A new dualistic approach to brand passion: Harmonious and obsessive

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ABSTRACT
Brand passion is increasingly seen as the ultimate emotional connection between the consumer and a brand. Limited previous research relied exclusively on Sternberg’s triangular interpersonal theory in developing the brand passion concept. This research paper integrates consumer brand identity theory, refines the definition of brand passion, and proposes a dualistic approach to brand passion which distinguishes between two different types of brand passion: harmonious and obsessive. Four separate studies confirm the existence of harmonious and obsessive passion in a consumer–brand context and begin to develop a nomological network of both antecedent and outcome variables for each type of brand passion. This research demonstrates that the conceptualization of consumer passion for a brand is much more complex than previously suggested.

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1. Introduction

In an increasingly competitive global marketplace where countless brands can satisfy consumer wants and needs, marketing practitioners and academicians have argued that the creation of highly emotional consumer–brand relationships is the driving force in consumer marketing (Fournier, 1998). It is in this context that the focus increasingly lies on generating brand passion. Brand passion is seen as the ultimate emotional connection between a consumer and a brand. Consumers become personally invested in the brand, sometimes even more so than they do with their friends and loved ones (McEwen, 2004). Consensus exists among marketing academicians that passion is a “core element” of this emotional connection and may translate in consumer loyalty (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Bauer, Heinrich, & Marin, 2007; Sternberg, 1997). Yet, notwithstanding the importance of passion and in contrast with other disciplines such as philosophy and psychology, marketing scholars have just recently begun to examine the complex phenomenon of passion in a consumption context (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013).

Despite the acknowledgement that brand passion is not homogeneous in nature but is rather comprised of “excitation, infatuation, and obsession” (Albert et al., 2013, p. 905), the existing research operationalizes brand passion as a unidimensional construct. Such operationalization leads to mixed findings. For example, positive relationships between brand passion and consumers’ acceptance for a higher price are shown to be significant in some (Bauer et al., 2007) but not in other studies (Albert et al., 2013). This evidence indicates that brand passion is not unidimensional, but is rather a complex phenomenon that may include interrelated, yet distinct components, resulting in different relationships with other variables.

The existing inconsistencies in brand passion research can be attributed to the lack of theoretical foundation which may explain the nuances and complexities of the passion construct. Previous research has consistently applied Sternberg’s triangular interpersonal theory of love as the foundation for studying brand passion. Although Sternberg’s theory advances a multi-dimensional structure of love, it fails to clearly distinguish between different types of love and, therefore, does not encourage analytical comparisons of different components and their combinations (Sternberg & Barnes, 1988). Furthermore, Sternberg’s theory fails to discuss how a loved brand is integrated into the consumer’s identity (Batra et al., 2012).

In order to understand the dimensionality of brand passion, it is essential to account for its psychological mechanisms which can be better understood through the framework of identity theory. Brands have been previously described as “a relationship partner that is important to (1) the private self, such that individual consumers use the brand to define who they are, and (2) the social self, such that these consumers consider themselves part of an in-group of consumers who identify with the same brand” (Lam, Ahearne, Hu, & Schillewaert, 2010, p. 129). The mechanisms that shape one’s private or social self may be either autonomous or controlled, therefore, generating a harmonious or obsessive type of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). While these types of passion have been established in psychology and management research (e.g., Vallerand et al., 2003), no studies have applied the duality of passion to the consumer...
brand context. However, such knowledge will allow for a more nuanced understanding of brand passion and its relations to other constructs.

While we do not suggest that researchers should abstain from using Sternberg’s interpersonal love theory when examining brand passion, we do argue that it is critical to integrate consumer brand identity theory to the further development of the brand passion concept. The purpose of this study is therefore threefold. First, drawing from consumer brand identity theory, we expand the definition of brand passion. Second, we propose a new dualistic approach to brand passion. We suggest there are two types of brand passion, harmonious brand passion and obsessive brand passion, which can be distinguished based on how the brand is internalized into one’s identity (Lam et al., 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). Third, to further demonstrate the convergent and discriminant validity of harmonious and obsessive brand passion, we develop a nomological network of antecedent and outcome variables specific to each brand passion type.

2. The concept of passion

Passion has long been a topic of discussion among philosophers. In line with the etymology of the word passion, from the Latin word “passio” for suffering, one group of philosophers that includes Kant (1724–1804) and Hume (1711–1776) proposes that the will is inevitably determined by the passions. People are slaves to their passions, which is evil. Kant defined passion as “a desire that has become a habitual inclination, and since habituation destroys freedom, passions cause the loss of freedom.” While Kant and Hume provide opposite answers to the question whether it is possible for reason to overcome the passions, they both subscribe to a conceptual dichotomy and view reason and passion to be exclusive categories. A different view is provided by Descartes (1596–1650) and Spinoza (1632–1677). They do not subscribe to the dichotomy between passion and reason. Men’s emotional orientation has changed from passivity to activity with Spinoza recognizing “the possibility of passions themselves being transformed into a form of reason” (Dilman, 1984, p. 186); thus, arguing that passions are not inherently evil and can lead to positive behavioral tendencies “as long as reason underlies the behavior” (Vallerand et al., 2003, p. 756).

