



A STUDY OF BRAND LOVE:

The Greatest Love Stories

BETWEEN CONSUMERS AND BRANDS

— MASTER THESIS —

ORKUN ETI AND LYSBET DE BOER

Supervisor:	Jon Bertilsson
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School of Economics and Management
MSc International Marketing and Brand Management

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Orkun Eti

Lysbet Doutzen de Boer

ABSTRACT

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KEYWORDS:	Brand Relationships, Relationship Marketing, Lovemarks, Brand Love, Emotional Branding.
THESIS PURPOSE:	The purpose of the study is to investigate how passionate consumers experience their brand relationship. With help of the photo elicitation technique we aim to evoke feelings, stories, and memories in order to provide a new perspective on the theory of brand love.
METHODOLOGY:	In-depth interviewing in combination with photo-elicitation.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:	Relationship Theory (Fournier, 1998), Brand Love (Albert et al. 2008, and Batra et al. 2012).
PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVE:	Lovemarks (Roberts, 2005)
CONCLUSION:	The interrogation study provided us with a richer understanding of consumers' passion for brands based on previous research in both practical and theoretical fields. Our empirical study revealed three new dimensions of brand love with a non-interpersonal character. The findings indicated that brand-related, as well as 'real' non-interpersonal relationship dimensions had greater relevance to brand love than person-related dimensions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	7
1.1 Background.....	7
1.2 Previous Studies	8
1.3 Problem Formulation and Research Aim	11
1.4 Relevance of the Study.....	12
2. PERCEPTIVENESS OF BRAND LOVE.....	13
2.1 The Development of Brand Love	13
2.2 Brand Love: Interpersonal or Non-Interpersonal	15
2.2.1 Brand Love, Emotion or Relationship?	16
3. THEORIES UNDERLYING THE CONCEPT OF LOVEMARKS	18
3.1 Lovemarks	18
3.2 Dimensions of Lovemarks.....	20
3.2.1 Mystery	20
3.2.1.1 Great Stories	22
3.2.1.2 Past, Present and Future.....	23
3.2.1.3 Taps into Dreams.....	24
3.2.1.4 Myths and Icons.....	25
3.2.1.5 Inspiration	26
3.2.2 Sensuality.....	27
3.2.3 Intimacy	28
4. TENTATIVE BRAND LOVE PROTOTYPE.....	30
4.1 The Construct of the Model.....	31
4.2 The Dimensions of Brand Love	32
4.2.1 Qualities.....	32
4.2.2 Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards	33
4.2.3 Brand-Personality Match.....	33
4.2.4 Frequent Thought and Use	34
4.2.5 Positive Affection	34
4.2.6 Duration of Relationship	35

4.2.7 Willingness to Invest	35
4.2.8 Outcomes of Brand Love.....	35
5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	37
5.1 Research Philosophy	37
5.2 Research Strategy	38
5.3 Research Method	39
5.4 Data Collection	39
5.4.1 Photo Elicitation Technique	40
5.4.2 Primary and Secondary Data Sources	41
5.5 Sampling Method and Participation Selection	41
5.5.1 Trustworthiness and Authenticity	43
5.6 Designing and Conducting the Interviews	44
5.7 Data Analysis.....	46
6. DATA ANALYSIS	47
6.1 Empirical Findings	47
6.1.1 Celine: “Family Tradition”	47
6.1.2 Kylie: “Secret Love Story”	54
6.1.3 Adele: “Guilty Pleasure”	60
6.1.4 Michael: “Big Love Index”	65
6.1.5 Jennifer: “Priceless Therapy”	71
6.1.6 Eric: “National Pride”	77
6.1.7 Bono: “Futuristic Love”	83
6.2 Empirical Model	89
6.3 Discussion.....	90
6.4 Summary.....	96
7. CONCLUSION	98
7.1 Implications	100
7.2 Limitations.....	102
REFERENCE LIST.....	103
APPENDICES.....	109

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Pyramid of Hierarchical Needs, Maslow (1954)	13
Figure 2. Taxonomy of Kind of Love, Sternberg (1986)	15
Figure 3. Love/Respect Axis, Roberts (2005)	19
Figure 4. The Importance of a Strong Brand Persona	20
Figure 5. The New World of Consumers, Roberts (2005)	21
Figure 6. Walt Disney and its Focus on Past, Present, and Future.....	24
Figure 7. From Functional to Emotional – An Example of Walt Disney	25
Figure 8. Correlation between Number of Senses and Brand Value, Lindstrom (2005)	28
Figure 9. Tentative Model	31
Figure 10. Photo Elicitation Process	41
Figure 11. Empirical Model	89
Figure 12. Unidirectional Pyramid of Love	96

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research paper is to deepen the understanding of consumer-brand interactions through investigating how passionate consumers experience their relationship with their loved brand. An exploratory study scrutinizing non-interpersonal dimensions, will contribute to currently existing research regarding non-interpersonal relationships. In the analysis, literature on consumer-brand relationships will be combined with the practical concept of Lovemarks (Roberts, 2005).

1.1 Background

The Feeling of Love in Consumer Behaviour

Throughout the years, one of the most challenging tasks marketers face has been to discover how to increase consumers' loyalty towards brands. Consumer Relationship Management has been a popular way of working, as it can provide companies with enhanced brand equity (Kim et al. 2008), and consumers with products and services that better fit their wants and needs.

“Although for decades, researchers have studied how consumers form ‘like and dislike’ attitudes towards brands”, the past few years have shown an increasing interest in consumer-brand love, not only among academics, but also among practitioners (Albert et al. 2008: 1062). According to Roberts, CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi and creator of the Lovemarks concept (2005), Consumer Relationship Management needs to be imbued with emotional power in order to create brand love. In academic research, brand love has adapted different theories concerning consumer relationships, resulting in various explanations of brand love. However, there is still little agreement on what brand love is. (Batra et al. 2012). In addition, Batra et al. (ibid) investigated the nature and consequences of brand love, clarifying its limitations by stating that there is a vague boundary between brand love as a unidirectional emotion and brand love as a two-way relationship when looking at existing research.

Interpersonal and Non-interpersonal Relationships

Fournier (1998) introduced a framework to research the affective aspects of consumer brand relationships, arguing for the validity of interpersonal elements in consumer-brand relationships. She demonstrates that brands can be ‘relationship partners’ for consumers, and comes up with a construct consisting of six brand relationship facets including brand love and passion. Next to Fournier's research (1998), other studies where brand love is considered as a form of interpersonal love (Sternberg, 1986; Shimp, Madden, 1988; Ahuvia, 1993; Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006; Bergkvist, Bech-Larsen, 2009; Reimann et al. 2011) do not provide a complete foundation of understanding how consumers experience their passion.

Although main literature regarding relationship theory in consumer research focuses on interpersonal love, Aggarwal (2004), Albert et al. (2008), and Batra et al. (2012) state that brand love is a different form of love than interpersonal love. Both Aggarwal (2004) and Batra et al. (2012: 1) state that: “it is important to note that consumer-brand relationships are not identical to interpersonal relationships”, because brands are unable to reciprocate by giving love back to the consumer. Moreover, the authors found that brand love was often described as less important than interpersonal love (Batra et al. 2012). Another difference concerns the involvement of monetary exchange in non-interpersonal relationships. (Aggarwal, 2004: 89).

The complex phenomenon of consumers forming relationships with brands has become increasingly appealing to consumer behaviour researchers, since we live in a branded world where brands play an important role in consumers’ life. On the other hand, as many academics and practitioners state: discovering the love and relationship structures between consumer and brand are also important for practitioners in order to achieve financial goals (Albert et al. 2008: 1074). Understanding why consumers are attracted to some brands more than others depends on several factors, which have been largely overlooked in existing interpersonal research (Blackston, 1993; Aggarwal, 2004). This research paper will therefore focus on passionate consumer-brand experiences, deriving from non-interpersonal relationship-dimensions rather than person-to-person relationship dimensions.

1.2 Previous Studies

According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs theory (1954), love comes directly after physiological and safety needs, which are precise requirements for human survival. Although Maslow (1954) describes the needs of love and belonging through focusing on interpersonal relationships, previous studies have shown that feelings of love are not developed towards human beings only (Albert et al. 2008: 1062). Supporting this, Fournier (1998 in Reimann et al. 2011: 129) reveals that: “brands can also create a ‘warm feeling’ among consumers, generate a pleasurable experience of being cared for, and ultimately bond consumers in a close connection.” Additionally, these feelings provide the basis for long lasting brand relationships according to the self-extension theory of Reimann et al. (2011: 131). From a psychological perspective, this can be explained as a result of the inclusion of brands into consumers’ self, as brands can be symbols of identity (Levy, 1959 in Reimann et al. 2011: 130) or brand relationships can be an expression of consumer identities (Escalas, Bettman, 2005 in Reimann et al. 2011: 130).

Interpersonal Love

In order to understand the difference between interpersonal and non-interpersonal love, various interpersonal brand relationship theories are essential to study. Shimp and Madden (1988) started to research two-way relationships between consumer and object by adopting Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love, and found that these arise from various combinations of different psychological processes such as motivation, emotion, and cognition (Shimp, Madden, 1988: 167). Shimp and Madden (1988 in Sarkar 2011: 82) researched brand desire relationships consisting of the dimensions liking and yearning. Their concept of brand desire is equivalent to Sternberg's interpersonal conceptualization of romantic love, which consists of intimacy and passion (Sarkar, 2011: 83). Shimp and Madden's research is important to mention since they have a different perspective through using person-to-person theory to study consumer-object relations, which provided as a foundation for further research.

The first empirical study regarding brand love was conducted by Ahuvia (1993 in Batra et al: 1), where he tried to investigate brand love directly by bringing consumer behaviour and psychological literature together. Although all forms of love may share the same underlying process at the construct level, Ahuvia's research concludes that the experience of brand love differs amongst consumers (Ahuvia, 1993: 57). In addition to Ahuvia, Shimp and Madden (1988), and Fournier (1998) stress 'love' as a key element of consumer-brand relationships.

However, Fournier (1998) clarifies that love is not the only dimension of the relationships quality, but that there are other additional dimensions such as; self-connection, commitment, interdependence, brand partner quality and intimacy (Fournier, 1998: 366). Based on the emotional value of these dimensions, Fournier's framework (1998) has inspired various researchers (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006; Albert et al. 2008) to make empirical contributions. For instance, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) found that brand love is linked to higher levels of brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. It is interesting that these outcomes come back in the non-interpersonal research studies of Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) (See figure 9). Next to the brand love dimensions, our research will also discuss outcomes in order to provide managerial implications.

Non-interpersonal Love

Both Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) created their own compilation of brand love dimensions which consist of self-brand connections (Escalas, Bettman, 2003), consumers' attachment to brands (Thomson et al. 2005; Park et al. 2010), the construction of self-identity (Belk, 1988), consumer-object bonds (Kleine et al. 1995), and brand communities (McAlexander et al. 2002 in Batra et al. 2012: 1). The difference between the two studies is that in addition to non-interpersonal love, Albert et al. (2008) includes interpersonal dimensions of love. However, Batra et al. (2012) criticize

Albert et al. (2008) owing to the use of interpersonal love elements as antecedents of brand love by stating that brands are unable to reciprocate.

Albert et al. (2008) conducted exploratory research including interpersonal dimensions of brand love where the authors agree with Batra et al. (2012) that no single interpersonal theory may claim to capture all emotions, since brand love is a complex phenomenon. With the help of mixed methods, Albert et al. (2008) found eleven dimensions of brand love, and clarified that the experience of love can be changed culturally. From their study it becomes clear that nationality has an influence on brand love.

Recently, Batra et al. (2012) have published an article including ten elements in their brand love prototype based on qualitative research. Batra's grounded theory (2012) unveils new non-emotional elements behind brand love whilst including dimensions that go beyond emotional and sensory branding theories. The dimensions of Batra et al. (2012) add a new perspective based on functional perceptions such as: the quality of the brand, wellbeing, good price, as well as emotional bonding and attachment. However, Batra et al. do not fill the research gap left by Albert et al. (2008) of investigating how dimensions vary per brand category. In order to rectify this shortcoming, our study will focus on seven different brands from various industries.

Besides academics (Fournier, 1998; Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006; Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012), also practitioners (Roberts, 2005) have highlighted the practical importance and critical role of brand love in marketing and advertising. The Lovemarks concept of global advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi delves deeper into the theory of brand love by emphasizing that human beings are powered by emotion rather than reason (Roberts, 2005: 16). Moreover, Roberts builds his concept on the fact that people are about eighty percent emotional and twenty percent rational (Calne in Roberts, 2005: 42). Furthermore, Roberts agrees with Calne that: "the essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action, while reason leads to conclusions (ibid)."

Lovemarks consist of at least one of the following dimensions: mystery, sensuality or intimacy, motivating consumers to start a relationship with brands, based on feelings towards e.g. products, organisations, and/or celebrities. According to non-interpersonal brand love studies (Aggarwal, 2004; Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012), it is not possible for brands to give love back to the consumer, although in practice Roberts (2005) shows that by using intimacy, sensuality, and mystery companies can attempt to humanize brands.

1.3 Problem Formulation and Research Aim

Although some knowledge exists on brand love, there is little agreement on what brand love is. This is caused by a theoretical foundation that mainly relies on interpersonal love. Limited previous studies generally assume that brand love is similar to interpersonal love, and consider the phenomenon as an emotion rather than a relationship (Batra et al. 2012: 2). Besides, from the practical perspective of Lovemarks, transaction-based reasoning is criticized by stressing the importance of emotion-driven relationship marketing. Both brand and consumer oriented approaches are therefore foundations for further research.

Further developments regarding brand love have been hindered by a lack of exploratory research that guide subsequent process in theory (Batra et al. 2012: 6). Besides, Batra et al. (2012) suggest not applying interpersonal theories on marketing studies, since brand love is not a 'real' type of interpersonal love. Hence, further research is needed in order to contribute to a common understanding of what brand love is. The main research question is therefore:

How do consumers experience non-interpersonal brand love relationships?

Given the increasing importance of brand love to marketing theory and practice, our contributions will help increase the understanding of how consumers experience brand love. Our higher-order empirical model will add value to currently existing research through investigating brand love among a variety of consumer brand categories. In order to expand upon the possibilities of conventional empirical research, the photo elicitation technique shall be used to investigate brand love for brands amongst different industries. Since the technique has never been applied to investigate brand love, we agree with Harper (2002: 13) that it will provide a new perspective by evoking feelings, stories, and memories. For these reasons, our ambition is to find answers to the following sub-questions:

How relevant are non-interpersonal dimensions to brand love?

Owing to the fact that practical perspectives have not been taken into account in previous literature, an innovative approach will be embraced to investigate consumer-brand relationships by taking both theoretical and practical aspects into consideration. Eventually, outcomes of the dimensions, as well as managerial implications will be provided in order to contribute to the foundations of future research.

Next to an investigation of the relevant brand love dimensions, another key contribution of this research will hopefully be to find new, complementary brand love dimensions by scrutinizing the non-interpersonal findings of Batra et al. (2012). As we take both perspectives into consideration, the theoretical elements of brand love will be combined with a practical concept of brand love called 'Lovemarks' (Roberts, 2005).

To conclude, our research focuses on how consumers experience the relationship with their brands. In order to obtain that goal, we will scrutinize existing dimensions in order to investigate similarities and differences, as well as aiming to discover new non-interpersonal aspects of brand love.

1.4 Relevance of the Study

For years, brand loyalty has been a field of interest to consumer researchers and practitioners because of the potential to provide essential benefits to both consumers and companies (Kim et al. 2008: 99). However, current thinking views brand love as a stronger and more fruitful subject than brand loyalty.

Brand love can lead to positive word of mouth and brand loyalty (Carroll, Ahuvia 2006; Fournier 1998; Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1), subsequently increasing consumers' willingness to pay a price premium (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1), and makes consumers forgive brand failures (Bauer et al. 2009 in Batra et al. 2012: 1). These outcomes are important for academics to better understand consumer behaviour, as well as for practitioners due to financial reasons.

According to Keller (1998 in Kim et al. 2008: 99), loved brands can lead to enhanced brand equity by lowering vulnerability to competitive marketing actions, increasing margins, increasing marketing communication effectiveness, and possibly generating more brand licensing or extension opportunities. Additionally, we agree that further research is needed since brands are no longer mysterious, and companies cannot understand the new consumer who develops feelings towards brands (Roberts, 2005: 35).

From an academic perspective, love, esteem, and self-actualization are all needs of human beings (Maslow, 1954). Brand relationships can satisfy consumers' need for love or belonging. Whilst also fulfilling the need for esteem (Aron et al. 1995 in Fournier, 1998: 345), and self-actualization (Richins, 1994 in Batra et al. 2012: 4). From a psychological perspective, love entails a two-stage process whereby the self-expands to new persons, and brands become included in the self (Aron, Aron, 1996 in Albert et al. 2008: 1063). Maslow's theory (1954) is critical to study in order to understand what love means for the self. Thus, understanding the phenomenon of consumer-brand relationships makes it possible to look at Maslow's *'hierarchy of needs'* with a new perspective on non-interpersonal aspects.

In conclusion, understanding consumer-brand relationships is crucial for consumer researchers since; "brands are omnipresent in the everyday life of consumers (Albert et al. 2008: 1062)", increasing the need for brands to respond to consumer's feelings and attitudes.

2. PERCEPTIVENESS OF BRAND LOVE

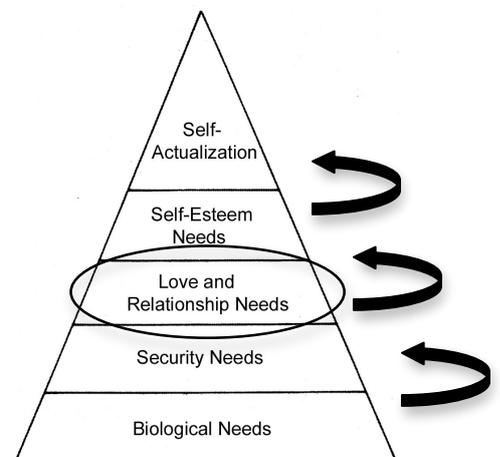
In this chapter the process of formation of brand love will be discussed in a chronological order. Our research starts with understanding the Maslow theory. From there we will make the transition to more recent studies focusing on emotional non-interpersonal relationships between consumer and brand. Subsequently, the distinction between interpersonal- and non-interpersonal relationships will be presented. Finally, we will discuss whether brand love is seen as an emotion or a relationship.

2.1 The Development of Brand Love

The word 'love' has various different definitions. Decades ago, in the hierarchy of needs theory, Maslow (1954) describes love as a human need that follows in priority: physical survival needs, and the need for safety and security. From an interpersonal perspective, love can be defined as a psychological state, by seeking experiences of extending the self to new persons, whereby the object of the extension becomes included in the self (Aron, Aron, 1996 in Albert et al. 2008: 1063). Interpersonal theories show that studying one side of these relationships is not sufficient to understand love. These theories describe brands as beloved 'partners' in their relationships with consumers (Fournier, 1998). Aron and Aron (1996) make clear that love is interrelated with third parties, making the feeling of love not being romantic in all cases, but also applicable to actors such as family and friends. This means that higher levels of motivation such as the need for self-esteem, and self-actualization need to be studied to understand how 'real' love (from person-to-person) is experienced. Basically, the higher up in the pyramid of Maslow you seek to reach (self-esteem and self-actualization), the more important the lower levels of motivation become (biological-, security-, and love needs). See figure 1.

Although Maslow's definition of love is limited due to its interpersonal character, recent research has shown that people may develop feelings towards not only living beings, but also to objects (Albert et al. 2008: 1062). Other than 'like-dislike' attitudes, 'brand love' has become a popular research subject among both academics and practitioners. Since "brands are omnipresent in the everyday life of consumers (Albert et al. 2008: 1062)", it becomes important for marketers to include multiple self-brand connections such as: cognitions, emotions, and behavioural elements to better fit consumers' needs (Batra et al. 2012: 2). Moreover, amongst other outcomes, brand love can influence important marketing variables such as brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth (Bergkvist, Bech-Larsen, 2009: 504).

Figure 1 - Maslow's pyramid of hierarchical needs - the importance of "love needs"



Furthermore, brand love has been defined as: “the degree of passionate emotional attachment as a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006: 81)”. In contrast, brand loyalty is defined as: the biased behavioural response to repurchase the same brand under conditions of strong perceived brand differences (Kim et al. 2008: 100).”

Although brand loyalty can still provide consumers and companies with essential benefits (Kim et al. 2008: 99), Roberts (2005) argues that today, having loyal customers is not enough. This has led some companies, referred to as Lovemarks to succeed in the creation of loyalty beyond reason (Roberts, 2005: 66) by emotionally attaching their brands to consumers. However, the concept of Lovemarks clarifies that it is difficult to indicate which emotional and rational factors of marketing need to be increased, and which to be reduced in order to maintain consumer-brand relationships (Roberts, 2005). Brand love can therefore be described as a complex phenomenon, increasing the need for further research.

Next to brand love and brand loyalty, there is also a distinct difference between brand love and brand satisfaction. Whereas brand satisfaction is a transaction-specific outcome and a result of cognitive judgment, brand love derives from a long-term relationship with the brand. Furthermore, as a result of consumer-brand identity integration, brand love motivates consumers to declare love with statements such as: *‘I love this brand’*. Therefore, brand love has a stronger affective focus than cognitive brand satisfaction, since the consumer knows what to expect from the brand. (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006: 81)

The first process in understanding brand love is to reveal consumers’ definition of love when they state that they *‘love’* a particular brand (Batra et al. 2012: 2). Rosch (1975 in Batra et al. 2012: 2) describes that the concepts of love are best described as prototypes, which are lists of attributes that, in this case, clarify brand love. Structural brand love prototypes are criticized by Batra et al. (2012) by stating that the love categories have indistinct boundaries due to the arrangement of brand love by *‘loved’*, *‘not loved’*, and *‘sort-of-loved’* categories. In contrast to classical definitions, the grounded research study of Batra et al. (2012) uses mental categorization in order to research which aspects have the best fit with brand love. Batra et al. (2012) also point out the limitation of previous structural prototypes of defining outcomes of brand love as antecedents (Batra et al. 2012: 3). The prototype of Batra et al. (2012) therefore separates the dimensions of brand love from the outcomes. For example, Batra et al. (2012: 1) found that positive word of mouth, brand resistance, and a greater willingness to invest were outcomes of brand love. These dimensions and outcomes will be used to create our tentative model of brand love (see figure 9).

2.2 Brand Love: Interpersonal or Non-Interpersonal

In early consumer-brand love studies, researchers applied interpersonal love theories such as Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love (1986) in order to investigate consumer-brand relationships. Sternberg's theory (ibid), investigates the forms of brand love based on the following three components: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment (Albert et al. 2008: 1063). See figure 2. Although the theory of Sternberg (ibid) takes account of

Kind of love	Components		
	Intimacy	Passion	Decision, commitment
Nonlove	-	-	-
Liking	+	-	-
Infatuated love	-	+	-
Empty love	-	-	+
Romantic love	+	+	-
Companionate love	+	-	+
Fatuous love	-	+	+
Consummate love	+	+	+

Figure 2 - Taxonomy of Kind of Love, adapted from Sternberg (1986) Source: Albert et al. 2008: 1063

interpersonal relationships, the three components can also be found in non-interpersonal relationship studies. This is a clear demonstration that interpersonal- and non-interpersonal relationship theories are interrelated.

Instead of exploring consumers' love for brands in an open-ended manner, most brand love researchers started with an interpersonal theory, followed by related scale items (Batra et al. 2012: 2). Aggarwal (2004), Albert et al. (2008), and Batra et al. (2012) criticize this approach based on the bidirectional characteristics of interpersonal love (Carroll, Ahuvia, 1993; Oliver, 1999; Shimp, Madden 1998 in Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006: 81). Besides, Aggarwal (2004: 89) argues that non-interpersonal relationships can be interpreted as relationships between celebrity and fan, rather than between two people who know each other intimately. As a consequence, consumers that love a brand are not expected to yearn sexual intimacy with brands, something that is generally associated with passionate interpersonal love (Belk, 1998 in Bergkvist, Bech-Larsen, 2009: 506). Therefore, we agree with Aggarwal (2004) that love for products and brands, is different from love for human beings.

Recent research of Batra et al. (2012: 5) continues that brand love is often described as a less important relationship than interpersonal love. The authors mention two main differences between brand love and interpersonal love. Firstly, although altruistic concern is a strong element of interpersonal love, this is not the same for brand love. Namely; "consumers are more concerned with what the brand can do for them, rather than what they can do for the brand (Batra et al. 2012: 5)." Secondly, brands do not return one's love through positive behaviour and empathy, which is the case with human relationships. In other words, brands do not experience emotions and do not answer consumers' love in the same way (Batra et al. 2012: 5).

As brand love is not a person-to-person form of love, this makes the application of interpersonal love theories not appropriate in all respects (Aggarwal, 2004: 89; Batra et al. 2012: 2). As stated by Albert et al. (2008: 1064), interpersonal theories are not enough to capture all emotions, and understand the

complex phenomenon of love in marketing (Albert et al. 2008: 1064). Fournier (1998), as one of the pioneer researchers in this field, employed an empirical approach consisting of studying consumers' declarations of 'love' towards brands, instead of applying interpersonal theories to consumer situations (Albert et al. 2008: 1064). In line with Fournier (1998), Batra et al. (2012: 2) argue that brand love needs to be conceptualized from the ground up, built on a deep understanding of consumer experiences, before valid connections can be made to interpersonal literature. We agree with Batra et al. (2012) and do not consider interpersonal love literature as isolated. However, person-to-person theories will not directly be applied to brand love based on previous reasoning.

2.2.1 Brand Love, Emotion or Relationship?

Current literature does not provide clear differences between love as an emotion and love as a relationship (Batra et al. 2012: 2). Since a 'love emotion' is a single, specific feeling, akin to affection (Richins, 1997 in Batra et al. 2012: 2), it is one-sided and its duration is often short term. In contrast, a 'love relationship' is bipartite, can last for many years and can even be unconditional, including various cognitive, affective; and behavioural experiences (Fournier, 1998 in Batra et al. 2012: 2). Both consumer-brand love concepts are interrelated and should therefore be studied together in order to acknowledge the distinctions between them.

