



# ASSOCIATION FOR CONSUMER RESEARCH

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## **Brand Love: Towards an Integrative Model**

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This paper reports two sequential studies on consumers' love of brands. In study 1, a series of 70 first interviews and 10 follow-up depth interviews revealed how people understand and experience love in the consumption context. Findings were compared to past studies on the love prototype developed in psychology. Data revealed how love of products and consumption activities shares the key elements of the popular understanding of interpersonal love. This description of love in consumption contexts is then used as the basis for developing and testing a structural equation model looking specifically at consumers' love of brands.

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## SYMPOSIA SUMMARY

# From Tools to Theories: How Different Methodologies May Impact Theory Development in Brand Relationship Research

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### SESSION OVERVIEW

The topic of brand loyalty and brand relationship has been explored extensively in the consumer behavior literature for a number of years, and continues to be a vital research area in consumer behavior. Much of this work has concentrated on theory development regarding the nature of the brand-consumer relationship (e.g. Aaker, 1997, Kressman, et. al., 2006, Yoon, 2006). Crucial to furtherance of this understanding is the development of reliable and valid methods for assessing the relationship of consumer to brand. As suggested by Gigerenzer (1991), the emergence of cognitive theories is strongly influenced by the research tools available to theorist. In essence, different methodologies lead to different theories. Over the past twenty years the field of consumer behavior has witnessed an astounding proliferation of data collection and analytical methodologies, and it is certainly difficult to argue *against* the assertion that this proliferation has influenced the course of theory development. Presumably, it is this proliferation of both methodologies and theories that makes the theme of the conference, *building bridges*, so appropriate.

In this spirit, this session intends to present several methodological approaches to brand relationships with the overall objective of exploring the impact these different approaches may have on theory development. The session includes 1) research that utilizes depth interviews and structural equation modeling to develop a consumer brand-identification scale; 2) a set of studies that leverage qualitative depth interviews to develop a structural equation model of brand love, and 3) a videographic exploration of consumer-brand relationship that seeks to provide insight as to the influence of functional and emotional elements of brand relationships. While each paper is of course interesting in its own right, the key contribution of this symposium is the opportunity to present and discuss these different methodological approaches in light of their likely influence on theory development in the area of brand loyalty in a single session.

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### EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

#### "Antecedents and Consequences of Consumer-Brand Identification: Theory and Empirical Test"

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A key to the formation of strong relationships between consumers and brands is the concept of *identification*, i.e., a consumer's sense of oneness with a brand. This concept has a long history psychology and has been studied heavily in organization science; more recently, it has received the attention of academic researchers in the branding area (e.g., Bhattacharya and Sen 2003; Fournier 1998). It has been proposed that consumers identify with brands for cognitive as well as emotional reasons, and as in the work of Bhattacharya and Sen (2003), several different factors have been suggested as being conducive to consumer-brand identification (CBI).

Although the conceptual aspects of brand identification have received a fair amount of attention from academic researchers, empirical work in this area seems to have lagged behind. Scholars have proposed and tested scales for social identity and organizational identification (e.g., Mael and Ashforth 1992; Bergami and Bagozzi 2000), but such work does not address some of the unique aspects of the ties that potentially bind consumers to brands. Most fundamentally, brands are things we *consume*—thereby implicating the consumption experience itself as being integral to why we identify strongly with some brands and not others. Thus, for example, the affective traces left in memory by a certain brand consumption experience, or the social context in which a brand is consumed, can be among the factors leading to CBI. Further, as proposed in our conceptual model, variables such as product category involvement and product category symbolism are likely to moderate the impact of some of the influences conducive to consumer brand identification. Obviously, the aforementioned types of factors are quite unique to the consumption context and thus need to be taken into account in research on CBI.

Therefore, in the present research the construct of consumer-brand identification (CBI) is investigated in conceptual and empirical terms with two principal research objectives. The first objective is to develop a parsimonious scale for CBI with appropriate psychometric properties, including convergent and discriminant validity. The second and more important objective is to propose and test a model of the antecedents and consequences of CBI, including key moderating variables.