Based on the view supported by Spinoza and Descartes that passion and reason are not mutually exclusive, a recent advancement in psychology has proposed a dualistic approach to passion toward activities. Passion is defined by Vallerand et al. (2003) as “a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy” (p.757). Furthermore, Vallerand et al. (2003) propose that there are two types of passion, harmonious and obsessive, which can be distinguished based on how an individual internalizes the passionate activity into one’s self-identity. Most individuals who are passionate are able to keep their passion in harmony with other aspects of their lives, thus experiencing harmonious passion. Yet, other individuals are passionate to the extent that the object of their passion dominates their existence causing imbalance with other life domains.

3. Brand passion in the marketing literature

In the marketing literature, the construct of passion has been mainly discussed within the framework of Sternberg’s triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986). The triangular theory of love posits that love includes three components: intimacy, decision/commitment, and passion. Sternberg defines passion as “the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationships” (Sternberg, 1997, p. 315).

Researchers applied Sternberg’s triangular theory to explain passion in a consumption context. Initial qualitative research likened passionate feelings toward a product or brand to the passionate feelings toward another person, as in the case of interpersonal love relationships (Shimp & Madden, 1988). Bauer et al. (2007) defined passion as “a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioral factors” (p. 2190). Recently brand passion has been defined as “a psychological construct comprised of excitement, infatuation, and obsession for a brand” and “a feeling which few consumers embrace” (Albert et al., 2013, p. 2 and p. 5). In general, the existing conceptualizations suggest that passion is at the core of strong and high quality consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). Passionate consumers are driven by desires that are overpowering and may dominate consumers’ thoughts, feelings, and actions, and often come alive in a social context (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003).

Research has linked brand passion to a number of antecedents and outcomes such as brand uniqueness, the prestige of the brand, and self-expressive and hedonic features of the brand. Brand identification is the best predictor of brand passion, and is predicted to a lesser degree by brand trust (Albert et al., 2013). No consensus exists on whether consumers’ characteristics help predict brand passion. While Bauer et al. (2007) did not find a relationship between extraversion and brand passion, another study did find a relationship between the two variables (Matzler, Pichtler, & Hemetsberger, 2007). In regards to brand passion outcomes, previous research shows that consumer passion for a brand translates into consumer loyalty (Wiang, Allen, Sahourney, & Zhang, 2004). Additionally, mixed findings have put into question whether brand passion leads to a consumer’s willingness to pay a price premium for the brand (Albert et al., 2013).

Despite researchers’ attempts to examine antecedents and outcomes of brand passion, the nomological framework of the construct lacks the desired consistency. This limitation, in part, stems from the narrow scope of Sternberg’s triangular theory that fails to capture the duality of the passion construct. To this end, we propose a new dualistic model of brand passion. We ground our arguments in the customer–brand identification framework (CBI) (Lam et al., 2010) and the dualistic passion approach (Vallerand et al., 2003).

4. A new dualistic approach to brand passion

It is an accepted concept in the marketing literature that our possessions are a reflection of our identities (Belk, 1988). Recent research established that when a consumer loves a brand, the integration of the brand into the consumer’s identity is a central aspect of the brand love. The sense of consumer identification toward the brand is critical for establishing a passionate feeling for the brand (Albert et al., 2013; Batra et al., 2012). Yet, Sternberg’s triangular theory of love does not include the integration of the beloved into the self. Perhaps Sternberg’s failure to integrate identity theory is because research elsewhere, especially early research in the organizational identification literature (for a review, see Ashforth, Harrison, & Corley, 2008), conceptualizes identification as purely cognitive. Hence, conceptualizations of brand passion based on Sternberg’s theory are likely to omit the ways that brands are used by consumers to help create their identity.

Unlike Sternberg’s theory, the customer–brand identification framework (Lam et al., 2010) embraces the multidimensionality of identification. CBI is defined as “a customer’s psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand” (Lam et al., 2010, p. 130) and consists of three dimensions: a cognitive dimension, an emotional connection (i.e., the emotional consequences of brand usage), and an evaluative dimension (i.e., “whether the consumer thinks the psychological oneness with the brand is valuable to him or her individually and socially”; Lam et al., 2010, p. 137). Batra et al. (2012) defined passion-driven behavior as behavior reflecting a strong desire to use the brand, invest resources into the brand, and a history of having done so. We propose a new definition of brand passion that combines Batra’s conceptualization and integrates a multidimensional identity perspective based on the CBI framework. We define brand
passion as a strong emotional connection to a brand that people value, find important, desire to own and/or use, incorporate into their identity, and invest resources in over a period of time. Hence, brand passion becomes central to one’s identity and serves to define the person. For example, those who have a passion for Harley-Davidson do not merely use the product but are “HOGS” (Harley Owner Group members); their passion for the brand becomes part of who they are.

