

TURNING POINT ANALYSIS OF BRAND LOVE TRAJECTORIES

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ABSTRACT

Brand love is a recent consumer construct that examines the passionate and emotional feelings of satisfied consumers. The present study examines the journey that consumers have with their loved brands from the first contact to the present moment through the lens of turning points. Using semi-structured interview and Retrospective Interview Technique (RIT), the present study identifies nine turning points and five different trajectory types. Out of the nine turning points that have been identified, six turning points were found to help the brand love development, and three of the turning points were found to hinder the development of brand love. Further, five patterns of brand love trajectories were inductively categorized, which shows that the formation of brand love does not follow a specific pattern. The trajectories indicate that consumers do not experience love at first sight, thereby suggesting that brand love formation is complex.

INTRODUCTION

Satisfaction has been at the core of all marketing-related activities for a very long time (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Durgee, 1999; Larsen and Wright 2020; Naylor and Kleiser, 2002; Oliver, 1989; Swan, Martin, and Trawick, 2003). However, there have been significant efforts to look for concepts beyond satisfaction, as today's business environment requires constructs over and above satisfaction to improve the financial performance of firms (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Homburg, Wieseke, and Hoyer, 2009). In this vein, Fournier and Mick (1999, p.11) suggested that "satisfaction as love probably constitutes the most intense and profound satisfaction of all."

Brand love, a consumer construct, is defined as the amount of passionate, emotional attachment that satisfied consumers have for their loved brands (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). In other words, brand love can be understood as a construct that explains variation in post-consumption behavior of satisfied consumers (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brand love has been a topic of interest to many researchers in the recent past (e.g., Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012; Rossiter, 2012; Sarkar, 2014). This increase in interest can be attributed to the crucial managerial consequences that the brand love has to offer, such as brand loyalty (Batra et al. 2012; Bairrada, Coelho and Coelho, 2018), positive word of mouth (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Bairrada et al. 2018), willingness to pay a premium (Bairrada et al. 2018), resistance to negative information (Batra et al. 2012), etc.

Though there has been a surge in the research publications on brand love, a literature review suggests that most research on brand love has taken a snapshot approach to capture this phenomenon (Palsuk, Koles, and Hasan, 2019; Langner et al. 2016). In other words, most of the studies on brand love have examined the already formed brand love (Palsuk et al. 2019; Langner, Bruns, Fischer, and Rossiter, 2016) and have not looked at the *trajectory* of brand love (Langner et al. 2016).

The trajectory of brand love is an essential investigation because love is an emotion and, like all the other emotions, it is episodic in nature (Batra et al. 2012; Sternberg, 2003). Hence, brand love is subjected to constant change. As love is dynamic in nature, the consumer–brand relationships that are based on love also change and so do the relational feelings and the underlying behaviors of that relationship (Avtgis, West, and Anderson, 1998). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the cause of change in the trajectories of these relationships (Baxter and Bullis, 1986). This cause of change has been termed as turning points (Bolton, 1961) and they serve as a useful function of describing relational processes and change (Baxter and Bullis, 1986).

The present study contributes to the literature on brand love by examining the dynamic nature of brand love through the lens of turning points. Studying the trajectories of consumer–brand relationships might better the understanding of how relationships evolve, change, refuel, stagnate, redefine, and reduce. Past research on brand love has demonstrated that consumers and brands can also end up in divorce (Hemetsberger, Kittinger-Rosanelli, and Friedmann, 2009). Hence, it can be understood that the intensity of love in consumer–brand relationships can also reduce. An understanding of what causes a reduction of intensity can be a crucial insight for marketers. Thus, the objective of the present study is to understand how love for a brand forms and what causes the reduction in feelings of love for a brand.

Specifically, the present study attempts to answer the below two research questions:

RQ1: *What are the turning points that shape the trajectories of brand love?*

RQ2: *How do brand love trajectories evolve over a period of time?*

Brand love as a concept has been examined in various contexts such as fashion (Joshi and Garg, 2020), wine (Correia Loureiro and Kaufmann, 2013), destinations (Amaro, Barroco, and Antunes, 2020), etc. However, the construct has received limited attention in the context of electronic appliances. Electronic appliances as a category includes both consumer electronics and household appliances that are often sold by the same retailer¹. While consumer electronics (e.g., mobile phones, laptops, etc.) are consumed both privately and publicly, household appliances are generally used in private spaces (e.g., Trimmers, Washing Machines, etc.). Hence, the category contains offerings that address both symbolic and functional needs of the consumers. An examination of consumer responses to the offerings of such a category can provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon (Joshi and Garg, 2020).

The present study has been conducted in Indian geography. India has a population of 1.2 billion people, which indicates that the Indian market is a high potential market (Kumar and Paul, 2018). The revenue of consumer electronics of Indian geography alone stood at USD \$48,575 million in 2020 and revenue from the sale of household appliances stood at USD \$1,308 million in 2020. These revenue figures reiterate the managerial significance of exploring the concept of brand love.

In the following, the present study provides a brief theoretical background. Then, it presents the methodology and explains the turning points that have been identified and the emergent trajectories of brand love. After the elucidation of findings of the paper, the paper presents a discussion section. After the discussion section, the paper provides a section on limitations and future research directions, followed by the conclusion.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Love is regarded as a complex emotion (Correia Loureiro and Kaufmann, 2012) that contains positive and negative elements (Strongman, 1996). The positive elements of this complex emotion are interest, joy, pleasure, happiness, euphoria, etc. Research on love in a consumption context was pioneered by Shimp and Madden (1988) based on the Triangular

Theory of Love that was proposed by Sternberg (1986). According to this theory, love is based on three components: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. Intimacy is a component that is made of feelings of warmth, closeness, communication, support, and respect. Passion refers to the motivation that is primarily derived from emotion. Decision/commitment is the cognitive component of love that refers to the acknowledgment of love and willingness to stay or maintain a long-lasting love-relationship. Based on these three components, Shimp and Madden, in their conceptual study, suggested that eight possible consumer–object relationships could emerge. They are: nonliking, liking, infatuation, functionalism, utilitarianism, inhibited desire, succumbed desire and loyalty.

Ahuvia (1993, 2005) furthered the literature on brand love by conducting empirical research on consumer's ability to love objects, such as brands. Using an interpretative paradigm, Ahuvia found that consumers can also develop love for inanimate objects. Further, Ahuvia's work suggested that there are fundamental similarities between brand love and interpersonal love. This thought process received support from other researchers too (e.g., Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005).

Literature on brand love demonstrates that not everyone has considered brand love as analogous to interpersonal love. In other words, it has been observed that literature was divided in terms of different conceptualizations. In addition to interpersonal conceptualization, there were two other conceptualizations of brand love. One of the two considered brand love as analogous to parasocial relationships (Fetscherin, 2014). Parasocial relationship as a term was introduced by Perse and Rubin (1989) and was based on the concept of parasocial interaction that was developed by Horton and Richard (1956). Parasocial relationships are those that are unidirectional in nature, and only one of the two parties is expected to hold emotions (Fetscherin, 2014). In the context of consumption, only consumers hold emotions for the brands, and they do not expect brands to reciprocate the emotions (Fetscherin, 2014). The third and most significant conceptualization of brand love was posited by Batra et al. (2012), which suggested the use of a grounded theory approach to capture the phenomenon of love in the context of consumption. However, Batra et al. (2012) suggested that it is, in fact, appropriate to use the interpersonal theory in the consumption context, as there is a similarity of the attribute of love in both constructs, though the objects in the relationships are starkly different.

The present study also considers the interpersonal conceptualization of brand love, as companies of this day and age are in a constant dialog with the consumers by responding to queries and grievances promptly and emphatically (Sarkar, 2014).

Research on interpersonal relationships demonstrates that not all relationships progress in the same way (Baxter and Bullis, 1986). That is, there are people who fall in love at first sight and there are also people who gradually end up in love and between these two extremes, there are various interpersonal circumstances that trigger falling in love (Flicker, Sancier-Barbosa, Afroz, Saif, and Mohsin, 2019; Sangrador and Yela, 2000). Barelds and Barelds-Dijkstra (2007), in their research, mentioned that the speed of falling in love has no relation with the ultimate duration or perceived quality of the relationship. Riela, Rodriguez, Aron, Xu and Acevedo (2010) found that 56% of the participants in their study rated their speed of falling in love as "fast or very fast" and 44% of the participants in their study rated their speed of falling in love as "slow or very slow." Further, their study also mentioned that love at first sight could be attributed to physical appearance, and the speed of love is majorly impacted by dispositional traits such as human personality traits and mate preferences (Riela et al. 2010).

