Is Brand Romance a Decent Predictor of Brand Loyalty? Evidence from Sri Lankan Automobile Market

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Abstract

In a competitive automobile industry where consumers have a wide variety of automobile brands to choose from, it is imperative for marketers to foster brand loyalty in order to establish enduring consumer-brand relationships. Promotion brand romance has been suggested to marketers to cultivate emotional attachments between consumers and brands to increase brand loyalty. This study focused on determining the extent to which the three underlying dimensions of brand romance; namely pleasure, arousal and dominance predict brand loyalty among automobile users in the Southern province of Sri Lanka. 150 respondents participated in the study in total. The results indicated with respect to brand romance, respondents' current automobile brands generate brand pleasure and brand arousal, but the specific brands do not dominate the minds. Although respondents participating in the study did not exhibit strong levels of brand loyalty towards their current automobile brands, the three underlying dimensions of brand romance are statistically significant predictors of brand loyalty.

Keywords: Brand Romance, Brand Arousal, Brand Pleasure, Brand Dominance, Brand Loyalty

1. Introduction

Modern day consumers interact with thousands of brands during the lifetime; however, they only develop solid attachments to few of them. Further it is important to note that, consumer emotions play a significant role behind these attachments (Belaid & Temessek Behi, 2011). The emotional attachments that consumers, foster with brands are important to marketers who wish to establish long-term relationships with their consumers (Long-Tolbert & gamma 2012). Emotionally attached customers while brand loyal are less expensive to maintain and thus become more profitable for marketers in the long run (Basile & Vrontis, 2012).

Emotional attachments to brands have being explored by many researchers with the objective of developing better understanding of their customers (eg: Thomson, 2005; Park, 2009; Oliver 1999).

Current study is planning to explore more on one such concept, "Brand Romance". Brand romance reflects the deep emotional attachment customers have on brands which in turn dominates customer cognition through arousal of pleasure while using the brand (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). Kruger (2013, P2) defines brand romance as an emotional attachment; an attraction yet to be developed into brand love. Brand romance can be explained by using three underlying dimensions, namely pleasure, arousal and dominance (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). It is also important to note that, this deep emotional bond between customers and brands increase not only loyalty, but also prevent customers from switching to competitor brands.

Despite the importance as far as authors' knowledge is concerned, there are no studies done in Sri Lanka enquiring the impact of brand emotions on repeat purchase intention. Therefore, the main objective of the current study is to investigate the impact of brand romance on brand loyalty. Here the study will also be planning to examine the impact of sub variables of brand romance; namely brand arousal, brand pleasure and brand dominance, on brand loyalty.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Brand Loyalty

According to Jacoby & Kyner, (1973, P2) Band loyalty is the biased behavioural response expressed over time by some decision-making unit with respect to one or more alternative brand out of a set of such brands and is a function of psychological decision making and evaluative process. Oliver (1999, P33-44) defines brand loyalty as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future. Companies have started to focus more attention on customers with a higher level of brand loyalty, because they are more profitable than non-loyal customers (Helgesen, 2006). Also, brand-loyal consumers are confident in their brand judgments, committed to the value and price appeal and not price sensitive, so that the same brand is purchased repeatedly (Kruger, Kuhn, Petzer, & Mostert, 2013). Further (Park, MacInnis, & Priester, 2008; Petruzzellis, 2010) argue that brand loyalty is created by establishing and maintaining long term consumer-brand relationships. These long-term relationships create emotional attachments which is a necessary condition for consumers to act as partners in consumer-brand relationships

(Petzer, Mostert, Kruger, & Kuhn, 2014). Thus, researchers highlight the importance of understanding emotions in building brand Loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

2.2. Brand Romance

We as human beings tend to feel more loyal, to what we feel connected with, attached to, and love (Bowlby, 1979,P405). When considering about effective branding practices, this tendency can translate into the consumer-brand relationship. Consumer brand relationships have received considerable attention from both academics and practitioners alike since they have realized the contributing roles of relationship building for brand success. Further previous studies have verified that strong consumer-brand relationships enhances consumer' brand loyalty (Park et al., 2008). Therefore, while the importance of establishing and maintaining strongconsumer-brand relationships increases, how to do so remains as a challenge, especially within a business environment surrounded by huge competition with similar brands and products fighting for ever shrinking set of customers. Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) introduced the concept of "Brand Romance" to measure the consumers' emotional attachment towards brands. They define brand romance as a state of emotional attachment (evoked in response to the brand as a stimulus) that is characterized by strong positive effect towards the brand, high arousal caused by the brand, and a tendency of the brand to dominate the consumer's cognition.