Furthermore, we propose that the dualistic approach to passion toward activities by Vallerand et al. (2003) translates into the consumer–brand environment and applies to the brand passion concept. Two distinct types of passion arise as a result of how the brand is internalized in one’s identity. Harmonious brand passion results from an autonomous internalization of the brand into one’s identity. Autonomous internalization of the brand occurs when individuals themselves, without any contingencies or other influences, like the brand, find it important, desire to obtain and/or use the brand, and decide to spend resources on it. Individuals purchase or use the brand without feeling compelled to do so based on any social and other external pressures. This internal motivation to pursue the brand enables individuals to keep their relationship with the brand in harmony with other aspects of their lives.

Obsessive brand passion (OBP) results from a controlled internalization of the brand into one’s identity. Controlled internalization occurs when individuals like the brand, find it important, desire to obtain and/or use the brand, and decide to spend resources on it because of inter-personal (social) intra-personal (internal) pressures or sometimes for no apparent reason but simply because they cannot help but purchase it. Although individuals like the brand, contingencies control their attachment to it, such as feelings of social acceptance (interpersonal or social) or self-esteem (intra-personal or internal). Because the relationship with the brand is out of the individual’s control, ownership and/or use of the brand eventually dominates the individual’s identity; therefore, the individual becomes obsessed with the brand, and the brand passion interferes with other facets of the individual’s life. Thus we hypothesize:

**H1.** Two distinct types of brand passion exist, harmonious and obsessive.

5. Developing a nomological framework

In this section of the paper we develop a framework of antecedents and outcomes for the two different types of brand passion (Fig. 1).

5.1. Self-expressive brands, harmonious brand passion, and obsessive brand passion

Self-expression of a brand is defined as “the consumer’s perception of the degree to which the specific brand enhances one’s social self and/or reflects one’s inner self” (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 82). Lam et al. (2010) define a strong brand as “a relationship partner that is important to the private self, such that individual customers use the brand to define who they are, or, the social self, such that these customers consider themselves part of an in-group of customers who identify with the same brand” (p. 9). The level of self-expression of a brand is thus a central component of brand identification. Past research demonstrates that brand identification and self-expressive brands contribute to brand love and brand passion (Albert et al., 2013; Bauer et al., 2007).

What distinguishes harmonious brand passion from obsessive brand passion is how the brand is internalized in one’s identity. What both types of passion have in common is that the brand is part of the consumer’s identity. It follows then that both types of consumer brand passion should be greater for those brands that play a significant role in shaping a consumer’s identity. Thus, consumers who perceive brands to gradually enhance their identities may increasingly develop either harmonious or obsessive passion for the brand, or more formally hypothesized:

H2a. The level of self-expression of a brand is positively related to harmonious brand passion.

H2b. The level of self-expression of a brand is positively related to obsessive brand passion.

![Fig. 1. Antecedents and outcomes of harmonious and obsessive brand passion: A: Conceptual model. Note. The model does not show H1 (the dual structure of brand passion) and H6c (the difference in the strength of relationships between harmonious passion and obsessive passion and willingness to pay premium price).](image-url)
5.4. Obsessive brand passion and brand evangelism

An important determinant of an individual’s behavior is the influence of others. “Consumer behavior cannot be fully understood unless consideration is given to the effects of interpersonal influence on development of attitudes, norms, values, aspirations, and purchase behavior” (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989, p. 473). It has been argued that consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a general trait that varies across individuals and helps determine individual decision processes (Bearden et al., 1989). Consumer susceptibility is defined as “the need to identify or enhance one’s image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others and/or seeking information from others” (Bearden et al., 1989, p. 474). Passionate desires for products or brands often emerge and manifest themselves more prominently from interpersonal influences, in a social context (Belk et al., 2003).

We argue that consumers who are highly susceptible to interpersonal influence are more likely to develop a passion for brands that is obsessive. The driving force for internalizing the brand in one’s identity is the need to identify with others and/or conform to the expectations of others regarding acquisition and use of the brand. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3. Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is positively related to obsessive brand passion.

5.3. Harmonious brand passion and positive word-of-mouth

Brand passion has been considered the most managerially relevant component of brand love because it often elicits positive, passion driven behaviors which may ultimately result in brand loyalty (Batra et al., 2012). Recent studies have demonstrated that a consistent outcome of brand passion is positive word-of-mouth (Albert et al., 2013; Bauer et al., 2007). We argue that positive word-of-mouth is an outcome of one particular type of passion, harmonious brand passion. Consumers who experience harmonious passion for a brand incorporate the brand as part of their identity, without any external contingencies, but rather because of the satisfaction that the brand provides. Their willful brand choice and feelings of satisfaction will more likely encourage positive word-of-mouth because speaking positively about a brand to others may provide a means of expressing their own self-identity (Arnett, German, & Hunt, 2003), and the greater the degree of overlap between the brand and the self, the more likely that the individual will reflect positively about the brand. We hypothesize:

H4. Harmonious brand passion is positively related to positive word-of-mouth.

