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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Brand love: conceptual and empirical investigation of a holistic causal model

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Abstract
Explicating and specifying the origins of brand love, as well as how it affects consumer behavior, establishes vital insights into how brand managers might reap favorable economic consequences from promoting brand love effectively. Therefore, this article presents and validates a holistic, causal model of brand love that accounts for brand stimulus features and the internal, mental processes of consumers, along with the behavioral outcomes of their resulting brand love. Using both qualitative and quantitative approaches, the authors propose and test seven antecedents (including three mediators) and four consequences: Functional and sensory brand uniqueness emerge as indirect antecedents of brand love; brand satisfaction, brand fit with the inner self, and personal experiences are direct antecedents. Contrary to expectations, communicative uniqueness and brand pleasure are not influential factors. This study also verifies four desirable behavioral consequences of brand love: brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, word-of-mouth intentions, and forgiveness of brand mistakes. These findings offer several theoretical and managerial implications.

Keywords Brand love · Consumer–brand relationship · Brand uniqueness · Brand loyalty · Brand forgiveness · Brand management

Introduction

Consumers frequently report intense emotional relationships with brands, comparable to feelings of interpersonal love (Batra et al. 2012; Fournier 1998). Such deep consumer–brand relationships influence consumer behavior in various ways and even can reach extremes, as when Harley-Davidson fans express their lifelong devotion to the brand by getting the company's logo tattooed on their bodies. Empirical studies thus show that brand love results in positive outcomes, such as brand loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium (Albert and Merunka 2013; Rossiter 2012). Considering the ways in which these outcomes promise to enhance the performance and economic value of companies (Rossiter 2012), it is unsurprising that the brand love phenomenon attracts substantial interest from practitioners (Roberts 2004) and appears in a growing stream of research (Albert and Merunka 2013; Batra et al. 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Heinrich et al. 2012; Langner et al. 2016; Sajtos et al. 2020; Schmid and Huber 2019; Tsai 2013). Yet several important questions remained unaddressed. In particular, brand love studies tend to feature partial models and focus on isolated effects, without establishing a comprehensive, integrative model of the multiple antecedents and consequences of brand love. That is, neither academics nor practitioners have determined comprehensively what really drives brand love. In response to this gap, we propose a conceptual framework and hypotheses, based on an extensive literature review, in the next section, which we test with a mixed methods approach. First, we report on a qualitative study to confirm whether our proposed conceptual framework and hypotheses about the key drivers (e.g., functional, sensory, and communicative brand uniqueness) and behavioral consequences (e.g., brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium) of brand love align with real-world consumer feelings and experiences. Second, with a quantitative approach, we test the validity of the hypotheses. The results identify functional and sensory brand uniqueness as indirect antecedents of brand love; brand satisfaction, brand fit with

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the inner self, and personal experiences are direct antecedents. Contrary to our theoretically grounded expectations, communicative brand uniqueness and brand pleasure are not influential determinants of brand love in our model.

Theoretical background: brand love, antecedents, and consequences

Literature review

The aim of our research is to establish a comprehensive model that comprises the most relevant antecedents and consequences of brand love. To identify these variables, we follow a two-step procedure. In an extensive literature review, we first search for the antecedents and consequences that are most often analyzed in the context of brand love. Then, we conduct a qualitative study to check whether our variable set is complete. In 14 semi-structured interviews, we surveyed consumers to understand their relations with their most loved brand in great detail. We find evidence for two additional variables (brand satisfaction and personal experiences), less studied in past research, which we include in our conceptual model of brand love.

To start our analysis, we reviewed research that refers to interpersonal love, object love, or brand love, which helped us develop a clear understanding of brand love as the core construct for this study. Then with a Web of Science search of Social Sciences Citations Index entries, published since 1956, we identified 60 articles with "brand love" in their titles. From this sample, we identified 51 publications that analyzed brand love and its causal relations to antecedents or consequences. Through a careful assessment of the variables included in these models, we found more than 150 differently named variables, and we considered their interrelations, overlaps, and connections to brand love. Through this multistep review of prior literature, we establish an initial foundation of variables that have been introduced as antecedents, constituent elements, or consequences of brand love.

The review also reveals that most brand love studies are narrowly focused, analyzing segments of a larger, causal network. In particular, some researchers concentrate on the antecedents of brand love (e.g., Huang 2019; Long-Tolbert and Gammoh 2012; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia 2014), whereas others examine its consequences (e.g., Albert et al. 2009; Barker et al. 2015; Rossiter 2012). Despite the many facets involved in the formation of brand love though, no prior study has provided a comprehensive framework detailing how it develops and exerts effects on brand performance. In Table 1, we provide an overview of the variables used in our study and show how they have been used in existing literature, sorted according to whether they appeared as antecedent variables, elements, or consequences of brand love. In the following sections we discuss the components of our conceptual model (Fig. 1) in more detail.

Brand love as a core construct

Fournier (1998) determines that consumers develop different bonds with the brands they use. At the extreme, strong consumer–brand relations are deep, lasting, and accompanied by intense feelings. Brand love represents the most intensive consumer–brand relationship (Rossiter 2012), distinct from other, more transient forms, such as flings or fads (Alvarez and Fournier 2012; Fournier 1998). Research into interpersonal love identifies deep affection (Sternberg 1986; Walster 1971) and separation distress (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986; Hazan and Shaver 1987; Rubin 1970) as fundamental components of the love construct. An established conceptualization likewise represents brand love as a two-dimensional construct, comprised of deep affection and separation distress (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010; Langner et al. 2016; Rossiter 2012). Affection distinguishes love from negative or neutral relationships, but it cannot differentiate it from mere liking, which also might evoke affection or positive feelings. Therefore, the second component is required, because separation distress, which arises when the loved object is absent, effectively differentiates love from pure liking. Sternberg (1986) accordingly proposes an "absence test" to indicate love, because a person's reaction to the absence of a beloved person distinguishes love from liking. According to Ahuvia (2015, p. 3), referring to consumers, "The more horrible they anticipate the loss to be, the more sure they are that they truly love that thing." We note though that separation distress also is not sufficient to assess brand love on its own, in that it might arise in relations marked by dependence, even if they do not feature love (Fournier 1998).

Beyond establishing its two constitutive components, we also delineate brand love by clearly distinguishing it from its antecedents and consequences. Bergkvist and Langner (2020) emphasize the serious threats that can arise for content validity, discriminant validity, and comparability if researchers measure a construct using items that capture its antecedents and consequences, rather than the target construct itself. Notably, antecedents of brand love often affect other constructs too, such as liking, attachment, or attitude. Furthermore, we recognize that outcome variables can reflect the impact of other constructs, not just the target construct. In contrast with these conceptual concerns though, brand love research often blurs these distinctions. For example, Batra et al. (2012) include self-brand integration as a component of brand love, whereas other studies regard it as an important antecedent (Albert and Merunka 2013; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). More generally, a prevalent tendency is to include

Table 1 Variable classifications

Classification of variables in relation to brand love in current article		Classification of variables in relation to brand love in existing literature		
		Antecedents	Part of Brand Love	Consequences
Antecedents	Functional Brand Uniqueness	Aro et al. (2018) ("Uniqueness"); Bairrada et al. (2018, 2019) ("Brand Uniqueness")	Hegner et al. (2017) ("Uniqueness"); Barker et al. (2015) ("Competitive Uniqueness"); Huang (2019) ("Uniqueness")	
	Sensory Brand Uniqueness			
	Communicative Brand Uniqueness			
	Brand Satisfaction	Aro et al. (2018) ("Satisfaction"); Bigne et al. (2019) ("Satisfaction"); Drennan et al. (2015) ("Wine Brand Satisfaction"); Hsu and Chen (2018) ("Satisfaction")		
	Brand Pleasure	Aro et al. (2018) ("Hedonic Brand"); Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) ("Hedonic Product"); Huber et al. (2015) ("Hedonic Value"); Junaid et al. (2019) ("Hedonic Product Type"); Karjaluoto et al. (2016) ("Hedonic Product"); Kang (2018) ("Hedonic Value")	Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Positive Affect"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Positive Affect"); Hegner et al. (2017) ("Pleasure"); Huang (2019) ("Pleasure"); Zarantonello et al. (2016) ("Pleasure")	
	Brand Fit with Inner Self (resp. Brand Identification)	Algharabat (2017) ("Self-Expressive Brand—Inner"); Alnawas and Altarifi (2016) ("Customer Brand Identification"); Aro et al. (2018) ("Self-Expressive Brand"); Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) ("Self-Expressive Brand—Inner Self"); Huber et al. (2015) ("Inner Self"); Karjaluoto et al. (2016) ("Self-Expressiveness"); Kaufmann et al. (2016) ("Self-Expressiveness"); Khandeparkar and Motiani (2018) ("Inner-Self Expressiveness"); Loureiro et al. (2017) ("Self-Brand Image Congruency"); Mody and Hanks (2019) ("Intrapersonal Authenticity—Self-Expressive Brand (Inner Self)"); Palazon et al. (2019) ("Self-Brand-Connection"); Strandberg and Styvén (2020) ("Self-Expressiveness"); Yang et al. (2018) ("Identity Expression")	Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Current Self-Identity"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Current Self-Identity"); Lee and Hyun (2016) ("Self-Brand Integration"); Velicia Martin et al. (2020) ("Brand Connection"); Maxian et al. (2013) ("Brand Identification"); White et al. (2020) ("Self-Brand Integration (Identity)"); Zarantonello et al. (2016) ("Self-Expression")	
	Personal Experiences (resp. Personal Memories)	Manthiou et al. (2018) ("Impression in Memory")	Hegner et al. (2017) ("Memories/Dreams"); Huang (2019) ("Memories")	Aro et al. (2018) ("Dreaming and Memories")

Table 1 (continued)

Classification of variables in relation to brand love in current article		Classification of variables in relation to brand love in existing literature		
		Antecedents	Part of Brand Love	Consequences
Part of Brand Love	Affection (resp. Emotional Attachment)		Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Emotional Attachment"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("Emotional Attachment"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Emotional Attachment"); Hegner et al. (2017) ("Intimacy/Idealisation"); Huang (2019) ("Intimacy"); Kang (2018) ("Brand Intimacy"); Lee and Hyun (2016) ("Emotional Attachment", "Passionate Love"); Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2012) ("Intimacy"); Rossiter (2012) ("Passion/Deep Affection"); Shin and Back (2020) ("Intimacy", "Passion"); Velicia Martin et al. (2020) ("Emotional Attachment"); Zarantonello et al. (2016) ("Attachment"); Zhang et al. (2020) ("Brand Closeness")	
	Separation Distress		Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Anticipated Separation Distress"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("Anticipated Separation Distress"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Anticipated Separation Distress"); Rossiter (2012) ("Separation Anxiety"); White et al. (2020) ("Anticipated Separation Distress (Distress)")	Aro et al. (2018) ("Anticipated Separation Distress")

Table 1 (continued)

Classification of variables in relation to brand love in current article		Classification of variables in relation to brand love in existing literature		
		Antecedents	Part of Brand Love	Consequences
Consequences	Brand Loyalty	Wang et al. (2019a) ("Commitment")	Alnawas and Altarifi (2016) ("Decision/Commitment"); Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Long Term Relationship"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("Long Term Relationship"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Long Term Relationship"); Huang (2019) ("Duration"); Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2012) ("Decision/Commitment"); Shin and Back (2020) ("Commitment"); Zhang et al. (2020) ("Brand Commitment")	Algharabat (2017) ("Brand Loyalty"); Aro et al. (2018) ("Loyalty"); Alnawas and Altarifi (2016) ("Brand Loyalty"); Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Loyalty"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("Brand Loyalty"); Bairrada et al. (2019) ("Loyalty"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Loyalty"); Bigne et al. (2019) ("Revisit Intentions"); Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) ("Brand Loyalty"); Coelho et al. (2019) ("Brand Loyalty"); Drennan et al. (2015) ("Brand Loyalty"); Hsu and Chen (2018) ("Brand Loyalty"); Huang (2019) ("Brand Loyalty"); Kaufmann et al. (2016) ("Brand Loyalty"); Kim et al. (2008, 2020) ("Brand Resonance (Loyalty)"); Lee and Hyun (2016) ("Behavioral Loyalty"); Machado et al. (2019) ("Consumer-Based Brand Equity"); Mody and Hanks (2019) ("Brand Loyalty"); Nikhashemi et al. (2019) ("Continuous Purchase Intention"); Palazon et al. (2019) ("Brand Equity"); Roy et al. (2013, 2016) ("Store Brand Loyalty"); Velicia Martin et al. (2020) ("Loyalty"); White et al. (2020) ("Loyalty"); Zarantonello et al. (2016) ("Brand's Share of Requirements/Share of Wallet"); Zhang et al. (2020) ("Behavioral Loyalty")
	Willingness to Pay Price Premium (resp. Invest Resources)		Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Willingness to Invest Resources"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("Willingness to Invest Resources"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Willingness to Invest Resources")	Aro et al. (2018) ("Insensitivity to Prices"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("Willingness to Pay a Price Premium"); Bairrada et al. (2019) ("Willingness to Pay More"); Kang (2018) ("Willingness to Pay More"); Nikhashemi et al. (2019) ("Willingness to Pay More"); Velicia Martin et al. (2020) ("Willingness to Invest Time")

Table 1 (continued)

