
Original Article

Two studies of consequences and actionable antecedents of brand love

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ABSTRACT Brand love is a recent marketing construct, which has been shown to influence important marketing variables such as brand loyalty and word-of-mouth. Although this knowledge is academically interesting, its managerial relevance depends on the identification of actionable antecedents of brand love. This study adds to the understanding of the managerial potential of brand love by proposing and testing two actionable antecedents of brand love: Brand identification and sense of community. The study uses the Partial Least Squares approach to structural equation modelling to analyze data from two survey-based studies. The study tests two conceptual models using data for six different brands. The results show that brand identification and sense of community both have a positive influence on brand love, which in turn has a positive influence on brand loyalty and active engagement. These findings form the basis for a discussion of the use of image extensions and market shielding to strengthen brand identification and sense of community – with the purpose of elaborating and building brand love.

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INTRODUCTION

Brand love is a recent marketing construct that, so far, has been the object of limited attention but seems to attract a steadily growing interest among academics as well

as practitioners. Among academics, brand love attracts interest as a construct in its own right^{1,2} and as a facet or dimension of broader constructs such as brand relationship quality^{3,4} and emotional attachment.⁵

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In these studies, brand love has been shown to influence important marketing variables.⁶ One example of practitioner interest in brand love is the global advertising agency Saatchi & Saatchi's concept of 'Lovemarks', that is, creating brands that are truly loved⁷; another is market research companies offering studies on the love consumers feel for brands.⁸

As will be shown below, the inherently dynamic nature of the construct of brand love is expedient for the development of a strategic perspective on brand management from introduction to growth and maturity. Thus, apart from offering a refined understanding of different facets of other brand constructs, for example, various arousals related to social identification and consistency of self-image, brand love is of interest from a brand management point of view.

A few studies have investigated antecedents of brand relationship quality,^{9,10} but their results do not necessarily apply to brand love because it is only one facet of brand relationship quality. To date, few studies have investigated those factors that drive consumers' brand love. In fact, only one study appears to have studied antecedents of brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ find that hedonic product categories and self-expressive brands, which are product- or brand-level variables, are associated with stronger brand love. Thus, knowledge about those factors that make consumers feel love for a brand seems to be limited. It is important to address this knowledge gap because the study by Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ shows that brand love is positively related to brand loyalty and word-of-mouth (WOM), two outcomes that are desirable for brands.

In relation to our outset in the brand management perspective, it should be noted that marketing efforts could influence only one of the antecedents in Carroll and Ahuvia's study,⁶ namely, self-expressive brands. The other antecedent, hedonic

product category, is a given for the product category and is practically impossible to influence with marketing efforts. Identifying additional antecedents to brand love not only improves the understanding of the drivers of an important marketing construct but also points to marketing activities that can be implemented to increase brand love, and, indirectly, to the positive outcomes related to brand love.

Acknowledging that brand love can only be controlled to some extent, it is important to consider those antecedents of brand love, which lend themselves most readily to brand image management. In their framework for strategic brand image management, Park *et al*¹¹ distinguish between functional, symbolic and experiential brand concepts. They recommend different strategies when introducing, elaborating and fortifying these brand concepts. The brand love construct is most akin to what Park *et al* call the symbolic brand concept. As positioning efforts should be based on one concept only,¹¹ we have chosen to study how the two symbolic positioning strategies recommended by Park *et al*, that is, brand identification and community membership, may influence consumers' brand love and subsequently their brand loyalty and brand-related activities.

As a consequence this study seeks to broaden the understanding of what causes brand love by proposing and testing two potentially actionable, individual-level antecedents of brand love: brand identification and sense of community. In addition, this study seeks to extend earlier findings with respect to the consequences of brand love by including two outcome variables: brand loyalty and active engagement.

ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF BRAND LOVE

The interest in consumers' love for brands is relatively recent and only a few articles

focus specifically on brand love rather than on consumer–brand relationships in general.^{1,2,6} However, the roots of the research on brand love can be traced back to, among others, the work of Belk¹² who suggests that possessions could constitute an extended self, and Fournier⁴ who shows that close and intimate relationships, similar to interpersonal relationships, with brands may occur. Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ define *brand love* as ‘the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name’. Brand love and interpersonal love differ in that brand love is unidirectional, whereas interpersonal love is bi-directional² and that consumers are not expected to yearn for sexual intimacy with brands, a feeling generally associated with passionate interpersonal love.¹³ Moreover, love is generally regarded as qualitatively different from liking, that is, love is not extreme liking but rather a construct that is different from, but related to, liking.¹⁴

Brand love is important in a marketing context because it is positively related to brand loyalty and WOM.⁶ However, little is known about the antecedents of brand love. So far the only study that has investigated antecedents of brand love is the study by Carroll and Ahuvia.⁶ They find that products with mainly hedonic (as opposed to utilitarian) benefits are associated with stronger brand love and that brands that are perceived as enhancing and/or reflecting the consumer’s social or inner self are loved more than brands that do not. Together, these two variables explain 25 per cent of the variance in brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ did not consider other antecedents of brand love in their study. The present study adds to the literature by suggesting and testing two additional antecedent variables, brand identification and sense of community.