5.4. Obsessive brand passion and brand evangelism

Matzler et al. (2007) defined brand evangelism as “a more active and committed way of spreading positive opinions and trying fervently to convince or persuade others to get engaged with the same brand” (p. 27). Words that are often used to describe consumers who participate in this type of behavior are zealous, militants, devotees, and/or missionaries (Pimentel & Reynolds, 2004). Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that people define their self-concepts by their connections with social groups or organizations. Bhattacharaya and Sen (2003) noted that “consumers become champions of the companies with whom they identify” (p. 76–77). Matzler et al. (2007) demonstrated that passionate consumers who are extraverts are more likely to engage in brand evangelism. In analogy to passionate extravert consumers, interpersonal interaction is important to those consumers who experience obsessive passion (Mooradian & Swan, 2006). Consumers with obsessive brand passion adopt the brand as part of their identity because the brand prompts feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem. Unlike positive word-of-mouth that reflects the balanced nature of harmonious passion (Albert et al., 2013), the uncontrolled liking of the brand that comes with obsessive passion will push consumers to do more than simply “share the good word” about their favorite brand to family and friends. Because obsessive passion involves overvaluing the object of passion and putting it above all aspects of one’s own life (Vallerand et al., 2003), those with obsessive brand passion will most likely seek to convert others and “preach the brand’s most loved aspects and all positive associations that come with it to people who have so far not acknowledged the wonder of it” (Matzler et al., 2007, p. 27). We therefore hypothesize:

H5. Obsessive brand passion is positively related to brand evangelism.

5.5. Harmonious brand passion, obsessive brand passion, and willingness to pay a premium price

A consensus in the marketing literature exists that consumers are willing to pay a higher price for the brand that they value (Aaker, 1991). Previous studies demonstrated that brand passion influences consumers’ willingness to pay a higher price (Bauer et al., 2007), albeit sometimes mediated by brand commitment (Albert et al., 2013). While we agree that both harmonious and obsessive brand passion influence consumers’ willingness to pay a premium price, we argue that the relationship between obsessive brand passion and willingness to pay a premium price will be stronger than the relationship between harmonious brand passion and willingness to pay a premium price.

Consumers who are harmoniously passionate experience positive feelings about the brand, yet the brand does not take an overpowering space in their identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Individuals value the brand greatly as part of their identity and would be willing to pay a premium price only as long as it is in harmony with other aspects of their lives. In contrast, the controlled internalization of the brand in one’s identity which takes place in consumers who experience obsessive brand passion breeds an internal compulsion to consume the brand (Vallerand et al., 2003). The brand takes on disproportionate space in the person’s identity which may lead to a willingness to pay a premium price, even to the extent that it may cause conflict with other aspects in the person’s life. Thus, we hypothesize:

H6a. Harmonious brand passion is positively related to willingness to pay a premium price.

H6b. Obsessive brand passion is positively related to willingness to pay a premium price.

H6c. The relationship between the two different types of brand passion and willingness to pay a premium price is stronger for obsessive brand passion than it is for harmonious brand passion.

6. Methodology

To establish a nomological structure of the brand passion construct, we first performed a small-scale qualitative study followed by three quantitative studies. Study 1, the qualitative study, included a series of interviews with academics, high school and university students, and non-academic friends. The goal was to assess the face and content validity of the dual brand passion construct. The interviews provided evidence of the existence of harmonious and obsessive brand passion. Study 2, launched as a pilot, aimed to obtain preliminary statistical
evidence of the duality of the brand passion construct. It employed student data \((N = 121)\). Study 3 further confirmed the dual structure of brand passion and expanded its nomological structure by including brand passion antecedents into the model. Study 3 used a more diverse sample \((N = 296)\) collected from Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Finally, Study 4 built upon and expanded Study 3 by examining brand passion outcomes. Data were collected using a cross-sectional survey obtained from the Qualtrics, Inc., an interactive consumer panel representing U.S. consumers over the age of 18 \((N = 500)\). The above four-step approach allows extensive support for the convergent and discriminant validity of brand passion and its generalizability to the U.S. consumer population. Below, we describe each of the studies in more detail.