Classification of variables in relation to brand love in current article		Classification of variables in relation to brand love in existing literature		
		Antecedents	Part of Brand Love	Consequences
Consequences	WOM Intentions	Algharabat (2017) ("WOM")		Aro et al. (2018) ("+WOM"); Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("WOM"); Bairrada et al. (2018) ("WOM"); Bairrada et al. (2019) ("Positive Word-of-Mouth"); Batra et al. (2012) ("WOM"); Bigne et al. (2019) ("WOM"); Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) ("+WOM"); Coelho et al. (2019) ("WOM"); Dalman et al. (2019) ("Brand Defense"); Hsu and Chen (2018) ("Positive Word of Mouth"); Junaid et al. (2020) ("Customer Engagement—Influencing"); Kang (2018) ("Advocacy"); Karjaluoto et al. (2016) ("WOM"); Khandeparkar and Motiani (2018) ("+ WOM"); Loureiro et al. (2017) ("e-Word-of-Mouth"); Nikhashemi et al. (2019) ("Word of Mouth Communication"); Rodrigues and Rodrigues (2019) ("WOM+"); Rossiter (2012) ("Brand Recommendation"); Roy et al. (2016) ("WOM"); Strandberg and Styvén (2020) ("Positive WOM"); Velicia Martin et al. (2020) ("WOM")
	Willingness to Forgive Mistakes (resp. Resistance to Negative Information)			Aro et al. (2018) ("Resistance to Negative"); Bagozzi et al. (2017) ("Resistance to Negative Information"); Bairrada et al. (2019) ("Resistance to Negative Info"); Batra et al. (2012) ("Resistance"); Hegner et al. (2017) ("Forgiveness"); Khandeparkar and Motiani (2018) ("Resilience to Negative Information"); Wang et al. (2019b) ("Forgiveness Behavior")

Please see "Appendix 3" for details on all articles listed in Table 1

In this table we consider 46 studies. Single-construct factors and first/higher-order factors were assigned to a category on the basis of their (a) naming (naming identical or similar to the target variable) and (b) their operationalization (same or similar items as the target variable)

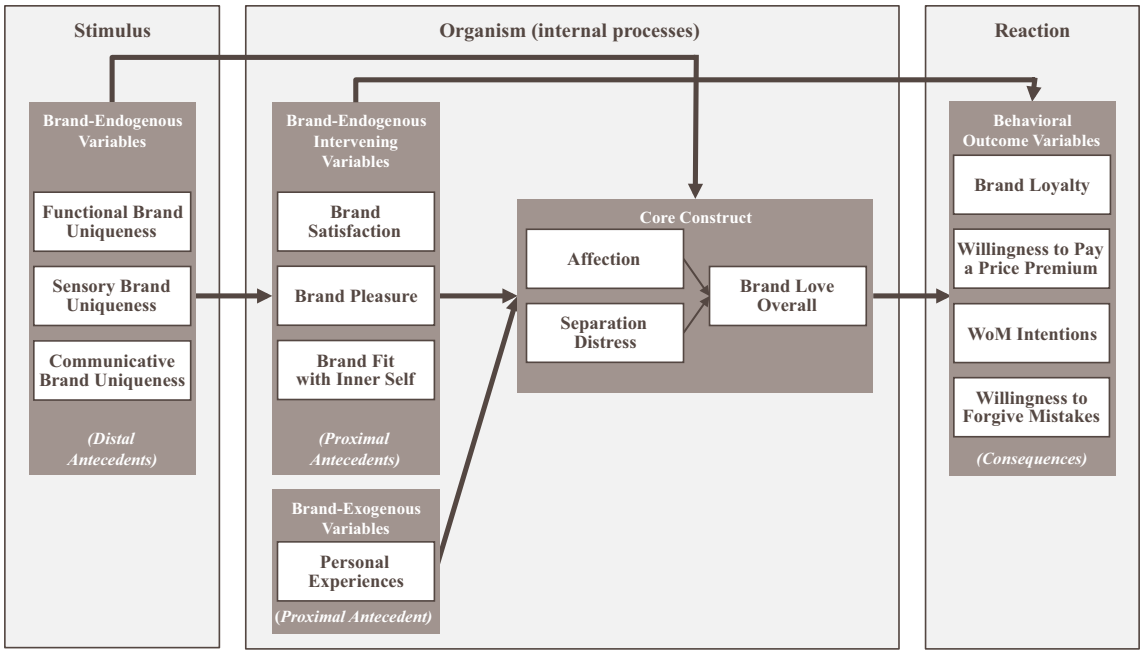

Fig. 1 Conceptual framework of brand love

brand love antecedents in measures of the brand love construct, instead of treating them as independent constructs (Albert et al. 2009; Batra et al. 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Hegner et al. 2017; Schmid and Huber 2019). Furthermore, some researchers rely on behavioral outcome variables (e.g., willingness to invest resources) to measure brand love, rather than treating them as consequences (Bagozzi et al. 2017; Schmid and Huber 2019).

Considering these potential issues and the lack of clarity in prior research, we adopt an operationalization of brand love provided by Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010), Rossiter (2012), and Langner et al. (2016), which explicitly seeks to minimize the overlap of brand love with related constructs and thereby ensures greater construct validity. It features both affection and separation distress as indicators, and it avoids the explicit use of the term "love" in a brand context, which might create confusion when consumers use that term loosely in consumption contexts ("I'd love to see that movie," "I love Cheerios," Rossiter 2012, p. 909).

Antecedents of brand love

Research on the antecedents of brand love tends to be restricted, focusing on just a few variables. For example, Batra et al. (2012) examine high brand quality as the sole predictor of brand love (see also Hwang and Kandampully 2012). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) investigate two constructs: hedonic and self-expressive benefits (see also Albert and Merunka 2013; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010). Rarely does research include brand- or product-specific features, related to brand design or brand communication, and their effects on brand love. In studies that consider product-related features, the variables tend to pertain to a more general level, such as product quality (Batra et al. 2012), or else the features (e.g., uniqueness, high price) are mentioned in items included in the brand love construct (Hegner et al. 2017). This tendency is surprising, considering that the "brand stimulus," which is composed of brand-related stimuli such as brand logo, packaging, product, or communications, is the primary origin of the cognitive, affective, and social processes within consumers (Fournier 1991). The importance of the brand stimulus is also confirmed by the results of our qualitative study, as summarized in two exemplary statements (Table 2):

> Simply because I think that they [MINI] make very good commercials. They really give the brand an outstanding character […] and they also have a certain sense of humor in their commercials. And they are cool. (Anna, female, 26).

> On this note, the designs are also something extraordinary. Of course, they [Lyle and Scott] chose a unique logo which, in my opinion, no one can copy very easily. (Samuel, male, 26).

Thus, in contrast with previous research, we consider the brand stimulus as the starting point of a causal chain that leads to brand love. In this chain, economic success requires brand uniqueness (Keller and Swaminathan 2019). Brands

Table 2 Selected statements from qualitative study

Participant (gender, age)	Statement	Loved brand	Construct
Gregor, male, 56	"Affection, appreciation, even respect"	Porsche	Brand love: Affection
Susanne, female, 54	"It goes far beyond of what I can technically do with it, in a manner of speaking, I would call it true love; it is a feeling of familiarity, just seeing the symbol or holding it in my hand. That means quality of life for me. And I feel comfortable with it, this is why it is so important to me"	Apple	
Moritz, male, 27	"It [the Sony Vaio] broke by my own fault and the moment I heard the terrible noises coming from it I already missed it and felt very sad, not so much about the economic aspect but about losing a highly appreciated utility item and I was instantly thinking about buying a new one"	Sony	Brand love: separation distress
Justus, male, 26	"For example, I have a Ronaldo jersey by Nike. I keep all my jerseys in a box, except for this one for which I use a coat hanger. The reason might be the player on the one hand but also the brand itself because they are awesome, great materials. It shall not be damaged. So it can be well preserved"	Nike	
Susanne, female, 54	"The user interface is unique, the system is so much better than the Windows system. It is simple, clear, structured. I love it"	Apple	Functional brand uniqueness
Justus, male, 26	"[…] And then I bought Nike and from the first ball contact, I realized: Wow, this is awesome! I noticed a different feeling, I mean, it is a soccer shoe but I felt the difference. When putting them on they fitted totally different and later during the match I thought: 'Yeah, that's right up my alley!'"	Nike	
Samuel, male, 26	"On this note, the designs are also something extraordinary. Of course, they chose a unique logo which, in my opinion, no one can copy very easily"	Lyle and Scott	Sensory brand uniqueness
Gregor, male, 56	"Hearing […], a very important aspect, for Porsche in particular. […] the boxer engines have a very special sound"	Porsche	
Anna, female, 26	"Simply because I think that they make very good commercials. They really give the brand an outstanding character […] and they also have a certain sense of humor in their commercials. And they are cool"	Mini	Communicative brand uniqueness
Cora, female, 26	"This is great brand communication […]. It's probably complete nonsense but well done. […] I am just visualizing the Coke commercial with those little stuffed toys, very good"	Coca-Cola	
Anna, female, 26	"I'd rather say […] satisfaction. Because I am absolutely happy with this car"	Mini	Brand satisfaction
Ruth, female, 57	"You simply feel good and you know that you have a high-quality, valuable product which you can rely on. […] If you don't get good value for money, if the quality is not what I expect, in that case, I would use the product only once and never again"	Chanel	
Anna, female, 26	"The pleasure of driving, a bit of a go-cart feeling. […] When I get into my car I look forward to driving it. Thus, simply fun!"	Mini	Brand pleasure
Moritz, male, 27	"Great pleasure […] simply fun […] happy"	Sony	
Samuel, male, 26	"VW, because I drive one myself and basically identify myself with my car. On this note, this is brand love. […] I don't have to find 100% identification but if I can't identify at all, it [brand love] is impossible for me"	VW	Brand fit to inner self
Veronika, female, 27	"And then I believe it is normal that a brand you love is in some way similar to your own character, otherwise you would not love it"	Haribo	
Richard, male, 44	"I think that is something you associate with growing up. […] I used to learn for school in the morning, always having a mug in my hand, containing oats that I always ate from the mug. One of my early memories from elementary school, sitting at home with a mug of oats in my hand memorizing poems"	Kölln	Personal experiences

Table 2 (continued)

Participant (gender, age)	Statement	Loved brand	Construct
Justus, male, 26	"For example, I was wearing this Nike jacket when we slept at the Amazonas and all of a sudden it started pouring. And before, everyone was laughing at me asking why I was carrying a rain jacket. I had the Nike rain jacket with me and it was dead right. […] And I was only able to take it with me because you can pack it so well"	Nike	
Corinna, female, 38	"I keep buying them again and again, I buy them often. I buy them for my kids, I also buy them as birthday presents […]. We have a list upstairs with items she [name of her daughter] already has, so that we don't run the risk of ordering the same thing again"	Lego	Brand loyalty
Susanne, female, 54	"As long as there is Apple I will never buy anything else. Whatever happens, I won't buy a Hewlett Packard computer!"	Apple	
Corinna, female, 38	"Although the sets are sometimes very expensive, people are willing to spend their money because they know you get something fantastic for it"	Lego	Willingness to pay a price premium
Moritz, male, 27	"Everyone knows that it [the Sony Vaio] is expensive. You pay a certain amount for the brand and the image, although, you know it could be 2/3 lower in price if there were a different label on it. […] Let's put it like this, I could have saved 600 Euro and bought another good product which in the end would have the same technical capabilities as the Sony Vaio but would not be so fancy, would not stand for the same thing"	Sony	
Veronika, female, 27	"That you feel attached to the brand, that you are happy if it is there. That you share your joy for it with others, that you tell other people about it and you want them to like it as well"	Haribo	WOM intentions
Susanne, female, 54	"I must admit that I have been evangelizing quite a bit. Because I know so much about the brand and somebody told me I would be a good salesperson for Apple. This might seem a bit obtrusive. Because it is so absolute […]."	Apple	
Justus, male, 26	"And if something goes wrong, it is not so bad. Things just happen […], after that, I had been disappointed only once because the shoe did not last for two years but only one. But I forgive my brand for that"	Nike	Willingness to forgive mistakes
Gregor, male, 56	"I do forgive its weaknesses. […] If the engine does not start respectively has a bad fuel consumption […], that I don't have the full range of functionality regarding everyday use […], that I can't offer everyone a ride […], you have to compromise concerning daily handling and I do excuse this for the brand or product"	Porsche	

All qualitative interviews were conducted in German, and the author team translated the excerpts into English. Names of the respondents are changed, for anonymity

must establish unique attributes that differentiate them from competitors, to ensure that consumers prefer them. These so-called points of difference have their origin in either functional, performance-related or imagery-related brand perceptions (Keller 2003, p. 131). Virtually any functional, communicative, or sensory brand attribute can provide a foundation to establish brand uniqueness. Consequently, we include functional, sensory, and communicative brand uniqueness as the major exogenous variables in our model (Fig. 1).

In terms of frequency, the most popularly studied brand love antecedents relate to consumers' identification with the brand (Table 1). Overall, 20 articles include variables such as "self-expressive brand" (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006) or "self-brand image congruency" (Loureiro et al. 2017), with 13 studies classifying these variables as antecedents. The items that make up these variables usually measure the extent to which the brand fits with or reflects the consumer's personality. Ranking next in frequency are variables that measure pleasure linked to consumption, such as "hedonic value" or "pleasure," which appear in 11 studies (6 studies consider pleasure as an antecedent of brand love). Accordingly, our conceptual model includes brand fit with the consumer's inner self and brand pleasure.

Moreover, our qualitative study provides support for including two further antecedents: memories of meaningful past experiences the consumer has had with the brand, such as childhood, family, or travel experiences and satisfaction with the brand (Table 2). Prior research occasionally considers the impact of meaningful past personal experiences, and some evidence indicates its high relevance, in support of its inclusion in our framework (Langner et al. 2016). For example, Braun-LaTour et al. (2007, p. 51) illustrate the importance of personal experiences in the formation of brand love by quoting one of their study participants: "When I was about 4 years old, I remember going to the beach in my Dad's Toyota truck. The day stood out because it was my birthday, and my Dad took off work to bring me to the beach. I can smell and taste the saltwater breeze mixed with the exhaust of this off-road machine, and to this day, I have a fascination with Toyota trucks." Similarly, brand satisfaction has been shown to be a highly relevant antecedent of brand love (Bigne et al. 2019).