2.3. Brand Pleasure

Jordan (1998, P26) defines pleasure as; the emotional and hedonic benefits associated with product use and displeasure; the emotional and hedonic penalties associated with product use. Positive experiences and feelings attached to the band was termed by Patwardhan and Balasubramanian (2011) as 'Brand pleasure' and it includes feelings like love, attraction, desire, pleasure, fun and excitement belong to the same constellation of emotions.Li, Dong & Chen (2012) states that emotional attachment and consumer–brand relationships start with consumers experiencing pleasure.

2.4. Brand Arousal

Researchers have found out that Brand arousal is a variable directly related to cognitive and affective processes, which influencs the human capacity to react to external stimuli (Ali at.el, 2017;LeDoux, 1998). Arousal is thus a physiological and psychological state of alertness(Smolders & de Kort, 2014). As a fundamental dimension in the study of emotions, arousal has been related to simple processes such as awareness and attention, but also to more complex tasks such as information retention and attitude formation. (Ali, et.al, 2017;

Robert & John, 1982) Previous literature suggests that arousal affects ad effectiveness, brand desirability and memory decoding (Belanche, Flavián, & Pérez-Rueda, 2014). Further it is suggested that, physical approach, preference, liking or positive attitudes, exploration, performance and affiliation can increase with higher levelof arousal (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011).

2.5. Brand Dominace

Brand Dominance captures the brand's tendency to engage the consumer's cognition(Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011). The complete immersion of Harley Davidson bikers to the brand within their community, provides evidence to the centrality of the brand in their lives (Oliver, 1999; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Wang et,al, 2019). Further extant research on brand communities depicts the extent to which brands become inextricably embedded within some portion of the consumer's psyche, as well as his/her lifestyle" (Oliver, 1999, P40).However such dominance is perceived as negative when it limits the freedom to think or act; but when it does not, it is actually preferred by customers (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974; Wang at.al, 2019).

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method and Design

This study is quantitative in nature and a carry a descriptive research design. The data was collected using a convenience sampling. The target population of the study included all those who were 18 years and older who lives in Sri Lanka at the time of the study and owns a passenger car. Passenger car users in Southern province were selected as the sampling unit of the study and the sample size was 140 respondents. There were no documentary evidence suggesting that geographical differences of buyers influencing emotional perception on brands, thus authors do not believe that selecting respondents from one province will impact the results. We acknowledge the limitations of convenience sampling and the small sample size, which was due to resource limitations.

The questionnaire was researcher administered and used a filtering question in order only to select respondents belonging to the required group. The questionnaire had two sections.The first section to determine the demographic profile of respondents and the Second section evaluated the perceptions on Brand Pleasure, Brand Arousal, Brand Dominance and Brand Loyalty. Refer table 01 for operationalization of variables. Second section comprised with 5-Point Likert scales questions to test the respondent's agreement to the stated scenarios. Five

points were allocated to the scales extended from 1 to 5 which depicted a range from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.
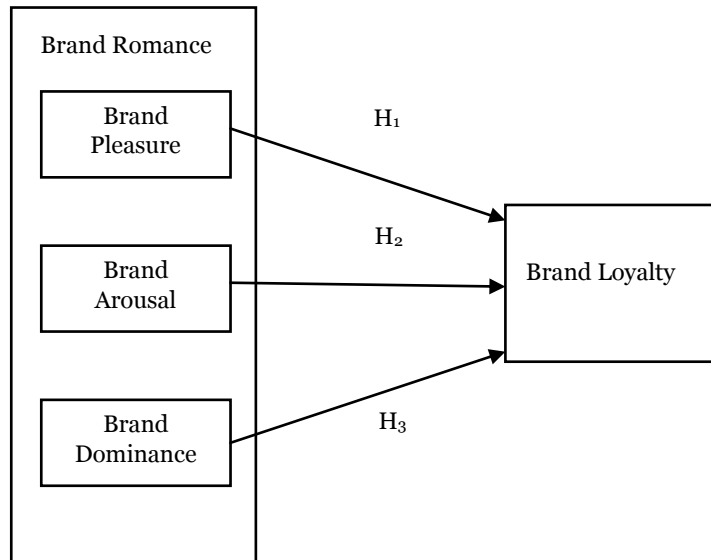
3.2. Conceptual Framework