7. Studies 1, 2, 3, and 4

7.1. Study 1

In order to obtain preliminary evidence of the validity of the dualistic approach to brand passion, a convenience sample was interviewed. The sample consisted of 17 people, ranging in ages from 17 to 53. Ten participants were female. One participant was Hispanic, two were African American and fourteen were Caucasian. Four participants were high school and five were college students. Professions of the other participants included a nurse, a high school teacher, a clerical worker, an oil field worker, a flight attendant, a fireman, a homemaker, and a secretary. The interviews were unstructured, allowing participants to freely provide their opinions. The interview began with the interviewee discussing potential emotional connections with his/her favorite brand(s) and what type of role these brand(s) played in his/her life. We then described the meaning of harmonious and obsessive brand passion \((\text{Vallerand et al., 2003})\) and asked the interviewees in which category their brand passion would fit and why. We probed if they could tell us about someone they knew who would fit into the other category. If they knew someone, we would ask for details to demonstrate the placement. The interviews lasted from 10 to 40 min. Some of the remarks clearly indicated the existence of both harmonious and obsessive brand passion, as well as provided examples of three different drivers of controlled internalization (in the case of obsessive passion): social, internal, and “no reason” \((\text{Vallerand et al., 2003})\).

Table 1 provides the examples of quotes from the study participants which illustrate the differences between the two types of brand passion.

7.2. Study 2

7.2.1. Participants

Study 2 was launched as a pilot study and aimed to obtain preliminary statistical support for the plausibility of the two-factor model of passion \((\text{Vallerand et al., 2003})\) in the context of consumer brands. One hundred fifty undergraduate and graduate students from a University in the southern United States were contacted with a request to participate in the study, which resulted in 121 usable surveys (a response rate of 80.65%). Similar to the most recent brand passion research conducted by Albert et al. (2013), participants indicated a favored brand, of their own choice, and responded to the survey relative to that brand. Participation was anonymous and no incentives were provided. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 50 years \((M = 22.66; \text{SD} = 4.09)\). Fifty-two \((41.2\%)\) were females and seven \((5.8\%)\) were married. Seventy-one \((58.7\%)\) were white, twelve \((9.9\%)\) were Hispanic, fourteen \((11.6\%)\) were African American, eight \((6.6\%)\) were Native American, and sixteen \((13.2\%)\) were other.

7.2.2. Measures

To measure the dual passion construct, we adapted the dual passion scale developed by Vallerand et al. (2003) to the consumer brand context. A total of 10 items are used to assess harmonious passion \((5 \text{ items})\) and obsessive passion \((5 \text{ items})\). The responses range from “strongly disagree” \((1)\) to “strongly agree” \((7)\). Cronbach’s alphas for the harmonious and obsessive scales are \(\alpha = .87\) and \(\alpha = .89\) respectively.

7.2.3. Analyses and results

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), using a maximum likelihood estimation in LISREL 8.80 \((\text{Jöreskog & Sörbom, 2006})\), assessed the validity of the two brand passion constructs \((\text{Table 2})\). The measurement model revealed an acceptable fit \((\chi^2 = 51.32 \text{ df.} = 34, p < .028, \text{RMSEA} = .06, \text{NFI} = .98, \text{CFI} = .99)\). To test convergent validity, we used factor loadings, squared multiple correlations (SMCs), composite reliabilities and average variance extracted (AVE). The average factor loading was .91. SMCs shared variance or reliability between each indicator and its respective underlying construct indicate convergent validity if found to be greater than .50 and/or have a significant t-value which is observed for each indicator \((\text{Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1989})\). All SMCs were above the .50 cutoff value. Both constructs exceeded the recommended minimum standards proposed by Baggozzi and Yi (1988) in terms of composite reliabilities and AVEs which were greater than 0.60 and 0.50 respectively: harmonious passion \((\rho = .89; \text{AVE} = 61.53\%\), and obsessive passion \((\rho = .95; \text{AVE} = 80.33\%)\). Hence, the two-factor construct structure demonstrated convergent validity.

Because the two types of passion have not been applied to consumer brands, it is useful to explore the structure of brand passion by examining several alternative conceptualizations. We treated the hypothesized two-factor model with correlated factors as the baseline model \((\text{Table 2})\). Two plausible alternative models were compared against the baseline model: 1) the two-factor model with uncorrelated factor covariances and 2) the one-factor model in which all ten manifest variables load on one factor, general brand passion. The hypothesized model provided a better fit than any of the alternative models across
all of the fit indices (Table 2). As expected, the results from Study 2 provide preliminary statistical evidence in support of H1.

7.3. Study 3

7.3.1. Participants

Study 3 was conducted to both confirm the dual structure of the brand passion construct and examine brand passion antecedents. The data (N = 296) were collected through Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Although a relatively new source of data collection, the utilization of MTurk has been shown to result in high quality, diverse, and reliable data (Buhrmester, Kwang, & Gosling, 2011). Participants received $2.50 in exchange for participating. The eligibility for survey participation was determined by being at least 18 years old and residing in the U.S. Three hundred responses were received. However, four responses were incomplete, therefore resulting in 296 usable questionnaires. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 80 years (M = 33.35; SD = 11.34). One hundred forty-nine (50.3%) were females and one hundred fifteen (49.7%) were males. Two hundred thirty-two (78.6%) were married. Two hundred thirty-two (78.6%) were married. Two hundred thirty-two (78.6%) were married.