Brand identification as an antecedent of brand love

In a recent study, Ahuvia¹ finds that loved objects are central to people’s identity. The informants in his study use objects they love to boost their identity and reconcile conflicting identities. Although Ahuvia does not explicitly discuss causality or causal order, his study suggests that a consumer is more likely to love a brand, the stronger, he or she identifies with. For example, Ahuvia¹ reports how one of his informants requires a ‘deep connection with what she sees as her desired identity as a culturally sophisticated bohemian’ for her to love a product.

One construct that has been applied in the context of brands and personal identity is brand identification. Brand identification is defined as ‘the extent to which the consumer sees his or her own self-image as overlapping the brand’s image’.¹⁵ Brand identification is also known as self-image congruence¹⁶ and self-connection.⁴ Although a number of previous studies^{17,18} have investigated the role of brand identification, none has investigated the relationship between brand identification and brand love. However, Kressman *et al*⁹ find a positive relationship between brand identification and brand relationship quality, which, following Fournier’s⁴ definition, include the love and passion dimension. Even if the love and passion items only make up a third of the brand relationship quality scale in the study by Kressman *et al*,⁹ their results suggest a positive relationship between brand identification and brand love.

Sense of community as an antecedent of brand love

An interesting construct mediated by brand identification, which could have an indirect effect on brand love, is social identity.¹⁹ Bagozzi and Dholakia¹⁵ apply social identity within a brand community context

arguing that social identity should influence brand identification because increased identification with the brand community leads to greater involvement with the brand, which, in turn, leads to an assimilation of the brand's identity into one's own identity. As expected, the results in their study show that social identity was positively related to brand identity. However, the social identity construct cannot be used in the present research because this construct is mainly applicable in the context of membership of a social group and not in a more general consumer context. Therefore, the present study includes a similar, but more general, construct called sense of community, which is defined as the kinship or affiliation a customer feels with other people associated with the brand.²⁰ This construct is similar to the self-categorization (or cognitive) dimension of social identity, and Keller's²⁰ operationalization of sense of community is similar to the operationalization of self-categorization in Ellemers *et al.*¹⁹ The similarity between sense of community and social identity suggests that the results in Bagozzi and Dholakia¹⁵ might also apply to the relationship between sense of community and brand identification. Thus, the present research tests whether an increased sense of community leads to increased brand identification.

Outcomes of brand love

Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ find that brand love is positively related to two outcome variables: brand loyalty and WOM. The present study includes brand loyalty as an outcome of brand love in order to replicate this aspect of their study. Apart from being of value in itself,²¹ this also provides evidence of the nomological validity of the present study. The present study also includes active engagement that is defined as 'when customers are willing to invest time, energy, money, or other resources in the brand beyond those expended during purchase or

consumption of the brand'.²⁰ Examples of active engagement include WOM, visiting brand websites, and buying brand merchandise. The reason for including the broader construct of active engagement rather than WOM is that it may vary in relevance for different types of products. For example, Chung and Darke²² find that WOM is more likely to occur for self-relevant than for utilitarian products. By using active engagement, our study captures a broader array of behaviours that may be applicable to different types of products. Ahuvia¹ writes that 'loved items tended to be objects and activities that demanded a sizable investment of time and energy', and Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ find a positive relationship between brand love and WOM, which is one manifestation of active engagement. Thus, increased brand love is expected to lead to increased active engagement.

Conceptual model

The structural model implied by the relationships hypothesized in the preceding sections is shown in Figure 1. In addition to the relationships of direct interest to the present research, the model also includes two relationships suggested by earlier research: (1) between brand identification and brand loyalty;^{9,17,18} and (2) between brand loyalty and active engagement.¹⁸ Thus, the study will test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Sense of community is positively related to brand identification.

Hypothesis 2a: Brand identification is positively related to brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 2b: Brand identification is positively related to brand love.

Hypothesis 3a: Brand love is positively related to brand loyalty.

