

The Complex Nature of Brand Relationships:
Interpersonal or Parasocial Love?

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The purpose of this research was to offer deeper understanding of the nature of the relationships that consumers have with their favorite brands. The understanding helps organizations to build and develop their brands, and to understand how the consumers feel about their brands and why.</p> <p>The focus of this research was especially in two different brand relationship types - interpersonal and parasocial - and that which type does this research's results represent. The relationships were also evaluated through the concepts of brand history, brand loyalty and brand love. The research questions were 1) are there any interpersonal attributes related to brand relationships, 2) are there any parasocial attributes related to brand relationships and 3) how do brand history, brand loyalty and brand love show in brand relationships?</p> <p>The research was conducted with semi-structured in-depth interviews, and the research material was analysed by directed content analysis. In the center of the interviews were the five main themes of the research. The frame for the interview was based on Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on's (2012) previous research. Six interviews were conducted with an alignment that everyone had to choose one food brand according to which they answered the questions. Three of the interviewees were food professionals, and the other three civilians with an interest towards food.</p> <p>The brand relationships of this research appeared to be more interpersonal than parasocial, and brand history and brand loyalty appeared to matter more on the relationships than brand love. Brand loyalty was the strongest theme amongst all interviewees. Admitting the existence of a relationship was hard for the consumers, but the research proved that the relationships exist and are a very virile phenomenon, even though the consumers don't easily identify them and speak about the brands as their partners.</p> <p>Therefore it is important for the companies to include the consumers in the brand culture and listen to them, and this way ensure the continuity of the consumer-brand relationships, as they might initiate brand advocacy and positive word-of-mouth. The companies should focus on what happens after a consumer infatuates with a brand: they need to know how to manage the relationships and serve them the best way they can. Even though the results of this research can't be generalized, the research showed that the brand relationships have more to give for the companies, and that there still is a lot of viable information to decipher.</p>	
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<p>Tiivistelmä</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tarjota syvällisempää ymmärrystä kuluttajien ja heidän lempibrändiensä välisten suhteiden luonteesta. Syvempi ymmärrys auttaa organisaatioita rakentamaan ja kehittämään omia brändejä, sekä ymmärtämään, mitä kuluttajat tuntevat brändejä kohtaan ja miksi.</p> <p>Tutkimus keskittyi erityisesti kahteen eri suhdetyyppiin - interpersonaaliseen ja parasosiaaliseen - sekä siihen, kumpaa näistä suhdetyypeistä tutkimus edustaa. Suhteita arvioitiin myös brändihistorian, brändiuskollisuuden ja brändirakkauden käsitteiden kautta. Tutkimuskysymykset olivat 1) liittyykö brändisuhteisiin interpersonaalisia piirteitä, 2) liittyykö brändisuhteisiin parasosiaalisia piirteitä, ja 3) kuinka brändihistoria, brändiuskollisuus ja brändirakkaus näkyvät brändisuhteissa?</p> <p>Tutkimus toteutettiin puolistrukturoituina haastatteluina, ja tutkimusmateriaali analysoitiin sisällönanalyysillä. Haastatteluiden keskiössä olivat tutkimuksen viisi pääteemaa. Haastattelupohja perustui Fetscherinin ja Conway Dato-onin (2012) aikaisempaan tutkimukseen. Kuusi haastattelua toteutettiin sillä linjauksella, että jokaisen tuli valita yksi ruokabrändi, jonka pohjalta he vastasivat kysymyksiin. Kolme haastatelluista oli ruoka-alan ammattilaisia, ja loput kolme haastateltua olivat ruoasta kiinnostuneita siviilejä.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen brändisuhteet osoittautuivat olevan enemmän interpersonaalisia kuin parasosiaalisia, ja brändihistorialla ja brändiuskollisuudella näytti olevan enemmän vaikutusta brändisuhteisiin kuin brändirakkaudella. Brändiuskollisuus nousi vahvimaksi teemaksi kaikkien haastateltujen keskuudessa. Suhteen olemassaolon myöntäminen oli kuluttajille vaikeaa, mutta tutkimus osoitti, että brändisuhteet ovat olemassa oleva ja hyvin elinvoimainen ilmiö, vaikka kuluttajat eivät niitä helposti tunnistaikään tai puhuttelisi brändejä kumppaneinaan.</p> <p>Näin ollen on tärkeää, että yritykset sisällyttäisivät kuluttajat brändikulttuuriin ja kuuntelisivat heitä, sekä tällä tavalla varmistaisivat kuluttajien ja brändien välisten suhteiden jatkuvuuden niiden voidessa saada aikaan brändikannattajuutta ja positiivista word-of-mouthia. Yritysten tulisi keskittyä siihen, mitä tapahtuu sen jälkeen, kun kuluttaja ihastuu brändiin: heidän on tiedettävä kuinka hallita suhdetta ja palvella sitä parhaalla mahdollisella tavalla. Vaikka tämän tutkimuksen tulokset eivät ole yleistettävissä, osoitti tutkimus, että brändisuhteilla on enemmän annettavaa yrityksille, ja että niissä piilee vielä paljon hyödyllistä tietoa.</p>	
Asiasanat - Interpersonaalinen rakkaus, parasosiaalinen rakkaus, brändirakkaus, brändiuskollisuus, brändihistoria, brändisuhteet	
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1 INTRODUCTION

I personally know an advertising executive who got the Apple logo of Macintosh tattooed on his chest – next to his heart! [...] people sometimes form a very intimate bond with brands and, in some extreme cases, a passion that is often associated only with a close circle of friends and family.

(Aggarwal 2004, 87.)

According to Luoma-aho (2008, 11) “we have shifted along with the reputation society to an era of strong emotions, where we feel strongly, both hate and love, towards organizations”. The phenomenon of humanizing has infiltrated to the organizational level, which means that the importance of cherishing the relationships between organizations and stakeholders has become as important as cherishing interpersonal relationships. Consumers seem to take the relationships with organizations and brands as seriously as interpersonal relationships: according to Fournier (1998, 344) consumers have an increasing need to see organizations and brands as soulful objects. A significant factor in this phenomenon is also the modern easiness of expressing one’s feelings, as social media has become such an everyday environment and tool for communication.

According to Aggarwal (2004, 88) consumers rarely know how to make a difference between an organization and its brands – for them an organization and a brand are the same things. So the most natural way to affect the consumers and their consuming habits happens through the brands. Interaction and communication are an important way to build a relationship

between brands and consumers (Suvatjis and de Chernatony 2012, 373; Berthon, Hulbert & Pitt 1999), and according to Morgan and Hunt (1994, 31) communication helps building trust. From researcher's point of view, this means that brands are also often the closest thing that they can reach in the organization – physically and emotionally.

In brand literature there, is a moderate amount of researches about consumer-brand relationships (CBR). According to Fetscherin, Boulanger, Gonçalves Filho and Souki (2014, 78), the research in the CBR field is “interdisciplinary and complex”. Also, Fetscherin and Heinrich (2014, 367) state in their meta-analytic literature review on CBR that the concept has been studied in multiple disciplines: business, marketing, management, applied psychology and communications. Even the disciplines of leisure, sports and tourism have contributed to the research (Fetscherin & Heinrich 2014, 367). Consumer-brand relationship is a vast concept, which has been studied with the focus of different brand-related constructs, such as brand love, brand attachment, brand commitment, brand loyalty, brand personality, brand communities and cults, or brand relationships and storytelling (Fetscherin & Heinrich 2014, 367).

This research won't be purely from a communicational point of view: it won't focus on different organizational communication theories or phenomena of public relations. This research focuses on a vaster concept that extends to multiple disciplines. In researcher's opinion, it is getting harder to draw a line between different disciplines as they are constantly integrating with each other more and more. As the core construct of this research is “relationship”, and communication is a vital factor in functioning relationships, the discipline of communications will naturally follow this research its whole length. However, the role and impact of CBR in organizational communications and public relations have been taken into account especially in the final conclusions of this research.

The concept of consumer-brand relationship has been largely assimilated with interpersonal relationships, which means that brand relationships have been seen as bi-directional (e.g. Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli 2007; Aggarwal 2004; Fournier 1998). Fournier (1998, 362; Table 1) describes consumer-brand relationships for example as best friends, committed relationships or flings. However, there has been debate in the brand relationship literature whether consumer-brand relationships are more like interpersonal or parasocial relationships (e.g. Fetscherin 2014; Huang & Mitchell 2014; Horton & Wohl 1956). Parasocial relationships are one-

directional relationships between audiences and media figures (Huang & Mitchell 2014, 39), and according to Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on (2012, 153) “brands, like celebrities, do not reciprocate knowledge of the lover and can only participate in a uni-directional or parasocial relationship”.

According to Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on’s (2012, 160) findings, “the construct of brand love is nested in the theory of parasocial love rather than interpersonal love”, which even more strongly continues to question the existing studies on brand love and interpersonal relationships. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to test this statement. Researchers remind that interpersonal relationships ought not to be directly transferred to consumer-brand relationships because brand relationships are processed in a different area of the brain than actual interpersonal relationships (Nordhielm 2008; Yoon & Gutchess 2006, 36). However, because the interpersonal love has so far been the choice of majority in CBR literature, it will also be taken into equal account in this research.

Consumer-brand relationship research area celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2013, and since 2010 Consumer Brand Relationship Association has organized already three *International Consumer Brand Relationship Conferences* (4th International Consumer Brand Relationships Conference 2015; Fetscherin & Heinrich 2014, 366) so the community around CBR can be described rather active for such a small field. Even though there have been studies on different brand relationship types before – even a couple of comparing studies (e.g. Fetscherin 2014; Fetscherin & Conway Dato-on 2012) such as this study – it is clear that the CBR field, as thriving and active it is, needs more delving into this particular question.

1.1 Research gap and research questions

The research problem of this research is the nature of brand relationships. The focus is on the different consumer-brand relationship types: which one of the presented relationship types actually appears more in this study or can they even be differentiated from each other? The aim of this research is to offer deeper understanding of the nature of the relationships that consumers have with their favorite brands in this research’s interview results. Understanding consumer-brand relationships, and the nature and division of the relationships offers fresh aspects to brand management: how to build brands that have greater value for the consumers, how to ensure the relationships last longer, how to build brand advocacy, how to develop

corporate image and identity through the brands, or what kind of communications is best for each brand.

The research focuses on identifying the attributes of interpersonal and parasocial love in consumer-brand relationships. From researcher's point of view and experience from exploring the CBR literature consumers don't usually recognize their relationship behavior with brands, or even acknowledge brand love. This means that in order to achieve usable research material the thoughts, values and attitudes of consumers need to be explored more thoroughly than just by browsing, for example, online discussions, where there is no interaction between the researcher and research subjects. In this case successful research demands interaction.

The research problem of this research was the nature of brand relationships. The first two research questions were developed from the two main relationship types that are discussed in the brand relationship literature: interpersonal brand relationship and parasocial brand relationship. The third research question was also developed from the literature, as these themes have proven to be common aspects of brand relationships. The research questions were formed in the following manner:

- RQ 1: Are there any interpersonal attributes related to brand relationships?
- RQ 2: Are there any parasocial attributes related to brand relationships?
- RQ 3: How do brand history, brand loyalty and brand love show in brand relationships?

1.2 Implementation of research

This research was conducted with semi-structured in-depth interviews, and the research material was analysed by directed content analysis. Because the research problem was based on previous theories of brand relationships, and this study tested these theories, interviews offer a profound and flexible way to explore the thoughts and emotions of consumers about their favorite brands (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 34-35).

The interviews and the interview questions were based on five different themes: interpersonal brand relationships, parasocial brand relationships, brand history, brand love and brand loyalty. The research was conducted in Finland and the interviews were held in Finnish for Finnish consumers.

This thesis was divided into three phases. The first phase includes an introduction to the theoretical framework and main concepts: interpersonal brand relationship, parasocial brand relationship, brand love, brand loyalty and brand history. The second phase includes the implementation of the research: performing the interviews and analysing the research material. The third phase includes critical analysis of the findings, drawing conclusions, answering to the research questions, comparing the results to the theoretical framework and presuppositions, and, in conclusion, offering a deeper insight on the research subject in its interview results.

2 BRANDS AS RELATIONSHIP PARTNERS

In this chapter the theoretical framework of brand relationships is presented. Firstly the most essential concept – brand relationship – is defined. After this the chapter concentrates on both most popular brand relationship types, interpersonal and parasocial relationships, through which brand relationships have been defined in the field. Lastly, also brand love, brand loyalty and brand history as concepts are being reviewed from the consumer-brand relationship point of view. The empirical conduction of this research is strongly based on this chapter.

The origins and cornerstones of the concept of brand relationships derive from three different studies in the 1990's. Firstly, Blackston (1993, 113) defined brand relationships as “the interaction between consumers' attitudes toward the brand and the brand's “attitudes” toward the consumer”. According to Blackston (1993, 113) having a successful relationship with a brand is dependent on the consumer's perceptions of the brand's attitudes. After that Fajer and Schouten (1995, 666) stated that interpersonal relationship theory offers good models for defining person-brand relationships. Then finally, Fournier (1998; see Table 1) finished the true establishment of CBR research field with creating a typology of consumer-brand relationship forms, such as best friendships, marriages, kinships, flings and secret affairs.

Fournier (1998, 344) says that “one way to legitimize the brand-as-partner is to highlight ways in which brands are animated, humanized, or somehow

personalized". What Fournier means with this comparison, is that according to the theory of animism there is a proven existing need to anthropomorphize inanimate objects to enable interaction with the spiritual world. This way also brands may be seen as humanized, soulful objects, to which it is easier to form a relationship to. Also Aaker (1997, 347–348) states that consumers often complete their perceptions of brands with human personality traits, and that for example advertisers use anthropomorphization, personification and creation of user imagery in branding in order to achieve preference for brands that feel emotionally closest to the consumers.

