

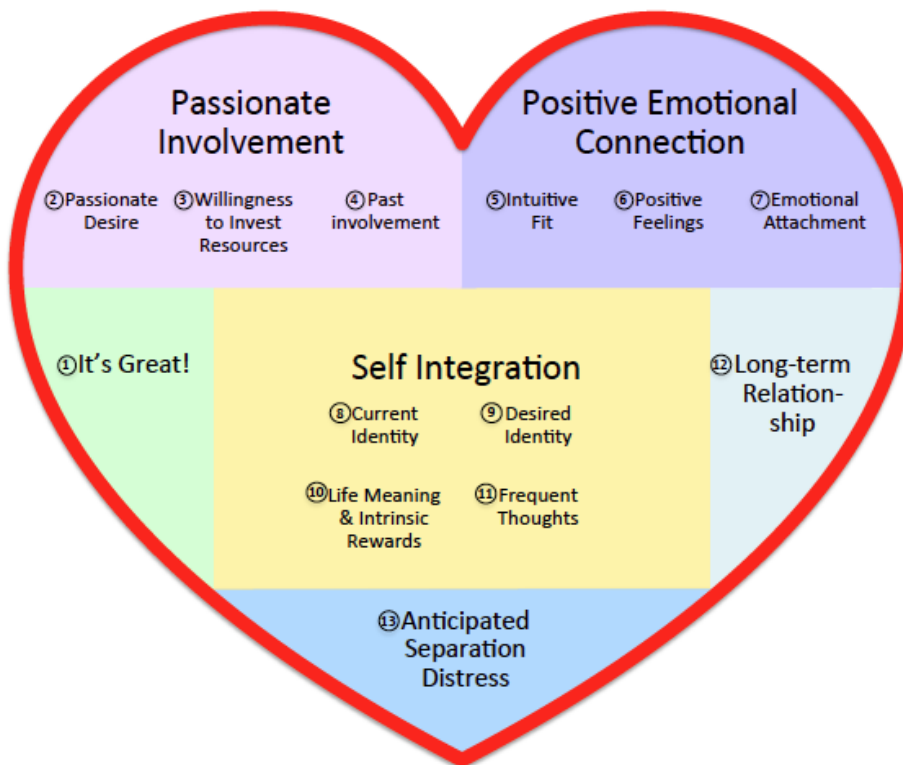
# What is Our Love For Things Made Of? The Brand Love Components

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This article presents a summary of the components that make up non-interpersonal love. I first uncovered these elements of love in the 1990s (Ahuvia, 1993) and over the years, often working with Rajeev Batra and Richard Bagozzi from the Ross School of Business, have refined them to their current state<sup>1</sup> (Ahuvia, Bagozzi, & Batra, 2012, 2014, Ahuvia, Batra, & Bagozzi, 2008, 2009; Bagozzi, Batra, & Ahuvia, 2016; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012), see figure 1.

Figure 1. Brand Love



<sup>1</sup> Most of this research uses the term “brand love” which is simply non-interpersonal love when the thing someone loves is a brand, product or possession.

## 1. It's Great!

Not only did respondents tend to see their loved brands as durable and well made, but they excelled at whatever the core feature or benefit of the product category was, and often provided a wide variety of benefits beyond that. Here the respondent explains why his Sandisk mp3 player is only in the sort-of-love category, rather than the love category. This is very typical of respondents who said that simply knowing a better alternative product exists is enough to mean that they don't truly love the product they have.

Respondent 13: I wouldn't really say I loved it. Why? . . . Because it's my second mp3 player because the other one didn't hold as much as I wanted and this holds more music and stuff, but *since there's better things out there and I had to settle on this one due to financial reasons, I guess that's why it's not in the love pile.* (Italics added)

Interviewer: Because you can imagine something that you really wanted more. Respondent 13: Yes.

Interviewer: And you anticipate if you get the finances to buy the ipod...

Respondent 13: I anticipate it would be in the love pile.

## 2. Passionate Desire

Respondents talked about having a compelling passionate desire for that item. For example, a man talked about some of his favorite clothes: "I saw them, and it's like one of those things when you're in a store, and you see something and it screams your name, you have to buy it. That's the way I feel about these clothes" (M, publishing, 23). Respondents also talked about a lack of this passionate desire as being a reason why they didn't really love something:

Interviewer: Why don't you love Sony?

Respondent: It does the job but it doesn't excite me. There's no inspiration involved.

## 3. Willingness to Invest Resources

Respondents often invested high levels of time, energy and money into loved brands. The impact of price on love seemed to differ slightly between lower and higher priced items. For lower priced items, being considered a bargain was a commonly mentioned virtue of loved brands. If a higher priced brand was seen as truly loved, it was always considered worth the price and sometimes the price was mentioned as making the product more special to the consumer.