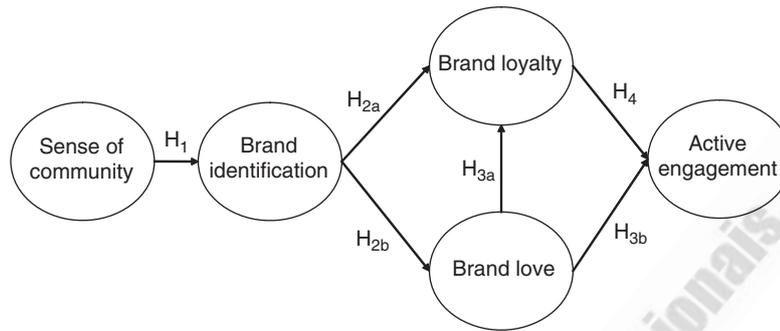


Figure 1: A conceptual model of antecedents and outcomes of brand love.

Hypothesis 3b: Brand love is positively related to active engagement.

Hypothesis 4: Brand loyalty is positively related to active engagement.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Two survey-based studies with undergraduate students at an Australian University as participants were carried out (see Table 1 for an overview). Surveys were administered by handing out pen-and-paper questionnaires during class and participants did not receive any reward, other than thanks, for their participation.

Previous studies of brand love⁶ and emotional attachment⁵ have typically asked respondents to select the brands included in the study. Apart from not facilitating a valid generalization of the existence of brand love from an idiosyncratic to a broader market phenomenon, this approach is inexpedient for managerial purposes. Contrary to marketing academics, brand managers are not free to choose which brands they want to work with. In accordance with the managerial imperative behind our contribution, we thus chose to base the two studies on a mixture of pre- and self-selected brands. Acknowledging, however, the cultural specificity of brands that may be loved, and the fact that neither of the authors are Australians, the selection of

Table 1: Sample size, demographics and brands in the two studies

	Study 1	Study 2
N	158	135
Mean age	22	21
Women	63%	61%
Men	37%	39%
Brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • iPod • Participant's favourite brand of clothes • Panadol 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vegemite • Participant's favourite soft drink • Colgate Total

brands for the study was based on discussions with students (excluding respondents in the two studies) and staff at the University where the studies were conducted.

The three brands finally selected for each of the two studies were chosen to represent a broad range of products and brands. iPod (www.apple.com/itunes/) and Vegemite (www.vegemite.com.au) are both iconic brands that many Australian consumers are likely to have close relationships with, although they are very different products. Panadol is a well-known and liked brand in the painkiller category and Colgate Total has the same standing in the toothpaste category. However, both product categories are utilitarian and, therefore, less likely than hedonic brands to encourage love.⁶ Asking the participants to name a favourite brand of clothes or soft drink ensures the inclusion of really well-liked brands in two diverse

product categories in the studies. The expectation was that scores for iPod, Vegemite and the two favourite brands would be higher than the scores for Panadol and Colgate Total. The order of the brands was rotated to avoid order effects.

Measures and analysis

Both studies included the same measures (Table 2). One of the measures, active engagement, was made up of formative indicators, whereas the remaining four were made up of reflective indicators.²³ The items used to measure sense of community, brand loyalty and active engagement were based on suggestions in Keller,²⁰ using answer scales from Rossiter.²⁴ The operationalization of brand loyalty varied slightly between brands as some items would have been illogical to use for certain brands. For example, Vegemite has no credible substitutes on the Australian market and asking about relative purchase frequency, or having to choose a substitute brand for Vegemite, would not make sense. Thus, the number of items used to measure brand loyalty varied between two and four for the six brands in the two studies. The measure operationalizing brand identification was used by Bergami and Bagozzi²⁵ to measure organizational identification and by Brown *et al*¹⁸ to measure identification with retailers.

An important aim when constructing the brand love measure was to minimize the risk of overlap with other brand-related constructs, including only items clearly measuring brand love. Brand love measure in the study by Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ is made up of 10 items and their measure seems to overlap with a number of other constructs such as emotional attachment⁵ and attitudinal attachment.²⁰ We measured brand love with two items, one measuring expressed love and the other measuring the sense of loss in case of unavailability. Expressed love is often included in passionate

love scales²⁶ and a sense of loss is an important component of passionate or romantic love.^{26,27}

The psychometric properties of the measures will be addressed in the Analysis and Results section. The questionnaire also included questions on respondent age and gender, and a question on their first language. The latter question was used to filter out individuals who did not have English as their first language.²⁸