2.1 Interpersonal brand relationships

Although Fournier was the one who finalized the concept of consumer-brand relationships, she has also been one of the leading researchers of interpersonal consumer-brand relationships. One of the most substantial juxtaposition of brand relationships and interpersonal relationships in CBR research history is the already mentioned Fournier's (1998, 365) illustration of brand relationships with fifteen different relationship forms from different categories (see Table 1) such as friendship (e.g. best friends, childhood buddies), marriage (e.g. committed partnership, arranged marriage) and "dark side relationship" (e.g. dependency, secret affairs). In her typology of consumer-brand relationship forms, she has listed all of these forms, their definitions and case examples from her study (the case examples presented in Table 1 have been altered a bit by the researcher to be more understandable). The typology shows that brand relationships may vary for example in expected duration, voluntariness, level of intimacy or commitment. According to Fournier (1998, 361–363) defining different forms of relationships is important because 1) different relationship forms have different tendencies to offer varying benefits, such as ego support and sense of security, and 2) all relationships don't need the same amount of care and maintenance (cp. marriages and flings).

Table 1. A Typology of Consumer-Brand Relationship Forms (Fournier 1998, 362)

<p style="text-align: center;">A Typology of Consumer-Brand Relationship Forms (Fournier 1998)</p>		
Relationship form	Definition	Case examples
Arranged marriages	Nonvoluntary union imposed by preferences of third party. Inteded for long-term, exclusive commitment, although at low levels of affective attachment.	Adoption of ex-husband's preferred brands
Casual friends / buddies	Friendship low in affect and intimacy, characterized by infrequent or sporadic engagement, and few expectations for reciprocity or reward.	Household cleaning brands
Marriages of convenience	Long-term, committed relationship precipitated by environmental influence versus deliberate choice, and governed by satisficing rules.	Switch of a local bakery brand due to moving
Committed partnerships	Long-term, voluntarily imposed, socially supported union high in love, intimacy, trust and a commitment to stay together despite adverse circumstances. Adherence to exclusivity rules expected.	Brands related to hobbies, cooking, cleaning etc.
Best friendships	Voluntary union based on reciprocity principle, the endurance of which is ensured through continued provision of positive rewards. Characterized by	Running shoes, Coke Classic

	revelation of true self, honesty, and intimacy. Congruity on partner images and personal interests common.	
Compartmentalized friendships	Highly specialized, situationally confined, enduring friendships characterized by lower intimacy than other friendship forms but higher socioemotional rewards and interdependence. Easy entry and exit attained.	Collection of perfumes
Kinships	Non-voluntary union with lineage ties.	Brand preference of tea inherited from mother
Rebounds / avoidance-driven relationships	Union precipitated by desire to move away from prior or available partner, as opposed to attraction to chosen partner per se.	Atkins chocolate bars
Childhood friendships	Infrequently engaged, affectively laden relation reminiscent of earlier times. Yields comfort and security of past self.	Brands familiar from childhood, such as Nestlé Quik
Courtships	Interim relationship state on the road to committed partnership contract.	Collection of certain kind of perfume brands during initial trial period
Dependencies	Obsessive, highly emotional, selfish attractions cemented by feeling that the other is irreplaceable. Separation from other yields anxiety. High tolerance of other's transgressions results.	A much needed and used make up brand or body lotion brand

Flings	Short-term, time-bounded engagements of high emotional reward, but devoid of commitment and reciprocity demands.	Trial size shampoo brands
Enmities	Intensely involving relationship characterized by negative affect and desire to avoid or inflict pain on the other.	Husband's preferred brand post-divorce, Diet Coke
Secret affairs	Highly emotive, privately held relationship considered risky if exposed to others.	Tootsie Pops sneaked at work
Enslavements	Non-voluntary union governed entirely by desired of the relationship partner. Involves negative feelings but persists because of circumstances.	Internet operator brand chosen by the partner

Aggarwal (2004, 88) continues on the same path as Fournier and combines social relationship theory to consumer-brand relationships: when having relationships with brands that remind one of their social relationships, the norms of these social relationships are being adapted to the brand relationships, and therefore the social relationships function as an example for the relationships with brands. This also means that the brands are being evaluated the same way as every other member of the society - how it behaves and answers to the norms that govern the society as if they were like any citizens. (Aggarwal 2004.)

According to Aggarwal (2004, 88), there are two reasons why consumers perceive brands the same way as their social interactions. Firstly, consumers rarely make the difference between a brand and the company that manufactures the brand: "to them, the company is often the brand and the brand is the company". This shows especially with service brands (e.g. spas and airlines) and brands that offer both products and service (e.g. online stores) because consumers interact with actual people, who represent the brands. Secondly, Aggarwal mentions the same reason as Fournier (1998, 344): animism. When consumers perceive brands as soulful objects or, at

least, think that they have some human-like qualities, it is easier to interact as if they were people and thus also follow the same societal rules and guidelines with brands as they do in their social relationships (Aggarwal 2004, 88). Aggarwal (2004, 88) also states, that even though consumers' relationships with brands aren't necessarily as deep and rich as with other people, they sometimes do behave as if they have some sort of relationship with them.

Monga (2002) has studied brand relationships from the gender's effect point of view. She defines brand relationships through Duck and Sant's (1983 in Monga 2002, 37) definition of a relationship: "active social processes like fighting, communicating and jointly behaving create a relationship". Therefore, a relationship is comprised of more than just interactions between the partners - it is built up through cognitions, emotions, motivations etc. This also means that both partners have influence on the relationship (Monga 2002, 37). According to Monga (2002), a body of previous research shows, that men and women act and initiate differently in relationships. For example, women have shown more personal, emotional and self-disclosing communication in their friendships than men. Men on the other hand maintain friendships by doing activities together (e.g. playing sports). Monga (2002, 37) says that the differences between men and women don't necessarily show on the depth of their feelings, but rather on the way they are expressed, as men aren't that prone to let others know about their explicit feelings.

Another angle to understanding interpersonal brand relationships is offered by Swaminathan, Page and Gürhan-Canli (2007). According to them, consumers form strong relationships with brands that represent the same values and personality traits as themselves. Swaminathan et al. emphasize the meaning of self-concept connection and self-construal in the formation of consumer-brand relationships. They define self-concept connection as "the relationship between a consumer and a brand on the basis of a connection between a consumer's unique self and what the brand symbolizes for the consumer". Self-construal, on the other hand, can be seen as a repertory of thoughts, emotions and actions regarding the relationship that one has for another, such as the level of connectedness that one is experiencing towards others - and in this case: brands. (Swaminathan et al. 2007, 248-249.)

Fournier (1998, 363) has created a construct of Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) to measure the strength and depth of interpersonal brand relationships. According to Fournier "there is more to keeping a relationship

alive than the pull of positive feelings”: affective and socioemotive attachment, behavioural ties and supportive cognitive beliefs. These three cornerstones, that ought to develop the strength and quality of a relationship, are constructed from six smaller facets in all. As Table 2 illustrates, these facets are: love/passion, self-connection, interdependence, commitment, intimacy and an overall positive evaluation of brand partner quality.

Table 2. Brand Relationship Quality (Fournier 1998)

Brand Relationship Quality (Fournier 1998)	
Affective and socioemotive attachment	Love/Passion
	Self-Connection
Behavioral ties	Interdependence
	Commitment
Supportive cognitive beliefs	Intimacy
	Brand Partner Quality

The facet of **love/passion** suggests that in strong brand relationships the relationship between the consumer and the brand have shown to fulfil more the traditional concept of love than just brand preference: the feelings have varied from warmth and caring to passion and dependency. This facet has also proven to show biased and purely positive judgement of the brand, exactly like with partners who are madly in love with each other. (Fournier 1998, 363–364.)

The facet of **self-connection** reflects the amount of identity factors that the brand and the consumer have in common, and how the brand therefore reflects the consumer. The more the factors, the more connected to the brand the consumer feels. (Fournier 1998, 364.)

The facet of **interdependence** is shown in strong brand relationships as strong interdependence between the partners. This means repetitive interaction with the brand, interest and interaction with deeper and more diverse brand-related activities, and more intense individual interaction with the brand. (Fournier 1998, 364–365.)

The facet of **commitment** reflects the consumer's need to show one's dedication to the brand and the longevity of the relationship. (Fournier 1998, 365.)

The facet of **intimacy** refers to the increased amount and quality of layers in the brand relationships, which make the relationship more lasting. The brand is seen as a superior product compared to other similar products. (Fournier 1998, 365.)

The facet of **Brand Partner Quality** refers to how the consumer evaluates the brand as a relationship partner. The factors evaluated about the brand are: 1) the feeling that the brand relates to the consumer positively, 2) how dependable, reliable and predictable the brand may be seen in the relationship, 3) the commitment to the implicit rules made for the relationship, 4) the brand won't let the consumer down, but it will deliver what is wanted from it, and 5) the comfort of knowing that the consumer is able to trust the brand and its actions. (Fournier 1998, 365.)

Monga (2002, 36) criticizes the scale for concentrating only in consumers' actions towards brands and not vice versa: it proposes for example how a consumer might describe how much he loves and understands a brand, but not how much the brand loves and understands him. If the consumer-brand relationship were to be truly interpersonal, it should be influential both ways (Monga 2002, 36). Monga's research about this two-way process indicates that men don't see brands as active relationship partners in the way that women do. According to the research, women recognize both "consumer-as-actor" and "brand-as-actor" features in their brand relationships, but men mainly recognize "consumer-as-actor" features. This means that women are also more prone to be for example offended by brands (e.g. "I can't believe L'Oreal did this to me") and that companies should therefore be very careful about the way their brands "behave" towards consumers. (Monga 2002, 38–40.)

Bengtsson (2003, 154) agrees that the concept of brand relationships is "a promising new way of thinking about consumer-brand behavior", but he

also states that the CBR research has so far failed to execute proper reflection whether it actually offers adequate description of the way that consumers really interact with brands. Bengtsson (2003) doesn't take a stand on the applicability of parasocial relationships to brand relationships, but he is critical about the functionality of a brand as a relationship partner.

Bengtsson (2003) challenges Fournier's (1998) ideology of personifying brands because according to him brands can't be people. A brand can be like a person when it's given human characteristics, but that doesn't make it an active partner in a relationship - only a metaphor of one. What seems to be an even more important factor in the unfunctionality of the interpersonal relationships is that they lack reciprocity, which is by Bengtsson's (2003) - and a body of other researchers' - standards a requirement for a "pure relationship". (Bengtsson 2003, 154.) In regard to his research Bengtsson (2003) argues that there isn't reciprocity in the relationships between companies and their brands and consumers, and therefore, he questions whether they should even be called as "relationships". He admits that there can be a relation, even in the consumer's terms, but the relationship can never be equal, and therefore, ought never to be compared to a relationship between two human beings. (Bengtsson 2003, 157.)

2.2 Parasocial brand relationships

According to Schmid and Klimmt (2011, 254) "parasocial relationships are more or less stable, long-term construal media users hold and can access both during and between exposure to messages featuring a media character". Basically it means a friendship or intimacy between a person and a media character, for example in celebrity-fan relationships, and Fetscherin (2014, 430) has presented the idea of applying the parasocial relationship theory into brand relationships. According to Fetscherin & Conway Dato-on (2012, 153) the existing literature about brand relationships has a grave deficiency, as a major part of the literature carries the assumption that brand love is bi-directional. Whang, Allen, Sahoury and Zhang (2004, 320) have favoured the same point of view a couple of years earlier: love is an outcome when two partners share bi-directional and dynamic interaction, but when the other party changes into a product or a brand it becomes unidirectional, and so the nature of the love changes too. The discussion over brand love goes fast into one of the biggest questions of our time: what is love? However, the concept of brand love - and therefore love itself - will be discussed more in chapter 3.1.

Horton and Wohl (1956) are known for their research about parasocial interaction (PSI). The origins of parasocial interaction are in the media research, so most of the examples of parasocial relationships are from radio, television and movies. It is characteristic for parasocial relationships that the viewer from the audience has no obligation, need for effort or responsibility toward the remote media persona, or the brand in this case. The viewer can withdraw from it whenever it wants, and therefore choose which character it has a relationship to, but it can't create a new one. (Horton & Wohl 1956.) According to Horton and Wohl (1956) parasocial interaction is "one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development". They also say that usually parasocial relationships are rounded out with fantasy, and that parasocial interaction leads to an illusion of a face-to-face relationship.

Perse and Rubin (1989, 60-61) agree with Horton and Wohl on the nature of parasocial interaction and relationship. The theory is again discussed in the context of media personas, but they stated that it is natural for viewers to get a sense of friendship with the characters in television, when they watch them repeatedly and learn to know them. Very much like Bengtsson (2003) stated in regard to his research that consumers feel *as if* they are in a relationship with a brand. Perse and Rubin (1989, 61) define parasocial relationships through friendship attributes: it feels bad if the object fails at something, the object seems like a down-to-earth person, and therefore it makes one feel more comfortable.

According to Fetscherin's (2014, 435) research "conceptualizing 'brand love' as a parasocial relationship leads to superior and stronger results compared to interpersonal relationship" meaning that the way we should see brand love is one-sidedly, and not two-sidedly. Fetscherin (2014, 435) described parasocial brand relationships to be stronger and show more positive word-of-mouth than interpersonal brand relationships.

Labrecque (2014) have researched parasocial interaction and consumer-brand relationships in social media environment, and according to her even though the internet as a communicational environment is bi-directional unlike the traditional PSI environments (e.g. television, media), the communication in online environments often is one-sided as the "object party" (e. g. brand or celebrity) usually follows "pre-approved scripts and response guidelines". The brand representative might vary from one respondent to multiple different company employees who form the perception of the brand's

communicational online image and even to automated softwares that have been programmed to answer in a certain way to the consumers' questions. (Labrecque 2014, 135–136.) Her research showed however that brands are able to create a real sense of parasocial interaction for consumers through their varying online communication. The consumers' feeling of connection even extended to grow stronger brand loyalty towards the brands. (Labrecque 2014, 139.)

In researcher's point of view as the school of interpersonal consumer-brand relationships is very strong and well argued, it is clear that applying the analogy of parasocial interaction to consumer-brand relationships isn't simple or easy. The discussion however is crucial to the development of the concept of consumer-brand relationships, and even though the parasociality in brand relationships hasn't been studied as much as interpersonality, it still has entrenched its position in the CBR discussion beside interpersonality.

