

Brand addiction conceptual development

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Abstract

Purpose – Although emerging literature has discussed different consumer–brand relationships and addictive behavior constructs, to date, it has not explored the brand addiction phenomenon. This study aims to undertake a conceptual inspection to better understand the nature of the brand addiction phenomenon, thereby providing a clear and concise conceptual definition.

Design/methodology/approach – To develop a concise definition of brand addiction, the researcher applies a conceptual development procedure, which identifies potential attributes of brand addiction by assembling a descriptive set of definitions, collecting the construct's key attributes, generating a preliminary definition of brand addiction, identifying unique and shared attributes of brand addiction with other constructs in related areas and, finally, refining the conceptual definition based on a set of guidelines.

Findings – This study defines brand addiction as a psychological state that entails an emotional attachment to a particular brand, driven by compulsive urges that generally provide pleasure. This involves dependence, habit formation, loss of control, failure to withstand impulses and tension before starting the behavior related to the addicted brand. In addition, some of the following attributes might also characterize brand addiction: social, mental and behavioral preoccupation with the brand, tolerance development, frequent engagement in activities related to the brand, restlessness or irritability when unable to engage in activities/behaviors related to the addicting brand, repeated efforts to stop the behavior and dismissal of occupational, social and recreational activities to engage in activities related to the addicting brand.

Originality/value – Since the concept of brand addiction has not been empirically tested, this paper has the potential to append a compulsory conceptual understanding of the concept of brand addiction by developing an accurate definition that serves in discriminating the focal concept from other constructs in related areas, and helps advance subsequent work for theory development.

Keywords Compulsive buying, Brand love, Brand addiction, Addictive behaviour, Brand passion, Consumer-brand relationships

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

You're standing in an impossibly glamorous room, your hands are sweating in anticipation and the excitement is almost unbearable. But you're not waiting to meet the Queen. You're simply spending a week's wages on a designer jacket you can't afford and don't really need. If this sounds remotely familiar, the likelihood is you're a brand addict. (Boorman, 2006)

Statements such as the above are manifested by consumers in relation to their favorite brands. For instance, in a BBC news article, Boorman (2006) stated the following:

I am addicted to brands. For as long as I can remember, they have occupied my thoughts during the waking day. What they look like, what they do, what they mean.

As a young teenager, all I ever wanted to do was to work with my favourite brands – Adidas, Technics, Budweiser, Sony – the names that were plastered over the things I craved to own.



In a different instance, an American lady received a divorce letter, in which her husband accused her of creating a secret room in her exclusive apartment where she had concealed around 700 pairs of Louboutin shoes, with prices ranging between \$700 and \$4,000 a pair (Bates, 2012).

The above examples indicate that individuals may continuously occupy themselves with their beloved brands to the extent of ceaselessly demanding and collecting the brands' items. These individuals' obsession with their beloved brands is highly likely to weaken the inhibitory function of self-control against engaging with the brand. This type of behavior is described as brand addiction. Despite consumers' use of the term "brand addiction", this phenomenon has received less attention in the marketing and consumer behavior literature. What is brand addiction? How is it used to describe the valence of consumer–brand relationships? How is it different from constructs in the area of consumer–brand relationships and that of addiction?

This study aims to address these questions by undertaking a conceptual inspection of the nature of the brand addiction phenomenon and providing a clear and detailed conceptual definition of brand addiction. The conceptual definition is crucial as it not only discerns the nature of the phenomenon represented by this construct but also aids in discriminating the focal concept from other constructs in related areas. As the development of theoretical constructs assists in constructing solid blocks for theory development (Goertz, 2006; Klein and Zedeck, 2004), the development of a conceptual definition of brand addiction will aid subsequent theory development and measurement of this construct in the field of addiction and consumer–brand relationships, and lead to a better understanding of other related constructs in the field. Researchers (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2011) have noted that although a clear definition of a construct is of great importance, many researchers neglect this stage of concept development or do not apply it accurately. Researchers have recently called for exploring and differentiating brand addiction from other constructs in the related area, e.g. brand attachment (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015; Fournier and Alvarez, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2013; Reimann *et al.*, 2012; Swimberghe *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, developing a proper conceptual definition of brand addiction will fill this literature gap. The current study also allows future researchers to define the attributes that accurately capture and reflect brand addiction as a latent construct of both theoretical and practical importance.

Thus, this paper is organized as follows. First, the author presents the background literature on the concept of brand addiction. Next, the author applies the conceptual development process, based on three stages. Finally, the author concludes the paper with a discussion of the research findings along with their theoretical implications.

Brand addiction background

While researchers have been examining consumers' attitudes to liking and disliking brands for decades (Batra *et al.*, 2012), the past few years have revealed an expanding interest in furthering research in the field of consumer–brand relationships. Research into consumer–brand relationships has greatly expanded to examining constructs such as brand attachment (Belaid and Behi, 2011; Malär *et al.*, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2010), brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012) and brand passion (Albert *et al.*, 2010; Swimberghe *et al.*, 2014). While previous research in the area of consumer–brand relationships has made important contributions, still more research is required to explore other facets of the totality of the relationship between the consumer and the brand (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015).