The six hypotheses were tested using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach (specifically PLS-Graph 3.0).²⁹ PLS is used because it is one of the approaches to structural equation modelling that can handle relatively small sample sizes and formative indicators³⁰ (active engagement was measured with formative indicators). As the models may vary between brands, each brand is analyzed separately. For example, Chung and Darke²² find that western consumers provide more WOM for self-relevant products and, Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ find that both hedonic product and self-expressive brand are positively related to brand love. Moreover, as the operationalization of brand loyalty varied between the brands, merging the data would entail reducing the brand loyalty measure to the two items that were common to all brands.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Study 1

Scores on mean indices for each of the constructs in the study are shown in Table 3. The scores on these indices differ significantly ($P < 0.001$) between the brands in the study. The favourite clothes brand has the highest scores with iPod as a close runner-up. As expected, Panadol scores markedly lower than the other two brands. Thus, the results demonstrate that the measures do pick up variation between different brands.

Table 2: The constructs in the study and their measures

Construct	Items																																				
Sense of community	1. Do you feel like you belong to a 'club' with other users of/BRAND/? ^a 2. Do you identify with people who use/BRAND/? ^a 3. To what extent is /BRAND/used by people like yourself? ^a																																				
Brand identification	1. Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own personal identity and the other circle at the right represents /BRAND's/identity. Please indicate which one case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G or H) best describes the level of overlap between your and /BRAND's/identities. Circle only one letter on the following scale:																																				
<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Me</th> <th>/BRAND/</th> <th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>A</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> <td>Far Apart</td> </tr> <tr> <td>B</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> <td style="text-align: center;">○</td> <td>Close Together but Separate</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">○ ○</td> <td>Very Small Overlap</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">○ ○</td> <td>Small Overlap</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">○ ○</td> <td>Moderate Overlap</td> </tr> <tr> <td>F</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">○ ○</td> <td>Large Overlap</td> </tr> <tr> <td>G</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">○ ○</td> <td>Very Large Overlap</td> </tr> <tr> <td>H</td> <td colspan="2" style="text-align: center;">○</td> <td>Complete Overlap</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			Me	/BRAND/		A	○	○	Far Apart	B	○	○	Close Together but Separate	C	○ ○		Very Small Overlap	D	○ ○		Small Overlap	E	○ ○		Moderate Overlap	F	○ ○		Large Overlap	G	○ ○		Very Large Overlap	H	○		Complete Overlap
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Brand love	1. Would you miss /BRAND/ if it was no longer available? ^a 2. Do you feel deep affection, like 'love', for /BRAND/? ^a																																				
Brand loyalty	1. Are you loyal to /BRAND/? ^{a,c} 2. Would you go out of your way to buy or use /BRAND/? ^{b,c} 3. When you buy /PRODUCT CATEGORY/, how often do you buy /BRAND/? ^{b,d} 4. If /BRAND/ is not available, does it irritate you if you have to buy another brand instead? ^{a,e} 5. If you were to buy /CATEGORY/, how likely is it that you would choose /BRAND/ rather than another brand? ^{a,f}																																				
Active engagement	1. To what extent do you follow news about /BRAND/? ^a 2. How often do you talk about /BRAND/ to others? ^b 3. How often do you visit the /BRAND/ web site? ^b 4. Would you be interested in buying merchandise with the /BRAND/ name on it? ^b																																				

^aAnswer scale: 1=not at all; 2=slightly; 3=quite; 4=extremely.

^bAnswer scale: 1=never; 2=sometimes; 3=usually; 4=always.

^cUsed to measure brand loyalty for all brands.

^dUsed to measure brand loyalty for Favorite Clothes brand, Panadol, Favorite Soft Drink, and Colgate Total.

^eUsed to measure brand loyalty for Panadol, Favorite Soft Drink, and Colgate Total.

^fUsed to measure brand loyalty for iPod and Favorite Clothes brand.

Measurement validation

Before the PLS analysis, the reflective constructs were tested for unidimensionality,

using principal components analysis,³¹ and they were all unidimensional. The factor structure in the PLS analyses work out

Table 3: Study I: Mean scores on the brand constructs

Construct	iPod	Favorite Clothes brand	Panadol
Sense of community	2.1 (0.73)	2.2 (0.84)	1.6 (0.46)
Brand identification	3.8 (2.27)	4.9 (1.93)	2.9 (1.97)
Brand love	1.9 (0.92)	2.3 (0.90)	1.4 (0.60)
Brand loyalty	2.3 (0.90)	2.4 (0.81)	1.7 (0.72)
Active engagement	1.7 (0.64)	1.9 (0.74)	1.3 (0.43)
N	157	143	156

Notes: All constructs were measured on 1–4 scales, except brand identification which was measured on a 1–8 scale. A low score on all scales means a 'negative' response and a high score a 'positive' response.