Figure 01: Conceptual Framwrok

3.3. Research Hypotheses

By forming consumer-brand relationships, marketers can limit switching behaviour and strengthen brand loyalty (Aydın, 2017) thereby reducing marketing costs and increasing the share of consumers' spending (Petzer et al., 2014)While numerous research studies focussed on satisfaction as a mediator accounting for the relationship between numerous constructs and loyalty (Petzer et al., 2014) most studies conclude that satisfaction alone does not lead to brand loyalty (Dagger & David, 2012; Drengner, Jahn, & Gaus, 2012). Consequently, recent branding studies focussed on the mediating role of emotional attachments when long-term relationships with consumers are considered (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012; Long-Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012). While studies suggest that brand romance may forecast loyalty better than brand attitude (Patwardhan & Balasubramanian, 2011).

As per our study we conceptualize brand romance using three underline dimentions namely brand pleasure, brand arousal and brand dominance. We developed the following hypothesis based on the literature in order to be tested by the study.

Ha1: Brand pleasure significantly impact the brand loyalty

Ha2: Brand arousal significantly impact the brand loyalty

Ha3: Brand dominance significantly impact the brand loyalty

3.4. Operationalizationof Variables

Table 01: Operationalization of Variables

Concept	Dimensions	Scale items
Brand Romance (Patwardhan and Balasubramania, 2011)	Brand Pleasure (BP)	• BP1 - I love this brand. • BP2 - Using this brand gives me great pleasure. • BP3 - I am really happy that this brand is available. • BP4 - This brand do not disappoint me.
	Brand Arousal (BA)	• BA1 - I am attracted to this brand. • BA2 - I desire this brand. • BA3 - I want this brand. • BA4- I look forward to using this brand.
	Brand Dominance (BD)	• BD1 - My daydreams often include this brand. • BD2 - This brand often controls my thoughts. • BD3 - This brand only brings positive feelings in to my mind when making purchase decisions. • BD4 - This brand always seems to be on my mind.
Brand Loyalty (Keller, 2001)		• BL1 - I consider myself loyal to this brand. • BL2 - I feel this is the only brand of automobile I need. • BL3 -I consider this brand is my first choice when I want to buy an automobile. • BL4 - I recommend this brand those who ask my advice.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Assessing Reliability of Variables

Table 02: Reliability Statistics of The Study Variables

Constructs/Dimensions	Number of items	Cronbach's alpha coefficient
Brand Pleasure	4	0.898
Brand Arousal	4	0.789
Brand Dominance	4	0.875
Brand Loyalty	4	0.841

Source: Survey (2019)

To assess the internal consistency the reliability of the scales was used to measure the underlying dimensions of brand romance and the brand loyalty construct, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated which are subsequently presented in Table 2. According to Pallant (2010, p6), a coefficient of 0.7 and higher indicates sufficient internal consistency reliability which allows for the calculation of an overall mean score for the dimension or construct.

4.2. Demographic Profile of Respondents

As presented earlier in the methodology section, researcher has conducted the survey through a questionnaire and has collected data from 140 respondents through convenience sampling method. The following demographic analysis has been done using the data collected on the demographic related questions in the questionnaire.

Table 03: Demographic Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	82	58.6
	Female	58	41.4
Age	Below 25	14	10.0
	26-45	59	42.1
	46-65	53	37.9

	Above 65	14	10.0
Occupation	Government employee	46	32.9
	Private employee	63	45.0
	Self-employment	18	12.9
	Non-Employment	3	2.1
	Retired	10	7.1
Average Monthly Income	Below 75,000	26	18.6
	Between 75,000-99,999	30	21.4
	Between 100,000-149,999	40	28.6
	Between 150,000-249,999	22	15.7
	Between 250,000-349,999	15	10.7
	Above 350,000	7	5.0
Passenger car brand currently used	Toyota	52	37.1
	Honda	22	15.7
	Nissan	13	9.3
	Suzuki	24	17.1
	BMW	8	5.7
	Mecedez-Benz	10	7.1
	Other	11	7.9
Period using current passenger car brand	Less than 6 months	25	17.9
	6 months or longer, but less than 1 year	41	29.3
	1 year or longer, but less than 3 years	30	21.4
	3 years or longer, but less than 5 years	23	16.4
	5 years and longer	21	15.0