Building on the research of Gupta and Singh (1982), Iyengar (2010), made a similar observation. Iyengar (2010) compared arranged marriages and love marriages in a longitudinal study and found that love marriages tend to score higher than arranged marriages after the first year of marriage on the Rubin love scale, and arranged marriages tend to score higher than love marriages after ten years of marriage on the same scale. This shows that relationships change

from time to time and various factors govern the relationship trajectories. This also explains that the speed of falling in love does not assure the quality of the relationship. Another interesting point that can be inferred from this study is that there can be different paths to love, which are shaped by various factors and circumstances. As brand love is considered analogous to interpersonal love, it can be understood that there can be different trajectories in the case of brand love, too. Relationship trajectory techniques have been used extensively in interpersonal relationships to trace the evolution of the relationships (e.g.: Graham, 1997); however, the use of relationship trajectory techniques in the field of brand love has not been much (Palsuk et al. 2019; Langner et al. 2016).

A review of the literature indicates that past studies on relationship evolutions have been largely influenced by linear stage models (Duck, Rutt, Hoy and Strejc, 1991; Knapp, 1984), which have a beginning, middle, and an end. Though these models are parsimonious and straightforward, they do not offer critical insights pertinent to relationships, as relationships sometimes dissolve only to be reborn in another, and this is a critical aspect in understanding the evolution of relationship trajectories. As seen above, relationships are redefined from time to time and can involve turning points that are instrumental in relationship development and redefinition. The turning point can be defined as “any event or occurrence that is associated with a change in a relationship” and is central to a process view of relationships (Baxter and Bullis, 1986). In other words, turning points are the substance of change in relationships (Baxter & Bullis, 1986).

The concept was first used by Bolton in 1961 and was found to be beneficial in understanding relational processes and changes (Baxter and Bullis, 1986). They are instrumental in triggering a reinterpretation of what relationships mean to the respondents (Graham, 1997). These meanings can influence the perceived importance of the relationships and rationale for staying invested in a particular relationship. For example, most individuals would perceive *prompt corrective action* from the brand as a turning point that signifies a point of relational redefinition. Therefore, turning points in the present study’s context can be viewed as symbolic interpretations and evaluations of events or incidents that shape brand love relationships. Roughly, turning points can be understood as factors that cause a change in the development of brand love trajectories. Understanding the turning points in the context of brand love (consumer–brand relationships) can help practitioners craft better strategies.

The first empirical study in this direction was conducted by Langner et al. (2016), who used Rossiter’s (2012) brand love measure (hate, dislike, neutral, like and love). Brand love measure of Rossiter (2012) was chosen for Y-axis (hate and dislike on the negative Y-axis and like and love on the positive Y-axis), and the time period from the first contact to today was chosen for X-axis by Langner et al. (2016). The study revealed five different types of brand love trajectories. They are: *slow development*, *liking becomes love*, *love all the way*, *bumpy road*, and *turnabout*. The body of work indicated that two types of formative experiences shape these trajectories: integral formative experiences and incidental formative experiences. Integral formative experiences are crafted by the brand managers, and incidental formative experiences are beyond the control of managers. Langner et al. (2016), in their study, noted that the majority of the experiences that shape brand love trajectories are incidental and beyond the control of managers. Thereby, Langner et al. (2016) specifically posited that achieving brand love formation is “serendipitous.”

The study of Langner et al. (2016) has been highly beneficial, as the study could effectively demonstrate that consumer–brand relationships similar to interpersonal relationships do not follow a particular path. The present study is an extension of the study of Langner et al. (2016) by studying the development of brand love trajectories through the lens of turning points as they are effective in describing relational processes and change (Baxter and Bullis, 1986).

METHODOLOGY

To address the objectives of the study, the authors employed the qualitative research method, as it unravels the meanings that people ascribe to a social phenomenon and provides the reasons for underlying behaviors (Weinrich, 1996). Further, the present study was conducted in India, an emerging market (Kumar and Paul, 2018; Sarkar and Sarkar, 2016). Indian population is young and has been noted as the population that enjoys shopping (Atwal and Bryson, 2014). Love is an experiential consumption and is expected to reach a peak at a young age (Belk, Ger and Askegaard, 2003). Therefore, the present study employed young adults who experienced brand love as respondents. In this regard, the personal networks of the authors were used for identifying respondents (Lee, Noh and Kim, 2013). In addition to this, the authors also leveraged social media sites and snowballing sampling technique to find a suitable sample. Interview requests were posted on the authors' personal pages and on various relevant pages to select respondents.

Sampling Technique

The study employed a purposive sampling approach to choose respondents who suited the study requirements (Kuzel, 1992; Palys and Atchison, 2008). Sampling for the present study followed a two-step process. Participants who showed interest in the study were asked to briefly outline their love for their favorite electronic appliances brand. To validate the emotional bond, Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) scale of brand love was chosen as a screening criterion. The scale items were used as a screening questionnaire and were administered to the potential sample of the present study. All the respondents who chose Strongly Agree and Agree (a five-point Likert scale was used for this purpose) for all the positively coded questions were chosen as respondents for the present study. One hundred twenty-seven participants took part in the sampling process (the majority of them did not fall in the sample category). The authors interviewed only the participants who suited the requirements (those who chose Strongly Agree and Agree as responses for the positively coded questions) of the study. The authors fixed appointments as per the convenience of the respondents. All the respondents were briefed about the study's objective and were assured that all the information would be kept confidential. The final sample of the present study stood at 30, after which the data collection was stopped as authors were experiencing theoretical saturation (Lincoln and Guba, 1986).

Respondents' Profiles

The average age reported by the respondents was 28.03 years, with the range being 22 to 40. The mean annual family income of the respondents was 1,811,667 rupees, which is equivalent to USD 24,155.56 (1 USD = 75 Rupees). The average annual income of the respondents was observed to be high in the Indian context (Sarkar, Sarkar, and Rao, 2016), and it was assumed that affluent consumers would engage more in experiential consumption due to higher disposable income (Atwal and Bryson, 2014). The respondents included students, businesspeople, and working professionals from various parts of the country. India is a land of diversity and drawing a sample from various parts of the country broadened the scope of the data (Sarkar, 2014).

Data Collection

All authors were involved in data collection. Semi-structured and Retrospective Interview Techniques (RIT) were used to collect data. The data collection began with the semi-structured interview technique to understand the underlying reasons for loving their respective brands (Creswell, Hanson, Clark Plano, and Morales, 2007). To this end, each respondent was asked to describe their loved brand, experiences with the loved brand, reasons for loving the brand, and their efforts to stay close to the loved brand. Probing questions were also used

wherever it was deemed necessary. After this deliberate memory priming interviewing, the authors used RIT for the collection of data; an approach used to capture turning points (Baxter and Bullis, 1986; Huston, Surra, Fitzgerald, and Cate, 1981). Using this technique, the authors of the study captured all of the turning points (along with sketching of the path) of each respondent with his or her loved brand since the first contact to present moment on a graph template that was used by Langner et al. (2016). The X-axis of the template represented the time, and the Y-axis represented the intensity of feelings where liking and love were on the positive end and dislike and hate on the negative axis. At each identified turning point, the authors probed for additional information. The verbal descriptions were recorded and transcribed for further analysis. On average, each interview lasted for about 65 minutes. After plotting the graph, each respondent was given adequate time to make any alterations, if necessary. All the 30 graphs collected during this process were scanned and shared electronically with all three authors for further analysis.

Data Analysis

After completing the transcription process, the authors read and re-read all the transcripts to familiarize themselves with the data. This was followed by a coding process to categorize various turning points that have been observed. To this end, the authors used the constant comparison method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). All the authors carried out the analysis independently, and the final categories were refined in consultation with each other. In case of any disagreement, the authors deliberated until consensus was reached. During the coding process, the authors also conducted a member check procedure (Bitsch, 2005) by meeting the respondents to verify if the interpretations of the authors were in tune with the intended meaning of the informants.

In addition to the above analysis, the authors also categorized the emerging brand love trajectories. The authors used the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine similarities among the RIT graphs (trajectories) for categorization purposes. The authors deliberated until a consensus was reached. Disagreements in the whole process were amicably sorted. At the end of this process, five types of brand love trajectories were ascertained: *Turnaround to Love*, *Drop in Love*, *Liking to Love*, *Gradual Development*, and *Roller Coaster Ride*.

