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# The Effect of Product Category on Consumer Brand Relationships

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## **The Effect of Product Category on Consumer Brand Relationships**

**Purpose:** This paper investigates the effect of product category onto consumer brand relationships.

**Design/methodology/approach:** Based on a total of 800 consumers, respondents evaluated their relationship with their favorite brand in one of the four product categories studied (soft drink, mobile phone, shoes, cars). EFA, subsequent CFA, SEM and ANOVA were used to assess these relationships and the product category effect.

**Findings:** We find that brand love positively influences brand loyalty and both, influence positively WOM and purchase intention. Looking at the directionality of these relationships, our results show no product category differences. However, we found significant differences in terms of their intensity and their effect on the explanation power of the brand outcome variables WOM and purchase intention.

**Research limitations/implications:** The survey was conducted in Brazil and future research should assess the same product categories in other cultural settings as well as consider other product categories to assess the external validity of our results.

**Practical implications:** This paper demonstrates that consumer brand relationships are not product category specific. However, certain product categories tend to have more intense relationships than others.

**Originality/value:** Despite the importance of the product category effect in the branding literature, our study shows that consumer brand relationship theory can be applied to different product categories. This suggests, the product category is less important in the study design than the unit of analysis which requires to be the consumer's favorite brands.

## The Effect of Product Category on Consumer Brand Relationships

### 1. Introduction

In the past decade the assessment of the relationships consumers have with their brands emerged as a new research field (Fournier, 1998; Keller and Lehmann, 2006). Consumer brand relationships research is multi-disciplinary, complex, dynamic and “many unresolved issues and conundrums remain” (Fournier, 2009, p. 5). Brands have been identified as relationship partners (Keh *et al.*, 2007) with many different constructs used (Fournier, 1998) where this relationship can have a spectrum of intensities of emotional bonds (Ashworth *et al.*, 2009; Pavlos, 2012). Terms such as brand loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978), brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), brand passion (Bauer *et al.*, 2007), brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005; Belaid and Behi, 2011) brand romance (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011), brand fidelity (Hess, *et al.*, 2011) and brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert *et al.*, 2008a; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012) have been used to distinguish among various types and intensities of emotions and relationships consumers have with brands (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Reimann and Aron, 2009).

Brand love is one of the least researched topics in consumer brand relationships. The seminal work by Fournier (1998) identified love as one key dimension of consumer brand relationships. Several studies offer empirical evidence for the feeling of love toward brands (Aggarwal, 2004; Monga, 2002; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007). Current brand love studies either assess the conceptualization and dimensionality of brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Batra *et al.*, 2008; Albert *et al.*, 2008b; Batra *et al.*, 2012) or focus on the relationships theory consumers have with brands (Albert *et al.*, 2008a; Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2008; Ahuiva, 2005; Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on, 2012). Despite the effect of product category in the branding literature, little is known whether brand love is universally applicable to any product category or if it's product category specific.

The role of the product category has been studied in the branding literature for decades. Its effect has been noted for example to the importance on brand extension (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994), the number of acceptable and unacceptable brands within a product category (Newman and Dolich, 1979), brand personality (Aaker, 1997), or consumer product variety seeking behavior (Trijp, *et al.* 1996). Psychological theories on exploratory behavior (Fiske and

Maddi, 1961) or the intrinsic motivation theory (Deci and Ryan, 1985) provide a base to explain product category differences in variety-seeking behavior (Trijp, *et al.*, 1996). The schema and categorization theory (Sujan, 1985) indicates that product-category characteristics influence the brand-level effects consumers have. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, p. 83) further argue, these “theories *suggest* that product-category cognitions are *likely* to precede thoughts and feelings about brands within the product category”. Please note the authors use the word ‘*suggest*’ and ‘*likely*’ and therefore provide no conclusive results. Current consumer brand relationship research diverges about the product category effect. For example, Kressmann *et al.*, (2006) show product category involvement leads to higher perceived brand relationship quality. However, more recently Valta (2013, p. 101) finds empirical evidence that “product category involvement does not significantly impact brand relationship quality”. Current brand love studies either look at brands from one product category (Hayes *et al.*, 2006; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2007; Batra *et al.*, 2012) or brands from multiple product categories without specifically analyzing if there are any product category differences (Ji, 2002; Carroll and Ahuiva, 2006; Smit *et al.*, 2007; Albert *et al.*, 2008a; Mai and Conti, 2008; Breivik and Thorbjørnsen, 2008; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010).

