

# BRAND LOVE CREATES BRAND LOYALTY- EVIDENCE AMONG THE YOUTH

Deepak Babu, Rajagiri College of social sciences  
Abraham Babu, Rajagiri Business School

## ABSTRACT

*This study tries to explain the relationship between brand experience, brand identification, brand love and their impact on brand loyalty. University students between the age group of 20 and 28 years were considered. The direct relationships between brand experience, brand identification and brand loyalty were analysed. The mediating role of brand love on brand loyalty was also analysed using Structural Equation Modelling. It was found that brand experience and brand identification showed a positive and significant relationship with brand love and brand loyalty. A positive influence of brand love on brand loyalty was also found. It was seen that brand experience and brand identification showed insignificant result when mediator variable brand love was considered as the independent variable. However, it was concluded that brand love has full mediating effects on both brand experience and brand identification and in turn on brand loyalty. These results have strong implications (on the bond between the brand and the customer which will in turn create loyalty among the customers.) on customer retention through the loyalty perception.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the marketing domain, one of the evolving areas of interest is brand love. The major focus of academicians is to understand the construct of brand love and to explain the relationship with this construct to the much broader concepts like brand relationship quality and consumer relationship management (Batra et al., 2012). Literature both from academic and managerial perspective are intriguing. From the viewpoint of businesses, customer retention and acquisition is possible through dynamic marketing strategies, which can be achieved by providing functional and experiential benefits to the customers (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018; V.K, 2013; Yi & La, 2004a, 2004b). In the present context, the big brands are trying to create unique customer involvements by providing memorable experiences through their products and services (Hudson et al., 2015; H. Park & Kim, 2014). Earlier research on experiential marketing shows that the companies are shifting from brand related benefits to brand related experience. Further, for organizations to remain competitive in the marketplace, creating stronger and longer relationships between the brands and the consumer, would in turn lead to repeated investment by the individual on the brand (Blodgett et al., 1995; Fournier, 1998; Riki Wijayajaya & Tri Astuti, 2018a). From the standpoint of the brand managers, they try to create brands which are truly valued by the consumers and distinctively stand above the competition. In this context, brand love creates an emotional attachment with the consumer to interpersonal interactions between the individual and the brand. A few studies have investigated the importance of brand love and brand relationship quality but still the factors which influence customer's perception of love towards a brand is limited (Huang, 2017; Wallace et al., 2014). The earlier studies in the field of brand love establishes the relationship between this construct and other major marketing variables

(Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). A majority of literature available in brand love tries to explain the concept of consumer brand relationship rather than focusing on brand love (Huang, 2017). In addition, researchers found that core aspect of individual identity is created through the preferred objects or entities, like a consumer may love a brand if that brand is nearer to the identity which consumer wants to establish in the society. The construct which is aligned to the relationship of brands and personal identity is brand identification. The literature related to customer relationship management shows that companies try to establish brand image of a product as nearer to the identity of the niche they want to target (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). More literature shows that if an emotional relationship is established between the consumer and the brand then it will bring a feeling of trust which will lead to loyalty behaviour by the consumer (Riki Wijayajaya & Tri Astuti, 2018b; Uzaimi et al., 2015). Despite the importance of brand experience and brand identification on creating a loyal behaviour towards a brand, very few studies have tried to understand the mechanism of interaction between these variables. This study tries to fill this gap by understanding the relationship between brand experience, brand identification and brand love (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Plumeyer et al., 2019; Riki Wijayajaya & Tri Astuti, 2018a; Schallehn et al., 2014; Vinhas & Faridah, 2008). Again, this study also tries to demonstrate the importance of mediating effect of brand love on relationship between brand experience, brand identification and brand loyalty. In case of brands and products, customer involvement in decision-making is diverse, based on the value and type of the product. For low involvement products there is usually a lower value attached as compared to high involvement products. This also creates a difference in the perception of a brand. The lower involvement products require less effort which will create lack of a rational rating of the alternatives in a product category which will lead to parity perception among the brands. However, in case of high involvement products, customers take more effort for making a decision so the rationality of rating different alternatives increases and hence lowers the parity perception among the brands (Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010; Islam & Rahman, 2016; Nyadzayo & Khajehzadeh, 2016; Tarofder et al., 2016; Wu et al., 2011).