FINDINGS

Turning Points in Brand Love Trajectories

A total of 98 turning points were identified at the end of the process, with a mean of 3.26 turning points per respondent. These 98 turning points were finally categorized under nine broad categories, with six turning points being positive and three turning points being negative, as shown in Table 1.

Positive Turning Points

Positive turning points are events that have helped the trajectories in the development process of love for the brand. As per the analysis, 71 positive turning points were observed.

Functional Value. From Table 1, it can be understood that functional value is the most frequently reported turning point in the development of brand love. Functional value can be defined as the utility received from a brand's perceived quality and expected performance (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001).

Table 1: Frequencies of Turning Points

No.	Turning Points	Frequency (N=98)
	A. Positive Turning Points	Frequency (N=71)
i.	Functional Value	42
ii.	Positive Peer Influence	15
iii.	Prompt Corrective Action	5
iv.	Spokesperson Endorser Influence	1
v.	Hedonism	5
vi.	Social Value	3
	B. Negative Turning Points	Frequency (N=27)
i.	High Price	9
ii.	Negative Past Experience	16
iii.	Negative Peer Influence	2

“It was actually very slim, had a very good quality build-up, and had that sandy texture, which was not used by any phone at that time. It caught my attention. I used it for a while. I was very impressed by the smoothness and safety features.” (R1, One Plus)

“When I used it for my activities, I could see that even with less storage, it was even able to outperform windows machine for computational activities. These things triggered a positive affect, and that became love over a period of time.” (R6, Apple)

“I get the quality here. The speed of the mobile doesn’t change. From day one, it more or less remains the same. That is something that is attracting me towards Apple.” (R10, Apple)

Though brand love describes the emotional nature of consumer–brand relationships, one must not forget that brand love has a cognitive grounding (Sarkar, 2014; Fournier, 1998). Further, Batra et al. (2012) found that consumers love brands that offer superior performance, superior value for money, and superior attributes. Thus, for a brand to be loved, it must be a brand that offers superior functional values. It has also been noted that “cognitive activity causally precedes an emotion in the flow of psychological events” (Lazarus, 1999). Hence, for the brand love to form, it is also imperative for the brand to deliver on the rational attributes, failing which the formation of brand love is hindered (Huber, Meyer and Schmid, 2015). As love is a post-consumption evaluative response (Thomson et al. 2005), cognitive satisfaction derived from a brand is crucial for the formation of brand love. This emotional satisfaction that occurs because of cognitive attributes has been found to match the effect of emotional satisfaction that is gained from hedonic attributes (Fournier, 1998; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006). Hence, the realization of superior functional value was considered as a positive turning point.

Positive Peer Influence. The second turning point, “positive peer influence,” was the second most reported positive turning point. It refers to the events where friends and family have influenced the respondents positively. The below illustrations can shed some light on this turning point:

“I bought the phone [iPhone] because all my friends were using iPhone, so from negative feelings, I developed some positive feelings for iPhone.” (R13, Apple) (Quote 1)

“Slowly what happened is I started getting testimonials from my friends who were using Macbook. [...] That is when my liking started taking a very steep inclination”. (R6, Apple) (Quote 2)

“Actually, in Punjab, everybody had an Apple iPhone. It is a cultural norm. If you did not have, you are considered an outlier.” (R9, Apple) (Quote 3)

A literature review suggests that consumer behavior cannot be fully understood without considering the interpersonal influence on the development of attitudes, norms, values, aspirations, and purchase behavior (Stafford and Cohanougher, 1977). Additionally, past research has also shown that consumers can love objects just to strengthen their social relationships (Miller, 1998). A comprehensive review and analysis of articles on various aspects of susceptibility to interpersonal influence by McGuire (1968) concluded that susceptibility to interpersonal influence varies across people. A person’s ability to be influenced in one situation tends to significantly impact a range of other situations. Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence can be defined as the need of a consumer to identify with or enhance one’s image in the eyes of significant others through the purchase and use of products and brands (Bearden, Netmeyer, and Teel, 1989).

Research in consumer behavior showed that interpersonal influence is manifested through normative influence or informational influence (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Normative influence can be understood as a tendency to conform to the expectations of others (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Further, literature in consumer behavior has divided normative influence into value expressive and utilitarian influences (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Park and Lessig, 1977). Value expressiveness can be understood as an individual’s desire to better the self–image by associating with a reference group. This type of interpersonal influence is motivated by an individual’s desire to better his or her self–concept through referent group identification (Kelman, 1961). It can be observed from quote 1 that the respondent developed some positive feelings for the brand because all her friends used the same brand.

Utilitarian influence, the other type of normative influence, is seen in individuals’ attempts to stay in tune with the expectations of others to achieve rewards or avoid punishments (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975; Bearden and Etzel, 1982). From quote 3, it can be understood that the respondent was under the utilitarian influence and had to have an iPhone, as he would be considered an “outlier” if he did not have one.

On the other hand, informational influence can be understood as a tendency to accept information from others as evidence about reality (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). According to Park and Lessig (1975), informational influence occurs either by searching for knowledgeable individuals or by making inferences based on the observation of the behavior of others. This can be observed in the excerpt of R6 (second quote), who mentioned that his liking for the brand took a ‘steep inclination’ once he started getting testimonials from the people who used Macbook. Therefore, a positive informational influence that acts as evidence can trigger cognitive satisfaction, leading to the formation of strong brand love (Oliver, 1999). Keeping

all the above substantiations in view, it can be concluded that the *positive peer influence* turning point helps in the development of brand love trajectory.

Prompt Corrective Action by Brand. Prompt corrective action can be understood as the measures taken up by a brand to bring back a product to the stage of normalcy. This turning point refers to the post-purchase services of the firm in case of a performance failure. Below is an excerpt that illustrates the prompt corrective action turning point.

“I had an issue with my Macbook charger, for which I had to visit the service center. [...] They followed up with me very well. The kind of prompt response that I wanted they matched to it. They stuck to their deadlines. They were very prompt.” (R2, Apple) (Quote 4)

“Apart from the utility, the second thing is service. I had a couple of problems; they were only hardware problems, not software problems. Whenever I went to a Lenovo service store, they repaired my laptop in a day or two without any fuss. It values its customers and tries to give the best service. That was something that attracted me.” (R4, Lenovo) (Quote 5)

“There is an application on my phone, where if I register a complaint, they come and pick up the phone. That is the feature that they give you. This I am talking about the post-sales support. Any part of the hardware or software, it does not get damaged; even if it does, they will change it immediately. [...] posted something about a very common problem of One Plus [on Facebook]. I was really amazed to see that One Plus responded within two minutes. I was really impressed by that.” (R1, One Plus)

Literature has shown that successful performance and positive events with respect to the interaction with a brand are instrumental in driving customer satisfaction (Bitner, Booms, and Tetreault, 1990). The experiences that are instrumental in shaping the customer evaluations of a firm that is executing the service are rooted in their reactions to how they were treated by the employees of the firm (Bitner, 1995). Hence, the attitudes, behaviors, and expertise of service employees in these encounters capture the performance of the firm (Brady and Cronin, 2001). Further, attention and valuing of the particularity, understanding and responsibility have been identified as the three dimensions of respect, and any combination of these components will seed respect (Ali and Ndubisi, 2011; Dillon, 1992). Respect has been observed as one of the most effective ways for brands to forge relationships with consumers because respect includes being moral, compassionate, and responsive towards consumers (Ali and Ndubisi, 2011; Dillon, 1992).

This positive experience with a brand's employees (and post-purchase service) can lead to positive evaluations of the brand and cognitive satisfaction. As brand love is the amount of passionate, emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), it can be concluded that prompt corrective action can lead to the formation of brand love. It can be understood from quotes 4 and 5 that the brands were responsive to the consumers in solving performance failures. Thus, by being prompt in taking corrective actions, the consumers have received respect from the brand. This is evident from quote 5 of the respondent, who said that the brand values its customers. Further, respect has been observed as an indicator of interpersonal love (Hendrick and Hendrick, 2006). Hence prompt corrective action by a brand has been found as a turning point of brand love trajectory.