Against this background, this paper contributes to the nascent consumer brand relationships theory by investigating the effect of the product category onto consumer’s relationship with brands. Our results show on one hand they supports the findings by Valtra (2013) as we did not found any product category effect if we consider the directionality of the relationships between the different brand relationship construct studies. On the other hand, our study supports the findings by Kressmann *et al.* (2006) as we found the *intensity* of these relationships and the explanation power of the brand outcome variables WOM and purchase intention are significant different between product categories.

## **2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses**

### *2.1. Brand Love*

Busacca and Castaldo (2003) suggested that the lowest intensity of a relationship between a consumer and its brands is brand satisfaction. The intensity of the relationship continues if brand satisfaction leads to brand trust (Horppu *et al.* 2008) and then brand loyalty. Brand satisfaction has been identified as a major driver of brand trust and brand trust as one of brand

loyalty (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Berry, 2000). This relationship has been extensively empirically supported (Kraft *et al.*, 1973; LaBarbera and Mazursky, 1983; Kasper, 1988; Bloemer and Lemmink, 1992). However, we know less about the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Aaker (1991) identifies consumer brand relationship on five levels where brand loyalty is the strongest. Later, Fajer and Schouten's (1995) show in their brand relationship typology that consumers have different levels of relationship from low-order relationships such as brand liking to high-order relationships such as brand loyalty. The few brand love studies (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.* 2012) show that brand love precedes brand loyalty. In line with previous research we expect "a positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty" (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010, p. 507) and state the following hypothesis:

*H1: Brand Love positively influences brand loyalty.*

As stated by Miniard *et al.* (1983, p. 206), "the prediction of purchase intention is a central concern in marketing" and the authors further argue "purchase intention is influenced by the attitude towards the brand". More recently, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) also indicate that the consumer's satisfaction with a brand influences the willingness to buy this brand. Furthermore, several studies demonstrated the positive relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Tellis, 1988; Krishnamurthi and Raj, 1991; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2002). Since brand love precedes brand loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) we expect that brand love positively influences purchase intention and state the following hypothesis:

*H2: Brand Love positively influences purchase intention.*

Many studies have focused on word-of-mouth (WOM) effects including extreme (dis)satisfaction (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002), commitment to the product (Dick and Basu, 1994), effects of word of mouth on attitudes and intentions of consumers (Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004), or the relationship between WOM and the length of the relationship with the brand (Wangenheim and Bayon, 2004). Bowman and Narayandas (2001) showed that self-described loyal consumers of a brand were significantly more likely to engage in positive WOM. Most recently, Batra *et al.* (2012, p. 1) confirms that brand love is "associated with positive word of mouth (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005)".

Therefore, it is expected that brand love positively influences (positive) word-of-mouth and we state the following hypothesis:

*H3: Brand Love positively influences word of mouth*

## 2.2. Brand Loyalty

Bloemer and Kasper (1995) clearly outlined the difference between brand loyalty and purchase intention. They suggest purchase intention is the buying of a brand where actual behavior prevails, irrespective of the commitment or loyalty the consumer has towards the brand. Many researchers have explored the positive relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973; Tellis, 1988; Krishnamurthi and Raj, 1991; Srinivasan *et al.*, 2002) or repurchase intention (Hellier, *et al.* 2003). Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention and state:

*H4: Brand loyalty positively influences purchase intention.*

The relationship between brand loyalty and word-of-mouth is less researched. Dick and Basu (1994) found that brand loyalty can add to positive word-of-mouth. Frank (1997) and Hagel and Armstrong (1997) further confirmed this. Srinivasan *et al.* (2002) found that even e-loyalty has a positive impact on word-of-mouth. The positive and direct relationship between brand loyalty and WOM finds further support by Reichheld (2003; 2006) and more recently by Walsh and Beatty (2007). Therefore, we expect a positive relationship between brand loyalty and (positive) word of mouth and state:

*H5: Brand loyalty positively influences word-of-mouth.*

## 2.3. Product category

As mentioned in the introduction, the role of the product category has been studied in the branding literature for a long time. Its effect has been noted for example to the importance on brand extension (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994), the number of acceptable and unacceptable brands within a product category (Newman and Dolich, 1979) or the influence of the product-category characteristics onto the brand-level effects consumers have (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Current consumer brand relationship research diverges about the product category effect. For example, Kressmann *et al.*, (2006) show product category involvement leads to higher perceived brand relationship quality whereas Valta (2013, p. 101) shows “product category

involvement does not significantly impact brand relationship quality”). Also Albert *et al.* (2008a, p. 1074) argue in their brand love study that “consumers *may* treat product categories differently in terms of their ability to generate love feelings” and even suggest that “a formal study of this phenomenon should help practitioners develop specific marketing programs toward consumer segments”, no brand love study has yet assessed this. As there no empirical study assessing the effect of product category on the brand love relationships consumers have, we were reluctant do develop specific hypotheses concerning what cross-category difference and similarities might be. We therefore state the following hypothesis:

*H6: Product Category influences the relationships between consumers and their brands.*

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 Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **3. Research Method**

#### *3.1. Measurement items*

*Independent Variables.* (1) *Brand Love:* We take the items from the *Love Attitude Scale* first suggested by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) to measure the love relationship consumers have with brands. (2) *Brand loyalty:* Jacoby and Kyner (1973) suggested behavioral and attitudinal aspects to be considered in any measurement of brand loyalty. We therefore use the items developed by Quester and Lim (2003) which includes three items to measure attitudinal aspects and two items for behavioral aspects for brand loyalty.

*Dependent Variables.* (1) *Purchase intention:* Two aspects were considered, purchase intention and purchase probability. Purchase intention scales are widely used in marketing research. Two items from Kumar *et al.* (2009) to ascertain purchase intention were used. Purchase probability captures another aspect of purchase intention. Like many other studies we use the widely-used Juster Scale developed by the Bureau of the Census (Juster, 1966). The 11 point probability scale is subject to a range of validation studies (Clawson, 1971; Pickering and Isherwood, 1974). (2) *Positive word-of-mouth:* The literature includes different WOM scales, from single-item (Singh, 1990; Swan and Oliver, 1989) to multi-item scales by Bone (1992) or Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). We use the same four items as the Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) used in their brand love study. Appendix 1 summarizes the items used in this study. If not mentioned

otherwise, all items were measured along a 5-point Likert scale where respondents expressed their agreement or disagreement (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). In order to prevent ecological fallacy<sup>1</sup> and atomistic fallacy<sup>2</sup>, we averaged the responses and compare our results between the four product categories (cf. Monga and Lau-Gesk, 2007).

### 3.2. Sample and Data Collection

Carroll and Ahuiva (2006) used the product categories like *soft drinks* and *cereals*. Albert *et al.* (2008a) studied brands from the product categories *shoes*, *cars*, *lingerie*, *watches*, and *perfumes*. Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) looked at *clothes brand*, *soft drink*, and *toothpaste* among others. We selected *soft drinks*, *mobile phones*, *(running) shoes*, and *cars* as the product categories for the following two reasons. First, by using these product category, category equivalence was guaranteed as all product categories and subsequent brands were widely available in the country surveyed (Buil *et al.* 2008; Bensaou *et al.* 1999). Second, these product categories have been used in previous brand love studies but no study has compared if there are any product category differences. By using these product categories, our study complements current research and shed some light to what extend there are product category differences.

For our survey in Brazil, we used a translation-back-translation method by two independent translators to establish translation equivalence<sup>3</sup> (Douglas and Craig, 2007; Mullen, 1995; Bensaou *et al.* 1999). Local trained field workers conducted first a pre-test with 20 respondents to uncover any potential question-based issues. We then randomly selected consumers at a shopping mall in a major city in Brazil. In fact, the shopping mall is known for the highest flux of consumers in terms of genre, age and social class distribution. The shopping mall got in 2012 about 14.6 million visitors. The respondents were recruited in each of the ten doors of the shopping mall and the survey was conducted from Monday to Sunday between 10am and 10pm in order to obtain variance of profile respondents. We introduced the objectives of the survey and asked for permission to conduct the survey. We randomly gave them one of the four questionnaires. Through unaided brand recall, respondents were asked to mention three brands within the specific product category assigned to them and then to declare their favorite

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<sup>1</sup> Ecological fallacy: drawing conclusions of an individual based on the group that individual belongs (Robinson, 1950).

<sup>2</sup> Atomistic fallacy: drawing conclusions between groups based on individuals from the groups (Alker, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> “Translational equivalence implies that questionnaire items can be translated in a way that does not alter the item's meaning. Translation equivalence is essential in testing construct validity and in cross-validating measures across groups” (Lopez *et al.*, 2009, p. 597).



brand. This indicated respondents had some brand knowledge consisting of a certain brand awareness and brand image. If the respondent didn't have any favorite brand we aborted the survey assuming the consumer doesn't have sufficient knowledge about the product category or the brand. The data collection occurred from January to March, 2010.