Respondent: They are priced higher . . . but I think it's worth it. . . . Even their cheapest mp3 player is still pricey compared to any other one you can get . . . But a lot of times it's worth it.

#### **4. Past Involvement**

Having frequent interaction with a brand was widely seen as an important attribute of love. Several respondents talked about how the mere fact that they used product X more than product Y, led them to say that they loved product X more than they loved product Y. This was true even if they understood that their greater use was caused by a totally exogenous factor that had no bearing on the merits of the two products. Here, for example, we see a case where a shift in lifestyle from having a commute to not having a commute, led this respondent to use her iPod less, and from this she concludes that she now loves it less.

Respondent: I used to like the iPod more. For example I don't even know where it is right now. I've been traveling so I haven't used it for at least three weeks, so it's not top of mind. When I was commuting to work it was essential. It was part of my daily life, I listened to it to and from all the time. Now I live one block from school, so I don't use it every day like I used to. I use it when I go to the gym, which is much less frequently.

Interviewer: If I had asked you this question and it was a while ago when you were using the iPod all the time.

Respondent: I would have said I loved it.

Interviewer: You would have said you loved it then. But now you're not using it as much, and so you wouldn't say you loved it.

Respondent: Is it a huge part of my daily life? Is it really changing the way I live my life? Commuting, it transformed my commuting experience. To be able to have that with me just made the time fly. To go anywhere and do anything just having my favorite music with me.

#### **5. Intuitive Fit**

Respondents talked about a sense of natural fit and harmony between themselves and the brands they loved. This sense of natural fit with a brand was sometimes expressed as *love at first sight*.

Respondent: I remember when I was really young (Victoria's Secret) had an Aquarius body lotion, and this is one of my first memories of ever setting foot in there. And I thought, I'm an Aquarius, out of all the smells of all the different signs, that was the one that I loved the most too. I knew that before even seeing it was Aquarius. I'm like, '*This was for me and they knew it.*'

## 6. Positive Feelings

People loved brands that made them feel good.

Respondent: When I see other non-electric toothbrushes I feel happy that I have a Sonicare toothbrush because . . . I think that I'm actually doing something good for my teeth. So it's that sort of 'yeah' feel good kind of love.

Here another respondent explains why Canon is a better example of love than is fresh seafood.

Respondent: Because as much as I like to eat, I like to take pictures more. I get so much enjoyment out of that hobby. . . . And I get a lot of enjoyment with sharing the images with friends and family

## 7. Emotional Attachment

Feeling bonded with, and emotionally attached to a brand was an important aspect of love. This can be seen in the response of a woman who broke a camera she loved.

Respondent: I had a digital camera for years. It was big, chunky, old fashioned, embarrassing. This summer I decided I needed a new one. I do extensive research when I buy something new, so I looked at consumer reports, looked at these other sources, figured out this one was the best. It's very slim, very small, I can take it anywhere, it has this huge screen so I constantly show it off to friends. It's just in my purse, wherever I am I pull it out, I can show photos that I've taken recently to people. I really like it.

I actually lost this camera this summer.

Interviewer: What was it like when you lost it?

Respondent: I bought it and immediately, like that next weekend . . . it was a gift from my parents, I went and purchased it but they paid for it. Went to the beach with friends, we were outdoors, and it fell in the water. I was upset, I was crying.

Interviewer: Emotionally it was a problem.

Respondent: Oh yah. It's only a \$200 camera so I actually went back out and bought another one. So it wasn't the money it was, Mom and Dad bought this, I finally bought this after years of waiting, it was perfect for me, and you know.

And there no, there were almost no pictures on there. So it wasn't that. I was telling friends "I don't know why I'm so upset, but I am."

## **8 & 9. Current and Desired Identity**

The brands we love are both self-expressive and aspirational; i.e. they express who we are and who we hope to become. Here the respondent explains why she considered an art-graphic T-shirt from Express to be something she loved, but didn't feel that way about her New Balance shoes.

Respondent: The t-shirts I got from Express I think they're really unique. They were only available for only a limited time. They're just really artsy and really pretty they say something about my style and whatnot, whereas the shoe is just because it fits. I mean, it fits really well which is important but it doesn't really say anything about me.

## **10. Life Meaning & Intrinsic Rewards**

In the early research life meaning and intrinsic rewards were seen as separate components of brand love. But later structural equations modeling found that they are so strongly associated with each other that they can be seen as a single phenomena.

“Life meaning” refers to the fact that the brands we love help make our lives more meaningful. Respondents saw love as a deep and profound experience. So while loved brands were praised for providing a wide variety of benefits such as comfort, transportation, entertainment, exercise, relaxation and so on, items were more likely to be loved when they also connected to something the respondent felt was ‘deeper’ such as self actualization, close interpersonal relationships, existential meaning, or religious or cultural identities.