The relationships between consumers and brands are similar to relationships among people. In her research on consumers and their brands, Fournier (1998) suggested the conceptualization of brand relationship quality in parallel to relationship quality constructs

in the interpersonal context. This view claims that relationships among people are determined by how they are connected with each other. The consumer–brand relationship parallels such human relationships in that one determines the former by how a consumer is bound to a brand. In parallel with this logic, it is asserted that the relationship between a consumer and a brand also follows a classification of the intensity of the relationship along the continuum. This assertion is based on previous research on interpersonal theories, which has classified the connection between people along a continuum that starts from non-intense emotions to moderate emotions, friendly emotions and passionate love, culminating in addictive obsession (Fehr and Russell, 1991; Sternberg, 1986). Following this logic, the relationship between a consumer and a brand reflects the intensity of connection along a similar continuum, starting with non-intense emotions and ending in addictive obsession. Accordingly, as interpersonal theories claim that one individual can form an addictive, obsessive relationship with another, it follows that one can view this type of connection in the relationships that consumers establish with brands.

Fournier's (1998, p. 361) empirical research further shows that numerous "dark side" relationships between the consumer and the brand can be identified, such as "dependency, enmity, enslavement and secret affairs". According to Fournier, these dark side relationships lead to the belief that such a connection between the consumer and the brand brings "brand-level specification to general concepts of addiction (Hirschman, 1992), and compulsive consumption (O'Guinn and Faber, 1989; Rook, 1987)" (cited in Fournier, 1998, p. 361). Consequently, Fournier's analysis of consumer–brand relationships points out that the consumers can develop states of addiction to certain brands.

The concept of consumers' addiction to certain brands constitutes a sub-category of the general concept of addiction. Brand addiction means that the state of addiction to brands is somehow similar in description to shopping addiction and the general concepts of addiction. For this reason, in addition to the theories of consumer–brand relationships, understanding of consumers' addiction to brands should also be grounded in the theories of addiction. Consequently, it can be argued that consumers' addiction to certain brands forms both a consumer–brand relationship and a type of addiction.

The traditional definition of addiction is limited to substance intake, e.g. alcohol and drug addiction (Alexander and Schweighofer, 1988; Peele and Brodsky, 1975). However, nowadays, researchers believe that addiction involves people's dependence on specific set of behaviors or activities (Young, 2004). Egorov and Szabo (2013, p. 199) define behavioral addictions as "compulsive psychological and physiological urges for one or more specific behaviors". Hence, numerous activities are considered as possibly addictive, for instance, exercising, gambling, using the internet and playing video games (Griffiths, 1997). An established view classifies addictive consumption as an abnormal behavior that may negatively impact the individual consumer and society as a whole (Budden and Griffin, 1998). However, other views consider that addictive behavior can take the form of progression from a normal behavior to a pathological behavior (Elliott *et al.*, 1996; Scherhorn, 1990).

Although most of the definitions of addiction discuss the harmful consequences resulting from addiction, some researchers believe that addiction does not always have to be harmful (Alexander and Schweighofer, 1988; Glasser, 2012). Foddy and Savulescu (2010, p. 35) defined addiction as "a strong appetite". They further described appetite as "a disposition that generates desires that are urgent, oriented toward some rewarding behavior, periodically recurring, often in predictable circumstances, sated temporarily by their fulfillment and generally provide pleasure" (p. 35). Their definition does not reveal harmful or destructive effects of addiction but, instead, focuses on the pleasure that results from the

addictive behavior or activity. In his article “Positive Addiction”, Glasser (1977, p. 5) noted that positive addiction “was something a person chose to do, did by himself/herself, took some discipline to do it and did it on a regular basis”. According to Glasser (1977), the individual subsequently becomes so addicted to this behavior that if this individual seeks to terminate this behavior, he/she will experience withdrawal symptoms. Glasser (1977) concluded that weakening addictions, such as alcohol and drugs, gambling and overeating, are considered positive addictions as they induce the individual to become stronger and happier. However, such behaviors will take the form of negative addictions when individuals begin to misuse them, ultimately negatively affecting the person and his/her social milieu. Glasser’s (1977) proposition of positive addiction not only positions addiction as only negative but also gives it a positive perspective that might benefit the addicted individuals. Consequently, this view suggests that addiction does not always lead to harmful consequences.

As addiction to a brand may lead to negative consequences and, as the literature fails to explore this concept, the development of the conceptual meaning and characteristics of brand addiction is important to marketers, policymakers and health-care practitioners. This research opens avenues for future research to explore the etiological foundations and mechanisms that lead individuals to engage in addictive forms of consumer behavior. To better understand the phenomenon of brand addiction, the following section presents a detailed conceptual analysis that explores the concept of brand addiction based on theories of addiction and consumer–brand relationships.

Conceptual development

This section reports the development of a concise conceptual definition of brand addiction. It shows a clear step-by-step process that leads to creating a precise definition of the phenomenon under study by following the recommended literature guidelines on the development of conceptual definitions (Goertz, 2006; Mackenzie *et al.*, 2011; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016). Three stages were undertaken to generate the brand addiction’s definition:

- (1) collecting possible attributes of the brand addiction construct by examining and assembling a set of definitions from the literature;
- (2) compiling the key potential attributes and generating a preliminary definition of brand addiction; and
- (3) refining the definition of brand addiction.

Collection of attributes of the brand addiction concept and its representative definition

To identify the potential attributes of the focal concept under examination, following the literature recommendation (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016), several techniques were implemented to collect potential attributes and generate an illustrative set of definitions of brand addiction: definition from dictionaries and a literature search and review.