According to Batra et al. (2012), brand love is best described as a mental prototype, consisting of higher-order constructs, including multiple cognitions, emotions, and behaviours (Batra et al. 2012: 2). These constructs also include *brand attachment* (Thomson et al. 1995 in Batra et al. 2012: 2) and *self-brand connections* (Escalas, Bettmann, 2003 Batra et al. 2012: 2). Besides, they also find that consumers describe their love in terms of the length of the relationship (Batra et al. 2012: 6). We believe that brand love should be understood as a first step, followed by investigating consumer-brand relationships, since love is the mechanism and motivational force of close relationships (Reimann et al. 2012: 129).

Consumer-brand relationships can be understood from previous concepts and measures regarding *brand sensitivity* (Kapferer, Laurent, 1992), *brand attachment* (Thomson et. al, 2005), *brand commitment* (Samuelsen, Sandvik, 1998), *brand trust* (Chaudhuri, Holbrook, 2001) and *brand loyalty* (Jacoby, Chesnut, 1978). They distinguish various consumer-brand relationships and segment consumers into groups on the basis of relationship intensity (Fournier, 1998 in Albert et al. 2008: 1062).

Fournier (1998: 21) researched that there are fifteen different types of consumer-brand relationships e.g. committed partnerships, best friendships, and secret affairs, which are shaped according to relationship length, commitment stage, attachment, and tolerance level. Our research differs from

Fournier (1998) in that we specifically focus on love and passionate types of relationships in order to investigate how consumers experience brand love.

Within these two-way consumer-brand relationships, both consumer and brand act as relationship partners. As an example, “Spokespersons may have personalities that so strongly fit those of the brands they advertise that the brand, in a sense, becomes the spokesperson with repeated association over time (Fournier, 1998: 345).” This identity convection helps to surpass the personification qualification, and makes the brand an active partner in the relationship rather than a passive object. (Fournier, 1998) We agree with Fournier that brand love is a relationship rather than a short-term emotion, because passionate consumers integrate brands into their everyday life.

Finally, various other factors can affect how consumers perceive consumer-brand relationships (Berscheid, Peplau, 1983; Hinde, 1995 in Fournier 1998): Age, life cycle, gender, family, social network, and culture may influence relationships and behaviours (Fournier, 1998: 4), and meaningful relationships can change or reinforce self-worth and self-esteem concepts (Aron et al. 1995 in Fournier, 1998: 4). This interpersonal interpretation is in line with the higher levels of Maslow’s pyramid of motivational needs: self-esteem and self-actualization (Maslow, 1954). These variables will therefore also be taken into consideration in our research.

3. THEORIES UNDERLYING THE CONCEPT OF LOVEMARKS

This chapter focuses on currently existing theories related to the Lovemarks concept. Within this chapter the brand dimensions: mystery, sensuality, and intimacy, that have provided Lovemarks with their special emotional resonance, will be focused on with the aim of clarifying connections between academic theories. Both academic perspectives and practical examples will be assessed in order to illuminate consumers' reasoning behind brand love.

3.1 Lovemarks

“The essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action while reason leads to conclusion (What is your Lovemark, 2006)”

As stated previously, brand love is defined by the degree of passionate emotional attachment of a satisfied consumer towards a particular brand (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006). It is also important to note that brand love includes passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand, and declarations of love for the brand (ibid) that are all important to understanding the dynamics of consumer-brand relationships.

Supporting academic studies, the Lovemarks concept of Kevin Roberts (2006) goes deeper into the theory of brand love by emphasizing that human beings are powered by emotion rather than reason. In line with this, the Lovemarks concept is built on the fact that people are about eighty percent emotional and twenty percent rational. Additionally, Roberts (2005: 42) agrees with neurologist Donald Calne that “the essential difference between emotion and reason is that emotion leads to action, while reason leads to conclusions”.

According to Roberts, the only way to create a Lovemark, in the form of a brand, a celebrity, an event or an experience is to transform it from irreplaceable to irresistible (Roberts, 2006). This starts with the creation of strong emotional experiences, resulting in an attraction and commitment to the brand. However, once consumers become more confident that they own Lovemarks, they start demanding a two-way conversation. During this process, the dimensions of Lovemarks: mystery, sensuality and intimacy enable companies to create compelling emotional experiences that will differentiate them in the marketplace and attract the love of consumers (ibid).

Mystery: Stories, metaphors, dreams and symbols. Mystery is about not giving all information away, but providing consumers with surprises in order to keep them awake and interested.

Sensuality: Sight, sound, scent, touch and taste that have the function of determining feeling. When sense branding is done correctly, the results are unforgettable while the brand is stored in consumers' minds.

Intimacy: Empathy, commitment and passion, leading to loyalty. Intimacy is about being close to family, customers, consumers, partners. Roberts (2006: 15)

The Lovemarks concept is visualized in the Love/Respect Axis (figure 3), including different stages of emotions and levels of respect. The axis makes it possible for marketers to measure brands on the basis of reason and emotion. 'Lovemarks' fall into the highly respected and highly loved category, leading to an upgrade of the brand from irreplaceable to irresistible.

In conclusion, "the concept of Lovemarks sets products and services apart from 'me too' products, and enables a long-term 'love affair' with consumers, giving brands a meaning and identity with the help of storytelling (Roberts, 2006: 15)."

3.1.1 The Foundation of Lovemarks

The appreciation of consumers' needs and wants can deliver great experiences that make a brand become a beloved part in consumers' lives. Therefore, creating a Lovemark can be possible by understanding consumers' dreams, finding out what they want and when they want it. (Roberts, 2006: 73) Besides, a solid foundation of respect, performance, innovation, reputation, and honesty is essential for a Lovemark to become established (Roberts, 2006: 15). Batra et al. (2012) reinforces this by presenting brand qualities as a brand love dimension in their prototype (e.g. performance, trustworthiness, beauty, innovation).

Roberts summarizes these essences of Lovemarks into the 'REAL concept', which consists of Respect, Emotion, Action and Love (Roberts, 2006: 73). According to REAL, when the values are built up, effective communication and persuasion can lead to a meaningful and emotional relationship with consumers (Roberts, 2006: 15). Although Roberts states the requirements of REAL, there are no clear rules on how to become a Lovemark. Personality and distinction determine whether a brand will stand out or not (Roberts, 2006: 73). This statement is also in line with recent academic research.

Herskovitz and Crystal (2010: 24), and Gobe (2003: 27) confirm Roberts' point by stating that loyalty and trust need to be developed over a long time, resulting from many well-performed acts, in order to create a crucial, intrinsic, and implicit emotional connection.

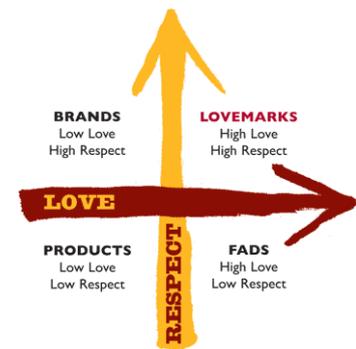


Figure 3 - Love/Respect Axis, Source: Roberts (2005)

Figure 4 - The importance of a strong brand persona - An example of Nike

As mentioned above, for a Lovemark to get established, a solid foundation of respect, performance, innovation, reputation, and honesty is needed (Roberts, 2006: 15). The next example makes it clear how important these foundations are for a brand to be loved.

The brand persona of Nike stands for winning and performance. Both their slogan “Just do it”, and their logo, the swoosh, are immediately recognisable. However, ultimately, Nike succeeds not because of its memorable slogan or logo, but because it forms long-lasting associations between its products and the atmosphere of glorious performance that surrounds those who use them, whether amateurs or professional athletes.

Nike’s brand personality is built on various success stories, consisting of small and large victories. However, when there is no longer a connection between a brand (Nike) and its brand persona (winning and performance); there is a chance that customers disconnect from the brand (Herskovitz, Crystal, 2010: 25). This happened when skier Bode Miller, one of the athletes sponsored by Nike during the Olympic Winter Games in 2006, fell short in all five of his medal attempts. However, because of the impressive loyalty Nike enjoys from its consumers and its strong persona, the brand did not suffer lasting harm from the disappointed achievements of a single athlete. *Source: Herskovitz and Crystal (2010)*

According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010: 24), a strong brand persona can make this happen and can also form the basis for a long-lasting relationship build on the predictability of the brand’s behaviour. Additionally, the authors state that: “a brand narrative without a well-defined, recognizable, memorable, and compelling persona can become a series of disconnected adventures.” Herskovitz and Crystal (2010) compare brand persona to storytelling, one of the dimensions of Lovemarks, namely mystery (see section 3.2.1).

3.2 Dimensions of Lovemarks

This part describes the dimensions of the Lovemark’s concept that capture new emotional connections in creating a meaningful relationship with consumers. Roberts (2005: 76) explains that these dimensions concern: mystery, sensuality and intimacy.

3.2.1 Mystery

Mystery comprises great stories, dreams, inspiration, myths, icons as well as a combination of the past, present, and future. Mystery is a key part of creating ‘loyalty beyond reason’, since it lies in the stories, metaphors, and iconic characters that give relationships complexity and texture (Roberts, 2005: 85). Lindstrom (2010: 140) shares a similar point of view by saying that the unknown factors in a brand have proven to be just as inspiring as those that are known. Additionally, Lindstrom (2010:

140) mentions that: “the more mystique a brand can cultivate, the stronger foundation it has for becoming a sought-after and admired product”. Today, many brands are not mysterious anymore. The rise of educated consumers makes it more difficult for brands to hide information. Roberts (2005: 33) explains the shift from an Information Economy, via an Attention Economy, to an Attraction Economy (Roberts, 2005: 33) (see figure 5), showing that the relationship between consumer and marketers is changing as modern consumers are setting the terms and conditions rather than the company itself.

In order to create an emotional interactive brand, it is important to touch upon people’s personalities, dreams and desires (Roberts, 2006: 35). Supporting this, Kaufman (2003: 11) states that an organization’s missions and values can be aligned with people’s intrinsic needs to belong and contribute through stories.

Figure 5. The New World of Consumers, Source: Roberts (2006: 34)

Attention economy	Attraction economy
Interruption	Engagement
Directors	Connectors
Shout	Entice
One-to-many	Many-to-one
High-powered messages	Engaging content
Reactive	Interactive
Larger than life	My life
Return on investment	Return on involvement
Big promise	Intimate gesture
What you need	What you want
Explanation	Revelation

Within today’s economy, consumers are becoming more aware of how brands intend to manipulate them, which increases the difficulty for marketers to act in an unexpected, surprising way. According to Roberts (2005: 88), mystery has the ability to open up consumers’ emotions by explaining the world to them and by giving value to the things they love. We agree with Roberts (2005) that mystery is an important dimension that can emotionally attach consumers to brands. Remarkably, mystery has not been studied in previous research. Therefore, a mystery-related dimension shall be included in our prototype in order to increase the understanding of brand love.

3.2.1.1 Great Stories

“Great brands have always been surrounded by great stories (Roberts, 2005: 90)”

According to the Lovemarks concept, people love being told stories and when stories are related to their consumer experiences, it reinforces brand love and thus the relationship itself. In other words, stories feed Lovemarks and drive consumers to develop feelings towards brands. (Roberts, 2005: 90) Although this is a practical perspective of understanding the effects of stories on consumer-brand relationship, storytelling has also become appealing to academic researchers (Boje, 1995; Boyce, 1996; Jensen, 1996; Hill, 2003; Kaufman, 2003; Sametz, Maydoney, 2003; Zaltman, 2003; Herskovitz, Crystal, 2010).

Nowadays, consumers make an impulsive, subconscious, emotional assessment in their buying behaviour by defining the potential return from the purchase (Hill, 2003: 63). The question of what the brand has to offer can effectively be answered by a story, enabling brands to make a topic much more realistic to the audience (Kaufman, 2003: 12). Futurist researcher Jensen (1996: 9) states that storytelling is becoming increasingly important, as consumers will buy legends, emotions, and lifestyles. Additionally, Sametz and Maydoney (2003: 19) feel that this has to do with the fact that stories explain: *‘why people should care’*, in addition to answering *‘what’* and *‘how’* questions. The authors base their answer on the fact that stories connect to listeners on both analytical and emotional levels by communicating a feeling, idea or meaning.

Storytelling is one of the oldest and most powerful modes of communication that allows companies to strengthen their bonds with all stakeholders (Kaufman, 2003: 11). Moreover, Kaufman’s argument refers back to Boje (1991, in Boyce 1996:13), describing storytelling as: “the preferred sense-making currency of human relationships among internal and external stakeholders in organizations.” This definition is certainly in line with Robert’s Lovemark concept (2005), as he states that great stories create an important trigger of brand love, namely mystery.

However, the idea that brands are a form of storytelling is not new (Zaltman 2003: 211). Moreover he explains that the consumption of stories is the largest activity in marketing, as it is so general and pervasive that ordinarily it escapes attention, or it is so noticeable that it spreads all experience. When marketers tell a brand story, they can engage or activate the consensus maps of their consumers. What consumers will get to know and remember of marketing stimuli comprises the basis for storytelling, a re-presentation of consumers’ beliefs. Consequently, the content is stored in the form of social norms and icons, consisting of metaphors that bring together different sets of memories that are personally relevant. (Zaltman, 2003: 207) Therefore, even though the stories are the same, the effects of them on brand love may differ from each other owing to consumers’ differences in character and personality. In line with this, Fournier (2003 in Zaltman, 2003: 211) states that; “we need to remember that brands

only exist in the minds of others. The brand in my mind is not the same as the one in yours.”

Most communication experts agree that at least two-thirds of communication is non-verbal, a percentage that jumps to ninety percent when the topic has been imbued with emotional weight (Hill, 2003: 63). Storytelling gives brands excitement and specialty by opening up new meanings, connections, and feelings (Roberts, 2005: 85). Supporting these, Roberts categorizes storytelling under the dimension of mystery, as Lovemarks are infused with powerful and evocative stories that can grow into mythical tales (Roberts, 2005: 75). Herskovitz and Crystal (2010: 25) further build on this by saying that when words and deeds match a certain feeling or idea, an implicit emotional connection will be established, forming the basis of a long-lasting relationship.

Fog et al. (2001: 13) reinforces that a core story in itself has a far greater potential, going beyond branding and marketing. Roberts (2006: 213) and Sametz and Maydoney (2003: 20) discuss that a story should not become too clear and obvious, since the attraction of consumers will be higher when mystery is involved, containing information that is unfamiliar or unknown. In other words, a higher level of mystery increases consumers' attention and makes consumer-brand love stronger.

Furthermore, just like Roberts (2005, 2006), Zaltman (2003) explains that storytelling can be verbal, pictorial, or take many other forms, such as music and dance. In order to build-up a relationship with the consumer, marketers should carefully select and design the ingredients, the relevant thoughts and feelings that encourage consumers to construct favourable stories (ibid). Zaltman's statements are in line with Roberts (ibid), who describes how important it is to find the right balance between emotional and rational factors in order to enhance consumer-brand relationships. In conclusion, previous academic studies and practical perspectives reinforce the importance of storytelling to the development of consumer-brand relationships.

3.2.1.2 Past, Present and Future

The creation of a Lovemark is a cumulative process that never freezes in place. According to Roberts (2005: 93), it is tough to understand what the next generation needs. According to Herskovitz and Crystal (2010: 24) “while a good brand persona remains true to its core, it is able to grow over time and adapt to changing situations. As this happens, good brands will evoke strong emotional responses from their customers including; loyalty, trust, and devotion.” Herskovitz and Crystal (ibid) clarify that the outcomes of trust and promising qualities are connected to the past, present and future. This is in line with the standpoint of Boje (1995: 1000), who defines storytelling as a performance that interprets past or anticipated experience.

“Acknowledging how the past, present, and future are entwined was one of the guiding principles of Walt Disney as he built the Disney Corporation out of a short cartoon about a mouse. Walt Disney World, where dreams come true”. (Roberts, 2005: 91)

Figure 6 - Walt Disney and its focus on past, present, and future

Walt Disney World California, whose story goes back to 1954, is a perfect example of a company that successfully entwines past, present, and future. The world of Disney is more than a collection of theme parks; it is an entire themed world that blends imagination and storytelling with an art form from the 20th century. A good story sweeps consumers along with its descriptions of the way things look, sound and smell, referring to sensitive branding. Disneyland is a successful brand utilizing the past, present, and future concept effectively to tell a thousand stories and offer experiences, which are designed to create illusions that make them forget the outside world.

Source: Disneyparkvideos (2008)

To conclude, the example of Disney mentioned in the figure above, in addition to branding that activates the senses, as well as storytelling, Disney World creates dreams, and warm feelings of attachment toward the brand, all contributing to brand love. Besides, as the previously mentioned authors enlightened, when past, present, and future work brilliantly together, consumers' perceptions, love, and trust towards brands will increase exponentially.

3.2.1.3 Taps into dreams

As two-thirds of the stimuli reaching the brain are visual, it can be concluded that people think in images rather than words (Hill, 2003: 63). Dreams also consist of images and they are constructed in one of the three phases of where brain development takes place. Within this centre of sensory mechanisms and emotional processes, dreams occur after information is taken in through the senses (Hill, 2003: 63).

“Dreams create action and action inspires dreams. Now that is what I call a virtuous cycle! It all comes down to this. If we know what consumers dream, it can only be because we are trusted and loved (Roberts, 2005: 93)”

Rolf Jensen, director at the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies is the pioneer of the Dream Society Theory. Jensen (1996: 9) discusses that stories, tales, and emotional fulfilment are the main aspects of the dream society, making a brand last in the mind of consumers. Jensen (1996: 9) explains that the functional value of products make place for emotion and style. Subsequently, the following authors: Boje (1995), Lewis and Bridger (2000), Hill (2003), Sametz and Maydoney (2003) and Roberts (2005) have derived their theories and concepts from Jensen's 'Dream Society'.

Whereas Jensen (1996: 9) discusses the change from information economy (1960-2000) to dream society (twenty-first century), Roberts (2006: 35) discusses the switch from attention economy to attraction economy. According to Jensen (1996: 9), knowledge was the most powerful possession in the information society, whereas the dream society makes space for dreams, adventure, spirituality, and feelings. Jensen clearly states that consumers' life is encompassed by stories and dreams that are defined as value statements rather than scientific truths, and that the emotional power of dreams creates a visual communication strategy. This emotional power can result in brand love, something that is in line with Robert's Lovemark concept (2005).

Figure 7 - From functional to emotional – An example of Walt Disney

In the era of the information society, Disneyland was a part of the service industry. Currently, Walt Disney World belongs to the dream society, while it has been growing to a theme park consisting of stories, fantasies, hopes, and futuristic thoughts. *Source: World Disneyparkvideos (2008)*

Jensen concludes that those who will have an impressive future in the Dream Society are those people or organisations that can tell a good story, making consumers recall the brand. The emotional power of dreams makes the dream society an important theory for our study as it stimulates the relationship between brand and consumer. In line with Jensen's research, Robert (2005), Albert et al. (2008), and Batra et al. (2012) also included 'dreams' as a dimension of brand love. Tapping into dreams is a powerful way of showing consumers that their desires are understood; so the brands then can tap into the dreams, on any occasion in line with the brand's values, meaning what the brand is more likely to be loved over time (Roberts, 2005: 93).

3.2.1.4 Myths and Icons

According to Roberts (2005: 98), icons must respond to the hopes, fears, and needs of new generations. Therefore, in order to be consistent, there should be a fit between icons and brands. Besides, Holt (2004: 8) explains that brands become icons when they perform identity myths, which are basic fictions addressing cultural anxieties from imaginary worlds.

“Nothing cuts through everyday clutter better than myths and icons. Why?

Because, they are memorable and memory is the wellspring of the heart. Many great Lovemarks are also great icons. (Roberts, 2005: 96)”

Myths offer an escape from everyday reality (Roberts, 2005). This means that brands that give directions to the masses through brand stories and brand activities become a part of the brand culture. Holt (2004) reinforces this by stating that the goals expressed in these myths are an imaginative

representation of consumers' perceived identity. Therefore, myths supported with goals that are in line with the brand's identity can motivate emotionally attached and passionate consumers to develop feelings towards the brand (Roberts, 2006).

Consumers also start comparing myths to the brand's visual characteristics such as name, logo, or design elements. Supporting this, Manning (2010: 35) explains that semiotic objects make the brand imaginative and allow consumers to make personal associations with the brand. After consumers have reflected the myth to visual characteristics, and consume the product, they can experience a part of the myth, increasing their affectionate feelings towards the brand.

Furthermore, "consumers who use the brand's myth for their identities forge tight emotional connections to the brand (Holt, 2004: 9)", since myths are interrelated with sensuality aspects such as images, sounds or feelings (see chapter 3.2.2). As a result, the brand becomes a symbol, defined as a material embodiment of the myth. Although literature makes it clear that only a few companies are able to achieve an iconic status (Zaltman, 2003), both academic and practical perspectives refer to myths and icons as drivers of consumers' feelings and affection. All in all, next to the other Lovemark dimensions, myths and icons are also active players in the establishment of the relationship between consumer and brand.

3.2.1.5 Inspiration

Controlling consumers by listening to them is one of the great Lovemark skills (Roberts, 2006). Roberts (2005) states that companies need to respond to the newly informed and inspirational consumer that is no longer prepared to accept what is offered. Inspirational consumers also understand that brand love has two directions. When a consumer loves a brand enough to take action, it is time for the brand to take immediate notice (ibid). As a result, the love of inspirational consumers can result in e.g. fan sites, communities, forums, blogs and/or events. "Inspirational consumers love influencing other consumers as well as those who make the products they love (Hynter in Roberts 2006: 56)."

According to Roberts (2006), inspirational consumers are the people who are ready and willing to intensify their interaction with companies. As an outcome, the company is referred to as more respectful, useful, and loved. Roberts (2006: 55) explains that today's inspirational consumer adopts the language of love and emotion, draws other people into the brand, and taps into the creativity of R&D departments of the brand.

This is in-line with academic theories stating that inspirational consumers can also be interpreted as '*product makers*' rather than '*product takers*' (Cova, Pace, 2006: 1096; Pires et al. 2006: 944; Wind, 2008: 2). Vargo and Lusch (2004 in Vesel and Zabkar, 2008: 1334) explain that the new consumer has resulted in new perspectives of marketing, in which the focus is on intangible resources, the co-

creation of value, and trustworthy relationships. The authors argue that consumer relationships are needed in order to become appealing to the active consumer of today (Rust 2004, in Vesel and Zabkar, 2004: 1335). Such relationships require a long-term view, mutual respect, and the acceptance of consumers as partners and co-producers of value, not just as passive recipients (Gummesson, 1998, in *ibid*). In conclusion, understanding inspirational consumers helps brands create strong emotional bonds, resulting in a long-term consumer-brand relationship.

3.2.2 Sensuality

“The senses are the fast track to human emotions (Roberts, 2005: 105).”

The switch from attention to attraction economy and from functional to emotional decision-making has resulted in new tasks for marketers (Jensen, 1996:10). Nowadays, it has become increasingly important to create environments that stimulate certain emotions by using colours, scents, and/or textures. The sensory aspects are important to study as they can easily affect consumers' decisions and are closely connected to creating a dream environment for storytelling. Therefore, next to mystery, sensuality is also closely related to consumer love and respect. The five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste, play an important role in consumers' persuasion and decision making, since they help consumers' recall memories and previous experiences (Roberts, 2005: 106f).

Moreover, behavioural psychologists today estimate that up to eighty percent of all the impressions consumers form when communicating with other people are nonverbal, meaning that they are sensory (Lindstrom, 2010: 10). Lovemarks understand the relationship between sensuality and consumers since the concept interacts with consumers in ways that go beyond rational arguments and benefits. (Roberts, 2005: 105). Therefore, many successful Lovemarks can be recognized with some specific associations: e.g. the smell of Abercrombie, the bottle design of Coca Cola, or the pattern of Burberry.

Nowadays, consumers are continuously targeted on the five senses (Lindstrom, 2010). By appealing to consumers' senses, brands can easily find a way to establish an emotional relationship. For instance, hearing is an important sense since it can set moods and trigger powerful emotions, enabling brands to create deep emotional connections with consumers (Roberts, 2005:118) Supporting this, Lindstrom (2010: 14) researched that when music fits the brand identity, brands are ninety-eight percent more likely to prompt memory recall (Lindstrom, 2010: 14).

*“As human being we are by far at our most receptive when we are operating on all five tracks”
(Lindstrom, 2010: 16).*

Everyday consumers get overwhelmed with advertising messages. However, they mostly only convey the visual and auditory senses (Lindstrom, 2010: 15). In order to become outstanding as a brand, the combination of visual and auditory characteristics in advertising is no longer enough. Lindstrom uses

the graph below to illustrate that the perceived brand/product value is higher when all five senses are used in communication. Likewise, Roberts (2005) clarifies the importance of appealing to all five senses in order to build strong passionate relationships with consumers (Roberts, 2005: 126).

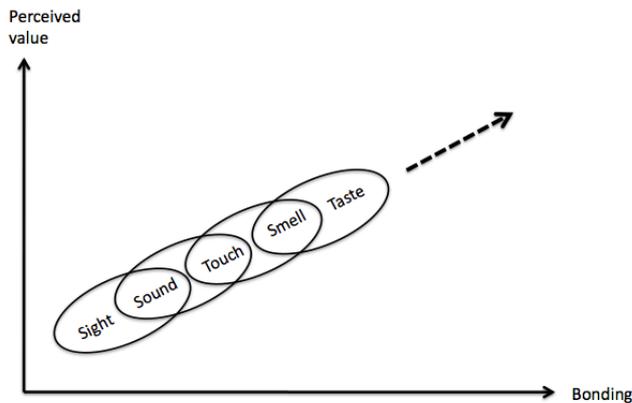


Figure 8 - Correlation between number of senses and brand value, Source: Lindstrom (2005: 70)

However, today, only a few companies bother to use more than sight and sound elements in their advertising messages (Lindstrom, 2010: 15). In order to be successful in the future, brands should extend their brand communication to encompass the other three senses, as all of them remind consumers who they are and what feels safe and familiar (Roberts, 2005: 110). Supporting this, the graph below shows that in order to maintain loyalty in the future, brands should build on strategies that appeal to all the senses. In conclusion, understanding the quality of senses is crucial in order to make consumers loyal and emotionally attached (Batra et al. 2012).

