

Grounded Theory and Emotional Engagement: What do we learn from the Field?

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GROUNDING THEORY AND EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT: WHAT DO WE LEARN FROM THE FIELD?

Emotional engagement can occur when both utilitarian requirements and hedonistic pursuits are satisfied. Although the concept of emotional engagement has been studied by academics, there has been little work on the pragmatic conditions needed to trigger emotional engagement through marketing activities and the consequences of emotional engagement on consumer behaviour are still to be measured. In an attempt of bridging conceptual definitions of emotional engagement and its operationalization in the professional world, we designed a study which analyses the emotional engagement generated by a cultural Festival called Italian Week. Italian Week has been held in Brisbane, Australia since 2007 and its outstanding success has been gathering a growing number of attendees every year. The data collected and presented in this article was gathered in real time during the last two editions of Italian Week. This is an exploratory study into practitioner perspectives of festival customer 'emotional engagement'.

Keywords: emotional engagement, Italian Week, grounded theory

1. FESTIVAL PROFITABILITY AND EMOTIONAL LINKAGES

Measures of Festivals' efficiency have been purely quantitative and short term focused. Models to measure Festivals' success in financial terms exist (Rao, 2001), yet the effects of emotional engagement are largely excluded from evaluations conducted so far as the strong sentimental and emotional pride linked to Festivals is currently not taken into consideration. Research indicates that emotional stimulation and motivation affect consumer patterns and behaviour (Lee et al., 2011) and this in turn can impact not only Festivals' economic benefits but also consumption habits of attendees. Indeed, Lee et al. (2011) identified hedonistic and functional values as antecedents of emotional value and explained the role of emotional value as intrinsic to satisfaction, investigations conducted by (Holbrook, 1994) suggest that emotional value is critical to understanding the consumer experience and in enhancing the overall customer satisfaction.

We propose that measuring the ability of a Festival in creating emotional engagement and its consequent residual impact on consumption behaviour is critical to a better understanding of the powerful marketing tool that are cultural Festivals. According to Getz and Theobald (1995), festivals are themed, public celebrations of an event or occasion within a community and have been created to provide a platform for people to share, rejoice, learn and celebrate shared pride. This is supported by Lee et al. (2011) who suggest that events creating positive emotional experiences for consumers will yield rewards well beyond the immediate economic and social benefits to the host community.

2. PURPOSE OF STUDY

The use of Grounded Theory in human sciences has been explained and practiced by the need of flowing information from data to abstraction in accordance with Critical Realism (Kempster and Parry, 2011), which assumes that phenomena exist independent of individuals. Put in other words, phenomena exist at the level of events and experience as well as at non observable deeper levels.

Previous research (Gambetti et al.,2013), has analysed the gap between academics and practitioners approach to Consumer-Brand Engagement (CBE), claiming that the current marketing literature failed in providing a clear and unitary definition of the concept. The same could be said about emotional engagement. As a close concept, emotional engagement may it be to a brand, to a product or to an event deserves to be analysed from its deepest roots, that is, from on-field marketing activities which create emotional engagement and have not been thoroughly studied by academics.

Thereby, the purpose of this research is twofold. First, we attempt to contribute to a better understanding of how cultural events stimulating strong emotions can bring recognizable and measurable benefits to the industry involved. Second, we aim at contributing to build a shared knowledge of a construct of emotional engagement based on the CBE concept (Gambetti et al., 2013). We believe that academics should acknowledge the ability of marketing activities to trigger emotional engagement and practitioners should build on a consolidated theoretical construct and be more accurate with the measures of the impact of such activities both on consumers and on the industry in general. In the specific case of this research, we aim at demonstrating that grounding our analysis in a

cultural festival as Italian Week can help to provide a clearer idea of emotional engagement as a construct that causes changes in consumers' buying behaviour (Sorbelli and Karsaklian, 2014).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

As we believe that CBE and emotional engagement are close concepts, we walk in the footsteps of Gambetti et al. (2013), in using a qualitative and exploratory approach to the topic (Holbrook & O'Shaughnessy, 1998) with the goal of introducing a conceptual framework originated from marketing practice.