This empirical study offers an overview to explain the relationship mechanism between brand experience, brand identification, brand parity and brand loyalty in context of low and high brand parity perception products. A clear gap in theory is evident especially in explaining the role of brand love, brand experience and brand identity in developing loyalty behaviour among the customers. Hence, this study tries to bridge this gap by providing a novel conceptual framework which will be helpful in explaining the concept of creating brand loyalty through different cognitive brand related variables like love, experience and identification.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The brand resonance model states that to achieve brand loyalty there are two different strategies-rational strategy and emotional strategy (Oliver, 1993; Santos & Boote, 2003). The rational strategy consists of performance components like reliability, efficiency and price whereas in case of emotional strategy the major components are influenced by the cognitive aspects like fun. Brand identification and brand love is considered to be the emotional components which will develop loyalty behaviour for the brand (Yi & La, 2004a). Brand love is considered as a higher order construct which is a collection of different multifaceted feelings, which is influenced by imagery feelings of brand identification (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, brand love is considered as a mediator in this study. The rational strategy can be

explained by brand experience which is evolved through subjective evaluation of brand related stimuli which will create internal consumer response (Fournier & Yao, 1997; Francisco-Maffezzolli et al., 2014; Kim & Trail, 2011; Ling-Chuan et al., 2019; Smit et al., 2007).

### **Brand Loyalty**

Brand loyalty is defined as a psychological process generating biased behavioral response which is expressed by any decision making unit over a specific time with respect to choice between different evaluative options (Erciş et al., 2012; Minarti & Segoro, 2014). Previous research theories assume loyalty is a random behavior by any decision making individual based on continuous process of purchasing similar product over a period of time rather than any other influencing factor (Chen-Yu et al., 2016; Minarti & Segoro, 2014; Uzaimi et al., 2015). But other stream of researchers considers loyalty as a biased process where factors related to consumer behavior happens to build loyalty through repeated purchasing of same product (Mbango, 2018). In this framework brand loyalty is considered as attitude which is evolved due to impact of various antecedents originated from consumer behaviour.

### **Brand experience**

Gilmore & Pine (1999) are the pioneers, who first introduced the concept of brand experience. Brand experience can be determined as an impression that is formed based on the encounters between the customers and the brand. Brand experience is conceptualized as sensory, intellectual and behavioural responses evoked by brand related stimuli that are part of brand management like design, packaging, communication and identity (Chen-Yu et al., 2016; Minarti & Segoro, 2014; Uzaimi et al., 2015). Brand experience is conceptually distinct from the set of brand constructs like attitude, involvement and attachment. The brand experience which is generated through interaction between brand and the customer can vary in the strength, intensity and type of relationship (Chen Ching-Fu, 2011; Dimitriadis & Papista, 2010; Kim & Trail, 2011; Ling-Chuan et al., 2019; J.-W. Park & Kim, 2001). The longer relationship with more intense feelings will impact the consumer behaviour especially the consumer decision making process. The brand experience is considered as a major driving force of brand love because of sensory component which has a cognitive aspects related to it will have huge impact on short-term psychological reactions like brand love (Amoako et al., 2019; Nyffenegger et al., 2015; Palmatier et al., 2006; Papista & Dimitriadis, 2012; Xie & Heung, 2012). Brand experience will create a better relationship quality between customer and brands, where the relationship is a combination of trust, commitment and loyalty towards the brand. The affective component of brand experience will induce more trust and commitment towards a brand which will create loyalty behaviour in individuals towards a brand (Minarti & Segoro, 2014; Uzaimi et al., 2015). The cognitive-affection-behaviour model which explains the rationale behind the hierarchy of effects. The cognitive responses like sensory and intellectual experiences will help to create emotional affections like brand love which will culminate in behavioural formations like customer loyalty behaviour. Based on the literature the hypotheses can be postulated as