3.2.3 Intimacy

“Personal. Sensitive. Continuous. What we were missing was Intimacy. Sure we need thrills, spills, and big gestures in our relationships, but we also need closeness, trust, and intimacy.

(Roberts, 2005: 128f)”

Intimacy is the factor that can give a mass experience a personal meaning, since it has the ability to make brands come close to consumers. Intimacy is much more contentious than mystery and sensuality, as it touches directly on personal aspirations due to a two-way process of listening and talking. (Roberts, 2005: 128) Nevertheless, most brands are not great at listening and mostly focus on talking by utilizing mass media (Roberts, 2005: 133).

According to the Lovemarks concept, intimacy consists of three elements: commitment, passion, and empathy. Whereas empathy makes brands understand and interact with people’s emotions, commitment proves that the relationship will be long-term. Passion on the other hand keeps the emotional relationship sparkling, as it has the power to give intensity to a relationship that will carry it

through good and bad times (Roberts, 2005: 142). Sternberg (1986, in Albert et al. 2008: 1063) explains the triangular theory of love that overlaps with Roberts' theory of intimacy, by focusing on similar conceptualizations of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment.

Similarly, Albert et al. (2008: 1063) defines intimacy as: "closeness and connectedness, being happy together, and being able to rely on the partner." The authors demonstrate that the duration of the relationship is often linked to intimacy, referring to the in-depth knowledge about the partner, generally as a result of time spent together (Sternberg, 1986; Ahuvia, 2005 in Albert et al. 2008: 1063f). In addition, the study of Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2009: 514) demonstrates that active engagement (intimacy) is an outcome of brand love.

Despite the fact that the practical dimension of intimacy from Robert's Lovemarks concept shows many similarities among academic theories, there is also a remarkable difference. Namely, Aggarwal (2004), Albert et al. (2008), Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2009: 506), and Batra et al. (2012) state that brand love and interpersonal love differ based on the fact that brand love is unidirectional, whereas interpersonal is bi-directional. Although the Lovemarks concept is non-interpersonal, it tries to steer brands in becoming bi-directional. The two approaches are not similar in all respects (Aggarwal, 2004), however both include the dimension of intimacy. Therefore it is important to combine the Lovemarks dimension of intimacy with equivalent dimensions from academic studies.

4. TENTATIVE BRAND LOVE PROTOTYPE

In this chapter, the history of interpersonal consumer-brand relationships will be discussed. From person-to-person theories we will make the transition to the focus of our study regarding non-interpersonal relationships. Finally, the different components of our tentative model will be explained, and it will be shared how the model was constructed.

4.1 The Construct of the Model

Fournier (1998) is the pioneer researcher in the field of interpersonal relationships between consumer and brand. She employed an empirical approach consisting of consumers' declarations of 'love' towards brands, measured relationship strength, defined different types of brand-consumer relationships, as well as a variety of brand relationship development trajectories (Fournier, 1998). Whereas Fournier defines fifteen different types of relationships, Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) only focus on passionate and loving relationships.

Inspired by Fournier, the studies of Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) focus on non-interpersonal relationships with the aim of increasing the understanding of brand love. Both Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) constructed an individual prototype, based on qualitative research in the case of Batra et al. (2012), and on a mixed study by Albert et al. (2008). As a result, their prototypes uncovered different unidirectional elements of brand love.

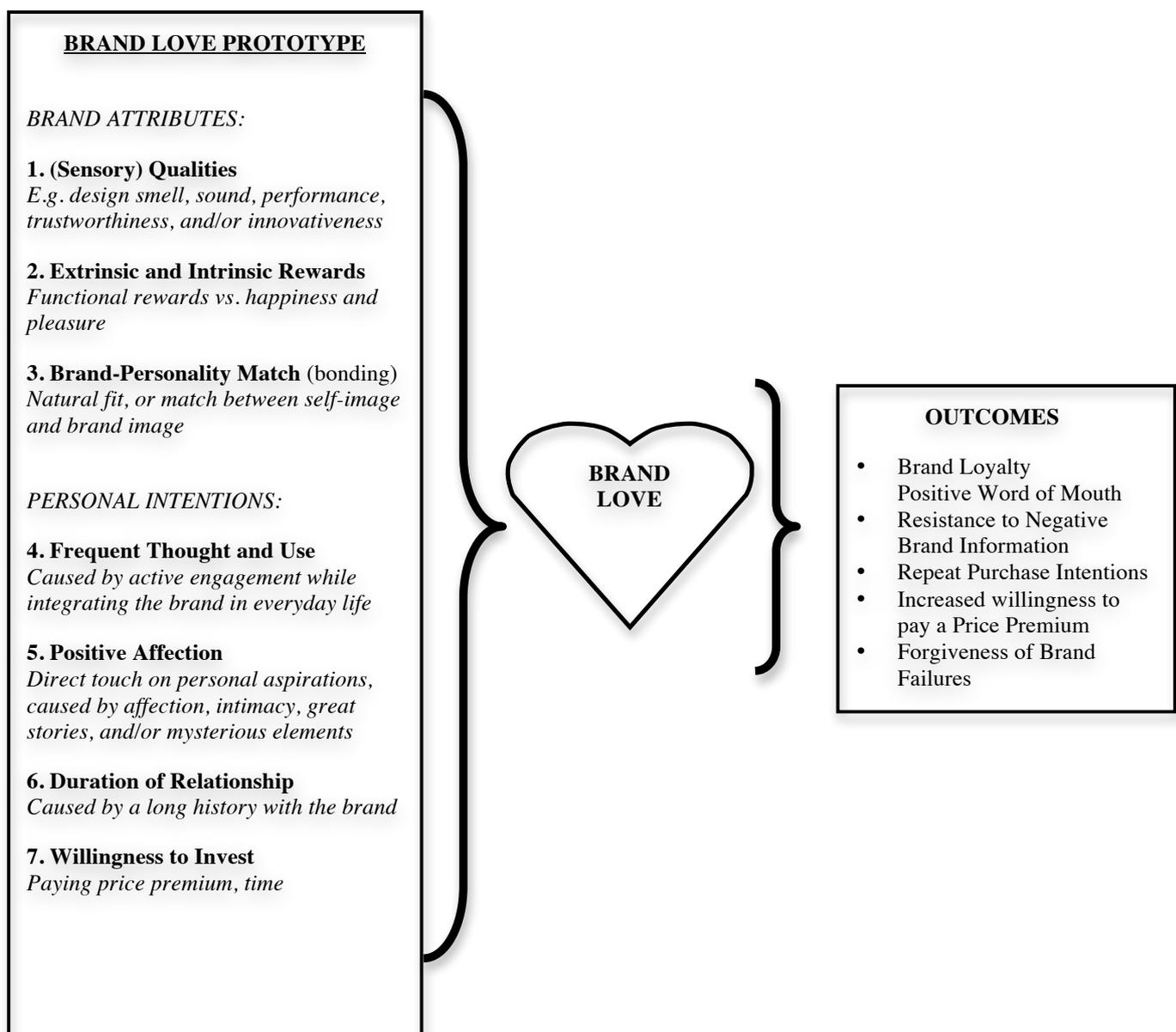
In our research we take both academic studies into consideration. The reason for combining a selection of the dimensions of both Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) is based on the uniqueness of their individual dimensions. For instance, whereas functional brand perceptions are retained as major dimensions of love in the study of Batra et al. (2012), they are excluded in the exploratory research of Albert et al. (2008). Although the study of Fournier inspired us, her findings are not directly applied to our study due to the different focus of the research.

Besides academics, Roberts (2005) deals with brand love from a branding perspective. Where Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) focus on the consumer perspective by researching the non-interpersonal dimensions resulting in a relationship between consumer and brand, Roberts describes the ingredients for brands to become 'Lovemarks'. The aim of our research is to further investigate non-interpersonal brand love by scrutinizing the dimensions of Albert et al. (2008), Batra et al. (2012), and the Lovemarks concept of Roberts (2005).

At the start of the research process, a theoretical model was constructed, summarizing the elements from Robert's Lovemark concept (2005), the dimensions Albert et al. (2008), as well as the dimensions of of Batra et al. (2012). Whereas Roberts (2005) demonstrates brand love from the

branding perspective only, Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) also focus on the personal side of the phenomenon. In our model, similar dimensions among the three studies were grouped together. Additionally, the dimensions in the model were divided into two groups; one group representing the brand-related elements, and the other group the personal-related ones. The reason for presenting the branding and personal related dimensions separately is to increase the understanding of brand love deriving from both sides. The model illustrates that both sides need to be studied in order to research love relationships between consumers and brands.

Figure 9 - Model combining the brand love dimensions of Batra et al. (2012), Albert et al. (2008), and the concept of Lovemarks by Roberts (2005)



4.2 The Dimensions of Brand Love

In the next part, the dimensions of love will be individually explained with use of the theories of Albert et al. (2008), Batra et al. (2012), and the concept of Lovemarks by Roberts (2005).

4.2.1 Qualities

The brand's attractive qualities such as its exceptional performance, trustworthiness, and good-looking design can be drivers of brand love, which are not unconditional like interpersonal love. In line with this, Albert et al. also share beauty as one of the dimensions that plays an important role in forming and maintaining consumer-brand relationships (Hatfield, Spencer, 1995; Sangrador, Yela, 2000 in Albert et al. 2008: 1073). A good-looking design can make a brand become favourable, leading to long-term relationships with consumers. According to all three authors, a successful trademark only cannot guarantee successful differentiation. The brand qualities mentioned above are needed to make the brand distinguishable and meaningful in order to be loved by the consumer. Roberts (2006: 98) confirms that by saying: "no matter how much consumers love a brand, no matter how much they love a concept, the advertising, the packaging, the positioning, at the end of the day if consumers do not connect emotionally with the scent or the taste they are less likely to come back and buy it again." Subsequently, when a brand is different or special in its own way, it may relate to feelings of idealization (Albert et al. 2008: 1073). This means that the brand cannot be replaced by another brand, just like lovers considering their partners to be unique.

According to the authors, trust is also a key brand quality since it provides a certain level of satisfaction and safety (Batra et al. 2012: 4). Trust is therefore closely related to brand performance, which is an important trigger of brand love. According to Roberts (2005), brand qualities can lead to imagination, creating myths or icons (see chapter 3.2.1). In conclusion, from the examples above it becomes clear that brand qualities have an essential influence on brand love, since they can cause a direct declaration of affect (Albert et al. 2008). Besides, Roberts (2005) brand quality dimensions can also have an indirect effect by influencing other dimensions such as mystery.

4.2.2 Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

When brands provide extrinsic rewards only, consumers feel they do not love the brand, but are satisfied or get pleasure from benefits which do not naturally become embedded within the core product constellation (Jenkinson, 1996). They do not have high affinity with the core product concept, and only stimulate a temporary lift, not long-term customer value (Whitehill, 2011). External motivating factors, extrinsic rewards, include discount vouchers, promotions, and loyalty cards.

However, intrinsic rewards go beyond this with consumers buying products because of emotional reasoning driven by enjoyment: *'I just love it'* (Roberts, 2005). Intrinsic benefits have the ability to

extend the base product or service, and thereby contribute more positively to the brand (Jenkinson, 1996).

Whereas Roberts (2005) only discusses intrinsic rewards, Batra et al. (2012) state that brand love commonly results from both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. Besides, Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) emphasize that a loved brand provides intrinsic rewards when it creates psychological states such as happiness and/or pleasure. Roberts confirms that by stating: “getting a positive emotion is key in making people feel good about a brand (2005: 43).” To conclude, although extrinsic rewards (acting to gain something) are not a requirement to become loved, loved brands commonly provide both intrinsic (acting because of one loves it) and extrinsic rewards. Therefore we chose to have both elements of rewards as a dimension in our tentative model.

4.2.3 Brand-personality match

According to previous studies there are two ways to create an emotional bond between consumer and brand. Primarily, brand love can be driven by a natural fit between consumer and brand (Albert et al. 2008, Batra et al. 2012): Albert et al. (2008) states that passion is the first dimension in brand love. Batra et al. (ibid) build further on that, by underlining that: “when this sense of natural fit with a brand is combined with passionate desire, it can express *‘love at first sight’* (Batra et al. 2012: 4).”

Next to a natural fit between consumer and brand, it can also be that the brand has certain values that fit the consumer’s personality (Batra et al. 2012). Brands are more likely to be loved when they are related to consumers’ beliefs, values or close interpersonal relationships (Richins, 1994 in Batra et al. 2012: 4, Roberts. 2006: 106). This means that consumers are likely to start a relationship with a brand, because the brand offers them something that has a deeper meaning in light of goals, leading to self-actualization (Batra et al. 2012: 4). Brand aspects that can have a deeper meaning in consumers’ minds can be connected to culture, the environment, or society. Likewise, Albert et al. (2008) mention the concept of self-congruity, indicating congruity between consumer’s self-image and brand image as a dimension of brand love. This congruity is shaped in terms of ethnic, social, or religious profile, as well as their values, interests, humour, or psychical aesthetics (Byrne et al. 1986; Capella, Palmer, 1990; Galton, 1984; Rushton, 1989 in Albert et al. 2003: 1073). So, next to a natural fit, brands can be loved fiercely if they reflect consumers’ existing identity or enact their desired identities (Belk, 1998; Escalas, Bettman, 2003, 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 4). In contrast to the academic theories, the concept of Lovemarks (Roberts, 2005) neither discusses *‘love at first sight’*, nor does it provide information *‘brand-personality match’* based on shared values.

4.2.4 Frequent Thought and Use

Consumers' frequent engagement and interactive behaviour with brands motivates consumers to develop feelings towards brands (Fournier, 1998 in Batra et al. 2012: 4). Besides, there is a positive correlation between the time spent on using or thinking about a brand and brand love. Batra et al. (2012: 4f) also clarify that: "having frequent interactions with, or thoughts about, a brand is an important aspect of brand love". Hence, consumers tend to love brands more when there is active engagement and integration with the brand in their everyday life. Both frequent thought and use should therefore be taken into consideration when analyzing how consumers experience brand love.

4.2.5 Positive Affection

Batra et al. (2012) describe that brand love can derive from positive affection, covering the lower-arousal emotions, such as '*affection*' or '*warm-hearted*' feelings. Albert et al. (2008: 1073) reinforce this by stating that '*declaration of affect*' is a dimension of brand love, resulting from attraction, trust, and satisfaction.

However, previous research shows that these positive emotional feelings are an important aspect of consumers experiencing their brand relationship (Albert et al. 2008 and Batra et al. 2012). Additionally, dreams and memories evoked by the brand are also stated as brand love dimensions since they could also cause affection (Roberts, 2005; Albert et al, 2008: 1073). Roberts (2005: 96) refers to memory as '*the wellspring of the heart*', and additionally states that iconic characters also cause memory recall. Roberts (2005: 98) states that: "many great Lovemarks are also great icons" and "like Lovemarks, icons must also respond to the hopes, fears, and needs of new generations" in order for the brand to maintain being recalled in the future.

To sum up, Roberts (2006: 106) delights the dimension of positive affection from a branding perspective: "when brands are able to prove to consumers that they care about their well-being, future, and relationship with the brand, consumers will reward the brand with Loyalty Beyond Reason." Brands can create this special emotional resonance with consumers by using mystery, sensuality, and intimacy, making brands become myths, and leading to dreams and positive word of mouth (Roberts, 2005: 74).

In conclusion, the dimension of positive affection is build-up from the lower-arousal emotions mentioned in previous academic research. Besides dreams and memories, previous research does not touch upon mysterious elements, icons, characters, and myths. Therefore, the currently existing dimension of '*positive affection*' from Batra et al. (2012) is extended with the previously mentioned elements from Robert's Lovemarks concept (2005).

4.2.6 Duration of Relationship

“Past behaviour is often a good predictor for future behaviour (Guadagni, Little, 1983 in Batra et al. 2012: 5), as it implies a greater loyalty to loved brands (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 5).” Supporting this, previous studies (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012) have shown that having a long history with a brand is also a dimension of brand love. Likewise, Albert et al. (2008: 1073) states that the critical importance of the history and the duration of the relationship can lead to consumer satisfaction, and also trigger brand love. Additionally, the history derived from trust, commitment, satisfaction, or intimacy can lead to integration of the brand into consumers’ life and shape personal identity (Batra et al. 2012: 5).

Furthermore, Albert et al. (2008) show that pleasure influences the duration of the relationship due to the positive feeling it brings together (Albert et al. 2008: 1073). Moreover, intimacy, which refers to in-depth knowledge of the consumer about the brand, is generally a result of how the brand is integrated in the consumer’s life (ibid). Hence, intimacy can make love stronger and result in long-term consumer-brand relationships. This dimension implies that knowing the brand for a long time, or facing the brand in an early stage in life, may cause a strong emotional and lifetime attachment to the brand.

4.2.7 Willingness to Invest

As stated previously, brand personality match is an important dimension that motivates consumers to attach themselves to the brand. As a result of this match, consumers tend to invest high levels of time, energy, and money into their loved brands (Batra et al. 2012: 4). According to Batra et al. (2012), consumers’ willingness to invest is another brand love dimension, which is a result of the anticipated separation distress (Hazan, Shaver, 1994 in Batra et al. 2012) and the price insensitive attitude (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 4f). Evidently, consumers’ willingness to invest is highly related to the final goal from a company perspective. Nowadays, brand love is becoming a popular topic for companies as it can positively affect companies’ revenues. Besides, the dimension of willingness to invest can be behavioural characteristics of emotionally attached consumers. For these reasons, the dimension is scrutinized in order to detect differences in consumers’ spending between different brands from different industries.

4.2.8 Outcomes of Brand Love

Although interpersonal love theories are not enough to understand the brand love phenomenon, they can be used in order to measure brand love (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012: 6). As described in the relevance section of the thesis, the level of brand love may vary due to product categories or brand types. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) for instance, find that hedonic product categories and self-expressive

brands are associated with stronger levels of brand love. In the same research, positive correlations between brand love and other brand outcomes such as word of mouth and brand loyalty have been shown (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006: 88f).

There are various marketing and monetary reasons behind the current popularity of brand love. Firstly brand love creates positive word of mouth, repeat purchase intention, increased brand loyalty, and resistance to negative information about the brand (Batra et al. 2012: 2). In addition, brand love also further increases consumers' willingness to pay a price premium (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012:1) and forgiveness of brand failures (Bauer et al. 2009 in Batra et al. 2012:1).

Although scrutinizing previously researched outcomes of brand love is not the priority of this study, the interviews may provide additional information regarding the results of the dimensions under study. We think that since the outcomes are a result of the dimensions under study, it is required to include them in our tentative model. In case the interviewee directly touches upon the previously mentioned outcomes or potential new outcomes, we will mention these in the analysis part and take them into consideration when constructing the empirical model.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, we will explain our methodological framework. First of all, we will provide information on how our topic in consumer-brand relationships affected our choice of ontology and epistemology. Subsequently, the sampling method and the recruiting process of participants will be discussed. Then, the reasoning behind the photo elicitation technique will be presented in relation to the emotional weight of the study. Finally, we will explain how the output of the interviews was analyzed.

5.1 Research Philosophy

A constructionist ontological stance was chosen due to the complex structure of consumer-brand relationships and the existence of various relationship dimensions. According to Easterby-Smith et al. (2008: 59) a social constructionist philosophy is suitable to understand these complex structures, as well as human behaviour (Jost, Kruglanski, 2002). For these reasons, a constructionist ontological framework was embraced where “social entities are considered as constructions that are built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors” (Alvesson, 2003: 13; Bryman, Bell, 2011: 20).

Within the constructionist ontological philosophy, reality is considered to be a social construct that results from different individual and group perspectives (Hudson-Anderson, Ozanne, 1988). From the constructionist perspective, research is started without assuming any pre-existing reality aims, which help researchers understand what is happening in the environment. Subsequently, they assist in comprehending the language and conversations between entities. (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 63) In our case, entities refer to both brands and consumers. Although this perspective might be criticized because of time consumption, the constructionist perspective is most suitable to understand processes and meanings in specific cases such as brand love.

However, ontology and epistemology are not independent from each other. Any of them can affect or transform the other. (Alvesson, 2003: 14; Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 61, Bryman, Bell, 2011: 23) In other words, the ontological stance may not be enough to find an accurate answer as it only helps gaining knowledge. Therefore, after understanding consumers’ brand love experiences and consumer-brand relationship structures, an interpretative epistemological stance is also taken to interpret the socially constructed reality by using the knowledge gained (Schembri, 2009: 1302). Additionally, this allows us to gather natural data and to adjust it to new developments as they emerge (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 72).

5.2 Research Strategy

An exploratory study was implemented in order to research the importance of the different brand love dimensions, and thus answer how consumers experience consumer-brand relationships. Since previous research does not provide a complete framework for investigating this topic (Anselmsson, Johansson, 2007: 840), information was collected in a semi-structured manner (Burns, Bush, 2010: 57). Additionally, in line with the chosen research philosophy (constructionism as ontological orientation, and interpretivism as epistemological orientation), a qualitative strategy was employed. The reason qualitative research was owing to limited previous literature and the nature of the research questions (Alvesson, 2003: 13; Bryman, Bell, 2011: 27).

A qualitative strategy is flexible and relatively unstructured, focusing on meanings that are attributed by the people under study. Qualitative studies provide a contextual understanding of behaviours, values, beliefs, and processes. (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 402f) “One of the main reasons why qualitative researchers are keen to provide considerable descriptive detail is that they typically emphasize the importance of the contextual understanding of social behaviour (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 404).”

On the contrary, some researchers criticize qualitative research because of being too impressionistic, subjective and difficult to replicate and generalize (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 408). However, Mayring (2001) states that: “in the last century, especially the second half of it, the development of qualitative methods showed impressive progressions and outcomes.” This clarifies that qualitative research has gained more acceptance, and not only in the field of social research (Mayring, 2001).

Quantitative research was not suitable for our study since we aimed to create a model by exploring unexplored parts in literature. Moreover, in order to find out about consumers’ perspectives and experiences, words are the most appropriate data collection for considering the intimacy of brand love (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 61f; Bryman, Bell, 2011: 386).

Since emphasis was placed on generating a model, an inductive approach was used to implement qualitative research. This allowed us to gain a clear insight into consumer behaviour by observing what people did and said (Burns, Bush, 2010: 235). Besides, employing a qualitative approach made it possible for us to define categories, as well as to outline relationships between these categories (McCracken, 1988: 21).

Another benefit of a qualitative strategy is that it ensures the sustainability of the research due to its flexibility to easily adjust the direction of the investigation when necessary (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 406). Additionally, the iterative approach, which refers to “a repetitive interplay between collection and analysis of data”, was employed to overcome possible changes (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 406). The

iterative approach allowed us to refer back to the analysis in order to modify or extend the empirical model with new dimensions.

5.3 Research Method

Based on a detailed literature review it can be concluded that there is no conceptual framework that investigates consumer-brand love experiences from both a practical and academic perspective. Hence, we decided to make use of both perspectives in order to come closer to the interviewees under study and to better understand their experiences with the brand (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 94).

As mentioned previously, there are two main entities in this research that have an effect on the relationship, namely consumers and brands. Due to the different structures of those entities, a phenomenological qualitative method was employed. Subsequently, consumer-brand relationships and the way of experiencing them were investigated with the help of in-depth interviewing. Therefore, the phenomenological method that questions: “how individuals make sense of the world around them” is employed in order to understand consumers’ perspectives, experiences, and reactions towards the brands (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 640).

In-depth interviews are great methods to gain knowledge for how and why questions (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 144). The goal of the one to one interviews is to understand how consumers experience consumer-brand relationships by interrogating the brand love dimensions of previous studies. In-depth interviews fit the research perfectly since they enable us to investigate deeply, uncover new information, open up new attributes of the problem, and secure vivid and accurate descriptions based on personal experience (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 144). In addition, they allow us to collect information and capture meaning and interpretation of phenomena in relation to the interviewee’s worldview (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 144). This suits the naturalism view of the social constructionism philosophy (Bryman and Bell, 2011: 44).

5.4 Data Collection

Face-to-face interviews enable researchers to acquire knowledge by probing the mind of another human being. We therefore chose to use face-to-face interviews to collect primary data. (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 402) The participants concerned seven different consumers with strong feelings for their love brand. Although we were aware of the fact that participants’ behaviour could be affected by knowing the purpose of the study, we decided to briefly share the general research aim with them. However, our overt role provided an ethical and relaxed research environment that is most suitable for inexperienced researchers like ourselves (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 433).

A social ontological approach was used to collect data by analyzing social phenomena as configurations of individuals where the social is located in the human mind. For our study it is

appropriate to use a social ontological approach that views the respondent as a *'feeling'* and *'acting'* individual besides just a *'thinking individual'* (Thompson et al. 1989 in Koch et al. 2010). In order to collect natural language data from consumers in line with the phenomenological research method, seven in-depth interviews were conducted. The goal was to discover consumers' views, perceptions and underlying thoughts on the brand (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 142).

Phenomenology is described as an effort to improve the understanding of the self and the world by means of careful description of experience (Husserl, 1906 in Roy 2010:51). Husserl came up with the Husserl's *'epoche'*, which is explained as: "a photo of the natural attitude so that one can attend to a phenomenon as it shows itself (ibid)." In order to better understand how consumers experience the relationship with their brand, we chose the method of photo elicitation in line with the phenomenological approach of the study.

5.4.1 Photo Elicitation

The analysis of visual data has been one of the most spectacular developments in qualitative research in recent years (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 451). The authors explain that the trend has started to impact business and management research, since a growing number of researchers, especially in the field of marketing, have started to explore the potential of visual data as a means of understanding business and management. Photo elicitation is a method that integrates photographs into the interview by asking respondents to reflect, explain, and comment on the meaning of the objects in the photograph (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 222).

The greatest number of photo elicitation studies has taken place in social and anthropological research fields that are integrated in our research topic (Harper, 2002: 13). The emotional weight of our topic made the technique suitable by requiring participants to talk about their feelings, passion, memories, and stories that connect them to the brand.