Sekaran (1983) and later Erdem *et al.* (2006, p. 37) identify two ways to get sample comparability, "drawing nationally representative samples or selecting matched samples on the basis of some set of characteristics of interest". Due to budget limitations, we recruited four convenient consumer samples in the same location and matching the samples on size, gender and age distribution (Table 1a). Our data collection efforts yielded 800 consumer respondents with each product category having 200 respondents. Our sample size is well above the suggested minimum of 17 observations per cell by Cohen (1998), 20 observations by Hair *et al.* (1998), ten subjects per item by Nunally (1967) or Hinkin (1995), or suggested minimum sample size from 100 – 200 by Spector (1992). As the objective of the study was to assess the impact of product category on brand love and subsequent brand relationship constructs, a convenience sample of consumers was considered adequate for that purpose.

## 4. Analysis and Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistics and Preliminary Analysis

Table 1a provides descriptive statistics on the composition of our four samples.

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Insert Table 1a about here

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We also calculated the number of different brands mentioned as their favorite brand within each product category and reported its percentage. In order to measure the degree of concentration of the brands in each product category, we calculated a concentration index. This calculation is derived from the commonly accepted Herfindahl–Hirschman Index (HHI) which consists of the sum of the market shares in square of the largest firms within an industry. In that respect, we calculated a proxy for our 'brand concentration index' that characterizes the distribution of the brand 'market share' in the mind of the respondents. Similar to other studies (Putsis, 1997), the HHI gives a proxy of the perceived degree of brand concentration (Rubio and Yagüe, 2009). A lower HHI indicates this product category is not 'dominated' by a particular

brand and has a higher degree of brand dispersion (Putsis, 1997). A higher HHI indicates a higher concentration of brands within a product category. The following table summarizes for each product categories the different ‘brand concentration indexes’.

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 Insert Table 1b about here  
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The descriptive statistics from our samples clearly indicate that product categories for mobile phones and soft drinks are in the mind of respondents dominated by fewer brands. Not only the percentages of the most mentioned brand (66% for mobile phones with “Nokia” and 64% for soft drinks with “Coca-Cola”) are very high but also brand concentration indexes are very high with values of 4,674 and 4,238 respectively.

#### *4.2. Measurement Validation*

First, an explorative factor analysis (EFA) was conducted in order to assess the underlying structure of our data and to compare it with our theoretical framework. The principle components extraction method with varimax rotation was used to test whether the items loaded on the expected factors as the literature suggests (Appendix 2 provides the EFA’s for the sample). As expected, the results reveal 4 factors with Eigen values greater than 1. Each one of the 19 items loaded only on one of the 4 factors with a factor loadings  $> .5$  and none had cross loadings higher than  $.5$  on two or more factors. This is consistent with our research model as outlined in Figure 1.

Second, our measurement validation approach consisted of three steps. First, content validity was addressed initially by consulting with marketing professors who reviewed the measurement items to ensure they were based on established and validated scales. Second, we examined the goodness of fit of the model with four samples. We got a Chi-square/df of 3.88, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) are higher than the threshold of  $.9$  and our RMSEA is below the threshold of  $.09$  (cf. Table 2a). Third, we assessed the validity of each construct of the measurement model based on four criteria:

- a) Do the items measure the same concept? Our convergent validity measured shared variance, magnitude of cross-loadings and error correlations (cf. Table 2b)

- b) Is the constructs measuring distinct concepts? Our discriminant validity measured average shared variance relative to interconstruct correlations (cf. Table 2b).
- c) Is the construct reliable? This question was answered with the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  metric (cf. Table 2b).
- d) Do we have nomological validity? Magnitudes of interconstruct correlations relative to our theory were evaluated (cf. Table 2b)

Our confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) led to drop one item associated with purchase intention (PB3). The results of our analysis with the 18 items are presented in Tables 2a and 2b.

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Insert Table 2a about here

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Insert Table 2b about here

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The nomological validity was achieved as all estimated correlations between constructs are positive as expected. The only challenging part of the measurement model appears to be the brand loyalty construct. It has a low average variance extracted of .42, indicating that the five items of loyalty do not “converge” very well, meaning they do not share a significant proportion of variance in common. Contrarily to what we saw with the indicator PB3 of purchase intention, there is no single indicator nor a set of two indicators of loyalty that, if removed, would improve significantly the model. We decided to keep all 5 measurement items for brand loyalty.