2.3 The constructions of brand relationships

The consumer-brand relationships have usually been studied by using other concepts near consumer-brand relationships, such as brand love, brand loyalty and brand satisfaction. These concepts help to define the nature of the relationships even further by indicating for example the intensiveness and type of a relationship. In this thesis the concepts through which the brand relationships are examined are brand love, brand loyalty and brand history the same way as Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on (2012) has in their research. (Fetscherin & Conway Dato-in 2012, 151.)

2.3.1 Brand love in brand relationships

The word "love" is bandied about more promiscuously than almost any other word in the English language. We "love" Yorkshire pudding, a football team, our spouses, Uncle Vanya, babies, and the new restaurant that specializes in Beef Stroganof.

(Murstein 1988, 2-3.)

Freud (1952) defines love as sexual desire, Harlow (1958) sees it as behaviour of attachment, and Pope (1980) says it is an interest towards another person. Murstein (1988, 14, 21–26) says that love originates from our humane emotional interdependence, and it has been defined as “an affect, an attitude,

a behaviour, or a judgment or cognitive decision”. It seems that love may be too big a phenomenon to explain scholarly, and that even if it was endeavoured it should be complemented with visions from philosophy and literature for instance (Gammelgaard, 2011).

Most of the CBR studies are based on the concept of brand love, which in past studies have been built on Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of interpersonal love. The Triangle of Love is formed by three components, or vertices as Sternberg says: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment (see Figure 1). **Intimacy** means “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondness in loving relationships”. **Passion** means “the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationships”. **Decision/commitment** means “the decision that one loves someone else, and in the long term, the commitment to maintain that love”. Therefore largely intimacy stands for the emotional investment, passion for the motivational involvement and decision/commitment for the cognitive decision and commitment. (Sternberg 1986, 119.)

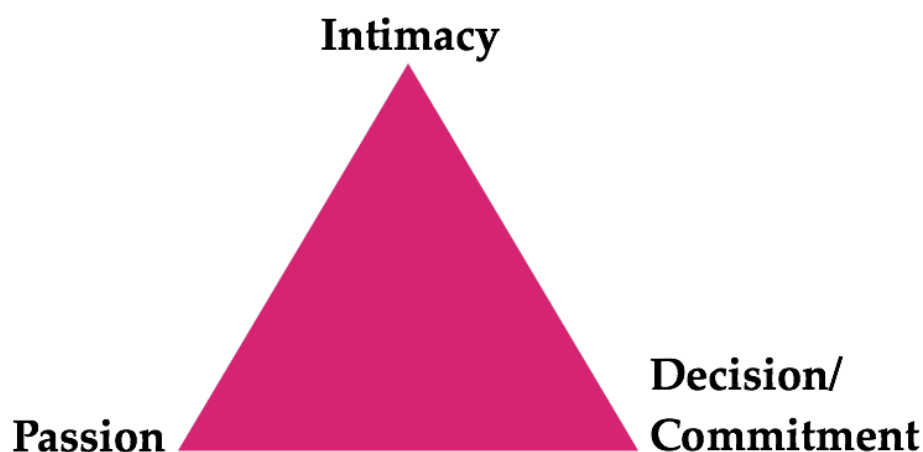


Figure 1. The Triangle of Love (Sternberg 1986)

Sternberg (1986, 120) reminds that even though when conceptualizing a psychological phenomenon it might be justifiable to divide the concept into several components through which the whole concept is easier to understand and explain, it is just as important to examine also the whole of the concept in the analysis of the components. Sternberg (1986, 120) says that

“Love is a complex whole that appears to derive in part from genetically transmitted instincts and drives but probably in larger part from socially

learned role modeling that, through observation, comes to be defined as love”.

The different components of the love triangle differ according to the nature of the relationship. For example in short-term love relationships passion seems to have more role than decision/commitment, whereas long-term love relationships are stronger on decision/commitment than passion. Then again for example friendships emphasize decision/commitment and intimacy, but not passion. (Sternberg 1986, 120.)

Another very classical way of defining love in the side of Sternberg's Triangle of Love is Lee's typology of love. The different love styles according to Lee (1973/1976 in Hendrick and Hendrick 1986, 393) are Eros, Ludus, Storge, Mania, Pragma and Agape. Eros means strong and physical love with early attraction, high commitment and eroticness. Ludus means a game-like love that one plays out with potentially diverse partners. Ludic love isn't deep nor loyal, but more deceptive and manipulative: ludic lover might have several partners without deep feelings of love. Storge means love that is a mixture of love and friendship: the love usually ignites from a friendship and it never has particular passion in it. It is characterized more as 'evolutionary' than 'revolutionary'. Pragma means rational and calculated love: attributes of a desired partner are reviewed carefully as well as the probable lifetime of the relationship. Hendrick and Hendrick (1986, 400) use the term 'love planning' with this love type. Mania means uncertainty about love, the partner and the lasting of a relationship, and therefore very extreme depth of feeling the love. Agape means self-sacrificing and unselfish love: agapic lover is willing to do and give anything so that the partner would be happy. (Hendrick and Hendrick 1986, 400-401.) According to Hendrick and Hendrick (1986, 400-401) one relationship doesn't necessarily follow only one love type, but can show attributes of several different love types.

Sternberg and Lee's definitions of love have concentrated on the components or natures of different kinds of love. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) have tried to resolve the concept of brand love, but also they have had to start from the beginning. According to Batra et al. (2012, 2) when the ambiguous concept of brand love is to be deciphered, one should start from uncovering the exact definition of love. In the case of brand love it is appropriate to define the love that consumers feel about certain brands in their own words. As love is so open-ended and malleable as a concept and doesn't answer to any certain criteria, it is best described as prototypes. (Batra et al. 2012, 2.) Also Fetscherin (2014, 430) states, that "the concept of 'brand love' is often

used as a holistic term, including many of the previously mentioned construct such as brand loyalty or brand passion". According to Fehr (2006, in Batra et al. 2012, 2) "a prototype is a list of attributes that people associate with a particular kind of thing, in this case love". With love these features could be trust, attachment, passion, attraction etc.

Prototype-based definitions don't however offer a precise explanation for concepts - on the contrary. Referring to previous studies about prototypes of emotions Batra et al. (2012, 3) state that prototype-based definitions often include elements of the emotion (e.g. attachment), but also antecedents (e.g. previous satisfaction from the brand) and outcomes (brand loyalty). This means that the features of the prototype don't necessarily describe the actual emotion, but also the phenomena around it.

After their studies Batra et al. (2012, 13) were able to provide a prototype conceptualization of brand love that includes seven different elements:

1. Passion-Driven Behaviours (e.g. passionate desire to use)
2. Self-Brand Integration (e.g. desired self-identity)
3. Positive Emotional Connection (e.g. emotional attachment)
4. Long-Term Relationship (e.g. predicting a long-term commitment)
5. Anticipated Separation Distress (if the brand were to go away)
6. Positive Attitude Valence
7. Attitudes held with Certainty and Confidence

Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2008) have studied brand love by comparing the experiences of brand love in France and in the US. They strongly problematize the use of the term 'love' in brand love researches, because of its ambiguity even between different cultures. Therefore, they developed a methodology to study brand love without using the term 'love' by utilizing a set of images to map out participants' views on love towards brands. As a result of their research they found the next dimensions of brand love:

1. Passion (for the brand)
2. Duration (the relationship with the brand exists for a long time)
3. Self-Congruity (congruity between self-image and product image)
4. Dreams (the brand favours consumer dreams)
5. Memories (that the brand evokes in the consumer)
6. Pleasure (that the brand provides to the consumer)
7. Attraction (felt toward the brand)

8. Uniqueness (of the brand and/or of the whole relationship)
9. Beauty (of the brand)
10. Trust (the brand hasn't disappointed the consumer)
11. Declaration of affect (the consumer feels so strongly about the brand that he wants everyone to know about it)

This research shows the dimensions of brand love that occur in the French market. Albert et al. (2008) compared these dimensions to the ones that occurred in the researches conducted with American participants. According to Albert et al. (2008), all of these dimensions can more or less be seen in the previous American interpersonal love theories except for the dimension of memories.

Thus based on these two researches brand love can be defined from various angles: passion, trust, attraction, attachment, dreams about the shared future, identity, history, pleasure, expressions of love and yearning. Therefore, the experienced brand love may be very diverse for different consumers and with different brands: the whole and its context have a lot more meaning than just brand love in the nature of brand relationships. Even Levin (2000, 119) has stated that 'love' as an abstract concept cannot be defined in one specific way that would serve all purposes. However it also seems to be the *fuel* of the relationships, so it shouldn't be underestimated either.

2.3.2 Brand loyalty in brand relationships

As opposed to brand love, brand loyalty is a relatively old concept. However, the deciphering of the concept regarding its understanding, measuring and leveraging has been rather defective especially over the last few decades. The academic landscape of brand loyalty is in need of new theoretical perspectives. (Fournier & Yao 1997, 451.)

The conceptualization of brand (or customer) loyalty has been somewhat uniform throughout the years of research. The most popular and cited conceptualizations have been made by Oliver (1999), Dick and Basu (1994), Jacoby and Kyner (1973), and Day (1969) (see Table 3).

What seem to recur in these conceptualizations is a repetition of choice and consumer's awareness of equivalent products or services when choosing a particular brand. Oliver (1999, 34) emphasizes commitment behind loyalty so that the consumer is determined to choose a particular brand over and over

again despite the enticement of other brands, which indicates that loyalty is based on attitudes. Dick and Basu (1994, 100) agree with Oliver on knowingly choosing a brand in spite of other similar brands and their attempt of seduction. Dick and Basu (1994, 100) however also mention the importance of consumers' advocating the brand when brand loyalty is being constructed.

Jacoby and Kyner's (1973, 2) conceptualization of brand loyalty is more compartmentalized than the others, yet in the end it respects the same things as mentioned above. They define brand loyalty through six factors, which basically state that brand loyalty always includes making an abreast choice compared to rivals, which manifests as advocating behaviour such as purchasing the brand multiple times. As a contrast to Jacoby and Kyner's (1973, 2) thorough conceptualization, Day (1969, 30) offer the most simple and narrow conceptualization of brand loyalty from the presented definitions in Table 3. According to Day (1969, 30) brand loyalty can be measured by the amount of the purchases made of one particular brand in comparison to other purchased brands. So whichever brand is being purchased more often than other brands in their entirety enjoys the true brand loyalty.

Table 3. The conceptualizations of brand loyalty

The conceptualizations of brand loyalty	
Oliver (1999, 34)	"A deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, <i>despite</i> situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior."
Dick and Basu (1994, 100)	"Both a favorable attitude that is high compared to potential alternatives and repeated patronage are required for loyalty." (Customer loyalty)

Jacoby and Kyner (1973, 2)	"The definition is expressed by a set of six necessary and collectively sufficient conditions. These are that brand loyalty is (1) the biased (i.e., nonrandom), (2) behavioral response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed over time, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes."
Day (1969, 30)	"The usual loyalty measures are derived in one way or another from the proportion of total product purchases devoted to the brand most often purchased."

As Quester and Lim (2003, 26) state, there are two approaches to defining brand loyalty in the literature. The first approach basically argues that brand loyalty is "a consistent purchase behaviour of a specific brand over time". The second approach illustrates brand loyalty as "a favourable attitude towards a brand". Thus brand loyalty can be divided into behavioural and attitudinal brand loyalty. (Quester & Lim 2003, 26-27.) All of the four definitions presented in the table 3 are aligned with this dichotomy although they don't present the issue in such manner. Quester and Lim's (2003, 26-27) opinion on the matter is that brand loyalty is usually presented only behaviourally, when attitudinal is a very much needed approach on the side of the behavioural loyalty. They even appoint the attitudinal loyalty as the "true" brand loyalty, because "brand loyalty implies a commitment to the specific brand and goes beyond repetitive behaviour" (Quester & Lim 2003, 27).

If a brand or product is being purchased often and regularly enough it shows *behavioural loyalty* from the consumer to the brand. If the consumer shows commitment towards the brand by executing an evaluation process about choosing the brand, the loyalty includes also the dimension of *attitudinal loyalty*. (Bandyopadhyay & Martell 2007, 37.)

According to Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on (2014, 155) there isn't a scholar consensus about the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Some say that brand loyalty is an outcome of brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006, 82; Kamat & Parulekar 2007, 94), but then again Aaker (1991 in Fetscherin & Conway Dato-on 2014, 155) says that brand satisfaction precedes brand loyalty, and brand loyalty precedes brand love. Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on (2014) favour the Aaker's logic, which was also utilized in this research.

2.3.3 Brand history in brand relationships

Albert et al. (2008, 1071) have identified two dimensions of brand history in brand love. According to them the duration of the relationship between a consumer and a brand have an influence on the nature and quality of the relationship: the longer the duration of the relationship, the stronger the bond. A long duration of a relationship refers to deep knowledge of one another between the partners, and satisfaction towards the relationship. (Albert et al. 2008, 1073.) In addition to this brand love may be affected by the positive memories that a certain brand rouses in a consumer. The memories usually have at least some sentimental value for the consumer, such as nostalgic memories from the childhood or memories of consumer's mother using the brand. (Albert et al. 2008, 1073.)

Also Fournier and Yao (1997) point out that the bond with a brand may exist due to "nostalgic remembrances from childhood". This refers to the same point that Albert et al. (2008, 1073) stated that the relationship may exist only because of a familial connection, such as coffee, cocoa or detergent brands that have been used in the household for many years. However, according to Fournier (1998, 346) there are several kinds of bonds in the base of relationships, such as tasks, obligations, investments, kinship, non-kinship, simple liking and addiction. Obviously, these all have significance when examining the history of a relationship between a consumer and a brand: where did it all start and how has it evolved?

In researcher's opinion brand history has a rather small, but very essential role in the construction of consumer-brand relationships. As proven before in this chapter it has appeared in both brand love and brand loyalty conceptualizations, although not in a very distinct way. Brand history enhances the intensiveness of consumer-brand relationships by adding more dimensions to them.