According to Bryman and Bell (2011: 222), photo elicitation can provide a point of reference for discussion and can help to move the interview from the concrete to the social abstract, by letting the participant explain what the objects in the photograph mean. Additionally, this also creates interactions that trigger interviewees to talk much more about their experiences with the brand and the stories behind the images (Harper, 2002: 13; Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 162).

The advantage of photo elicitation is that it may overcome difficulties of in-depth interviewing, since the image is to a certain extent understood by both parties (Harper 2002: 20). Besides, since the interviewee's images are the medium of communication (Burt et al. 2007: 454), there is less need to ask specific questions, decreasing the chance of the interviewee's answers being affected by the interviewer.

The form of photo-elicitation applied concerns ‘*autodriving*’, indicating that the interview is driven by the interviewees who are seeing their own behaviour (Heisly and Levery, 1991 in Hurworth, 2003). The process of autodriving photo-elicitation was inspired from the study of Burt et al. (2007). However, whilst in the study of Burt et al. (2007) participants took the photographs themselves in-store; our participants were asked to find the concerned images on the Web. In our study it is more relevant to make participants find images on the Internet, in order to get a better understanding of how consumers experience brand love rather than the brand’s store image. Nevertheless, our process of the photo elicitation shares similarities with the interviews conducted by Burt et al. (2007):

Figure 10 - Photo Elicitation Process

The interviewee was asked to:

- Answer general opening questions regarding to their backgrounds, personal interest etc.,
- Talk about each of the twelve images individually,
- Arrange the numbered images in themes, glue them on a piece of paper, give names to the different themes; rank them in order of importance, and motivate why the concerned images had been grouped together and why the concerned order had been chosen,
- Create a second collage consisting of a storyline, representing what kind of role the brand plays in his or her life, clarify the meaning of the images with help of expressions and brief explanations, and briefly present the final collage,
- Answer semi-structured questions of the interviewer in case certain topics were not yet clearly explained.

Ultimately, the collage collection technique allowed gathering the interviewee’s inner representations of experiences as ideas, imagery, and consumption practices (Wagner, 1979; Scott, 1999). The collage results helped us to understand how brands are integrated in consumers’ lives.

5.4.2 Primary and Secondary Data Sources

For the research, data sets consisted of consumer experiences and stories. However, in order to understand the complex structure, we first investigated previous literature, theories about brand love, company reports, and websites. This secondary data search helped us to understand the phenomenon and the antecedents of brand love in order to build on previous research (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 162; Bryman, Bell, 2011: 91f). Additionally, primary data was collected during semi-structured photo interviews, leading to new insights (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 11). In conclusion, the combination of both primary and secondary data guided us to answer the research questions.

5.5 Sampling Method and Participation Selection

“Good sampling design can make it easier to draw conclusions about data from a sample”

(Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 231)

To begin with, a newer form of convenience sampling and snowball sampling were used to choose suitable candidates (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 218). Potential participants were asked to establish contacts with others in order to create a larger sample (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 192). The result is that only those who are in the social network have a chance of being selected into the sample, not providing a suitable representation of the population (Burns, Bush, 2010: 388). Although the theory cannot be used to generalize results, it provides worthwhile qualitative data concerning the means of the concerned consumer-brand relationship under study. Besides, the final output can be valuable data for further research (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 190).

Based on both time constraints and the qualitative character of our study, the sample size was determined to be seven participants. We followed the advice of Morse (1994: 225) and Guest et al. (2006: 61) to interview at least six people for phenomenological studies. Because of the phenomenological approach of seeing the world from how people interpret the world, we aimed for rich data by conducting seven in-depth, face-to-face interviews, lasting for eighty-ninety minutes rather than a higher number of short interviews. Although face-to-face interviews were needed due to the complexity of the interview process, they also provided benefits in terms of higher levels of commitment and motivation in contrast to online or telephone interviews (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 489).

As previously mentioned, a convenience sampling strategy was used to select sample units on the basis of how easily accessible they are (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 217). We started selecting passionate participants from our own social network, mainly consisting of students studying at Lund University. The potential participants from the snowball sample were contacted by email which stated that we were looking for passionate consumers only. As a result, we were provided with eleven responses. Since the number of responses was higher than the number of participants we needed, we had the opportunity to select them owing to our purpose. During the personal introduction meetings with the interview candidates we began to understand how passionate they were about their brand. The recruiting process was therefore carried-out according to consumers' level of love for the brand.

After we had chosen our candidates, credibility and future aspects were kept in mind (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 148). As a result, we sent the potential participants a professionally laid out e-mail to inform them of the overall process and interview requirements. At the start of the interviews we made sure that the interviewee knew specifically what the interview was about, and that the interview was confidentially dealt with. Interviews took place in private meeting rooms that were easy to reach for the participant. In order to motivate participants, we gave them a 100 SEK coffee card each as gift before starting to interview.

The age of the target group was not the primary element of our research as the main focus is put on homogeneity on our topic, brand love. We aimed for participants with different nationalities, mind-

sets, and love brands. Due to snowball sampling it is a coincidence that participants with an age lying between 22 to 26 turned-out to be in our non-probability sample.

5.5.1 Trustworthiness (Credibility, Transferability) and Authenticity

Trustworthiness is made up of different criteria of which transferability and credibility are important for our research (Wallendorf, Belk, 1989; Bryman, Bell, 2011). Credibility derives from our findings that entail good practice, resulting in rich empirical data (Bryman, Bell, 2011). Namely, forty pages of transcript were provided based on an empirical study consisting of seven in-depth interviews of eighty to ninety minutes each. In addition, confidence in the research can be found in the rich picture material comprising two collages of twelve images each.

The romanticism position we took in interviewing is criticized in many ways by neo-positivists. We overcame these limitations of trust and reality by making the participant choose images reflecting their passion for the brand. The images were chosen for particular personal reasons that were shared during the interview. The photo elicitation technique can be seen as an instrument used to encourage the interviewee to reveal his or her authentic expressions (Alvesson, 2003). Besides, the images provided us with reflexivity, as they stimulated interplay between the meanings of them. This makes our data reveal reality and creativity stemming from rich and meaningful empirical material (ibid).

Furthermore, the photo elicitation technique limited the influence of the interviewer on the results, and thereby supported the phenomenological approach of viewing the world from the participant's point of view. Harper (2002: 22) states that photo elicitation adds validity and reliability to word-based interviews. Ultimately, expertise and engagement regarding the topic are essential characteristics of our research (Wallendorf, Belk, 1989).

Next to credibility, our empirical model regarding how consumers experience brand love can be applied and transferred to other types of research. In order to understand the consumer behavioural phenomena of brand love, knowledge was selected across a variety of study fields. The findings of our research are therefore applicable to other fields of research related to consumer behaviour, such as; psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Furthermore, due to the deep understanding of the phenomenon, our research can be perceived as authentic. Namely, the aim was to gather an in-depth understanding of the interviewees' experiences by mainly using picture material and additional open-ended follow-up questions (Seale, Silverman, 1998). As a result, in-depth knowledge combined with the photo material, and sensitivity towards the interviewee determined goodness, reliability, and validity (Lincoln, 2007). Authenticity is also reflected by the sample size: "traditionally, narratives are rich at the level of detail and convey a high degree of authenticity, which is often not economically possible to achieve with larger sample sizes.

Therefore, one or few cases are better suited for narrative data analysis. This additionally avoids simple or general data (ibid).

5.6 Designing and Conducting the Interviews

“Non-directive interviews where interviewees talk freely without interruption or intervention” are often useful to understand unexplored phenomena (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 143). However, it is better to guide the interviewees towards the research topics in order to assure outcomes. Therefore, the study was based on seven semi-structured individual interviews with the aim of finding a way to enter the respondents’ world in terms such as words, beliefs, values and interests.

The participants were asked to collect twelve images representing their passion for their brand directly or indirectly. In the interview handout (appendix 1) that was sent to the participants before the interview took place, more information was provided regarding the task of collecting images through the Internet. A couple of days after having sent the hand-out via email, an additional phone call was made to assure the participant had understood the guidelines. In the phone call it was clarified that there was a need for symbolized images next to those with a direct meaning (logo, products from the brand, shops of the brand). The participants were told that the interview itself would allow them to enlighten each image with the required explanation and stories. The participants were asked to send us the twelve images one day before the interview would take place. That way it was easy for the participant to recall the reasons and stories behind the different images. After the images were received, in-depth interviews were conducted. Rather than being non-directive, we chose to use semi-structured interviews to increase the quality of our research by receiving answers to questions that corresponded with our research questions (Easterby Smith: 2008: 144).

To explore the most and least important elements in consumer’s relationship with the brand, an image categorization technique was used. The participant was hereby asked to divide the twelve images into themes, and subsequently rank the themes according to their importance. This method was executed in the form of a collage (appendix 2). When the grouping-assignment was finished, participants were asked to explain their reasoning behind the themes. To follow up, a second collage with a second set of the same images was constructed. In contrast to the first collage, the participant was asked to arrange the images in such a way that it became clear what kind of role the brand plays in his or her life.

During the interviews the participants were able to talk freely about their experiences and stories in the areas of our interest. We prepared an interview guide with loosely structured questions to assure that the main topics were touched upon in every interview, providing us with more similarity in style among the different interviews (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 473). The questions were general and not asked in a specific order, allowing us to ask questions according to the answer of the participant. As the

interviewers, we had the opportunity to respond to points that seem relevant for the research and worth being followed-up (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 467). According to Easterby Smith (ibid), semi-structured and non-structured interview questions often give a higher degree of confidentiality, as the replies of the interviewees tend to be more personal in nature. Since we were not experienced interviewers, and to avoid the chance of being provided with poor data, we chose a semi-structured approach (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 144). Nevertheless, the personally selected images motivated the participant to talk about many experiences with the brand. Very often the received explanation on the images answered our questions from the interview guide. So, although we had a list of follow-up questions, it was often not necessary to ask them outside the context. As a positive outcome, this minimized the bias-effects and enabled the interviewees to leeway in how to reply (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 467). To enhance the outcomes further, we took the following practical factors into consideration: obtaining trust, being aware of social interaction, and using appropriate language (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 147). To sum up, all of the above-mentioned characteristics of semi-structured interviews provided us with a reliable source of data, and painted a promising picture for understanding consumers' experiences.

Easterby-Smith et al. (2008: 145) discuss the fact that people cannot be trusted to say exactly what their motives are, as they often get ideas about their own motives from commonly accepted half-truths. Trust is crucial as it enhances the interviewee to tell the researcher what he/she is looking for. A trustworthy atmosphere was created by starting with general questions, acting in a professional manner, and communicating in an enthusiastic way (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 148). Another practical element applied was to adjust the language to the level of the participant.

In addition to the open questions in the interview guideline, '*probes*' were used to improve upon and sharpen the interviewee's response, as well as for accuracy reasons to discover the participant's real motives and truths. Besides, in the formulation of the questions we avoided constructing direct why-questions, as this might have led to more distance, rationalized answers, or even defensive behaviour (Easterby-Smith, 2008: 147).

Furthermore, "although interviewing is often claimed to be '*the best*' method of gathering information, its complexity can sometimes be underestimated (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 143)." Therefore, researchers should follow certain rules while conducting interviews. Firstly, interviewees should be convinced that the research is for an academic institution and all conversations will be confidential and not used for commercial purposes. Additionally, researchers should make sure that questions sound unthreatening and simple. (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 468) Therefore, all chosen interviewees were informed one by one, about the research's scope and confidentiality. Moreover, interviews were conducted in a quiet place using the same tone-of-voice and all were recorded in order to make the analysis easier and increase in-depth understanding (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 468).

In addition, because of limited experience in the field of interviewing, pilot interviews were conducted to train and test our interviewing skills, before the actual interviews took place. A senior lecturer in English from Lund University was taken as a pilot interviewee with the goal of helping us improve our interviewing skills and probing techniques. Moreover the pilot interview made us aware of practical weaknesses, which improved the actual interviews and brought them up to a more professional standard.

5.7 Data Analysis

As a social constructionist perspective was chosen, our attempt was to show similarities between the theory, data collection analysis, and interpretation (Langley, 1999; Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 172). In order to reach this goal, we embraced a narrative data analysis approach related to the telling of stories. Since, stories tell us about things that are happening or have happened to people (Ozyıldırım, 2009: 1210)”. This analysis method helped us examine values, ideas, and beliefs that were hidden in the stories (Alvesson, 2003: 30; Bryman, Bell, 2011: 520). Besides, it enabled us to recapture past experience (Labov, 1972: 360 in Ozyıldırım, 2009: 1210) and interpret the stories behind the images (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008: 182) in order to understand consumer-brand relationships through personal stories.

Moreover, the study of narratives can be defined as the study of the ways humans experience the world (Ozyıldırım, 2009: 1209). This approach helps us to understand how brands are integrated into consumers’ lives, since brands are omnipresent in the modern world (Albert et al. 2008: 1062). Although there are various types of narrative stories (Schank, 1990), our individual, in-depth interviews provided mostly *‘first hand stories’* which represented the interviewee’s personal experiences (Ozyıldırım, 2009: 2010).

Since we gained rich interview data, supported with personal stories, memories, and visuals, we believe that this technique fits our analysis. First of all, while the interviews were being transcribed, the theoretical concepts were kept in mind. To grasp its content and relevancy, the transcripts were several times read thoroughly. Subsequently, the questions from the interviewer and irrelevant information were deleted from the transcripts. We aimed to create a rational link between empirical findings and the theory. Therefore the remaining part was divided into groups and coded in line with the dimensions of our tentative brand love prototype. This enabled us to keep the original words of the interviewees and allowed us to examine the respondents’ answers thoroughly and frequently (Bryman, Bell, 2011: 481). Consequently, the interviews were analysed one-by-one to understand how consumers experience their relationship with the brand. The links between theory and empirical findings contributed to a new and different understanding of the phenomenon (Wiklund-Gustin, 2010: 36).

6. DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis will provide a deeper understanding of how consumers experience brand love by applying a narrative approach. In this process, narratives will be considered individually for their manifestation of personality themes such that a holistic understanding of brand love within the context of the consumer will emerge. Ultimately, an apprehension of the relevant non-interpersonal dimensions leading to brand love will be presented in the form of an empirical model.

6.1 Empirical Findings

Following a narrative approach, we will first analyze and categorize the interviews according to the theoretical dimensions (figure 9). To investigate how the participants experienced brand love, selective coding procedures will be used to connect the empirical findings with the theoretical dimensions of brand love. The focus is on how the specific brand is integrated in the participants' personality, life, and memories with help of visual material. The seven different brands related to different industries will be analyzed and reflected upon individually. The brands can be categorized in the following brand categories: luxury clothing (Burberry), mainstream clothing (H&M), technology (Apple), furniture (Ikea), fast food (McDonald's), coffee (Starbucks), and fictional character (Hello Kitty).

6.1.1 Celine: "Family Tradition"

Interviewee: Celine is a twenty-year old bachelor student born in Sweden. She has Turkish roots and currently lives in Lund where she studies informatics. Besides her studies, Celine works as a tennis trainer. She loves shopping, travelling and enjoys playing tennis.

Brand: Burberry is a luxury-clothing brand that was found in the United Kingdom in 1856. The brand is known for its famous tartan pattern as well as its iconic trench coat. Although Burberry started by offering coats, today they have a broad assortment including products such as fragrances and fashion accessories. Being a luxury and expensive brand, Burberry is associated with quality, design, and fashion attributes. (uk.burberry.com, 2012)

6.1.1.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

Academic theories emphasize that qualities are an important part of brand preference (Batra et al. 2012: 3), which is reinforced by Celine's statements. Throughout the interview, Celine talked about a variety of that had an effect on her passion for Burberry, both sensory and non-sensory. She especially

mentioned her taste for the brand's quality, patterns, and colours. Her appreciation of the brand's high quality was revealed with the following statement:

"The material of the coats makes it possible to use it in both winter and summer. It is a very useful and functional fabric which you can use for every occasion."

Moreover, Celine's awareness of the different colours and patterns became noticeable while talking about her favourite traditional pattern 'Nova-Check.' Subsequently, a strong link to the sensory quality of 'sight' was made by saying that: "(...) the pattern is so beautiful. I can die in it!" [Laughing]

Next to functional and sensory qualities, one of her narratives also revealed that social values were connected to her passion for the brand. It became clear that Celine did not like to hide her adoration for the chequered brand, but rather prefers to be seen in public with it. Furthermore, not only did Celine relate to the pattern as something special to Burberry, but the brand's unique heritage and historical values as well.

"The values of the 'old Burberry brand' are still valid today and will make the brand live on for 200, 300, 400 years from now."

Celine's brand stories revealed that various qualities contributing to her love of the brand. In the interview she once said:

"I think the brand has it all: history, quality, pattern, tradition, stories, colours, classics, just the whole package. (...) Everything I know about the brand, I love".

From these statements it can be concluded that sensory qualities (Roberts, 2005), as well as functional qualities (Batra, 2012 et al. 2012) are important in her love for the brand.

Mystery and Positive Affection

Supporting the previously shared theoretical framework, various icons, stories and mystery elements were mentioned as drivers of positive affection (Roberts, 2005). One of the icons referred to concerned actress Blake Lively, was viewed by Celine as the modern it-girl of today. According to Celine, Blake Lively connects the past with the future by showing how the brand lives on.

"Blake Lively attracts my attention, because she wears Burberry in her daily life, a good symbolization of the brand."

Our research suggests that consumers' credibility in the celebrity can enhance positive associations and affection towards the brand (Charbonneau, Garland, 2010). Moreover, Celine associated the actress of the American teenage series Gossip Girl with the brand's future. According to academic

theory, connections to the type of people who endorse the brand are often dependent on the target group in which consumers' age plays an important role (Tantisenepong et al. 2012).

Although Celine is familiar with Burberry's past and heritage, she also appreciated the brand's attempt to be up-to-date. Celine emphasized that the brand is more than today:

“Burberry was established in 1856, but the most it-girl in the world still wears it. So, I mean, the brand is not dead. It is still alive...”

However, Celine did not directly mention that Blake Lively is her icon, as was the case for Audrey Hepburn. We observed that the match between the brand and Celine's icon, Audrey Hepburn, increased her attachment to the brand. Celine clearly stated that she likes her personality and appreciates her interest for Burberry's tradition.

“This is the icon that I like, it is Audrey Hepburn! She wears a Burberry trench coat in this film, breakfast at Tiffany's from the 60's. And I love her, because she was a Unicef ambassador as well. She is more of a person. She is human. (...) and wore Burberry and I know she liked it a lot. It was a popular movie and Burberry was popular then, as well as today. This is an ongoing process, and it is modern all the time.”



(Collage image nr. 9: Audrey Hepburn)

This narrative reveals the important role of icons and stories in consumer-brand relationships (Roberts, 2005), and shows how they can cause positive affection (Albert et al. 2008: 1073).

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

Celine got to know the brand when she was fourteen years old. From that moment, Burberry became a part of her life. Celine mentioned various intrinsic rewards provided by her brand, but did not touch upon extrinsic elements. With regard to intrinsic rewards, Celine explained her preference for Burberry by using the psychological stages of 'happiness' and 'pleasure' that are in line with the studies of Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012).

“I feel comfortable with Burberry’s products and I think that is pretty important. When I buy it, I do not think: ‘Oh my god, can I wear this?’ Wearing a piece of Burberry makes me feel comfortable, confident and happy!”

This story clarifies Celine’s passion for Burberry by the expression of intrinsic rewards derived from feelings (Roberts, 2005: 183) and brand qualities.

Brand-Personality Match

Celine considers herself as a more traditional, classical type of person, just like Burberry:

“The pattern is traditional and classic, just like me. (...) I love the pattern and the colours, I think they fit me, and that is one of the reasons I buy it.”

As mentioned before, out of the different patterns that Burberry offers, Celine prefers the traditional ‘Nova Check.’ Although she likes the classical aspect of Burberry, she also likes its exclusive, up-scale image: *“I like to show off as well, but sometimes I want to stay classical.”*

The similarities between Celine and the brand are not limited to classical and exclusive aspects only. Burberry’s heritage, country of origin, and attitude towards nationalism are all important factors of Celine’s passion for the brand. In line with this, she chose a picture of the first Burberry store to emphasize the brand’s rich history. In addition, Celine shared a narrative about how Burberry started by producing raincoats for the British army, emphasizing her respect in terms of nationalism.

“To help your country in war is one of the most beautiful things you can do I think.”

Due to Burberry’s rich history, nationalist attitude, as well as love for the country of origin, we conclude that the classical image of Celine matches the brand. To sum up, Burberry is more likely to be loved compared to other similar brands due to beliefs and values (Richins, 1994 in Batra et al. 2012:4; Roberts, 2006:106).

Ultimately, Celine had something special to say about one item of Burberry related to a form of self-enhancement:

“I think that every girl has a lady inside and that the Burberry scarf takes the lady out. So, that is the reason why I like the Burberry scarves so much.”

Next to the fit between Celine and Burberry, there is also a feeling of self-actualization that the brand provides as the concomitant of this fit (Batra et al. 2012:4).

Frequent Thought and Use

Celine came to the interview wearing a Burberry scarf and watch. She stated that Burberry had become part of her daily life by using the items at least four to five times a week. Although she mentioned she was a picky person when it comes to shopping, Burberry always offers products that fit her.

“I buy stuff that I can use. I can use the watch all the time; I can use the scarf all the time, and the jacket...”

From the quote, it can be concluded that Burberry’s wide assortment of products allowed Celine to buy items which she liked and wear them on a daily basis:

“It is nice that some brands are specialized in one thing, but sometimes that can be boring. I love it that I can buy a lot of things from Burberry”.

To sum up, we found that Celine’s love for Burberry is positively affected by active engagement and integration of Burberry in everyday life (Fournier, 1998).

Duration of the Relationship

Celine met Burberry in an early stage of life due to her family’s involvement with the brand and not surprisingly, was the first exclusive brand that she purchased. From that moment, her satisfaction and interest in Burberry started to increase, resulting in a high level of brand love (Albert et al. 2008: 1073). While talking about her past with Burberry, Celine seemed very excited. She stated that she sees Burberry as a part of their family tradition:

“I got a scarf from my grandmother... I can still use it and she used it for all her life. That is the history, I like it! I like the tradition!”

Moreover, she shared a picture taken with her dad holding a Burberry trench coat at her graduation ceremony. Supporting the previous quote, she stressed that her father’s coat is a traditional piece from the 80’s. These examples clarify that both Celine and her relatives have a relatively long history with the brand. In line with the theoretical concepts (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012), this great integration with memories from the past drove her to feel more passionate for Burberry.

Willingness to Invest

As explained previously, Celine expressed her beliefs about the high quality of Burberry products. She stated that Burberry products are worth paying price premium due to their high level of quality (Batra et al. 2012). Moreover, Celine stated that she is willing to save money to purchase new products.

Although Burberry is an expensive luxury brand, she underlined that today the brand is more affordable compared to the past:

“Today, Burberry is not that upscale anymore. It was like that before. I mean, almost everybody can buy Burberry. Maybe not right away, but if you save some you can afford it after two or three months.”

Burberry’s price strategy has never been changed (Moore, Birtwistle, 2004). This statement explains that Celine’s increased interest in the brand increased her willingness to pay an additional price, making her become more price insensitive (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1).

6.1.1.2 New Dimensions

Brand Exposure and Global Image

Celine seemed highly affected by the brand’s global image when she stated that:

“It is a luxury brand and it is recognized all over the world. I mean, I used the products with care and respect, and that is the same in other countries as well ...I love the global image.”

In her collage, Celine positioned the image of the world map on the top of other images, showing the importance of global image. Moreover, the relationship between brand exposure and brand love was clearly described:

“I like to look at the brands that inspire me. Now, I see it every day in front of me. I can see it on TV, I can see it at home, I can read about it and I see it in movies, in oldies, classics. So this makes me love the brand more.”

Therefore, we can conclude that strong global image and high brand exposure motivated Celine to create passionate feelings for the brand.

Country of Origin

Celine admires the British culture, which she associates with knowledge, academic works, and know-how. She says that Burberry has strong connections with Great Britain as well as the British culture in many ways. Her deep admiration of Burberry’s associations with Britain were clearly explained during the interview:

“I would not buy a 500 dollar Burberry scarf just because it makes me a lady. I would buy it because of the brand’s culture, country and quality.”

Although the country of origin is not shown as a brand love dimension in previous studies, our

research suggests that the connection with Britain in this case is an important driver behind Celine's passion.

Reference Group Effect

Being a traditional individual, Celine values her elders' (dad and grandmother) opinions. It can be concluded that Celine's interest in the brand increased because of the reference group (Credé et al. 2009). As a result, different brand stories were implied from the reference group effect.

For instance, Celine emphasized that she uses her grandmother's Burberry scarf. She seemed very proud of this fact and added: *"I might give that scarf to my grandchildren as well."* She even mentioned that she still used her grandmother's scarf, making her proud and happy.

In addition to her grandmother, Celine's father was also considered as an inspirational person who wore Burberry in his daily life.

"I listen to my father a lot. I think he is a smart guy. When I need something, I go talk to him. He is more than my father, he is my mentor! He wears Burberry as well. When I see trustworthy people wearing it, I get inspired."

In this narrative, Celine's father was viewed as an inspirational person, having a positive effect on her relationship with Burberry.

Derived from the above-mentioned stories, we suggest that *'reference groups'*, consisting of friends, families, or inspirational people (Escalas, Betman, 2005), should be seen as a new dimension of brand love.

6.1.1.3 Outcomes

As a result of brand love, we conclude that Celine became a loyal customer of Burberry based on the number of products she has and her repeat purchase intentions (Carroll, Ahuvia 2006; Fournier, 1998). Celine stated that she preferred buying Burberry sport clothes even if they were not as high in quality as products of specialized sport brands. This indicates that Celine's passion for Burberry makes her forgive the brand of not providing the highest of quality (Bauer et al. 2009 in Batra et al. 2012: 1). Finally, since the brand's upscale position has not been changed during the relationship, Celine mentioned her willingness to pay a premium price (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012:1).