First, the brand addiction construct was examined in dictionaries. However, the search results indicate that no definition of brand addiction exists. As this concept straddles the area of consumer–brand relationships and that of addiction, some definitions of addiction and consumer–brand relationships were, therefore, examined. Results indicate that dictionaries in the social sciences domain do not define consumer–brand relationships but only define addiction. Table I presents the results of the addiction definitions. Guided by Maynes and Podsakoff (2014), this table includes

Table I.
Summary of
addiction definitions
and key attributes
from dictionaries
search

Source	Definition of addiction	Key attributes
American psychological association (2017)	“Addiction is a condition in which the body must have a drug to avoid physical and psychological withdrawal symptoms. Addiction’s first stage is dependence, during which the search for a drug dominates an individual’s life. An addict eventually develops tolerance, which forces the person to consume larger and larger doses of the drug to get the same effect”	Physical and psychological withdrawal Dependence Tolerance development Persistent use
Concise medical dictionary (2012)	“A state of dependence produced either by the habitual taking of drugs or by regularly engaging in certain activities (e.g. gambling). People can develop physical and psychological symptoms of dependence, which include a strong desire to take the substance or exercise the behaviour, impaired capacity to control such behaviour or substance taking, a physical or psychological withdrawal state, evidence of tolerance development, social and mental preoccupation with substance use or the given behaviour, and persistent use despite harmful consequences”	Dependence Physical and psychological symptoms Loss of control Physical or psychological withdrawal state Social and mental preoccupation Tolerance development Persistent use
The American Heritage® Science Dictionary (2002)	“A habitual or compulsive involvement in an activity, such as gambling”	Compulsive behavior Habit Involvement
The American Heritage® Stedman’s Medical Dictionary (2002)	“Habitual psychological and physiological dependence on a substance or practice beyond one’s voluntary control”	Habit Psychological and physiological dependence Loss of control
The American society of addiction medicine (2011)	“Is reflected in an individual pathologically pursuing reward and/or relief by substance use and other behaviors “Addiction is characterized by inability to consistently abstain, impairment in behavioral control, craving, diminished recognition of significant problems with one’s behaviors and interpersonal relationships, and a dysfunctional emotional response”	Compulsive urge Relief Substance use/ engagement in behavior Loss of control Withdrawal symptoms Cravings Interpersonal relationships problems Dysfunctional emotional responses

information related to the source of the definition, the definition itself and the key attributes inferred from the definition.

The analysis of the definitions indicates that only the American Psychological Association defines addiction in terms of drug addiction. However, the other definitions describe addiction as a state of dependence that is generated either by routine drug intake or by the frequency of engagement in a specific behavior or activity, such as gambling and spending. Thus, the main difference between general definitions of addiction and those of behavioral addiction mainly exhibits the use or absence of substance intake. The analysis indicates that across all the definitions of addiction, there are common features in physical and psychological states of dependence. These features comprise the desire for substance

intake or involvement in the activity, tolerance development, reduced ability to control the substance intake or the addictive behavior and physical or psychological withdrawal symptoms. The main differences that can be examined across the definitions are the two additional features in the definition by American Society of Addiction Medicine, which attributes addiction to some interpersonal relationship problems and dysfunctional emotional responses.

Following the literature recommendation (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016), the next step is to survey the academic literature and identify how it defines brand addiction. Table II shows the source, the definition itself and the key attributes inferred from the definitions found from the literature. To the best of our knowledge, the three definitions in Table II are the only definitions that describe brand addiction in the academic literature. Compared with the previous definitions of addiction, the physiological and psychological dependence states are the similarities between the general definitions of addictions and the brand addiction definitions. In addition, the attribute of emotional attachment is included in the three definitions of brand addiction. This suggests that both psychological dependence and emotional attachment features are attributes of brand addiction.

As reported in Table II, the results indicate that marketing and addiction academic literature does not accurately define the concept of brand addiction. The existing definitions are not based on a detailed conceptualization or a set of attributes. As brand addiction brings “brand-level specification to general concepts of addiction and compulsive consumption” (Fournier, 1998, p. 361), the general definitions of addictions are also examined to identify the brand addiction attributes. Following Gerring’s (2012) guidelines for conceptual developments, the search for further definitions is discontinued when the concept definitions and attributes became repetitive. Table III summarizes the results of the disciplinary areas. Thus, the common attributes of addiction identified from all the academic definitions of addictions are dependence states, habit formation, excessive and compulsive urges, tolerance development, the failure to withstand impulses, loss of control, preoccupation with the activity, feeling of pleasure and restlessness or irritability in case of inability to engage in the behavior.

Author	Definition of brand addiction	Key attributes
Antonova (2012)	“The investigation of brand-addiction phenomena, which means absolute loyalty to one or several brands and can lead to personality deformations (deformations in motives structure, goals, values, self-perception and others)”	Extreme loyalty relationship Personality deformations
Fajer and Schouten (1995)	“Brand-addicted relationships are characterized by a consumer’s extreme reliance on the brand because of a perception of non-substitutability. The brand is like a crucial friend upon which the person relies for well being” (p. 664)	Dependence Non-substitutability Crucial relationship
Solomon (1992 cited in Fajer and Schouten, 1995, p. 664)	“An intensely brand-loyal relationship with the distinguishing component of psychological and/or physiological dependency”	Psychological and physiological dependency Intense loyalty relationship

Table II.
Summary of definitions and key attributes of brand addiction from literature search

Table III.
Summary of
addiction definitions
and key attributes
from academic
literature