All mean scores were significantly different across brands (repeated-measures ANOVA, $P < 0.001$).

Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

satisfactorily (Table 4). The composite reliabilities, comparable to coefficient alpha,³² are all high, ranging from 0.84 to 0.95, the

average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than the minimal cut-off of 0.50³³ for all reflective constructs, and the loadings are good, in all cases exceeding the commonly used cut-off of 0.70.^{32,34} Moreover, in all cases, the t -values associated with the loadings are much higher than 1.96 (not shown in Table 4) and, thereby, significant on at least the 0.05 level.³⁵ The weights for active engagement (formative) indicators are all significant except for one weight in the Panadol model. Thus, overall, the results show that the measurement models of the PLS analyses are good. Moreover, the R^2 s for the endogenous variables show that the model overall does well in explaining the variance in the endogenous variables: The R^2 s range from 0.22 to 0.73.

PLS offers a number of indicators of discriminant validity. The most common of these is to check whether the square root of the AVE for a latent variable is higher than the latent variable's correlation with the other latent variables,³³ and,

Table 4: Study I: Composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), R^2 and loadings from the PLS analyses

Construct	Brand	Composite reliability	AVE	R^2	Loadings/weights
Sense of community	iPod	0.83	0.62	—	0.80, 0.82, 0.75
	Favorite Clothes	0.90	0.74	—	0.88, 0.92, 0.78
	Panadol	0.74	0.50	—	0.54, 0.82, 0.73
Brand identification	iPod	1.0	1.0	0.31	1.0
	Favorite Clothes	1.0	1.0	0.22	1.0
	Panadol	1.0	1.0	0.26	1.0
Brand love	iPod	0.91	0.83	0.42	0.92, 0.90
	Favorite Clothes	0.89	0.81	0.31	0.89, 0.90
	Panadol	0.83	0.71	0.27	0.84, 0.84
Brand loyalty	iPod	0.74	0.74	0.73	0.89, 0.91, 0.79
	Favorite Clothes	0.78	0.78	0.63	0.88, 0.88, 0.89, 0.87
	Panadol	0.91	0.73	0.61	0.84, 0.89, 0.82, 0.85
Active engagement	iPod	NA	NA	0.63	0.26, 0.41, 0.42, 0.18
	Favorite Clothes	NA	NA	0.62	0.28, 0.34, 0.36, 28
	Panadol	NA	NA	0.35	0.65, 0.37, NS, 0.27

Abbreviations: NS=non-significant; NA=not applicable.

furthermore, to check whether the loading of the manifest variables on their constructs is high simultaneously with their cross-loadings, that is, correlations with the other constructs are low.³⁵ In this study, the squared AVE is larger than the correlations for all the reflective constructs and the loadings of the manifest variables are consistently higher than the correlations between the manifest variables and the other reflective latent variables (the results of these analyses are not presented here but they are available upon request from the corresponding author). These results support discriminant validity between the constructs in the study.

Hypothesis testing

The path coefficients for the three PLS models are reported in Table 5. Overall, Hypotheses 1, 2b, 3a and 3b are strongly supported. The coefficients for these paths are significant and relatively large for at least two out of three models. For Hypotheses 2a and 4, the path coefficients were relatively small and, in most cases, non-significant, thereby casting doubt on these two hypotheses.

The results from Study 1, thus, demonstrate support for brand identification and sense of community as antecedents of brand love. Moreover, the results concur with those in Carroll and Ahuvia,⁶ with regard to the outcomes of brand love, because a positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty was supported. The positive relationship between brand love and active engagement suggests that brand love leads not only to WOM, as found by Carroll and Ahuvia,⁶ but also to other brand-related activities.

As a further check on the results from the PLS analyses, formal mediation tests,³⁶ using the scores on the latent variables from the PLS analyses, were carried out on all the mediational paths in the PLS model.