6.1.2 Kylie: “Secret Love Story”

Participant: Kylie is 23 year old Chinese student living in Lund. She comes from Beijing and has a bachelor degree in business from China. She decided to take her master degree in Sweden since she wanted to experience the western education system. In her free time, she loves travelling, yoga, cooking, and meeting new people from different cultures. She is very interested in the Japanese Kawaii culture.

Brand: Hello Kitty is a cartoon character that was designed by Yuko Shimizu in 1974 for the Japanese company Sanrio. Since that it has become a world-known brand. Hello Kitty was invented as a character that can bring out the preteen girl in women of all ages. The brand offers a wide assortment consisting of stationery, clothing, accessories, food, electronics etc. (hellokittyuniverse.com, 2012)

6.1.2.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

Kylie mentioned that cute characters are fairly common in China, and Hello Kitty is an especially popular character. It was the popularity of the Hello Kitty brand that caught Kylie’s attention, causing her to get to know the brand. She met her brand for the first time in the form of a McDonald’s theme toy when she ordered a happymeal. From that time on, she started collecting Hello Kitty theme toys and became even more interested in the brand.

During grouping task portion of the interview, Kylie gave one the themes the name: ‘*Kawaii Culture*’, which she related to the brand’s popularity:

“Kawaii is a Japanese word which means cuteness. (...) There is a new term that refers to the cute culture: Kawaii culture, and Hello Kitty represents this culture. They share the same concept of cuteness.”

Kylie’s statement indicates that Hello Kitty has a special place in her world while being representative for a popular culture. Supporting this notion, she showed an image with stickers of ‘cute figures’ to clarify the connection between the brand on the one side, and the stickers’ popularity and cuteness on the other side:

“The stickers represent the cuteness of Hello Kitty. Those stickers are very popular in China and remind me of Hello Kitty.”

This narrative clarifies that functional qualities (popularity) can be interrelated with sensory qualities (cuteness) (Batra et al. 2012). For instance, Kylie often mentioned the sensory quality of ‘*sight*’

(beautiffulness) while she was talking about Hello Kitty (Roberts, 2005). Additionally, we observed that outlook, visuals, and packaging play an important role in Kylie's purchase decisions. It was mentioned that due to the brand's association with the colour pink, her visual preferences changed towards pink, affecting her buying behaviour.

“Every single Hello Kitty item that I have is pink. So once I saw decorations with a lot of pink elements in it, it reminded me of the kitty. I can feel the Kawaii cuteness (...)”

Kylie brought a Hello Kitty mirror and a pair of ear-warmers to the interview. She clearly explained the importance of how products look (sensory qualities) by stating that cuteness and beautifulness motivated her to buy them. This explanation is in line with studies saying that beauty is one of the brand love dimensions that play an important role in forming and maintaining consumer-brand relationships (Hatfield, Spencer, 1995; Sangrador, Yela, 2000 in Albert et al. 2008: 1073). Batra et al. (2012) support this by stating a strong connection between all qualities can lead to high levels of brand love.

Mystery and Positive Affection

It was found that strong stories, dreams, and memories were main drivers behind Kylie's interest and positive affection for the brand (Roberts, 2005). Kylie shared a narrative about how Hello Kitty affected her preferences. As stated previously, she began to love the colour pink when starting to collect the Hello Kitty theme toys. We believe that this memory plays an important role on her love for the brand, as we observed that it motivated her to talk about Hello Kitty in an extreme positive way. (Roberts, 2005). Next to this story, Kylie seemed highly convinced and knowledgeable about the 'personal' Hello Kitty story as well:

“Hello Kitty has a life, she has a family, she has a boyfriend, and she has friends (...) the cat is not just an animal. She has a personality. It is more like a person! Currently, she is 38 years old. And her birthday is celebrated all over the world on the 1st of November.”

Moreover, Kylie shared her dreams about going to the Hello Kitty theme parks in Japan, meeting other fans, and experiencing the Hello Kitty world. She referred to the theme parks as Hello Kitty's hometown where she would be able to meet Hello Kitty in person. We concluded that the mysterious world (Roberts, 2005) of Hello Kitty call-up warm-hearted feelings and increased brand interest, resulting in positive affection towards the brand (Albert et al. 2008: 1073).

What surprised us was that Kylie stated that she felt totally comfortable in the theme parks while using and wearing Hello Kitty items. This also reinforced the idea of “Hello Kitty's branded world”, where fans meet each other:

“There you can do everything in a Hello Kitty way and you do not have to be ashamed for it; because all people love Hello Kitty there!”

We also noticed Kylie’s aspiration to fully experience Hello Kitty once, not only by visiting the theme park, but also by taking the Hello Kitty airline to the theme park:

“This is Taiwan Airlines. They have an airplane that is decorated in pink with Hello Kitty images everywhere. (...) and the more amazing thing is that the airplane only flies from Taipei, Taiwan to those two theme parks. When I go to the theme parks, I would first fly to Taiwan and catch the Hello Kitty plane to the theme park, that’s part of the experience!”

In conclusion, all previously shared examples demonstrated that Kylie is caught by the utopian world of Hello Kitty encouraged her to talk about the brand in a highly positive and affectionate way (Roberts, 2005; Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012).

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

Kylie never touched upon extrinsic rewards during the interview. Instead, she mentioned mainly how Hello Kitty makes her happy: *“I love the feeling of having it. When you have it, you feel girly!”* It was shown that emotional reasons driven by pleasure are crucial factors explaining brand love for fictional character brands (Roberts, 2005). Although Kylie was more than enthusiastic about Hello Kitty, she stressed that she hides her love due to the strong associations between the brand and children.

“I care about how other people think about me, so I want to hide my love. Hello Kitty has always been argued about, either in a positive or negative way. Some people think it is too cute, girly so I do not really want people to know it. Only my close friends know about it!”

Nevertheless, we believe that this attitude might be linked to the characteristics associated with the Asian culture such as shyness and unassertiveness (China Today, 2000).

Next to the theme parks, Kylie also shared images of other Hello Kitty services such as the Hello Kitty café and the Hello Kitty Hospital. Rather than extrinsic rewards, Kylie mainly touched upon intrinsic rewards such as ‘*enjoyment*’, and stated that all the Hello Kitty places are worth to experience.

“This is the first official Hello Kitty café in the world. Everything is pink and has Hello Kitty on it. The couch is pink and round, it looks so cosy and cute. You can even have a cup of Hello Kitty cappuccino with a kitty face on top. They have Hello Kitty cakes as well. It would make me feel comfortable by enjoying the cosy atmosphere of Hello Kitty café!”

Based her statement, it can be concluded that emotional reasons that were driven by enjoyment (Roberts, 2005) motivated Kylie to consume Hello Kitty products or services without waiting to receive anything in return (Batra et al. 2012).

Brand-Personality Match

In line with previous brand love literature, we observed a natural fit between Hello Kitty and Kylie as a result of the brand's deeper meaning (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012). Supporting our argument, Kylie clearly emphasized the similarities between her and the character's personality that caused her to get attached to Hello Kitty directly when she met the brand for the first time. Nowadays, Kylie refers to the brand in terms of elements that fit her personality:

“Hello Kitty reflects my hidden and innocent parts, girlyness, and immaturity. When you grow up, you experience a lot of things. I do not want the whole society influence me! I still want to remain my youth, and I believe that Hello Kitty can give me that. And make me feel young!”

Subsequently, she placed the raw strawberry image in the middle of her collage and clarified the meaning of the images with: *“Stay young, stay foolish”*, and explained:

“The strawberry is not ripe or red yet, but yellow or light green, which symbolizes immaturity. I think it reflects my personality. Even though I am already an adult now, I still have some immature elements. I do not want to be that savvy, professional woman. I still want to have a bit different, innocent, creative thinking as a child, and look at things from another perspective.”

Both narratives show that Kylie is under influence of the utopian world of Hello Kitty (Roberts, 2005) by referring to self-enhancing elements (Maslow, 1954) as girlyness, immaturity, and innocence.

Frequent Thought and Use

As mentioned previously, Kylie came to the interview with a few Hello Kitty products and stated that she often used them. This was reinforced by the first collage task of grouping images together under a certain theme name. Images of frequently used products were grouped under the theme: *“Everyday with Hello Kitty”*, and was indicated as the best representative theme for her relationship with Hello Kitty:

“Those pictures represent my everyday life with Hello Kitty. With those products you can live in your own Hello Kitty world. She is everyday with me!”

This statement proved the integration with the brand in everyday life, which caused Kylie to maintain her brand love for Hello Kitty (Fournier, 1998).

Duration of Relationship

During the interview, Kylie constantly stated how Hello Kitty affected her life since the time she came across the brand. Although she did not use to like *'pink stuff'* when she was a child, this changed after she met Hello Kitty:

“My mom bought me pink dresses, toys, accessories when I was a child, but I did not like them at that time. I thought they were too childish. (...) Then I started to collect McDonald’s Hello Kitty theme toys and changed my mind.”

In addition to the duration of the relationship, this turning point in her life also made Kylie establish strong associations with her childhood (Albert et al. 2008). Ultimately, Kylie’s introduction to the brand in an early stage in life developed a strong emotional and lifetime attachment (ibid).

Willingness to Invest

From the time Kylie met Hello Kitty, she saved her budget to buy toys and various other products. During her time in Sweden, Kylie’s interest for Hello Kitty increased, since she discovered Hello Kitty products at other shops than Hello Kitty shops, such as H&M. Additionally, we observed that she enjoys investing time on going to H&M to check the new Hello Kitty products.

Since the nearest Hello Kitty shop can be found in Copenhagen, she does not make visits on a regular basis. This is different in her home country where Hello Kitty stores are more accessible.

During the interview, she seemed very enthusiastic about the service of Hello Kitty. Kylie mentioned being willing to pay a premium price due to the intrinsic rewards that the brand provides:

“For that amazing experience in the Hello Kitty Café I would be willing to pay an extra price (...) The food and beverages they offer provide me with additional value. It would make me feel comfortable in the café by enjoying the cosy atmosphere!”

On top of that, Kyle shared her interest of giving birth to a child in the Hello Kitty hospital, even though she would have to queue and pay a lot for it.

(Collage image nr. 9: Hello Kitty Hospital)



While talking about the final collage, Kylie concluded that she would love to experience Hello Kitty in different ways:

“I started buying small Hello Kitty products that I could afford when I was sixteen. I wish I would have enough money in the future to experience Hello Kitty in a more exclusive way! Like going to the Hello Kitty Café, drinking Hello Kitty wine with friends, experiencing the whole Hello Kitty world in the theme park, and taking a Hello Kitty flight! (...) I know it costs a lot of money but it is something that I would love to experience.”

To sum up, the stories mentioned above show that she tended to invest time, energy, and money on her brand (Batra et al. 2012). Therefore, frequent thought and use of the brand can be seen as an important attribute of her relationship with Hello Kitty.

6.1.2.2 New Dimensions

Brand Exposure and Global Image

Kylie mentioned the variety of Hello Kitty products that are offered in China. Although this is not the case in Sweden, she is fascinated by the fact that Hello Kitty products are provided in big retail stores in Sweden such as H&M:

“Hello Kitty definitely became more accessible from the time it started to cooperate with other brands! Now it is easier for Hello Kitty fans to buy various products. I like that they have pjamas, make-up, accessories, everything!”

Therefore, we conclude that brand exposure can be considered as an important part of brand love dimension.

Reference Group Effect

Kylie emphasized that she has friends who love Hello Kitty as well. She seemed happy when she talked about the Hello Kitty gifts that she received from her friends as a birthday gift. Despite her passion, she hides her interest for the brand based on potential negative opinions of others. One of Kylie's stories clearly described how she feels affected by her friends:

“Once I was thinking to change the case of my laptop for a Hello Kitty one. But, I hesitated because I did not want other people to see that I am a fan of Hello Kitty. I did not buy that case. But, I have a friend in China who is so crazy about the kitty that she has different Hello Kitty cases for her computer, iPhone and even her suitcase... I love the products that my friend has!”

We found that, for these reasons, reference group effects not only affect personality and attitude (Credé et al. 2009), but consumers' affection to the brand as well.

6.1.2.3 Outcomes

We conclude that Kylie became a loyal customer to Hello Kitty due to a natural fit between her and the brand. Over time, this resulted in brand loyalty and motivated her to pay more for Hello Kitty's products (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1). Both loyalty and willingness to pay premium price were observed as outcomes of Kylie's relationship with Hello Kitty (Batra et al. 2).

6.1.3 Adele: "Guilty Pleasure"

Interviewee: Adele is a 21year old bachelor student, born and raised in Montreal, Canada. She studies International Business and Operations Management, and currently studies in Lund as an exchange student. Adele considers herself as person with broad interests and hobbies, ranging from tennis, going to concerts, but especially travelling. She has set foot on all the continents, except Antarctica. For her, life is all about enjoying the present and its numerous surprises with your loved. Her motto is: "live life to the fullest".

Starbucks: Starbucks is an American coffee chain found in Seattle in 1971. It is world's largest coffee chain with more than 17.000 chops in fifty countries. Next to coffee, Starbucks also sells other hot drinks, cold drinks, sandwiches, snacks, and cakes. The brand with the Mermaid as logo also started to sell books, music, and films via its Entertainment department 'Hear Music'. Starbucks is known for its service, quality and the experience around the coffee itself. (starbucks.com, 2012)

6.1.3.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

While talking about her passion for the brand, Adele refers to a variety of qualities, both sensory and non-sensory. Next to the brand's service attributes, Adele mainly experiences Starbucks through the sensory qualities of 'sight' and 'smell' (Roberts, 2005).

"(...) it is the feeling when you go into the Starbucks. It feels cosy and warm and it smells good. It also feels home since the barista knows my name and I do not need to ask for what I want."

Adele refers to the unique service, vibe, and feeling of the brand in a sense that other coffee places do not offer. However, the taste of the coffee is an even more important brand attribute to her. Quality coffee is essential for Adele, which she expresses with help of a quote from her dad that hangs above

the coffee machine in their home kitchen: *“life is too short to drink cheap coffee.”* Adele’s reasoning for drinking Starbucks coffee is that she likes the taste of her favourite coffee better at Starbucks than anywhere else. She describes herself as being addicted to the brand mainly caused by the Starbucks taste as well as the experience part of the brand.

It goes without saying that the exclusiveness and Starbucks’ customer-centric approach also has its price tag:

“Starbucks is something that people with a privileged background would drink. It is expensive and not a lot of people can afford it.”

Although the brand is exclusive, Adele explains that Starbucks is highly accessible in a physical way. The chain has many shops with one even located right next to her university. The accessibility of Starbucks has a direct influence on her level of consumption: *“When Starbucks would not be right next door, I would not drink just as much.”*

Mystery and Positive Affection

The direct effect on Adele’s personal aspirations was explained by the mystery behind the brand, as well as stories that make her feel connected to it (Roberts, 2005). For Adele, mystery starts with the Starbucks’ gold member card:

“I did not get the card until long time after I started drinking Starbucks. It was just my dad who asked me whether I knew about it. Since Starbucks does not advertise the card, you do not really know they have it.”

Next to the gold card, Adele explained that a lot of people do not know about the secret menu either. In her case, many years after having visited the same Starbucks shop, the barista asked her whether she would like to try something new. At that moment, the barista provided her with the secret menu. Although she still orders the same coffee as she did before, *‘the white mocha’*, the menu provided her with a mysterious element of the brand, which she had not discovered before.

From mystery, we will make the transfer to visuals and stories, starting with the mermaid that is represented by Starbucks’ logo. Instead of the logo, the little mermaid that Adele sent us stands for her favourite movie, Disney’s the Little Mermaid. Adele connects the mermaid character from the movie with Starbucks:

...“every time I watch the movie with my little cousins, the mermaid reminds me of the Starbucks logo. It just makes me think of coffee and makes me think of Starbucks, just because of the mermaid.”

Amongst the images Adele sent us, there was one image of a 24-hour Starbucks. Her dad sent the picture to her when he was in Jakarta, Indonesia.



(Collage image nr. seven: 24-hours Starbucks, Jakarta, Indonesia)

Adele refers to the picture as a dream. Since they do not have these types of Starbucks shops in Canada, the twenty-four hour Starbucks is kind of a dream to her. She would love to have these types of Starbucks shops at home.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

With help of her dad's quote: *'life is too short to drink cheap coffee'*, Adele described Starbucks as her *'daily guilty pleasure.'* Her daily loyalty towards Starbucks has led her to apply for a gold member card. This gold card represents an additional aspect of delight and pleasure for Adele:

"The day I got the card, I opened the mail and saw that it was really a gold card! (...) The card makes me feel special... and really happy!"

Next to intrinsic rewards as a result of psychological stages such as delightfulness and happiness (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012), the card provides Adele with the benefit of receiving a free drink after every fifteen drinks, getting two bags of coffee beans for the price of one, or switching to soy milk without charge. The rule is that thirty Starbucks coffees need to be consumed in one year time in order to keep the card. Although the card provides Adele with functional and motivational rewards, she clarified that the card is a complementary element of her passion for Starbucks. Nevertheless, this example aligns with theory explaining that brand love commonly results from both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards (Roberts, 2005; Batra et al. 2012).

Brand-Personality Match

Adele explains that the exclusiveness and *'coolness'* of the brand fit her privilege background: *"It starts my day, it is cool. I have the secret menu, I have the gold card, and they know my favourite coffee!"* Adele refers to the personal consumer treatment of not having to order, her special rights of being a gold member, and the hidden menu that is provided by the barista to loyal customers only.

Next to these unique and attractive brand attributes, the brand provides her with feelings of calmness reflecting her personality that is calm and stress-proof. This is well represented by a quote her mom sent her once: *“Keep calm and drink coffee”*. In Adele’s case, the word coffee was interpreted as Starbucks’s coffee. Drawing from the above, we conclude that there is a strong congruity between Adele’s self-image and the brand image that leads to the brand love (Sirgy, 1985 in Albert et al. 2008).

Frequent Thought and Use

In Sweden, Adele does not visit Starbucks often as they only have a few stores in Sweden. Back home, she makes a visit to Starbucks five times a week due to the high level of accessibility within the bigger cities.

In her collage, Adele used the image of a Starbucks coffee mug and her laptop to symbolize that Starbucks is integrated in her everyday life.

“This is what I experience on a daily basis: with my coffee and my computer at school. This is how I start my day and everyday I drink my coffee from that cup.”

Next to drinking Starbucks coffee frequently, she thinks about the brand on a regular basis. For instance, the little note in the kitchen with: *“life is too short to drink cheap coffee”* makes her think of Starbucks everyday.

“Everyday I wake up, this is the start of my day. This note tells me that I am going to spend money on Starbucks again.”

To conclude, frequent engagement and interactive behaviour motivated Adele to develop affectionate feelings towards Starbucks (Fournier, 1998). Moreover, we agree with Fournier (1998) that Starbucks became a legitimate *‘relationship partner’* due to the brands integration with her everyday life (Batra et al. 2012).

Duration of Relationship

The start of Adele’s love story took on a whole new level dominated her daily routine together with her friends from high school:

“It started when my best friend and I did shopping with our moms in a big warehouse back home in Montreal. We ended up having almost the same lunch with a Starbucks Frappuccino. From that moment, we started drinking Starbucks coffee on a regular basis.”

The relationship between Adele and Starbucks started five years ago and grew more intense over time. Her increased level of affection was caused by the brand’s global presence, allowing Adele to visit her

favourite coffee shop in foreign countries as well: *“My interest for Starbucks has increased by time. I try to get Starbucks in every country I go to now.”*

It can be concluded that Adele’s long-lasting relationship with Starbucks comes with a feeling of satisfaction (Hendrick et al. 1998 in Albert et al. 2012). Satisfaction is referred to as an important dimension of brand love, making consumer-brand relationships last long (Albert et al. 2008).

Willingness to Invest

Although Adele finds a cup of Starbucks coffee as expensive, she is willing to pay premium price due to the brand being integrated in her life (Batra et al. 2012). Furthermore, Adele mentioned that Starbucks is a place where she can go with her friends who, just like her, love to visit Starbucks. While making the comparison between Starbucks and her friends, she explained that her friends outweigh the price of Starbucks coffee, making it worth to pay an additional price:

“When I do not go to school, I realize how much I usually spend on Starbucks. But I guess you have to pay for what you love!”

Although Adele is willing to pay for the brand, she is not willing to spend more time on the brand when there is no Starbucks nearby. Adele explained that when Starbucks would be far away she would only visit the shop occasionally, and not on a regular basis like back home. Therefore, convenience and accessibility are seen as relevant contributors of Adele’s love for the brand (Batra et al. 2012).

6.1.3.2 New Dimensions

Brand Exposure and Global Image

Adele clarified that her passion for Starbucks increased over time. She likes the brand being exactly the same across the world. Supporting her point, Adele stated that although most shops look different, they all provided the same type of cosy atmosphere.

While travelling, Adele said she tries to take advantage of the brand’s global image by visiting a Starbucks shop in every country she goes to. It makes her happy that her favourite coffee brand enables her to drink her loved ‘white mocha’ all around the globe.

For these reasons, we deduce that Starbucks’ high visibility and its ubiquitous image play a crucial role on the establishment and sustainability her love for the brand. Brasel and Gips (2009) support that brand exposure is inexorably linked with the affective experience portrayed in advertising.

Reference Group Effect

In her passion for Starbucks, there is also the influence of other people who inspired Adele to start drinking Starbucks coffee. Her dad taught her to drink coffee when Adele was young, but she cannot say that her dad inspired her to drink Starbucks coffee, something that is completely different in Adele's eyes.

Her love for Starbucks started with her best friend. Adele explained that the image with the two cups of empty Frappuccino's (Appendix 2, Theme Collage Starbucks, image 1) explains why she still drinks Starbucks.

"Starbucks is closely related to friends for me, but not all of them, only my high school friends. On the picture we bond and chill over a Starbucks, not just a regular coffee."

Adele emphasizes that besides the mermaid, her friends also make her think of Starbucks. She recently received a picture from her friend that was taken in a Starbucks shop that they used to visit together on a regular basis. Adele clarified that the picture described the love of both her friend and her for Starbucks. For these reasons, we suggest that the '*reference group effect*' is not only relevant for product and brand evaluations (Bennett et al. 2010), but also for brand love.

6.1.3.3 Outcomes

Adele's passion for the brand has led to repeat purchases, causing the brand to be fully integrated in her life nowadays (Batra et al. 2012). Her privileged background allowed Adele to purchase five cups of Starbucks coffee every week. The taste of the coffee, the experience, the global presence, and the connection between the brand and Starbucks love determine her willingness to pay premium price (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1).

In addition, Adele mentioned that the gold card and the secret menu especially made her talk about Starbucks in a positive way with her friends and family. We can therefore conclude that Adele is an ambassador of her brand by spreading positive word of mouth (Batra et al. 2012).

6.1.4 Michael: "Big Love Index"

Interviewee: Michael is a 22 year old bachelor student from the USA, Chicago. Back home, Michael studies at the International Business School of Chicago to obtain his bachelor degree. Because Michael has Swedish roots and family living in southern Sweden, he chose to participate in a one-year exchange programme at Lund University. Michael loves cars, meeting friends, and reading. Back home he is a fanatic basketball player, but here in Lund he is only training with a student team.

McDonald's: World's largest hamburger fast food chain is present in one hundred nineteen countries. The company was founded in 1955 in USA, and started as a barbecue restaurant. In the past few years, McDonald's has modernised its restaurants, and introduced the new concept of the McCafé. Today, McDonald's is striving for a sustainable future by changing part of their red and yellow colours into green. Their iconic golden arches have also started to appear with a green background in some countries. (mcdonalds.com, 2012)

6.1.4.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

In line with the brand's industry, the sensory qualities of 'taste' and 'sight' were often mentioned as dimensions of brand love (Roberts, 2005). Michael explained why he prefers McDonald's: *"I would literally eat McDonald's for breakfast, lunch and dinner if I could. It is because of the taste!"* Next to the taste, Michael elucidates that McDonald's visual appeal is different compared to other places: *"It looks good. Any burger looks good, but McDonalds just looks a lot better."*

Although the taste of burgers is the main reason for Michael to visit McDonald's, he explained that the uniqueness of McDonald's is not only due to the taste of the burgers. Michael compared the shop's atmosphere with the one of Burger King and came to the conclusion that McDonald's was more welcoming, the colours they employ are warmer, and they provide a family-friendly atmosphere.

In line with this, Michael also stated that he likes McDonald's new restaurants after renovation: *"I think the new restaurants are very nice, they look less industrial and more like a cosy and home place to stay."* Based on the importance of sensory brand qualities, we agree with Roberts (2005) that: "no matter how much consumers love a brand, if they are not connected emotionally to sensory qualities at the end of the day, they are less likely to come back."

In addition to sensory qualities, price was shown as another factor that differentiates McDonald's from other burger places. Michael mentioned that some of their burgers are only one dollar.

"I like McDonald's so much because their products are so easy to buy. McDonald's prices vary in the different countries, but in America it is cheap, and that is maybe why I go into McDonald's too (...)"

Other important brand attributes addressed concerned: safety in offerings, accessibility, and service. According to Michael, McDonald's is 'literally larger than life'. It was noted that the high number of restaurants in his home country make the brand become accessible, affecting his love for the brand.

Next to accessibility, McDonald's mainly offers the same products and services all across the world. This makes the brand a safe choice when he goes into another country where they have food he does not like:

“You always know that there is at least McDonald's. It is a kind of safety then, my safety net. I went to Peru ones and didn't like the food, so I ended up in McDonald's. (...) Good tasting, a safe choice, convenience, and quality. It never fails, and it is secure, as you know that it is always going to be the same.”

In conclusion, both functional and sensory qualities are drivers of Michael's love for McDonald's. From the theory it was understood that brand qualities make brand love stronger (Batra et al. 2012). In terms of Michael, we can speak about an integration of qualities, making him trust the brand, leading to satisfaction and brand love (Hendrick et al. 1998 in Albert et al. 200).

