

Emotional Association with a Brand: A Link that Lasts in Consumers' Memory Through Experience

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Abstract

Experience is that element which resides in the human mind and heart for a lifetime. Whenever the chapters of memories open, emotions are evoked, narrating whether the incident experienced was pleasurable or not. The purpose of this paper was to provide today's marketers with an outlook on how experiences provided by products and services can entangle customers into emotional association with brands. The study also examined the effect of customers' emotional association with a brand on satisfaction. The review of literature identified growing evidence of effect of product dimensions on customers' emotional association with a brand. This paper has shown empirically how emotions primarily work on building customers' emotional association with a brand.

Keywords: consumer, experience, product, brand, emotional association, customer satisfaction

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Customers today seek experiences with which they can associate themselves emotionally. According to Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005), the degree of emotional association the customer experiences with an object predicts his/her nature of emotional interaction with that object. Chaudhari and Holbrook (2001) observed that when customers experience the emotional element of pleasure in the usage of products, they will have an increased favourable effect towards the brands consumed by them. Therefore, organizations should perceive customer's interaction with their goods and services as a source of creating emotional association with a brand. This will not only strengthen the consumer-brand relationship, but will also help marketers to predict the consumer's commitment to the brand (e.g., brand loyalty) and their willingness to make financial sacrifices, for example, readiness to pay a price premium in order to attain it (Fournier 1998; Thomson et al., 2005). This shows that when a consumer buys a product, he/she learns to appreciate its added value and begins to form an emotional preference for the brand (Palmer, 2010).

For achieving this, an organization needs to focus not only on the utilitarian value provided by the product, but also on the hedonic value associated with emotions. Here, hedonic value is perceived as sensations derived from the functioning of the product (Chaudhari & Holbrook , 2001 ; Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003). Today's customer is not only interested in goal directed activities such as searching for information, evaluating available options, and making decisions, but is looking for experiences from products and services that can associate them emotionally with the consumed brands (Frow & Pyne, 2007; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). The present article proposes that consumers purchase a brand on the basis of their interactions with a product, that is, the utility and experiential value the product holds for them. The evaluation of these dimensions evokes emotions which consumers associate with brands and this acts as a stepping stone in measuring satisfaction. Thus, the objective of the present paper is to find out the types of emotions customers associate with brands and to examine whether the elicitation of emotions leads to satisfaction.

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Literature Review

Experience occurs when interaction between the characteristics of the user (e.g., personality, skills, background, cultural values, and motives) and those of the product (e.g., shape, texture, colour, and behaviour) takes place. This includes (a) instrumental interaction that involves using, operating, and managing products, (b) non-instrumental interaction, which refers to the interactions that do not directly serve a function in operating a product, such as playing with or caressing the product, and (c) non-physical interaction, which refers to fantasizing about, remembering, or anticipating usage of a product for one can anticipate interaction ("I expect this handle to break when I push it too hard") or fantasies about interaction ("My computer thinks it knows what I want, but it does not have a clue") (Desmet & Hekkert, 2007 ; Hoch & Ha, 1986). This provides evidence that consumers purchase products for two basic reasons - first for consummatory affective gratification and secondly for instrumental reasons (Batra & Ahota, 1990). These reasons can be defined as two basic dimensions of a product, that is, utilitarian and hedonic, where utilitarian refers to the performance of the product in everyday life of the consumer, and hedonic defines the pleasure potential of the product ; when these elements are experienced, they generate brand-level effects such as brand loyalty or brand performance (Chaudhari & Holbrook, 2001).

Thus, it is the social, inventive, aesthetic, and the operational dimensions of the product that contribute towards building consumer emotional association with a brand (Margolin, 1997). A brand is something that identifies the maker of a product and allows the consumer to assign responsibility to a particular manufacturer. So, a brand signifies a joint project between a manufacturer and his customers who associate with a brand when the image created by the manufacturer matches their needs, values, and lifestyles (Palmer, 2010 ; Sreedhar & Singh, 2006). Moreover, the consumers' experience with a brand of a particular product category, whether in terms of actual use or simply an understanding of it also results in an emotional association in memory. By measuring the consumer-brand emotional association, the marketers can better understand and develop an advertising communication strategy for their brand (Percy, Hansen, & Randrup, 2004). An emotional association not only attaches the consumer with the brand, but also elicits feelings such as affection, passion, and connection towards that brand (Thomson et al., 2005). Thus, a good experience provided by the product makes the customer feel much closer to the brand and evokes positive internal feelings that help to register the brand in the memory of the customer (Valencia, 2005).