Consequences of brand love

We find greater consistency with regard to the variables used to measure the outcomes of brand love (Table 1). Studies typically assess consumers' intentions to engage in a particular behavior because of the brand love they feel. The most frequently cited consequences of brand love are brand loyalty (29[1] studies, with 25 studies classifying this variable as a consequence), positive word of mouth (WOM) (22 studies, with 21 studies classifying this variable as a consequence), willingness to pay a price premium, respectively, invest resources (8 studies, with 6 studies classifying this variable as a consequence), and willingness to forgive mistakes (7 studies, with all studies classifying this variable as a consequence). Due to their prominence, we include these variables in our conceptual model.

Hypotheses: relationships of brand love with antecedents and consequences

Brand love

Brand love is the core construct for our model. We maintain that it is not simply a stronger form of brand liking (Rubin 1973) but rather is a qualitatively different phenomenon, determined by the two causal-formative indicators (Bollen and Diamantopoulos 2017) of affection and separation distress (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010; Langner et al. 2016; Rossiter 2012). Formally,

H1 The deeper the affection consumers feel for a brand, the more they love the brand.
H2 The more separation distress consumers anticipate to feel in the absence of a brand, the more they love the brand.

Antecedents of brand love

In contrast with previous research, we focus particularly on the brand stimulus and its impact on the cognitive, affective, and social processes involved in consumers' brand love formation. To specify the brand stimulus, we concentrate on the uniqueness of the brand (and its communication), which so far has only been included in a few brand love studies (though usually as an item in the brand love measure; Hegner et al. 2017). We consider three subdimensions of brand uniqueness—functional, sensory, and communicative—as distal antecedents, then conceive of brand satisfaction, brand pleasure, brand fit with inner self, and personal experiences as proximal antecedents of brand love (Fig. 1). The proximal antecedents affect brand love directly; the effects of the distal antecedents are at least partially mediated. Brand satisfaction, pleasure, and fit are endogenous, in the sense that brand management efforts can affect them directly, but past personal experiences are exogenous and cannot be determined directly by brand activities.

Because brand love is a formative construct, its antecedents should exert effects by influencing the two causal-formative indicators, affection and separation distress (Temme et al. 2014). To simplify our exposition, we do not develop separate hypotheses for the influences of the various antecedent variables on the two causal-formative indicators of brand love but instead assume comparable effects.

Brand uniqueness

Brand uniqueness is "the degree to which customers feel the brand is different from competing brands" (Netemeyer et al. 2004, p. 211). Uniqueness is essential for brand success and a core facet of brand equity (Aaker 2010); it originates from three main sources: functional brand characteristics, sensory brand features, and brand communication. For consumers, brand love is the result of strong functional (Batra et al. 2012; Langner et al. 2015), sensory (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006), and communicative (Pawle and Cooper 2006) characteristics. Therefore, we derive the following hypotheses about the direct effects of brand uniqueness on brand love:

H3 The more consumers perceive the (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness of a brand, the more they love the brand.

[1] A few studies consider brand loyalty both as a part of brand love (e.g., long-term relationship) and a consequence (e.g., loyalty) of brand love. The same applies to willingness to pay a price premium.

Brand satisfaction

Brand satisfaction is an overall cognitive evaluation of the total brand experience (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001; Fullerton 2005). All three uniqueness factors likely affect brand satisfaction and thus inform brand love. Both Batra et al. (2012) and Langner et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of high product quality as a prerequisite for brand love. Consumers also tend to justify their love for a brand by referring to its superior qualities, such as "exceptional performance" or the "good looking design" (Batra et al. 2012, pp. 3). Brand quality has been established as an important antecedent of consumer satisfaction too (Golder et al. 2012). Finally, Esch et al. (2006) find that brand image exerts a positive impact on brand satisfaction. Thus, unique brand associations, established by experiencing the brand as distinct in its sensory, communicative, or functional elements, might enhance consumer satisfaction. Considering that satisfaction results from a positive cognitive evaluation of a brand, which leads to positive emotions, it should affect brand love (Keh et al. 2007; Loureiro and Kaufmann 2012; Tsai 2013). This prediction further is in line with Roy et al.'s (2013) assertion that positive, cumulative consumer experiences of high satisfaction increase their emotional attachment to a brand over time. In summary, we expect the three brand uniqueness factors to influence brand satisfaction; brand satisfaction then may exert a positive influence on brand love. Thus, we predict that brand satisfaction mediates the impact of the brand uniqueness subdimensions on brand love:

H4 The more consumers perceive (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative brand uniqueness, the more they are satisfied with the brand.
H5 The more consumers are satisfied with the brand, the more they love the brand.
H6 Brand satisfaction mediates the effect of perceived (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness on brand love.

Brand pleasure

Brand pleasure refers to a summary judgment of how good it feels to interact with a brand (Le Bel and Dubé 1998). A consumer's evaluation of his or her hedonic experiences with the brand's sensory/emotive character is crucial (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Moreover, superior functional aspects (e.g., good performance) can boost feelings of pleasure (Jordan 1998). Cho (2011, p. 140) reports a comment by a consumer that highlights this effect: "Apple makes my days easier. The unique system is different from the others and it makes me feel different too and proud of myself. The use of Apple was totally fun and nice." Consumers experience pleasure directly when they purchase or consume a brand and also indirectly by coming in contact with various brand communications (Brakus et al. 2009). Accordingly, previous research implies that all three brand uniqueness dimensions exert impacts on brand pleasure, which in turn is strongly linked to brand love (Batra et al. 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Huber et al. 2015; Kim et al. 2008). In their qualitative study, Langner et al. (2015, p. 627) note that "many participants reported that they loved a brand because its usage evoked an extraordinarily good feeling." Similarly, Mugge et al. (2008) provide evidence that pleasure mediates the impact of superior product characteristics on product attachment. We expect that these findings about the mediating role of pleasure transfer to a brand love context too, so

H7 The more consumers perceive (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness, the more they experience pleasure with the brand.
H8 The more consumers experience pleasure with a brand, the more they love the brand.
H9 Brand pleasure mediates the effect of consumers' perceived (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness on brand love.

Brand fit with inner self

Consumers often draw on the symbolic meaning of brands to form their self-identities, which helps them integrate into their social environments while also distinguishing themselves from others (Escalas and Bettman 2009). Such consumer–brand identification encompasses the "consumer's perceived state of oneness with a brand" (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012, p. 407). In the self-identification process, brand uniqueness is pivotal, in that it can fulfill consumers' need for uniqueness, defined as "an individual's pursuit of differentness relative to others that is achieved through the acquisition, utilization, and disposition of consumer goods for the purpose of developing and enhancing one's personal and social identity" (Tepper Tian et al. 2001, p. 52). Consumers prefer brands with unique properties that allow them to express their self-identities. Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012) provide empirical evidence that brand uniqueness has a significant effect on brand identification.

Brand love literature also stresses the important role of brand identification in the formation of brand love (Batra et al. 2012). Many empirical studies show that brand identification precedes brand love (Albert and Merunka 2013; Alnawas and Altarifi 2016; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010; Breazale and Ponder 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Hwang and Kandampully 2012; Kim et al. 2008; Loureiro et al. 2012; Ortiz and Harrison 2011; Tsai 2011). Among the origins of brand identification, it appears that personal brand

fit is a key determinant of identifying with a brand. Therefore, consumers report that they fall in love with brands that express who they are (inner self) and who they want to be (desired self) (Batra et al. 2012; Breazale and Ponder 2012). Reimann et al. (2012) also find that the integration of the brand with the self is significantly stronger in established brand love relationships than in recently formed ones. In neutral brand relationships—unlike brand love relationships—the levels of brand–consumer fit are consistently lower too. It appears that consumers first perceive initial similarities between their inner selves and a brand. Then over time, these perceptions of similarity strengthen, and brand integration progresses. Because the integration process has gone further in established brand love relationships, and the *fit of the brand with the inner self* is more prominent (cf. Breazale and Ponder 2012), we focus on this type of fit. All three proposed brand uniqueness features should strengthen fit with the inner self, which in turn may mediate the effects of brand uniqueness on brand love. Accordingly:

H10 The more consumers perceive (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative brand uniqueness, the more they perceive a fit of the brand with their inner self.

H11 The more consumers perceive a fit of the brand with their inner self, the more they love the brand.

H12 Consumers' perception of the fit of the brand with their inner self mediates the effect of perceived (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative brand uniqueness on brand love.

Personal experiences

People can experience love for brands just because they connect the brand with meaningful moments or significant people from their personal lives (Albert et al. 2008; Breazale and Ponder 2012; Ortiz and Harrison 2011). In a study that asked consumers to describe critical incidents in their brand love formation process, Langner et al. (2016) reveal that in addition to product experiences, participants cite emotion-charged experiences related to their loved brands. Yet these *personal experiences* were mostly separate from direct brand experiences. For example, more than half of the participants recalled specific childhood memories in which the brand played an important role. Brand-related events seem to occur at young ages in family environments and initialize brand socialization, which fosters brand familiarity and facilitates the development of close brand relationships. If brands are linked to specific people who have essential roles in consumers' lives, personal appreciation for these people transfers to the brands. For nostalgic consumers who long for things, persons, or situations from the past (Ortiz and Harrison 2011), brands also provide a means to maintain a sense of the personal past and revive valuable memories. Mugge et al. (2008) provide quantitative evidence of the positive effect of personal product memories on product attachment. Although only one quantitative study in the context of hotel branding (Manthiou et al. 2018) to date has confirmed this impact of personal memories on brand love, the results from qualitative studies generally support such a relation (Langner et al. 2016). Therefore, we predict:

H13 The more consumers relate personal experiences to a brand, the more they love the brand.

Consequences of brand love

To provide a comprehensive picture of brand love, we include brand loyalty, WOM intentions, willingness to pay a price premium, and willingness to forgive mistakes by the brand as consequences in our conceptual model (Fig. 1). Recent brand love research confirms generally positive effects of brand love on these outcomes. Moreover, the proximal antecedents of brand love (brand satisfaction, brand pleasure, and brand fit with inner self) may have positive, direct effects on these brand love consequences—in addition to the partially mediated effects by brand love. Therefore, we allow for both direct and indirect effects in our framework. However, for personal brand experiences, we anticipate that the effects on the consequences are fully mediated by brand love. We assume that meaningful experiences do not per se affect loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, WOM intentions, or willingness to forgive mistakes, but they may exert impacts if they lead to brand love.

Brand loyalty is "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, *despite* situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver 1999, p. 34). For brand managers, loyalty is an important behavioral outcome, because a loyal customer base can function as strong protection against competition and secure greater sales and revenues (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001). Research shows that brand love enhances brand loyalty (Albert et al. 2009; Bairrada et al. 2019; Batra et al. 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Tsai 2013). Moreover, satisfaction (Homburg et al. 2005), pleasure (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001), and identification (Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012) generally have positive effects on brand loyalty.

Willingness to pay a price premium indicates the additional amount of money consumers would agree to pay for a product associated with a particular brand, rather than for a product without that brand link, when both brands offer comparable performance (Netemeyer et al. 2004). Such

willingness is frequently reported as a result of brand love (Albert and Merunka 2013; Heinrich et al. 2012; Kang 2018; Keh et al. 2007). Empirical findings indicate direct effects of satisfaction (Homburg et al. 2005), pleasure (Wakefield and Inman 2003), and identification (Homburg et al. 2009) on willingness to pay a price premium.

As another consequence of brand love, *WOM intentions* refer to "informal, person-to-person communication between a perceived non-commercial communicator and a receiver regarding a brand, product, an organization or a service" (Harrison-Walker 2001, p. 63). Positive WOM can facilitate brand success, as an influential communication channel (Keller 2007). It also is a significant consequence of brand love (Albert and Merunka 2013; Batra et al. 2012; Bairrada et al. 2019; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Rossiter (2012) finds that positive WOM happens approximately twice as often among consumers who love a brand than among those who merely like it. Again, satisfaction (Heitmann et al. 2007), pleasure (Ladhari 2007), and brand fit with inner self (Kuenzel and Halliday 2008) should have direct impacts on WOM intentions.

Like any actor, brands might make mistakes (Rusbult et al. 1991). Consumers might terminate brand relationships in response to brand misbehaviors, such as a product failures or ethical problems (Perrin-Martinenq 2004; Pullig et al. 2006), but they also might be willing to forgive some mistakes and to resist to negative information (Fournier 1998; Heinrich et al. 2012; Wang et al. 2019b). Consumers' *willingness to forgive mistakes* refers to a "willingness to give up retaliation, alienation, and other destructive behavior, and respond in constructive ways after an organizational violation of trust" (Xie and Peng 2009, p. 578). Consumers exhibit less sensitivity to brands' mistakes and accept mistakes more easily when they have an emotionally intensive bond with the brand (Donovan et al. 2012; Fedorikhin et al. 2008).

Thus, we anticipate[2]:

H14 The more consumers love a brand, the more positive consequences toward the brand [(a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) WOM intentions, (d) willingness to forgive mistakes] they show.

H15 The more consumers (a) are satisfied with a brand, (b) experience pleasure with a brand, and (c) perceive a fit of the brand with their inner self, the more positive consequences [(a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) WOM intentions, (d) willingness to forgive mistakes] toward the brand they show.

H16 Brand love partially mediates the effects of (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand pleasure, and (c) brand fit with inner self, and it fully mediates the effects of (d) personal experiences, on the consequences of brand love [(a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) WOM intentions, (d) willingness to forgive mistakes].

Qualitative Study

The purpose of our qualitative study was to determine whether the identified antecedents and consequences of brand love and the hypothesized causal relationships are comprehensive and in line with real-world consumer feelings and experiences.

Sample and procedure

In total, 14 consumers (50% women), 26 to 57 years of age ($M = 39$ years), took part in semi-structured, face-to-face interviews (30–90 min in length), conducted in German. First, we provided participants with a short introduction to the concept of brand love. Second, we asked them to name and rank brands they love, according to the perceived strength of their love. Third, in the remainder of each interview, we focused on the brands the participants loved most. The interviews included questions about their general relationships with brands, origins of brand love relationships, reasons they love brands, explorations of brand and product characteristics that lead to brand love, significant experiences with brands, roles others play in brand love relationships, behavioral outcomes of brand love relationships, and explorations of what would stop consumers from buying their most loved brands. Fourth, we analyzed participants' understanding of the brand love concept—that is, what brand love means to them. All of their responses and statements were provided in German; the author team translated them for use in this article.