Hedonism. Hedonism was observed to be a significant marker event in the present study. The below excerpts shed some light on the same:

“I used to play PUBG and all high end [graphic] games, when these games used to play without any glitches, without any lag then I used to feel good.” (R7, One Plus)

“The product was also visually very good. I loved using that product.” (R30, Asus) (Quote 18)

“The bright logo that appears fascinated me so much. There is no doubt that Macbook is beautiful, the design and the sleekness are all very good.” (R21, Apple) (Quote 19)

Hedonism can be defined as positive feelings of pleasure, fun, excitement, and enjoyment (Triantafillidou and Siomkos, 2014). Research suggests that hedonic experience has been commonly seen in young people (Wilska, 2003). Hedonism has emerged as a crucial turning point as consumers purchase products or brands because they expect some benefit from the consumption experience (Leroi-Werelds, Streukens, Brady and Swinen, 2014). On this account, the concept of customer value started gaining prominence in the area of consumer behavior (Zeithaml, 1988; Woodruff, 1997; Smith and Colgate, 2007). To this end, Holbrook (1996) specifically differentiated two types of value: extrinsic and intrinsic value.

Extrinsic value refers to the instrumentality of a brand and covers the potential ability to perform a function by providing a superior perceived quality (Holbrook, 1996). On the other hand, intrinsic value refers to the feelings such as enjoyment, pleasure, fun, or excitement experienced on using a brand (Holbrook, 1996) and these experiences have been found to create a strong emotional base that can lead to the formation of a robust consumer-brand relationship (Sheth, Newman, and Gross, 1991; Fournier, 1998; Smith and Colgate, 2007). Further, it has been found that hedonism gives rise to delight (Chitturi, Raghunathan and Mahajan, 2008), which, in turn, can generate higher levels of arousal (Oliver, 1997). Hence, hedonism has been found to be a turning point in the development of brand love trajectories.

Social Value. Social value was also found to be a turning point in the development of brand love trajectories. The below excerpts indicate social value as a turning point:

“Samsung was an aspirational brand, and I wanted to have an image like Samsung, that is being relevant and cool. [...] Since our college days, Samsung was always treated well in my peer circle”. (R28, Samsung) (Quote 16)

“If you are a Sony user, you are a premium user. That’s the feel. There were many phones even then Samsung, Sony, Nokia, but Sony was considered premium. I don’t have to say anything about myself, but my Sony phone would do the talking for me, even if the Sony phone was not so expensive”. (R22, Sony) (Quote 17)

A literature review suggests that consumers use brands to shape their identities (Malar, Krohmer, Hoyer, and Nyffenegger, 2011) and establish themselves in a social context (Naylor and Kleiser, 2002; Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg, 2009; Wallace et al. 2014). Consumers attempt to incorporate the features of a brand into their own identity by purchasing and consuming the brand (Becerra and Badrinaryanan, 2013). Hence, in addition to performing various functions, brands also provide value to the consumers by serving as a platform to

express themselves and to differentiate themselves from others in a social context. This value is referred to as social value. Social value is defined as the utility derived from the ability to enhance one's social self-concept through the consumption of value-offering (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Self-concept can be understood as "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (Rosenberg, 1979, p.7). Self-concept has four dimensions: actual self-image, ideal self-image, social self-image, and inner self-image (Dolich, 1969). Quotes 16 and 17 indicate that the respondents derived enhancement of social self on purchasing and consuming their loved brands. Past research has shown that a strong connection between social-self of an individual and brand can lead to enhancement of social-self. This enhancement can, in turn, lead to strong affective responses for the brand (Aaker, 1997; Naylor and Kleiser, 2002; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Malar et al. 2011). Further, it has also been noted that a brand that fits a consumer's personality and facilitates a consumer to express his or her social-self will also deliver the consumer a sense of comfort (Huber et al. 2015). Hence, it can be concluded that social value leads to the formation of brand love.

Spokesperson Endorser Influence. As per the analysis of the paper, spokesperson endorser influence was found to be a turning point in the development of brand love trajectories. The illustration of this turning point reads as below:

"I pretty much knew about Apple and products of Apple from 2010. One of the key reasons for me to love the brand initially was Steve Jobs. There was this weird fascination to own Apple products which included iPhone, Macbook, and iPad, though I did not own one then. So, I used to follow Apple keynotes and releases very rigorously." (R12, Apple) (Quote 7)

It has been established that consumers are always in the process of defining their self-identities and desired self-images (Escalas, 2004). Consumers tend to buy certain brands in view of this process, as these brands would facilitate fulfilling of self-definitional needs (Belk, 1988). According to the theory of meaning movement (McCracken, 1989), cultural meanings from cultural space are transferred to objects. This is because brands have the ability to possess strong symbolic associations that are instrumental in making a match with consumer's sense of self. Over a period of time, these brands develop strong relationships with consumers and generally facilitate favorable brand attitudes and behavioral intentions (Escalas, 2004). In the same line of thought, McCracken (1989) explained a theory of meaning movement, a process by which cultural meanings are moved from cultural space to material objects and into the lives of consumers. When an endorser is associated with a brand, there is a transfer of the endorser's personality and lifestyle-related associations into the brand (and the products of the brand) (McCracken, 1989). If the brand endorser transfers symbolic associations that are in tune with the self-concept of a consumer, then the consumer can develop a strong equation with the brand and also develop favorable brand attitudes and behavioral intentions. In other words, consumers have a strong drive to act in a manner that can establish or enhance their ideal-self, and in this process, they consider certain endorsers (or people with strong social presence) as inspirational personalities, which can trigger the activation of ideal – self (Boon and Lomore, 2001; Escalas and Bettman, 2003). Hence, to achieve this ideal self, consumers are inclined to conform to or follow the attitudes and behaviors of these endorsers. Keeping this in view, it can be concluded that endorser influence impacts brand love positively.

Negative Turning Points

Negative turning points are those events that have hindered the development of brand love trajectories. A total of 27 negative turning points were observed in the present study.

High Price. From the analysis, it has been understood that high price is the most observed negative turning point. A typical illustration of this turning point reads as follows:

“Initially, I felt the phone was unnecessarily expensive.” (R13, Apple)

“I realized that for a phone with these features, this price is way too high.” (R2, Apple)

“I do not have such love feelings for the brand now. I have realized that the brand is releasing way too expensive phones.” (R26, Apple)

A literature review suggests that price and value are related constructs (Sheth et al. 1991). While price measures the monetary sacrifice that a consumer had to make to obtain a product or service, value refers to the consumer's judgment in terms of the benefit(s) received. Additionally, price can be judged easily, but value has an idiosyncratic and personal component (Zeithaml, 1988). Broadly, consumers understand value as what they pay and receive (Sawyer and Dickson, 1984). This judgment of value by consumers facilitates an internal price reference through which consumers judge prices of the products and prices of similar products (Lalwani and Monroe, 2005).

Further, research has shown that dis/satisfaction is based mainly on value analysis (Day and Crask, 2000). Therefore, if the high price of a brand's product is not justified (Day and Crask, 2000), it can lead to dissatisfaction, an antecedent of brand hate (Bryson, Atwal, and Hulten, 2013). A literature review suggests that prices and related price judgments influence loyalty formation and consumption behavior (Thomson et al. 2005). Further, loving brand relationships are driven by rational components (Langner et al. 2015). This was also noted by Huber et al. (2015), who mentioned that the role of rational benefits in brand love increases with the increase in relationship duration. Thus, high prices of a brand can lead to cognitive dissatisfaction. To add to it, brand love, which is based on cognition, is weakened as cognitive dissatisfaction leads to weaker brand love. Hence, the trajectories of brand love experienced a dip due to high price.

Negative Peer Influence. Negative peer influence refers to those critical incidents where friends and families of respondents have triggered negative feelings about a brand. Few descriptions are given below:

“I was surrounded by friends [peers] who criticized Macbook; hence I never thought of buying a Macbook”. (R2, Apple)

“My best friends did not like Apple; hence even I had negative feelings for Apple”. (R13, Apple)

From the above excerpts of the interview, it can be understood that the respondents did not consider purchasing Apple as they did not want to project themselves negatively to the peer group or significant others. Research has shown that negative association of brand image and desired social image are important determinants of brand hate (Hegner, Fetscherin, and Van Delzen, 2017). The incongruence between the desired social self and the brand image results in a phenomenon called brand embarrassment. In other words, negative brand social expressiveness is a significant factor for causing brand embarrassment (Sarkar, Sarkar J G, Sreejesh, Anusree and Rishi, 2020). Brand embarrassment is a feeling of awkwardness experienced by consumers and is based on the perception of getting negatively evaluated by others while consuming a brand in a social context (Sarkar and Sarkar, 2017).