The emotions consumers associate with a brand can be defined as that experiential aspect of consumer behaviour which focuses on symbolic, hedonic, and aesthetic nature of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). These emotions are aroused when the consumer encounters a product, brand, or any other marketing stimuli, or by his thinking about them. Havlena and Holbrook (1986) believed that in addition to the social world, many product or usage situations or brand choices produce subjective or emotional reactions in the consumer. Thus, emotions are elicited not only by the product's aesthetics, but also by other aspects, such as the product's function, brand, behaviour, and associated meanings (Desmet, 2003).

Various authors have built the order of emotions by defining them as a set of basic or fundamental emotions (Richins, 1997). For example, Izard's (1977) differential emotion scale (DES) describes 10 emotions as the basic emotions: interest, joy, surprise, sadness, anger, disgust, contempt, fear, shame/shyness, and guilt. Plutchik (1980) identified eight emotions consisting of fear, anger, joy, sadness, acceptance, disgust, expectancy, and surprise known as 'primary emotions'. In the same way, Mehrabian and Russell (1974) developed dimensions of emotion known as PAD dimensions - pleasure, arousal, and dominance, reflecting a variety of emotions or emotional categories. In addition to this, Tomkin (1962) worked with eight basic dimensions - surprise, interest, joy, rage, fear, disgust, shame, and anguish; Ekman (1992) described a list of six feelings covering: happiness, disgust, anger, fear, surprise, and sadness.

In addition to the development of basic emotions, another type of response related to emotional arousal involves advertisements. Holbrook and Batra (1987) provided a 52-item scale for measuring the dimensions of emotions provoked by advertisements and found that positive and negative emotions are the two dimensions elicited by advertisements. Furthermore, Olney, Holbrook, and Batra (1991) studied the effect of emotions in establishing the relation between advertisement content and consumer attitude. Edell and Burke (1987) examined the role of

emotions in the prediction of advertisement effectiveness. Moreover, the researchers measured the specific emotion the consumer experiences during consumption. Schifferstein and Hekkert (2007) examined the relationship between emotion and consumption of the product. Oliver (1999) found that the consumption of automobiles and cable pay television (CATV) subscription elicits positive and negative emotions. On measuring product-consumption emotional responses, Oliver (1993) found that it is the positive and negative affectivity that mediates the effects of product attributes on satisfaction. Furthermore, Mano and Oliver (1993) investigated the role of evaluations, feelings, and satisfaction in the post consumption behaviour. Westbrook (1987) revealed that emotion and consumption relationship leads to several central aspects of post purchase processes such as word of mouth and complaint behaviour. Thus, positive and negative affects are ever-present in the experience of emotions that impacts both behavioural intentions and actual behaviour of consumers towards consumption of a product (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005; Nyer, 1997). Importantly, Richins (1997) stated that emotions are context specific, and the emotions that arise in the context of intimate interpersonal relationships are likely to be different in intensity and quality from the emotions experienced when say, buying a pair of shoes.

Moreover, there have been arguments on using the appropriate scale to measure consumption related emotions as many consumer behaviour scholars have based much of their work on frameworks of emotions developed in psychology, which are largely defined through studies of body and facial expression known as basic emotions and comprises of the affect programme that is fundamental to all humans and has a limited involvement in the actual cognitive process controlling for long-term action. Thus, it has been suggested that the focus should be on secondary emotions as these are acquired and triggered by things to which people are associated through experience (Hansen, Christensen, & Lundsteen, 2007 ; Percy et al., 2004 ; Richins, 1997).

On the basis of the above discussion, we can say that emotions are the internal feelings that are shaped by social interactions and long term experiences. Therefore, marketers should understand that if individuals use interactions and experiences to build an emotional bond with the social world, then they can use the same to construct an emotional association with a brand. Moreover, when consumers experience a series of pleasurable experiences and emotions in a consumption process, they identify a certain level of satisfaction, which is more likely to result from using a brand. The emotions evoked by brands during product consumption or usage are so strong that consumers become emotionally attached to brands and are likely to be satisfied with the same, and are expected to purchase those brands again and again (Chaudhari & Holbrook, 2001). Thus, satisfaction results from the good experiences a customer has while using a brand, and this is enough to make an emotional association in the mind of the consumer. Moreover, satisfaction has been regarded as the central mediator of post purchase behaviour such as repurchase intentions, word of mouth intentions, and complaint behaviours (Westbrook, 1987).