3 METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as a qualitative research, and the research material was gathered with semi-structured in-depth interviews. The research material was analysed with content analysis. In this chapter the methodology and research process are presented.

The field of consumer-brand relationships still debates that what is the essence of brand relationships: how they work, how they are born, how they should be handled, and even more importantly what do they consist of? The main line in the field has been the debate over interpersonality and parasociality, but also for example the meaning of love and loyalty, as the model to the brand relationships has been sought for from the actual relationships between human beings. It seems as if the researchers want the brand relationships to be like the relationships between people (e.g. Fournier 1998; Aggarwal 2004). Therefore it is intriguing to test these thoughts.

The research problem of this research was the nature of brand relationships. The two first research questions were developed from the two relationship types that are discussed in the theoretical part: interpersonal brand relationship and parasocial brand relationship. The third research question was also developed from the literature, as these themes have proven to be common aspects of brand relationships. The empirical part of the research aims to answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: Are there any interpersonal attributes related to brand relationships?
- RQ 2: Are there any parasocial attributes related to brand relationships?
- RQ 3: How do brand history, brand loyalty and brand love show in brand relationships?

3.1 Semi-structured interview

As this study aims to offer deeper understanding of bonds, emotions and behaviour between human beings and brands in this research's interview results, the best way to study this matter was qualitative research. According to Stake (2010, 11) qualitative research is based on human perception and understanding: it trusts in "personal experience, intuition, and skepticism". In qualitative research the researcher has a significant, subjective role as his or her personal experiences and observations effect the interpretations made during the research process (Stake 2010, 20). Stake (2010, 27) also states that qualitative researchers pursue to understand the chosen, unique phenomenon or "thing" profoundly. This thesis is aiming to achieve that when examining the nature of consumer-brand relationships.

Stake (2010, 31) describes qualitative research as "interpretive, experience based, situational, and personalistic". He says that as qualitative researchers usually are somewhat passionate about their research subject (phenomenon or "thing") and as context means the world to the research, qualitative researchers always do their researches differently. However, it also means that they strive in their interpretations to make the best of it. (Stake 2010, 31.)

The material for the research was gathered with semi-structured in-depth interview. In-depth interview as a method was very suitable for this research, as according to Seidman (2013, 9) it is based on the motive of understanding "the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience". Therefore it offered a profound way to figure out consumers' thoughts and emotions about their favourite brands. According to Galletta (2012, 45) semi-structured interview enables to vary the questions before and during the interview, and the interview question may be both theory-driven and open-ended, which makes it a flexible method.

The only standard factor that recurs in every semi-structured interview is, that at least one of the aspects of the interview has been determined in

advance, but not necessarily all of them. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 34–35; 47.) According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 47) one school says that the interview questions are in the same form for everybody, but the order of them may vary. Then again an other school says that the questions are determined in advance, but the researcher may change the wording of them, or that instead of certain answering options the questions can be answered open-endedly (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 47).

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 23) for example interview as a datacollecting method is “a result of collaboration between the interviewer and interviewee”, as they both have an effect on the interview progress. Interaction between the interviewer and interviewee was essential also in this research. Even though the interviewer determined the questions and the discussed themes, the interviewees had all the possibilities to accentuate the progress of the discussion by for example emphasizing different themes that the interviewer assumed that the interviewee would emphasize. After all, as this research aimed to unwind the complex nature of consumer-brand relationships, the researcher ought to be open for the unexpected.

3.2 Implementation of interviews

The semi-structured interviews for this research were conducted by focusing on the research problem: the nature of consumer-brand relationships. According to literature the two main theories of CBR are interpersonal and parasocial relationships, which were the main aspects also in this research. In addition to this the following constructs were closely paralleled with these theories: brand love, brand loyalty and brand history. These five themes are in the center of the interviews.

The research interviews were conducted in Finland with Finnish consumers. According to Albert, Merunka and Valette-Florence (2008) the most popular product categories that have been connected with the emotion of love include music, cars, furniture, watches, lingerie, cigarettes, perfumes, food items and personal care. In order to achieve as deep discussions about the brand relationships as possible, food brands were selected as the product category for the interviews. In this research food brands may include food, drink and alcohol brands, but not for example restaurants.

The interviewees were selected with forethought: they had to be able to put their soul well into the interviews, as some of the questions were rather abstract. Therefore all the interviewees were chosen according to an interest

or hobbyism towards food. The researcher looked for the interviewees by asking around whether any acquaintances knew good candidates within the given demands. The researcher also tried to contact several food bloggers by e-mail, but none of them answered. Six candidates were chosen to do the interview. Three of the interviewees were found from the researchers own circle of acquaintances, and the last three were recommended to the researcher by an acquaintance. Each of the interviewees represented a different answering profile (see table 4), which was important to the researcher so that the interviewee pool would be at least somewhat heterogeneous.

Table 4. The interviewee profiles

The interviewee profiles		
Interviewee id	Profile	Selected favorite brand
INT 1 <i>Male</i>	A non-professional, who finds passionate pleasure in both junk food and fine dining. Cooks rarely, but when he does he trusts in classic gourmet dishes.	Pepsi (beverage)
INT 2 <i>Female</i>	A non-professional home culinarian, who has previously worked in Alko, which is a national monopoly company that sells alcoholic beverages. Hence, the interviewee has a deep knowledge and expertise in this area.	Heinz (ketchup)
INT 3 <i>Female</i>	A former food blogger, who nowadays passionately concentrates on developing her cooking expertise especially in vegetarian diet and clean food.	Valio
INT 4 <i>Male</i>	A professional food critic and a writer, who has published several food-related books and performed as a judge in cooking competition programs in national television.	Parmigiano Reggiano (cheese)

INT 5 <i>Female</i>	A professional cook in a fine dining restaurant.	Valrhona (chocolate)
INT 6 <i>Male</i>	A professional cook and a food entrepreneur, who was at the time of interview reforming the fast food line in Hartwall Arena.	Bertolli (olive oil)

As table 3 shows, half of the interviewees were professional: INT 4, INT 5 and INT 6 work in the food industry. The other half represented a bit more common perspective to the industry and cooking, but with a notable passion.

In the beginning of the interviews the participants were directed to the right state of mind by presenting the idea and objective of the interview. They were to choose their favorite food brand based on which they would answer the questions. Each interviewee turned out to be a bit different from each other, which makes sense as consumers and people in general rarely are totally identical by their likes, dislikes, values, views and attitudes. If there had been for example two more interviewees, it probably wouldn't have changed the conclusions. It is possible that the conclusions would have stayed the same even though there had been only four interviewees, but as the interviews' duration was approximately half an hour, and not hour and a half, four interviewees felt too small of an amount to the researcher. Therefore the actualized amount of interviewees proved to be quite adequate.

The interview questions were drawn from a scale from Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on's (2012) research about interpersonal and parasocial love in brand relationships. The scale takes into account all of the themes mentioned above, but as it was originally meant for a survey, where the research participants answer as per Likert scale, some alterations had to be performed, so that it would be more suitable for interviewing. Also, because the interview was conducted with Finnish consumers, it had to be translated into Finnish. In Finnish culture the word "love" has a rather deep meaning and it is traditionally used with great consideration. Even Bengtsson (2003, 156) states that using of the word "love" varies between different cultures, and that the habit of saying "I love it" is quite widespread for example in America. As "love" has been used in the original scale to illustrate an affectionate, warm feeling towards a brand, it had to be toned down as an expression, so that the Finnish interviewees could realistically identify with consumer-brand relationships.

Fetscherin and Conway Dato-on (2012) have used six different researches to build the scale. The interview frame of this research was also added a couple of new questions from other literature to complement it (see Appendix 1), and they have been marked with "NEW" on them. The new questions were added for either focusing on a new side of the theme or for getting a more deep view of the theme. The presented themes focus on the following attributes, and they were searched for from the research material. The attributes have been condensed from the sources and the interview questions according to the expressions used in the questions and the researcher's interpretations of them:

Interpersonal relationship

- Deep friendship with the brand
- Interaction with the brand (NEW)
- Commitment
- Interdependence

Parasocial relationship

- Admiration of the brand
- Inequality with the brand (NEW)
- Fantasizing about the brand
- Possibility to back out whenever consumer wants to (NEW)
- No responsibility or obligation towards the brand

Brand history

- Significant memories associated with the brand
- A long history with the brand
- A connection to childhood memories

Brand loyalty

- Loyalty and engagement toward the brand
- Positive word-of-mouth (NEW)
- Forgiveness

Brand love

- Attractiveness of the brand
- Strong feelings towards the brand

- Love towards the brand
- Inability to live without the brand

Even though the questions were determined in advance, the primary role of them was to merely navigate the discussion. Therefore, the order of the themes or even the questions might have varied if the discussion appeared to move on well on its own. Interviewees answered open-endedly and they were encouraged to tell about their brand relationships on their own initiative in addition to the interview questions.

Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2000, 104) say that if the interviewee starts a discussion about a theme that is supposed to be handled later on during the interview, the interviewer should take an advantage of the chance to naturally move on to the other theme and guide the discussion according to interview plan. The only danger that lies within this flexibility is that the already initiated discussion about the first theme won't be finished, so the interviewer should somehow ensure that all planned discussions will be finished properly (Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2000, 104).

3.3 Analysis of the research material

The research material was analyzed with qualitative content analysis, which is a method used to analyze any verbal, print or electronic text data. The material may be obtained for example from interviews, open-ended questions, observations or books. Qualitative content analysis may be used diversely from counting words to examining language more thoroughly. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1278)

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) divide qualitative content analysis into three different approaches: conventional, directed and summative. In this research the content analysis has been conducted with the directed approach. The directed approach to content analysis is most suitable, when there are already theories or prior researches about the subject or phenomenon, and those prior theories and findings still need supplement. The directed approach's aim is to further validate or extend already existing theory or theoretical framework. The existing theories might help to build the research questions and design the empirical part of the research, such as in this thesis' research. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1281.)

In the directed content analysis the prior theories and researches define the key concepts or variables for the analysis to be the coding categories (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1281). In this research those categories, or themes, were interpersonal relationship, parasocial relationship, brand love, brand loyalty and brand history. Next each category or theme is defined by using the prior theories, which helps analysing the research material. In this research the themes were defined by attributes (see chapter 3.2). After this the research material is analysed with the help of the categories and their definitions. (Hsieh & Shannon 2005, 1281.)

According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005, 1281) when the goal of the analysis is to identify and categorize all expressions of the phenomenon, the transcriptions of the interviews should be read carefully and the parts that manifest the given categories in any way ought to be highlighted and later defined. Therefore any instances of the given themes (categories) were looked for from the transcriptions, and they were determined as such for example according to the context, tone and choice of words. The research data from each interview was also compared with each other through the whole review process.

4 RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The research consisted of semi-structured interviews, which were analysed with directed content analysis. The cornerstones of the interviews and the analysis were the five themes drawn from the literature: interpersonal relationship, parasocial relationship, brand history, brand loyalty and brand love. With the reviewed material from the interviews the research questions were answered. Each interview material was reviewed individually, and then together to get an understanding of the whole. The interview materials were also compared with each other. Those materials that showed particularly strongly the given themes were reviewed more thoroughly to get a better perception of why they were so strong.

4.1 Interview 1

Interviewee 1 (INT1) was a 25-year-old male, who chose as his favorite brand Pepsi. The interviewee described himself as a non-professional, who finds passionate pleasure in both junk food and fine dining. He cooks rarely, but when he does he trusts in classic gourmet dishes.

Interpersonal or parasocial relationship?

INT1 described his relationship to Pepsi as a deep friendship that resembles more family relationships than romantic relationships. He called Pepsi his *friend* unprompted. They share the same values and interests (e.g. football)

and INT1 identifies himself with Pepsi, which helps to maintain the relationship.

INT1 favors Pepsi strongly over competitive brands and is committed to the brand. He is always delighted when he gets to use the brand again and he believes that he and Pepsi are going to be friends in the future too. INT1 is ready to forgive and have forgiven mistakes that the brand has made such as renewing their logo into uglier one, using uninteresting celebrities as their marketing faces or news of unethical activity.

"I think the deal is that it is the same taste as it was when I was, let's say, a 6-year-old, and then all those positive experiences with Pepsi that have piled up during these 20 years sort of come back when you taste it or see the logo (which has been modified but nevertheless)."

(INT1. Freely translated from the interview.)

Even though their relationship is deep and complies strongly with interpersonal relationship, INT1 acknowledges that Pepsi is "just a brand" and doesn't try to humanize it. However, INT1 said that by using celebrities (football players, artists etc.) in their marketing makes Pepsi seem more humane so that he actually wants to share some special moments with the brand.

"I think this could be about the fact that they use football players when it's customary, for example during championship games or something else, they do some really cool marketing stuff with the football players, and for some reason there is always someone from my favorite football team Arsenal or some other player that I admire greatly but who isn't an obvious choice. I mean that it isn't necessarily Cristiano Ronaldo, but they search different angles to choose different kinds of players to do the cool stuff. That's when I feel that we have a dialogue."

(INT1. Freely translated from the interview.)

INT1 felt that they have dialogue in their relationship and that Pepsi addresses INT1 with for example their marketing. INT1 didn't however admit that their relationship was bidirectional, and INT1 questioned the existence of the mutual dependency and equality in their relationship, which is a clear sign of parasocial relationship. He also doesn't believe that Pepsi thinks of him the same way that he does of Pepsi, which could be because he knows that Pepsi is "just a brand".

From the list of Fournier's (1998, see table 1) relationship types INT1 chose "childhood friendship" to illustrate their relationship. He also said that it is somewhat a "best friendship". The researcher's interpretation is that INT1 and Pepsi's relationship is quite strongly both, if it's possible. Fournier (1998) has defined "best friendship" as a relationship that is voluntary, reciprocal, and rewarding, and that it is characterized by revelation of true self, honesty, and intimacy. Partners also share common interests. However, "childhood friendship" has been defined as infrequent with a bond to earlier times, and that the brand yields comfort and security (Fournier 1998). INT1's relationship with Pepsi clearly has started a long time ago, when INT1 was a child and it still makes INT1 feel safe. The relationship however seems to have grown over time into a "best friendship", as Pepsi has more significance in INT1's life today than it would if it were only a "childhood friend".