Various authors (Malhotra *et al.* 1996; Aulakh and Kotabe, 1993; Roth, 1995; Bensaou *et al.*, 1999) asks for measurement equivalence including calibration equivalence (not applicable), translational equivalence (see previous section), and metric equivalence (Malhotra *et al.* 1996). Metric equivalence needs equality of factor structure and loadings to compare the inferences about relationships between variables in the samples. Since we have 4 different samples, each one used for a different product category, we conducted also an explorative factor analysis (EFA) for each product category separately and assessed the number of factors and items that load on each. We got similar results across samples (Ryan *et al.*, 1999). Although the weights of the factor loadings varied across samples, the EFAs produced the same number of factors with

similar item loadings. The results above confirm that the research model in Figure 1 is well specified and our hypotheses can be tested with our model.

#### 4.3. Hypotheses testing

We use structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess the relationships as outlined in our research model in Figure 1. The results are provided in Table 3a and 3b respectively. The Chi-square/df for each of the four models is below the threshold of 3.0 (Schumacker, 1992; Schumacker and Lomax, 1996). The goodness of fit criteria with TLI, CFI are all, except one, higher than the threshold of .9. The RMSEA are all, except one, below the threshold of .09.

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 Insert Table 3a about here

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 Insert Table 3b about here

Five main observations can be drawn from our results in Table 3a and Table 3b.

(1) For all product categories, the model is well specified. Looking at Table 3b, we are able to explain with our model, depending on the product category, between 31% - 40% of the positive word of mouth and 17%- 27% for purchase intention.

(2) Looking at Hypothesis 1 (H1) and 3 (H3), we got a significant and positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty (H1) ranging from [.41;  $p < .01$ ] to [.61;  $p < .01$ ] as well as between brand love and positive word of mouth (H3) with values between [.32;  $p < .01$ ] to [.41;  $p < .01$ ]. This suggests that if consumers love a brand, independently of the product category, this influences positively brand loyalty and positive word of mouth.

(3) As for Hypothesis 2 (H2), we also got positive values, but not all relationships between brand love and purchase intention are significant. It was insignificant for the soft drinks [.10;  $p > .10$ ] and cars [.09;  $p > .10$ ] but significant for mobile phones [.18;  $p < .05$ ] and shoes [.22;  $p < .01$ ]. This suggests that there seems to be some category specific difference between brand love and purchase intention where brand love leads to significant higher purchase intention for mobile phone and shoes.

(4) We tested hypotheses 4 (H4) and 5 (H5). For both hypotheses, the relationship between brand loyalty and purchase intention (H4) with values between [.26;  $p < .01$ ] to [.46;  $p < .01$ ] and for brand loyalty and positive word of mouth (H5) with values between [.28;  $p < .05$ ] to [.42;  $p < .01$ ] respectively were positive and significant. This suggests, and in line with existing literature, brand loyalty positively influences purchase intention and positive word of mouth.

(5) As for hypothesis six (H6), a first observation is that all models have the same sign and directionality of the relationships between the various brand constructs suggesting there are no product category differences. The main differences with the current results are their *intensity* of relationships. For example the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty is the strongest for cars, followed by soft drinks, shoes and mobile phone<sup>4</sup>.

#### 4.4. Analysis of variance

In order to further analyze the impact of product category on brand love and subsequent brand constructs, we conducted an analysis of variance (ANOVA). Table 4 illustrates the ANOVA results and reveals significant main effects of the product category for all brand relationship constructs studied. We got for brand love [F (3,786) = 5.358,  $p < .05$ ], brand loyalty [F (3,795) = 8.328,  $p < .01$ ], word of mouth [F (3,788) = 12.972,  $p < .01$ ] and purchase intention [F (3,770) = 7.648,  $p < .01$ ]. For our ANOVA, we performed the Levene's test for equality of variance. For most variables (3 of the 4) it was non-significant at the 1% level. As the Levene's test was significant for purchase intention, we use the F-Welch test to test the significance of product category that takes into consideration different variances in our samples for that variable. Table 4 provides the sum of squares, degrees of freedom (*df*), and mean square values along with the appropriate F-value.

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 Insert Table 4 about here  
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<sup>4</sup> Note: It should be mentioned that for the Brazilian sample, the i-phone was not available at the point in time of the survey.