The study presented here is part of a longitudinal research over a 10 year period. It is designed to analyse the effects of emotional engagement created by Italian Week. Data collected from the field in the last two editions of Italian Week (Hede and Kellett, 2011, Urošević, 2012) provides a dynamic and holistic view of the incident under investigation (Yin, 1989).

Further research will see a practitioner based model which will be investigated to determine relevance to actual festival customers' emotional engagement and subsequent festival behaviour

A pilot script was pre-tested with two interviewees and after minor adjustments the definitive script was applied to 32 informants during the Festival who had attended Italian Week from between one (1) to five (5) years and were asked to describe emotions stimulated by the event. The interviewee's comprised; ten (10) people born in Italy, seven (7) with at least one Italian parent and born in Italy, one (1) born in New Zealand, and fifteen (15) born in Australia with Australian parents. The Interviewees were a combination of festival attendees, supporters and sponsors and exhibitors/stallholders. The interviewees were selected from an Italian Week database and emailed to seek participation, 32 respondents create the final selection.

Marketers' understanding of how people were emotionally attached to Italian Week was explained by the fact that they too experience the vibe of Italian week from the inside. Although their intuition proved to be accurate about the types of emotional linkages attendees had with the Festival, they were unable to classify such linkages in a structured way. Our conceptual framework will fill in this gap.

Selected interviewees were first contacted by telephone and after having accepted our invitation for an interview they were met in central location in Brisbane for a face-to-face interview and each of the interviews lasted around 1h. Interviewees were asked to freely talk about emotions emerging during the Festival (d'Astous et al, 2006). All interviews were recorded and integral transcripts were analysed via manual content analysis and coded by each author separately before having them put together to ensure that no misinterpretations occurred. Minor discrepancies were noticed between the two analyses (Yin, 1989).

4. FINDINGS

Evidence from our research demonstrate that both professionals involved in the Festival and attendees understand that Italian Week triggers emotional engagement and that the concept of emotional engagement is multi-dimensional as is the concept of CBE (Gambetti et al., 2013). Emotional engagement created by a cultural Festival appears to be an overarching concept generated by identity, hedonism and typicality as illustrated by the following quote: *I would describe Italian Week as one big family festival where you are going to eat nice food, have a lot of laughs, it's going to be loud, there is going to be music playing, it's going to be a high energy environment.*

Cultural festivals play a paramount social role in peoples' lives because they are a thematic celebrations that take place usually once a year within a predetermined period of time (Getz, 1991) and consumption in Festivals is mainly social in that one usually consumes it together with many other attendees who share the same interests. These social experiences take place outside people's normal environment and are highly hedonistic (d'Astous et al., 2006) as illustrated in the following quote: *Italian Week certainly has opened up the eyes of many people in our community. There was a great deal of visual exposure apart from advertising and local businesses being involved and the local community being involved. It was there for all to see every time you drove through the city. People recognized that it was Italian Week and I think people got behind it.*

Based on the above, we suggest that components of emotional engagement are Identity, Hedonic Fulfilment and Typicality and its results are changes in consumption behaviour and residual effect as depicted in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 here. Components and results of Emotional Engagement

Identity

Gursoy et al. (2006), found that Festivals can reinforce cultural and social identity within a community, adding meaningful understanding to a community's composition. According to Grappi and Montanari (2011), consumers attend Festivals to communicate to others a significant allegiance to a social and cultural group and often provide a key to a community's shared histories. Mitchell and Fisher (2010), propose that Festivals are deeply symbolic events which can provide cultural and social benefits like revelry, public joy and merriment for the community. Supporting this argument, Ryan (2006) believes that it is important that Festivals meet the emotional needs of stakeholders and attendees as opposed to simply generating profits. Motivation and emotional satisfaction dimensions are the core of Festival production (Nicholson and Pearce, 2001) and thus a need to interact with family, whilst enjoying cultural enrichment ought to form part of the offering of Festivals (Sorbello and Karsaklian, 2015) as illustrated by the following quote: *... the Italian festival, is something that I would want to share with other people, I would want to share that emotion that it brings to me with people of my culture and I would want to share that with them and encourage them to come visit something that I'm really proud of and makes me feel the way I do. Italian Week evokes positive emotions and I want to be involved with that and be passing that experience on to other people and obviously I'd want to share that positive emotion that I'm feeling. I'd want other people to share in that sensation as well.*

A study conducted by Crompton and McKay (1997) revealed that consumers seek to engage with others who share similar visions, beliefs and views of the world. Festivals create opportunities for celebrating the unifying similarities found in the human dimension which enable people to communicate and connect with each other, to share intense emotions and feelings and celebrate shared

visions and histories. In other words, Festivals generate a sense of belonging resting on emotional engagement. Table 1 features the words coded as describing Identity.