Author	Definition of brand addiction	Key attributes
Belk <i>et al.</i> (1996)	“Addiction, the ‘strong appetite’, involves devotion, dependence, surrendering control, habit, obsessiveness, and preoccupation with the object to the detriment of well-being” (p. 371)	Devotion Dependence Loss of control Habit Obsession Preoccupation
Egorov and Szabo (2013)	“Compulsive psychological and physiological urges for one or more specific behaviours” (p. 199)	Physical and psychological symptoms Compulsive urges
Foddy and Savulescu (2010)	“A strong appetite” (p. 35), which is “a disposition that generates desires that are urgent, oriented toward some rewarding behaviour, periodically recurring, often in predictable circumstances, sated temporarily by their fulfilment, and generally provide pleasure” (p. 35)	Appetite Urgent desires Periodically recurring Pleasure
Goodman (1990)	“(A) Recurrent failure to resist impulses to engage in a specified behavior. (B) Increasing sense of tension immediately prior to initiating the behavior. (C) Pleasure or relief at the time of engaging in the behavior. (D) A feeling of lack of control while engaging in the behavior. (E) At least five of the following: (1) frequent preoccupation with the behavior or with activity that is preparatory to the behavior (2) frequent engaging in the behavior to a greater extent or over a longer period than intended (3) repeated efforts to reduce, control or stop the behavior (4) a great deal of time spent in activities necessary for the behavior, engaging in the behavior or recovering from its effects (5) frequent engaging in the behavior when expected to fulfill occupational, academic, domestic or social obligations (6) important social, occupational or recreational activities given up or reduced because of the behavior (7) continuation of the behavior despite knowledge of having a persistent or recurrent social, financial, psychological or physical problem that is caused or exacerbated by the behavior (8) tolerance: need to increase the intensity or frequency of the behavior in order to achieve the desired effect or diminished effect with continued behavior of the same intensity (9) restlessness or irritability if unable to engage in the behaviour” (p. 1,404)	Failure to withstand impulses Tension before starting the behavior Feeling of pleasure or relaxation Loss of control Frequent preoccupation Frequent engagement in the behavior over long periods Repeated efforts to stop the behavior Amount of time spent engaging in the behavior Dismissal of occupational, social and recreational activities Tolerance Restlessness or irritability Persistence of the behavior despite negative consequences
Mendelson and Mello (1986)	“...behaviour [that] is excessive, compulsive, beyond the control of the person who engages in it, and destructive psychologically or physically” (p. 21)	Inability to control Excessive and compulsive Physical and psychological symptoms
Peele (1985 cited in Belk <i>et al.</i> , 1996)	“...exists when a person’s attachment to a sensation, an object, or another person is such as to lessen his [sic] appreciation of and ability to deal with other things in his environment, or in himself, so that he has become increasingly dependent on that experience as his only source of gratification” (p. 371)	Attachment Dependence
Sussman and Sussman (2011)	“... (a) engagement in the behavior to achieve appetitive effects, (b) preoccupation with the behavior, (c) temporary satiation, (d) loss of control, and (e) suffering negative consequences” (p. 4,025)	Appetitive effects Preoccupation Loss of control Satiation Negative consequences

Compilation of the key conceptual attributes and generation of a preliminary definition of brand addiction

A construct's attributes represent the meaning of the construct and enable one to differentiate the construct from other constructs in its related area (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016). Researchers have noted that there are two different types of concept definition and describe the first type in terms of some necessary and collectively sufficient properties (Sartori, 1970). The second type classifies the construct into a family resemblance (Goertz, 2006). According to Rosch and Mervis (1975, p. 575):

A family resemblance relationship consists of a set of items of the form AB, BC, CD, DE. That is, each item has at least one, and probably several, elements in common with one or more other items, but no, or few, elements are common to all items.

Accordingly, for the concept to qualify as a member of the family resemblance group, a list of shared attributes should be common for at least two concepts in the same group (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016).

Given that brand addiction falls within the domain of addiction and that of consumer–brand relationship, one should build this focal construct in terms of family resemblance, whereby one can distinguish it from other constructs in related areas. Thus, the purpose is to generate the underlying conceptual attributes in the area of both consumer–brand relationships and addiction, identify the key attributes for each construct and then identify the shared attributes among the constructs. This allows the generation of the attributes that are unique to brand addiction and those that are shared with other constructs in the related area.

The consumer–brand relationship literature classifies brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012), brand passion (Albert *et al.*, 2013), brand loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), brand liking (Anselmsson *et al.*, 2008), brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2010) and brand trust (Delgado-Ballester, 2004) as forms of consumer–brand relationships. Thus, one can compare brand addiction and differentiate it from these concepts. In addition, the addiction literature classifies different types of substance addiction (drug and alcohol) and addictive behaviors such as gambling, exercise addiction, internet addiction, overeating, plastic surgery and compulsive buying (Griffiths, 2012; Martin *et al.*, 2013) as forms of addiction. Given that compulsive buying is the only form of addictive behavior, whereby individuals are likely to purchase and use branded products (as opposed to substance intake, game addiction, internet addiction, etc.), it is the only construct that is included in the analysis between brand addiction and the other forms of addictive behavior.

To combine the key attributes of the above constructs, a thorough examination of the literature was undertaken. Definitions of each of the previously listed constructs were collected from the academic literature. Also, the intensional properties of each concept were gathered from the available literature sources.

To perform this comparative analysis, a preliminary definition of brand addiction was developed following the suggestions on conceptual development in the literature (Mackenzie *et al.*, 2011; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016). According to Mackenzie *et al.* (2011), the definition of a construct must incorporate the “property” the concept characterizes and the “entity” to which that property relates. The property can include characteristics, thoughts, emotions, perceptions or behaviors represented by the concept, while the entity of a concept can be an individual, a relationship or a group. In this study, the property of brand addiction is related to the emotions and behavior displayed toward the brands. As for the entity, brand addiction is characterized in terms of the relationship between consumers and brands. Thus, as a preliminary definition in this study, brand addiction is described as a psychological

state that entails an emotional attachment to a particular brand, driven by compulsive urges that generally provide pleasure.