Hypotheses Development

➲ **Product Experience and Emotional Association with a Brand :** During the consumption of a product, a customer experiences emotions such as happiness, relief, excitement, worry, sadness, and guilt, and these emotions were empirically examined by Richins (1997). Therefore, it can be said that products elicit emotions characterized by their ability to concurrently evoke positive and negative emotions that connect (i.e. high positive affect and negative affect) consumers' emotional association with brands (Mano & Oliver 1993; Thomson et al. 2005). Therefore, the following hypothesis was framed for the study :

➔ **H1:** Consumers' experiences with products result in emotional associations with brands.

➲ **Relationship Between Satisfaction and Emotional Association with a Brand :** Customer satisfaction is the net result of the good experiences minus the bad ones that result when the gap between customers' expectations and their subsequent experiences has been closed (Meyer & Schwanger, 2007). In order to analyze whether the gap is filled or not, emotions play an important role. A customer who is emotionally associated with a brand is more likely to be satisfied with it. This satisfaction provides a basis for emotional association. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed :

→ **H2:** Satisfaction is positively correlated with emotional association with a brand.

Methodology

For conducting the study, firstly, the existing literature was reviewed for finding the product categories that provide both utilitarian and hedonic experiences to be used for the survey (Batra & Ahotla, 1990 ; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Crowley, Spangenberg, & Kevin, 1991; Percy et al., 2004; Voss et al., 2003 ; Westbrook 1987). Blue jeans was selected as the subject matter for the present study. While selecting blue jeans, the nature of the subject and its daily based need were considered. A total of 150 students, who were pursuing post graduation in different streams, were selected from a university located in the northern region of India.

The survey consisted of a self-administered paper and pencil questionnaire that contained the scales for the measures relevant to the present study and evaluated questions on a 5-point scale (1= “not at all”, 5= “very much”) to measure the degree to which the respondents felt the specific emotion towards their brand for each of the adjectives. Satisfaction with the consumed brand was measured on a 5-point Likert scale. The survey began with an introductory statement about the word 'experience' and was followed by explaining measures associated with a brand - such as emotion and satisfaction.

Measurements

⦿ **Brand Emotions:** Damasio's (1999) 24 item emotion scale was taken to measure brand emotions. This included "desire," "sexy," "arousal," "stimulate," "happy," "fine," "calm," "pretty," "expectant," "pride," "success," "aggressive," "smart," "doubt," "boring," "sad," "pain," "loneliness," "fresh," "relief," "critical," "worry," "annoying," and "fear."

⦿ **Customer Satisfaction :** For measuring customer satisfaction, Barkus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello's (2009) four item model was used, “If I could do it again, I would buy this existing brand again,” “I am satisfied with the brand and its performance,” “My choice to buy this brand has been a nice one,” and “I feel proud about my decision to get this brand.”

To find out the results, factor analysis and regression were applied to the data for the present study. Factor analysis was conducted to test H (1) in order to summarize and reduce the 24 emotion items scale so as to extract a smaller number of factors that represented the original items. Then factor scores were calculated and stored to study the relationship of emotions with satisfaction for testing the H (2). Furthermore, regression analysis was applied where satisfaction was taken as the dependent variable and emotions were considered to be represented by factor scores, which were taken as independent variables in order to find out whether satisfaction is positively correlated with positive (negative) emotions.

⦿ **Data Collection :** A field survey with 150 actual users was conducted for the product category - blue jeans in the month of June 2013. Respondents were first asked if they used 'blue jeans,' and if the respondents qualified for the analysis, they were then invited to participate in the study. The data were collected in three stages. Firstly, the respondents were asked to write down a brand name. Secondly, they were asked to choose the emotions - from the 24 emotion item scale - they associated with the brand name. Thirdly, data were collected on the satisfaction level with the help of a 4- item scale by asking the respondents to choose the statement that well defined their level of satisfaction.

Analysis and Interpretation

It was found that out of 150 questionnaires, 15 questionnaires contained incorrect responses or incomplete information and were not reliable for further analysis, and they were thus not considered for the final analysis.