Results

Causal paths

We find qualitative evidence for the integrity of the causal paths of our conceptual model, across different participants and for different product categories. To present these findings, we use the pertinent example of one participant, Moritz (male, 27), who loves the notebook brand Sony Vaio due to

[2] When we report the results related to hypotheses H15 and H16, we present the letters designating each antecedent first, followed by the letter designating each outcome, such that for example, H15aa reflects the prediction regarding the effect of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty.

its functional and sensory brand uniqueness (distal antecedents of brand love):

> Beautiful functionality—the [Sony Vaio] had beautiful, conspicuous, smart keys at the keyboard [and] was the first notebook of its generation that had a Blue-Ray Player.

These brand-endogenous antecedents of brand love affect pleasure, as a proximal brand love antecedent ("great pleasure that makes simply fun, happy"), which then elicits brand love through both affection ("a certain warmness") and separation distress:

> It broke by my own fault, and the moment I heard the terrible noises coming from it, I already missed it and felt very sad—not so much about the economic aspect but about losing a highly appreciated utility item, and I was instantly thinking about buying a new one.

Finally, this brand love positively affects Moritz's behavioral outcomes, such as his willingness to pay a price premium:

> Everyone knows that [the Sony Vaio] is expensive. You pay a certain amount for the brand and the image, although, you know, it could be two-thirds lower in price if there were a different label on it..... Let's put it like this, I could have saved 600 Euro and bought another good product which in the end would have the same technical capabilities as the Sony Vaio but would not be so fancy, would not stand for the same thing.

Other participants described similar patterns, though the importance of particular paths varied, so for example, some participants stressed the importance of personal experiences, brand fit with inner self, or their brand satisfaction.

Completeness of variables

The respondents to this study frequently mentioned all the different variables we identified in our literature review. Brand satisfaction and personal experiences represent two additional variables that have been studied occasionally before but that we also found in our qualitative study to be of substantial relevance for the concept of brand love. Therefore, we include them in our conceptual model. Table 2 provides some typical statements, reflecting the importance of the different constructs and their causal relations.

In particular, when talking about the loved brand, all respondents highlighted its *uniqueness*. In addition to high quality standards, superior functionality was an important discriminator of competing brands. Many participants emphasized the sensual properties of a loved brand and gave particular weight to distinct visual design.

However, with regard to communicative uniqueness, we observe some difference of opinions. That is, the majority of participants did not indicate that brand advertising communications were relevant to their brand love. However, some participants' statements indicated that loved brands can evoke clear, positive, unique associations, suggesting that communication is important to the development of personal feelings that induce brand love. In addition, five participants cited brand communication or highlighted the communicative uniqueness of their most loved brands. Because communicative uniqueness seems directly relevant to some consumers, we chose to retain this construct in our model and test it further with our subsequent quantitative analysis.

When describing *brand love*, the respondents mentioned highly emotional relations with their loved brand and even referred to it as an indispensable part of their life. Across the aggregated responses, we find that most respondents experience strong affection toward and separation distress with regard to their loved brand.

In reply to a question about why consumers might stop loving a brand, respondents mentioned both a failure in terms of fulfilling their expectations and disappointment. These comments imply that brand love is based on an exchange principle, whereby giving and taking are expected. In this sense, *brand satisfaction* is an important antecedent of brand love. We also identify frequent mentions of how the loved brand elicits feelings of *brand pleasure*, including joy, surprise, or happiness. Most respondents emphasize the importance of fit between the loved brand and their own identity, or else they describe the possibility of transferring desirable brand traits to their perception of themselves. Consumers use these loved brands to express themselves in their social environment. These findings from the qualitative study provide initial evidence that *brand fit with inner self* is an important driver of brand love. Finally, the participants often mentioned their *personal experiences* with the loved brand, including childhood or adolescent memories, travel, leisure activities, and gift situations, as well as experiences shared with family members or friends.

Turning to the consequences of brand love, respondents reported strong behavioral consequences as outcomes of their brand love, including expressions of brand loyalty and manifestations of their willingness to pay a price premium, talk positively about the brand, and forgive it for mistakes.

Quantitative study

With a second study, we test our proposed hypotheses regarding the antecedents and consequences of brand love quantitatively.

Methodology

Sample

We surveyed 222 business students at a large university. Student samples are common in brand love research, for two reasons (Bagozzi et al. 2017; Gumparthi and Patra 2019; Sajtos et al. 2020). First, students are convenient to acquire and willing to participate simply in exchange for course credits. Second, as is true of interpersonal relationships, the quality of student–brand relationships should not differ from that of relations that other consumers develop with brands. Research in brand management also affirms that insights gained from student samples frequently transfer to other demographic groups (Völckner and Sattler 2006, 2007). After removing 23 questionnaires (due to non-native speakers, incomplete questionnaires, and one outlier) from the data set, our final sample comprises 199 participants, 108 of whom (54.3%) are women. The respondents have a mean age of 25 years ($M = 24.94$, SD = 3.34). We randomly assigned them to two conditions (brand love $n = 132$; brand liking $n = 67$), then merged the two groups into one data set to ensure sufficient variance in the responses.

Data collection

The questionnaire began with a short introduction, describing the purpose of the survey and the idea of brand love. After participants answered some demographic questions, we asked them to write down the brands they loved and to select the single brand they loved most. We gave participants in the brand liking group an additional instruction, namely, to list the brands they merely liked (and did not love) and to choose the brand they liked most from this set. We then asked participants in this latter group to ignore the brands they initially identified as loved brands for the remainder of the survey and evaluate only their most liked brand. We designed this procedure to ensure that the liked brands clearly contrasted with the loved brands selected during the first task. Next, participants in both groups answered questions related to key variables, in reference to their selected loved or liked brands, in the following sequence: hypothesized antecedents, hypothesized key construct of brand love, and hypothesized consequences. To avoid common method bias, we rotated three-item groups (Podsakoff et al. 2003). Finally, at the end of the questionnaire, we gave participants an opportunity to leave comments about the survey.

Measures

With the exception of brand love, we used reflective indicators for all constructs in our model. Affection and separation distress constitute brand love, so they function as causal-formative indicators of this focal construct. We used existing scales from literature wherever possible and adapted the item wording, as necessary, to reflect our research context. To specify the object of investigation clearly, each item used the term "my brand." We measured all indicators on 7-point Likert scales (1 = "completely disagree," 7 = "completely agree").

To translate the English-language measurement items obtained from previous research into German (see Appendixes 1 and 2 for the scale items in English and the reliability and validity statistics), we followed all the necessary steps suggested by Hambleton (2005). First, the items were translated into German by the first author. Second, a research assistant translated these German items back into English. Third, all authors checked whether the back-translation matched the initial English items and resolved any differences through discussion. Fourth, the translated and refined questionnaire was pretested with nine students, who evaluated the comprehensibility of the items. If necessary, we adjusted the item formulations. The indicators of the three brand uniqueness variables (functional, sensory, communicative) were identical in their wording except for the particular uniqueness dimension captured by the item; we derived them from general uniqueness scales used in prior research (Albert et al. 2009; Netemeyer et al. 2004; Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012) and assessed them with three items each. Because participants were free to select any brand they chose, there was great diversity in product categories. The uniqueness items (functional, sensory, communicative) logically should not apply equally to all these product categories. Therefore, in addition to using a 7-point Likert scale, we allowed participants to check a box marked "This statement does not apply to my brand." We adapted three items from prior literature to measure brand satisfaction (Brakus et al. 2009; Kuenzel and Halliday 2008; Oliver 1980). For brand pleasure, we considered five items, but we ultimately only used three items in the analysis, in line with our conceptual reasoning and previous operationalizations (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Mugge et al. 2006). In line with prior research, we also employed three items to measure brand fit with the inner self (Algesheimer et al. 2005; Batra et al. 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Participants reported their personal experiences in connection with the brand on four items, one of which was negatively phrased (reverse polarity), which helps encourage participants' control and cognitive processing of the questionnaire items (it is not included in further analyses) (Podsakoff et al. 2003). We adapted three items, related to personal experience, from Albert et al. (2009) and Mugge et al. (2006). The measurement of brand love comprised the two causal-formative indicators of affection and separation distress, each of which we assessed with a single item, using wording from Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) and Rossiter (2012). We took

Table 3 Intercorrelation matrix and psychometric statistics for latent constructs

Constructs	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1. Functional brand uniqueness	0.88	0.72	–												
2. Sensory brand uniqueness	0.91	0.78	0.41	–											
3. Communicative brand uniqueness	0.96	0.89	0.37	0.46	–										
4. Brand satisfaction	0.79	0.56	0.45	0.33	0.23	–									
5. Brand pleasure	0.82	0.61	0.35	0.43	0.37	0.51	–								
6. Brand fit to inner self	0.90	0.74	0.24	0.18	0.24	0.10	0.27	–							
7. Personal experiences	0.87	0.69	0.09	0.25	0.23	0.08	0.13	0.06	–						
8. Brand love overall	NA	NA	0.27	0.28	0.22	0.30	0.31	0.25	0.23	–					
9. Brand love 1: Affection	NA	NA	0.28	0.34	0.30	0.29	0.30	0.35	0.28	0.66	–				
10. Brand love 2: Separation distress	NA	NA	0.33	0.32	0.20	0.40	0.42	0.24	0.24	0.66	0.54	–			
11. Brand loyalty	0.83	0.61	0.36	0.31	0.23	0.61	0.40	0.19	0.18	0.77	0.54	0.59	–		
12. Willingness to pay a price premium	0.76	0.62	0.31	0.29	0.23	0.50	0.42	0.25	0.16	0.65	0.47	0.51	0.77	–	
13. WOM intentions	0.90	0.76	0.34	0.34	0.26	0.56	0.56	0.22	0.15	0.59	0.45	0.51	0.55	0.52	–
14. Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.93	0.86	0.06	0.08	0.07	−0.03	0.03	0.17	0.11	0.51	0.33	0.29	0.40	0.27	0.17

CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted, NA = not applicable

three items to measure brand loyalty from existing scales: two items from Albert et al. (2009) and one item, already available in German, from Langner et al. (2009). We adopted an existing operationalization of two items to assess participants' willingness to pay a price premium (Netemeyer et al. 2004); we measured WOM intentions with three items from Price and Arnould (1999). To measure willingness to forgive the brand, we adopted four items from previous studies (Aaker et al. 2004; Heinrich et al. 2012). However, two items suggested by Aaker et al. (2004) focus on acceptance of weaknesses, so we ultimately did not include them in the analysis and instead used the two remaining items to measure willingness to forgive the brand.

Results

The results come from the complete data set, pooled across the two (brand love and brand liking) groups. Table 8 provides an overview of all tested hypotheses and the results concerning their acceptance and rejection.

Reliability and validity analysis

All measurement models were checked for reliability and validity (Table 3). In a first step, we computed Cronbach's alpha values for all reflective scales. They varied from 0.76 to 0.96, above the minimum reliability level of 0.70 (Nunnally 1978). In addition, the corrected item-to-total correlations ranged from 0.56 to 0.93, above the suggested threshold of 0.50 (Netemeyer et al. 2003). An exploratory factor analysis established unidimensionality for the indicators of each construct, with explained variances of 58.8–89.0% for the reflectively measured constructs. Subsequently, we subjected the items to a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using Mplus software *(Muthén and Muthén 1998–2013)*. The CFA revealed a good overall fit. In addition, all factor loadings were highly significant ($p < 0.001$) and indicated a strong relationship between the items and their respective constructs (0.65–0.96). Indicator reliabilities (0.43–0.93) and composite reliabilities (0.76–0.96) provided satisfactory values, exceeding the minimum levels of 0.40 and 0.60, respectively (Bagozzi and Baumgartner 1994; Bagozzi and Yi 1988). Similarly, the average variances extracted (AVE) (0.56–0.89) exceeded the recommended threshold value of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker 1981). Overall, the CFA results established convergent validity for all reflective scales. To assess discriminant validity, we applied the Fornell–Larcker criterion: For each pair of constructs, the squared correlation (see Table 3) was below the AVE for the constructs involved, thus demonstrating discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker 1981). In conclusion, the reliability and validity analyses showed good psychometric properties for all measurement scales (for details, see "Appendix 2").

Model identification and fit

For our full structural equation model, we identified all reflective measurement models according to the three-indicator or two-indicator rule (Bollen 1989). We established the identification of the formative measurement model for brand love in two ways. First, we let brand love influence four reflectively measured behavioral outcome variables, which meets the 2+ emitted paths rule (Bollen and Davis 2009). Second, to establish a scale for the latent brand love variable, we specified a nonlinear constraint on the corresponding disturbance term, thereby standardizing brand love's variance to

unity (Edwards 2001). The proposed structural relationships between the constructs were recursive, so our entire model was identified. We produced maximum likelihood estimates for the parameters of the full structural model using Mplus software. We applied a bootstrap approach (5,000 bootstrap samples) to provide the standard errors and confidence intervals for all direct, indirect, and total effects and to take the non-normality of the data into account. The 90% confidence intervals (CI) corresponded to a one-tailed test at a 5% significance level. The overall fit statistics indicated that our model fit the data well: $\chi^2(438) = 660.26$, standardized root-mean-square residual = 0.06, comparative fit index = 0.95, Tucker–Lewis index = 0.94, and root-mean-square error of approximation = 0.05 (lower and upper bounds of the 90% CI were 0.042 and 0.058, respectively, and the *p*-value for the test of close fit was 0.45). Table 4 provides the standardized parameter estimates for the hypothesized direct effects with one-tailed *p*-values, along with the respective CI. Figure 2 depicts the estimated model with the standardized direct effects and corresponding significance levels.