Our conceptual model for CBI is based on a synthesis of prior work in consumer behavior, organizational behavior, social psychology, and marketing. In regard to the empirical part of the project, we went through a multi-stage process. First, after gaining insights from an extensive literature review, initial item development was accomplished with the help of qualitative in-depth interviews and a test of a preliminary item pool. We then proceeded to conduct two main studies with the intent of further scale purification and nomological validation via a test of the overall antecedents/consequences model. The first study was carried out with a

Web-based survey administered to a panel of almost 800 German consumers and involved four product categories (athletic shoes, mobile phones, soft drinks, and grocery stores). Sample demographics were fairly representative of the German population (average age 40.6 years, 47% females). The second study was conducted with a Web-based survey of around 400 U. S. college students and involved two product categories (athletic shoes and soft drinks).

The results from several analyses of these data sets show that our CBI scale has satisfactory psychometric properties. In addition, the results from confirmatory factor analyses and structural equation modeling methods provide support for the hypothesized relationships between CBI and its antecedents/consequences. Importantly, we also find a great deal of consistency in the results across the two studies. In brief, CBI is influenced mainly by brand-self personality similarity, brand distinctiveness, brand prestige, the brand's social facilitation, brand warmth, and memorable brand experiences. Further, several of these relationships are moderated by product category involvement and product category symbolism. On the downstream side, CBI is found to explain a significant amount of variance in both brand loyalty and brand advocacy.

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### "Brand Love: Towards an Integrative Model"

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Consumers' love of products and brands has become an increasingly popular research topic (e.g. Ahuvia 1993, 2005; Albert, Boyer, Mathews-Lefebvre, Merunka and Valette-Florence 2007; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Fournier 1998; Fournier and Mick 1999; Ji 2002; Kamat and Parulekar 2007; Keh, Pang and Peng 2007; Strahilevitz 2007; Thomson, MacInnis and Park 2005; Whang, Allen, Sahoury and Zhang 2004; Yeung and Wyer 2005). Love in consumption has also been drawing increased attention among practitioners (e.g. Roberts 2004). To see why love is relevant to marketing and consumer research, one need only think about the role it plays in relationships. Whether we are looking at romantic love or familial love, love is a powerful psychological process that brings and holds people together. For marketers who want consumers to be attracted to, and loyal to their products, love of products and brands is a topic of clear relevance.

Despite its growing popularity, consumer research on love is still in its infancy and much of the work centers around the basic question of what love is when applied to products and brands. Shimp and Madden (1998) adapted Sternberg's theory of love to

consumer behavior, and suggested that love in consumption was made up of three dimensions (see also Keh, Tat and Peng 2007); Kamat and Parulekar (2007) started out with Shimp and Madden's three dimensional model, but ended up with five somewhat different dimensions; building on Lee's (1988) research on interpersonal love styles, Whang, Sahoury and Zhang (2004) developed a three factor model; Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) developed a Brand Love scale with five dimensions; and finally Albert et al (2007) found a still different set of 7 dimensions. Thus we can see that past consumer research on love offers at least two dozen different dimensions that may, or may not, be part of love in consumption. To move forward on this important topic, we need more clarity about what the various aspects of love-in consumer behavior-are, and how they fit together. The extensive research literature on interpersonal love is one good place to start. However, Yoon and Gutches (2006) have found that consumer-product relationships are processed in a different part of the brain from interpersonal relationships. This suggests the need for caution in assuming the direct transferability of interpersonal love theories to explain consumer behavior. The common practice of borrowing constructs directly from the interpersonal love literature and developing measures for these constructs, prematurely limits the data collected to information derived from those constructs, and thus does not give unique nuances of love in consumer behavior a sufficient chance to emerge.

The current research combines qualitative interviews and structural equation modeling to produce a theory of brand love rooted in consumer experience. We begin by interviewing 70 adult consumers about what, if anything, they love aside from another person. These qualitative interviews are analyzed to produce a rich description of love in consumer behavior. Having attained a clearer understanding of love in consumer behavior, we then address the issue of discriminant validity and discuss the relationship between love and other, similar constructs. Study 2 uses the results of study 1 and other insights from the literature, to build a structural equations model of brand love, and test that model for both a "loved" and a "mundane" brand from the same product category. We conclude with a discussion of the theoretical and managerial implications of our findings.

