

Is Love All That Matters?

It's Complicated

Gillian Drewett



The relationship status between people and their brands should, like human relationships on Facebook, sometimes be labelled “It’s complicated”.

Why? Because we live in a systemic world where things exist and function in relation to one another, rather than as independent entities, not unlike the world of human relationships as viewed through the lens of social media.

There is one brand where the relationship status is very simple – you are either of the #lovemarmite view or of the #hatemarmite view. However, recently a grocery store brand made the relationship status much more complicated. More on that later.

As consumers, each of us has in our minds complex mental networks of associations with respect to different brands. The brand mental network is a rich picture of our unique mix of experiences, associations, impressions, shape, colour and so on. How then, in the complex world of brand desire, does a brand stand out and get chosen?

Being chosen requires working with a variety of contributing parts: being in mind, having a relationship, having high perceived value, being easy to choose in market. The elements work as a system to build up or break down brand relationships. Emotional connection is enveloped in, and contributes to, creating a mental network of brand association. But, being known and having feelings for a brand doesn’t guarantee that your brand will be bought.

There is a lot going on in the mind of someone choosing a brand, all this activity is taking place at warp speed and some of it unconsciously. Any brand in the market needs to at least be

Relationship Status:
it's complicated

considered as “buyable” by the consumer. This is the first step. Then it’s about the brand standing out and being available in the right kind of way, that is, offering the best value at the moment of choice. We can think of these two as different aspects of saliency:

- Memory salience: tapping into all the experiences and knowledge we already have, all the “priming” the brand has done to make it easy to find the right associations at the moment of choice, and
- Attention salience: relating to all the things the brand can do to swing the decision at the moment of choice.

My status with Marmite was originally quite simple: #Ilovemarmite. So, when my supermarket of choice stopped stocking it I, along with many other Marmite lovers, descended into mild panic as #Marmitegate erupted.



Although my supply of Marmite was very low, I waited a few days to see how #marmitegate would play out. Another retailer was an option, but my Tesco is conveniently located, stocks (almost) everything I need at the right price so I know my purchases will be within my budget. In my Marmite-induced mild panic, competitor brands tried to woo me, but, for me, there can be only one. In fact, the shortage made me love Marmite even more!



My state of mind with regards to Marmite was full commitment, so I did not even consider alternative products. I eventually went to a different supermarket and

stocked up on Marmite.

Because of my extra strong, positive emotional connection to Marmite (#iheartmarmite) I overcame the barriers of availability and price so I could still have my beloved Marmite for breakfast but Tesco didn’t get my money. My love for Marmite introduced me to a new store which offered me all the same things as Tesco, but in my (Marmite) moment that mattered, the new store offered me more. My mental network for Tesco changed and so did my buying behaviour. My experience disrupted my mental network for Tesco, but reinforced my mental network for Marmite. Because my emotional connection with Tesco was weak, as soon as their relevance to me declined it was easy to consider other options and make different choices.

Now that I have two supermarkets in my mental network, they compete for brand desire. If I were asked how I would rate the emotional and functional performance of both stores in a survey, I would have rated Tesco higher than the new store. Despite this, Tesco fell short when it mattered and now comes second to the competitor store when it comes to brand desire. Remember, it’s complicated and this idea of rank (Tesco is now second) complicates it even further. My brand desire for Tesco was impacted not only by my perception of it versus others, but also the **number** of competing brands that represent viable alternatives. Brand rank can be likened to the most viewed, shared or liked social media posts which are also impacted by other factors like seeding and ease of sharing.

So, is love all that matters? Well, for human relationships perhaps, but for brand relationships not so much. Emotional connection is only one of a few different elements that are considered in our decision processes, be they conscious or unconscious.

We live in a systemic world of multiple rather than dichotomous choices and influences. When we measure how well a brand is doing we need to measure why people choose it and then how we can influence those choices through a number of lenses. Looking at what is going on for a brand in a holistic manner is more likely to result in a successful outcome for brand desire than focusing on one element only (#itscomplicated).