Effects of brand love indicators on brand love overall

We find positive, highly significant effects of the causal-formative indicators, affection (H1, $\gamma = 0.43$; $p < 0.01$) and separation distress (H2, $\gamma = 0.44$; $p < 0.001$), on brand love. The two effects exhibit a balanced influence on brand love, such that they are both substantial (Chin 1998). Together, the causal-formative indicators explain approximately 57% of the variance in the latent brand love variable.

Direct effects of distal antecedents on proximal antecedents of brand love

Starting on the left side of our holistic model in Fig. 2, we first report the direct effects for the uniqueness variables, as more distal antecedents of brand love on the proximal antecedents of brand love. Functional brand uniqueness predicts brand satisfaction (H4a, $\gamma = 0.37$, $p < 0.001$), as does sensory uniqueness (H4b, $\gamma = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$). In contrast, we find no effect of communicative brand uniqueness on satisfaction (H4c, $\gamma = 0.02$, $p = 0.416$). Brand pleasure is significantly influenced by all three brand uniqueness dimensions (H7a, functional: $\gamma = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$; H7b, sensory: $\gamma = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$; H7c, communicative: $\gamma = 0.19$, $p < 0.05$), with sensory uniqueness as the most salient predictor. Finally, we uncover significant effects of both functional (H10a, $\gamma = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) and communicative (H10c, $\gamma = 0.17$, $p < 0.05$) brand uniqueness on brand fit with inner self. Sensory brand uniqueness does not influence brand fit though (H10b, $\gamma = 0.03$, $p = 0.375$).

Direct effects of distal antecedents on brand love indicators

After controlling for the indirect effects on the brand love indicators, through the more proximal causes of brand love (except the exogenous variable of personal experiences), we find no significant *direct* impact on affection (A) or separation distress (SD) due to the distal antecedents functional ($H3a_A$, $\gamma = 0.04$, $p = 0.316$; $H3a_{SD}$, $\gamma = 0.12$, $p = 0.116$), sensory ($H3b_A$, $\gamma = 0.13$, $p = 0.091$; $H3b_{SD}$, $\gamma = 0.08$, $p = 0.196$), or communicative ($H3c_A$, $\gamma = 0.07$, $p = 0.204$; $H3c_{SD}$, $\gamma = -0.07$, $p = 0.187$) uniqueness. Thus, any significant effect of the uniqueness dimensions on brand love (or its behavioral consequences) appears completely mediated by the proximal antecedents, as we detail subsequently.

Direct effects of proximal antecedents on brand love indicators

Brand satisfaction has significant effects on both affection ($H5_A$, $\gamma = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) and separation distress ($H5_{SD}$, $\gamma = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). However, brand pleasure does not exhibit a significant impact on affection ($H8_A$, $\gamma = 0.03$, $p = 0.378$) or separation distress ($H8_{SD}$, $\gamma = 0.20$, $p = 0.068$). Whereas the effect of brand fit with inner self on separation distress is non-significant ($H11_{SD}$, $\gamma = 0.13$, $p = 0.063$), affection is strongly influenced by brand fit with inner self ($H11_A$, $\gamma = 0.27$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, the model indicates significant effects of personal experiences on both affection ($H13_A$, $\gamma = 0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and separation distress ($H13_{SD}$, $\gamma = 0.18$, $p < 0.01$).

Direct effects of brand love and proximal antecedents on behavioral consequences

In line with our hypotheses, brand love exerts strong, highly significant effects on all four behavioral outcome variables. The standardized effect is greatest for the impact on brand loyalty (H14a, $\gamma = 0.65$, $p < 0.001$), closely followed by the effects on willingness to forgive mistakes (H14d, $\gamma = 0.57$, $p < 0.001$), willingness to pay a price premium (H14b, $\gamma = 0.51$, $p < 0.001$), and positive WOM intentions (H14c, $\gamma = 0.42$ $p < 0.01$). After controlling for the proximal antecedents' indirect effects through the brand love indicators, we identify strong, significant, direct effects of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty (H15aa, $\gamma = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$), willingness to pay a price premium (H15ab, $\gamma = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), and WOM intentions (H15ac, $\gamma = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). However, brand satisfaction does not directly influence willingness to forgive mistakes (H15ad, $\gamma = -0.17$, $p = 0.065$). Brand pleasure relates directly to WOM intentions (H15bc, $\gamma = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) but not to brand loyalty (H15ba, $\gamma = -0.02$, $p = 0.399$), willingness to pay a price premium (H15bb, $\gamma = 0.09$, $p = 0.235$), or willingness to

Table 4 Direct structural parameter estimates and goodness-of-fit indicators of the holistic causal model of brand love

Direct effects	Bootstrap bias-corrected method (90% confidence interval)				
	Standardized estimates	SE	Lower	Upper	*p*-value (one-tailed)
H1: Affection ➔ Brand love overall	0.43	0.13	0.219	0.630	0.001
H2: Separation distress ➔ Brand love overall	0.44	0.12	0.244	0.627	0.000
$H3a_A$: Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.04	0.09	−0.107	0.195	0.316
$H3a_{SD}$: Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.12	0.10	−0.044	0.278	0.116
$H3b_A$: Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.13	0.09	−0.029	0.278	0.091
$H3b_{SD}$: Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.08	0.09	−0.072	0.227	0.196
$H3c_A$: Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.07	0.08	−0.068	0.206	0.204
$H3c_{SD}$: Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	−0.07	0.08	−0.208	0.062	0.187
H4a: Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand satisfaction	0.37	0.09	0.224	0.525	0.000
H4b: Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand satisfaction	0.17	0.10	0.000	0.333	0.050
H4c: Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand satisfaction	0.02	0.08	−0.113	0.146	0.416
$H5_A$: Brand satisfaction ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.15	0.09	0.007	0.301	0.043
$H5_{SD}$: Brand satisfaction ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.21	0.13	0.004	0.418	0.047
H7a: Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand pleasure	0.16	0.10	0.003	0.319	0.047
H7b: Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand pleasure	0.28	0.10	0.118	0.441	0.002
H7c: Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand pleasure	0.19	0.09	0.032	0.340	0.023
$H8_A$: Brand pleasure ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.03	0.10	−0.136	0.200	0.378
$H8_{SD}$: Brand pleasure ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.20	0.14	−0.021	0.427	0.068
H10a: Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand fit to inner self	0.16	0.10	0.001	0.323	0.049
H10b: Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand fit to inner self	0.03	0.10	−0.129	0.191	0.375
H10c: Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand fit to inner self	0.17	0.09	0.021	0.316	0.030
$H11_A$: Brand fit to inner self ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.27	0.08	0.135	0.396	0.001
$H11_{SD}$: Brand fit to inner self ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.13	0.08	−0.009	0.263	0.063
$H13_A$: Personal experiences ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.20	0.07	0.081	0.315	0.003
$H13_{SD}$: Personal experiences ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.18	0.07	0.067	0.290	0.004
H14a: Brand love overall ➔ Brand loyalty	0.65	0.13	0.437	0.861	0.000
H14b: Brand love overall ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.51	0.11	0.336	0.693	0.000
H14c: Brand love overall ➔ WOM intentions	0.42	0.13	0.201	0.637	0.001
H14d: Brand love overall ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.57	0.12	0.380	0.766	0.000
H15aa: Brand satisfaction ➔ Brand loyalty	0.43	0.09	0.279	0.577	0.000
H15ba: Brand pleasure ➔ Brand loyalty	−0.02	0.09	−0.174	0.127	0.399
H15ca: Brand fit to inner self ➔ Brand loyalty	−0.00	0.07	−0.127	0.118	0.478
H15ab: Brand satisfaction ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.29	0.12	0.102	0.482	0.006
H15bb: Brand pleasure ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.09	0.13	−0.118	0.304	0.235
H15cb: Brand fit to inner self ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.06	0.08	−0.075	0.201	0.227
H15ac: Brand satisfaction ➔ WOM intentions	0.29	0.12	0.100	0.477	0.006
H15bc: Brand pleasure ➔ WOM intentions	0.28	0.12	0.091	0.471	0.008
H15cc: Brand fit to inner self ➔ WOM intentions	0.01	0.08	−0.122	0.141	0.453
H15ad: Brand satisfaction ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	−0.17	0.11	−0.351	0.014	0.065
H15bd: Brand pleasure ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	−0.08	0.12	−0.278	0.117	0.251
H15cd: Brand fit to inner self ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.07	0.10	−0.095	0.225	0.253
Fit indices					
χ^2(df)					660.26 (438)
SRMR					0.06
CFI/TLI					0.95/0.94
RMSEA					0.05

Standardized direct effects were estimated using Mplus 7; 5000 bootstrap samples have been used to provide bias-corrected confidence intervals; A = affection; SD = separation distress; SRMR = standardized root-mean-square residual; CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation

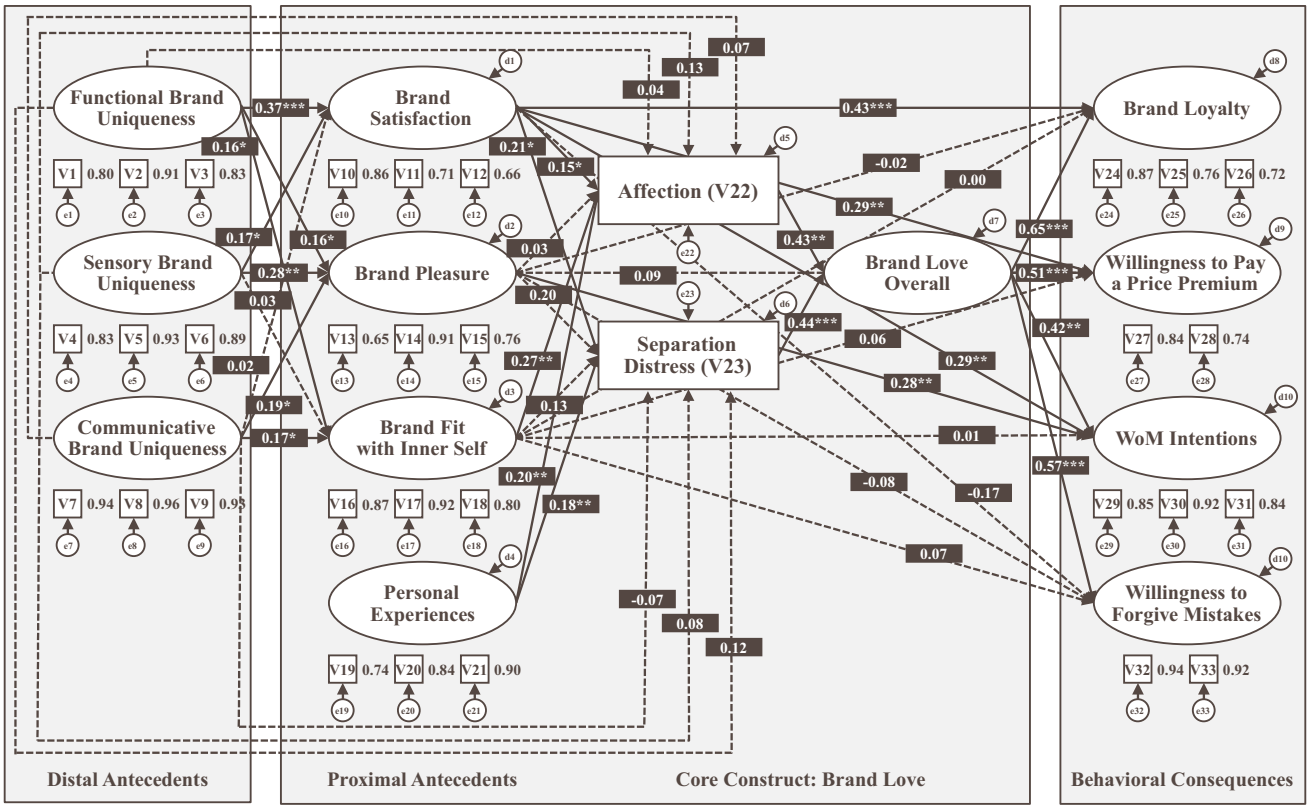

Fig. 2 Estimated holistic causal model of brand love

forgive mistakes (H15bd, $\gamma = -0.08$, $p = 0.251$). According to our analysis, brand fit with inner self has no direct impact on any of the behavioral outcome variables: brand loyalty (H15ca, $\gamma = -0.00$, $p = 0.478$), willingness to pay a price premium (H15cb, $\gamma = 0.06$, $p = 0.227$), WOM intentions (H15cc, $\gamma = 0.01$, $p = 0.453$), or willingness to forgive mistakes (H15cd, $\gamma = 0.07$, $p = 0.253$).

Total and indirect effects of distal and proximal antecedents on brand love overall

Table 5 contains the standardized parameter estimates and bias-corrected bootstrap CI for the total effects in our model, which consist of direct and indirect effects. We start with reporting the total effects of the distal antecedents of brand love on its causal-formative indicators and on brand love overall which essentially are the result of the mediation processes via the proximal antecedents. Functional brand uniqueness has significant total effects on both affection ($\gamma = 0.15$) and separation distress ($\gamma = 0.25$) and also on brand love overall ($\gamma = 0.17$). Similarly, the total effects of sensory brand uniqueness on affection ($\gamma = 0.17$), separation distress ($\gamma = 0.17$), and brand love overall ($\gamma = 0.15$) are significant. In contrast, the total effects of communicative brand uniqueness on affection ($\gamma = 0.12$) and separation distress ($\gamma = -0.01$) do not achieve significance. Thus, communicative brand uniqueness does not influence brand love overall ($\gamma = 0.05$). Most of the proximal antecedents of brand love—that is, brand satisfaction ($\gamma = 0.16$), brand fit with inner self ($\gamma = 0.17$), and personal experiences ($\gamma = 0.16$)—show significant total effects on brand love overall. As implied by its lack of effects on brand love's causal-formative indicators though, the total overall effect of brand pleasure on brand love fails to reach significance ($\gamma = 0.10$).