Our results show the product category differences are threefold. First, the product category affects the *intensity* of the relationships. Second, product categories have an effect on different *brand outcome variables* word of mouth and purchase intention in terms of explanation power. Third, also this was not subject to this study, another interesting observation is that our model fits better for product categories where respondents recalled a smaller number of brands and which had a higher brand concentration index (cf. Table 1b) compared to product categories where respondents recalled a larger number of brands with a lower brand concentration index. For example and as Table 1b shows, for the product category mobile phones respondents had only 11 favorite brands where 66% of them mentioned “Nokia” as their favorite brand. In the mind of the respondents, this product category is dominated by one brand with a brand concentration index of 4,674. Looking at Table 3a, mobile phones also got the best model fit values. This suggests that within-product category brand concentration may influence more the brand love relationships rather differences between-product categories. However, further research needs to be conducted in that respect. In sum, our results show there are no product category differences in terms of their directionality of brand relationships but we observe significant differences in terms of their *intensity* of the relationships and effect on the *explanation power* of brand outcome variables.

## 5. Conclusion and Limitations

This section consists of three parts. First, we provide a short summary and the study’s theoretical contribution. Second, we assess the practical implications for brand managers. Third, we provide a critical assessment of the study’s limitations suggesting opportunities for future research.

The effect of the product category has been studied extensively in the branding literature and noted on affecting brand extension decisions (Broniarczyk and Alba, 1994), the number of acceptable and unacceptable brands within a product category (Newman and Dolich, 1979) or brand personality (Aaker, 1997). The schema and categorization theory (Sujan, 1985) suggests product-category characteristics influence the brand-level effects consumers have (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). The opinions of the product category effect onto the consumer brand relationships diverge where some (Kressmann *et al.*, 2006) argue certain product categories lead to higher perceived brand relationship quality where others (Valta, 2013) find no product

category effect onto brand relationship quality. Against this background, this paper contributes to the nascent consumer brand relationships theory by investigating the effect of the product category onto the brand love relationships. In that respect, we compare four different product categories (cars, mobile phones, shoes and soft drinks). Based on a representative consumer sample of 800 Brazilian respondents, a survey was conducted to evaluate their relationships with their favorite brand. Our confirmatory factor analysis shows brand love positively influences brand loyalty. In turn, both influence positively word of mouth (WOM) and purchase intention. Looking at the positive directionality of these relationships, our results show no product category differences. However, our ANOVA reveal significant differences in terms of their *intensity* of the relationships and their effect on the *explanation power* of the brand outcome variables WOM and purchase intention. In that respect, our study supports current findings where on one hand, it supports the findings by Valtra (2013) as we did not find any product category effect if we consider the sign and directionality of these relationships. However, on the other hand, our study also supports the findings of Christy *et al.* (1996) or later Kressmann *et al.* (2006) as we did find the intensity of these relationships is different between product categories.

### *5.1. Practical Implications*

From a practical point of view, “building and maintaining strong consumer brand relationships are key factors of business’s success” (Valta, 2013, p. 103). Our study shows that no matter which product category, any brand could theoretically establish and specifically achieve a “love” type relationship with consumers. This has already been practically illustrated with examples such as Harley Davidson, Apple or Starbuck. Three loved brands from totally different product categories. Therefore, brand managers should focus on the brand relationship dimension brand love, which leads to stronger brand loyalty and ultimately to more positive word of mouths and increased purchase intention. All leading to higher sales and profits. This insight helps managers to justify expenditures in product development, pricing strategy as well as promotional campaigns in an effort to intensify the emotional bond consumers have with brands (Valta, 2013).

### *5.2. Theoretical Implications and Limitations*

This paper provides the following theoretical contributions and outlines limitations which can be a direction of future research.

(1) Product category and consumer brand relationship theory. We demonstrate that consumer brand relationship theory can be applied to different product category as there are no product category differences in terms of directionality of the relationships between different constructs such as brand love, brand loyalty, word of mouth and purchase intention. This suggests that the brand love relationship is not product category specific and that future brand relationships studies can use any type of product category.

(2) Product category and research method. We asked respondents to fill out the survey keeping in mind their favorite brand within the specific product category assigned. This suggests that future consumer brand relationships studies are able to get meaningful results as long as the object of study is the consumer's favorite brand. This is important for the research design as our study shows the product category is less important in the study design than the unit of analysis which is the consumer's favorite brand. In other words, when designing a brand relationship study, it is imperative that researcher design the study in a way that respondents can choose their favorite brand instead of giving a list of brands. In the case researchers want to assess a certain product category or categories, in order to get meaningful results, respondents should be given either the choice of choosing their favorite brand from that product category or if they have no favorite brand in that product category studies, either provide another favorite brand or terminate the survey.