Next, all the different sources, definitions and intensional properties of all the examined constructs are compiled. Then, the inferred key attributes are listed. Owing to the length of the intensional properties and given the word limit, [Table IV](#) summarizes only the definitions and the inferred key attributes of the examined constructs.

Following the guidelines in [Podsakoff et al. \(2016\)](#), all the collected key attributes of brand addiction ([Tables I, II and III](#)), in addition to the attributes of brand love, brand passion, brand attachment, brand liking, brand trust, brand loyalty and compulsive buying, are described in [Table V](#) in the form of an attribute matrix. Once the attributes are organized in the table, the attributes that represent each construct are defined based on the information available in [Tables I-III](#). The analysis in [Table V](#) compares brand addiction with brand love, brand passion, brand liking, brand attachment and brand loyalty. In addition, it also compares brand addiction with compulsive buying.

[Table VI](#) reports the analysis findings from [Table V](#). As [Table V](#) illustrates, the attributes of emotional attachment and feeling of pleasure are shared between brand passion, brand love, brand attachment and brand addiction. Therefore, they are central attributes for consumer–brand relationships. As one considers the central attributes of constructs in a given area of high importance in generating the focal construct’s definition ([Podsakoff et al., 2016](#)), the central attributes are, therefore, incorporated in the definition of brand addiction. In addition, one can consider frequent engagement in the behavior as a central attribute as it is shared between the consumer–brand relationship and addiction constructs. However, the unique attributes of brand addiction are habit; tension before starting the behavior; social and mental preoccupation; repeated efforts to stop the behavior; dismissal of occupational, social and recreational activities; and tolerance development.

Thus, the above results indicate that brand passion, brand love, brand attachment and brand addiction share several similarities. All of the discussed constructs are psychological constructs that refer to the relationships that consumers form with a brand over the long-term. Also, all of them involve the assessment of the strength and emotional attachment that consumers form with a brand. However, these constructs are regarded as being different as each of them has its own unique attributes that differ in several important respects.

The above analysis indicates that although all the constructs involve assessment of bond strength, the nature of the strength differs. This is consistent with the theory that similar to interpersonal theories which have classified the connection between people along a continuum, the relationship between consumers and their brands also goes from non-intense emotions to moderate emotions, friendly emotions and passionate love, to culminate in addictive obsession ([Fehr and Russell, 1991](#); [Sternberg, 1986](#)).

Brand liking is defined as “an evaluative and global measurement capturing how positive and strong the perceived brand assets are from a consumer perspective” ([Anselmsson et al., 2008](#), p. 6,667). Therefore, brand liking is conceptually not the same as brand addiction. Brand addiction is a more intense emotional response that incorporates the brand into the individual’s sense of identity which, according to [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#), may not happen in the case of simple brand liking.

Defined as “the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self” ([Park et al., 2010](#), p. 5), brand attachment is measured through two factors: brand–self connection and brand prominence. Brand–self connection, described in terms of the cognitive and the emotional bond between the brand and the self ([Escalas, 2004](#); [Escalas and Bettman, 2003](#)), reflects the individual’s feelings of unhappiness and nervousness as a result of separation from the brand, or feelings of contentment and relief resulting from a proximity with the brand, and

Construct	Definition	Key attributes
<i>Brand passion</i>	<p>Brand passion as “if a consumer is passionate about a brand, he/she will engage in a much more emotional relationship with the brand and even miss the brand or feel loss when the brand is unavailable” (Matzler <i>et al.</i>, 2007, p. 16)</p> <p>“...brand passion as a psychological construct comprised of excitation, infatuation, and obsession for a brand” (Albert <i>et al.</i>, 2013, p. 905)</p> <p>“...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” (Swimberghe <i>et al.</i>, 2014, p. 2,659)</p>	<p>Importance of the brand to the person</p> <p>Frequent thinking of the brand during the day</p> <p>Preference to spend time with the brand rather than with anything else</p> <p>Passion</p> <p>Excitement</p> <p>Pleasure when buying and using brand</p> <p>A feeling of pure pleasure when discovering new products for the brand</p> <p>A feeling of real pleasure when using the brand</p> <p>Continuous happiness</p> <p>Magical relationship with the brand</p> <p>Relationship with the brand considered the most important thing</p> <p>Idealization of the brand</p> <p>Memorable experience</p> <p>Emotional connection</p> <p>Desire to own the brand</p> <p>Brand identity</p> <p>Controllable passion</p> <p>Inability to live without it</p> <p>Strong urge</p> <p>Emotional dependence</p> <p>Obsession</p> <p>Investment over a long time</p>
<i>Brand attachment</i>	<p>Brand attachment is defined as “the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self” (Park <i>et al.</i>, 2010; p. 2)</p>	<p>Becoming part of the brand</p> <p>Personal connection with brand</p> <p>Emotional attachment</p> <p>Frequent thoughts</p>
<i>Brand love</i>	<p>Brand love is defined as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81)</p> <p>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)</p>	<p>Passion</p> <p>Attachment</p> <p>Positive evaluation</p> <p>Positive emotions (affection)</p> <p>Love declaration</p> <p>Passion</p> <p>A long duration</p>