Noting that the functional and sensory uniqueness of the brand exert positive overall effects on brand love despite non-significant direct effects, we consider these mediation processes more closely (Table 6). For functional brand uniqueness, the significantly positive total indirect effect on brand love appears to be caused through a mediation by brand satisfaction ($\gamma = 0.06$) and, to a slightly lesser extent, by brand fit with inner self ($\gamma = 0.03$). Sensory brand uniqueness significantly influences brand love through a mediation by brand satisfaction ($\gamma = 0.03$). In conclusion, brand satisfaction and brand fit with inner self fully mediate the overall effects of functional brand uniqueness (via affection and separation distress) on brand love (H6a: supported, H12a:

Table 5 Total effects of proximal and distal antecedents of brand love

Total effects	Bootstrap bias-corrected method (90% confidence interval)		
	Standardized estimates	Lower	Upper
On brand love (all effects)			
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love overall	0.17	0.064	0.296
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.15	0.011	0.289
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.25	0.104	0.395
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love overall	0.15	0.038	0.257
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.17	0.018	0.317
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	0.17	0.034	0.313
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love overall	0.05	−0.048	0.145
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 1: Affection	0.12	−0.013	0.258
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love 2: Separation distress	−0.01	−0.139	0.119
Brand satisfaction Brand love overall	0.16	0.020	0.295
Brand pleasure ➔ Brand love overall	0.10	−0.060	0.264
Brand fit to inner self ➔ Brand love overall	0.17	0.059	0.277
Personal experiences ➔ Brand love overall	0.16	0.064	0.260
On behavioral consequences (all effects)			
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand loyalty	0.27	0.147	0.388
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.22	0.114	0.332
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ WOM intentions	0.23	0.119	0.335
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.03	−0.051	0.118
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand loyalty	0.16	0.042	0.278
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.15	0.051	0.254
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ WOM intentions	0.19	0.086	0.291
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.04	−0.041	0.112
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand loyalty	0.03	−0.064	0.130
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.06	−0.028	0.143
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ WOM intentions	0.08	−0.015	0.172
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.02	−0.049	0.090
Brand satisfaction ➔ Brand loyalty	0.53	0.362	0.698
Brand satisfaction ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.37	0.176	0.570
Brand satisfaction ➔ WOM intentions	0.35	0.162	0.546
Brand satisfaction ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	−0.08	−0.260	0.104
Brand pleasure ➔ Brand loyalty	0.04	−0.150	0.235
Brand pleasure ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.15	−0.081	0.372
Brand pleasure ➔ WOM intentions	0.32	0.113	0.535
Brand pleasure ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	−0.02	−0.228	0.184
Brand fit to inner self ➔ Brand loyalty	0.11	−0.033	0.242
Brand fit to inner self ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.15	0.005	0.294
Brand fit to inner self ➔ WOM intentions	0.08	−0.049	0.209
Brand fit to inner self ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.16	0.002	0.320
Personal experiences ➔ Brand loyalty	0.11	0.044	0.166
Personal experiences ➔ Willingness to pay a price premium	0.08	0.028	0.139
Personal experiences ➔ WOM intentions	0.07	0.021	0.114
Personal experiences ➔ Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.09	0.034	0.152

Standardized total effects were estimated using Mplus 7; 5,000 bootstrap samples have been used to provide bias-corrected confidence intervals. Total effect = direct effect + indirect effects

Table 6 Total, direct and indirect effects of distal antecedents on brand love overall

Effects	Bootstrap bias-corrected method (90% confidence interval)		
	Standardized estimates	Lower	Upper
Functional brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love overall			
Total effect	0.17	0.064	0.296
Direct effect	0.07	−0.044	0.193
Total indirect effect	0.10	0.046	0.195
Indirect effect via Brand satisfaction	0.06	0.017	0.147
Indirect effect via Brand pleasure	0.02	−0.003	0.078
Indirect effect via Brand Fit	0.03	0.004	0.074
Sensory brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love overall			
Total effect	0.15	0.038	0.257
Direct effect	0.09	−0.021	0.206
Total indirect effect	0.06	0.008	0.134
Indirect effect via Brand satisfaction	0.03	0.001	0.087
Indirect effect via Brand pleasure	0.03	−0.006	0.092
Indirect effect via Brand Fit	0.01	−0.021	0.039
Communicative brand uniqueness ➔ Brand love overall			
Total effect	0.05	−0.048	0.145
Direct effect	−0.00	−0.098	0.100
Total indirect effect	0.05	0.006	0.121
Indirect effect via Brand satisfaction	0.00	−0.019	0.028
Indirect effect via Brand pleasure	0.02	−0.003	0.080
Indirect effect via Brand Fit	0.03	0.005	0.075

Standardized total, direct and indirect effects were estimated using Mplus 7; 5000 bootstrap samples have been used to provide bias-corrected confidence intervals; Total effect = direct effect + total indirect effect; Direct effect = effect of distal antecedent on brand love overall via causal-formative indicators of brand love; (Total) indirect effect = Effect of distal antecedent on brand love overall via proximal antecedent(s) and causal-formative indicators of brand love

supported). The effect of sensory brand uniqueness on brand love is mediated by brand satisfaction (H6b: supported, H12b: rejected). Somewhat unexpectedly, brand pleasure does not mediate the effects of the three brand uniqueness variables (H9a: rejected, H9b: rejected, H9c: rejected). Finally, communicative brand uniqueness does not have a role in establishing brand love. The positive, mediated effect of communicative brand uniqueness on brand love overall via brand fit with inner self (H12c: supported) does not translate into a positive overall effect on brand love due to a negative direct effect.

Total and indirect effects of distal and proximal antecedents on behavioral consequences

In addition to the total effects on brand love overall, we estimated the total effects of the distal and proximal antecedents of brand love on its behavioral consequences (Table 5). For the proximal antecedents (except for personal experiences), we also report their indirect effects on the behavioral consequences through the mediation of brand love (Table 7). The effect of the brand stimulus (i.e., distal antecedents of brand love) on the behavioral consequences is fully mediated, first by the proximal antecedents and then by brand love, thus, we report the total effects of the distal antecedents.

The total effect (in this case, equal to the total indirect effect) of personal experiences on each behavioral outcome variable is significant (brand loyalty $\gamma = 0.11$; willingness to pay a price premium $\gamma = 0.08$; WOM intentions $\gamma = 0.07$; willingness to forgive mistakes $\gamma = 0.09$). This result corroborates the mediation hypotheses H16da–H16dd. Brand satisfaction exerts a significant total effect on brand loyalty ($\gamma = 0.53$), willingness to pay a price premium ($\gamma = 0.37$), and WOM intentions ($\gamma = 0.35$) but not on willingness to forgive mistakes ($\gamma = -0.08$). The effects of brand satisfaction indirectly conveyed through brand love are significant for all behavioral consequences (including willingness to forgive mistakes), in support of H16aa–H16ad. With regard to brand pleasure, we find a significant total effect only for the relationship with WOM intentions ($\gamma = 0.32$); the total effects on the other three behavioral outcome variables are not significant (brand loyalty $\gamma = 0.04$; willingness to pay a price premium $\gamma = 0.15$; willingness to forgive mistakes $\gamma = -0.02$). All indirect effects of brand pleasure on the behavioral consequences were not significant. Thus, we must reject H16ba–H16bd. Brand fit with inner self has a significant total effect on willingness to pay a price premium ($\gamma = 0.15$) and willingness to forgive mistakes ($\gamma = 0.16$) but not on brand loyalty ($\gamma = 0.11$) or WOM intentions ($\gamma = 0.08$). All the indirect effects of brand fit on behavioral consequences are significant, which supports the mediation hypotheses, H16ca–H16cd. We find significant total effects of both functional and sensory brand uniqueness on brand loyalty ($\gamma = 0.27$ and 0.16), willingness to pay a price premium ($\gamma = 0.22$ and 0.15), and WOM intentions ($\gamma = 0.23$ and 0.19). However, neither functional ($\gamma = 0.03$) nor sensory ($\gamma = 0.04$) brand uniqueness influences willingness to forgive mistakes. In line with the lack of effect on brand love, communicative brand uniqueness has no effect on the behavioral outcome variables (brand loyalty $\gamma = 0.03$; willingness to pay a price premium $\gamma = 0.06$; WOM intentions $\gamma = 0.08$; willingness to forgive mistakes $\gamma = 0.02$).

In conclusion, brand love overall (via affection and separation distress) mediates the effects of personal experiences on all four behavioral outcome variables (H16da–H16dd:

Table 7 Total, direct and indirect effects of proximal antecedents of brand love on behavioral consequences of brand love overall

Effects	Bootstrap bias-corrected method (90% confidence interval)		
	Standardized estimates	Lower	Upper
Brand satisfaction → Brand loyalty			
Total effect	0.53	0.362	0.698
Direct effect	0.43	0.279	0.577
Total indirect effect	0.10	0.023	0.181
Brand satisfaction → Willingness to pay a price premium			
Total effect	0.37	0.176	0.570
Direct effect	0.29	0.102	0.482
Total indirect effect	0.08	0.011	0.150
Brand satisfaction → WOM intentions			
Total effect	0.35	0.162	0.546
Direct effect	0.29	0.100	0.477
Total indirect effect	0.07	0.002	0.130
Brand satisfaction → Willingness to forgive mistakes			
Total effect	−0.08	−0.260	0.104
Direct effect	−0.17	−0.351	0.014
Total indirect effect	0.09	0.007	0.173
Brand pleasure → Brand loyalty			
Total effect	0.04	−0.150	0.235
Direct effect	−0.02	−0.174	0.127
Total indirect effect	0.07	−0.041	0.173
Brand pleasure → Willingness to pay a price premium			
Total effect	0.15	−0.081	0.372
Direct effect	0.09	−0.118	0.304
Total indirect effect	0.05	−0.029	0.134
Brand pleasure → WOM intentions			
Total effect	0.32	0.113	0.535
Direct effect	0.28	0.091	0.471
Total indirect effect	0.04	−0.024	0.109
Brand pleasure → Willingness to forgive mistakes			
Total effect	−0.02	−0.228	0.184
Direct effect	−0.08	−0.278	0.117
Total indirect effect	0.06	−0.034	0.151
Brand fit with inner self → Brand loyalty			
Total effect	0.11	−0.033	0.242
Direct effect	−0.00	−0.127	0.118
Total indirect effect	0.11	0.037	0.181
Brand fit with inner self → Willingness to pay a price premium			
Total effect	0.15	0.005	0.294
Direct effect	0.06	−0.075	0.201
Total indirect effect	0.09	0.025	0.148
Brand fit with inner self → WOM intentions			
Total effect	0.08	−0.049	0.209
Direct effect	0.01	−0.122	0.141
Total indirect effect	0.07	0.017	0.124
Brand fit with inner self → Willingness to forgive mistakes			
Total effect	0.16	0.002	0.320
Direct effect	0.07	−0.095	0.225
Total indirect effect	0.10	0.032	0.161

Standardized total, direct and indirect effects were estimated using Mplus 7; 5,000 bootstrap samples have been used to provide bias-corrected confidence intervals; Total effect = direct effect + total indirect effect; Direct effect = effect of proximal antecedent of brand love on behavioral outcome; Total indirect effect = Effect of proximal antecedent of brand love on behavioral outcome via brand love overall

supported). We also find that brand love overall partially mediates the significant effects of brand satisfaction on brand loyalty (H16aa: supported), willingness to pay a price premium (H16ab: supported), and WOM intentions (H16ac: supported). Whereas brand fit with inner self has no direct influence on the behavioral consequences, brand love fully mediates the effects of brand fit with inner self on willingness to pay a price premium (H16cb: supported) and willingness to forgive mistakes (H16cd: supported).

The complete mediation of the effects of brand fit with inner self and personal experiences on willingness to forgive mistakes, in combination with the lack of other direct effects, indicates that brand love plays a dominant role in establishing consumers' willingness to forgive mistakes.

In line with the findings for the direct effects, brand pleasure is not as strong a predictor as we expected; all hypothesized mediation effects are not significant (H16ba-H16bd: rejected). The only direct effect of brand pleasure that we observe, independent of the brand love construct, is its effect on WOM intentions.