Insert Table 1 here. Words coded as describing Identity

The sense of community created by the association of the three types of identity becomes de cornerstone of the emotions triggered by the festival and of peoples' attachment to it as stated below: *I think the community has come on board. We are certainly getting more support from local businesses, local community. I think we have stepped outside of the just the Italian community and I think we have gone to a broader community now and it's not just the Italians that are celebrating. I think Brisbane's community as a whole is actually coming together for Italian Week so that Italian Week has really expanded. It's just not me celebrating being Italian, it's my friends who know me and I'm Italian and anyone who loves anything Italian is involved and I think it's an opportunity for us to share in our beautiful culture and I think it's intoxicating for all who, once they've shared it, want to be involved again.*

The Identity component of emotional engagement can be broken down into three dimensions as follows:

Insert Figure 2 here.

Hedonic Fulfilment

The hedonic fulfilment component of emotional engagement is critical to creating the needed attachment to the Festival because people aim at satisfying both utilitarian and hedonic needs and motivations (Gursoy et al., 2006), however predominantly, people attend Festivals for enjoyment (hedonistic) motives rather than for functional (utilitarian) needs.

Because hedonic dimension can be created from the symbolic meaning and emotions aroused by the event, the Festival's program, ambience, conditions, layout, entertainment, general location and a pleasant atmosphere positively affect emotions (Grappi and Montanari, 2011). This implies that a fundamental ingredient for consumer satisfaction is the satisfaction of hedonistic desires (Voss et al.,

2003), as illustrated by one interviewee: *It's more the food related brands because that has been a focus of my attendance. Italian wines I'm more likely to try now and I do look for more Italian brands in things that I use in cooking... people having fun, enjoying themselves at an event with good food and good wine, they look like they're going to stay there all night because they're enjoying themselves and they're engaged with each other.*

Of equal importance to complete consumer satisfaction is meeting the functional or utilitarian preconditions consumers expect and need for enjoyment (Childers et al., 2002) while Yang et al. (2011) researched Festivals from the emotional and behavioural perspective and found that Festival-goers seek emotional satisfaction, with the 'experience' being the main motivation for attending, Grappi and Montanari (2011), research into social identification and hedonism found that transmitting pleasure and delight increases social exchanges which, in turn can attract and retain consumers, as quoted by one respondent: *It was in a good spot, the way it was set out people can walk around, there is music, there's entertainment, as well as the food, they'd be entertained, there's a bit of space, there's even probably dance floor and the setting that does give it an Italian feel.*

The term 'Festivalscape', coined by Lee et al. (2008), encompasses the satisfaction of both utilitarian and hedonistic desires of patrons to Festivals. Creating an atmosphere where functionality and appeasement of desires are satisfied, increases positive emotions and social identification (Gursoy et al., 2006). Subsequent research undertaken by Lee et al. (2011) suggests that hedonistic or emotional value represent a clearer and more concise understanding of Festival attendance than utilitarian or functional value. That marketers should address consumers' senses is nothing new and in Festivals, sensory yielding is enhanced and patrons really need to 'feel' the event. Table 2 features the words used to describe their hedonic fulfilment.

Insert Table 2 here. Words coded as describing Hedonic Fulfilment

This component of emotional engagement can be broken down into three dimensions as follows:

Insert Figure 3 here.