*H1: -Brand experience has significant positive influence on Brand love*

*H2: -Brand experience has significant positive influence on Brand loyalty*

## Brand Identification

According to Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) individual tends to love a brand or an object which helps to shape a unique consumer identity which will induce strong emotional responses. The emotional responses shown by the consumer can be segregated into brand related constructs like brand loyalty, brand love, brand attachment (Şahin et al., 2017; Srivastava & Sharma, 2013; V.K, 2013; Yi & La, 2004a). In branding related literature, brand identification is a construct which is used to explain the relationship between brand and individual identity. Brand identification is defined as the level of agreement consumers has on overlapping impact of brand image on the personal image of the individual. Brand identification plays an important role in creating better brand relationship quality through creating a unique individual identity (Santos & Boote, 2003). The social identity theory helps to explain the repeated usage of a brand due to establishing a unique identity in the society by the brand which will create more value and loyalty towards the brand. A large number of studies have investigated the role of brand identification but very few studies focus on understanding the interrelationship between brand identification and loyalty behavior (Davcik et al., 2015; N. Srivastava et al., 2015; Tingting & Bilgihan, 2011; Tong & Hawley, 2009; Wansink, 2003; Wood, 2000). Very few studies emphasize on explaining the relationship between brand identification and emotional construct like brand love. Based on the literature the hypotheses can be postulated as

*H3: -Brand identification has significant positive influence on Brand loyalty.*

*H4: - Brand identification has significant positive influence on Brand love.*

## Brand love

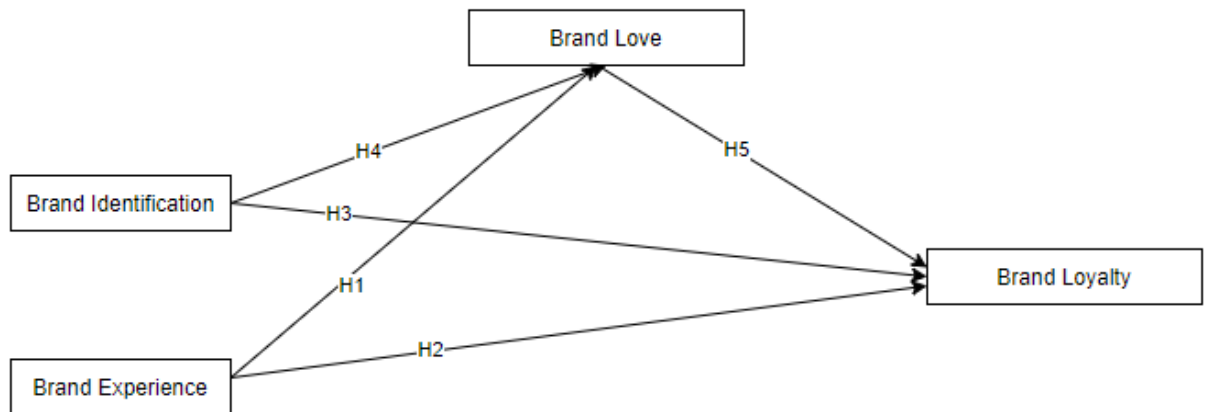
The concept of brand love comes from the field of social psychology. The triangular theory of love proposed by Sternberg's (1986) is based on interpersonal love. This concept was used by Shimp and Madden (1988) to conceptualize the construct of brand love. Brand love was defined as an affection developed via consumer towards a brand that has satisfied the consumer with its offering which will create passionate emotional attachment towards the brand. Brand love includes various dimensions like passion for the brand, attachment to the brand, positive evolution of a brand and positive emotions in response to the brand (Bagozzi et al., 2017; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017; Huang, 2017; Sarkar & Sreejesh, 2014; Wallace et al., 2014). Brand love is a higher construct to the satisfaction as individuals were loving a brand will always be satisfied by its performance, but all satisfied customers will not show brand love. The consumers display different attitudes towards a brand which is based on the factors which influences consumer self-schemas (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017). The consumer brand relationship is depicted by the passionate obsessive dependency of consumer in a particular brand which creates a feeling of void when the brand is missing. The consumer responses based on the degree of emotional attachment towards a brand will create other brand related outcomes like loyalty, attachment etc. (Huang, 2017; Wallace et al., 2014). To understand the interrelationship between brand experience, brand identification and brand loyalty, the concept of brand love is used as it is a higher order construct which comprises of different emotional and behavioral aspects (Bagozzi et al., 2017; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Further, brand love is considered as a vital construct in understanding brand relationship quality. Again, based on the literature the hypotheses can be postulated as follows