Further, Walsh, Albrecht, Hofacker, Grant, and Takahashi (2016), in their research, mentioned that brand embarrassment is a consumer's self-conscious emotion and impacts purchase decisions. In addition to impacting purchasing decisions, brand embarrassment creates brand hate (Sarkar et al. 2020). From this perspective, a negative interpersonal influence turning point pulls the trajectories of brand love downwards towards feelings of dislike and hate. Hence, negative peer influence impacts brand love negatively.

Negative Past Experience. Below are the few excerpts that illustrate negative past experiences with brands from the interviews of the respondents:

“The cable wire got broken and another thing is that there is a pin in the earphone jack which got broken so I could not use the earphone jack. So, I had to buy a Bluetooth earphone. This is the first time that something in a phone that got broken. So, I was a little disappointed at that point in time”. (R7, One Plus)

“The model had a huge hinge problem like the hinges of the laptop used to run out in a year or so. I had to replace the hinges like three to four times now”. (R4, Lenovo)

“I realized that Bose had better noise cancellation when compared to Sennheiser, that disappointed me so much”. (R20, Sennheiser)

“I loved using that product until last year, when the service guys did not do a good job but started blaming me for some internal damage. [...] I strongly feel the internal damage was done by one of those service guys in the process of repairing. For the first time, I just let it go because all this while Asus had given me a good experience. But the same thing happened again, this time I was so mad at them. I also did not like the way they communicated with me. My love for the brand instantly dropped”. (R30, Asus) (Quote 6)

Negative product experiences can be either because of the failure of products, dissatisfaction with the offering, or negative country of origin associations and service failures (Hegner et al., 2017; Bitner et al., 1990). Literature suggests that consumers buy various brands for various reasons; however, the most basic expectation of any consumer is an adequate product or service performance (Lee et al. 2009a, 2009b). After consuming a product or service, consumers compare their initial expectations of a product or service with the actual performance, and consumer expectations can be met or unmet (Oliver, 1980; Halstead, 1989). When consumers' expectations of a brand match the performance, it results in confirmation, thereby satisfaction (Hegner et al. 2017). On the other hand, disconfirmation occurs when consumers' expectations are either above or below the actual performance (Oliver, 1980). Further, negative disconfirmation occurs when the actual performance of a brand is below the expectations, which can eventually result in dissatisfaction (Oliver, 1980). This dissatisfaction is a strong determinant of brand hate (Bryson, Atwal, and Hulten, 2013; Zarantanello, Romani, Grappi, and Bagozzi, 2016). Additionally, past research has shown that disconfirmation leads to distrust (Nam, Baker, Ahmad, and Goo, 2020). As trust is a crucial component of brand love (Fehr, 1998), a negative impact on trust can lead to a drop in the positive feelings for the brand.

In addition to the performance failures, research has shown that customers who experience service failures are found to love a brand less intensely, perceive a brand less favorably and are also found to exhibit less happiness (Aaker, Fournier, and Brasel, 2004; Soscia, 2008) as seen

in quote six. Specifically, as seen in quote six, it has been noted that repeated experiences of performance failures can lead to the elicitation of anger (Oliver and Westbrook, 1993), a component of brand hate (Fetscherin, 2019). Further, Hegner, Fetscherin, and Delzen (2017) found that there is a positive relationship between negative past experience and brand hate. Therefore, it can be concluded that negative experiences with the product can lead to a dip in the trajectories of love.

TRAJECTORIES OF BRAND LOVE

As mentioned previously, five categories of brand love trajectories (patterns) were inductively derived as per the coding process. The resulting patterns are illustrated as below:

Table 2: Turning Points Observed Across Trajectory Types

Trajectory Types	Trajectory Names	Turning Points Observed
I	Turnaround to Love	Positive Peer Influence; High Price; Negative Peer Influence; Functional Value; Prompt Corrective Action; Negative Past Experience; Hedonism; Social Value
II	Drop in Love	Positive Peer Influence; High Price; Functional Value; Negative Past Experience; Hedonism
III	Gradual Development	Positive Peer Influence; Functional Value; Negative Past Experience; Endorser Influence; Hedonism; Social Value
IV	Liking to Love	Positive Peer Influence; High Price; Functional Value; Negative Past Experience; Hedonism; Social Value
V	Roller Coaster Ride	Positive Peer Influence; High Price; Negative Peer Influence; Functional Value; Prompt Corrective Action; Negative Past Experience

Tables 3 and 4 provide additional information about the brand love trajectories.

Turnaround to Love

The first type of trajectory (refer to Fig. 1a), *Turnaround to Love*, where five respondents were categorized under this trajectory type, indicates a reversal of the curves from negative affect zone to positive affect zone. The respondents categorized under this trajectory initially held negative feelings for their favorite brands due to high price and negative peer influence. However, the respondents developed positive feelings for these brands due to functional value, hedonism, and social value. A typical illustration of this type of trajectory is:

“It was not love at first sight. It seemed to me like Apple was overpricing its product just to be in the luxurious category without even providing the required specifications or features. [...] and when I used it for my activities, I could see that even with less storage, it was even able to outperform windows machine for computational activities. These things like triggered a positive affect and that became love over a period of time” (Respondent 6, Apple) (Quote 14).

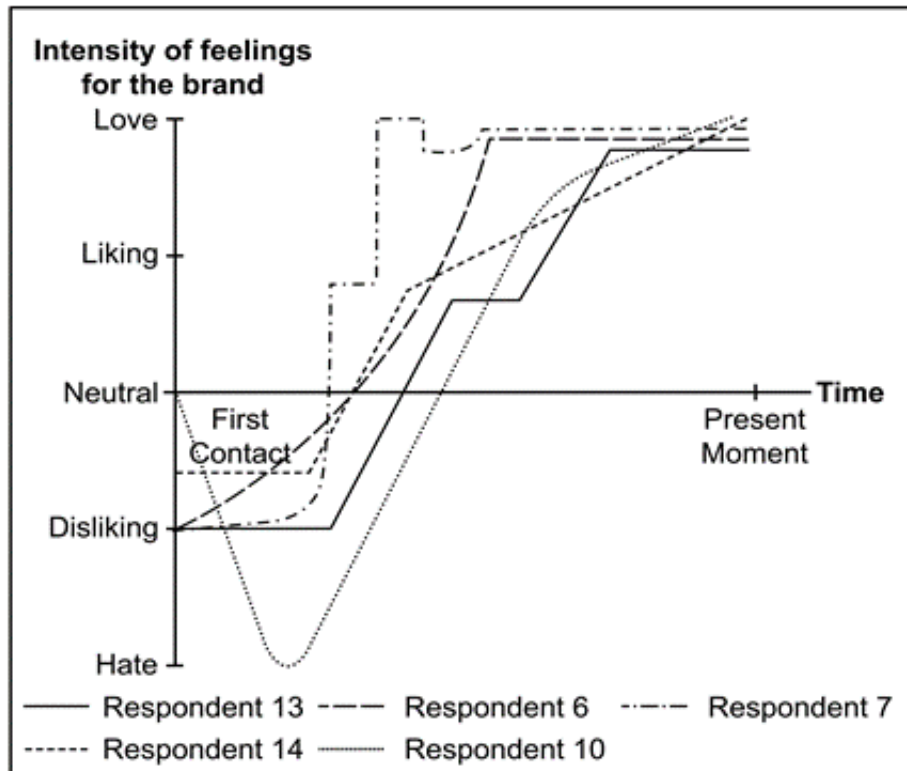
Another illustration of this type of trajectory reads as follows:

“Initially I had a negative perception about iPhones because it was too expensive, and it was not well-suited for Indian use” (Respondent 10, Apple) (Quote 15).

Interestingly, all the respondents whose paths turned positive experienced a flat path at the present moment, as one of the respondents stated,

“[...] after that my journey is like stable” (Respondent 7, One Plus).

Figure 1A: Type I—Turnaround to Love



Drop in Love

Drop in Love depicts a reduction in the intensity of positive feelings (refer to Figure 1B). The respondents categorized under this trajectory type, experienced drop in intensity of feelings, after reaching a state of love, due to negative experience and high price. Five respondents were categorized under this trajectory type. Interestingly, all the respondents of this trajectory have terminated their relationships with their loved brands. One of the respondents who was asked to explain the entire journey said:

“I think from 2011, I liked it. By the time it was Apple iPhone 4 or 5 during 2016-17, I was in the love stage. After iPhone 6S, it declined. It was not able to meet up to my expectations, and it inconvenienced me on several occasions, which led to many other problems” (Respondent 9, Apple) (Quote 8).