Like any study, there are a number of limitations which provide opportunities for future research. (1) Our study was conducted in Brazil and future research should assess other product categories in Brazil to provide external validity. (2) Related to the previous point, future studies should also assess the same product categories in other countries to provide cross-cultural validation. As Albert *et al.* (2008) stated, brand love and its expression are culturally grounded. By extending the research beyond the present Brazilian samples, researchers could examine whether our results hold in other cultures and provide cross-cultural validation or need adaptation. This would further help the external validity of the results. (3) Although there is extensive support for the use of convenience consumer samples, surveying a larger, more diverse pool of respondents would further allow the generalization of our findings. (4) The proposed model could be expanded by incorporating other factors that might influence and further explain the brand love concept. For example, one could add moderating variables (e.g., gender, age, religion) which might explain any possible difference between product categories. (5) Most



consumer brand relationships studies focus on tangible product brands (e.g., Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006) but more recent research has investigated the consumer service emotional relationship (Yim *et al.*, 2008). Future research could therefore investigate brand love in the context of product categories from the service sector and assess whether there are product category differences. (6) Finally, another interesting finding from our study was that our model fit was higher for product categories where respondents recalled fewer brands with a higher 'brand concentration index'. This suggests brand competitiveness within a product category may also impact brand relationships which is another avenue of future research.

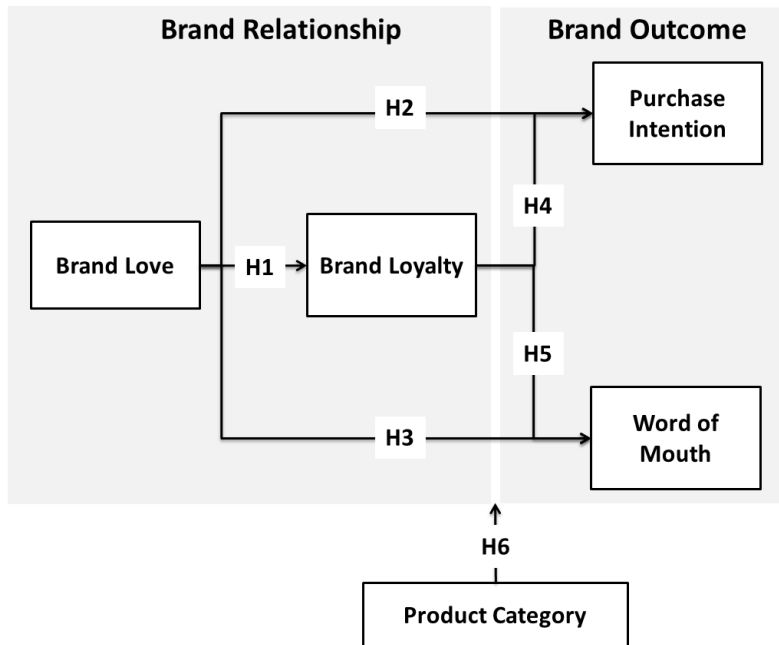


Figure 1: Research Model

**Table 1a: Description of Respondent Datasets**

	<b>Soft Drinks</b>	<b>Mobile Phones</b>	<b>Shoes</b>	<b>Cars</b>
<b>Number of respondents</b>	200	200	200	200
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	67%	54%	64%	57%
Female	33%	46%	36%	43%
<b>Marital Status<sup>5</sup></b>				
Single	92%	85%	94%	78%
Married	8%	15%	6%	22%
<b>Age</b>				
Min years <sup>6</sup>	18	19	18	18
Max years	58	76	59	62
Mean years	25	27	24	28

**Table 1b: Description of Product Categories**

	<b>Soft Drinks</b>	<b>Mobile Phones</b>	<b>Shoes</b>	<b>Cars</b>
<b>Number of brands mentioned</b>	18	11	21	26
<b>Most mentioned brand as % of total</b>	64%	66%	41%	24%
<b>Brand concentration index</b>	4,238	4,674	2,495	1,102

<sup>5</sup> Marital Status also included a category “divorced/other” which nobody checked as an answer.

<sup>6</sup> Age of 18 was required to survey adults.