*H5: -Brand love has a significant positive influence on Brand loyalty.*

*H6: -Brand love has a significant indirect influence on relationship between brand experience and Brand loyalty.*

*H7: -Brand love has a significant indirect influence on relationship between brand identification and Brand loyalty.*

Based on the hypotheses which were postulated the conceptual model of the study was framed in Figure 1.



**Figure 1**  
**THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF THE STUDY**

## METHODOLOGY

In this study, an empirical approach is used to determine the perception of the consumer regarding brand related constructs like brand experience, brand identification, brand love and brand loyalty. The purpose of this study was to establish direct relationships between independent variables like brand experience, brand identification and dependent variables like brand loyalty. Further, the mediating role of brand love is also analysed using IBM AMOS software based on Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

### Questionnaire Design

The questionnaire for different constructs in the study were developed based on the measurement scales from earlier studies. The items were modified pertaining to the study to increase the face validity. To improve the structure of the questionnaire a review panel was constituted comprising of Ph.D students and professors in the field of brand management. The items for all the constructs were based on a five point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. To establish overall perception about the brand rather than the characteristics of the product, respondents were asked to list down three top brands of smart phones.

### Sampling Technique

The population used for the study were university students between the age group of 20 to 28 years. The sampling units used in the study are assumed to be early adopters of new products and also users of branded products. A random probability sampling is conducted after creating a

database of all the students studying in three different universities. The online questionnaire was created and hosted through online learning management system Moodle with a response rate of 51.6%. A total of 1000 online questionnaires were circulated among the online customers.

## Data Analysis

In this study various statistical tests were performed to obtain the results. Initially sample profiling is done to understand the characteristics of the population. A hypothetical model was created based on the conceptual model and robustness was tested through calculating confirmatory factor analysis, reliability and validity testing. The measurement model was then tested to establish the relationship between different antecedent variables and latent variables in the study.

## Sample Profiling

The demographic summary shows that the two thirds of the respondents were male and 71% of respondents were between 20 to 25 years of age. The majority of respondents were residing in urban areas with 56% respondents having average salary ranging from INR. 25000-35000. All respondents were regular purchasers from both online and offline stores. The sample was representative of the contemporary characteristics of the customers.

## RESULTS

The validation of measurement model was done through computing model fit indices, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) estimates, inter-factor correlation and composite reliability. The model fit values reveal to establish the fitness between the data and measurement model. The hypotheses relationship between different constructs were established through inter-factor correlation. The values of inter-factor correlation show that all the relationships between the constructs were significant with the help of the covariance model and the confirmatory factor analysis by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The construct reliability is tested based on AVE which shows the volume of variance captured by the constructs as proposition of total measurement error in Table 1. The minimum value of AVE should be more than 0.5. It is observed that the composite reliability of each construct is also reasonably high with the minimum value being 0.51.

**Table 1**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS, RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY ESTIMATES**

					<b>Inter-factor correlation matrix</b>			
	<b>Cronbach Alpha Value</b>	<b>Critical Ratio</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Brand Loyalty</b>	<b>Brand Love</b>	<b>Brand Identification</b>	<b>Brand Experience</b>
<b>Brand</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>4.91</b>	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.51</b>			
<b>Brand Love</b>	<b>0.90</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>4.83</b>	<b>0.28</b>	<b>0.42**</b>	<b>0.68</b>		
<b>Brand Identification</b>	<b>0.93</b>	<b>0.89</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>0.63</b>	<b>0.50**</b>	<b>0.43**</b>	<b>0.79</b>	
<b>Brand Experience</b>	<b>0.92</b>	<b>0.83</b>	<b>5.36</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>0.42**</b>	<b>0.45**</b>	<b>0.46**</b>	<b>0.7</b>

# the italic and bold diagonal values in inter-factor correlation matrix shows the average variance extracted values. \*\* Correlation is significant at 1 % significance level.