7.3.2. Measures

Similarly to Study 2, the 10-item scale (Vallerand et al., 2003) was used to assess harmonious and obsessive passion. Cronbach’s alphas for the harmonious and obsessive scales were α = .81 and α = .88. Self-expression of a brand was measured with the 8-item self-expression brand scale (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was α = .93. Finally, we measured susceptibility to interpersonal influence with the 8-item scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989). The responses range from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was α = .94.

7.3.3. Analyses and results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for and among all variables are presented in Table 3.

We used CFA in LISREL 8.80 to assess the validity of the study scales. The four-factor measurement model (harmonious passion, obsessive passion, brand self-expression, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence) showed an acceptable fit (χ² = 982.94 df = 293, p < .001, χ²/df = 3.35, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .96, and CFI = .96). Although the value for chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio slightly exceeds the recommended cutoff point of 3, it is still between 3 and 5, and thus the model fit can be considered acceptable (Carmines & McIver, 1981). Further analyses of the two alternative models (Table 4) supported the discriminant validity of the four-factor measurement model, in which harmonious and obsessive passion are correlated. The average item loading was .91. All item SMCs but one ("I cannot live without my favorite brand," SMC = .39) were well above the .50 cutoff value. However, despite its low SMC, the t-value observed for that item was significant (t = 7.62), and the item was retained in the model. The composite reliabilities and AVEs were greater than 0.60 and 0.50 respectively: harmonious passion (p = .85; AVE = .53%), obsessive passion (p = .90; AVE = .63%), brand self-expression (p = .94; AVE = .66%), and susceptibility to interpersonal influence (p = .94; AVE = .67%).

We then used SEM to test Hypotheses 2a, 2b, and 3, predicting the antecedent-brand passion relationships (Fig. 2). The results show a good fit between the data and the model, as reflected by the χ² = 984.45 df = 294, p < .001, χ²/df = 3.34, RMSEA = .08, NNFI = .96, and CFI = .96. Although slightly higher than the recommended value of 3, the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio is in the acceptable bounds (Carmines & McIver, 1981). The path coefficients of the structural model provided direct evidence of the hypotheses supported (Fig. 2). The results suggest that self-expression of a brand is positively related to harmonious passion (H2a) and obsessive passion (H2b), whereas susceptibility to interpersonal influence is positively related to obsessive passion (H3).

7.4. Study 4

7.4.1. Participants

In Study 4, we further expanded the nomological structure of brand passion by simultaneously testing its antecedents and outcomes. Data were collected using a cross-sectional survey obtained from the Qualtrics, Inc. (N = 500). Sample data were compared to population demographic statistics obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau. No significant differences emerged from any of the demographic characteristics. Participants’ ages ranged from 18 to 80 years (M = 33.35; SD = 11.34). Two hundred fifty (50.0%) were females and two hundred forty (48.0%) were married. Two hundred sixty-six (73.0%) were white, sixty-one (12.2%) were African American, sixteen (3.2%) were Native American, forty-eight (8.2%) were Hispanic, and seventeen (3.4%) were other.

7.4.2. Measures

Brand passion was measured by 10 items (Vallerand et al., 2003). Cronbach’s alphas for the harmonious and obsessive scales were α = .88 and α = .93. Self-expression brands and susceptibility to interpersonal influence were measured with the 8-item and 11-item, 7-point scales, respectively (Bearden et al., 1989; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Cronbach’s alphas were α = .96 and α = .96, respectively. Word-of-mouth was measured with a 4-item, 7-point scale (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), and willingness to pay a premium price was measured with a 3-item, 7-point scale (Albert et al., 2013). Cronbach’s alphas were α = .88 and α = .92, respectively. Brand evangelism was assessed using the scale by Matzler et al. (2007). We retained 3 items from that

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Table 2

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<th>Model</th>
<th>χ²(d.f.)</th>
<th>Δχ²(d.f.)</th>
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<td>.98</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>93.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 1</td>
<td>68.14(25)</td>
<td>16.82(1)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td>108.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 2</td>
<td>268.97(36)</td>
<td>217.65(1)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td>308.97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 121. RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; AIC = Akaike information criterion.

* The two-factor model includes harmonious and obsessive passion; the factors are correlated.
* Items load on two separate factors: harmonious brand passion and obsessive brand passion, the factors are uncorrelated.
* Items load on one factor.