(continued)

Table IV.
Constructs’
definitions and key
attributes

Construct	Definition	Key attributes
		relationship Self-congruity Dreams Memories Pleasure Attraction Uniqueness Beauty Trust (satisfaction) Love declaration Positive affect Self-identity Life meaning Intrinsic reward Resource investment Passion Involvement Emotional bonding Relaxation Intuitive fit Frequent thoughts Evaluation
<i>Brand trust</i>	<p>Brand trust is conceptualized as “The confident expectations of the brand’s reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer” (Delgado-Ballester, 2004, p. 574)</p> <p>Brand trust is defined as “brand trust as the willingness of the average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p. 82)</p>	<p>Accomplishment of expectations Confidence in the brand name Expectations fulfilment Guarantee of satisfaction Honesty Reliance Trust Reliance Safety Honesty</p>
<i>Brand loyalty</i>	<p>Brand loyalty is defined as “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour” (Oliver, 1999, p. 34 cited in Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001, p. 82)</p> <p>Odin <i>et al.</i> (2001) considered that “the only definition that exists, and that makes the bond between stochastic and cognitivist approaches is Jacoby’s (1971), which postulates that brand loyalty is a behavioural answer, function of an evaluative psychological process” (p. 77)</p>	<p>Purchase when needed Intention to keep purchasing Commitment Willingness to pay a higher price</p> <p>Brand switching Brand substitutability Loyalty Continuous purchasing with higher prices Continuous purchase for a</p> <p>(continued)</p>

Table IV.

Table IV.

Construct	Definition	Key attributes
		long time Liking
<i>Brand liking</i>	Brand liking is defined as “an evaluative and global measurement capturing how positive and strong the perceived brand assets are from a consumer perspective” (Anselmsson <i>et al.</i> , 2008, pp. 66-67)	Brand evaluation
<i>Compulsive buying</i>	Compulsive buying is defined as a “chronic, repetitive purchasing that becomes a primary response to negative events or feelings” (O’Guinn & Faber 1989, p. 155 cited in Faber and O’Guinn, 1992, p. 459)	Repetitive purchasing Money spending Horrorifying spending habits Inability to afford purchased items Buying under debt Purchasing to higher self-esteem Anxiousness if activity is stopped Making only minimum payments on credit card Repetitive buying Lack of self-control Preoccupation with buying Buying unneeded items Impulsive buying
	Compulsive buying is defined “as a consumer’s tendency to be preoccupied with buying that is revealed through repetitive buying and a lack of impulse control over buying” (Ridgway <i>et al.</i> , 2008, p. 622)	

feelings of pride resulting from the brand’s exhibition (Park *et al.*, 2010, p. 2). Brand prominence is described in terms of “the perceived ease and frequency with which brand-related thoughts and feelings are brought to mind”. While conceptually comparing brand attachment with brand addiction, it can be inferred that brand addiction shares with brand attachment the emotional responses/feelings that consumers form with brands. From a cognitive perspective, although brand attachment is described in terms of frequent thoughts about the brand, brand addiction is more associated with social and mental preoccupations with the behavior related to the brand. The preoccupation in the case of addiction is more extreme than the frequent thinking of brand attachment. According to Sussman and Sussman (2011), addictive behavior involves thinking excessively about a given behavior, intense desire to perform a given behavior, spending an excessive time in planning and participating in the behavior and spending less time engaging in other activities.

Brand addiction is also conceptually different from brand love and brand passion. Drawing on interpersonal theories (Fehr and Russell, 1991; Sternberg, 1986), brand love is considered to be less intense than brand passion, and brand passion is considered to be less intense than brand addiction. The conceptual analysis reveals that brand addiction concerns a psychological state which involves both cognitive and affective forms of close consumer–brand relationship. However, brand love is centered much more around the affective focus.

Attributes	Brand addiction	Brand love	Brand passion	Brand attachment	Brand liking	Brand trust	Brand loyalty	Compulsive buying
Dependence	✓		✓					
Obsession	✓		✓					
Habit	✓							
Urge	✓	✓	✓					
Excessive and compulsive urges	✓							✓
Failure to withstand impulses	✓							✓
Tension before starting the behavior	✓							
Feeling of pleasure or relaxation/positive affect	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Loss of control	✓							✓
Social and mental preoccupation	✓							
Preoccupation with buying								✓
Frequent engagement in the behavior over long periods/long- term commitment	✓	✓	✓					✓
Repeated efforts to stop the behavior	✓							
Dismissal of occupational, social and recreational activities	✓							
Restlessness or irritability in case of inability to engage in the behavior	✓							✓
Tolerance development	✓							
Passion	✓	✓	✓					
Emotional attachment	✓	✓	✓	✓				
Controllable passion			✓					
Evaluation		✓			✓			
Positive emotion/ emotional connection		✓	✓					
Declarations of love		✓						
Life meaning		✓						
Intuitive fit		✓						
Dreams		✓						
Memories		✓	✓					
Desire		✓	✓					
Involvement		✓						
Attraction		✓						

Table V.
Constructs' shared
and unique attributes

(continued)

Attributes	Brand addiction	Brand love	Brand passion	Brand attachment	Brand liking	Brand trust	Brand loyalty	Compulsive buying
Trust		✓				✓		
Self-congruity		✓						
Frequent thinking		✓	✓	✓				
Anticipated separation distress		✓						
Resource investment		✓						
Safety						✓		
Reliance						✓		
Honesty						✓		
Guarantee of satisfaction						✓		
Purchase when needed							✓	
Commitment							✓	
Willingness to pay a higher price							✓	
Brand switching							✓	
Brand substitute							✓	
Liking							✓	
Importance to person			✓					
Preference to spend time with the brand rather than with anything else			✓					
Excitement			✓					
Continuous happiness			✓					
Pleasure when buying and using the brand			✓					
Feeling of pleasure when discovering new products related to the brand			✓					
Magical relationship			✓					
Relationship with the brand considered as the most important thing			✓					
Brand idealization			✓					
Brand identity			✓					
Inability to live without it			✓					
Becoming part of the brand				✓				
Personal connection with brand				✓				
Brand as part of self				✓				

(continued)

Table V.