Mystery and Positive Affection

Various dreams, memories, and stories of Michael were related to 'affection' or 'warm-hearted' feelings (Batra et al. 2012). Michael is known for his 'burger passion' among his friends and family, and burgers are even integrated in his dreams. He showed us an image of a burger shaped bed that he received from his sister:

“This is my dream bed, the bed for McDonald's fanatics. My sister always teases me by saying: ‘You like to eat, to sleep, and you like burgers so much, so this is the perfect bed for you!’ It is actually true (...)”



(Collage image nr. 2, “dream bed for McDonald's fanatic”)

It was noticed that Michael's childhood memories of McDonald's are linked to positive feelings and special occasions. The brand evokes memories from the past that Michael can still remember (Albert et al. 2008). Another brand story had regard to the iconic character of McDonald's:

“Ronald McDonald is something that other fast food restaurants don't have. You really have a person there, which is cool when you are a child.”

Michael's memories that were shaped with brand stories and icons that were indicated to have positive affection for the brand (Roberts, 2005).

At the end of the interview, Michael summarized his collage mainly with elements belonging to the dimension of positive affection: *"I sleep and dream of travelling the world and eating McDonald's in every country I visit. I recall my childhood memories of McDonald's and obviously the taste of a good burger."* This quote lends special credence to the mystery dimension of Roberts (2005) by referring to icons, dreams, and memories.

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

During the interview, Michael referred to the mainly intrinsic reward of *'happiness'*. Extrinsic rewards were not touched upon. Michael shared one of his childhood memories related to intrinsic rewards describing that his happiness from McDonald's all started when McDonald's staff members were willing to change his toys. Additionally, Michael emphasized that the Happy Meal is connected to his childhood and stirs up happy memories: *"You get the toy and the little box that made me happy!"*

For the grouping task, Michael tried to explain how people fall in love with McDonald's: *"First you get hooked, then you go into McDonald's for the fries for example, something that I love, and then you realize that you could eat McDonald's every meal, because you love it, it makes you happy."*

Observing from the previous quotes, Michael often used the word *'happy'* in explaining his memories. Based on that, it can be concluded that Michael goes to McDonalds just because he loves it (Batra et al. 2012). This shows that consuming McDonald's provides him with intrinsic motivations related to his love for the brand.

Brand-Personality Match

Supporting the previous academic literature, we observed that there is congruity between the self and the brand in terms of values and interests (Byrne et al. 1986; Capella, Palmer, 1990; Galton, 1984; Rushton, 1989 in Albert et al. 2003: 1073)

Michael previously mentioned the fit with the family-friendly associations that McDonald's has. Furthermore, he mentioned that he liked the appeal of Ronald McDonald's towards a larger audience: *"They actually have a social conscious. The fact that they are conscious of their surrounding makes me appreciate them."* (Ronald McDonald is a friendly clown character). Nowadays, Ronald McDonald is also connected to funding sick children by providing family homes for the parents and the sick children in the area of hospitals (McDonalds.com, 2012).

Consequently, it can be concluded that the match between Michael and the brand (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012) affected Michael's brand love for McDonald's.

Frequent Thought and Use

Although Michael comes from a health conscious family, he shared that going to McDonald's for special occasions was a part of his childhood. Whereas his mom had an influence on his behaviour when he was younger, this changed later on. As he became more independent in high school his affection for McDonald's grew.

"I now had the control of what I ate, and of course it turned to the worse. I started to eat more McDonald's, because I love it."

Furthermore, Michael stated that he limits himself to three to five visits a month, since he is aware of the fact that the food he loves is unhealthy. However, he would never stop eating McDonald's due to his love for the brand.

Duration of the Relationship

As stated previously, Michael linked McDonald's with childhood memories, as a result of content with the brand in the early stages of his life. According to theory, a long history with the brand can result in brand love (Guadagni, Little, 1983 in Batra et al. 2012). This applies to Michael as his childhood memories mean a lot to him.

While talking about his history with the brand, Michael stated that McDonald's Happy Meal triggered his affection for the brand. From that moment, his interest and love increased. Michael explained this increase by stating: *"When I grew up I loved it even more because it is so easy to go in there. When I like something I stick with it."* This reinforces previous studies stating that past behaviour is often a good predictor of future behaviour (ibid).

In line with previous studies, we point to Michael's relationship attitude as actively engaged and linked to past experiences. The relatively long duration of the relationship increased his satisfaction and triggered brand love (Fournier, 1998; Batra et al. 2012).

Willingness to Invest

Michael associates McDonald's with its low price policy. Although McDonald's is a cheap fast-food chain in his home country, Michael is willing to pay extra for the same food abroad:

"Especially when you go to a country where they have other food that you do not like, you always know that there is a McDonald's. In that case you are willing to pay a little bit extra."

This statement indicates that Michael tends to pay an additional amount of money for his love brand in order to get the service quality he is used to (Batra et al. 2012). Moreover, it was revealed that

Michael's loved brand is integrated in his life (Fournier, 1998). Supporting this, Michael stated that he always tries to eat the adapted menu of McDonald's in every country he travels to. He explained that he had the local adapter menu in about fifteen to twenty countries so far. Next to his tendency to pay premium price, this statements clarified that he also invests time and energy into the brand since he loves it (Batra et al. 2012).

6.1.4.2 New Dimensions

Brand Exposure and Global Image

Michael stated that the brand's global image is one of the reasons why he loves McDonald's. One of the images representing his love for McDonald's concerns the well-known Big Mac Index: Michael explained that although it is a financial tool that is used for measuring purchasing power parity,

"You can go to China and Peru, but there is still the same taste."

Michael seemed very enthusiastic while he was talking about the brand's global coverage and image.

"There are so many McDonald's all over the world, it is inevitable. That is what influenced my love for the brand and the fact that I became loyal to McDonald's. The competitors: Taco Bell, Burger King, and In and Out are not everywhere."

The quotes mentioned above clearly show that brand exposure and global image are relevant brand love dimensions. In conclusion, we noticed that these dimensions provided an advantage to McDonald's over its competitors and increased Michael's brand love.

6.1.4.3 Outcomes

As a result of the long history with the brand and its concomitant brand love, we noticed that Michael became a true loyal customer of his brand (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006: 88f).

Michael considers himself lucky to have good genes and although he knows about the anti-McDonald's documentary '*Supersize Me*' that tries to communicate the harms of McDonald's food, he keeps eating at McDonald's. This attitude shows that due to his love for the brand, Michael became resistant to negative brand information (Batra et al. 2012: 2).

Besides brand loyalty and resistance to negative brand information, increased willingness to pay price premium was another outcome of Michael's love for McDonald's (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1). Michael argued his willingness to pay price premium when he is abroad.

6.1.5 Jennifer: “Priceless Therapy”

Participant: Jennifer is 26 years old student living in Lund who is originally from Albania. She has a master degree in clinical psychology, and currently studies in another master program at Lund University. She is a non-materialistic, feminist person who appreciates equality. She enjoys exercising, shopping and watching TV series.

Brand: H&M (Hennes & Mauritz) is founded in 1947, in Sweden. Today, the company has over 2,500 stores in 44 countries. H&M is known for offering latest fashion and quality at the best price and a varied assortment for men, women, and children. (about.hm.com, 2012)

6.1.5.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

Jennifer was very enthusiastic about H&M in her interview. She touched upon different qualities of the brand while explaining the images that she collected. Reasonable price policy, product quality, and varied assortment were the qualities mentioned most. She emphasized how much she appreciated the price policy of H&M. Supporting these feelings, she chose a Euro sign as one of the images and explained:

“This is my favourite part. Everything is expensive here in Sweden. In H&M, clothes are usually quite affordable. I enjoy shopping at H&M as I can afford it! Price is an important reason which makes me love this brand.”

As it can be seen from the quote, there is a positive correlation between the H&M’s price policy and the brand love. Although she also likes another similar company called Lindex, she mentioned that she never shops there and explained: *“I could buy two clothes at H&M for the price of one at Lindex!”* It was shown that price and quality were mostly mentioned together. She was completely satisfied with the price-quality ratio of H&M: *“I really like the balance between price and quality. For low prices, they offer very high quality products.”* We think this strong relation between two functional qualities made her more attached to the brand (Batra et al. 2012).

Moreover, Jennifer fully appreciated the varied assortment of H&M. She showed her appreciation through different stories and also defined H&M as a one-stop shop:

“At H&M, I can buy for me, I can buy for sister, friends, mom, dad, everybody! H&M means shopping for everybody for different occasions! If you want to go to a formal meeting, you could find suits at H&M, for wedding ceremony you could find very nice dresses...”

Additionally, she summarized all the qualities that she appreciates: price, quality, and wide assortment, in one narrative:

“I had a strange glasses theme for my birthday party. We decided go to the city center to find a strange glasses. We checked some stores but they were expensive. Then one of my friends wanted to go and check H&M. I did not think that we would find them there. But, I went and found my glasses at H&M. I was so surprised! Who could believe that you can find these funny glasses at H&M! I thought that if I would spend this money, better I spend that on H&M sunglasses which are more quality than the other plastic glasses!”

Last but not least, sensory qualities such as the design and colors of H&M products, store ambiance and in-store music were also stated as other important factors behind her interest towards the brand (Roberts, 2005). However, sensory were not often mentioned compared to functional qualities, since she is a price sensitive consumer.

Mystery and Positive Affection

In line with related concepts (Roberts, 2005; Batra et al. 2012), it was noted that icons like Alessia Marcuzzi, a famous Italian presenter, and Donatella Versace, the owner and designer of Versace, have great influence on Jennifer’s positive affection. Jennifer was superiorly excited while explaining the image of Allesia Marcuzzi since she admires both her and H&M:

“Everybody loves Allesia, because she is a very normal person. And this year, she had an agreement with H&M to wear H&M clothes. This picture is from her Facebook profile. She took a picture of herself in an H&M dress and put it on Facebook. For me the message is clear: you can be quite famous, but you do not have to buy expensive clothes!”

Likewise, she mentioned that she appreciated the collaboration with Versace. However, it became apparent that her love derived from positive affect is unrivalled: *“H&M had clothes designed by Donatella Versace. I think it is nice they had Versace; but, I am in love with H&M!”*

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

Jennifer, being a price sensitive consumer, stated that she loved H&M’s sales. However, during the interview, mostly strong, and positive emotional connections with the brand were highlighted. She mentioned that new clothes from H&M make her happy, and she associated the brand mostly with emotional concepts such as happiness and pleasure:

Shopping makes me happy, especially at H&M. I associate shopping with happiness. Shopping is like a therapy for me. One day I was so stressed; I went to H&M and spent three hours there for just checking all clothes!”

In line with academic theory (Batra et al. 2012), this narrative reinforced that H&M provides intrinsic rewards to her.

We also observed that qualities that the brand offers such as the wide product range and price-quality ratio have positive effects on emotional expressions: *“H&M has so many clothes, so shopping there makes me happy. You just try everything, you are not limited!”* We conclude that strong connections between different brand dimensions strengthened the brand love.



(Collage image nr. 1: “Buy More!”)

Brand Personality Match

Jennifer is enthralled with the H&M’s product and price offering. We determined that the brand love is driven by natural fit between Jennifer and H&M (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012). As proved in previous studies, we name this brand love as *‘love at first sight’* since it is also combined with passionate desire (Batra et al. 2012:4). The following narrative which also reinforces the importance of quality dimensions, presents this natural fit:

“Clothes in H&M are not expensive, but it does not mean they are not beautiful. I really hate to have expensive clothes. People think it should be beautiful when it is expensive. But, it is not just because of it is 500 euros! For me it is beautiful when it fits you!”

Moreover, Jennifer knew what the brand stands for. She was also quite familiar with the brand’s image and target group, highlighting that she appreciates H&M’s taste of fashion and up-to-dateness:

“In H&M I always find clothes that I like. I really like the design of the clothes. H&M fits me because of my way of wearing. They know what is fashionable now, and they sell fashion for reasonable prices.”

Based on these statements, we found out that her high interest in fashion and price sensitive attitude perfectly fit H&M’s marketing strategy as stated previously.

Frequent Thought and Use

H&M has become a part Jennifer's daily life. She shared that she has more than 150 products from H&M. Proving the previously described theory, frequent use of the brand and the spent time on using it (as a result of the brand's integration in her daily life) affected the brand love positively (Park et al. 2010 in Batra et al. 2012: 4).

Moreover, this was not only limited with the daily use of the products, the brand became a routine for her which made her more attached to H&M: *"Sometimes I go to H&M just to see what is new, not to buy something! Just to get updated! It is like a hobby or a ritual!"* This statement reinforces Fournier's argument stating that frequent and interactive behavior with brand is most likely to brand love (Fournier, 1998).

Duration of Relationship

Jennifer noticed the brand two years ago in a third party in her hometown. In this relationship, the consumer's level of interest is enormous even though the duration of relationship is not so long. We therefore concluded that massive love is a result of the previously described brand attributes and the natural fit between the consumer and the brand (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012).

Willingness to Invest

Jennifer indicated that she often visits different H&M stores for different reasons. We noticed that she is willing to invest her time for whatever the reason is:

"Different stores have different clothes. Besides, during sale season, products on sale are not same for all stores. So, I check other stores when they are on sale. I also visit the big H&M store in Malmö periodically."

She also shared that she visited the Malmö store to check the new Versace collection since she could not find it in Lund. Her quotes supported that the higher level of willingness to invest the higher level of brand love (Batra et al. 2012). Moreover, we noted that she frequently goes to H&M stores even if she does not need something to buy. Following narrative showed how she is highly motivated to spend her time for the brand:

"Two days ago I was there not to buy. I found a jumper and it was 75 SEK, just a price pf sandwich! I bought it even though I knew that I would not need it in following days."

Although it might also be interpreted that she is not willing to pay premium price, we believe that her statements were highly connected to her current financial situation. She reinforced our idea with the following quote: *"Some products are still expensive to me. I wait for a sale to buy expensive stuff. But I really love H&M, even though they are sometimes expensive... And I think I will get my own job*

in future, so I will be able to afford them...” This quote also shows that her interest towards the brand will never be affected negatively in line with a possible increase on her budget. In contrast, this will make her more connected to the brand: *“I would still consider shopping at H&M, even if they increased the prices. In a reasonable way of course, as long as I afford it, I buy H&M!”*

Last but not least, she also shared a quite interesting narrative that we think clearly shows how she is also willing to take risks, next to saving her time and paying price premium:

“I should not tell you this! H&M send catalogues to their customers. And a month ago, I saw one of them just next to my post box; it was named to someone else. The second day catalogue was there, the third day catalogue was there... I took the magazine from there; I checked it for three days, saw all the H&M clothes... I put it back there after three days!”

In conclusion, during the interview it was revealed that Jennifer is willing to invest not only her money, but also her time and energy into H&M. This tendency clarified that she is passionate about the brand and also ready for taking risks for it. (Batra et al. 2012)

6.1.5.2 New Dimensions

Country of Origin

Although Jennifer did not know that the brand is originally from Sweden, her interest has increased since she learned this fact. The brand was highly associated with Sweden and we noted that this reinforced the brand love. Supporting this statement, she created a group called *‘I love Sweden’* for the grouping task, positioned the flag in the middle of the collage and stated: *“I loved H&M, and I love it more love because I love Sweden!”*

Moreover, we noticed that H&M is highly associated with Sweden even among her friends. Therefore, we found out that her friends’ jealousy about Sweden made her become more connected to the brand: *“The reason behind why I was jealous of the girl who had the scholarship, and my friends were jealous of me, was because of Sweden. When she heard about that I was going to move to Sweden, one of my friends called and asked me: ‘Are you going to the H&M’s place? Can you image where you are going? H&M’s home! You will have a lot of H&M there!’”*

We conclude that there is a strong relation between the country of origin and her love towards the brand. In the end of the interview, while talking about the storyline she created, she proved our conclusion by stating that: *“Sweden is one story: H&M and my best friends!”*

Reference Group Effect

During the interview Jennifer shared various narratives which were highly connected to the people who she cares about. The one regarding her scholarship clearly explained how those people affect her interest and increased her brand love:

“This girl has the same scholarship that I have. She got the scholarship last year and I could not! I was so jealous of her! We have a common friend; I saw this picture on Facebook. As you can see, she is pointing at the H&M store in Lund, implying I live in the city center, and I am very close to H&M! Look how she seems happy and proud! She got the scholarship and she lives very close to H&M! Oh my God, I was so jealous of her! Now I am in the same place, I have the same stuff and I can go to H&M! I told my friends that they can come and visit me, and we can visit H&M together as I live very close to it!”

Moreover, she mostly associated the brand with her friends and family. It was obvious that brand became a part of her daily life thanks to common use of the brand among her friends and family. She seemed very excited while sharing these narratives especially: *“This picture is from my birthday party. My birthday is same with this friend. So, we decided to celebrate together. I chose this picture because what I wore that day is totally H&M; my friend was in totally H&M as well. So we celebrated our birthdays wearing H&M clothes.”*

Furthermore, Jennifer chose her sister’s photo as one of the images and stated: *“She was here to visit me and for sure we went for H&M shopping. She really loves H&M! I associate H&M also with my sister!”* She grouped some pictures together under the name of ‘Me’ and gave the highest priority to that group since she thought that H&M is linked to her and people who she loves. This also supports the previous arguments showing that her family and friends’ positive affection is crucial part of this relationship. In conclusion, her best friend, sister, and friends play an important role on this relationship. Moreover, her grouping of all family and friends images under a theme also reinforced the importance of reference group effect for brand love.

6.1.5.3 Outcomes

Based on the findings presented in the previous sections, it can be concluded that Jennifer has a high level of loyalty to H&M, considering the number of H&M products she has and her statements during the interview (Batra et al. 2012). However, her brand love does not only lead to brand loyalty. Positive word of mouth and increased willingness to pay a price premium are other brand love outcomes that were found out. Jennifer mentioned that she invites her friends to visit her in Sweden to go to H&M for shopping. Here, her attitude and promotion of the brand can be explained by positive word of mouth. (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006)

Moreover, she also stated that she will keep shopping at H&M in future and will not mind to pay extra price when she has a job. This statement reinforces the high level of brand loyalty and reveals her increased willingness to pay a price premium. (Thomson et al. 2005 in Batra et al. 2012: 1)

6.1.6 Eric: “National Pride”

Interviewee: Eric is a 25 years old master student and comes from Malmö, Sweden. After he obtained his bachelor degree at Lund University, he decided to study international marketing and brand management. Eric is currently looking for a suitable job, and would preferably like to work abroad. Eric’s hobbies are reading and motor biking.

Ikea: Ikea is a company of Swedish origin with over 300 shops around the world. Ikea was founded in 1943 by the Swede Ingvar Kamprad in a village called Älmhult, located in southern Sweden. Ikea provides affordable furniture and other everyday-life products that often have to be assembled by the consumer itself. The specific flat packs that Ikea uses make it easy for consumers to take their furniture home. (ikea.com, 2012)

6.1.6.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

Eric’s attachment to Ikea is partly driven by rational reasoning towards the brand’s functionality. Eric explains that not only are the brand’s products functional, but also their service, the way products are packed, the self-assembly part, and the shopping route throughout the store. Eric highlighted the food stops Ikea provides: *“It is logical that people should have something to eat before making big purchase decisions.”* He referred to the quote of Ingvar Kamprad:

“‘You can never base a purchase decision on an empty stomach.’ During the food break I always evaluate my buying decisions, think about the colour or structure of the fabric, and then after the meal go back to buy it.”

Special attention was also drawn to the company’s flat packs:

“(…) that you get to select your furniture and pull it out of the shelves; that is fascinating! They have done that very efficiently and no other shop has that... The shopping charts are typically Ikea as well, specially made for these types of flat packs.”

In contrast to Roberts’ (2005) perspective, for Eric, not sensory qualities, but *‘functionality’* and *‘efficiency’* contribute to the brand’s distinctive character. In addition to his practical arguments, Eric addressed his admiration for the brand’s innovativeness by constantly improving its offerings.

“(...) Long ago they did not offer dishwashing machines and ovens. Now you can get that at Ikea. They do logical kind of things and I like that sense of innovativeness.”

Eric used the words ‘*coherency*’ and ‘*safety*’ to emphasize the brand’s performance and expectations. He clarified his argument by saying that: “*you know what to expect from Ikea*” and continued reflecting upon ‘*security*’ by emphasizing Ikea’s wide product range, ensuring he would always find the piece of furniture he is looking for. He also touched upon the fact that products are rarely out of stock, allows ensuring that he will find the products that he needs.

Eric explained that the previously mentioned qualities contribute to a unique Swedish shopping experience. According to him, these qualities are ‘*cool things*’ that are executed by the brand in a highly efficient way, making shopping at Ikea distinctive compared to other Swedish furniture stores. In conclusion, based on the explained points, we agree with Batra et al. (2012) that brand qualities affect consumers’ emotions.

Mystery and Positive Affection

Throughout the interview it became clear that Eric had various memories of Ikea occurring in different stages of his life. It all started in his childhood while listening to cassettes of Elmer Hult, an Ikea character whose name is derived from Älmhult, the town where Ikea was founded. He listened to the cassettes in the car and although he now refers to it as ‘*a form of propaganda*’, it entertained him, bringing back good memories. He stated that Ikea fitted into his childhood as a sort of identity that he carried with him for the rest of his life.



(Collage Image nr. 2: Nostalgia with Elmer Hult)

Besides the elements of ‘*nostalgia*’ (Albert et al. 2008), there are also icons and symbols creating positive affection for the brand (Roberts, 2005). One of his stories was related to the ‘*Billy bookcase*’, which he views as the most iconic product of Ikea.

“For me, the Billy bookcase is an icon that stands for functionality. (...) Once, I went to Älmhult with school to visit the Ikea museum, located in the basement of one of the buildings. The Billy bookcase played a central role in Ikea’s history, as the history was presented from Billy bookcases in which you could travel through the time.”

Eric explained that he would never buy a bookcase somewhere else, as it is the symbolic item of all Ikea's products. For him, the movable shelves and different design options define the functionality of the bookcase and Ikea. Eric explains that the popular *'Ikea assembly tool'* can be used to represent himself since he likes to assemble furniture himself, making it possible to take furniture home directly after having bought it. Ikea therefore avoids waiting for furniture or home delivery.

Furthermore, direct personal aspirations are also derived from the brand's Swedish roots, being founded in a small company in the middle of the southern province Småland. While talking about the foundation of the company, Eric referred to founder *'Ingvar Kamprad'* as an icon due to his success of turning Ikea into a global brand.

In sum, the following theoretical connections resulted in positive affection towards the brand: memories connected to childhood (Albert et al. 2008), the success story of the iconic founder of Ikea, the symbolic meaning of the Ikea assembly tool, and Ikea's product icon: the Billy bookcase (Roberts, 2005).

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

This is where Ikea starts to play an emotional role for Eric. Namely, many of his memories of Ikea are connected to his childhood, stirring up fun times and satisfaction. When Eric was younger, he always tagged along with his parents when visiting Ikea. They usually brought him to the store's play land, called *'Småland.'* Eric recalls Ikea's play land as enjoyable and highly entertaining. Even nowadays when Eric visits Ikea, he tries to catch a glimpse of this *'paradise for kids.'* (More memories will be discussed).

Additionally, Eric explained that his pride of Ikea for being a Swedish company makes him happy when he visits an Ikea store in a foreign country. This refers to pleasure a certain level of self-esteem. Furthermore, Eric views the Ikea stores abroad as a form of promotion for Sweden as a country. He explains that when international consumers enter an Ikea store, for him it feels like they are experiencing a part of *'Sweden.'*

Ultimately, every time Eric visits Ikea he also takes a plate of Swedish meatballs halfway through shopping and a hotdog after finishing. Eric perceives the meals as a treatment of pleasure, and refers to the hotdog as something he loves about Ikea: *"a reward for a whole day of shopping."* We also conclude this as an important intrinsic motivation that has become part of his routine when visiting Ikea in line with the research of Batra et al. (2012).

Brand-Personality Match

The most important similarity between Eric and his brand is 'Swedish origin'. He explained that his knowledge about Ikea, as well as his experience with the brand, is very intertwined with his Swedish identity. He explained that he had never been to another furniture shop since more expensive design does not fit his personality:

"Ikea is more democratic. You can get a good piece of furniture for a reasonable amount of money. I think Ikea would not have been such a friendly alternative to me when they would have been more expensive."

In addition to country of origin and the balance between price and quality, Eric mentioned the uniqueness of having everything under one roof. *"I am a one-stop shopper. I also do not want to wait for delivery, but take it home and get it done in the same day. (...) the assembly tool represents me very well, as I like to assemble the furniture myself; I think it is a form of personal empowerment... I get to feel manly by doing that."* [Laughing]

Eric also mentioned that he feels understood by the brand as they offer what he wants, from hotdogs to fast service. It can be concluded that the following brand values: Sweden, value for money, convenience, speed, as well as the self-assembly part reflect upon Eric's personality. (Byrne et al. 1986; Capella, Palmer, 1990 in Albert et al. 2003: 1073)

Frequent Thought and Use

When Eric is at home, Ikea is basically everywhere around him:

"My girlfriend and I have an entire Ikea kitchen: from the stove to cutlery, dishwashing machine, oven, and crockery. I also buy Ikea food when I go there, for example a bag of meatballs or ginger cookies. In the living room, the majority of the furniture is also from Ikea: the TV, TV stand, sofa, cushions, table, chairs..."

Eric even used blue Ikea bags for his laundry. It can therefore be concluded that Ikea is fully integrated in his life, and that he uses more than one Ikea product everyday that leads to high level of brand love (Fournier, 1998).

Duration of the Relationship

Being a Swede, Eric explained that Ikea followed him during his entire upbringing. He got to know Ikea when he was five years old. During that time, his parents became friends with the family Stennert, an Ikea-family who also had a son of Eric's age. Eric explained that the founder of Ikea, Ingvar Kamprad is married to a Stennert and that this Stennert happened to be the aunt of his friend.

Eric concluded that the friendship with the family formed the basis of his relationship with Ikea. Ultimately, as Eric became more knowledgeable about the brand through store visits, product experiences, and memories, his attachment towards Ikea became more affectionate (Ahuvia, 2005; Aron, Westbay, 1996; Fehr, 1988; Hendrick, Hendrick, 1992; Sternberg, 1986 in Albert et al. 2008).