Table 5: Study 1: Path coefficients

Relationship	Brand		
	iPod	Favorite Clothes brand	Panadol
H1: Sense of community → Brand identification	0.56**	0.46**	0.51**
H2a: Brand identification → Brand loyalty	0.17**	0.17**	0.06
H2b: Brand identification → Brand love	0.65**	0.56**	0.52**
H3a: Brand love → Brand loyalty	0.74**	0.68**	0.76**
H3b: Brand love → Active engagement	0.61**	0.52**	0.37
H4: Brand loyalty → Active engagement	0.21	0.31**	0.25

**P < 0.01

The results from these tests supported all the results in the PLS analyses with one important exception. The mediation test results question whether the effect of sense of community on brand loyalty and brand love is mediated by brand identification. In the tests, the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable is consistently greater than the effect of the mediator. This suggests that the indirect relationship suggested in the initial conceptual model is incorrect and that a direct relationship between sense of community and brand love and brand loyalty would be more correct. Therefore, the conceptual model is changed accordingly (Figure 2) and Hypothesis 1 is replaced with two new hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1a: Sense of community is positively related to brand loyalty.

Hypothesis 2b: Sense of community is positively related to brand love.

The new model and the new hypotheses are tested using the data from Study 2.

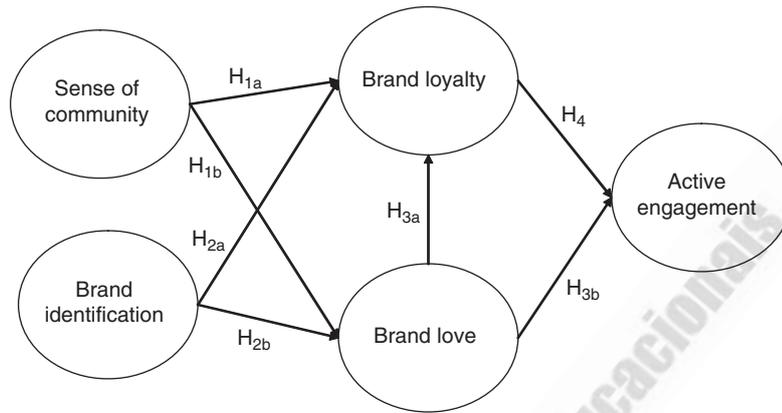


Figure 2: The revised conceptual model of antecedents and outcomes of brand love.

Study 2

The scores on the mean indices differ significantly ($P < 0.001$) between the brands in Study 2 (Table 6). Overall, scores are highest for the Favourite soft drink, followed by Vegemite, and, in turn, Colgate Total. Although Vegemite's score is lower overall than that of the Favourite soft drink, its score on sense of community is on par with the soft drink score and relatively higher than the other scores for Vegemite. This result probably reflects the standing of Vegemite as part of the Australian national identity and a brand all Australians, young and old, are familiar with.

Measurement validation

Similar to Study 1, the factor structure of the PLS models for Study 2 is satisfactory overall for the variables with reflective indicators (Table 7). For the formative active engagement construct, some of the weights for the manifest variables are not significant or, in one case, negative, which suggests that the manifest variables were not equally applicable to the different brands. This difference between brands could be explained by some types of active engagement being more relevant for some brands than for others. For example, consumers may be less

Table 6: Study 2: Mean scores on the brand constructs

Construct	Vegemite	Favourite Soft Drink	Colgate Total
Sense of community	2.0 (0.75)	2.0 (0.68)	1.5 (0.49)
Brand identification	3.6 (2.05)	4.2 (2.10)	3.0 (1.88)
Brand love	2.2 (0.90)	2.3 (0.82)	1.5 (0.69)
Brand loyalty	2.3 (0.97)	2.5 (0.81)	1.8 (0.85)
Active engagement	1.4 (0.49)	1.5 (0.53)	1.1 (0.29)
N	132	128	131

Notes: All constructs were measured on 1–4 scales, except brand identification which was measured on a 1–8 scale. A low score on all scales means a 'negative' response and a high score a 'positive' response.

All mean scores were significantly different across brands (repeated-measures ANOVA, $P < 0.001$).

Standard deviations are in parenthesis.

willing to follow news about a soft drink brand or visit the brand's website than to engage in WOM or buy merchandise with the brand name on it, as suggested by the weights for the soft drink brand. However, the differences in weights between the brands imply that the interpretation of the active engagement construct varies somewhat between the three brands.²³

The variance explained (R^2) for brand love increased sharply from Study 1 to 2.