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32

Attributes	Brand addiction	Brand love	Brand passion	Brand attachment	Brand liking	Brand trust	Brand loyalty	Compulsive buying
Money spending								✓
Buying under debt								✓
Purchasing to higher self-esteem								✓
Making only minimum payments on credit cards								✓
Horrifying spending habits								✓
Buying unneeded items								✓

Table V.

Table VI.
Summary of Table V
findings

Constructs	Shared attributes
Brand addiction and brand passion	Dependence Obsession
Brand addiction, brand love and brand passion	Passion Frequent engagement in the behavior over long periods/long-term commitment
Brand addiction, brand love, brand passion and brand attachment	Emotional attachment Feeling of pleasure or relaxation/positive affect
Brand addiction and compulsive buying	Loss of control Excessive and compulsive urges Failure to withstand impulses Frequent engagement in the behavior over long periods/long-term commitment Restlessness or irritability in case of inability to engage in the behavior

Thus, when consumers love a certain brand, the emotional state is experienced in the absence of cognition (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006), which is distinct from brand addiction, whereby the emotional response may decrease (Reimann *et al.*, 2012) and a change may take place from an emotional-driven response to a cognition-based stable form (Sussman and Sussman, 2011).

Brand passion has been differently conceptualized in the literature. Some studies have referred to Sternberg’s triangular interpersonal theory of love (Albert *et al.*, 2013), while others have referred to the framework of identity theory (Swimberghe *et al.*, 2014) to define and measure brand passion. After collecting the key attributes of brand passion from different sources (the identity and interpersonal theories), the results indicate that the only attributes shared between brand passion and brand addiction are dependence, obsession, emotional attachment, feelings of passion and frequent engagement in the behavior. However, the concept of brand addiction is characterized by additional and different attributes, such as the tension that arises before initiating a given behavior, social and mental preoccupation, repeated efforts to stop the behavior, dismissal of occupational, social and recreational activities and tolerance development. Accordingly, the attributes of brand addiction, which are features of addictive

behavior (Martin *et al.* 2013; Sussman and Sussman, 2011), are different from the attributes of the consumer–brand relationship constructs such as brand passion, brand love, brand attachment and brand loyalty. Thus, the just mentioned brand addiction attributes reveal the clear difference between brand addiction and the other consumer–brand relationship constructs. Therefore, detailed inspection of the key attributes of brand addiction offers evidence that brand addiction is a distinct concept from the other concepts in related areas, the area of consumer–brand relationship and that of addiction. Accordingly, the conceptual analysis results are supported by previous studies asserting that brand addiction is the highest level of intense emotions that consumers may form with particular brands (Fajer and Schouten, 1995; Fournier, 1998; Swimberghe *et al.*, 2014).

In addition, brand loyalty is conceptually different from brand addiction. Brand loyalty is described in terms of behavioral loyalty, which consists of repeated purchases of a given brand, and of attitudinal loyalty, which takes the form of the consumer's degree of commitment to consistently purchase a given brand (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Oliver, 1999). However, this construct is not characterized by excessive urges to buy the given brand, by the inability to regulate the self from buying the brand or even by the intensity of emotional attachment the consumer has to a brand, which makes the consumer a brand addict rather than brand loyal.

As for brand trust, it encompasses the cognitive and affective aspects. The cognitive aspect specifies that the brand meets the expectations of the consumer (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), while the affective dimension is related to honesty and altruism (Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2004). Brand trust is imbedded in the consumer's expectations about the brand's reliability, honesty and altruism (Albert and Merunka, 2013), whereas brand addiction refers to the emotional and cognitive state that the consumer develops with a particular brand, which includes more unique attributes that are not associated with brand trust.

A distinction can also be noted between brand addiction and compulsive buying. Even though both concepts are categorized under addictive behavior (Hirshman, 1992), compulsive buying is described in terms of the desire to reach higher levels of self-esteem through shopping. This behavior takes place without the person being able to regulate the self and may result in feelings of guilt rather than a desire to own objects (Faber and O'Guinn, 1992). As researchers (O'Guinn and Faber 1989; Ridgway *et al.*, 2008) indicate, unlike brand addiction, compulsive behavior is not characterized by feelings of pleasure, emotional attachment, the urge and the dependence on a brand, a product or an object. However, compulsive buying is characterized by a preoccupation with buying to reduce bad feelings, which is not the case of brand addiction. Thus, compulsive buying does not represent the higher-order cognitive phase of addictive behavior, such as trying to reach some appetitive effect and satiation while being involved in the addictive behavior, which may convert from the affective state to a cognitive state resulting from the addictive behavior (Sussman and Sussman, 2011).