Further, it was observed that the respondent still held positive feelings even after switching to another brand:

Table 3: Frequencies of Turning Points Across Trajectories

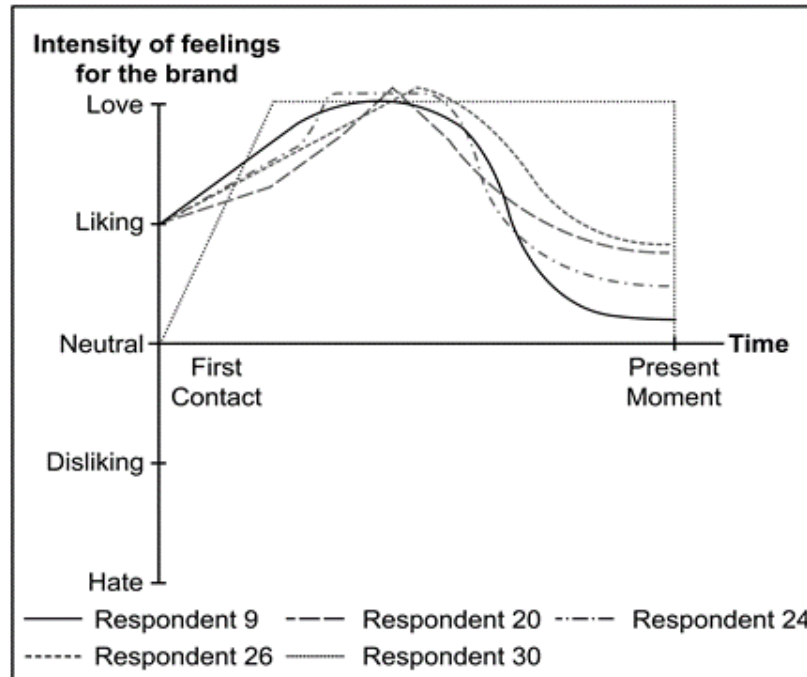
Trajectory Types	<i>Positive Peer Influence</i>	<i>High Price</i>	<i>Negative Peer Influence</i>	<i>Functional Value</i>	<i>Prompt Corrective Action</i>	<i>Negative Past Experience</i>	<i>Endorser Influence</i>	<i>Hedonism</i>	<i>Social Value</i>
Turnaround to Love	2	4	1	8	1	1		1	1
Drop in Love	3	2		5		5		1	
Gradual Development	4			13		3	1	2	1
Liking to Love	4	2		15		3		1	1
Rollercoaster Ride	2	1	1	1	4	4			
SUM:	15	9	2	42	5	16	1	5	3

Table 4: Number of Respondents Across Trajectories

Trajectory Type	Number of Respondents
Turnaround to Love	5
Drop in Love	5
Gradual Development	8
Liking to Love	5
Roller Coaster Ride	2

“I still love Apple (iPhone), it’s not like I hate Apple (iPhone). I really like it. I appreciate it really that, Apple (iPhone) is something, but it is not for me now” (Quote 12).

Figure 1B: Type II—Drop in Love



Another respondent who also fell under this category and had terminated his relationship with the brand mentioned:

“It broke my heart. It is a very bad experience because I was letting go off my companion of ten years” (Respondent 30, Asus).

When asked about the status of perceptions for the brand, he said:

“I still feel it is a respectable brand and there is every chance of revival, if need be” (Quote 13).

From the quote above, it can be understood that people break up with the brands that they love, and the breakup can be a painful experience too. Another respondent was found to have reduced his intensity of feelings, as the brand has increased its prices over a period, which has forced him to rethink continuing his relationship with the brand:

“I have found that Apple is a very good phone. All the features of the phone are really good. [...] I am disappointed with the price range of the phones. The brand is too expensive” (Respondent 26, Apple) (Quote 9).

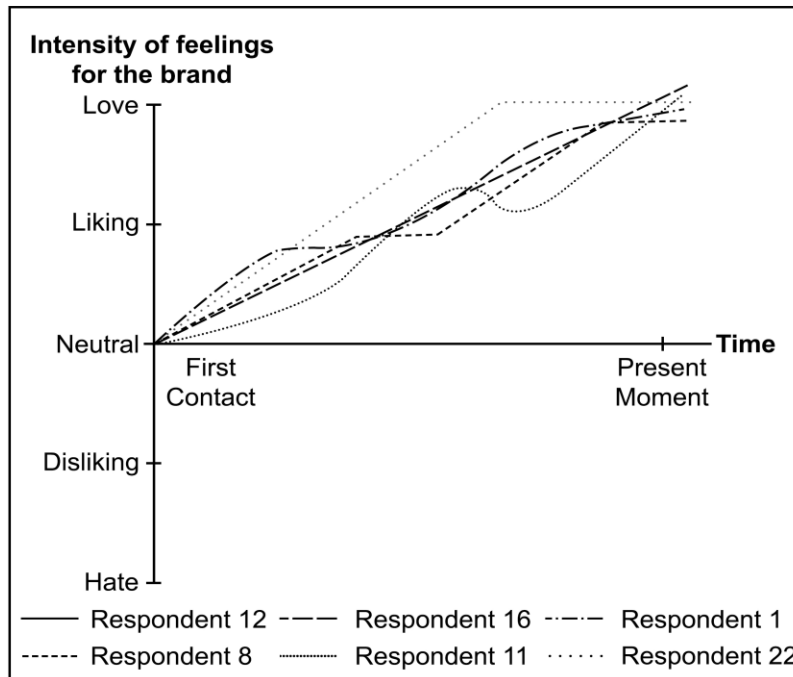
Further, another respondent of this trajectory type terminated his relationship with his loved brand because the brand was expensive. The illustration of the same is as follows:

“I am not using a Sennheiser right now. It’s expensive, my other earphones which are of some other company is giving a better feature for a lower price” (Respondent 20, Sennheiser) (Quote 10).

Another respondent also experienced a drop in the feelings when his favorite brand did not continue to provide offerings to public at large. The illustration of this is as follows:

“It’s a shame that they did not evolve but they held onto their model. Eventually they fell behind. I would have loved had they evolved. It was disappointing. [...] They misread the demand. They were quite complacent with whatever they had. When the crisis came, I was kind of lost” (Respondent 24, Nokia) (Quote 11).

Figure 1C: Type III—Gradual Development



Gradual Development

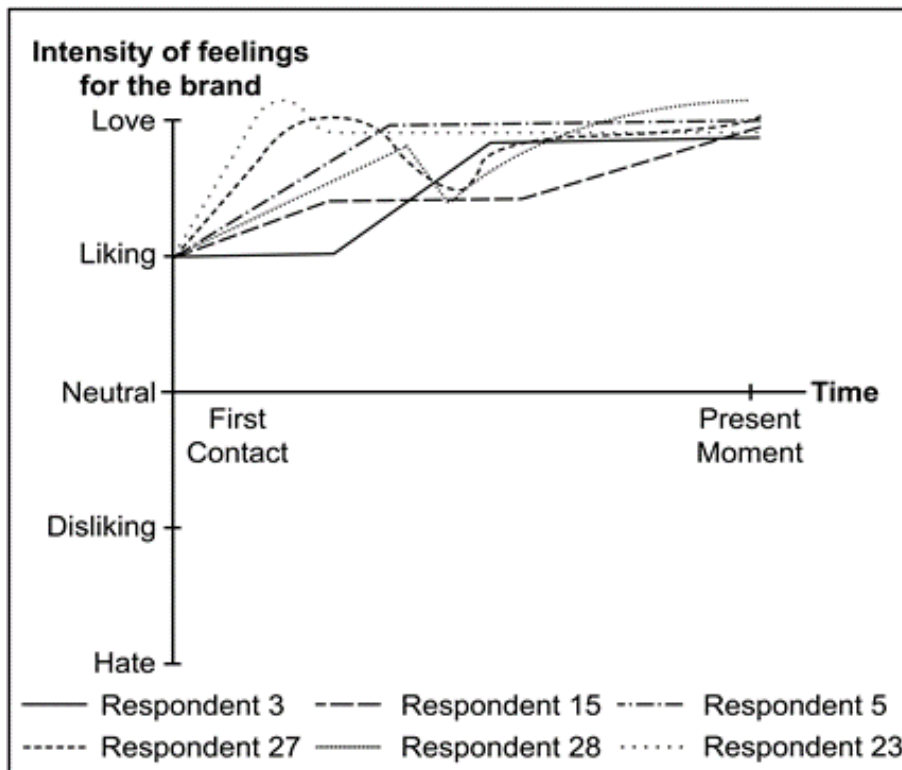
The third brand love trajectory (refer to Figure 1C), *Gradual Development*, refers to the slow and steady progress toward a fully intense positive feeling of love. The respondents categorized under this trajectory type experienced steady increase in feelings due to functional value, positive peer influence, hedonism, and social value. As illustrated in the figure, most respondents had neutral feelings at the first contact, and over a period of time all the respondents developed love-like feelings, eight respondents were categorized under this trajectory. A typical illustration of this type of trajectory reads as follows:

“I had neutral notion about the brand. I got to know about this particular product from my friend and he recommended me, then I bought it, I had a positive experience using it, I was delighted. I liked it, and since then, it’s a completely positive graph” (Respondent 8, Philips Trimmer).