Discussion

Our comprehensive research model has been largely corroborated by the empirical results; it offers a valid description of the origin, nature, and impact of brand love. We thus establish a brand love construct, with its two causal-formative indicators of affection and separation distress. Whereas some researchers (Ahuvia et al. 2013) regard separation distress as one of many indicators of brand love, our findings confirm the conclusions offered by Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010), Rossiter (2012), and Langner et al. (2015): Both affection and separation distress are significant, constitutive elements of brand love. Our model empirically confirms that the brand love construct is distinct from other, related constructs (e.g., satisfaction, pleasure, fit with inner self, loyalty). Relative to broader conceptualizations of brand love (e.g., Batra et al. 2012), our study affirms the advantages of

Table 8 Overview of tested hypotheses in the quantitative study

Hypothesis		Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent variable	Result
H1	The deeper the affection consumers feel for a brand, the more they love the brand	Affection	–	Brand love overall	Supported
H2	The more separation distress consumers anticipate to feel in the absence of a brand, the more they love the brand	Separation Distress	–	Brand love overall	Supported
$H3a_A$	The more consumers perceive the (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness of a brand, the more they love the brand	Functional brand uniqueness	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Rejected
$H3a_{SD}$		Functional brand uniqueness	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Rejected
$H3b_A$		Sensory brand uniqueness	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Rejected
$H3b_{SD}$		Sensory brand uniqueness	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Rejected
$H3c_A$		Communicative brand uniqueness	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Rejected
$H3c_{SD}$		Communicative brand uniqueness	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Rejected
H4a	The more consumers perceive (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative brand uniqueness, the more they are satisfied with the brand	Functional brand uniqueness	–	Brand satisfaction	Supported
H4b		Sensory brand uniqueness	–	Brand satisfaction	Supported
H4c		Communicative brand uniqueness	–	Brand satisfaction	Rejected
$H5_A$	The more consumers are satisfied with the brand, the more they love the brand	Brand satisfaction	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Supported
$H5_{SD}$		Brand satisfaction	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Supported
H6a	Brand satisfaction mediates the effect of perceived (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness on brand love	Functional brand uniqueness	Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	Supported
H6b		Sensory brand uniqueness	Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	Supported
H6c		Communicative brand uniqueness	Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	Rejected
H7a	The more consumers perceive (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness, the more they experience pleasure with the brand	Functional brand uniqueness	–	Brand pleasure	Supported
H7b		Sensory brand uniqueness	–	Brand pleasure	Supported
H7c		Communicative brand uniqueness	–	Brand pleasure	Supported
$H8_A$	The more consumers experience pleasure with a brand, the more they love the brand	Brand pleasure	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Rejected
$H8_{SD}$		Brand pleasure	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Rejected
H9a	Brand pleasure mediates the effect of consumers' perceived (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative uniqueness on brand love	Functional brand uniqueness	Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	Rejected
H9b		Sensory brand uniqueness	Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	Rejected
H9c		Communicative brand uniqueness	Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	Rejected
H10a	The more consumers perceive (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative brand uniqueness, the more they perceive a fit of the brand with their inner self	Functional brand uniqueness	–	Brand fit to inner self	Supported
H10b		Sensory brand uniqueness	–	Brand fit to inner self	Rejected
H10c		Communicative brand uniqueness	–	Brand fit to inner self	Supported
$H11_A$	The more consumers perceive a fit of the brand with their inner self, the more they love the brand	Brand fit to inner self	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Supported
$H11_{SD}$		Brand fit to inner self	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Rejected

Table 8 (continued)

Hypothesis		Independent variable	Mediator	Dependent variable	Result
H12a	Consumers' perception of the fit of the brand with their inner self mediates the effect of perceived (a) functional, (b) sensory, and (c) communicative brand uniqueness on brand love	Functional brand uniqueness	Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	Supported
H12b		Sensory brand uniqueness	Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	Rejected
H12c		Communicative brand uniqueness	Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	Supported
$H13_A$	The more consumers relate personal experiences to a brand, the more they love the brand	Personal experiences	–	Brand love 1: Affection	Supported
$H13_{SD}$		Personal experiences	–	Brand love 2: Separation distress	Supported
H14a	The more consumers love a brand, the more positive consequences toward the brand [(a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) WOM intentions, (d) willingness to forgive mistakes] they show	Brand love overall	–	Brand loyalty	Supported
H14b		Brand love overall	–	Willingness to pay a price premium	Supported
H14c		Brand love overall	–	WOM intentions	Supported
H14d		Brand love overall	–	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Supported
H15aa	The more consumers (a) are satisfied with a brand, (b) experience pleasure with a brand, and (c) perceive a fit of the brand with their inner self, the more positive consequences [(a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) WOM intentions, (d) willingness to forgive mistakes] toward the brand they show	Brand satisfaction	–	Brand loyalty	Supported
H15ba		Brand pleasure	–	Brand loyalty	Rejected
H15ca		Brand fit to inner self	–	Brand loyalty	Rejected
H15ab		Brand satisfaction	–	Willingness to pay a price premium	Supported
H15bb		Brand pleasure	–	Willingness to pay a price premium	Rejected
H15cb		Brand fit to inner self	–	Willingness to pay a price premium	Rejected
H15ac		Brand satisfaction	–	WOM intentions	Supported
H15bc		Brand pleasure	–	WOM intentions	Supported
H15cc		Brand fit to inner self	–	WOM intentions	Rejected
H15ad		Brand satisfaction	–	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Rejected
H15bd		Brand pleasure	–	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Rejected
H15cd		Brand fit to inner self	–	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Rejected
H16aa	Brand love partially mediates the effects of (a) brand satisfaction, (b) brand pleasure, and (c) brand fit with inner self, and it fully mediates the effects of (d) personal experiences, on the consequences of brand love [(a) brand loyalty, (b) willingness to pay a price premium, (c) WOM intentions, (d) willingness to forgive mistakes]	Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	Brand loyalty	Supported
H16ba		Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	Brand loyalty	Rejected
H16ca		Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	Brand loyalty	Supported
H16da		Personal experiences	Brand love overall	Brand loyalty	Supported
H16ab		Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	Willingness to pay a price premium	Supported
H16bb		Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	Willingness to pay a price premium	Rejected
H16cb		Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	Willingness to pay a price premium	Supported
H16db		Personal experiences	Brand love overall	Willingness to pay a price premium	Supported
H16ac		Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	WOM intentions	Supported
H16bc		Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	WOM intentions	Rejected
H16cc		Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	WOM intentions	Supported
H16dc		Personal experiences	Brand love overall	WOM intentions	Supported
H16ad		Brand satisfaction	Brand love overall	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Supported
H16bd		Brand pleasure	Brand love overall	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Rejected
H16cd		Brand fit to inner self	Brand love overall	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Supported
H16dd		Personal experiences	Brand love overall	Willingness to forgive mistakes	Supported

All causal relationships were expected to be positive; A = affection; SD = separation distress

a precise operationalization, using both affection and separation distress.

The question of whether brand love is a formative or reflective measure is not trivial.[3] To gain further insights into the nature of brand love, we analyzed the relationship between affection and separation distress in more detail. These indicators correlate at $r = 0.51$, leading to a Cronbach's alpha of 0.67, below the common threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally 1978). Furthermore, in an unreported scatter plot we find no linear relation between the two brand love indicators. Instead, medium to high values of affection tend to be accompanied by high values of separation distress, whereas substantial variation in separation distress is observed at low values of affection. Thus, both rational arguments and our empirical findings suggest the formative instead of reflective nature of brand love. We confirm brand love's predictive value too, with notable links to four behavioral outcomes: loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, WOM intentions, and willingness to forgive mistakes.

Among the antecedents, the results validate most of our hypotheses, but we are surprised that a few of them are not supported. Specifically, brand satisfaction, brand fit with inner self, and personal experiences with the brand are direct drivers of brand love, but we do not find that brand pleasure is a direct antecedent. Still, these findings are in line with existing research (Batra et al. 2012; Langner et al. 2015) that shows that in addition to affective reasons such as emotional personal experiences, cognitive drivers such as satisfaction are important to the formation of brand love. Also contrary to our expectations, functional, sensory, and communicative uniqueness are not direct antecedents of brand love. Rather, functional uniqueness exerts its influence on brand love via brand satisfaction and brand fit with inner self, while sensory uniqueness conveys its impact solely via brand satisfaction. This evidence of complete mediation offers a strong indication that we included the most important mediators of the impact of the brand stimulus on brand love (Zhao et al. 2010). Regarding communicative uniqueness, it does not affect brand love or any of the behavioral consequences we include in our model. The findings of our qualitative study signal the ambiguity of brand communication as a predictor of brand love; only a few respondents mentioned brand communication as a source of their brand love. In rejecting our hypothesis that communicative uniqueness is an antecedent of brand love, we derive several insights. First, our findings are in line with existing empirical research (Batra et al. 2012; Langner et al. 2016) that specifies functional and sensory brand uniqueness as essential drivers of brand love development. Second, brand communication may not be particularly important for brand love development, especially among consumers who love their brand due to their personal experiences. In such cases, brand associations likely develop primarily through meaningful personal experiences, independent of any company-issued communication. Third, even though the quantitative study did not find evidence for a causal relationship between communicative uniqueness and brand love, we believe that communication is nevertheless essential for creating brand awareness and image, which in turn are necessary for the establishment of any brand relationship.

We validate the brand love construct as the core mediator of the effects of the distal and proximal antecedents on behavioral outcomes. Whereas prior literature has narrowly examined this mediating role of brand love, we extend such findings to address the links of brand love with a broader array of antecedents and behavioral consequences. According to our results, brand love fully or at least partially mediates the significant effects of distal antecedents (functional brand uniqueness, sensory brand uniqueness) as well as proximal antecedents (brand satisfaction, brand fit to inner self, personal experiences) on behavioral outcomes of brand love (brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, WOM intentions, willingness to forgive mistakes).

We find that after controlling for the influence of brand love, none of the antecedent variables exerts a significant direct impact on willingness to forgive mistakes. Thus, only brand love is able to produce the important consequence of willingness to forgive mistakes. This result provides support for the old saying that (brand) love is blind. Brand-loving consumers develop a tolerance for their brands' mistakes (Fournier 1998).

Although recent research reveals a direct effect of brand identification on loyalty (Homburg et al. 2009; Stokburger-Sauer et al. 2012) and an indirect effect of identification through brand love on loyalty (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010; Hwang and Kandampully 2012; Tsai 2011), we only partially observe similar effects for brand fit, as defined for this study. Despite an indirect effect of brand fit on brand loyalty, the total effects indicate that brand loyalty is influenced only by brand love and brand satisfaction, not by brand fit with inner self. Nor do we find any direct effects of brand fit with inner self on the behavioral consequences of brand love. Brand love, however, conveys a positive effect of brand fit with inner self on WOM intentions and willingness to forgive mistakes. That is, in our model, the effects of brand fit with inner self on these two behavioral consequences are fully mediated by brand love.

In summary, brand satisfaction, brand fit with inner self, and personal experiences are direct antecedents, and functional and sensory uniqueness are indirect antecedents, of the formation of brand love. In this context, brand satisfaction and brand fit with inner self are the key mediators in the

[3] We acknowledge an anonymous reviewer for drawing this point to our attention.

causal chain from these direct and indirect antecedents to brand love. We confirm the strong mediating effect of brand love on all behavioral consequences. Even if communicative uniqueness and brand pleasure are not determinants of brand love, they are significant in relation to other constructs (e.g., effect of communicative uniqueness on brand fit with inner self; impact of brand pleasure on WOM intentions).

Conclusion, limitations, and implications

The purpose of this article has been to develop a holistic, causal model of brand love. Accordingly, our research contributes to a better understanding of the causal chain of brand love, from its formation to its behavioral outcomes. As other studies have before, our analysis confirms the strong impact that brand love exerts on behavioral consequences such as brand loyalty and willingness to pay a price premium. We find that functional and sensory brand uniqueness are indirect antecedents of brand love, whereas brand satisfaction, brand fit with the inner self, and personal experiences are direct antecedents. Contrary to our expectations, communicative uniqueness and brand pleasure do not influence brand love.

In terms of the limitations of this research, we acknowledge that the participants in our quantitative study are all students, though in the qualitative study, the respondents represent different age groups. Results obtained with student samples often transfer to other demographic groups (Lynch 1999; Völckner and Sattler 2006, 2007), but a replication study with a population-representative sample could provide a better assessment of the potential influence of socio-demographic features. Furthermore, complexity and manageability considerations prevented us from integrating all possible antecedents and consequences into the proposed model. Continued research should investigate other potentially relevant variables (e.g., anthropomorphism, escapism, perceived corporate social responsibility, brand prestige), as well as examine the unexpected findings of our study, such as the lack of effects of brand pleasure or communicative brand uniqueness on brand love. A longitudinal research approach might help validate our model, in relation to the origin and development of brand love over time. The role of causality in structural equation modeling also can be controversial. For example, as a result of brand love, perceived brand uniqueness might increase, in which case uniqueness might be a consequence of brand love. Continued experiments thus should analyze the causality between uniqueness and brand love in more detail, to identify potential boundary conditions for the reverse causality.

Practitioners can apply our results in several ways. Overall, they should consider brand love as an important goal especially for the management of consumer goods, given its strongly positive effects on desirable behavioral outcomes: Consumers are more willing to pay higher prices, forgive the brand's mistakes, talk positively about the brand, and exhibit loyalty when they love a brand. To establish brand love relationships, we recommend four key steps.

First, managers should ensure their brands possess unique functional and sensory attributes. They are the cornerstones of brand love.

Second, customers need to be satisfied with the brand. In line with prior research, we emphasize the significance of satisfaction for brand love, and to enhance brand satisfaction, we again recommend that managers focus on functional and sensory uniqueness. Apple products provide a good example of this strategy, such that the iPhone's functional features consistently ensure high user friendliness, and its appealing aesthetics offer high sensory uniqueness that differentiate it from competitors' offerings.

Third, moving beyond brand satisfaction, which is not sufficient to establish brand love alone (Langner et al. 2016), managers should encourage consumers to identify with the brand. Brand fit with the inner self can be influenced through functional and communicative brand uniqueness, as when the MINI brand sought to become a lifestyle brand for young, urban consumers through its strong functional qualities (e.g., size, convenience) and marketing communications (e.g., portraying exciting lifestyles, aesthetics).

Fourth, a challenge for brand managers is finding a way to get consumers to establish meaningful personal memories that involve the brand, initiated by emotional events such as childhood, family, leisure, or vacation experiences. In this case, we recommend that brand managers communicate how their brands can provide a basis for such events. Such efforts could range from more brand-endogenous experiences, such as experiential flagship stores or sponsorships, to brand-exogenous experiences, such as including brands in childhood experiences (e.g., Mercedes bobby car), likely shared with their families (e.g., Cheerios), or enjoyed during special occasions (e.g., Tiffany & Co.).

Ultimately, even if brand love cannot be forced, insights into the development and management of brand love relationships can be used as strategic tools and inform more effective professional brand management. We encourage managers to use our findings and leverage our framework to manage consumers' love for their brands more effectively.