Source: Computed values from primary data analyses using SPSS

The Cronbach alpha value also shows that reliability of constructs are falling within acceptable limits. Table 1 also shows convergent and discriminant validity of all constructs in the measurement model (using SPSS). The results show that the convergent validity is achieved in the measurement model (which is achieved) with respect to the score being above the minimum value of 0.6. The second aspect of validity pertains to confirming the discriminant validity which is calculated as square root of each construct AVE and inter-construct correlation values. The square root of each construct AVE should be greater than the correlation values of each construct with respect to the other constructs. The results of this study also fulfil the criteria of discriminant validity for all hypothesis.

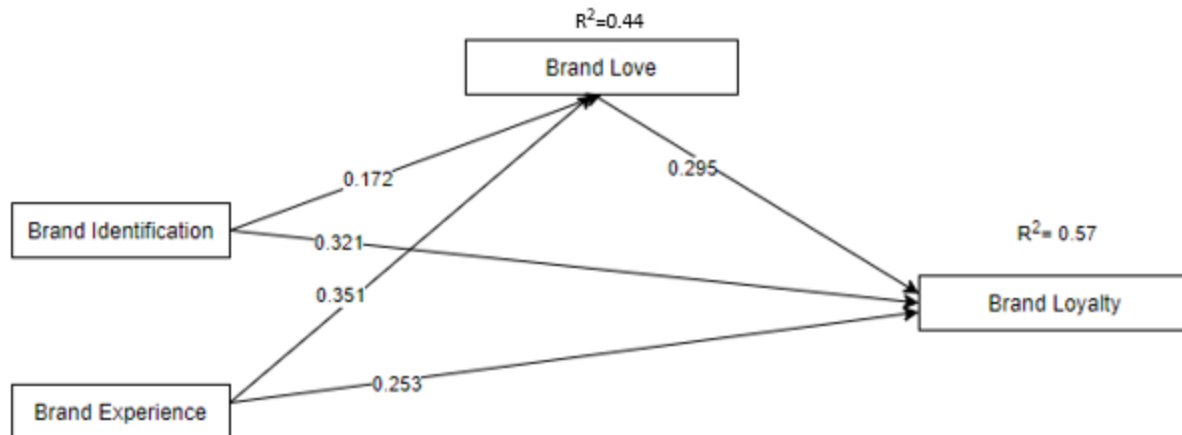
### Testing of hypothesis

The SEM analysis shows some interesting results based on relation between variables under consideration in Table 2.

Model Fit Indices	Value
normed $\chi^2$	2.406
CFI	0.983
GFI	0.951
AGFI	0.941
NFI	0.971
RFI	0.968
SRMR	0.035
RMSEA	0.021

Source: Computed values from primary data analyses using AMOS

Brand experience and brand identification shows a strong positive relationship with brand love. The coefficient of determination of brand experience and brand identification is approximately 57 % ( $R^2 = 0.57$ ) which shows an excellent explanatory power. These results shows that both brand experience and brand identification are important antecedents of brand love and particularly the influence of brand experience is strongest among these two variables, thus, this result supports both H1 and H2 hypothesis. The variables Brand love and brand loyalty show a positive relationship between themselves. Further, brand experience and brand identification depict a positive impact on brand love perception of the consumers. The coefficient of determination shows brand experience, brand love and brand identification explains 44% of total variation in brand loyalty, which shows an excellent explanatory power and thereby supports both H3 and H4. For studying the mediating effect of brand love on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty, the method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986) is adopted. In Figure 2 the independent variables were tested for the relationship effect on the dependent variables.