Willingness to Invest

Although a variety of qualities, various memories, and stories make Ikea a unique furniture shop for Eric, he also values the shop because of its *'reasonable price.'* When Ikea's prices would be more expensive than competitive stores, his loyalty towards the brand would decrease. *"Ikea would not have been such a friendly alternative to me when they would have been more expensive."* Additionally, Eric addressed his admiration for the brand based on its convenience of having *'everything under one roof'*, as well as *'speed in service'* due to the self-assembling. This clarifies that Eric is not likely to invest more time on buying products from Ikea in case another, cheaper furniture store would be closer and/or faster in service. However, as it can be deduced from previous statements, he is more than enthusiastic about investing his time and energy to visit IKEA as a result of his positive emotions (Batra et al. 2012).

6.1.6.2 New Dimensions of Brand Love

Brand Exposure and Global Image

As previously explained, Eric's passion and pride for Ikea's worldwide presence is linked to their common Swedish heritage. For Eric the friendly blue and yellow letters feel like home when he sees an Ikea in a foreign country, providing him with feelings of pride and happiness. Eric emphasized his love for the Swedish food section in the foreign Ikea's, enabling him to buy Swedish food wherever he is:

"(...) I love the Swedish food section at Ikea. During the time I studied in England I needed Swedish food for a Nordic Ball that I organized... We went into Ikea and bought three big bags full of Swedish specialties. Also in Sweden I often buy a bag of meatballs or some gingerbread cookies."

As previously mentioned, the brand's cultural connections and global image are crucial in Eric's love for the brand. Not only does it make him feel home, but according to him, also promotes Sweden abroad. For these reasons, the brand's exposure and global image can be seen as another important brand love dimension.

Country of Origin

Throughout the interview, it became clear that in addition to memories, the store's country of origin is one of the most important dimensions for Eric's passion for the brand. Once he entered an Ikea store in Spain he noticed the Swedish word '*fika*' (coffee break) on one of the walls, calling up affectionate feelings linked to Sweden:

"I lived in Spain for a year to learn Spanish and went to Ikea during that that time just for the fun of it. (...) I recall quite vividly the wall with Fika in blue and yellow letters with a Spanish translation underneath. At that time I felt a bit homesick, as I had not been home for four months. When seeing that in front of me with those friendly blue and yellow letters felt kind of like coming home in a sense..."

He explained that the word '*fika*' captures an important part of the Swedish culture and sentiments that most Swedes share. To Eric, Sweden and Ikea are interrelated, as he often mentioned the Swedish food section, the feelings of national pride when entering a store abroad. However, the overarching connection with Sweden is represented by the meatballs. *"The meatballs are very integral to my experience of Ikea. I take the meatballs instead of other dishes they offer, because meatballs are linked with Swedish tradition."* In conclusion, we believe that the link between Swedish culture and the brand and other Swedish associations also play an important role on brand love.

6.1.6.3 Outcomes:

It can be concluded that Eric has a high level of loyalty to his brand in terms of repeat purchases (Batra et al. 2012). Basically all the furniture he owns was bought at Ikea. He explained that he rarely bought a piece of furniture from another brand throughout his life.

Since 'value for money' is one of the reasons why Eric buys his furniture at Ikea, willingness to pay a premium price is only relevant to a small extent. In case of price increases, his loyalty towards the brand would likely be affected.

Throughout the interview, Eric made strong connections to his passion for the brand and the brand's country of origin, as well as its global image. A new outcome was derived from the pride of Ikea being present in foreign countries, which resulted in a form of self-esteem for Eric. He more than once expressed to his pride of international consumers experience Sweden, and the Swedish culture in a sense while shopping at Ikea.

6.1.7 Bono: “Futuristic Love”

Interviewee: Bono is a 24-year-old business student, currently studying at Lund University. Bono decided to leave the capital of Ireland for one year in order to obtain his Master in Science in Corporate Entrepreneurship and Innovation in Lund. Besides his studies, Bono likes watching movies, visiting parties, go skiing in winter, and playing water sports in summer. Being a fanatic rugby player he decided to join the local rugby team of Lund, the Lugi Lions. Bono considers friends and family as the most important things in life, and is fascinated about technology and religion.

Apple: Apple Inc. is an American electronics company founded in 1976. Apple became famous in the 70's with the introduction of the Apple II, which played an essential role in the development of the PC market. Whereas Apple was once known only for its computers, nowadays it also provides iPod music players, iPhones, and tablets, the iPads. (apple.com, 2012)

6.1.7.1 Theoretical Dimensions of Brand Love

Sensory and Functional Qualities

For Bono, design, colour, feel, and touch are important elements of his passion for Apple. By referring to one of the images he collected (Appendix 2, Apple Theme Collage, image 11), he touched upon the affection of the sensory elements of sight and touch:

“Apple is artistic and has flair for design. The brand takes a lot of effort in thinking on how the product should look and feel. It looks good when all the products have the same colour, this identifies Apple’s products. You can always see how many MacBooks are in class as they all have the same colour.”

Bono refers to Apple’s colours as arrogant by saying that the brand knows what the best design is. He reflected upon the feel of Apple’s products by mentioning that the iPad is ‘*tactile in your hand*’ when holding it. Next to these sensory qualities, Bono also addressed to the simplicity of the brand’s products while talking about the hard-drive that only spins when using the computer:

“A normal hard drive is just like somebody has hit the wall with a hammer, the MacBook is like surgeon with a scalpel just picking in the battery when it needs it”.

Bono talked about the uniqueness of the brand by referring to their ability to see and realize the future, and explained that no other electronics company does it nearly as well as Apple (Albert et al. 2008).

Next to the affectionate reactions, Bono also mentioned his cognitive aspirations for Apple deriving from functionality. As an example he explained his utilitarian reasoning behind the purchase of his

MacBook by referring to increased battery capacity and the ability to start writing right away when opening the lid.

Mystery and Positive Affection

Aside from getting inspirations or ideas by working with products of Apple, Bono became closely connected to the brand. Nowadays, he regularly visits the Apple website to look at new products and to read the Apple news.

He is fascinated with Steve Jobs and finds it easy to relate to him as a person. Bono refers to Steve Jobs in an iconic way by expressing admiration for the creative ideas he created, and his way of working by taking decisions on his own, without consulting anyone. To make this point, Bono referred to the time when Steve Jobs was brought back in the company the second time.

Bono brought an image of pirates (Appendix 2, Apple Theme Collage, image 10) showing the story behind the development of the Macintosh software. The pirates tell a story about: *“Apple being able to change the way we think.”* Bono explains that for Apple to be successful, they saw themselves as rebels, not buying into the dominant logic of the time period. In order to make the computers revolutionary, Steve Job’s attitude made the software engineers to think differently.

Bono clarifies the vision of Apple with help of a photo from 1989 he had seen of which Steve Jobs holds something that looks like the iPad. According to Bono, this explains that Apple knows what the future needs. In conclusion, all these examples show that all these mystery elements and stories made Bono get more attached to Apple (Roberts, 2005; Batra et al. 2012).

Extrinsic and Intrinsic Rewards

As soon as Bono realized the functionality of having an iPod, iPad, and iPhone together, his feelings towards Apple started to become more hedonic. It can be concluded that Bono’s emotional attachment to the brand increased when he started to buy more Apple products. (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006)

“I became aware of all the things that happened between the phone and laptop that I was not even doing, I just fell in love with it. (...) I can take photos with my phone and have them all saved on my laptop. It does it automatically when I plug my phone in to charge it. That is just amazing”.

Bono explained that as a result of being biased towards what the brand had to offer, he started to love the brand’s simplicity and functionality. He reflected this change from functional reasoning to affective feelings upon Apple’s software, and the iPad specifically. He also found the software worked more intelligently with the user in mind whereas he now thinks Windows is designed for functional reasons.

With regard to the iPad, Bono explains that he had always wanted one, but that he could not convince himself that he needed it. He found justification assuming he would read more when he had one. As a result, he bought himself an iPad at Christmas and instantly fell in love with it. Since the iPad makes his life much simpler, it provided him with feelings of pleasure (Albert et al. 2008). Bono expressed the feeling when he said that that he does not need to buy a newspaper anymore; instead, he just reads the news from his *'thin piece of metal'*.

Brand-Personality Match

The type of user, which Bono refers to as *'cult people'*, explains the closest fit between Apple and himself:

"I always thought they were a little bit like hippies, but then I slowly started to become one of them. I see Apple users as hippies, at least in my infancy. (...) they are in San Francisco and they all chill out on the west coast..."

Nowadays, he matches this hippy image with the design in a lot of their products, which he refers to as *'a bit chilled-out'*. As examples he mentioned the feel of the iPad and the smooth design of their laptops.

Furthermore, the entrepreneurial image of the company and its technological advancements fit Bono as a person. He claims that *'Apple shakes things up and really goes for it'*, and takes risks, especially in the case of Apple when the iPad came first out. Bono explains that these are aspects he relates to as a way of seeing himself. Additionally, he mentioned his interest for technology and the aspirations of the brand to stay ahead of others.

It can therefore be concluded that Bono feels comfortable by being part of the Apple community that he refers to as *'relax'* and *'laid-back'* (Albert et al. 2008). Words of dissent were expressed towards Windows in order to clarify his preference for Apple. Apart from to being part of the cult-group, Bono's personality is reflected by the brand's entrepreneurial, innovative, and competitive character.

Frequent thought and use

Although Bono already has an iPad, iPhone, and Macbook, he explains that he can still go to the Apple website and look at advertisements for new products or even products he already has. It can be concluded that owning Apple products makes him think more highly of Apple products, resulting in his keeping up-to-date with the brand's developments and newest offerings (Batra et al. 2012).

Next to frequent thought, Bono uses his three products up to fifteen hours a day during busy periods at University. He watches TV on his laptop and uses the iPad for reading e-books, news, and information on forums. Bono also mentioned that he always has his iPhone with him. The main reason for this is

that the high-quality camera in his phone allows him to record and make pictures of activities that would otherwise have been forgotten. The automatic synchronization between iPhone and Macbook makes him prefer an iPhone over any other phone with a camera. We conclude that these dimensions and the integration of the brand with everyday life make him feel more passionate about the brand (Fournier, 1998).

Duration of the Relationship

Although Bono bought his first iPhone in August of 2009, he previously knew of Apple for seven or eight years. The first product he bought was the *'iPhone U2 Special Edition'*, but at that time Bono was not as into the brand as he is nowadays.

Bono's relationship started to change from functional to emotional when obtaining more products, and while getting to know these products better. It will be shown that also Bono's knowledge helped his emotional attachment towards Apple (Ahuvia, 2005; Aron, Westbay, 1996; Fehr, 1988; Hendrick, Hendrick, 1992; Sternberg, 1986 in Albert et al. 2008).



(Collage image nr. 4: Emotional attachment to Apple)

Bono's personal aspirations for Apple are not limited to the revolutionary products only. He explained that for him the image of music group 'U2' symbolizes that Apple safeguarded the music industry, increasing his aspirations and affection towards the brand:

"Apple redefined how the music industry looks like nowadays. Apple just said: this is how music gets done now and everyone else stepped in line and started it doing that way. They just changed the whole way content gets distributed, from movies to music to everything and iTunes. This is why I would never leave the brand."

Willingness to Invest

Currently, Bono owns three items: his MacBook, iPad, and iPhone. Switching to another brand is no option:

“A Samsung tablet for example, would never link with my other devices in the same way as they do now. I would never buy similar products from another brand than Apple, mainly because of the cloud that synchronizes the three devices.”

It can therefore be concluded that Bono has a high level of willingness to invest that cause positive affect, and brand love (Batra et al. 2012).

6.1.7.2 New Dimensions

Country of Origin

In addition to the previously mentioned brand dimensions, Bono addressed a link between his passion for the brand and the brand's country of origin. He connects the story of Apple to the American dream; a small and little known company becoming a worldwide phenomenon. When he thinks of Apple he also thinks of the American dream.

According to Bono, viewing the aspect from a foreign perspective, the dramatic start and successful end of the story is typically American: *“It is really like the American dream, everyone can do it.”* It can be concluded that the attribute of *‘country of origin’* brings about associations with America depending on Bono's image of the country.

Reference Group

When explaining his choice of images, Bono touched upon the influence of his friends, strengthening his attachment to Apple. He revealed that the functional qualities were not the only motives for buying the MacBook, but also the envious feelings towards his friends having one.

Today, Bono's emotional reasoning for Apple goes beyond being jealous, as he feels like *‘stabbing his friends in the back’* when buying a Samsung product for example. Bono mentioned that all his friends have the same Apple products with the iPad as an occasional exception.

6.1.7.3 Outcomes

The outcomes of Bono's passion for Apple have resulted in total brand loyalty caused by repeat purchases. From the narratives it can be concluded that Bono is willing to pay a premium price due to the brand's unique attributes, as well as its exceptional quality of synchronizing different Apple devices, making the product nearly irreplaceable. (Batra et al. 2012) Bono also touches upon the theoretical outcome of *‘resistance to negative brand information’* (ibid). During the interview, Bono explained that he finds himself defensive of Apple when somebody is arguing against them.

Ultimately, Bono also provided us with a narrative in which he forgave Apple of indirect disappointment of the brand's performance. Bono clarifies the meaning of the 'capitalist image' (Image X, Appendix X) by making the link to the company 'Fox', a mass production facility that produces ninety per cent of the parts for Apple, who's employees started taking their own lives due to low pay and deplorable working conditions and hours.

"The fact that this is also part of Apple's image slightly affected the relationship but not hugely... I still buy their products."

Although Apple had "let the ball drop there", Bono stated that it does not give the company the right to act in an unethical way. After buying his iPad last December, Bono did feel guilty; but, although the story made him look at the company in a different light, it does not stop him from buying new products due to the brand love (Bauer et al. 2009 in Batra et al. 2012:1).

6.2 Empirical Model

The ‘*prototype of brand love*’ mentioned below is an extension of our tentative model presented in figure 9. In contrast to the tentative model, this model is expanded with new dimensions of love (*) that were derived from our empirical study. The model aims to structure the relevant dimensions to increase the understanding of how brand love is experienced by consumers.

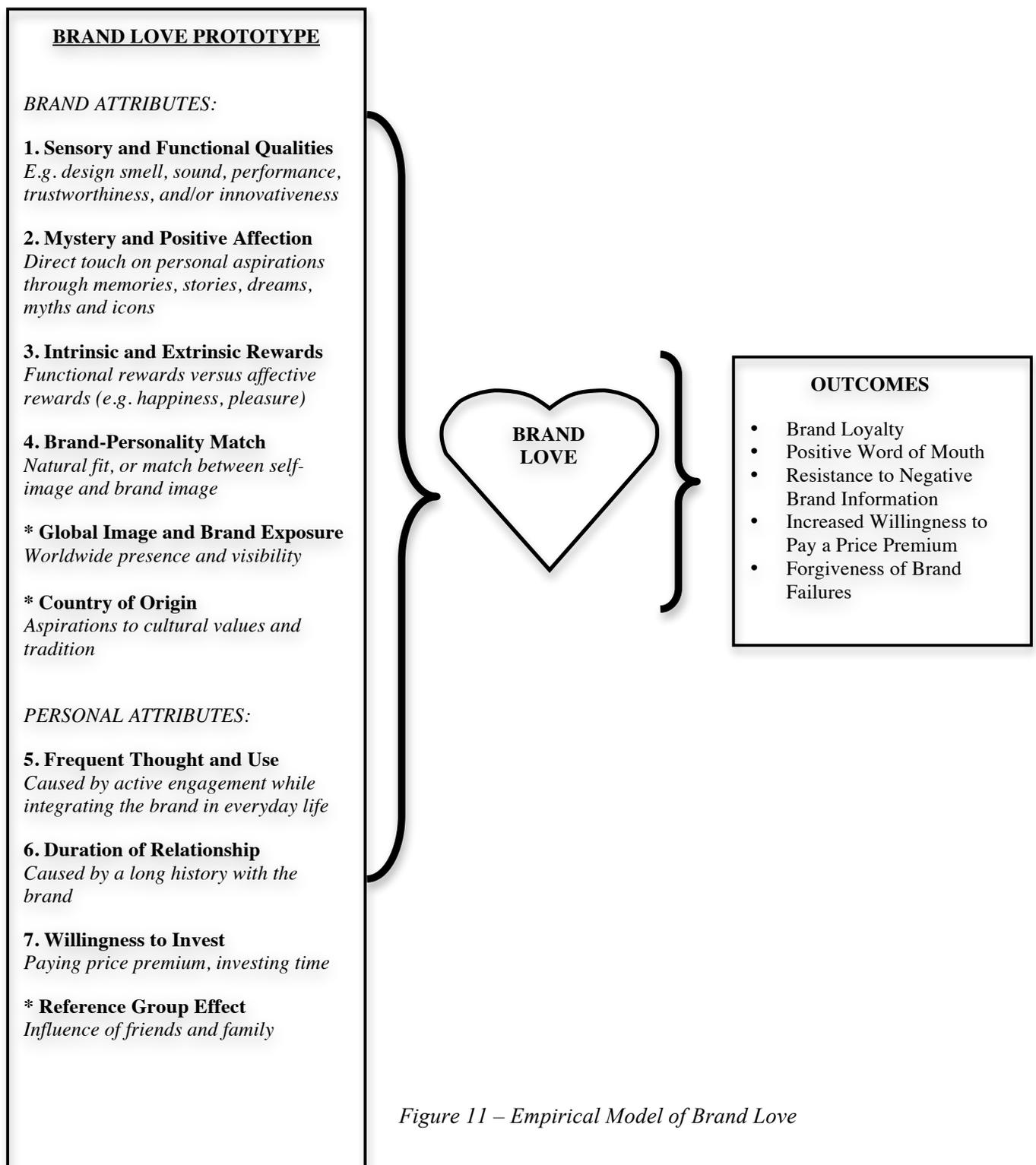


Figure 11 – Empirical Model of Brand Love

6.3 Discussion

The interrogation process provided us with a good understanding of how participants experience the relationship with their brand. The following part will explain the relevance of the different dimensions based on strong indications from the empirical findings. Next to the relevance of the existing dimensions, three additional dimensions of consumer-brand love were identified. These concern: brand exposure and global image, country of origin, and reference group effect. All dimensions will be briefly introduced with a theoretical perspective. Subsequently, the link with the empirical data will be made.

6.3.1. Sensory and Functional Qualities

Previous research on brand love gave us the understanding that both sensory and functional related brand qualities are relevant in consumer-brand relationships. In contrast to Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012), Roberts (2005) focuses mainly on sensory quality aspects, and pays less attention to functionality attributes such as: service, trustworthiness, performance, and product quality. Although both practitioners and academics show differences regarding the type of qualities that seem important to create passionate feelings for brands, both emphasize the importance of brand qualities.

From the empirical data it can be concluded that all the interviews are highly related to brand qualities, both sensory and functional. Similarities between the interviews were found on the sensory quality of '*sight*'. All interviewees addressed aspects of '*beauty*' in terms of design and/or colours, not only related to the brand's products but also to the brand's store. Additionally, '*smell*' was mentioned for Starbucks, '*sound*' (referring to in-store music) for H&M, '*feel*' for Apple's products, and '*taste*' for the food and beverage brands, McDonald's and Starbucks.

Concerning the functional qualities, participants put emphasis on the dimensions of '*service*' and '*quality*'. Likewise, the interviewees referred to: history, safety, accessibility, price, ambiance, and simplicity. The brands under study were shown to be valued according to a variety of different brand quality attributes, increasing the complexity to determine its level of importance on brand love.

From the interviews it can be concluded that both sensory qualities and functional qualities have a greater effect on creating brand love. Both qualities were found to be relevant drivers of brand love as they were both reflected upon with use of passionate and emotional expressions.

6.3.2 Mystery and Positive Affection

Previous research studies on brand love make clear that dreams, memories, and warm-hearted feelings create feelings of positive affection. Roberts (2005) expanded these theoretical dimensions with myths, icons, as well as brand stories, belonging to one of the three pillars of Lovemarks; '*mystery*'.

The most important finding regarding the dimensions of *'mystery'* and *'positive affection'* are that all participants made the link with one or more *'icons.'* A majority of the participants mentioned the relationship of the icon to a person: either the founder of the company or celebrities endorsing the brand. In other cases, the icon concerned a fictional character: the Little Mermaid, Ronald McDonald, and Kitty.

Next to iconic characters, empirical data projected brand love to be symbolized by iconic products of the brand. For instance, the iPod was addressed as Apple's revolutionary product that safeguarded the music industry. In terms of Ikea, the Billy bookcase was symbolized as an iconic product, whereas for McDonald's this turned out to be the Big Mac.

6.3.3 Intrinsic Rewards

In the practical concept of Roberts, no specific attention was drawn towards extrinsic rewards. On the other hand, Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) demonstrated that brand love often resulted from both extrinsic and intrinsic rewards. They mention however that extrinsic rewards are not a requirement to become a love brand. Similarities between academics and Roberts (2005) were therefore expressed regarding the importance of intrinsic rewards in building love relationships.

The theoretical argument mentioned above is confirmed by our empirical data, indicating that less weight was put on extrinsic rewards in defining brand love. Although Starbucks' gold member card and H&M's promotional activities were touched upon extrinsic rewards, intrinsic rewards were indicated to be more relevant. This can be concluded by a majority of the empirical content referring to feelings of happiness derived directly from the brand's offerings. The relevance of intrinsic rewards is therefore in-line with both Roberts view (2005), as well as with both academic perspectives.

From the empirical findings we noticed that every participant made different connections towards intrinsic rewards. This was likely caused by the different brand categories, and thus for different meanings and performances of the brand were asked. However, the data showed one similarity related to childhood memories. Namely, the brand Hello Kitty was found to provide feelings of childishness, whereas Ikea and McDonald's were observed to bring back childhood memories.

6.3.4 Brand-Personality Match

On one side, this dimension refers to *'love at first sight'*, a natural fit between consumer and brand. On the other side it also involves the *'bonding'* between consumer and brand, based on similar beliefs and/or values.

It is important to note that both perspectives are derived from academic theories on brand love, excluding the practical concept of Roberts (2005). Roberts (2005) does not focus on personal values in

the concept of Lovemarks, but rather highlights the phenomenon of brand love from a branding perspective. Our empirical data with regard to brand-personality match will therefore only be reflected upon academic theory.

From our empirical findings, we can conclude that part of the interviews showed a natural fit between consumer and brand whereas the majority of the participants expressed their love based on brand values suiting their own personality. The participants for Starbucks, McDonalds, and H&M defined their love as *'love at first sight'* and mentioned that their passion for the brand was strong from the beginning. For the other brands, love was not strong upon introduction to the brand, but build-up gradually.

Next to brand love, the dimension of brand-personality match lead to levels of self-actualization when the brand offered something that had a deeper meaning to the consumer (Maslow, 1954). This was observed from the participants for Burberry, Hello Kitty, and Ikea. Celine, who participated in the interview for Burberry, remarked that the scarves of Burberry helped her to *'bring out the lady in her.'* Hello Kitty participant Kylie explained that the brand provided her with *'a feeling of 'childishness'* by giving her something back from her youth. From the Ikea interview, it became clear that the brand provided Eric with feelings of *'national pride'* that deeply touch upon his personal aspirations.

6.3.5 Reference Group

This is a new dimension, and different from the previous four dimensions due to the fact that it is person-related rather than brand-related. From the research outcomes we suggest that the effect of a reference group is a relevant driver of brand love due to the influence of friends and family.

In consumer behaviour literature, different research studies have been executed in order to better understand the behavioural basis of reference group effects. In the case of luxury goods, it was researched that reference groups especially influenced product and brand evaluations (Etzel, 1982 in Amaldoss, Jain, 2008). Additionally, research reflects upon upward social comparisons with the aspirational group (Amaldoss, Jain, 2008). Previous research does not make this comparison between consumer-brand relationships and the influence of reference groups.

Our empirical data revealed that communicating with others and sharing common interest could enforce brand love; namely, the majority of the participants referred to the influences of reference groups on their relationship with the brand. In case of Apple, the participant clearly addressed which group he wanted to belong to and the one he did not want to be part of.

In the majority of the cases, the reference group was indicated to consist of one's best friend or a group of friends (Apple, Starbucks, and H&M). The participant for the luxury clothing brand Burberry explained that instead of friends, her dad inspired her love for the brand.

Furthermore, we found that reference groups could help in achieving self-motivational goals. In some cases, our empirical findings made clear that participants saw friends and families as inspirational groups to which they felt attracted to because of similar values and beliefs.

The emotional power of reference groups on consumer-brand relationships caused us to add this new dimension to the empirical model of brand love.

6.3.6 Global Image and Brand Exposure

Previous research (Batra et al. 2000; Holt et al. 2004) argued that '*perceived brand globality*' could result in a source of competitive strength, more significantly than local brands. They found that the higher brands' perceived globalness, the higher its perceived quality, prestige, and purchase intentions (Steenkamp et al. 2003 in Dimofte et al. 2008). Holt states, "several recent studies have provided some evidence of a positive relationship between the perceived globalism of a brand and its perceptions of quality" (Holt et al. 2004) and esteem (Johansson, Ronkainen, 2004 in Dimofte et al. 2008). Although self-esteem can be seen as a higher dimension of love (Maslow, 1954), there is no research supporting the correlation between globalism and consumer-brand relationships.

Besides global image, brand exposure refers to the brand's visibility and its effects on consumer behaviour, becoming an increasingly important area of research (Brasel, Gips, 2010: 57). Holt et al. (2004) reinforce this notion by stressing the practical importance of global branding for companies in today's society. The authors refer to the emergence of a global market with uniform products and services all over the world, and address the importance of brands' global presence and visibility (ibid).

Although both positive and negative effects of brand performance have been highlighted in previous literature (ibid), no researchers have investigated the relation between brand exposure and brand love.

Studying global brands was not our intentional aim. However, since we applied the snowball sampling method to recruit interviewees, it was a coincidence that all of our participants shared passionate feelings with a global brand rather than a national or local brand. While conducting the different interviews, we noticed that the global image of brands caused feelings of affection, contributing to the emotional weight in consumer-brand relationships.

In addition participants' collages visualized the links between global image and brand exposure with images showing foreign stores, world-wide brand presence, and logo visibility. The dimension of global image and brand exposure is therefore shown as a new dimension of brand love.