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Harmonious passion</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Obsessive passion</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-expressive brand</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>.15**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 296. The reliabilities (alpha coefficients) are reported in the diagonal pattern in the table (numbers in italics). ** p < .01.
Table 4
Fit statistics for alternative models: Antecedents of harmonious and obsessive passion (Study 3).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>χ²(df)</th>
<th>Δχ²(df)</th>
<th>RMSEA</th>
<th>NNFI</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>AIC</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypothesized model (baseline model)</td>
<td>982.94</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1098.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 1(^a)</td>
<td>1005.08 (294)</td>
<td>22.68 (1)(^***)</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>1119.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alternative Model 2(^b)</td>
<td>1520.01 (296)</td>
<td>537.07 (3)(^***)</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td>1630.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 296 \). RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; NNFI = nonnormed fit index; CFI = comparative fit index; AIC = Akaike information criteria.

\(^a\) The four-factor model includes harmonious passion, obsessive passion, self-expression of a brand, and susceptibility to interpersonal influence; all factors correlated.

\(^b\) Harmonious and obsessive passion factors are uncorrelated.

\(^c\) All items of harmonious and obsessive passion load on one factor; other factors are distinct.

\(* p < .001.\

Fig. 2. Antecedents of harmonious and obsessive brand passion (Study 3). Note. \( N = 296 \). Goodness-of-fit statistic: \( \chi^2 = 984.45 \text{ d.f.} = 294, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .08, \text{NNFI} = .96, \text{and CFI} = .96. \) The loadings are standardized beta-coefficients. \( p < .001.\)

7.4.3. Analyses and results
The means, standard deviations, and correlations for and among all variables are presented in Table 5. CFA results reveal a good fit for the seven-factor measurement model (harmonious passion, obsessive passion, brand self-expression, susceptibility to interpersonal influence, positive word-of-mouth, brand evangelism, and willingness to pay a higher price). \( \chi^2 = 1672.75 \text{ d.f.} = 573, p < .001, \chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 2.91, \text{RMSEA} = .06, \text{NNFI} = .98, \text{and CFI} = .98. \) Given the high correlation between positive word of mouth and brand evangelism (\( r = .73 \)), we tested an alternative six-factor model in which positive word of mouth and brand evangelism loaded on a single factor. This model yielded a worse fit (\( \chi^2 = 2311.84 \text{ d.f.} = 579, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .08, \text{NNFI} = .97, \text{and CFI} = .97; \Delta \chi^2 = 639.09, \text{d.f.} = 6, p < .001), suggesting that positive word of mouth and brand evangelism are distinct. In regards to convergent validity, all SMCs except for one item ("I have shared the good word and converted several of my friends to my favorite brand," SMC = .27) exceeded the .50 cutoff value. Despite its low SMC, the observed t-value for that indicator was significant (\( t = 11.34 \)), and the indicator was retained. All item loadings were significant. Composite reliabilities and AVEs were greater than 0.60 and 0.50 respectively: harmonious passion (\( \rho = .90; \text{AVE} = 64.46 \)), obsessive passion (\( \rho = .95; \text{AVE} = 78.18 \)), brand self-expression (\( \rho = .96; \text{AVE} = 77.30 \)), susceptibility to interpersonal influence (\( \rho = .97; \text{AVE} = 80.29 \)), positive word-of-mouth (\( \rho = .94; \text{AVE} = 8.64 \)), willingness to pay a premium price (\( \rho = .91; \text{AVE} = 76.47 \)), and brand evangelism (\( \rho = .84; \text{AVE} = 65.32 \)); therefore, supporting convergent validity.

The hypothesized structural model demonstrated a good fit, \( \chi^2 = 2048.57 \text{ d.f.} = 585, \chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 3.50, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .07, \text{NNFI} = .97, \text{and CFI} = .97. \) Although the chi-square/degrees of freedom ratio slightly exceeds 3, it is still within the acceptable range and indicates the acceptable model fit (Carmines & McIver, 1981). All hypothesized relationships for brand passion antecedents and outcomes are significant (Fig. 3). Confirming Study 3, self-expression of a brand is the antecedent of both harmonious (H2a) and obsessive passion (H2b); whereas, susceptibility to interpersonal influence is the antecedent of

Table 5
Means, standard deviations, and correlations among the variables (Study 4).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Harmonious passion</td>
<td>5.29</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Obsessive passion</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-expressive brand</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>.51**</td>
<td>.59**</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Susceptibility to interpersonal influence</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>.19**</td>
<td>.46**</td>
<td>.54**</td>
<td>.96</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Positive word-of-mouth</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.26**</td>
<td>.37**</td>
<td>.14**</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Brand evangelism</td>
<td>4.20</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.49**</td>
<td>.55**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.73**</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Willingness to pay a premium price</td>
<td>4.24</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>.34**</td>
<td>.38**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.29**</td>
<td>.48**</td>
<td>.60**</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. \( N = 500. \) The reliabilities (alpha coefficients) are reported in the diagonal pattern in the table (numbers in italics).