Refinement of the brand addiction definition

The last stage of the conceptual analysis comprises refining the conceptual definition of the examined construct (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016). Researchers (Goertz, 2006; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016) have noted that in certain cases, one can define a construct in terms of unique and shared attributes in addition to some additional attributes. To define the concept of brand addiction, the conceptualization in this study has drawn on the established definitions of addiction (Goodman, 1990; Sussman and Sussman, 2011) and followed the recommendation and general rules of the family resemblance structure (Mackenzie *et al.* 2011). Consequently, after the previous stages of conceptual development and generating the unique and shared attributes of brand addiction, the definition of brand addiction should be refined. Thus, this study defines brand addiction as a psychological state that entails an emotional attachment to a particular

brand, driven by compulsive urges that generally provide pleasure. This involves dependence, habit formation, loss of control, failure to withstand impulses and tension before starting the behavior related to the addicted brand. In addition, some of the following attributes might also characterize brand addiction: social, mental and behavioral preoccupations with the brand; tolerance development; frequent engagement in activities related to the brand; restlessness or irritability when unable to engage in activities/behaviors related to the addicting brand; repeated efforts to stop the behavior; and dismissal of occupational, social and recreational activities to engage in activities related to the addicting brand.

Conclusion

Research on brand addiction is still in its infancy, providing limited understanding of what is meant by this phenomenon. The purpose of this article is to generate a clear and concise conceptual definition of brand addiction, which is essential for scientific research of this important phenomenon. Adopting a step-by-step conceptual development approach and building on previous work on consumer–brand relationship and addiction, this study makes several significant contributions.

The first is a conceptual contribution in the attributes of brand addiction, which differentiates this concept from other constructs in related areas. The conceptual analysis has resulted in a new definition of brand addiction which highlights the unique attributes of brand addiction and its shared attributes with constructs in related areas. Specifically, brand addiction shares two central attributes (emotional attachment and feelings of pleasure) with brand love, brand passion and brand attachment; two other attributes (passion and frequent engagement in the behavior over long periods) with brand passion and brand love; and two more other attributes (dependence and obsession) with brand passion. Also, the findings reveal that brand addiction shares several attributes with compulsive buying (loss of control, excessive and compulsive urges, failure to withstand impulses, frequent engagement in the behavior over long periods and feelings of irritability when unable to engage in the behavior).

The conceptual development of brand addiction also offers theoretical contributions by mitigating the problem of poor conceptual clarity. Thus, it reduces the confusion over what is referred to when describing the concept of brand addiction. Also, specifying the unique and shared attributes of brand addiction suggests that the combination of these features permits researchers to distinguish this construct from other related concepts. Accordingly, the conceptual analysis undertaken in this paper not only provides “construct clarity” of the brand addiction phenomenon, but also represents a major theoretical contribution with a better understanding of the constructs with family resemblance, such as the consumer–brand relationship constructs (e.g. the difference between brand love, brand passion, brand attachment, brand liking, brand loyalty and brand trust) and the addictive behavior constructs (e.g. brand addiction and compulsive buying). Thus, this study helps future researchers avoid redundancy of defined and established constructs in the field by generating constructs with different terms and with overlapping essential attributes. It also helps to avoid invalid conclusions about theoretical relationships that involve brand addiction because the indicators of brand addiction do not measure what they are supposed to measure.

The findings of this study offer theoretical contributions supporting earlier studies, which assert that brand addiction is the highest level of intense emotions that consumers may form with particular brands (Fajer and Schouten, 1995; Fournier, 1998; Swimberghe *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the results help refine our understanding of the examined constructs in the areas of consumer–brand relationships and of addiction. This research, therefore, presents an academic contribution by adding to the body of literature in the marketing, consumer behavior and psychology literature. Finally, establishing conceptual clarity facilitates the process of

generating the potential attributes of a construct that are necessary for the preliminary stages of construct operationalization. In addition, it facilitates stipulating and testing the concept's nomological validity as it allows future researchers to better specify the antecedents and outcomes of this construct. Thus, this paper serves as a preparatory and crucial step for the next stages of testing the validity of the potential attributes in measuring the focal construct.

The current study provides some significant insights for managers aiming to fortify the relationship that consumers build with their brands. First, it provides them with a better understanding of the different relationships that consumers may establish with a certain brand, which they may find beneficial in decisions concerning the marketing mix. Second, it helps them classify their markets based on behavioral segmentation, taking into account the different levels of emotional intensity of consumer–brand relationships. As such, marketing managers can use this study to understand their consumers better and to establish and maintain long-term relationships with them. Such a classification helps managers to select the most promising segment and then design market strategies (product-development, positioning, pricing and promotional strategies) to profitably serve and communicate with the selected segments.

Some limitations are noted in this research. As this research is focused on developing a conceptual definition of the brand addiction construct, our analyses remained within the attributes of the brand addiction concept compared with other related concepts, without generating the operationalization of the concept. While the definition of brand addiction provides a clearer understanding of what the concept means, developing its measurement is an important next stage of work, which is not accomplished in this paper but will be carried out in the future. Although the current paper provides a thorough analysis of the definitional attributes of the brand addiction construct, the validity of the construct's attributes cannot be verified until the definition is attested by its measurement with empirical data. Thus, this research contribution is only a beginning, and additional research is necessary. To get an in-depth understanding of brand addiction, future researchers are encouraged to undertake further qualitative research to thoroughly explore how individuals experience the state of brand addiction and generate further attributes that may also describe brand addiction. In addition, it is suggested that researchers should conduct additional empirical research to differentiate brand addiction conceptually and theoretically from other constructs in the related area, and to test how brand addiction is connected with other important behavioral constructs in a meaningful nomological network.

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