (2005, 2006). The abovementioned papers have found that brand affect (love) influences both attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty. This finding is supported by other marketing research papers (see Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

7. Conclusion

The current paper provides a clarification of the relationships among constructs that marketing specialists may find useful when making decisions about company's marketing and brand management. The relationships among brand love and brand loyalty are discussed in detail. The current study also includes the Lovemark experience (high brand love and respect). Based on the findings in this paper and consistent with Roberts' (2005, 2006) Lovemarks – positive cognitive and emotional experiences contribute to the Lovemark experience, marketing practitioners should build mystery, sensuality, and intimacy into a brand experience in order to ensure brand loyalty.

It should be noted that this research does not consider variables that express neutral and/or negative affect about the brand in order to define brand love (such as brand hate and others). Future papers in this topic may consider other antecedents and/or consequents of brand love (for example brand personality, credibility and customers' willingness to sacrifice). In addition to the abovementioned, different (product) categories and/or brands have be a part of the research context. Finally, when enough information on

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the discussed subject, namely brand love, is gathered, proposing a typology of the different types of brand love will be possible.

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LJUBAV PREMA BRENDU: ISTRAŽIVANJE LOJALNOSTI BRENDU I „LOVEMARK“

Apstrakt: Važnost lojalnosti brendu, za upravljanje marketing strategijama i aktivnostima, od posebnog je značaja za kompanije, jer je konkurencija jaka; malo je diferencijacije između brendiranih proizvoda; potrošači su konstantno pod iskušenjem pred atraktivnim ponudama na tržištu. Ovi, kao i drugi faktori, dokazuju da je važno zadržati postojeće lojalne kupce brenda i generisati nove. Cilj istraživanja je istražiti zašto potrošači razvijaju duboku emocionalnu vezu prema brendovima. Sadašnji članak je razvijen upotrebom koncepta "lovemark" - brenda koga potrošači vole - i pokušava da ponudi bolje razumevanje odnosa između potrošača i brenda. Štaviše, razmatrani su i elementi koji utiču na stvaranje lojalnosti i emotivnu vezanost potrošača prema brendovima..

Ključne reči: lojalnost brendu, emocionalna vezanost, brendiranje, „lovemark“, ljubav prema brendu.