Three of four interpersonal relationship attributes were shown in INT1's interview strongly: deep friendship with the brand, interaction with the brand, and commitment. However also three out of five parasocial relationship attributes were shown in INT1's interview strongly: admiration of the brand, inequality of the brand, and no responsibility or obligation towards the brand. The only interpersonal relationship attribute that didn't show strongly was interdependence, and the two parasocial relationship attributes that didn't show strongly were fantasizing about the brand and possibility to back out whenever consumer wants to.

As it seems the relationship between INT1 and Pepsi do have some attributes of parasocial relationship, but since the relationship shows more strong interpersonal attributes such as deep friendship, some of these parasocial attributes can be chalked up to interpersonality.

Brand history

The relationship started when INT1 was a child and INT1's feelings towards Pepsi have been very strong since the beginning. Hence, the brand has nostalgic value to INT1. Nowadays INT1 perceives Pepsi and its taste as familiar and safe, and he said that he feels that they have a long history together. All of the brand history attributes were shown in INT1's interview strongly: significant memories associated with the brand, a long history with the brand, and a connection to childhood memories.

Brand loyalty

INT1 thought that he is very loyal to Pepsi and committed to it. He recommends the brand to others and even tries to change opinions so that more people liked Pepsi. He believes it is important to support Pepsi in spite of the occasional negative issues related to the brand, and he described himself as an advocate of Pepsi. All of the brand loyalty attributes were shown in INT1's interview strongly: loyalty and engagement towards the brand, positive word-of-mouth, and forgiveness. Thus both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty were shown. As Jacoby and Kyner (1973) see brand loyalty as a clear choice of brand instead of rivals and as advocating behavior by purchasing the product often, this shows also in INT1's behavior. For INT1 Pepsi is the only choice and he encourages also others to choose so.

Brand love

INT1 was infatuated by Pepsi strongly right in the beginning of their relationship and the relationship has deepened since over the years. INT1 has strong feelings towards Pepsi, but he wouldn't call it love or attraction.

Summary

The relationship between INT1 and Pepsi is very strongly interpersonal with a hint of parasociality by acknowledging that the relationship isn't exactly like between two human beings. Otherwise INT1's answers didn't represent parasociality. INT1 and Pepsi have a very strong brand history and brand loyalty. INT1 doesn't feel brand love towards Pepsi in a romantic way, but he does share strong positive emotions with Pepsi in a familial nature.

Table 5. INT1's relationship with Pepsi

Theme	Strength						
	Very weak	Weak	Rather weak	Nothing	Rather strong	Strong	Very strong
Interpersonal relationship							X
Parasocial relationship	X						

Brand history							X
Brand loyalty							X
Brand love			X				

4.2 Interview 2

Interviewee 2 (INT2) was a 25-year-old female, who chose as her favorite brand Heinz (ketchup). The interviewee described herself as a non-professional home culinarian, who has previously worked in Alko, which is a national monopoly company that sells alcoholic beverages. Hence, the interviewee has a deep knowledge and expertise in this area.

Interpersonal or parasocial relationship?

INT2 didn't perceive Heinz as her friend and avoided calling their relationship "a relationship". In fact, she found it amusing that a basic grocery could be a friend, and she rather called their relationship "an emotional bond". INT2 prefers and favors Heinz over competitive brands, and likes very much the taste of Heinz ketchup. Liking the brand has been completely determined by the affection to the ketchup product and its taste. She doesn't share any values with the brand and isn't actually interested at all in the brand's values, mission or vision. INT2 trusts in Heinz, but doesn't recognize any strong positive feelings towards it. Renunciation of Heinz wouldn't be hard for her. She does however see herself using the brand in the future. This indicates that a relationship exists, but it doesn't seem to show attributes of interpersonal or parasocial relationships at all or only a little.

INT2 described Heinz as an everyday consumer good, with which the bond is stable, but not strongly emotional. INT2 felt that Heinz as a consumer good can't offer any added value for herself or other consumers. The reason INT2 uses Heinz is that it is by far the best ketchup there is, and therefore the nature of the relationship between INT2 and Heinz is primarily practical.

"It is just an everyday consumer good. I have a lot stronger emotional bond for example with my Apple products (technology). And overall with

food. There are only a few grocery products, if at all – well okay, some champagnes maybe because they cost a lot more, but a bottle of ketchup that costs about three euros doesn't cause any big emotional bursts for me.

(INT2. Freely translated from the interview.)

INT2 didn't believe that she is incapable of brand love, but that Heinz just isn't the kind of brand that would make her feel deep brand love. She referred to the price of the brand's products in a way that indicates that a more costly brand is more likable.

INT2 isn't interested in Heinz otherwise than in its product: she doesn't regularly follow any news related to it and she doesn't feel that Heinz's values would strengthen their relationship. However if it occurred that Heinz were to use for example child labor or presented other unethical behavior that wasn't in line with INT2's values, INT2 would stop using Heinz. This indicates that INT2 would be the dominant in this relationship, but INT2 admits that the brand always has the decision-making power: when Heinz makes decisions and executes them, the consumer follows and acts according to the brand's decisions. This indicates that the relationship has some weak attributes of parasociality. In addition to this, when Heinz made a ketchup product that has less sugar, INT2 felt as if Heinz had understood what she needs and values in life.

From the list of Fournier's (1998, see table 1) relationship types INT2 chose "marriage of convenience", because according to her it matched right away with how she perceives her relationship with Heinz. Marriage of convenience has been defined as a long-term and committed relationship that has been born and developed by environmental influences and satisfaction (Fournier 1998). Also in researcher's opinion the choice fits, as INT2 and Heinz's relationship might be lacking in emotion, but definitely has been vital due to the fact that INT2 really likes Heinz products and prefers them to others.

Brand history

The relationship between INT2 and Heinz started in her youth, when her mother bought Heinz ketchup to their home occasionally. INT2 said that she noticed Heinz's excellence already at the time, but wasn't infatuated with it. She might have made requests of Heinz ketchup every now and then, but the use of Heinz wasn't as regular then as it is now. When she moved to live on

her own in young adulthood, she felt that she could make the decision of always buying Heinz ketchup, and at this point their relationship deepened. INT2 doesn't have any meaningful memories from the childhood with Heinz and it doesn't offer any nostalgic value for INT2.

Brand loyalty

INT2 misses Heinz in situations where it is needed but isn't available. She rarely uses competitive brands to substitute the need for ketchup, because other brands aren't as satisfying. The way INT2 talked about Heinz and their relationship changed a little at this point: she told that she had wanted ketchup with her lunch that day, but because she didn't have her own and her co-worker only had competitive brand ketchup, she chose not to have ketchup at all. She didn't qualify the competitive brand. INT2 says that she favors Heinz, but not as much as she could. She recommends Heinz to others.

INT2 did show brand loyalty and advocating, but as it culminates "only" into the excellence of the product and its taste, it isn't very multidimensional. Two of the three brand loyalty attributes were shown in INT2's interview strongly: loyalty and engagement towards the brand, and positive word-of-mouth. Thus both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty were shown. However INT2 seemed to have passion in showing her brand loyalty, so does it actually matter that advocating the brand rests only on the ketchup's taste?

Even though INT2 didn't have as multidimensional brand loyalty towards her brand as for example INT1 did for his, advocating Heinz at INT2's situation culminates into the excellence of the product and its taste. After all Dick and Basu (1994) proclaims the importance of advocating the brand when it comes to building brand loyalty.

"I advocate Heinz in that sense that vinegary rubbish won't be bought ever. And if we're preparing a meal collectively and the food demands ketchup, then we'll definitely buy Heinz."

(INT2. Freely translated from the interview.)

Brand love

INT2 didn't have strong feelings towards Heinz and she didn't find the brand attractive. She trusts in the product and loves its taste.

Summary

The relationship isn't interpersonal at all, but has some weak attributes of parasocial relationship. INT2 is loyal to Heinz and likes to show it, but it lacks in multidimensionality as it rests only on the taste of the product. INT2 feels that she is satisfied with what she gets from the brand, but satisfaction and trust are the strongest positive feelings towards Heinz. The brand is familiar from the youth, but as the relationship initiated only in the young adulthood, the relationship doesn't have any nostalgic value.

Table 6. INT2's relationship with Heinz

Theme	Strength						
	Very weak	Weak	Rather weak	Nothing	Rather strong	Strong	Very strong
Interpersonal relationship				X			
Parasocial relationship	X						
Brand history					X		
Brand loyalty						X	
Brand love		X					

4.3 Interview 3

Interviewee 3 (INT3) was a 26-year-old female, who chose as her favorite brand Valio. The interviewee described herself as a former food blogger, who nowadays passionately concentrates on developing her cooking expertise especially in vegetarian diet and clean food.

Interpersonal or parasocial relationship?

INT3 perceived Valio as her friend: she described it as trustworthy and kind, and she has memories with the brand. The relationship is deep, but according to INT3 in a platonic way: the kind of relationship that one has

with their parents or with an old, safe friend. In addition to trustworthiness, INT3 described Valio as safe and warm. She values that it is a Finnish brand and said that it is the first brand that she remembers to have acknowledged. The brand has sentimental value for INT3. INT3 told that she is forgiving towards Valio and is willing to overlook mistakes. According to her, every deep friendship has its ups and downs, but that she still respects and values Valio.

"But yeah, I would say it is friendship, because sometimes there are some setbacks such as when they have added vitamin D to milk or launched new crazily flavored monster quarks. I've been irritated by this and might have thought that maybe I don't appreciate this brand that much, but then I have always somehow realized that I respect it and I think it is safe. Because after all I always buy the products I believe in."

(INT3. Freely translated from the interview.)

INT3 felt that they have interaction with Valio through Valio's products. After setback situations as presented above INT3 might have gone to a grocery store and noticed that Valio has a new nonadditive or organic product: at those times she feels as if the brand understands INT3 better.

INT3 believes that they will be friends with Valio forever unless the brand does something bad (that she couldn't overlook). INT3 described that she has such long traditions with Valio and she is so used to having it in her life, that letting go of it would feel bad. INT3 trusts in Valio because it has always met her requirements and it is almost always available.

INT3 acknowledged that Valio could never replace a real human being as a friend, because they can't do things together. However the brand represents clearly something stronger than just a collection of dairy products to her.

"I don't know if it could really be my friend since it won't come and watch a movie with me. But if I'm visiting at my friend's house and open the fridge and see Valio, I do think to myself that "what a nice surprise to see you here too".

(INT3. Freely translated from the interview.)

However, INT3 also described that she feels that Valio is the dominating party in their relationship because INT3 doesn't genuinely think that Valio cares about what she thinks or does. Even when Valio launches new organic

products that make INT3 feel like Valio is personally reaching for her, she knows that in the rational level this isn't true.

INT3 thought Valio is approachable because it is Finnish and humane. Only products that aren't in line with INT3's values irritate her, but she is very forgiving regarding the brand because she trusts it in the long run.

From the list of Fournier's (1998, see table 1) relationship types INT3 chose "childhood friendship", because they have a strong bond that has been building over the years and due to experiences with the brand. According to INT3 the bond won't break even if she bought other dairy brands. INT3's description matches the childhood friendship's definition of being infrequent with a bond to earlier times, and that the brand yields comfort and security.

All of the interpersonal relationship attributes were shown in INT3's interview: deep friendship with the brand, interaction with the brand, commitment, and interdependence. Only two out of four parasocial relationship attributes were shown in interviews: admiration of the brand, and inequality with the brand.

Brand history

INT3 told that she wouldn't know if they were friends with Valio if she was introduced to the brand today. The relationship is so deep nowadays because the traditions related to Valio have such deep meaning for her. The relationship started when she was very young and Valio has been the preferred dairy brand in her household ever since so she hasn't really questioned the excellence of the brand. It wasn't love at first sight, but evolved as a relationship over time. It has become more of a standard for her. In addition to this INT3's former partner's family had a dairy farm, which produced milk for Valio. This strengthened the bond with Valio and the perception of domesticity.

A meaningful thing in the brand for INT3 as a child was Valio's brand mascot, the Valio penguin, which she was fond of. Valio reminds INT3 of her childhood, so the brand has nostalgic value for her.

All of the three brand history attributes were shown in INT3's interviews: significant memories with the brand, a long history with the brand, and a connection to childhood memories.

Brand loyalty

INT3 told that she is committed to Valio and loyal to it, and that she feels bad and guilty if she buys a cheaper brand instead of Valio. She prefers Valio, but nowadays more in an emotional way than rational, because it reminds her of her former partner or childhood. If she were to think about the brand only in a rational way, she would end up questioning the whole relationship. INT3 would recommend and have recommended Valio for other people.

All of the three brand loyalty attributes were shown in INT3's interviews: loyalty and engagement towards the brand, positive word-of-mouth, and forgiveness. Thus both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty were shown.

Brand love

INT3 has very strong positive feelings towards Valio: she loves it and is attracted to it, but in a platonic sense. She described her feelings towards Valio with words 'safe', 'trust' and 'warmth', and it reminds her of childhood evenings and her mother. If she weren't able to use the brand anymore she would feel bad, and that she might even cry. INT3 also told that she has noticed that for example quark tastes better for her if she sees that it comes from Valio's package. However, she also told that she wouldn't probably make a difference between Valio and Ehrmann's quark by the mere taste.

Three out of four brand love attributes were shown in INT3's interview: attractiveness to the brand, strong feelings towards the brand, and inability to live without the brand. INT3 was the only interviewee who showed more than one brand love attribute.

Summary

The relationship has some weak indications of parasocial relationship that exemplifies INT3's realistic way of seeing the relationship, but it is clearly more an interpersonal one because of the deepness of the relationship and the bidirectionality. INT3 sees their relationship mainly like a real friendship between two people. INT3 and Valio's brand history is very strong, long and the relationship has nostalgic value. The attributes of brand love were repeated through the whole interview, and the love is strongly value-based.