Another respondent of the same trajectory type started off with a slightly positive affect, typifying his trajectory; he mentioned:

“So I pretty much knew about Apple and products of Apple from 2010. One of the key reasons for me to love the brand was Steve Jobs. I got to know about what they did and how Apple products have been made from 1970s by watching a movie called Pirates of Silicon Valley. I watched that in my college. There was this weird fascination to own Apple products. I used to keep myself updated with all the latest updates and various product lines of Apple” (Respondent 12, Apple).

Figure 1D: Type IV—Liking to Love



Liking to Love

The fourth brand love trajectory (refer to Figure 1D), where ten respondents were categorized under this trajectory, *Liking to Love* refers to the pattern of those respondents who had a liking for that brand from the first contact itself. This type of trajectory has been majorly influenced by functional value turning point. An example of this trajectory type reads as follows: One of the respondents (Respondent 3, Bose), whose love evolved from mere liking stated that:

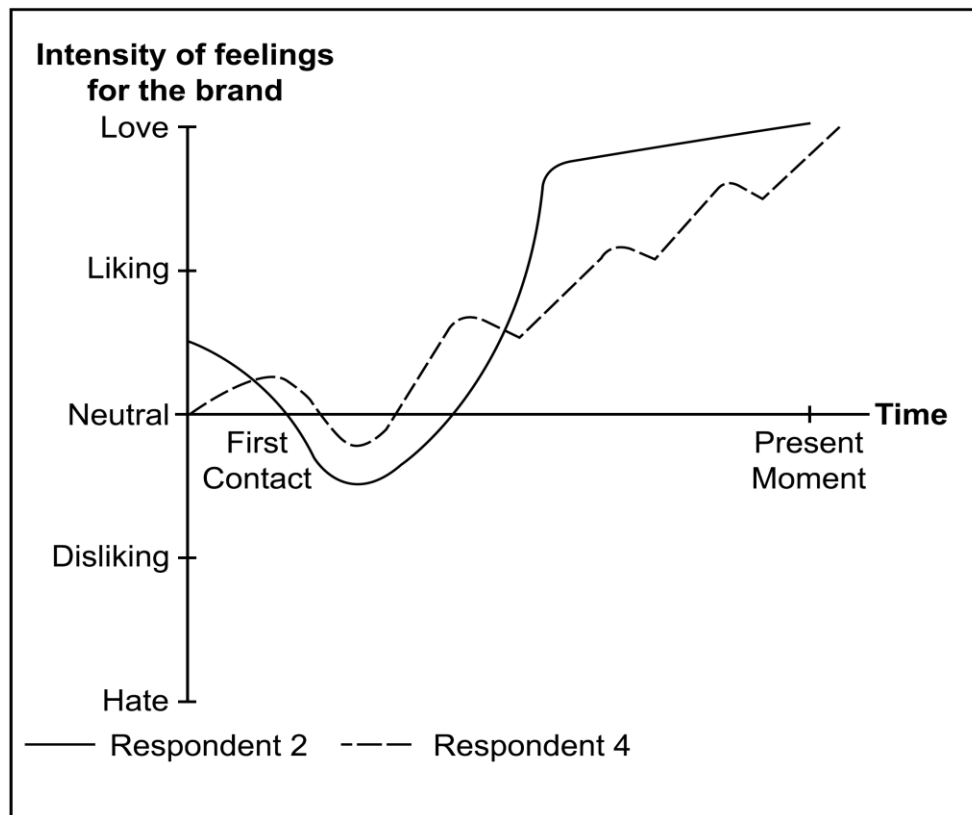
“the first contact happened during the first year of my B. Tech. At my hostel, one of my friends was using the Bose speaker. The sound quality, the loudness, everything

was perfect. Everyone used to appreciate it. When I first went to his room and I heard the music, I really liked it.”

This respondent added further that,

“I happened to go to Kolkata during my semester holidays. There I had walked into an electronics store and I happened to see the same Bose speaker that my friend was using. I could not resist, and I just bought it and I started using it rigorously from that day and my liking became love.”

Figure 1D: Type V—Roller Coaster Ride



Roller Coaster Ride

The fifth brand love trajectory (refer to Figure 1E), where two respondents could be categorized under *Roller Coaster ride*, was characterized by considerable changes and fluctuations. Two respondents were categorized under this trajectory type; both the respondents started off on a positive note, but experienced negative feelings due to negative peer influence and negative past experience. However, both these respondents ended up being in love with their favorite brands. A typical illustration is as follows:

“One of my friends in my college has been using Macbook since a long time [...] he influenced me positively [...] I used his Macbook for quite some time, like 2 – 3 months and I felt the feasibility, the way Macbook functions and its usage really good and is helpful and easy. So, I thought maybe I should give it a try. [...] Earlier, I had HP and that used to crash frequently but now I can use this Macbook without any disruption [...] from there, love for the brand is continuing” (Respondent 2, Apple).

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to illuminate the trajectories of brand love through the lens of turning points. A total of nine turning point categories were identified, and five types of trajectories emerged from the categorization of all the RIT graphs. At a basic level, the study results suggest that there are significant critical events that affect the intensity of feelings that a consumer has for a brand. The identification of 98 turning points and five trajectory types across all the respondents is evidence that consumer–brand relationships are as dynamic as interpersonal relationships. Further, the present study has shown that the element of reciprocity can also be observed in the trajectories which have been positively impacted by brand communication, pricing, and prompt corrective actions initiated by brands. The study ascertains that consumer-brand relationships are bidirectional in nature. Further, the present study has also observed that any positive action initiated by brand, has resulted in increase in the intensity of positive feelings. Of the nine categories of turning points, six types of turning points helped develop brand love trajectories (positive turning points), and three types of turning points were identified as those that hindered the development of brand love trajectories (negative turning points).

Functional value was reported as the most frequently reported turning point, which indicates the perceived brand quality and expected performance of the product (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). The high frequency of this turning point across the trajectories indicates the importance of rational attributes like superior brand quality and superior performance in the formation of brand love (Sarkar, 2014; Batra et al. 2012). Hedonism was also found as a turning point in the development of brand love trajectories. Rational attributes of a brand provide satisfaction, but hedonic values of a brand provide delight, which creates more arousal (Oliver, 1999). Hence, the brand managers of electronic appliances are advised to provide stimulating and pleasant experiences through their value-offerings. Further, as observed in quotes 18 and 19, aesthetics of electronic appliances plays a major role in providing hedonic benefits. Keeping this in view, brand managers should also place emphasis on producing products that are visually pleasing.

In addition to hedonic values, the present study also showed that social value as a turning point leads to the formation of brand love. Social value, as mentioned previously, is the utility derived from the product’s ability to enhance social self-concept of a consumer (Sweeney and Soutar, 2001). Past research has noted that consumers strongly identified with the objects that they loved as they express their identities and facilitated enhancement of their identities (Belk, 1988; Escalas and Bettman, 2003). This expression of identity not only established a strong connection with the brand, but also facilitated a strengthening of interpersonal relationships (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002). Keeping this in view, managers are encouraged to provide holistic value through their electronic appliances that can lead to the formation of brand love.