Table 1. Factor Structure of the Emotion Item Scale

Emotion items	Unhappy	Well Adapted	Elucidate	Attractive	Decisive	Hostile	Vexation
Worry	.674						
Sad	.560						
Doubt	.697						
Boring	.733						
Pain	.598						
Fear	.552						
Happy		.471					
Success		.604					
Smart		.504					
Relief		.511					
Fine		.598					
Fresh		.558					
Expectant		.652					
Desire			.629				
Calm			.700				
Sexy				.841			
Arousal				.540			
Pretty				.360			
Critical					.763		
Loneliness					.685		
Aggressive						-.832	
Stimulate						.411	
Annoying							.647
Eigenvalues	3	2	1	1	1	1	1
Variance	13.2	12.3	7.9	7.5	7.0	5.4	4.8
Cumulative (%)Variance	13	25	33	41	48	53	58

Hence, 135 responses were considered for the final analysis. The data were subject to two different analyses. The first analysis was conducted to determine the kinds of emotions the customers associated with a brand. For this, factor analysis was performed on the 24 item emotion scale. A seven factor solution was obtained, explaining the positive and negative emotions the respondents associated with a brand. The second analysis was conducted to investigate the kind of emotions that led the respondents to report satisfactory or unsatisfactory experiences. For this, regression analysis was conducted, indicating a relationship between emotions (of the respondents) and satisfaction, specifically the effect of positive or negative emotions on the determination of respondents' level of satisfaction. H (1) postulates that emotional association with a brand results from the experience of positive or negative emotions. For this, factor analysis was conducted to find out the kinds of emotions the respondents associated with a brand. Factor analysis using the principal component analysis of the adjectives revealed seven factors with eigen values greater than one, explaining 57% of the variance. However, when the item "pride" (which has communalities less than 0.3) was deleted, the variance increased to 58%.

The Table 1 shows the varimax-rotated solution of items loading above or near 0.5. The results show seven factors, which are explained and labelled as follows: The first factor was labelled as Unhappy and includes items such as worry, sad, doubt, boring, pain, and fear. The second factor was labelled as Well Adapted. It includes the items happy, success, smart, relief, fine, fresh, and expectant. The third factor was named as Elucidate that contains

Table 2. Results of the Regression Analysis

	Unhappy	Well Adapted	Elucidate	Attractive	Decisive	Hostile	Vexation
Beta coefficient	-.155	.264	.279	.096	-.001	.104	-.10
T value	1.959	3.336	3.528	1.213	.010	1.317	1.359
Significant	.052	.001	.001	.228	.992	.190	.177

the items - desire and calm. The variables that loaded on the fourth factor are sexy, arousal, and pretty, and this factor was named as Attractive. The fifth factor had the loading of the variables -critical and loneliness and was named as Decisive. The sixth factor was named as Hostile that involves variables like aggressive and stimulate. The variable that loaded on the seventh factor is annoying, and the factor was named as Vexation. These seven factors describe the emotions the respondents associated with the brands of blue jeans.

On the basis of the review of literature and the factors that were derived, it is suggested that both positive and negative affectivity are the two basic dimensions of emotions that consumers associate with a brand. Various studies have defined positive and negative affect (emotion) as the two dimensions of affect (emotion). For example, Russell (1991) suggested that pleasantness- unpleasantness and arousal-quietness are affect's two primary dimensions. Mano and Oliver (1993) examined positive and negative emotions as the two dimensions that affect the consumers' experiences in a consumption situation. Westbrook (1987) revealed that joy, interest (positive), and anger and disgust (negative) were independent dimensions of affective response to products in use.

In addition, Laros and Steenkamp (2005) identified two types of emotions the customers experienced during usage of a product and named them as the negative affect that includes anger, fear, and shame; and positive affect that includes contentment and happiness. Therefore, the interpretation suggests that the said seven factors can be labelled as positive and negative emotions (Table 1) the respondents associated with a brand of blue jeans. The factors - Well Adapted (Factor 2), Elucidate (Factor 3) , Attractive (Factor 4), and Decisive (Factor 5) depict positivity in emotions, whereas the factors -Unhappy (Factor 1), Hostile (Factor 6) , and Vexation (Factor 7) depict negativity in emotions. This categorization is similar to the one given by Percy et al. (2004). Therefore, the analysis helped us to categorize emotional association with a brand as positive and negative. Thus, H (1) is accepted.