Table 7. INT3's relationship with Valio

Theme	Strength						
	Very weak	Weak	Rather weak	Nothing	Rather strong	Strong	Very strong
Interpersonal relationship							X
Parasocial relationship		X					
Brand history							X
Brand loyalty							X
Brand love							X

4.4 Interview 4

Interviewee 4 (INT4) was a 51-year-old male, who chose as his favorite brand Parmigiano Reggiano. The interviewee described himself as a professional food critic and a writer, who has published several food-related books and performed as a judge in cooking competition programs on national television in Finland.

Interpersonal or parasocial relationship?

INT4 had clear problems to call Parmigiano Reggiano his friend and acknowledging the relationship analogy, although according to him their relationship is somewhat a friendship because he is able to trust that the cheese that carries the name Parmigiano Reggiano is always highly homogeneous.

INT4 has known the brand for 30 years and he has visited the manufacturing premises in Italy. According to him the manufacturing conditions were exactly what one might expect from an Italian manufacturer: non-regulated and highly bribed activity, and the level of hygiene wouldn't pass in Finland. However this didn't affect H4's loyalty towards the brand, but on the contrary it strengthened it. He seemed to admire the Italian arrogance. INT4

stated that he believes they will always be friends with Parmigiano Reggiano, because the product itself and the usability of it are extraordinary. He said that the cheese makes any food better, even though the dish wasn't Italian. In the side of trust this may also be seen as admiration of the brand.

INT4 described the relationship unprompted as "loveless marriage" because he doesn't recognize any strong feelings but he doesn't want to give it up either. Yet INT4 was also surprised about how he himself described to have a relationship with the brand: the thought of him having a relationship with a cheese seemed to be very difficult for him.

"I think it clearly is this sort of 'loveless marriage'. I don't have any strong feelings, but on the other hand I don't want to live without this product because my life would be much lonelier and poorer. Damn, what am I talking about?"

(INT4. Freely translated from the interview.)

INT4 didn't feel that they have interaction or dialogue at all in their relationship with Parmigiano Reggiano, which indicates parasociality. He highlighted that he is in the relationship for the convenience.

INT4 described that he has a very contradictory relationship with Italy, which concerns also his relationship with Parmigiano Reggiano. He is irritated and bothered by Italy and their farm production's corruption and the black market, so according to him whenever he learns that there is a scandal in Italy regarding for example food, he is spiteful and pleased that they get punished. At the same time however his favorite cheese is manufactured in Italy. He trusts the product and doesn't want to stop using it.

He didn't humanize the brand easily, but when asked that which kind of person INT4 sees the brand as, he did have a description that surprised him. He said that the brand reminded him of a middle-aged, well-dressed man with a moustache. He repeated severally that he didn't know why he saw that brand this way, but at the end he explained the description by telling that Parmigiano Reggiano isn't a luxury product, but that then again it is. In Finland its high price makes it sort of a luxury product and it has high status, but in Italy it is a very ordinary food. According to him, the choice of a middle-aged man indicated either identification with the brand (for he is a middle-aged man himself) or mafia and a bribed public officer. This was told a little humorously and incredulously.

INT4's attitude towards Parmigiano Reggiano is strongly pragmatic: he thinks of it as a product that makes food better. INT4 didn't feel that the brand understands what he wants in life because according to him "Parmesan doesn't understand a thing". He does pay attention for example to news written about the brand, but he also highlights that it is part of his job to know the product even behind the scenes. When asked if INT4 ever felt the brand as distant and unattainable, he understood the question only on a pragmatic level and not in an emotional: how a couple years ago you couldn't necessarily find the cheese in any other grocery store. He didn't feel that he has an equal relationship with Parmigiano Reggiano.

"No, it's not equal. Of course I can't affect the cheese in any way, other than not buying it. The relationship is not equal. It usually goes that way: there is a brand and they're selling something for you. The only way you can have an influence is whether you buy or not."

(INT4. Freely translated from the interview.)

From the list of Fournier's (1998, see table 1) relationship types INT4 first chose the arranged marriage, but then changes it into the marriage of convenience. INT4 himself describes the relationship as a loveless marriage as has been stated before, but he also says that he doesn't want to live without it, because life would be lonelier and poorer without it. Fournier (1998) describes arranged marriage as a relationship that has been brought into one's life by someone other, and that it has been initially meant to be a long-term, committed relationship, but is in fact at low levels of affective attachment. However in researcher's opinion INT4's change into the marriage of convenience was a suitable one, as it has been defined as a long-term and committed relationship that has been born and developed by environmental influences and satisfaction (Fournier 1998). No matter how repulsive INT4 might see the idea of having a committed relationship with cheese, his commitment and satisfaction with it indicates otherwise.

The relationship between INT4 and Parmigiano Reggiano isn't very interpersonal, and it has only some indications of parasociality such as admiration and inequality. Instead practicality is emphasized in this relationship, and INT4 clearly has also some value-based attitudes and thoughts towards the brand through Italy and its questionable market economy. He trusts the brand and he acknowledges that he is "only a consumer". He uses it in cooking often and he wouldn't want to give up

using it, but he doesn't worship it. He feels that he is in charge of the continuation of the relationship.

Brand history

The strongest memory that INT4 described to have about Parmigiano Reggiano was about his visit to the production premises of the cheese. The memory is work-related because at the time he was writing an Italian cookbook and this is why he visited the premises. INT4 felt that their relationship has lasted long. He mentioned that he became infatuated with the cheese immediately when he tried it the first time, and that he has used it ever since. INT4 didn't feel the memories related to the brand nostalgic at all.

Two out of three brand history attributes were shown in INT4's interview: significant memories with the brand, and a long history with the brand.

Brand loyalty

INT4 felt that he is committed to the brand and loyal to it. He prefers it over other similar cheeses. He notices other cheeses too, but in a comparing state-of-mind. INT4 felt the need to use Parmigiano Reggiano only because it makes food better, not because he had emotional dependency towards it. Therefore the attitudinal loyalty is left a bit shallow, but it is explained with INT4's pragmatic attitude towards the brand. All of the three brand loyalty attributes were shown in INT4's interview: loyalty and engagement towards the brand, positive word-of-mouth, and forgiveness.

INT4 has recommended the brand to other, but he felt that Parmigiano Reggiano is starting to be the kind of food that you don't need to recommend. He felt that it is more than a brand, like milk or meat.

Brand love

INT4 didn't acknowledge being attracted to Parmigiano Reggiano, and the thought seemed pervert to him. At the end of the interview he admitted to have strong feelings towards the brand, but denied to be in love with the brand. Previously during the interview INT4 stated a couple of times that he wouldn't want to give up using Parmigiano Reggiano, but on the other hand at the end of the interview he said that he wouldn't be devastated if he couldn't use it anymore, since there are moderately good alternatives for it.

Summary

INT4 had clear issues with the thought of having a relationship with a brand, because it was difficult or even impossible for him to view Parmigiano Reggiano in an emotional or abstract level. He connects the brand to his work and sees it in a pragmatic way. The relationship has however some weak traces of parasocial interaction, but one couldn't define it purely as such. INT4 himself called the relationship himself as "loveless marriage". The history with the brand is strong, and INT4 trusts the brand and is loyal to it, but only because of its excellence. Strong feelings are involved, but not brand love per se.

Table 8. INT4's relationship with Parmigiano Reggiano

Theme	Strength						
	Very weak	Weak	Rather weak	Nothing	Rather strong	Strong	Very strong
Interpersonal relationship	X						
Parasocial relationship			X				
Brand history						X	
Brand loyalty						X	
Brand love			X				

4.5 Interview 5

Interviewee 5 (INT5) was a 24-year-old female, who chose as his favorite brand Valrhona (chocolate). The interviewee described herself as a professional cook in a fine dining restaurant.

Interpersonal or parasocial relationship?

INT5 preferred calling Valrhona "a reliable colleague" rather than a friend. She explained this by telling that she uses the brand only in her working

environment and never in her leisure time. She connects the brand to her work very strongly. INT5 was infatuated by the brand right away, and the relationship has deepened ever since. She got excited about the brand, when she was starting as a cook and she met some Valrhona representatives, who offered her recipes and instructions concerning the use of chocolate, and in addition to this her colleagues used the brand. She trusts the brand and she connects the brand to success: she felt that Valrhona makes her perform better.

INT5 believed that she would be using Valrhona as long as it exists. She didn't deny of using other brands too, but she perceives Valrhona as good and trustworthy chocolate brand. She didn't have any problems calling it a relationship; on the contrary she told that it felt natural because of the work-relatedness. She also felt that there is interaction and dialogue between them, although it manifests only on a pragmatic level.

"Hmm, well yes, there is interaction. Not necessarily with the product directly, but I am a lot in contact with their distributors and representatives, and they also are a lot in contact with their customer, who mainly are cooks and chocolate masters. They share information and recipes a lot, and brings samples. I feel that the relationship with the brand and their distributors it is very interactive."

(INT5. Freely translated from the interview.)

INT5 shares the same values with Valrhona and identifies herself with it. INT5 explained that the reason why so many cooks prefer Valrhona is because it is purely meant for professional use. This separates Valrhona from for example Fazer and others, because Valrhona invests in quality, professionalism and precision, and they take the different nuances into account.

If some problems occurred with using the brand, INT5 would consider together with her work community whether to continue to use it or not in the future – not by herself. If she weren't able to use it anymore, she would be sorry about it, because she finds it very trustworthy and it would mean a lot of wasted working hours. This indicates even more the pragmatics of their relationship.

INT5 described Valrhona as a reserved and distant expert, who is very objective, so the vision of Valrhona can be seen as professional. At times INT5 experiences exhilarations with the brand, when they're changing

menus at work or she's testing new recipes that they got from the brand. This makes her feel sometimes like she couldn't wait to get to work with Valrhona chocolate. INT5 described that for her Valrhona is the best there is, and that she feels that the brand understands what she and other professional cooks need in their work. She also follows the news about the brand.

However INT5 also told that sometimes Valrhona feels distant and unattainable. Physical distance, large size and unattainability make it harder to take over everything inside the whole brand. The brand has a lot of customers and INT5 didn't feel as if she was the most important one for them, but according to her dialogue decreases the distance. She also didn't feel that they have equal possibilities to develop their relationship, because she is just a cook and Valrhona is a big brand. She mentioned that maybe if she were a really famous and influential cook, she would get her own chocolate collection or her own line within the brand. She did however feel that Valrhona wants to work with professionals, which was important for her.

"The interaction and dialogue of course decrease the distance, when they come to me, bring samples, instructions and recipes. That's when the brand is closer to me."

(INT5. Freely translated from the interview.)

Three out of four interpersonal relationship attributes were shown in INT5's interview: interaction with the brand, commitment, and interdependence. Interestingly three out of four parasocial relationship attributes were shown in INT5's interview too: admiration of the brand, inequality with the brand, and no responsibility or obligation towards the brand.

From the list of Fournier's (1998, see table 1) relationship types INT5 chose the marriage of convenience, which has been described as a long-term and committed relationship that has been born and developed by environmental influences and satisfaction (Fournier 1998). In researcher's opinion this matches quite well with the relationship that INT5 has been describing: a functioning and trustworthy relationship without any big feelings.

Brand history

As the relationship with Valrhona connects to INT5's work life, also the memories concerning the brand concentrate on work environment. She remembered to have acknowledged the presence of the brand in for example

cooking competitions and training occasions. In addition to this the brand reminded her of her colleagues, successes, and cooperation with the brand representatives. All of the memories were very positive.

INT5 felt that their relationship has continued a fairly long time already and it has never failed her. However INT5 felt that nostalgia was a bit too sophisticated for this context, so the brand has no nostalgic value for INT5.

Brand loyalty

INT5 is committed to the brand and loyal to it, although she felt that she could be even more committed to it by for example sponsor cooperation. She prefers the brand and never uses other brands in work, because she thinks it is the best. She told that she has recommended it and will continue to recommend it.

Two out of three brand loyalty attributes were shown in INT5's interview: loyalty and engagement towards the brand, and positive word-of-mouth. Thus both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty were shown.

Brand love

INT5 told that she admires and idolizes Valrhona and the image that the brand builds of cooks. She described to have positive feelings towards the brand, but that they aren't that strong. If she weren't able to use the brand anymore, she would feel bad, but she wouldn't be devastated.

Summary

The relationship has indicators of both interpersonal and parasocial relationships. She describes the brand as more of a colleague than a friend, and admires the brand a lot. The idolization of the brand makes it seem more like a parasocial relationship, but then again INT5 and the brand have interaction and dialogue in their relationship, which doesn't fit in parasocial relationship at all. However the positive feelings towards the brand weren't that strong, and INT5 didn't feel that they're equal with the brand, even though the brand means the best for her (and all the other cooks), so the relationship seems to be more a parasocial relationship than an interpersonal one.

Table 9. INT5's relationship with Valrhona (chocolate)

Theme	Strength						
	Very weak	Weak	Rather weak	Nothing	Rather strong	Strong	Very strong
Interpersonal relationship						X	
Parasocial relationship						X	
Brand history					X		
Brand loyalty						X	
Brand love					X		

4.6 Interview 6

Interviewee 6 (INT6) was a 32-year-old male, who chose as his favorite brand Bertolli (olive oil). The interviewee described himself as a professional cook and a food entrepreneur, who was at the time of the interview reforming the fast food line in Hartwall Arena.

Interpersonal or parasocial relationship?

INT6 recognized Bertolli as his friend and explained it by telling how the Bertolli olive oil is an important part of his cooking at home, work and everywhere. He believes they will be friends always, because they have been friends such a long time already. INT6 ended up founding Bertolli when he was looking for a good, basic olive oil brand that one can find in any grocery store. The first time he tried Bertolli it became his primary choice of olive oil. His search for a better one still continues, but Bertolli has kept its position for ten years now.

INT6 had difficulties with seeing himself and Bertolli in a relationship with each other. Even though INT6 called Bertolli his friend, it was more in a modest way: Bertolli is trustworthy and available in every store, but there are no deeper positive feelings nor interaction or dialogue between them, because INT6 didn't feel they had gotten to such deep level with Bertolli.