Table 7: Study 2: Composite reliability, average variance extracted (AVE), R^2 and loadings from the PLS analyses

Construct	Brand	Composite reliability	AVE	R^2	Loadings/weights
Sense of community	Vegemite	0.87	0.69	—	0.77, 0.89, 0.83
	Favorite Soft Drink	0.84	0.63	—	0.72, 0.86, 0.79
	Colgate Total	0.83	0.62	—	0.78, 0.83, 0.76
Brand identification	Vegemite	1.00	1.00	—	1.00
	Favorite Soft Drink	1.00	1.00	—	1.00
	Colgate Total	1.00	1.00	—	1.00
Brand love	Vegemite	0.77	0.77	0.69	0.90, 0.86
	Favorite Soft Drink	0.85	0.74	0.52	0.88, 0.84
	Colgate Total	0.85	0.74	0.53	0.88, 0.84
Brand loyalty	Vegemite	0.85	0.85	0.70	0.92, 0.92
	Favorite Soft Drink	0.92	0.73	0.72	0.91, 0.88, 0.77, 0.85
	Colgate Total	0.95	0.81	0.72	0.92, 0.94, 0.83, 0.92
Active engagement	Vegemite	NA	NA	0.41	0.45, 0.49, -0.21, 0.42
	Favorite Soft Drink	NA	NA	0.40	NS, 0.71, NS, 0.27
	Colgate Total	NA	NA	0.36	0.76, 0.42, NS, NS

Abbreviations: NS=non-significant; NA=not applicable.

In Study 1, the brand love R^2 ranges from 0.27 to 0.42, and in Study 2, R^2 ranges from 0.53 to 0.69. This increase is induced by the change in the structural model, which meant that sense of community is modelled as a direct antecedent of brand love. However, R^2 for brand loyalty, the other variable, to which sense of community was added as a direct antecedent, increased only marginally. In Study 1, the R^2 ranged from 0.61 to 0.73, and in Study 2, R^2 ranged from 0.70 to 0.72.

With respect to discriminant validity, Study 2 replicates the results from Study 1, that is, the results demonstrated discriminant validity for the four reflective constructs. (These results are not shown here but they are available upon request from the corresponding author.)

Hypothesis testing

The results are mixed for the two paths that were added to the revised structural model. The path from sense of community to brand loyalty (Hypothesis 1a) is weakly

supported, whereas the path from sense of community to brand love (Hypothesis 1b) is strongly supported. Moreover, formal mediation tests³⁶ did not refute these relationships. For the remaining paths, Study 2 essentially replicates the results in Study 1 (see Table 8).

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present research is to propose and test two antecedents of brand love, and to include these in a structural model also including some outcomes of brand love. The results clearly indicate that both brand identification and sense of community are antecedents of brand love, although the revised model tested in Study 2 shows that sense of community is directly related to brand love and not indirectly, via brand identification, which was the initial hypothesis.

The results also show that brand loyalty and active engagement are outcomes of brand love. The present research complements to the sparse literature on brand love by adding two antecedents of brand love

Table 8: Study 2: Path coefficients

Relationship	Brand		
	Vegetite	Favorite Soft Drink	Colgate Total
H1a: Sense of community→Brand loyalty	0.19*	0.41**	-0.01
H1b: Sense of community→Brand love	0.55**	0.41**	0.61**
H2a: Brand identification→Brand loyalty	0.38**	-0.02	0.13
H2b: Brand identification→Brand love	0.38**	0.44**	0.23
H3a: Brand love→Brand loyalty	0.36**	0.55**	0.79**
H3b: Brand love→Active engagement	0.47**	0.34*	0.74**
H4: Brand loyalty→Active engagement	0.20	0.33*	-0.18

** $P < 0.01$; * $P < 0.05$.

to those identified by Carroll and Ahuvia⁶ (that is, hedonic product and self-expressive brand). The research also makes a contribution by extending the outcome results in Carroll and Ahuvia.⁶ The fact that the present results are replicated across two samples and six brands adds extra weight to the results.

The present research extends the research on brand communities, which up until now have focused mainly on relatively small brand communities for niche brands such as Apple Newton³⁷ or Harley-Davidson owners,¹⁵ and where the focal communities have tended to be formally organized clubs.^{15,17,38} The present study took a broader view and focused on the effects of consumers' sense of community rather than the effects of community membership and interaction. Sense of community applies to consumers in general, not only to those who are members of a brand club or belong to an informal niche brand community, but also should be relevant to a wide variety of brands. The present research also has implications for the research on brand identification and its relationship to brand loyalty. Previous research finds brand identification to be directly related to brand loyalty,^{9,17,18} whereas the present study finds that the influence of brand identification on brand loyalty is mediated by brand love. Thus, the present study suggests that the earlier research on this relationship has

been too limited in scope and that future studies should include brand love as well as brand identification and brand loyalty.