Typicality

Researchers have conducted numerous investigations into the impact of culture on consumer habits (Sapienza et al., 2006) and country of origin is recognized in the literature as an important tool for marketers to influence consumers' perceptions towards brands, behaviour and intention to buy (Agrawal and Kamakura, 1999). The importance of a brand's nationality was first recognized by Dichter (1962) who argued in favour of the "tremendous influence on the acceptance and success of products" (p. 116) based on the perceptions consumers hold toward that country (Sapienza et al., 2006). Accordingly, consumers were found to attach emotions to products based simply on COO (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999) because country of origin is a cue for identity, pride and self-identification via emotive and symbolic significance (Botschen and Hemetsberger, 1998). The following quote illustrates such type of attachment: *I think it's, to me, probably the gregariousness of being Italian and the way of life and the joy of living and the joy of food and the joy of wine. I think that's the emotion it evokes in me. Just all things Italian, yes, just the way of living and people's attitude towards life I think and the simple things. It's our Italian community and our spirit I think that people connect too. ...the festival is a place that I am attracted to because growing up Italian, I am used to a lot of people eating, drinking, being loud, that sort of high energy is what you grow up with. You do have big families. I can remember having thirty to thirty five people at Christmas or Easter at my mums place, and that was just immediate family. And it was always high energy, and the festival reminds me of that, so you have the individual table going off, the guys playing music, so it gets you in the mood that it's very Italian. Normally these are terrific nights, they are great fun nights.*

We refer to the country celebrated by the Festival as a trait of typicality. Indeed, our broad definition of typicality embraces the notions of country of origin effect, stereotypes and the knowledge people with and without Italian origins have about the country. To us, typicality is represented by any perceptions, opinions or ideas interviewees have about Italy. Table 3 displays the words having led to the Typicality component.

Insert Table 3 here. Words coded as describing Typicality

Typicality can be broken down into three dimensions as well:

Insert Figure 4 here.

Emotional Engagement

Arcadia and Witford (2007), argue that within a Festival context, emotions are the singular most important consideration of visitors' behavioural intention. Their findings suggest that a strong relationship exists between visitors to events and emotions, perceived value and behavioural intention. From an economic perspective, the study of consumer behaviour in Festivals is incomplete if it fails to consider the effects of emotions (Lee et al., 2008). Emotions are important predictors of behaviour (Grappi and Montanari, 2011), affecting social and emotional satisfaction, which in turn affects social identification. Yoon (2010), claims that consumer's psychological experience is affected by emotional satisfaction. The power of this emotional satisfaction or engagement connects consumers who can demonstrate commitment to a community (Gursoy et al., 2006) which builds trust and sense of belonging. This suggests that understanding how consumer perceptions affect the appraisal of Festivals is paramount for organisers of Festivals (Gursoy et al., 2006) to deliver emotionally satisfying and fulfilling experiences as illustrated by the following quote from a participant: *It's like a football club, the same. If you are emotional about it, you have to keep following your club every match, every day because you are emotionally involved. You want no change in allegiance, that sort of thing continues on.*

Accordingly, Yang et al. (2011) propose that high levels of emotions generated at events will transfer into high levels of intention to return to participate in the activity again. We add that the impact of Italian Week goes beyond willingness to return by stimulating attendees to extend the emotional connection with the Festival by consuming products sold and advertised during the event after it is finished. Duffy and Waitt (2011) put forward the idea that emotional engagement occurs when people really identify with their environment and activities, when there is an emotional investment in the event they are participating in. Emotional engagement happens when people identify positive feelings with their recreation and are motivated by the desire to enjoy themselves and share common experiences at a deep seated emotional level. Indeed, emotions act as gatekeepers to decisions, bridging rational and non-rational functions of the brain whereas engagement begins with a conscious

or unconscious emotional response to a stimulus (Heath, 2009). Creating an environment where the hedonistic and utilitarian needs of Festival patrons are met sets the stage for creating and engendering emotional engagement. Table 4 features the words and expressions having led to the concept of emotional engagement.

Insert Table 4 here. Words having been coded as describing Emotional Engagement

Based on the above, we can breakdown the concept of emotional engagement into four factors:

Insert Figure 5 here.