Source: Survey (2019)

Above table 3 depicts that out of 140 sample there are82 males and 58 females and further 58.6% of the sample is male. The majority of the respondents (59) belong to the age category 26-45 which represent 42% of total respondents. According to the occupation analysis of the respondents, most of them are working in private sector. When considering about the income level, majority of the respondents are earning 100,000-149,999 which accounts for 40 respondents (28.6%). Further, according to the results 37% are using Toyota brand, while 17.

% are using Zusuki brand. Most of the respondents (around 30%) had the car for less than a year. Refer table 3 for more information.

4.3. Descriptive Statistics on Brand Romance and Brand Loyalty Perceptions

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics on Brand Romance and Brand Loyalty Perceptions

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Brand Pleasure	140	4.0750	.58280
Brand Arousal	140	4.0643	.63782
Brand Dominance	140	3.4536	.58962
Brand Loyalty	140	2.7432	.48723
Valid N (listwise)	140		

Source: Survey (2019)

According to the table 4,all brand romance dimensions namely brand pleasure, brand arousal and the brand dominance indicate overall mean score which is higher than the midpoint of the scale. (Pleasure =4.075, Arousal =4.064,Dominance = 3.454).**It** can therefore be concluded that, **the** passenger cars are illicit brand romance dimensions; brand pleasure, brand arousal and the brand dominance, in the users' mind. However, as far as overall mean value of brand loyalty is concerned, it indicates a value of 2.74 which is below the midpoint of the scale. Accordingly, we do not notice significant levels of brand loyalty perceptions among the respondents of the study.

4.4. Correlation Coefficients among Variables

Table 5: Correlation Coefficients

	Brand Pleasure	Brand Arousal	Brand Dominance	VIF
Brand Pleasure	1			2.389
Brand Arousal	.724***	1		2.248
Brand Dominance	.620***	.588***	1	1.739
Brand Loyalty	.766***	.811***	.672***	

Source: Survey (2019)   *** represents 99% confidence level.

The table 5 summarizes the associations between the variables. According to the results, there are positive relationships across all variables and all values are significant at 0.99 level. The highest correlation among independent variables is recorded among the two variables; brand arousal and brand pleasure which is 0.724 (99% confidence level). Further, the highest VIF value recorded was 2.389, which is below the threshold level of 10 (Hair, et.al, 2012), which guarantees the absence of multicollinearity issues.

4.5. Multiple Regression Analysis Results

Overall R Square value of 0.750 for the regression model indicates that the three independent variables (brand pleasure, brand arousal and brand dominance) together explain around 75 percent of the variability in the dependent variable, brand loyalty.

Table 6: Model Summary

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	SE
1	.866a	.750	.745	.34481

a. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Pleasure, Brand Arousal, Brand Dominance

Source: Survey (2019)

Refer table 08. Further, according to the ANOVA calculations (refer table 09 for more details) the p-value is below 0.01 and the f-value is 130.080, thus signaling the high probability to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, the study can conclude that the regression line predicted by independent variables; brand pleasure, brand arousal and brand dominance, explain significant amount of variance in the dependent variable, brand loyalty.

Table 7: ANOVA

Model	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-value	p-value
Regression	48.536	3	16.179	136.080	.000b
Residual	16.169	136	.119		
Total	64.705	139			

a. Dependent variable: Brand Loyalty, b. Predictors: (Constant), Brand Pleasure, Brand Arousal, Brand Dominance

Source: Survey (2019)

Table 8: Beta Coefficients

Model	Standardized coefficients Beta-value	t-value	p-value
Brand Pleasure	.289	4.365	.000
Brand Arousal	.477	7.415	.000
Brand Dominance	.212	3.753	.000

a. Dependent variable: Brand Loyalty

Source: Survey (2019)

As per Table 8 it is evident that the three dimensions of brand romance are statistically significant predictors of brand loyalty. Among them, Brand arousal is the best predictor of Brand Loyalty (beta-value = 0.477; p-value < 0.05), followed by Brand Pleasure (beta-value = 0.289; p-value < 0.05) and Brand Dominance (beta-value = 0.212; p-value < 0.05).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

For passenger car makers cultivating brand loyalty is a challenging task since consumers have numerous passenger car brands to choose from. However, studies suggest that brand romance may predict brand loyalty, thus the current study was set out to determine the extent to which the three underlying dimensions of brand romance; (namely pleasure, arousal and dominance) predict brand loyalty among passenger car users. Table 9 and Figure 02 summarizes the testing results.