Also when INT6 was shown a list of different kinds of interpersonal relationship types and asked to choose one that fits the best, he chose “committed partnership”, which was explained by Fournier (1998; see Table 1) as “long-term, voluntarily imposed, socially supported union high in love, intimacy, trust and a commitment to stay together despite adverse circumstances, adherence to exclusivity rules expected”.

“It’s the committed companionship, it fits the best. The trustworthiness and that it is sort of like marriage: you have to be committed and able to trust. When I’ve been at work and I’ve had a different selection of olive oils from which to choose, I have almost always chosen Bertolli only because of our old partnership.”

(INT6. Freely translated from the interview.)

INT6 explained that if he heard bad news about Bertolli, his natural reaction would be to defend it, because he felt that if he has made his decision on something, it sticks and his job is to stand for it. He didn’t admit that he would necessarily feel bad for Bertolli or that his defense reaction would be exceptionally strong, but according to him he is just stubborn that way.

The presence of Bertolli makes INT6 feel good and if he noticed that he was out of Bertolli, he would feel a bit bad and go and buy it. As the brand is such an essential part of his everyday life, he couldn’t live without it. When asked more about Bertolli as a friend, INT6 told that he can’t really see the brand as a real friend, but on an abstract level Bertolli could be seen as childhood friend, with which you don’t need to be in touch every day to keep the relationship alive. INT6 felt that Bertolli understands what he needs in life, because it functions and behaves like he wants in cooking. He follows what is written about the brand, but he explained that it’s not the kind of brand that is in the news every day, so there are days when he doesn’t think about it at all and therefore the brand might sometimes feel a bit distant.

INT6 described that they both can affect the relationship and develop it, when Bertolli launches new versions of olive oil and INT6 gets to test them. Even though he usually goes back to the basic version after trying different variations, he felt that this way the relationship lives. INT6 also thought that Bertolli thinks of him the same way he thinks of the brand, because Bertolli operates according to the wishes of cooks and consumers and tries to offer the best as possible olive oil for basic use.

From the list of Fournier's (1998, see table 1) relationship types INT6 chose the committed partnership, because according to him "it fits the best". The committed partnership has been described as a long-term, voluntarily, and socially supported union that has a lot of love, intimacy, trust, and a commitment to stay together even if it's hard. The relationship also ought to be exclusive. In researcher's opinion INT6's description was the least matching of all interviewees' descriptions of their relationships mainly because INT6 doesn't really describe his relationship with Bertolli at any point as affectionate or intimate, nor does he admit of having strong positive feelings towards the brand. Otherwise he is committed and loyal to the brand, but not perhaps in such a deep level as the definition of committed partnership goes. In researcher's opinion a more fitting relationship type could be something between the marriage of convenience and the casual friends, which has been described as a "friendship low in affect and intimacy, characterized by infrequent or sporadic engagement, and few expectations for reciprocity or reward".

The relationship has some indications of both interpersonal and parasocial relationships, but they're quite weak. However, interpersonality shows a bit more strongly, because of INT6's commitment and loyalty, and feeling that they can equally develop the relationship.

Brand history

INT6 mentioned that Bertolli reminds him of the beginning of his cooking career and Jamie Oliver. Before this INT6 and his family hadn't used any olive oils, but Jamie Oliver was a big inspiration for him, when he started studying to be a cook. That's when he started to use Bertolli too. Their relationship has lasted now approximately ten years and the brand has never failed INT6.

INT6 earliest memories with Bertolli are set to the time he started as a cook and when his children were very small, so according to INT6 there are some small nostalgic memories related to Bertolli around that time.

Brand loyalty

INT6 is committed to the brand and loyal to it, and he always ensures that there is Bertolli at home and work. When he goes to the grocery store to pick up Bertolli he notices the other brands too, but feels confident when choosing Bertolli, because he knows that he is getting quality olive oil.

INT6 uses Bertolli for basic use such as frying, but when a bit more sophisticated olive oil is needed for example for salads, he doesn't have a problem using something else than Bertolli. He described how at work sometimes others would accept cheaper olive oils for basic use, but it is important for INT6 to choose Bertolli for this purpose and in these situations he stands for Bertolli.

INT6 has recommended Bertolli and could imagine recommending in the future too. All three brand loyalty attributes were shown in INT6's interview: loyalty and engagement towards the brand, and positive word-of-mouth, and forgiveness. Thus both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty were shown.

Brand love

INT6 didn't admit of being attracted to Bertolli, nor did he mention to have deeper positive feelings towards it other than loyalty and trust. He would feel bad if couldn't use Bertolli anymore, but he wouldn't be devastated. According to him, he would probably start to look for another olive oil brand.

Summary

INT6 trusts Bertolli and is loyal to it, but the relationship isn't otherwise very strong. It is more interpersonal than parasocial, because INT6 feels they both can equally develop the relationship and because of INT6's commitment and loyalty towards Bertolli. They don't however have any interaction or dialogue in their relationship according to INT6. The weakness of the relationship is probably a result of the fact that INT6's brand love towards Bertolli isn't very strong. However they have a rather long history together and both parties seem to be happy to their parts.

Table 10. INT6's relationship with Bertolli

Theme	Strength						
	Very weak	Weak	Rather weak	Nothing	Rather strong	Strong	Very strong
Interpersonal relationship			X				
Parasocial relationship		X					

Brand history					X		
Brand loyalty						X	
Brand love	X						

4.7 Overview of the interviews

The reviewed material will be examined as a whole in this sub-chapter, and in addition to this the research questions “are there any interpersonal attributes related to brand relationships”, “are there any parasocial attributes related to brand relationships” and “how do brand history, brand loyalty and brand love show in brand relationships” will be answered.

The relationships were more interpersonal than parasocial. Interpersonality was “very strong” with two interviewees (INT1 and INT3) and “strong” with one (INT5). Parasociality wasn’t “very strong” with any interviewees, but it was “strong” with one interviewee (INT5). INT5’s relationship showed nearly as much interpersonal and parasociality, but the researcher interpreted the relationship to be more parasocial on the whole. INT5 and INT1 had the same amount of interpersonal and parasocial attributes, but the difference between them was how passionately they talked about the brands and how they described their distance to the brands: for INT5 Valrhona represented a distant and admirable work-related brand through which she could show professional ambition, and for INT1 Pepsi was by his own words a close friend who is there for him and has the same values as him. This indicates why it was important to examine the relationships from more than just the interpersonal and parasocial relationship points of view.

With the rest of the interviewees parasociality showed as “rather weak” at the highest. All of the interviewees did however show at least some attributes of parasociality, whereas with interpersonal there was one interviewee (INT2) that didn’t show any attributes of it (see Table 11).

As presented in Table 11 the most common interpersonal attribute was “commitment”. All of the interpersonal attributes appeared in the brand relationships, but INT3 was the only one who had all the interpersonal

attributes in her relationship with Valio. INT1 and INT4 had 4/5 of the interpersonal attributes. The two second-most common interpersonal attributes were “interaction with the brand” and “interdependence”. Only two interviewees perceived their relationships as “deep relationship with the brand”, even though three of them perceived the brand as “a friend” and one as “a reliable colleague”. Only INT2 and INT4 were absolute that the brands weren’t their friends, and even indicated that the thought of it was comical.

The most common parasocial attribute was “admiration of the brand” (Table 11). All of the interviewees showed admiration of the brand, even though it manifested in different ways. The admiration came through in interviews in different manners, but with the same core idea: the brand is doing something great that I like and I’m benefiting of it. For some the admiration was value-based, for some steady satisfaction through years that sometimes gets exceeded, and for some just because the brand is “something else” even in a frustrating manner, and you have to like it anyway.

The second-most common parasocial attribute, “inequality with the brand”, may be seen as realism or cynicism amongst the interviewees as none of them felt they have equal relationships with brands, even though they might feel they have interaction and dialogue in them (INT1, INT3 and INT5). All other parasocial attributes appeared quite much, except “fantasizing about the brand” and “possibility to back out whenever consumer wants to”, which didn’t appear at all. The lack of attribute “possibility to back out” doesn’t necessarily mean that the interviewees don’t have a possibility to back out, but that they just didn’t point this out. A few of the interviewees did however mention how “the brand is just a brand” and the reason they won’t stop using them is because they prefer the brand – not because they can’t.

Table 11. The list of theme attributes that appeared in interviews

Attributes	Civilians			Professionals		
	INT1	INT2	INT3	INT4	INT5	INT6
Interpersonal relationship						
Deep friendship with the brand	X		X			
Interaction with the brand	X		X		X	

Commitment	X		X	X	X	X
Interdependence			X		X	X
Parasocial relationship						
Admiration of the brand	X	X	X	X	X	X
Inequality with the brand	X		X	X	X	
Fantasizing about the brand						
Possibility to back out whenever consumer wants to						
No responsibility or obligation towards the brand	X	X		X	X	
Brand history						
Significant memories associated with the brand	X		X	X	X	X
A long history with the brand	X	X	X		X	X
A connection to childhood memories	X	X	X			
Brand loyalty						
Loyalty and engagement towards the brand	X	X	X	X	X	X
Positive word-of-mouth	X	X	X	X	X	X
Forgiveness	X		X	X		X
Brand love						
Attractiveness to the brand			X			
Strong feelings towards the brand	X		X	X	X	X

Love towards the brand						
Inability to live without the brand			X			

Brand history and brand loyalty appeared strong on average: brand history was “rather strong” at the lowest, and brand loyalty “strong” at the lowest with all of the interviewees. INT1 and INT3 had “very strong” brand history and brand loyalty, and they both were also the ones who showed “very strong” interpersonality. The most common attributes of brand history were “significant memories associated with the brand” and “a long history with the brand” (Table 11). Only the “civilian” interviewees had also the attribute “a connection to childhood memories”, which can be explained with the fact that the professional interviewees all selected a brand that they use in their work. The professional interviewees’ emotional bonds with the brands aren’t necessarily weaker than civilians’, because some people might take their professional life very seriously and experience real moments of happiness at work, as for example INT5 described her relationship with the Valrhona chocolate. In researcher’s opinion family ties however tend to be emotional by default, so brands that remind us of our childhood are more prone to raise strong feelings and therefore deepen the relationship.

Brand loyalty was the strongest theme of all themes amongst all interviewees, and both civilians and professionals seemed to show as much brand loyalty in their brand relationships. The only attribute that wasn’t showed by all of the interviewees was “forgiveness”. Half of the interviewees (INT1, INT3 and INT6) indicated that the brands have made decisions they didn’t like, but that they liked the brand anyway and accepted that the parties don’t always agree on everything in a relationship. Even though INT2 and INT5 didn’t express the attribute of “forgiveness”, they weren’t aggressive or absolute about it either. With them the lack of “forgiveness” merely meant that if the brand doesn’t please anymore, they just simply look for a replacement for it without drama.

Brand love on the other hand appeared to be a bit more difficult theme for the interviewees to empathize with. INT3 was the only one who had “very strong” brand love in her brand relationship and INT5 had “rather strong” brand love. The rest of the interviewees’ brand love was “rather weak” at the highest, although everyone showed at least some brand love – even INT2, who didn’t show any interpersonality and only very weak parasociality in her brand relationship.

The weakest showings of brand love were with INT2 and INT6, because the only “strong positive feelings” they admitted to have were trust and loyalty, which of course are already by themselves very strong feelings and attitudes to have towards a brand. The reason why INT2 doesn’t have the attribute “strong positive feelings towards the brand” marked (Table 11) was because she stated clearly that for her the product itself is the most important thing (not necessarily the brand or its values) and because she was very absolute when telling that she didn’t have any strong positive feelings towards the brand, but that she trusts the products and loves the taste of it. She didn’t recognize trust as a strong positive feeling at the time of the interview. INT6 on the other hand expressed the matter in a slightly milder manner by telling that he didn’t have any *other* strong positive feelings towards Bertolli than trust and loyalty, and this is why INT6 has “strong positive feelings towards the brand” marked.

INT2 did however indicate that she could have potential to be a brand advocate with regarding how she talked about preferring Heinz ketchup to other ketchup brands. Her loyalty seemed more aggressive than for example INT2 or INT5’s, who didn’t have any problems in admitting that they have strong positive feelings towards their brands and who had clear indications of interpersonal relationship. INT2 expressed her aggressive preference by criticising the other ketchup brands as lousy compared to Heinz, and her tone of voice when saying this was rather strict and straightforward. INT2 did however mention in her interview that if she were to have the discussion about for example her Apple devices, her expressions would be very different, meaning that it would be easier for her to show her positive feelings towards a different kind of brand – not a cheap everyday food brand.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter combines the conclusions of the research and further discussion of the research process. First, the results and findings will be mirrored with the presented theoretical framework and further conclusion will be made. After that the research will be evaluated: was it ethically executed and did any possible limitations occur? Lastly, the implications for the future research will be made.

5.1 Conclusions and discussion of the research

The relationships between the consumers and the brands in this research were more interpersonal than parasocial insofar as the existence of a relationship was admitted. It turned out in the interviews that admitting the existence of a relationship with a brand was very hard for some of the interviewees, and with most of the interviewees the thought of a relationship had to be warmed up, as if it was a game. However it was known in advance that the subject would be of such kind that needed warming up.

The brands could be missed and yearned a lot, and make the consumers feel good, but the bond wouldn't easily be admitted as a relationship. Even though some of the interviewees used the word 'admit', it could very well be also about simply not experiencing it as a relationship because of for example the lack of interaction. However as all of the interviews proceeded, it was obvious that some kind of relationship did exist between the consumers and the brands.

This indicates that even if the brand relationships aren't knowingly discussed and that their existence is hard to admit at first, they are however a very alive and virile phenomenon that is living its own, silent life somewhere among brand communications and consumer behaviour. Some brands seem to take it more clearly into account in marketing and communications, such as luxury brands (Patrick & Hagtvedt 2014, 267), but the fact is that consumers have relationships with even the most ordinary food brands, even though the brands wouldn't advance them.

The question at this point is that how well do organizations take consumer-brand relationships into consideration in their communications, marketing and brand management? CBR is more than just creating a magnificent brand, marketing it for the most potential audience and then hoping that it becomes a huge sales success. It is about what happens after the infatuation between the consumer and the brand, and how to make it last: what kind of conversations does the consumer have with the brand, what does the brand stand for for the consumer, does the brand respond to the consumer's needs, does it represent the same values that the consumer believes in?