Appendix 1: Adjustments in measurement items

Brand love model	Existing items from prior literature	Sources
Functional/sensory/communicative brand uniqueness		
1. The functional performances/sensory characteristics/communication of my brand are/is unique	This brand is unique Brand X is unique	Albert et al. (2009) Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012)
2. The functional performances/sensory characteristics/communication of my brand are/is something special	The brand is special	Albert et al. (2009)
3. In comparison to brands of the same product category, the functional performances/sensory characteristics/communication of my brand stand(s) out	(Brand name) really "stands out" from other brands of (product) Brand X stands out from its competitors	Netemeyer et al. (2004) Stokburger-Sauer et al. (2012)
Additional explanation per item: functional performances = quality, functionality; sensory characteristics = how the brand looks, tastes, smells, sounds or feels like; communication = advertising, brochures, website		
Brand satisfaction		
1. I am satisfied with my brand	I am satisfied with my car I am satisfied with the brand and its performance I am satisfied with my decision to get or not to get a flu shot	Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) Brakus et al. (2009) Oliver (1980)
2. I have always had good experiences with my brand	Owning this car has been a good experience	Kuenzel and Halliday (2008)
3. My brand is always the right choice	I am sure it was the right thing to buy this car My choice to get this brand has been a wise one My choice to get or not to get a flu shot was a wise one/I think that I did the right thing when I decided to get or not to get the flu shot	Kuenzel and Halliday (2008) Brakus et al. (2009) Oliver (1980)
Brand pleasure		
1. My brand gives me a good feeling	I feel good when I use this brand I feel good when I use my backpack	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) Mugge et al. (2006)
2. My brand gives me pleasure	This brand gives me pleasure It is a pleasure to use my backpack	Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) Mugge et al. (2006)
3. I have fun with my brand	I enjoy my backpack	Mugge et al. (2006)
Brand fit with inner self		
1. My brand says a lot about who I am	Says something about who you are This brand says a lot about the kind of person I am The brand/the product says a lot about who I am	Batra et al. (2012) Algesheimer et al. (2005) Langner et al. (2009)
2. My brand symbolizes the kind of person I am inside	This brand symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)
3. My brand fits to my personality	This brand reflects my personality	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006)
Personal experiences		
1. My brand reminds me of people or experiences that are important to me	This brand reminds me someone important to me My backpack reminds me of people or events that are important to me	Albert et al. (2009) Mugge, et al. (2006)
2. My brand reminds me of meaningful moments of my past (moments in childhood or adolescence, vacations, Christmas, first love, a particular meeting, etc.)	This brand reminds me memories, moments of my past (childhood, adolescence, a meeting, …)	Albert et al. (2009)
3. My brand evokes special memories of my personal life	I associate this brand with some important events of my life	Albert et al. (2009)
Brand love 1: Affection		
1. I feel strong affection, like love, for my brand	I would say I feel deep affection, like love, for this brand and I would be really upset if I couldn't have it Do you feel deep affection, like "love" for /BRAND/?	Rossiter et al. (2012) Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010)

Brand love model	Existing items from prior literature	Sources
Brand love 2: Separation distress		
1. I would be really sad if my brand didn't exist anymore	I would say I feel deep affection, like love, for this brand and I would be really upset, if I couldn't have it Would you miss / BRAND/ if it was no longer available?	Rossiter et al. (2012) Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010)
Brand loyalty		
1. I am very loyal to the brand	I am very loyal to the brand	Albert et al. (2009)
2. It would be difficult for me not to use my brand anymore	It would be generally difficult for me not to use this brand/ this product anymore. [translated from German]	Langner et al. (2009)
3. I do not plan to use another brand of the same product category	I do not intend to switch to another brand	Albert et al. (2009)
Willingness to pay a price premium		
1. I am willing to pay a higher price for my brand than for all other brands of the same product category	I am willing to pay a higher price for (brand name) brand of (product) than for other brands of (product)	Netemeyer et al. (2004)
2. The price of my brand would have to go up quite high before I would switch to another brand	The price of (brand name) would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another brand of (product)	Netemeyer et al. (2004)
WOM intentions		
1. I express myself positively on my brand towards other people	I say positive things about this hairstylist to other people	Price and Arnould (1999)
2. I would recommend my brand to other people	I would recommend this hairstylist to others	Price and Arnould (1999)
3. I would recommend my brand to someone who asks me for my advice	I would recommend this hairstylist to someone who seeks my advice	Price and Arnould (1999)
Willingness to forgive mistakes		
1. I would forgive my brand, even if it disappoints me once	I would forgive (…), even if it disappoints me once	Heinrich et al. (2012)
2. I would forgive my brand, even if it makes a mistake once	I would forgive (…), if the brand makes a mistake once	Heinrich et al. (2012)

Statements were formulated in German, and judgments were made on numerical 7-point scales with 1 = "completely disagree" and 7 = "completely agree." We used existing scales from literature wherever possible and adapted item wording when necessary. Items had to be adjusted due to its translation from English to German, to reflect the different research contexts of their sources, and to ensure similar wording across all items in first-person style

Appendix 2: Measures with reliability and validity statistics

	$C\alpha$	R^2	ITTC	IR
Functional brand uniqueness	0.88	72.5%		
1. The functional performances of my brand are unique			0.75	0.63
2. The functional performances of my brand are something special			0.83	0.82
3. In comparison to brands of the same product category, the functional performances of my brand stand out			0.75	0.69
Additional explanation per item: (functional performances = quality, functionality, etc.)				
Sensory brand uniqueness	0.92	78.6%		
1. The sensory characteristics of my brand are unique			0.79	0.69
2. The sensory characteristics of my brand are something special			0.86	0.86
3. In comparison to brands of the same product category, the sensory characteristics of my brand stand out			0.84	0.79
Additional explanation per item: (sensory characteristics = how the brand looks like, tastes, smells, sounds or feels like)				
Communicative brand uniqueness	0.96	89.0%		
1. The communication of my brand is unique			0.91	0.88
2. The communication of my brand is something special			0.93	0.93
3. In comparison to brands of the same product category, the communication of my brand stands out			0.91	0.87
Additional explanation per item: (communication = advertising, brochures, website, etc.)				
Brand satisfaction	0.77	58.8%		
1. I am satisfied with my brand			0.70	0.74

	Cα	R^2	ITTC	IR
2. I have always had good experiences with my brand			0.64	0.51
3. My brand is always the right choice			0.56	0.43
Brand pleasure	0.81	62.4%		
1. My brand gives me a good feeling			0.57	0.43
2. My brand gives me pleasure			0.77	0.83
3. I have fun with my brand			0.67	0.57
Brand fit with inner self	0.89	74.4%		
1. My brand says a lot about who I am			0.80	0.75
2. My brand symbolizes the kind of person I am inside			0.84	0.84
3. My brand fits to my personality			0.74	0.64
Personal experiences	0.86	67.9%		
1. My brand reminds me of people or experiences that are important to me			0.67	0.54
2. My brand reminds me of meaningful moments of my past (moments in childhood or adolescence, vacations, Christmas, first love, a particular meeting, etc.)			0.74	0.71
3. My brand evokes special memories of my personal life			0.79	0.80
Brand love 1: Affection	NA	NA		
1. I feel strong affection, like love, for my brand			NA	NA
Brand love 2: Separation distress	NA	NA		
1. I would be really sad if my brand didn't exist anymore			NA	NA
Brand loyalty	0.81	61.9%		
1. I am very loyal to the brand			0.76	0.76
2. It would be difficult for me not to use my brand anymore			0.61	0.57
3. I do not plan to use another brand of the same product category			0.62	0.51
Willingness to pay a price premium	0.76	61.2%		
1. I am willing to pay a higher price for my brand than for all other brands of the same product category			0.61	0.70
2. The price of my brand would have to go up quite high before I would switch to another brand			0.61	0.54
WOM intentions	0.90	75.8%		
1. I express myself positively on my brand towards other people			0.79	0.72
2. I would recommend my brand to other people			0.85	0.85
3. I would recommend my brand to someone who asks me for my advice			0.78	0.70
Willingness to forgive mistakes	0.93	86.0%		
1. I would forgive my brand, even if it disappoints me once			0.86	0.88
2. I would forgive my brand, even if it makes a mistake once			0.86	0.85

Statements were formulated in German, and judgments were made on numerical 7-point scales with 1 = "completely disagree" and 7 = "completely agree." For each construct, Cronbach's α values (Cα) and explained variance (R^2) based on exploratory factor analysis (EFA) are reported. For each item corrected item-to-total correlation (ITTC) and indicator reliability (IR) based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) are noted. NA = not applicable

Appendix 3: List of Brand Love Research Papers Reviewed for the Literature Analysis

Ahuvia, A. C., Bagozzi, R. P. and Batra, R. (2014) Psychometric vs. C-OAR-SE measures of brand love: A reply to Rossiter. Marketing Letters, 25(2): 235–243.

Algharabat, R. S. (2017) Linking social media marketing activities with brand love: the mediating role of self-expressive brands. Kybernetes, 46(10): 1801–1819.

Alnawas, I. and Altarifi, S. (2016) Exploring the role of brand identification and brand love in generating higher levels of brand loyalty. Journal of Vacation Marketing, 22(2): 111–128.

Aro, K., Suomi, K. and Saraniemi, S. (2018) Antecedents and consequences of destination brand love: A study from Finnish Lapland. Tourismus Management, 67: 71–81.

Baena, V. (2016) Online and mobile marketing strategies as drivers of brand love in sports teams: Findings from Real Madrid. International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship, 17(3): 202–218.

Bagozzi, R. P., Batra, R. and Ahuvia, A. (2017) Brand love: development and validation of a practical scale. Marketing Letters, 28, 1–14.

Bairrada, C. M., Coelho, F. and Arnaldo, C. (2018) Antecedents and outcomes of brand love: utilitarian and symbolic brand qualities. European Journal Market, 52: 656–682.

Bairrada, C. M., Coelho, A. and Lizanets, V. (2019) The impact of brand personality on consumer behavior: The role of brand love. Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal, 23: 30–47.

Barker, R., Peacock, J. and Fetscherin, M. (2015) The power of brand love. International Journal of Market Research, 57(5): 669–672.

Batra, R., Ahuvia, A. and Bagozzi, R. (2012) Brand love. Journal of Marketing, 76(2): 1–16.

Bigne, E., Andreu, L., Perez, C. and Ruiz, C. (2019) Brand love is all around: loyalty behavior: active and passive social media users. Current Issues in Tourism, 23(13): 1613–1630.

Carroll, B. and Ahuvia, A. (2006) Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. Marketing Letters, 17(2): 79–89.

Coelho, A., Bairrada, C. and Peres, F. (2019) Brand communities' relational outcomes, through brand love. Journal of Product and Brand Management, 28(2): 154–165.

Dalman, M. D., Buche, M. W. and Min, J. (2019) The Differential Influence of Identification on Ethical Judgement: The Role of Brand Love. Journal of Business Ethics, 158: 875–891.

Drennan, J., Bianchi, C., Cacho-Elizondo, S., Louriero, S., Guibert, N. and Proud, W. (2015) Examining the role of wine brand love on brand loyalty: a multi-country comparison. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 49: 47–55.

Du Preez, R. and Terblanche-Smit, M. (2012) Exploring brand love versus brand liking. International Journal of Psychology, 47: 173.

Hegner, S. M., Fenko, A. and Teravest, A. (2017) Using the theory of planned behavior to understand brand love. Journal of Product and Brand Management, 26(1): 26–41.

Hsu, C. L. and Chen, M. C. (2018) How gamification marketing activities motivate desirable consumer behaviors: Focusing on the role of brand love. Computers in Human Behavior, 88: 121–33.

Huang, C. C. (2017) The impacts of brand experiences on brand loyalty: mediators of brand love and trust. Management Decisions, 55 (5): 915–934.

Huang, T. L. (2019) Psychological mechanisms of brand love and information technology identity in virtual retail environments. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 47: 251–264.

Huber, F., Meyer, F. and David, A. S. (2015) Brand love in progress: the interdependence of brand love antecedents in consideration of relationship duration. Journal of Product and Brand Management, 24(6): 567–579.

Junaid, M., Hou, F., Hussain, K. and Kirmani, A. A. (2019) Brand Love: The Emotional Bridge between Experience and Engagement, Generation-M Perspective. Journal of Product and Brand Management, 28(2): 200–215.

Junaid, M., Hussain, K., Basit, A. and Hou, F. (2020) Nature of brand love: examining its variable effect on engagement and well-being. Journal of Brand Management, 27: 284–299.

Junaid, M., Hussain, K. and Hou, F. (2019a) One last scuffle before we cherish brand love forever. International Journal of Market Research, 61(6): 571–573.

Junaid, M., Hussain, K. and Hou, F. (2019b) Addressing the dichotomy of brand love. International Journal of Market Research, 61(6): 577–580.

Kang, J. (2018) Finding desirable post-consumption behaviors: An investigation of luxury value and romantic brand love relationships. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 30: 2984–3003.

Karjaluoto, H., Munnukka, J. and Kiuru, K. (2016) Brand love and positive word of mouth: The moderating effects of experience and price. Journal of Product and Brand Management, 25(6): 527–537.

Kaufmann, H. R., Loureiro, S. M. C. and Manarioti, A. (2016) Exploring behavioural branding, brand love and brand co-creation. Journal of Product and Brand Management, 25(6): 516–526.

Khandeparkar, K. and Motiani, M. (2018) Fake-love: brand love for counterfeits. Marketing Intelligence and Planning, 36(6): 661–677.

Kim, K. M., Nobi, B. and Kim, T. (2020) CSR and Brand Resonance: The Mediating Role of Brand Love and Involvement. Sustainability, 12(10), 4159: 1–12.

Kim, J. J. and Kim, I. (2018) Moral imagination, parasocial brand love, and customer citizenship behavior: Travelers' relationship with sponsoring airline brands in the United States. Sustainability, 10(12), 4391: 1–18.

Langner, T., Bruns, D., Fischer, A. and Rossiter, J. R. (2016) Falling in love with brands: A dynamic analysis of the trajectories of brand love. Marketing Letters, 27(1): 15–26.

Lee, K. H. and Hyun, S. S. (2016) The effects of perceived destination ability and destination brand love on tourists' loyalty to post-disaster tourism destinations: The case of Korean tourists to Japan. Journal of Travel and Tourism Marketing, 33(5), 613–627.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest All authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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