Table 9: Summary of the Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis		Survey Findings
H1	Brand pleasure predicts consumers' brand loyalty towards their current automobile brands	Supported
H2	Brand arousal predicts consumers' brand loyalty towards their current automobile brands	Supported
H3	Brand dominance predicts consumers' brand loyalty towards their current automobile brands	Supported

Brand Pleasure

B'value = 0.289

B'value = 0.477

Brand Arousal

Brand Loyalty

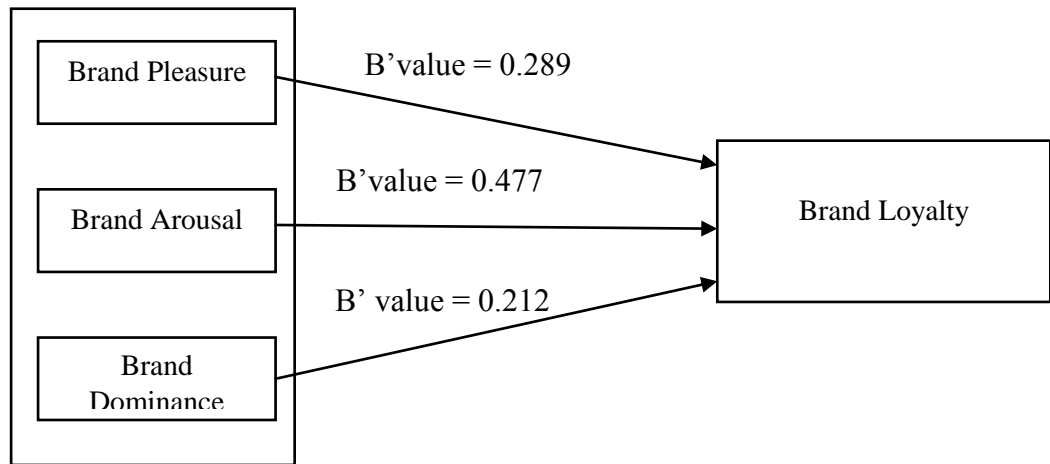B' value = 0.212

Brand Dominance

Figure 02: The conceptual Framework and the relationships

The results from this study indicate that, the three dimensions of brand romance, namely arousal, pleasure and dominance, are statistically significant predictors of brand loyalty. The results complement the present literature on brand romance as a viable construct for influencing brand loyalty. Although, all three constructs of brand romance are statistically significant predictors of brand loyalty, brand arousal is the best predictor of brand loyalty, followed by dominance and pleasure respectively.

Since it is apparent from the descriptive results that respondents experience pleasure more than what they are aroused, or that the passenger car brand dominates their thoughts, getting consumers involved with the brand will help to increase arousal. To increase dominance, passenger car marketers must clearly differentiate themselves; so that the brand will become part of consumers' identity instead of consumers viewing only the passenger car itself as part of their identity which results greater in brand loyalty. Also suggests that using romantic content in marketing communications to elicit romantic feelings for the brand. Affect, like brand romance, is not easily changed, but cognition can be redirected through argumentation. The possible influence of marketing stimuli aimed at attracting consumers to competitive brands will thus be weaker when brand romance is present, thereby resulting in more brand loyal consumers. For this reason, increasing brand romance could keep passenger car users' brand loyal. Finally, since the three dimensions of brand romance, namely pleasure, arousal and dominance, predict brand loyalty, passenger car marketers should attempt to increase consumers' brand romance to develop a brand loyal customer base.

5.1. Future Research

This study was conducted to determine the extent of the impact of the three underlying dimensions of brand romance namely pleasure, arousal and dominance; predict brand loyalty on passenger car users. Since brand romance is considered to be specific to a particular product, opportunities exist to measure it for different products in different contexts. Future research could include replicating the study in other product contexts to determine whether the three dimensions of brand romance, namely arousal, pleasure and dominance, predict brand loyalty.

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