Furthermore, to examine H(2), that is, whether emotional association is a predictor of satisfaction, regression analysis was conducted by taking each of the 24 emotional association items represented by factor scores as independent variables and customer satisfaction as the dependent variable to know which set of emotions affected satisfaction the most at the 10% level of significance. The results show that among the seven emotional association factors - Unhappy, Well Adapted, and Elucidate have a significant coefficient factor; satisfaction has the strongest positive emotional association with Well Adapted, and Elucidate has the strongest negative emotional association with Unhappy.

Evidently, Westbrook (1987) and Oliver (1993) observed that in the consumption process, consumers' positive affect directly relates to satisfaction appraisal or vice-versa. Moreover, the results are in confirmation with the results obtained by Nyer (1997), who examined consumption emotions such as happiness, anger, and sadness and found that these had significant effects on satisfaction. In addition, Mano and Oliver (1993) observed that satisfaction attains the strongest positive (negative) relationship with pleasantness (unpleasantness). Therefore, positive and negative affects directly influence the overall product judgements (Oliver, 1999).

Thus, on the basis of the review of literature and the empirical results, it can be concluded that positive and negative emotional association with a brand has significant effects on satisfaction. The results are shown in the Table 2, which suggests that emotions act as an antecedent to satisfaction. Hence, the H2 is accepted. Marketers should understand that emotions and feelings play an important role in creating memories about the things a human experiences, and this includes brands (Percy et al., 2004). Therefore, the marketers should strive to deliver the right type of experience to the customers with their product and services to build a strong brand that can imbibe the customer's desired thoughts, feelings, images, beliefs, perceptions, opinions, and so on with the brand (Keller, 2003).

Managerial Implications

For creating a superior customer experience, this study has revealed that marketing managers need to shift their focus from a product-and firm centric approach to a personalized customer experience centric approach. In order to achieve this personalization, the marketers should understand the role of emotions in creating an experience with a product. Emotions are the internal feelings that are shaped by social interactions and long term experiences. Therefore, it is proposed that the marketers should understand that if an individual uses interactions to build emotional bonds with the social world, then he/she can use the same to construct an emotional association with a brand.

The present study has demonstrated the relationship between the respondents' processes in experiencing a product and creation of emotional associations with a brand of that product. This will not only connect a consumer with a brand, but will also provide a deep understanding of how consumers' experiences with a product are influenced by their evaluation of products and association of positive and negative emotions. The findings suggest that experiences with products play an important role in influencing consumer purchase motivation, and it is the emotions customers experience with a product that have an impact on their emotional response systems. Thus, the present study has demonstrated the utility of including emotions in experiencing a product.

Conclusion

The main objective of the present study was to measure consumers' emotional association with brands. Based on the premise that consumers are able to articulate the nature of their emotional association with brands, I identified a set of emotions - both positive and negative - the customer experiences during the usage of a product, which leads to brand association. Moreover, it was found that emotions act as mediators in achieving the desired level of satisfaction. Thus, it is suggested that emotions are the key makers in linking consumers with brands. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the more are the positive emotions the customer experiences with a brand, the more he/she will associate himself/herself with a brand or vice-versa. Thus, the marketers should map and analyze the expectations and emotions of the customers as it is the experience provided by the products or services that leads to the customers' association with brands and builds a series of steps towards satisfaction.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Further Research

This study focused on the role played by emotions in creating an experience with a product. The experience starts with the purchase of a product, enhances with the evaluation of a product, and it gets registered in the mind of the customer with the usage of the product. The following are the limitations of the study : (a) this study focused only on blue jeans ; many other product categories could have been tested for the same purpose. Moreover, the study was conducted using convenience sample with a small sample size, (b) the questionnaire survey was only conducted in Amritsar and targeted only those respondents who shopped for and purchased blue jeans. However, the viewpoints from the consumers in other areas of Amritsar or other cities were not considered due to time and other constraints.

The present study focused on the measurement of customer experience created by the usage of a product. The study did not examine the role of service/servicescape, consumption, and brand in the measurement of the concept of customer experience. Therefore, this study recommends that future research should be carried out to analyze how customers' experience starts from the search and purchase of a product, and is enhanced with the interaction of servicescape and results in emotional association with a brand (after the customer has purchased a product). Future studies can also examine how customer experience is the result of interaction between consumer construct (personality) and experiential construct (product, servicescape, and brand). When combined, it starts an involvement process that makes a consumer to evaluate the product, service, and brand on hedonic and utilitarian dimensions, that when consumed, elicit emotions. This acts as a (a) stepping stone towards measuring the

satisfaction level of the consumers, (b) can be used to create an emotional association with the brand of that product or service.

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