### Study 1: The Components of Love

Data collection took place in two stages. Initially, 70 structured interviews were conducted. From these 70 respondents 10 subsequently participated in follow-up depth interviews. Respondents for the first stage of data collection were contacted through a snowball sampling procedure (Lincoln and Guba 1985). Although the search for respondents began with personal contacts, the actual respondents had not met the researchers prior to the research. Seventy people were contacted and all of them agreed to participate in the research. The respondents were evenly split by gender (36 male and 34 female), predominantly white (white 57, black 10, Hispanic 2, other 1), ranged from 23 to 45 years of age (M=32), and were generally well-educated (graduate school 38, college 27, high school 5). Quotes from respondents are identified by gender, occupation, and age; e.g. M, lawyer, 42. Ten respondents were selected from the large sample study for 2- to 4-hour home interviews. A purposive sampling design (Lincoln and Guba 1985) provided coverage of commonly mentioned love objects and redundancy on some of the most frequently mentioned items.

In the large sample study, confidential taped interviews were conducted over the phone and lasted from 10 minutes to one hour, averaging 20-30 minutes. Respondents were asked, 'if there is something aside from people with whom you have a close personal

relationship that you love—what is it?’ Respondents were then asked a series of open ended follow-up questions to learn more about their relationship with each item. The interview continued until the respondent ceased to name new loved objects. For the depth interviews, a questionnaire was developed to test the major findings of the phone interviews against a richer, more detailed data set. In addition to discussing loved objects mentioned in the phone interviews, respondents also discussed objects toward which they had a neutral or mundane relationship and people they loved. This allowed for a comparison between loved and mundane objects and activities, and for a comparison of interpersonal and non-interpersonal love.

Study 1 provides a description of the major components of love in consumer behavior, drawn from the experience of consumers. When consumers were given an open ended opportunity to talk about products that they loved, their comments went well beyond a particular emotion and encompassed a much larger and more complex psychological system. The things consumers loved were overwhelmingly seen as excellent. The emotional experience associated with these items was generally very positive, heightening positive moods and soothing negative experiences. However, consumers also made significant investments of time and money in the things they loved, and sometimes this work involved frustration or other kinds of sacrifice that were not altogether positive. Through these encounters and active involvement with the things they loved, consumers developed a strong sense of attachment to them. This stemmed at times from long histories of involvement with the loved items, and implied a sense of loyalty and commitment to the item in the future. In some cases this attachment was understood through the metaphor of an interpersonal relationship, and the product was seen as a friend, companion, etc. But these relational metaphors were not seen by all respondents as being part of love.

Respondents sometimes reported an experience akin to love at first sight, where they knew immediately at some intuitive level that this item was right for them. This was consistent with the desire and attraction for the item expressed in many cases. Respondents talked about the loved item meeting a wide variety of needs (Ahuvia 1993), but in particular love was associated with items that met consumers’ higher order needs for existential meaning and helped them enact and clarify their sense of identity. This tied into the fact that consumers tended to find the things they loved intrinsically rewarding, rather than being a means to a future end. Because the loved items were intrinsically rewarding (i.e. directly provided a rewarding experience), and because of the intuitive sense of “rightness” that respondents felt about many loved items, the respondents saw them as authentic parts of their identity.

Now that we have an understanding of love in consumer behavior that emerges out of the lived experiences of consumers, we can address the issue of how love differs from other consumer behavior constructs such as attitudes, involvement and satisfaction. When love is seen as a larger psychological system, these constructs are not rival but rather constituent parts. Love includes being involved with the item, being satisfied (at least) with the item, and having a positive attitude about the item. But love cannot be reduced to any one of these constructs.

### Study 2: Structural Equation Modeling of the Brand Love Construct

Our second study began with the findings from the qualitative work in which aspects of brand love were identified. On the basis of the qualitative work, we generated 140 items measuring the 16 aspects of brand love. These items were administered to 230 consumers, and exploratory factor analysis was used to identify a

set of items, as the basis for testing construct and nomological validity.

A total of 85 items passed the exploratory factor analysis stage of analysis. Because so many measures for the 16 factors would generate too many parameters to be estimated for the sample size at hand under confirmatory factor analysis, we parcelled items based on the factor loadings from the exploratory factor analysis so as to generate two indicators (parcels) per factor.

Confirmatory factor analyses show that convergent and discriminant validity of indicators were achieved for four subdimensions of cognitive brand love (i.e., beliefs related to self-identity, long-term use, life meaning, final quality, looking/feeling like one wants to look/feel), four subdimensions of affective brand love (i.e., feelings related to fit, emotional connection, positive affect, negative affect), three dimensions of cognitive brand love (i.e., willingness to spend resources, desire to use, things done in past), overall attitude valence, attitude strength #1, attitude strength #2, and loyalty. Tests of hypotheses on the relationships among these dimensions support a brand cognitive→attitude→loyalty sequence of effects. That is, attitudes mediate the effects of cognitive/affective/conative aspects of brand love on loyalty.