**Table 2a: Goodness of Fit measures**

	<b>CFA results</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
<b>Chi-square/df</b>	3.88	$\leq 5.00$
<b>Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)</b>	.94	$\geq .90$
<b>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</b>	.95	$\geq .90$
<b>RMSEA</b>	.06	$\leq .09$

**Table 2b: Construct Validity**

	<b>Brand Love</b>	<b>Brand Loyalty</b>	<b>WOM</b>	<b>PI</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
<b>Average Variance Extracted (AVE)</b>	.73	.42	.61	.82	$\geq .50$
<b>Reliability (Cronbach <math>\alpha</math>)</b>	.95	.78	.86	.9	$\geq .70$
<b>Discriminant Validity</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	AVE > all squared interconstruct correlation estimates (SICs)

**Table 3a: Summary Model Fit**

	<b>Soft Drinks</b>	<b>Mobile Phones</b>	<b>Shoes</b>	<b>Cars</b>	<b>Threshold</b>
<b>Chi-square/df</b>	1.954	1.777	2.504	2.056	≤ 3.0
<b>Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)</b>	.935	.928	.882	.920	≥ .9
<b>Comparative Fit Index (CFI)</b>	.946	.939	.901	.933	≥ .9
<b>RMSEA</b>	.077	.069	.095	.081	≤ .09

**Table 3b: Summary Results and Hypotheses Testing**

	<b>Soft Drinks</b>	<b>Mobile Phones</b>	<b>Shoes</b>	<b>Cars</b>	<b>All Product Categories</b>
<b>Summary Results (R<sup>2</sup>)</b>					
Brand Loyalty	28%	17%	21%	37%	22%
Purchase Intention (PI)	23%	25%	17%	27%	20%
Word of Mouth (WOM)	31%	35%	40%	32%	30%
<b>Hypotheses testing</b>					
H1: Brand Love → Brand Loyalty	.53***	.41***	.46***	.61***	.47***
H2: Brand Love → PI	.10	.18**	.22***	.09	.21***
H3: Brand Love → WOM	.32***	.41***	.32***	.35***	.39***
H4: Brand Loyalty → PI	.42***	.40***	.26***	.46***	.31***
H5: Brand Loyalty → WOM	.32***	.30***	.42***	.28**	.24***

\*\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*  $p < .05$ ; \*  $< .10$

**Table 4: ANOVA Results**

	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b><i>df</i></b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F-Test</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Welch F-Test</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
<b>Brand Love</b>	14.53	3	4.84	5.358	< .05		
<b>Brand Loyalty</b>	15.27	3	5.09	8.328	< .01		
<b>Word of Mouth</b>	29.07	3	9.69	12.972	< .01		
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	19.05	3	6.35			7.648	< .01

## Appendix 1: Measurement Items

### Independent Variables

#### Brand Love Items (adapted from Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986; Lee, 1977)

- BLo1 When I think of this brand, it is hard for me to say exactly when the friendship turned into love for this brand
- BLo2 In truth, the love I have for this brand required friendship first
- BLo3 I expect to always be friends with this brand
- BLo4 The love I have for the brand is the best kind because it grew out of a long friendship
- BLo5 The friendship with the brand merged gradually into love over time
- BLo6 The love relationship is really a deep friendship, not a mysterious, mystical emotion
- BLo7 The love relationship is the most satisfying because it developed from a good friendship

#### Brand Loyalty Items (adapted from Quester and Lim, 2003)

- BL1 I am committed to this brand
- BL2 I pay more attention to this brand than to other brands
- BL3 I am more interested in this particular brand than in other brands
- BL4 It is very important for me to buy this brand rather than another brand
- BL5 I always buy the same brand because I really like it

### Dependent Variables

#### Purchase Intention Items (adapted from Kumar *et al.*, 2009; Juster, 1966)

- PB1 I intend to buy this brand
- PB2 I plan to buy this brand
- PB3\* Taking everything into account, what are the chances of you personally buying this brand in the next 5 years? (11 probability scale)

#### Word-of-Mouth Items (adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006)

- WOM1 I have recommended this brand to lots of people
- WOM2 I “talk up” this brand to my friends
- WOM3 I try to spread the good word about this brand
- WOM4 I give this brand tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising

\*Item removed following confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) due to low loading and low reliability value.

**Appendix 2: Explorative Factor Analysis (EFA)**

	<b>Component</b>			
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
BLo4	.892	.139	.141	.055
BLo2	.880	.123	.133	.049
BLo7	.854	.163	.135	.059
BLo5	.853	.186	.161	.063
BLo1	.843	.201	.134	.088
BLo6	.796	.165	.213	.057
BLo3	.769	.223	.129	.139
WOM2	.207	.815	.044	.167
WOM1	.172	.787	.142	.206
WOM4	.177	.785	.195	.032
WOM3	.298	.775	.107	.093
BLb5	.075	-.045	.743	.158
BLb4	.246	.108	.726	.076
BLa1	.249	.100	.696	.059
BLa2	.170	.208	.661	.110
BLa3	.040	.139	.650	.082
PIa1	.169	.339	.092	.822
PIa2	.179	.423	.099	.763
PIb1	.004	.096	-.334	-.664



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