The fact that the path from brand love to behavioural loyalty is strongest for the utilitarian products is in accordance with Carrol and Ahuvia's⁶ observation that variety seeking for hedonic compared to utilitarian brands (pleasure from variation) is more common, and thus speaks in favour of a measuring brand loyalty with a behavioural as well as an attitudinal dimension.

From a managerial point of view, the present research suggests that marketing managers should cultivate a sense of community among the buyers and users of their brand which, in turn, would lead to an increase in brand love and brand loyalty. A sense of community can be cultivated by encouraging formal brand communities, for example, by supporting official user groups, or by building a sense of community, for example, through advertising or event sponsorships that show who the users of the brand are and what they have in common. Brand fests, that is, organized consumption experiences,^{38,39} are likely to be a particularly effective way of building up a sense of community. Similarly, managers should invest in marketing activities that increase brand identification. In general terms, these activities should aim to convey a brand image congruent with the self-image of the target audience, which

should increase their identification with the brand.¹⁶ For example, image advertising can be designed to strengthen image dimensions common to the brand and the target audience.

As the choice of brand love antecedents to be studied were based on Park *et al.*,¹¹ it is also reasonable to consider their recommendations on how to introduce, elaborate and fortify symbolic brand concepts (for example, concepts pursuing brand love). The brands in the present study – a majority of the self-selected brands included – were mature brands with high diffusion rates. Park *et al.* recommend the use of image extensions (for example, strategies of brand extension and corporate branding) to create brand-related lifestyles thus fortifying brand identification and sense of community, which has the highest relevance for this type of brands.

With regard to the elaboration of brand love, the strategy of market shielding may be a valid and necessary supplement to the image extension strategy. According to Park *et al.*, shielding a loved brand often involves the paradox of controlling general access while increasing general desirability. Thus, to maintain and fortify the brand love of the targeted segment, marketing managers may have to build identification and sense of community within this segment. One way of doing this is to increase desire – while at the same time restricting access – of the non-targeted segments to acquire and consume the brand.¹¹ Although other strategies for the construction of exclusivity and identification are available, and although the brands included in the present study cannot be defined as exclusive *per se*, a managerial perspective on brand love should acknowledge that it is hardly possible to build and maintain brand love without somehow considering the issue of exclusivity.

In general, however, some managerial caution is warranted as brands vary in their

potential for being loved. The relatively low brand love scores for Panadol and Colgate Total suggest that some brands may have limited potential to be loved by all consumers. Spending limited marketing resources on, for example, mass media advertising trying to build brand love for these brands, would thus not make sense.

The difference between brands in their mean scores on the other constructs in the study suggests differences between brands with respect to these constructs as well. For example, the scores on active engagement were markedly lower in Study 2 than in Study 1, most likely because the brands in Study 2 offered fewer opportunities for interaction than the brands in Study 1.

A limitation of the present research is that the measure of brand love was made up of two items only. We aimed to ensure that the measure of brand love had discriminant validity and did not overlap other constructs, for example, emotional attachment,⁵ or that it contained questions felt to be irrelevant for brands, although they may be relevant to interpersonal love. As shown in the discriminant analysis of the PLS results, the measure of brand love did show discriminant validity, but future studies might try adding items to the measure. Also, the active engagement measure had limitations. This measure was based on items suggested by Keller²⁰ who does not clarify whether he actually included all possible manifestations of active engagement among his suggested items. Omission of relevant manifest variables from a formative construct may have serious consequences as the construct may take on a different meaning if all relevant variables are not included.²³ However, limitations in the active engagement measure does not have any impact on the PLS modelling of the two main hypotheses in the study, that is, those two relating to the two antecedents of brand love. Thus, some caution is warranted in the interpretation of the path

coefficients between brand love and active engagement, and brand loyalty and active engagement but this limitation does not apply to the paths from brand identification and sense of community. Future studies should try to develop an improved measure of active engagement.

Respondent homogeneity together with the considerable variation in their ratings of love for the utilitarian as well as for the hedonic brands implies that it could be possible to pursue a brand love strategy even for the former type of brands. This offers an opportunity for further research. Also, as it is generally accepted that the meaning of inter-personal love is different at different age stages,³⁹ it might be interesting to study and compare brand love within different demographic subsamples. In general, to facilitate strategic brand image management, further research should focus on those consumer characteristics that are responsible for the fact that some segments love specific brands, whereas others do not.

Finally, research on how to strengthen consumers' brand identification and their sense of community seems to be lacking. Given the importance of these two constructs for brand love, future studies should investigate antecedents of these two constructs as well marketing activities that could be used to strengthen them, for example, advertising experiments to evaluate the effectiveness of different communication tactics.

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