

COLUMNS

## Emotion-based research: Measuring consumer love for luxury brands

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By **Steve Markov**

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Ask the most fashionable people on the street why they buy the designers they do and they will likely struggle to provide a rational reason. That is because it is less about the practical and more about the emotional connections that they have with certain brands, especially when it comes to luxury.

What drives the somewhat obsessive behavior to “must have” the latest Gucci bag or Rolex watch despite countless quality options at a fraction of the price? Simply put, consumer love for a brand.

LoveWorks

Although love is a deep, complex emotion, it is now possible for brand marketers to collect and analyze emotion-based data to inform a broad range of strategies, from brand positioning to product development. First, however, they need to understand how love works.

According to the principles of human relationship science, there are three key components to any loving relationship: chemistry, needs fulfillment and compatibility.

The same applies to relationships between consumers and brands.

o Chemistry is the unexplainable excitement that makes the heart take over the mind.

Consumer relationships with luxury brands are heavily driven by chemistry, leading them to make buying decisions with their hearts. This often results in price insensitivity, which is a key enabler of higher price points enjoyed by luxury brands.

o Needs fulfillment occurs at both an emotional and rational level. For example, when purchasing a ski jacket, the rational need is warmth on the slopes. While for some, the stronger emotional need may be social status, driving them to purchase Moncler over North Face.

o Compatibility is the foundation of a lasting relationship and brand loyalty. It is about shared values and principles between consumer and brand. For luxury brands, it is important that the brand align with the way that consumers want to be perceived by others, or “aspirational compatibility.”

Initial responses to a luxury brand typically occur in the subconscious, delivering an immediate, emotional reaction, followed by rationalization of that reaction.

So how do marketers access the subconscious when consumers may not be in touch with it themselves?

## **Feel for it**

Qualitative research techniques such as focus groups yield important insights into consumers’ emotions. But they do not always provide the critical mass that marketers need to confidently support break-through marketing strategies.

Traditional quantitative survey methods that use five-point scales struggle to capture emotional insights.

When asked to answer questions about feelings using a rational thought process, consumers provide rational responses. What we think we feel is different from how we actually feel.

However, new interactive survey tools now allow market researchers to gather more accurate emotional data on a widespread basis. And by applying these principles of relationship science with compatibility matching algorithms, similar to those used by online matchmaking sites, data scientists are able to measure and analyze the emotional connections between consumers and brands.

Understanding the drivers of love within a category and for a brand, and how to increase it, has important implications:

1. Emotion-based intelligence allows marketers to leverage specific emotional brand attributes and benefits to drive deeper emotional connections with consumers while further differentiating the brand from its competition.

2. The greater the love between a consumer and brand, the more likely a consumer will

exhibit certain behavior such as paying a premium, recommending it to a friend, interacting with its social media, and paying attention to its advertising.

3. It is proven that emotions drive consumer purchases. In fact, according to Harvard Business School professor Gerald Zaltman, 95 percent of purchasing decisions take place in the subconscious mind.

Our own large-scale study conducted across industries with more than 250 brands and 6,000 respondents further confirms the correlation between brand love and consumer behavior.

For example, in the luxury category, there is an 83 percent correlation between loving a brand and willingness to pay a price premium, a 91 percent correlation with following news about the brand, and an 87 percent correlation with engaging with the brand on social media. This correlation is especially good news for Tiffany & Co., which scored highest for consumer love among the luxury brands tested and eighth highest among all 250 brands studied.

NOW THAT reliably measuring emotional connections between consumers and brands on a large-scale is no longer elusive, luxury brand marketers can truly understand and harness this powerful information to ensure that their brands hold a unique place in the minds and hearts of its customers.

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