**Figure 2**  
**REGRESSION STANDARDIZED COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL VARIABLES**

This model shows that all the independent variables, namely, brand experience and brand identification show a positive impact on the dependent variable brand loyalty. In table 3 the relationship between all independent variables (brand experience and brand identification) on the mediator variable (brand love) was tested. This model shows a positive impact of both brand experience and brand identification on brand love. In the model, relationship between the mediator variable (brand love) and dependent variable (brand loyalty) were tested. This model shows a positive influence of brand love on brand loyalty. The relationship between both independent variables, mediator variable and dependent variable were tested. This model shows that brand experience and brand identification shows an insignificant result when mediator variable brand love is considered as the independent variable. It was also found that brand love has full mediating effects on both brand experience and brand identification and in turn on brand loyalty. The detailed results are presented in table 3.

<b>Table 3</b>				
<b>THE PATH ESTIMATES BASED ON THE CONCEPTUAL MODEL</b>				
<b>Paths estimated</b>	<b>Standardized coefficient</b>	<b>t -value</b>	<b>F-value</b>	<b>R2</b>
Brand Identification→Brand Loyalty	0.321*	6.13	58.52**	0.57
Brand Experience→Brand Loyalty	0.253*	0.567		
Brand Identification→Brand Love	0.172*	4.873		
Brand Experience→Brand Love	0.351*	2.131		
Brand Love→Brand Loyalty	0.295*	2.131		
Brand Identification→Brand Love→Brand Loyalty	0.542*	2.227		
Brand Experience→Brand Love→Brand Loyalty	0.491*	14.91		

\*Standardized regression values are significant at 5 % significance level.

Source: Computed values from primary data analyses using SPSS

**DISCUSSION**

There are extensive studies on brand loyalty and relationship between different constructs but a scarcity was found related to the impact of brand love on different antecedents of brand



loyalty. The concept of brand loyalty has been researched vastly under different environments and with different constructs. But very few studies were done to understand the impact of customer brand love on brand loyalty (Giovanis & Athanasopoulou, 2018). This study concludes with the following results, brand experience and brand identification are major drivers influencing brand loyalty. The study also shows that brand love is fully mediating the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. The mediating effect of brand love on relationship between brand experience and brand identification on brand loyalty was determined (Huang, 2017). Further, the results also find mediating effect of brand love on the relationship between brand identification and brand loyalty. The results contribute to the existing body of knowledge related to branding theory in many ways. This study tries to extend the literature on branding and brand love. In addition, since brand love is mediating the relationship it implies that in the presence of strong brand love and the impact of positive experiences related to brand will help to create more loyal customers (Ahn & Back, 2020). Along with this, the study also establishes that the identification of brand by customers can lead to more loyalty perception among consumers if the emotion of brand love is stronger towards the brand. The study further extends the claims made by previous studies that better identification of brand and experiences provided by certain brands will be creating more loyal customers (Fournier & Yao, 1997; Huber et al., 2010; Kim & Trail, 2011).

The marketing decision makers have recognized the power of positive brand experience and better brand identification in branding strategy. This study suggests that the marketers can create positive brand experience and unique brand identification to build on brand loyalty among the consumers (Erciş et al., 2012). Since the marketers have a huge challenge to retain customer loyalty, as customers have wide range of brands in almost all product categories, along with this, creating unique brand experience and distinctive identification can create more pressure on existing resource constraints (Davicik et al., 2015). This study suggests that marketers should try to connect emotionally to the customers to create feeling of love towards the brand. The emotional attachment to brand will create stronger bond between brand and the customer which will lead to create brand loyal customers (Ahn & Back, 2020). So marketers should always try to create unique experience through innovative ideas of sales and promotion which will create emotional relationship among the entities.

## LIMITATIONS

This study also has certain limitations which can provide directions for future research. The data collected was primarily based on the younger population from universities. In future the study design can be extended to more diverse population involving wide range of age profiles. The research model can be tested across different cultures and regions (and countries) for confirming the generalizability of the research model used in this study. Future research should investigate across different countries and add new constructs in different product categories. The measures of causality between the variables can be explained better if a longitudinal research design is adopted.

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