** \( p < .01. \)
obsessive passion (H3). Harmonious passion is positively associated with positive word-of-mouth (H4) and willingness to pay a premium price (H6a). Obsessive passion is positively related to brand evangelism (H5), as well as willingness to pay a premium price (H6b). Finally, the stronger path coefficient between obsessive passion and willingness to pay a premium price (b = .45, p < .001) compared to that between harmonious passion and willingness to pay a premium price (b = .29, p < .001) suggests support for H6c.

8. Discussion and conclusion

Despite the fact that consumer passion has been recognized as the core element of brand love that is most relevant for marketing managers, previous brand passion research is limited. Furthermore, marketing academicians have relied extensively on Sternberg's theory of interpersonal love in the development of the brand passion construct. Consequently, the passion experienced between two individuals has been used as analogy for consumer passion for a brand. Passion is previously defined to be of an obsessive nature and is experienced by few people. We argue, however, that the success and consumer excitement about brands as diverse as Apple, Harley-Davidson, and Red Bull among others demonstrates that consumer passion for a favorite brand is different from the passion between two individuals. Brand passion appears to not always be obsessive; and it is much more widely experienced than suggested in earlier academic research.

This study makes a significant theoretical contribution; it expands the definition of brand passion by incorporating brand–consumer identification theory. In addition, it introduces two different types of brand passion depending on how the brand is internalized as part of one's identity. Harmonious passion occurs when a consumer identifies with the brand on his or her own volition. In other words, there are no external motives for liking the brand, finding it important, having a desire to obtain and/or use the brand, incorporate it into their identity, and spend resources on it. This identification process with the brand further allows consumers to keep their brand passion in balance with other facets of their lives. Obsessive passion occurs when consumer identification with the brand is predominantly a result of intrapersonal or interpersonal pressures. Consumers value the brand, find it important, have a desire to obtain and/or use the brand, incorporate it into their identity, and spend resources on it on a regular basis because various contingencies are attached to it. As a result, consumers' passion becomes obsessive and they find it difficult to keep it in balance with other facets of their lives.

Redefining the brand passion construct to include brand identification theory and, more specifically, the introduction of two different types of brand passion also has important managerial consequences, specifically for brand managers. First, the study confirms that some consumers experience obsessive brand passion, while a much larger group of consumers experience harmonious passion. Second, this research demonstrates that both types of passion can each lead to positive outcomes in the marketplace. More passionate consumers are more likely to provide positive word-of-mouth, are more likely to become brand evangelists, and are more willing to pay a premium price for the brand. Thus, from a strategic perspective, brand managers have evidence that spending resources on a “passion branding strategy” is a business imperative for any company that plans to compete.

While enlightening, this research leaves questions unanswered and provides new research opportunities. First, the present study only tests a limited number of antecedents and market outcomes of each type of brand passion. Future studies could investigate other brand-related characteristics, consumer characteristics, and consumer–brand relational constructs, which may influence each type of brand passion. Different market outcomes for each type of passion can also provide another avenue of research. Second, while short term outcomes of both harmonious and obsessive brand passion appear to be positive for the company (e.g., consumer's positive word-of-mouth, willingness to pay a higher price, etc.), the definition of obsessive brand passion suggests that, in the longer term, this type of passion may lead to negative outcomes for consumers. Unlike harmonious passion, obsessive passion for an activity is uncontrollable, the activity is rigidly pursued, resulting in less than optimal functioning of an individual (Vallerand et al., 2003). Such compelled behavior may eventually border with or turn into addiction, which “departs from obsessive passion in the sense that it leads to a disliking of the activity” (Stenseng, Rise, & Kraft, 2011, p. 51). Consumers with obsessive brand passion may become so addicted to a brand that they would engage with it even after the positive returns are no longer forthcoming and the brand has become detrimental to their lives. Similarly to those with addiction to an activity (Phillippe, Vallerand, & Lavigne, 2009), consumers with an addiction to a brand will no longer perceive the brand as enjoyable but may continue purchasing it simply because they are “wired” to do so. This

Note. N = 500. Goodness-of-Fit Statistic: \( \chi^2 = 2048.57 \text{ d.f.} = 585, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .07, \text{NNFI} = .97, \text{CFI} = .97. \) The loadings are standardized beta-coefficients. \( p < .001. \)

Fig. 3. Antecedents and outcomes of harmonious and obsessive brand passion (Study 4). Note. \( N = 500. \) Goodness-of-fit statistic: \( \chi^2 = 2048.57 \text{ d.f.} = 585, p < .001, \text{RMSEA} = .07, \text{NNFI} = .97, \text{CFI} = .97. \) The loadings are standardized beta-coefficients. \( p < .001. \)
may result in overspending, emotional stress and intra-personal conflict, therefore negatively affecting a consumer’s well-being. To understand possible long-term effects of obsessive passion, future research should examine the construct longitudinally. Also, future studies should explore the causality between obsessive brand passion and brand addiction as well as the mechanisms and boundary conditions which may affect this link.

References