6.3.7 Country of Origin

We define this dimension as any factor that the country of manufacture, assembly, or design has on consumers' love for the brand.

In the literature, there is no agreement on the effects of the brand's country of origin on consumer behaviour. Some researchers (Ahmed et al. 2002; Liu, Johnson, 2005; Tse, Gorn, 1993 in Josiassen et al. 2008) state that the country of origin is an important criterion. Research of Josiassen et al. (2008) further builds upon the finding that a brand's country of origin can have an effect on consumer behaviour when product origin interacts with the image of the country. The researchers highlighted the importance of the brand's country of origin as a driver for consumer's product evaluations, quality perceptions, and purchase intentions (ibid).

Although there is some research investigating the previously mentioned topics, there is no theory explaining the relation between the brands' country of origin and brand love. However, in our research, the country of the brand's origin did seem to have an effect on consumer's love for the brand. To begin, the interviewees were well aware of the precise origin of their brand. In some cases participants were even able to provide us with information about the brand's history. Even more, the collages clearly explain the connection between consumer and country of origin. From appendix 2 it can be seen that participants expressed their love for the brand with help of flags, photos with the brand taken in the country of origin, and images related to cultural values and traditions. Therefore, we believe that country of origin should be included as a dimension of brand love.

6.3.8 Frequent Thought and Use

Based on frequent interactions with the brand, the majority of the respondents explained that the brand became an integral part in their life. This is also in-line with the academic theories (Fournier, 1998; Batra et al. 2012) that explain frequent interaction and engagement with the brand can result in brand love. Our findings revealed that consumers were regularly using, wearing or thinking about their product. Narratives related to mystery also revealed that icons, such as the little mermaid, made consumers think of the brand.

6.3.9 Willingness to Invest

Since it is all about love in regards to passionate consumer-brand relationships, the interviewees often referred to price as a by-product. One of our participants clearly explained her willingness to pay a premium price by saying: *"I guess you have to pay for what you love."* In case of Ikea and H&M, participants mentioned their willingness to pay a little bit extra, but not a premium price. Furthermore, in the case of H&M, the participant loved the brand because of its low prices during sales, and her relationship to the extrinsic values of the brand.

In some cases, participants explained that their reasoning behind paying a higher price was due to certain functional and/or unique brand qualities. Besides financial investments, time spent on the brand was also reflected upon as in the case of Hello Kitty. The empirical outcomes are in line with academic theories. Although willingness to invest is seen as a dimension of brand love, we also view it as an outcome. We believe brand love can also make consumers pay an additional extra price for their product.

6.3.10 Duration of Relationship

Academic theories explain that customer satisfaction can result from a long history with the brand (Albert et al. 2008). In addition, Roberts (2005) explained that the length of the love relationship could lead to intimacy, meaning an in-depth knowledge about the brand. This was certainly the case for Ikea, Burberry, and Apple where love has been built up gradually as the result of increased knowledge about the brand.

Exposure to the brand as a child was found to be important as many of the interviewees recalled past experiences with the brand with fondness. Early positive exposure to the brand shaped their relationship with it later in life. Examples include the play lands of Ikea, the Hello Kitty tools from the Happy Meal, as well as the Happy Meal itself, and birthday parties at McDonald's. In case of Burberry, the participant's grandmother was shown to be passing on the brand's history by giving her old scarf to her. The duration of love relationships can therefore be considered as a relevant dimension.

6.3.11 Outcomes

Brand loyalty was observed to be present in all cases, most notably in the case of H&M where the participant mentioned to have about one hundred fifty items of the brand. Another participant for Ikea mentioned that his love for the brand resulted in a high number of repeat purchases. He claimed not to have a single piece of furniture from a brand that was not Ikea. Furthermore, participants explained that the brand provided them with intrinsic rewards and affectionate feelings, leading to positive word of mouth, and in some cases even a resistance to negative brand information and forgiveness of failures such as in the case with Apple. Finally all interviewees were found to be brand ambassadors, spreading positive word of mouth. Willingness to pay a premium price was not always the case for each of the different brands under the study as the categories of brands ranged from luxury to mainstream brands.

6.4 Summary

The exploratory study helped us discover how the different dimensions were interpreted and experienced by the passionate consumers under study. As we were looking at the relationship theory from a non-interpersonal perspective, we did not see brands as active relationship partners by giving love back to the consumer. However, a few of the dimensions scrutinized were similar to person-to-person dimensions of brand love, these concern: intrinsic rewards, brand-personality match, frequent thought and use, duration of the relationship, and willingness to invest.

The narratives of the participants provided rich brand information in the form of: memories, icons, and dreams. The narratives included feelings such as: affection, passion, happiness, natural fit, self-actualization, security, and satisfaction.

In order to show how brand dimensions differ in relevance to the phenomenon of brand love, we created an adaptable model to visualize the empirical findings. This model was inspired by Maslow's (1954) hierarchy of needs theory.

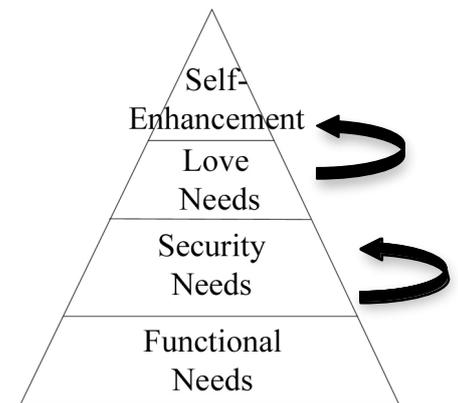


Figure 12 - The Unidirectional Pyramid of Love for Global Brands

Since the starting point of brand love differs per consumer, brand love can start from functional needs, but also at another stage in the pyramid. Functional needs refer to the basic needs the product fulfills. For Eric, it started with the Billy bookcase of Ikea that was purchased for the functional need of storing books. In addition, Bono bought his Macbook for the longer battery life of the laptop, as well as the need to start working when opening the lid.

From functional love we suggest that a higher level of love could be defined by security needs. The safety qualities of the global brands were explained with standardization all across the world (global image). In all interviews it was mentioned that the participants knew what to expect from the brand, providing them with a foundation of reliability.

The stage of love needs is where the emotional power of the brand starts to connect with consumers. Empirical findings express love needs in the form of passionate feelings, affection and intimacy. The related dimensions of brand love can be found in the empirical model.

A higher level of love was observed from brand-personality match and reference group. In terms of brand-personality match, the brand offered something with a deeper meaning to the consumer (national pride, history of country of origin, exclusiveness), resulting in self-enhancement.

Furthermore, it was investigated that also reference groups could help achieving self-motivational goals.

Furthermore, from the findings we observed that brand attributes had a larger effect on brand love than person-related attributes. This was concluded from the fact that a majority of the empirical findings signaled brand-related dimensions (brand qualities, mystery and positive affection, global image and brand exposure, and country of origin) to have an effect on their love for the brand. This also shows that non-interpersonal dimensions were determined more relevant, as these were mainly brand-related.

Another finding revealed that the dimensions that were similar to person-to-person dimensions (Intrinsic rewards, brand personality match, frequent thought and use, duration of the relationship, and willingness to invest) covered less emotional weight from the respondents compared to the ones that were 'real' non-interpersonal dimensions.

7. CONCLUSION

This research was executed in the true spirit of investigating the under conceptualized marketing phenomenon of brand love. Since the past few years have shown a burgeoning interest in consumer-brand love amongst academics and practitioners, the foundation of our research was determined to embrace both practical and academic perspectives. Subsequently, our research provided a further understanding of brand love that built upon existing literature in the area under study (Fournier, 1998; Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012). Next to the consumer-related theories, the Lovemarks concept (Roberts, 2005) was applied to extend previous literature from a branding perspective. The different dimensions from each study were combined in the form of a tentative model, providing a structure in researching how consumers experience the relationship with their brand.

The research pioneer in consumer-brand relationships is Fournier (1998), who investigated interpersonal dimensions of love by exploring consumer brand-bonds. Whereas Fournier concentrated on different types of relationships between brand and consumer, our research focused on passionate and love relationships only. In contrast to Fournier (1998) and other researchers with a foundation based on the person-to-person relationship theory, we agree with Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012) that brand love is non-interpersonal and unidirectional, since brands are unable to reciprocate by giving love back to the consumers.

Our research has consisted of an interrogation process of previous non-interpersonal dimensions in order to investigate its relevance and shortcomings. By doing so, the theory from relationship marketing together with the practical Lovemarks concept of Roberts (2005) was brought forward. Compared to previous qualitative research, our research differs as photo elicitation was used to stimulate the respondents to talk in great detail about their experiences with the brand (Easterby-Smith, 2008; Harper, 2002). Most importantly, our empirical data contributes to the limitation mentioned by Albert et al. (2008) regarding the relevance and importance of different brand love dimensions. Additionally, it provides a foundation of a second limitation mentioned by Albert et al. (2008) concerning the lack of brand love studies amongst different brand categories.

With the help of a narrative analysis approach, we contributed to existing theories and concepts by having found three new dimensions of brand love. These empirical dimensions concern: global image and brand exposure, country of origin, and the influence of reference groups. These dimensions were subsequently added in the empirical model (Figure 11).

In addition to the differences between interpersonal and non-interpersonal dimensions, similarities were detected in terms of consumer-personality bonding, frequent thought and use, duration of the relationship, willingness to invest (Fournier, 1998), intrinsic rewards (Kaufman, 2003), as well as a means of expanding the self (Maslow, 1954; Fournier, 1998). Nevertheless, the fact that interpersonal

related theories on brand love miss-out on dimensions that are unable to reciprocate shows that non-interpersonal dimensions provide a more complete understanding of how consumers experience brand love. This statement is grounded in the empirical findings.

To begin with, the empirical findings clarified that the non-interpersonal dimensions of brand love, (not showing overlap with the interpersonal dimensions) were defined by: brand qualities, mystery, global image, brand exposure, country of origin, and reference group. An interesting empirical finding concerned that the majority of the participants experienced their brand upon the '*real*' non-interpersonal dimensions (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012) including our own dimensions, rather than the ones overlapping with person-to-person dimensions (Fournier, 1998). Our study therefore concludes that non-interpersonal dimensions have a greater relevance to brand love compared to the ones related to interpersonal facets. As most of the non-interpersonal dimensions were brand-related, our findings suggest that consumers experienced brand love from branding aspects rather than personal aspects. (The difference between the two perspectives was viewed in the empirical model: figure 11).

The relevance of sensory and functional qualities was found to be central to the study, related to other empirical dimensions. Additionally, it was found that brand love was developed by respondents' love for the country of the brand's origin. Related to these cultural aspects, our study amongst global brands additionally enhanced the relevance of the brand's global image and exposure. Furthermore, the findings suggested that consumers experienced brand love more intense when knowing the brand for long time. The dimension of reference group was observed to make consumers experience the brand together, driven by family or friends that have similar values and beliefs.

The mysterious world created by the brand seemed to carry a great weight on respondent's brand love. As a result, the empirical findings revealed that intrinsic feelings of happiness derive from memories, stories, and dreams. The Lovemarks concept of Saatchi and Saatchi explained how to build loved brands. Based on a solid foundation of trust and respect, an emotional relationship with a consumer can be created with help of mystery, sensuality, and intimacy. The element of mystery is new in a sense that academic theories have not reflected upon myths, icons, and stories as dimensions of brand love.

To sum up, our contribution of a new prototype consisting of both theoretical, practical, and new dimensions of brand love is thereby a contribution to existing research, and provides a foundation for further studies.

7.1 Implications

7.1.1 Theoretical Implications & Future Research

Reflecting on the results of this research, several interesting directions for future studies can be identified. Our research provides a foundation for new studies in brand love based on the empirical model including new dimensions of brand love, both person-related and brand-related.

Considering the prototype for brand love as a whole, the identified dimensions could be further measured according to its individual or collective relevance on brand love. Although a basis of individual relevance was indicated, the findings cannot be considered as representative facts. Due to the limitation of using a qualitative research strategy, findings cannot be generalized to a larger population. Therefore, our study shows a pattern for further quantitative research to expand on in order to generalize the relevance of previous and new dimensions.

Another limitation was indicated due to the fact that the present study discusses seven brands belonging to seven different brand-categories. Although our study shows indications concerning the influence of brand-categories on brand love, these are not representative for a larger population. Our study can therefore be seen as a foundation for further research regarding the influence of brand-categories on brand love. A starting point is our brand-category analysis (appendix 3) that visualizes the influence of different brand-categories on brand love. This table allows comparing the relevance of the empirical dimensions amongst the different brand categories under study. The fact that our category analysis is based on seven brand-categories shows that more brands from additional categories could be studied to confirm the applicability of the research findings to multiple brand categories. New research could thereby help to uncover determinants of consumer's favourability towards becoming involved in a brand relationship within a certain product category.

As the snowball sampling provided us with participants with brand love for global brands only, further studies could focus on examining brand love amongst national or local brands. As we focused on product brands only, a research gap can be filled by putting service brands under study in order to detect potential differences in brand love amongst product and service brands.

Further research could also investigate whether there is a difference in brand love amongst consumers with different demographic backgrounds and nationalities. In the case of global brands, further research could be done to determine whether brand love is stronger for consumers from the country of the brand's origin in comparison to international consumers. Demographic factors, such as age, occupation, and gender could determine whether brand love varies amongst consumers according to age and occupation for example.

Furthermore, since the focus was on the dimensions of brand love rather than the outcomes (e.g. brand loyalty, positive word of mouth, forgiveness of brand failures), further research should be conducted to investigate how brand love affects aspects as brand image or the brand's financial performance.

7.1.2 Managerial Implications

As mentioned in the academic theory, brand love can result in both intrinsic and extrinsic advantages for practitioners. Although more research needs to be conducted with regard to this topic, the theory describes the benefits for practitioners as an opportunity to create a competitive market position, enhance brand equity, and increase profit margins. Several academics state that brand love can lead to positive word of mouth, brand loyalty, resistance to negative brand information, and forgiveness of brand failures (Carroll, Ahuvia 2006; Fournier, 1998; Thomson et al. in Batra et al. 2012). Although the main scope of our research was directed to the relevance of the dimensions, empirical findings also reflected these outcomes.

Hence, more importance is tied to the creation of emotional attachment between brand and consumer. Especially nowadays when it is getting more difficult for brands to act mysterious, it becomes beneficial for brands to understand the new emotional consumer who develops feelings towards brands (Roberts, 2005). Based on our empirical findings, we agree with Roberts (ibid) that emotional branding can lead to action by creating interaction with the consumer, leading to differentiation in the marketplace.

Nowadays, we live in an attention driven economy where it is difficult to hide and be unique or mysterious (ibid). Roberts (ibid) writes about this attention and the changing relationship between the consumer and marketer as the consumer has started to set the terms and conditions of the relationship rather than the brand itself. Roberts (2006) argues that consumer relationships are needed in order become appealing to the active consumer of today (Rust, 2004 in Vesel, Zabkar, 2004). Therefore, we suggest that companies should not only focus on emotional branding, but listen to customers as well.

To conclude, from the managerial point of view, times have changed. Consumers are not just passive recipients unlike any other time in history (Gummesson, 1998 in Vesel and Zabkar, 2004), but are willing to interact with the brand. Academic theory explains that brand love can result in various benefits related to the enhancement of brand equity. Seeing the outcomes of brand love, both academics and practitioners signal that it is time for companies to enforce their Consumer Relationships Management with emotional power.

7.2 Limitations

This section will address the several research limitations that should be acknowledged and discussed according to their implications on the research findings. The first limitation is related to the use of a qualitative research strategy and its inability to generalize findings to a larger population. Although the 80-90 minutes face-to-face interviews, as well as the photo elicitation technique provided us with rich and reliable data, findings were based on a limited number of interviews.

The second limitation regards brand categories as our research was formed on a limited variety of categories. The brands under study were all global brands as well as product brands. It could therefore be argued that the research is of limited application to service brands, and those that are local or national.

On top of that, demographic characteristics such as age, gender and nationalities were not taken into consideration while conducting the research study. We are aware of the possibility that older consumers behave differently in forming relationships with brands compared to the findings from our sample. A limitation can therefore be addressed by the formation of our sample, consisting of participants with an age lying between twenty-two and twenty-six.

For the reasons above-mentioned, our research should be considered as a basis for further research to increase the reliability of our study, and to make it representative to a larger population. In order to reach this goal, further qualitative and quantitative methods should be employed in different directions of the study.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1. Interview Handout

Participant: Michael
Brand: Ikea
Date/Time: 23/04/2012 – (15.30-17.00)
Interviewers: Orkun Eti and Lysbet de Boer
Location: Alfa, Conference Room
Topic: Consumer-Brand Relationships

This is a guideline explaining the interview procedure. The following instructions will give you an understanding of the interview and helps you to prepare.

The interview itself will take 80-90 minutes. We, Orkun and Lysbet, will both be involved as interviewers. We will meet you at 15.30 at Alfa. We will wait for you on the ground floor at the main entrance. Before the interview takes place we kindly ask you to complete a preparatory task of which the explanation can be found below.

The assignment:

We would like you to collect 12 images that reflect your passion towards Ikea and/or the relationship between you and Ikea **directly** and **indirectly**. You can send the images by e-mail to one of the two email addresses mentioned below. The deadline is one day before the interview takes place (tomorrow before 19.00 would be fine). Regarding the images: you can use any source that you need to find the right image. These are examples:

- Online images (please copy the link)
- Magazines (please provide us with a scan)
- Own photos (please give them a clear nametag)

Be creative and feel free to use other image sources as well! You can also send us a Word Document in which you pasted the images. Make sure that the quality of the chosen images is high and that the pictures are not too small.

Thank you in advance Michael. We are looking forward to meeting you for the interview!

Best Regards,

Orkun Eti
07 621 185 66
orkuneti@gmail.com

Lysbet de Boer
07 607 451 76
lysbedeboer@gmail.com

APPENDIX 2. Photo Collages

Burberry – Theme Collage

ICONS 1

GLOBAL 4

HISTORY 2

"LADY" 3

The collage consists of several distinct images and text elements:

- Top Left:** A historical advertisement titled "Service Outrigs BURBERRY Uniforms and Topcoats". It features an illustration of a man in a military-style uniform and text describing the quality and durability of Burberry's clothing for military and outdoor use. A red circle with the number "3" is next to it.
- Top Center:** A world map with red circles containing numbers "5" and "6" over different continents.
- Top Right:** A map of the United Kingdom with a Union Jack pattern, labeled with a red circle containing the number "4".
- Middle Left:** A photograph of a woman wearing a plaid scarf, labeled with a red circle containing the number "7".
- Middle Center:** A photograph of a man in a white shirt and tie, labeled with a red circle containing the number "8".
- Middle Right:** A photograph of a woman in a plaid scarf, labeled with a red circle containing the number "9".
- Bottom Left:** A photograph of a Burberry store facade with the sign "T. BURBERRY & SONS", labeled with a red circle containing the number "2".
- Bottom Center:** A photograph of a watch displayed in a store window, labeled with a red circle containing the number "10".
- Bottom Right:** A photograph of a plaid scarf with a red tag that says "100%", labeled with a red circle containing the number "6".
- Far Right:** A photograph of a plaid scarf with the word "LADY" written in red, labeled with a red circle containing the number "3".

Burberry – Brand Love Collage



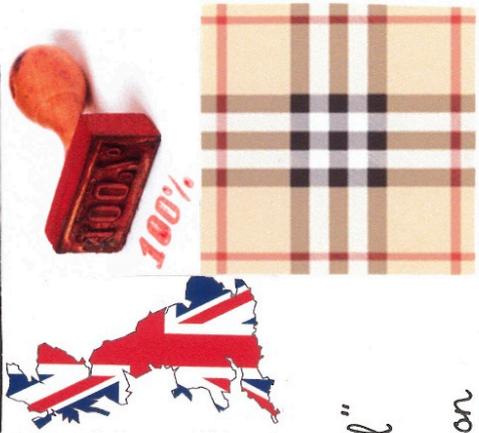
Service Outrigs BURBERRY
 Uniforms and Topcoats ensure security, comfort and distinction at home or abroad, being woven and produced by special processes without lint or fraying, and with a high degree of efficiency and protection against wet or chill and prolonged wear. Made in strong, yet lightweight, textures, suitable for every war zone.

Officers' Complate
 Kit in 2 to 4 Days

BURBERRY'S Haymarket LONDON & 10 Boulevard Malesherbes PARIS; and Provincial Agents.



You can be: the "if-girl" the smart man or... just a normal person



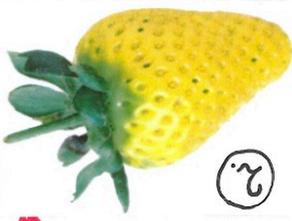
BUT → with the history

You can buy a "cool" item...



Or the scarf that makes you "you"!

Hello Kitty - Theme Collage



④
"Kawaii Culture"
(Cuteness 可愛)



③
Dreamland
for
Hello Kitty
FANS



①
Everyday with Hello Kitty

Hello Kitty - Brand Love Collage

10-16 year Hate Pink Kitty

Start collecting H-K Toys from McDonalds

Start to buy daily-used products of H-K

Innocent pure Heart

every girl has a dream-land

Stay Young Stay Foolish (Heart)

If I have money I'd like to expensive Quality life with H-K

HELLO KITTY WORLD

HELLO KITTY CAFE

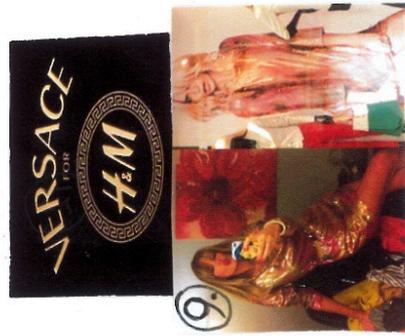
HELLO KITTY BOTTLES

HELLO KITTY PLUSHIES

HELLO KITTY TOYS

HELLO KITTY MERCHANDISE

H&M - Theme Collage



ME
1.



H&M - Brand Love Collage



shopping makes me →



& like to shop in good → Company



One story



save ↓



buy more →



without ↓



with ↑



Feel good & important

especially on ↓

Ikea - Theme Collage

Nostalgia

①

②

③

④

⑤

⑥

⑦

⑧

⑨

⑩

⑪

⑫

Functionality

1x

Everyday life

Experience

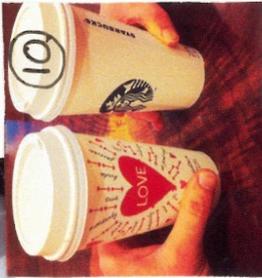
Avsluta med en wienerkorv och dryck!

Fika [fee-KA]

Starbucks - Theme Collage

My friends, Starbucks and I

1



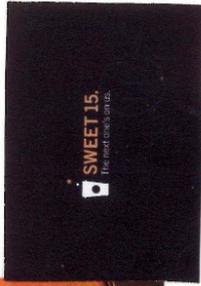
5) Wishing thinking



"Motto", Way of thinking 4



DAILY ROUTINE 2

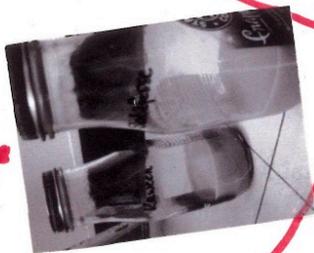


3 Starbucks makes me feel special



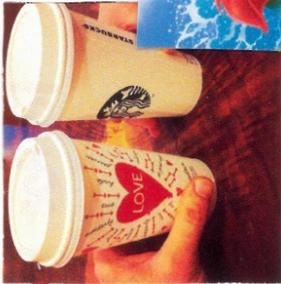
Starbucks - Brand Love Collage

Start of my Love Story



... that took over my daily routine

with my sisters and cousins



At school



Life's Too Short TO DRINK CHEAP COFFEE

And because it's convenient



And you ask me why?

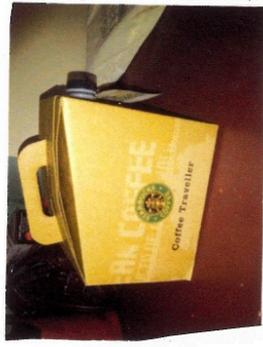


because there's

NO STRESS



and he will light up my day



Apple - Theme Collage



Simplicity in Design (2)



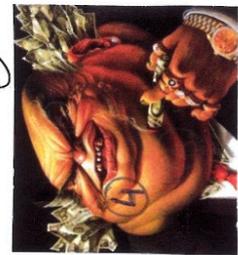
1

To Capture a moment (3)



2

Money and Capitalism (6)



4



Redefining how Mosis is done. (4)



Seeing the Future. (1)



5



5

Living the American Dream



9



7



5

Apple - Brand Love Collage



One of the things I love about apple

Apple seeing the future.



How huge would the future

This is what first attracted me to Apple



The man who made it all happen

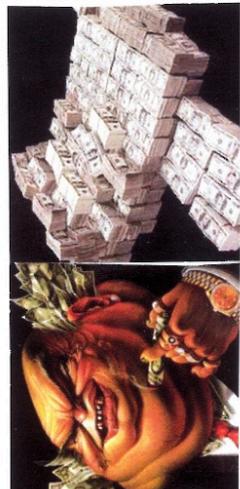


This is where the concept has its roots

Capturing moments



Capitalism and money were by products of apples success



APPENDIX 3. Brand Category Analysis

Hearts represent the importance of the category

Brand Categories:	Brand-Related:							Person-Related:				
	Sensual and Functional Qualities	Mystery and Positive Affection	Intrinsic Rewards	Brand Personality Match	Brand Exposure and Global Image	Country of Origin	Frequent Thought and Use	Duration of Relationship	Willingness to Invest	Reference Group Effect		
Dimensions →												
• Luxury Clothing Burberry				♥		♥					♥	♥
• Mainstream Clothing H&M				♥		♥					♥	♥
• Technology Apple						♥	♥				♥	
• Furniture Ikea				♥		♥	♥					
• Fast Food McDonald's				♥								
• Coffee Chain Starbucks							♥				♥	♥
• Character Brand Hello Kitty				♥			♥					♥