The present study also identified that *positive peer influence* as a turning point played a significant role in the formation of brand love. Positive peer influence is characterized by either normative influence or by informational influence (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). This signifies that brand love formation does not happen only because of the integral brand factors (factors created by brand managers), but also with incidental factors (factors that are beyond the control of managers). As informational influence plays a role in the formation of brand love, brand managers of electronic appliances can consider refer-a-friend program for promotional activities. Since positive peer influence is also characterized by normative influence, brand managers can produce electronic appliances that are self-expressive in nature. Therefore, brand managers can carefully craft product communication that is self-expressive in nature. Interestingly, the frequency of positive peer influence as a turning point was more than the frequency of negative peer influence as a turning point. Managers, then, are encouraged to design programs and build strong brand communities that can constantly facilitate the expression and enhancement of consumers' identities. On the other hand, the present study has also observed that 'negative peer influence' impacts the brand love formation. Interestingly, negative peer influence was observed only in the initial stages of brand love development and had no influence with increased duration.

The second most reported turning point in the present study is *Negative Past Experience*, which was found in all the trajectory types, and the high frequency of this turning point seconds the notion that dissatisfaction will always exist (Huefner and Hunt, 2000). This suggests that managers will have to deal with utmost caution in providing a good product and service experience. A failure in providing a good experience, as observed, can also lead to termination and reduction of brand love, as seen in quote six. However, as a counter to negative past experience, a prompt corrective action has been instrumental in helping the development of brand love, as seen in quotes 4 and 5. So, in addition to providing superior functional attributes, brand managers are also encouraged to provide an adequate post-purchase service which can help in resurrecting the trajectories. Prompt corrective action is essential, keeping in view the high frequency of negative past experiences as a turning point. Failing which, as observed in the present study, can lead to a severe drop in feelings, even for an established consumer–brand relationship. On similar lines, past research has also noted that dissatisfaction can lead to an exit of a consumer and retaliation, which can severely damage the reputation and business of brands (Huefner and Hunt, 2000). Hence, electronic appliances' brands are advised to establish processes so that dissatisfied customers can voice their dissatisfaction. As seen in the past, voice is not just about empowering the customer (Naylor, 2003; Huefner and Hunt, 2000); it is also an opportunity for the brands to strengthen their emotional relationships with consumers. Further, literature has noted that brands that offer resolution reported higher satisfaction than the brands that did not offer resolution (Naylor, 2003). Hence, electronic brands can establish annual maintenance contract schemes and account management practices so that there is continuous feedback in place and a scope to initiate prompt corrective actions which can mitigate the dissatisfaction of consumers created by performance failures (negative past experiences). Further, brands are also advised to establish quick resolution procedures, as the longer the time taken to resolve a problem, the lower is the customer satisfaction level (Naylor, 2003).

The present study has also found that *spokesperson endorser influence* plays an essential role in helping the development of brand love trajectories. Thus, brand managers of electronic appliances should organize various events that can make use of endorsers in promoting the value offerings of the brand.

Though willingness to pay a premium has been regarded as a consequence of brand love (Bairrada et al. 2018), the present study has noted that high price as a turning point hindered the development of brand love. Keeping this in view, the present study suggests managers to design communication in such a way that it justifies the price of their offerings. Pricing needs utmost caution as high price can lead to initial negative feelings about a brand (quote 14 and quote 15) and can also lead to drastic reduction in feelings of love for a brand (quote 8 and quote 9) in the long run.

The present study also found that not everybody starts off with the same intensity of feelings. Interestingly, the present study did not observe any love at first sight type of trajectories which was seen in the study of Langner et al. (2015). This suggests that the consumers of electronic appliances, of Indian geography take considerable time to fall in love with a given brand.

Further, it has been observed that there can be a dip in the intensity in feelings of love (Fig.2b). Interestingly, a few respondents who were categorized under this type of trajectory have terminated their relationships with their loved brands (as seen in quote 8, quote 9, and quote 10). Basing on interpersonal literature, Fajer and Schouten (1995) found that physical separation, new brands replacing the old ones and partner behavior can lead to alienating the other party, as the major reasons for brand relationship termination. The negative turning points that were observed in the trajectory type of drop in love are *Negative Past Experience* and *High Price*. Quotes 8 and 9 suggest that the respective brands exhibited a behavior that has alienated the respondents, which led them to terminate their relationships with their loved brands. On the other hand, quote 11 indicates that the brand ceased to continue in the marketplace which is analogous to the physical separation mentioned by Fajer and Schouten (1995). Further, literature also noted that consumer–brand relationships can deteriorate due to brand dyadic stress (Andreasen, 1984; Fournier, 1998). Brand dyadic stress refers to the damage caused by someone breaking the rules of a relationship, a breach of trust or failure to keep a promise and poor performance of brand or inability to strengthen consumer commitment (Hemetsberger et al. 2009). Brand dyadic stress was observed in quote 10, where it can be understood that the respondent found that the loved brand was not the best, as the respondent could see a competitor brand providing a better value. This amounted to drop in the intensity of feelings because loved brands were praised for being the best available and getting to know that a better brand existed provided a reason for the reduction in intensity of feelings for his favorite brand (Batra et al. 2012). Interestingly, quote 13 suggests that even after a drastic reduction of feelings and termination of relationship with the brand, the respondent showed signs of getting back to the brand. Keeping these instances in view, managers are encouraged to address the grievances (prompt corrective action) with utmost seriousness so that the positive feelings are resurrected. As suggested above, account management practices should be established to counter the drop in intensity of feelings. Additionally, electronic appliances’ brands can also introduce mobile applications for addressing such grievances. Top management of these brands can personally monitor the grievance redressal processes, which will only benefit the brands in the long run.

Interestingly, the turning points that led to brand love termination have been *Negative Past Experience* and *High Price*, which are rational in nature. This suggests that consumers and brands can get separated due to rational reasons. Therefore, managers are encouraged to emphasize on the rational attributes like product performance, service delivery and high price. This also suggests that with increasing duration, rational attributes of a brand become more significant for brand lovers (Huber et al. 2015). The present study also showed that even after a drastic reduction in feelings, a few respondents demonstrated positive perceptions about their loved brands which can

be inferred from quote 12 and quote 13. This is because consumers take a longer time to emotionally detach themselves from their loved brands even after physical termination (Hemetsberger et al. 2009). Hence brand managers may consider ameliorating such problems by initiating prompt corrective actions.

The *Turnaround to Love* trajectory type of the present study has signified that a person having dislike and hate for a brand can also be nurtured to the state of brand love. The analysis of the present study has demonstrated that the trajectory type has all the identified negative turning points. However, the most frequently reported negative turning point of the trajectory was *High Price*. Hence, this reiterates that high price of a brand can lead to initial negative feelings of consumers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The present study is a purely exploratory study and has been specific to Indian context and electronic appliances product category. Future research can explore the trajectories of brand love in other contexts so that the generalizability of the phenomenon can be enhanced. Further, future research can also consider performing a cross-cultural study, as brand love has received limited cross-cultural examination (Palsuk et al. 2019).

The present study is a purely qualitative study, and the results of this study are subjective and not generalizable (Day, 2002). Hence, insights gained from the present study can be used in other studies by employing quantitative research methods.

Researchers can also explore the role of consumer's personality in the development of brand love trajectories. An understanding of personality can help brand managers in designing strategies accordingly. Additionally, future researchers can also look at the influence of gender on brand love development. This insight is crucial because past research has noted that men and women differ in terms of forming relationships with brands (Monga, 2002). Knowledge of the turning points that play a role in this context can help marketers craft suitable strategies.

The RIT method facilitates a depiction of consumer-brand relationships that is rich in information. Keeping this in view, future researchers can leverage RIT to understand various other constructs that explain the nature of consumer-brand relationships such as brand trust, brand loyalty, brand devotion, etc.

The present study has examined the development of brand love by analyzing the trajectories through the lens of turning points. Thus, the insights of the study do not suggest the possible impact of the trajectories on outcomes such as brand loyalty, positive word of mouth, willingness to pay premium, resistance to negative information, etc. Future research can look at the possibility of exploring the types of outcomes with respect to each trajectory type. Further, future research can also understand if each type of trajectory has a different impact on crucial consequences such as brand loyalty, willingness to pay premium, positive word of mouth, etc.

CONCLUSION

The present study has been an attempt to understand the brand love trajectories of electronic appliances product category. The literature of brand love suggests that most of the research on brand love has examined the concept from a static perspective (Palsuk et al. 2019) and this is one of the very few studies that have examined the concept of brand love from a dynamic perspective. The present study adds to the literature of brand love by focusing on consumers who are presently experiencing brand love and also who have experienced brand love in the past. Hence the study illuminates turning points that can help in brand love formation and also those that can

hinder brand love formation. The present study has shown that achieving brand love is a complex process, with majority of turning points indicating that they are in control of brand managers. This suggests that achieving brand love is not serendipitous.

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