Italian Week in Australia triggers emotional engagement

The first edition of the Festival back in 2007 attracted 2000 attendees and the figures went up to over 55,000 people in 2015. Italian Week brings the best of Italy to Queensland during the Festival in a controlled environment where visitors' utilitarian and hedonistic needs are fulfilled as exemplified by the following quote from one respondent: *Friendships, lots of memories. Enjoyed the entertainment, the experience as a whole just makes me want to be more engaged with the Italian culture, community, learn more about the country, experience more of the country -- it makes you feel sort of warm, there's just a warm cultural or family oriented people and I just love it!*

Emotional engagement appears as being one of the pillars of the Festival instead of a consequence of it. Attendees go there to experience emotions more than anything else. Ultimately, non-Italians and tourists experience only the positive feelings of 'Italianness' without the shock or inconvenience of total immersion in a foreign culture (Ireland, 1981), as stated by some respondents: *... you can immerse yourself in the Italian culture without leaving Brisbane. It is like being in Italy, while being in Australia. And you can know a lot of people from different parts of Italy, or just people who like Italian culture.*

In phase with Hirschman and Holbrook (1982), who define consumption as a holistic expression of symbolic meanings, hedonic emotional responses, and sensory pleasures, Italian Week provides

participants with satisfaction at all these levels thanks to a large array of activities spread throughout the week: *I encourage others to come and enjoy the different events and entertainment Italian Week offers. Guests are friendly and everyone is welcomed with traditional Italian warmth. They're missing out if they don't come along and partake. It's a lot of fun, a lot of diversity, they really need to be part of it!*

5. MANAGERIAL AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Evidence from our research demonstrates the ability Italian Week has to trigger emotional engagement as stated by one participant: *You actually meet people that have fallen in love with Italy and it's really lovely seeing that part -- you know that connection that they've made and the love of Italy and Italian food even though their heritage is totally different. You actually see it through another person's eyes which is lovely because you actually get used to so many things about being Italian that's just part of you and then just actually see someone really appreciate that.*

The residual effect caused by emotional engagement makes participants want to extend the experience by (1) Learning to speak Italian, (2) Travelling to Italy, (3) Cooking Italian food or learning to cook Italian Food, (4) Engaging in activities linked to art such as music, films, opera, and art exhibitions, as illustrated by one quote: *I am now buying more Italian goods, services and brands as a result of attending Italian Week or seeing its promotional activities.* Admittedly, emotional engagement triggered by Italian Week has an impact on consumer behaviour as depicted in Figure 5.

Insert Figure 5 here. The impact of emotional engagement on consumption habits

The fact that Italian Week increases awareness of brands and creates desire for products and services was confirmed by reports obtained from the practitioners interviewed in our research.

The Fiat Experience

Italian Week 2015 worked extensively with WestPoint Autos who sought to penetrate into the marketplace with an extended product offering. The first event, 'Italian Style on the Magic Mile' consisted of hosting an Italian fashion parade. This event had over 200 guests. During the evening of the Fashion event, the car dealer sold two vehicles including an AUD\$50,000 Fiat Arbarth. The

second event involved placing the Fiat brand within the context of the ‘An Italian Affair’ street festival which was the centrepiece of the 2015 Italian Week. One month after the 2015 Italian Week, Nicholas Ball, Fleet Specialist at WestPoint Autos reported: *Being a part of the festival in 2015 has helped our Fiat and Alfa Romeo brands be recognised in our Moorooka Location. In hosting a small part of your enriched style and culture that has been created allowed us to grow from one or two Fiats sold a month to 3-4 a week (just in the last month and it continues to grow). Brisbane locals now realise that being a part of the Italian family, culture and brands is an enriching and valuable experience. One that needs to be latched onto. The young generation is realising this more everyday as they look to get on board and feel a part of a bigger family. Thank you once again for such a great experience and allowing us to be a part of your family.*

The Tastes of Italy feature

During Italian Week, food and wine appreciation workshops were held in conjunction with ‘Tastes of Italy’ and the Brisbane Library in the centre of the city. Apart from being three times as popular as any other workshops that they have held with over 150 people filling the Library presentation room to capacity, the course resulted in over 1/3 of the people attending the presentation (55 people), purchasing and subscribing for paid Italian Cooking Courses with the Tastes of Italy organisation which to occur in the months following to Italian Week.

Italian Language Classes

Italian Week worked with La Bella Figura Italian Language and Culture School extensively during the 2015 festival. The Language School sought to understand the opportunities in shorter courses and diversification into elementary travellers Italian classes and one day workshops. The various classes were promoted during the Italian Week festival and nowhere else. During the course of the festival and in the following month, La Bella Figura had a significant influx of inquiries which in turn translated into bookings for the rest of the year, resulting in an increase of over 35% on the previous year for the same period.

6. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

Practitioners interviewed in this study acknowledge the power of emotional engagement triggered by Italian Week in impacting consumption habits. Because such acknowledgement was unstructured and somehow intuitive our contribution with this research was to present a conceptual framework identifying components of emotional engagement that can be beneficial to both academics and practitioners in the marketing field. Our model represents a theoretical contribution to the marketing field in identifying the main components of emotional engagement and helps practitioners to better target their marketing activities when involving emotional engagement. Although we believe that our results can possibly be extrapolated to other cultural Festivals, further research is needed in order to support this assumption and replicate our model.

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Figure 1. Components and results of Emotional Engagement

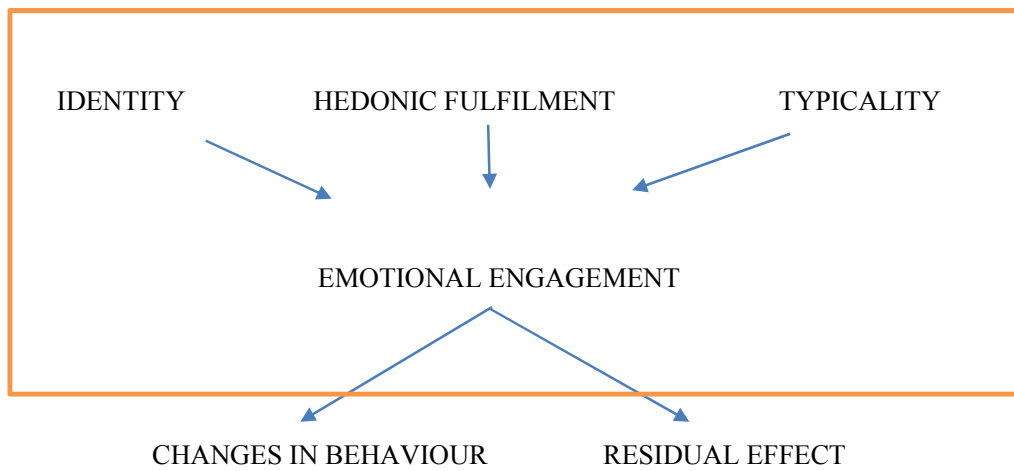


Table 1. Words coded as describing Identity

<p>Social, Cultural and Self Identification / Community</p>	<p>People People have fun together Involved with the community / Community spirit Engagement Connecting and reconnecting with people Food brings people together Nice people each year The spirit of being Italian</p>
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Table 2. Words coded as describing Hedonic Fulfilment

<p>Hedonic fulfilment</p>	<p>A feast for all your senses Live life to the full Embrace beauty Love family Express emotions</p>
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IDENTITY

Figure 3.

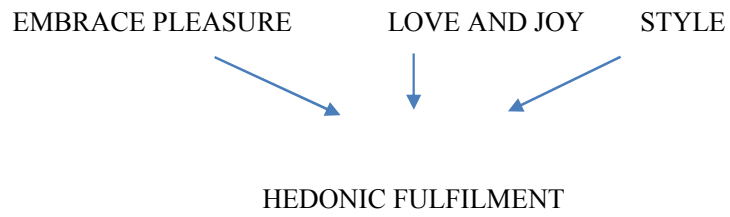


Figure 4.

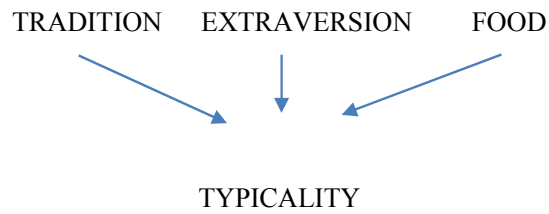


Figure 5.

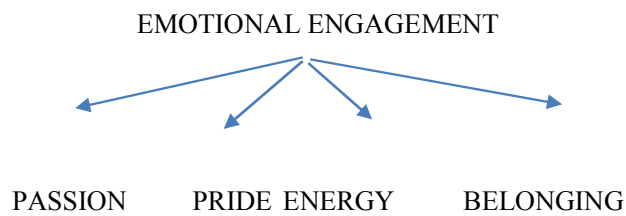


Figure 6. The impact of emotional engagement on consumption habits