Here the respondent talks about a pair of earmuffs that have many of the attributes associated with love, yet explains that “they're just earmuffs, so I don't love them”. She then contrasts the earmuffs with things which might better qualify as love, among them “giving back to others, volunteering”. I interpret the “they're just earmuffs” comment, especially in the context of the contrast she makes with volunteering, as indicating that her relationship with the earmuffs is not ‘deep’ enough to qualify as love. That is to say it's too superficial, too lacking in ethically significant content found in activities like volunteering, to be considered love.

Respondent: These I've had for . . . three or four years, and I love them every year and they are great and functional and they're fashionable and they're pretty classic so they haven't gone out of style. I wear them every day in the winter months so I spend a lot of time with them. But at the same time they're just earmuffs. . . .

Interviewer: And what is it that kept them out of even the sort-of-love pile?

Respondent: Clothes are great but they aren't something that I'm so passionate about.

Interviewer: So the things that you are more passionate about are . . . ?

Respondent: Family, friends . . . maybe giving back to others, volunteering. . . I really like volunteering, it makes me happy.

The notion of "intrinsic rewards" is based on the common distinction between performing an act 'to get something' (extrinsic) as opposed to doing it because 'you love it' (intrinsic). A loved brand provides intrinsic rewards when it creates psychological states such as happiness, which are perceived as being part and parcel of using the product or performing the action (e.g., using this brand is pleasurable). Loved brands commonly provided both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards, so providing extrinsic rewards was not a problem per se. But, when brands provided *only* extrinsic rewards, respondents felt they didn't really love the brand but rather were just using it to get something else that they did love. Here a respondent starts out by explaining why she enjoys, but does not love, the band Fall Out Boy. In her comments we see a chain of extrinsically rewarding things that aren't loved, but that eventually end in the what working out "does for me" which is intrinsically valuable and hence loved.

Respondent: I enjoy (Fall Out Boy's) music . . . Interviewer: Is music important to you?

Respondent: Not that important. I like certain things. More so that if I want to go to the gym and work out, it's more like you need music to help you work out . .

. . it helps me put more effort into working out. Because it will keep me distracted, or the faster beats will keep me moving my legs faster.

Interviewer: Would you say that you love working out?

Respondent: No, but *I love* what it does for me. It makes you feel better about yourself. You don't feel so lazy like an unaccomplished couch potato. . . . It gives you energy rather than taking it away. It makes you feel better. . . . (Italics added)

## 11. Frequent Thoughts

Having frequent thoughts about a brand is an important attribute of love. In the earlier qualitative research, having frequent thoughts about a loved brand was combined with frequent use of the brand to create a single brand love component called 'frequent thought and use'. However, later structural equations models showed that these were actually two separate aspects of brand love. As an example, this respondent talks about why he does not love his shoes and his DVD player. Earlier in the interview he

explained that they are excellent shoes and an excellent DVD player. Below he explains that although he uses both of them fairly frequently, he doesn't think about them all that much, and this lack of mental attention to them explains why he doesn't love them.

Respondent: Well . . . when you're wearing shoes, if you throw on your shoes to go to the mall, you're not thinking with each step, 'Wow these are really comfortable.' You just kind of put them on. . . . And kind of the same thing with the DVD player: once you put a movie on, at least to me, I don't think anymore about that DVD player. . . . I just put it on and then it becomes something I don't even think about. I just watch the movie and forget about the DVD player. Same thing with the shoes: I put them on and I do what I need to do and then I don't think about it.

## 12. Length of Use

While people can love things that they have just been introduced to, having a long history with a brand can nonetheless help create a deeper sense of love for it. This shared history often gives the loved object an important place in the respondent's life story, and suggests that consumers are likely to remain loyal to the brand in the future.

The impact of length of use on perceived brand love can be seen in the way one respondent classified Ecco shoes. Respondents were asked to list a brand in a variety of categories such as automotive, food, etc. or which met various criteria such as something they had owned for a long time, something that they did not own, etc. Respondents were allowed to use the same brand or product in more than one instance if it fit more than one criterion. One respondent listed Ecco shoes twice: when he thought of Ecco shoes simply as a fashion brand he explained that he didn't really love them. Then when asked to name a brand he had used for a long time he again mentioned Ecco, and this time decided that he did in fact love them, in part because of the long history he had with them.

## 13. Anticipated Separation Distress

Anticipated separation distress simply means that if the loved brand were to go away, the person would feel very bad. When trying to decide if they loved something, respondents would frequently use a mental test where they would try to anticipate how much they would miss it if it went away. They would only say they truly loved something if they "couldn't live without it".

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