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#### **"Head, Hand, Heart: A Videographic Exploration of Functional and Emotional Aspects of Brand Relationships"**

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The topic of brand loyalty and consumer-brand relationship has received substantial attention in the literature for many years. A long and important debate in this literature revolves around the question of how functional and emotional aspects of brand relationship relate to brand loyalty (see, e.g., Kressman et al. 2006). Emotional aspects of brand relationship reflect the assertion that brands have a "personality" and that consumers' relationship to these brands are similar to their relationships to people (Aaker, 1997, Yoon, 2006). In this context brands may engage the ego or bolster the self-esteem of the consumer. In contrast, functional aspects of brand relationship are presumed to involve the concrete, utilitarian aspects of brand performance; brand loyalty is based on consumers' evaluation of these functional criteria. In addition, involvement has been identified as a key factor that affects brand loyalty, and that both low and high-involvement relationships merit consideration (see, e.g. Hoyer, 1984).

There is presently a substantial body of research has been developed that leverages ethnographic methodologies to examine brand loyalty (see e.g. Belk, 1988). The primary focus of much of this work is on "high-involvement" brand loyalty, usually centered on one product category and/or one group of consumers. However, initial depth interviews on the topic of brand loyalty suggest that the same consumer may have a variety of brand relationships that vary in terms of both functional/emotional aspects as well as involvement level. From a brand perspective, it also appears that while certain types of brands may lend themselves more naturally to certain types of brand relationships, the same brand may indeed have consumers that relate to that brand in either an emotional or functional way, and at varying levels of involvement.

The purpose of the present research is to further explore the possibility and extent to which consumers may have different relationships with different brands, and that brands may have different relationships with different consumers. Based on depth interviews of approximately 30 consumers, three classifications of brand loyalty have been developed: *heart loyalty* is high involved, emotionally-based brand loyalty; *head loyalty* is similarly high-

involved, but is functional in nature; and *hand loyalty* is low-involved loyalty where consumers exhibit neither functional nor emotional connections to the brand but remain (behaviorally) loyal nonetheless.

The videographic portion of this research seeks further explore these three types of loyalty. One purpose of this work is to further understand the multi-faceted nature of brand loyalty at the individual level; for example, one respondent indicated a strong emotional identification with Apple Computers associated with self-reported brand loyalty. This same respondent also reported being loyal to Toyota automobiles; however, when probed, the revealed nature of this relationship appeared to be much more functional in nature. Finally, she also reported a (behavioral) loyalty to Kleenex tissues, but, when probed, did not appear to have any strong emotional or functional ties to the brand. In contrast, another respondent also loyal to Kleenex tissues appeared to have a far stronger emotional connection to the brand, and responded in an extremely positive fashion to the recent Kleenex "Let it Out" campaign that has a strong emotional appeal (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=E5fZ-dnmExE>). Hence, it appears that the same person can have different types of brand loyalty, and the same brand can also have different types of brand loyal consumers.

Another purpose of this research is to explore the relationships between attitudes and behavior as they relate to these three types of loyalty. Raymond (1976) classified the behavior-learning hierarchy into learn-do-feel, feel-do-learn, and do-learn-feel. These three classifications map naturally onto the head, heart, and hand classifications discussed above. The videography will be used to explore whether or not these mappings hold.

Finally, we are interested in exploring the nature of consumers' resistance to competing brand proposals in each of the loyalty states. If, for example, some consumers have a strong emotional commitment to a particular brand, we should expect them to be highly resistant to competing offers. In fact, if this type of relationship is truly ego-involved, we might expect them to experience something of a personal affront at the suggestion that another brand is superior to theirs. In contrast, head loyals, by virtue of their functional relationship, might be expected to be more responsive to propositions that reveal functional superiority of competing products. In depth interviews this outcome was observed when consumers were given competing brand offers; we attempt to examine this further in the videography.

We believe this research represents an important contribution to the area of brand relationships in that it 1) reveals further insights regarding the emotional and functional aspects of brand loyalty, 2) examines these relationships in light of consumer involvement level by leveraging the videographic methodology, and 3) begins to examine how a single consumer might exhibit different types of loyalty to different products and a single product might engender different types of loyalty in different consumers.

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