For the communications and marketing professionals this means reformed requirements of the job. As an example, according to the interview results all of the interviewees admire their chosen brands. Whether the admiration is value-based, satisfaction-based, or inspiration-based, the communications and marketing professionals need to know it. It means investigating and observing customers and their behaviour more deeply, but also discussing with them about their motives, desires and needs. It means going to the grassroots. At the same time in order to speak for the brand, the communications and marketing professionals need to own the brand and its voice. By believing in the brand one is able to credibly speak for it.

However, as the consumers see their relationships with brands interpersonally, shouldn't the consumer-brand relationships be developed and nurtured in the same way as a relationship between two human beings? If Fournier (1998, 344) is right about the fact that interpersonality in CBR is strong because consumers like to humanize objects, wouldn't it be easier for the organizations to develop the relationships by making brands more humane and approachable? Of course as stated before, according to Aaker (1997, 347-348) the advertisers already try to make the brands emotionally more approachable. But why not advance this thinking into real relationship maintenance? One can't have an actual conversation with a cheese, but they can have an actual conversation with a brand representative, or

communications and marketing professional, about for example how to use the cheese in weekends' dinner plans.

As the research indicated, most of the consumers acknowledged that they don't necessarily have a relationship with individual products of the brand, but with the whole and the experience that the brand offers for the consumer: feelings, experiences, customer service, memories, identification etc. All this probably has been of course already executed by some brands, and potentially even according to a brand marketing plan or strategy, but how much of it actually concentrates on individual consumers and their needs from the relationship point of view? Every relationship is different, and this goes just as much with brand relationships as with actual interpersonal relationships, as the research indicated. What works for one consumer, might not work for another, so **successful CBR management requires from communications and marketing professionals flexibility, agility, insightfulness, monitoring and dialogue**. For this purpose also a table like Fournier's typology of consumer-brand relationship forms (Fournier 1998, 362; Table 1) might be practical, as it would offer a listing of different kinds of possible relationship types, and how to understand and utilize them.

What was both interesting and not very surprising about the results was that even though the relationships were more interpersonal, the consumers weren't very keen on showing brand love. Trust and loyalty were easy to speak for, but love not so much. Therefore Bengtsson's (2003, 156) view of the use of the word 'love' between different cultures seems to apply in this case, as the Finnish interviewees felt that in Finnish 'love' was too big of a word to describe their feelings towards the brands. However when asked about English word 'love', it was different: it was a lot easier to say in English that "I love this brand". In researcher's opinion this indicates that the volume of love doesn't change between cultures, but the power of the word varies probably due to cultural differences. Even Finnish people might have gotten used to it that in English the word 'love' is used more loosely whereas in Finnish it is a very strong word that isn't used lightly. This doesn't however necessarily mean that the feeling is different - only the way it is expressed in.

The most common interpersonal attribute in the interview results was 'commitment'. In Sternberg's (1986, 119) triangular theory of love one facet is commitment. According to Heinrich et al. (2012, 141) those consumers who show strong commitment towards a brand quite possibly also show brand love, which is interesting in the light of this thesis' interview results. Is it

possible that brand love didn't do so well in the interviews, because commitment did? Or should it be even more obscure that brand love didn't show so much in the interviews even though commitment did? Or is the fault in the Finnish interviewees and their difficulty with word and concept of love? Do they see commitment as a more ordinary and realistic form of brand love?

Even though parasociality didn't show that much in the interviews, the most common parasocial attribute was 'admiration of the brand' with every interviewee showing it. Admiration is of course probably a pursuable goal for brands, but unfortunately it is also a feature that isn't necessarily shown in public or said out loud. What could the food brands, or other brands for that matter, do to get this social acceptance and admiration into a visible form? How can they ensure that everyone sees that people admire their brand? Apple organizes live media events, when they launch new products (Apple 2016), and Beyoncé is known for her Beyhive fanbase (Tumblr 2016) that speaks for her and publicly admires her. Common for these examples is that the brand creates an arena for the admiration and enables to show it and support the brand.

Brand loyalty was the strongest theme amongst all interviewees. Both attitudinal and behavioural brand loyalty were strong in this research's relationships. Attitudinal loyalty was weaker only when the relationship was seen mainly pragmatically, but all in all most of the brand loyalty manifested as commitment and trust (attitudinal), and only after that as preference and recommending (behavioural). Some of the interviewees felt that they could express their loyalty more in action by for example sponsorship or advocating. Those who expressed brand loyalty the most strongly trust the brand, because it has proved its functionality or because they like the image the brand has created for itself. Aaker's (1991 in Fetscherin & Conway Dutton 2014, 155) view of brand loyalty applies to this, as brand loyalty in this research has started with satisfaction with the brand, and then grown into trust and commitment, and then again recommending to others.

Brand advocacy came out in the conversations naturally even though it weren't asked from the interviewees: one felt that he already was a brand advocate (INT1), and one expressed that she could be an advocate, if the brand was more suitable for her (INT2). For the organizations brand advocacy means creating a special advisor or consultant for the other consumers (Lawer & Know 2006, 123), and according to Parrot et al. (2015, 361) brand advocates' most significant influence happens through advice and

recommendations, so therefore from brand relationship management point of view brand advocacy is a desirable outcome of consumer relationships. In these cases however, as the research also indicates, the brand has to be the kind of a brand that speaks to the consumer in an extraordinary way: the bidirectionality is the very key in brand advocacy. For one consumer a beverage brand with same interests is the one, whereas for another it might be a modernly designed technology family that makes her heart beat in a way that in time provokes brand advocacy. This way the advocacy is also authentic, and not just another bought marketing face.

Brand history seemed to affect the development of brand relationships. As Albert et al. (2008, 1073) stated how nostalgic memories from childhood might affect the brand relationships, half of the interviewees admitted the brand to have connections to their childhood. It is interesting how the choices of one's parents might affect on what brand of ice cream one buys when they're adults. And this doesn't necessarily mean that consumers inherit their preferences from their parents, but they might actually want to rebel against the childhood preferences. Other half (the professionals) had also rather long relationships with the brands, although the relationships had started in professional environments.

Even though any generalizations can't be made out of this research, there were three men and three women participating in it, and as the differences between men and women in relationships have been discussed previously (Monga 2002), it is interesting to see how the theory applies to this research. According to Monga (2002) women usually see both "consumer-as-actor" and "brand-as-actor" features in brand relationships, whereas men mainly see "consumer-as-actor" features. This means that for women there are two actors in a relationship who matter, and that men only see themselves as actors in relationships.

The features weren't particularly studied in this research, but some indicators could have been recognized. As it turned out 2/3 men (INT4/Parmigiano Reggiano and INT6/Bertolli) did seem to see only "consumer-as-actor" features, and 2/3 women (Valio and Valrhona) saw both "consumer-as-actor" and "brand-as-actor" features. The women had a more deep insight of their relationship with the brand than the men generally. Both sexes had one exception. The men's exception was INT1/Pepsi, which was also the one who admitted being a brand advocate, and women's exception was INT2/Heinz, who only saw the brand as a

product, but mentioned a possibility of being a brand advocate for some other brand.

An interesting notion however is that even though INT4 made very clear that he has a distant relationship with Parmigiano Reggiano, if a relationship at all, and that he saw Parmigiano Reggiano very strictly only as a cheese, he expressed *schadenfreude* when he told about the legislative problems that the production had involved. This yet again might be an indicator of the fact that the phenomenon of brand relationships might not be acknowledged well or accepted at all, but it still exists as the unspoken power.

An interesting thought emerged to the researcher during the research process about whether a relationship exists, if the consumer doesn't use the product. This would mean that the consumer admires or respects a brand or what it represented for example by values or status without actually ever using the brand. In this case the admiration is based on images and visions about the brand, and isn't this after all what for example luxury fashion brands do in their brand marketing already? Are the consumers in these cases having a relationship with the brand, when they for example follow them in social media and explore the products in blogs? Or does a relationship require owning the product or using the service?

The benefit for the company behind the brand in these cases is of course the advocacy, positive word-of-mouth and conspicuousness etc. that the consumers' engagement develops and upholds. However, it is generally known that for example some luxury fashion brands are actually pursuing it that not everyone can afford and therefore own the products of the brand, but that still everybody admires them and wants to have them. Can the company reaching out to the consumers and the consumers answering to that in some way be interpreted as a relationship? Isn't this purely about the company communicating a certain vision so strong for the consumers that it would ignite a need in the consumers to have a connection to the company's brand even though they wouldn't actually be using any products of the brand?

So how can companies advantage from consumer-brand relationships and how should it be taken into account in public relations and brand communications? As the research indicated the brands' choices and acts affect the way the consumers see them and feel about them. Marketing and advertising the brand in the most suited way is important, but even more important is how the brand communicates with the consumer after the

relationship has begun. The consumers are forgiving of mistakes if the brand is important enough for them, but the positive experiences – such as showing the same values through products and services, or being understanding in customer service situations – are those that really builds and deepens the relationship and loyalty. Consumer-brand relationships aren't exactly the same as the relationships between human beings, but they have a lot of the same characteristics and patterns. However when a consumer is having a conversation with a brand representative, the relationship gets naturally a more interpersonal dimension than when the consumer is “only” using the product or service.

Fournier's Brand Relationship Quality (1998, see table 2) construct includes a facet of self-connection. It “reflects the amount of identity factors that the brand and the consumer have in common, and how the brand therefore reflects the consumer”. According to this research the consumers seem to expect a feeling of togetherness, same values and great experiences from the brand. The facet of self-connection applies to this. The consumers also seem to want to have a possibility to effect and have an impact on the relationship, as it seems to make them feel like they matter and that the relationship is equal. Quitting the use of the brand isn't anymore the only way for the consumers to communicate that they don't like something the brand did, but it is more common to ask for a change from the brand. Especially social media has proven to be an essential part of this communication, as it is easier to get more consumers to ask for a change. This is a clear change in the dynamics of the consumer-brand relationships when compared to the time before the social media era. The consumers wanting the brands to be human-like isn't however a new thought, as it has been already stated throughout this thesis. Aggarwal (2004, 88) said that when the consumers are having similar relationships with brands as they have with other people, the same norms and rules start to apply to those too.

So it is important for the companies to include the consumers in the brand culture and listen to them, and this way ensure the continuity of the consumer-brand relationships. As stated before, Aaker (1997, 347–348) said that “consumers often complete their perceptions of brand with human personality traits.” Therefore it has been interesting to see how according to this research the consumers seem to respect bidirectional communications and interaction, and how they seem to want the brand to be available, supportive, transparent and trustworthy. Just like other people.

As mentioned in the introduction chapter of this thesis, the core construct of this research is “relationship”. According to Phillips (2006, 36) “stakeholder

relationships are intangible assets” for organisations. Brand relationships may be perceived as stakeholder relationships, as there is one very important stakeholder group involved: the consumers. Phillips (2006, 38) says that the stakeholder relationships being the core value of organisations, the first thing to do in relationship management is to identify the relationship partners (stakeholders) and the nature of the relationships. So what this research has to offer for the organisational communication and public relations’ field is more attention to both brand relationships and stakeholder relationships, and how to examine them.

This thesis has seized the phenomenon of relationships, and examined it in the crossroads of consumer research, brand management, organisational communication and public relations. The results of this research may not be generalized, but at some level they may be applied to other stakeholder relationships. This research also brings consumer research and brand management yet a bit closer to organisational communication and public relations.

Monitoring and dialogue seem to have as much role in brand relationships as they do in stakeholder relationships. And why wouldn’t they? One of the interviewees of this research (INT5) said that the brand feels closer, when there is dialogue with a brand representative. Two other interviewees (INT1, INT3) said that the choices made by the brand and the brand’s values affect the way they see the brand and feel about the brand. All these actions by the brand may be highlighted with the right kind of communications and marketing. So what this research has to offer both scientifically and in practice is what has been stated already in the beginning: understanding and deeper knowledge. It hopefully also offers new thoughts on how to examine or view stakeholders and their meaning in the organisation’s operational environment.

Branding seems to be an expanding concept, that isn’t exercised anymore only by the corporations, but also by regular people for example in applying for a job (Parmentier et al. 2013, 373). As this research showed the consumers also seem to understand branding and brands better than some time ago. From the consumers’ point of view how an organization manages its brands might have an affect on their reputation and image.

5.2 Evaluation and limitations of research

Defining the theoretical framework for this research wasn't easy. The field of CBR is very small, but it contains big concepts and phenomena that have been researched for a lot longer period of time. CBR needed to be presented as the biggest element of the theoretical framework, because hierarchically it was the main concept. The big concepts such as brand loyalty and brand love had been researched already so much that choosing the most suitable theories for this research from the field was troublesome, as the researchers in the CBR field didn't necessarily have coherent samplings of the concepts included. Some of the researchers talked only about brand attachment and brand commitment, whereas some talked about customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and basically they might have meant the same things. In addition, the concepts might to some extent also include each other, and scholars might have different perceptions about the hierarchy of different concepts.

However, as stated before in this research the model for the theoretical framework and the empirical research came strongly from Fetcherin and Conway Dato-on's (2012) research, as it had the most essential concepts presented in the same hierarchical manner as was wanted in this research. This approach proved to be practical and useful.

During the interviews the hardest part was not to be too leading, especially with a subject with what the interviewees weren't necessarily aware or sure of their feelings. There were often situations where the interviewee didn't exactly know what the question was about or the researcher knew a word for what the interviewee was explaining. In these situations it seemed questionable for the researcher to help interviewees to find the words and thoughts, because it might be interpreted as influencing and planting thoughts.

However, because the interviews were supposed to be more like conversations and not pure interviews, and if the help seemed to be justified, the researcher sometimes helped the interviewees with the answers by offering word options for what they might have been looking for, but also to clarify whether the interviewees were meaning what the researcher thought they were meaning. So the help was justified partly for reaching a mutual understanding. The help was also always offered by a question such as "do you mean love with this feeling?" and not "so it was love". The interviewees

always responded clearly and simply whether the researcher had understood them correctly.

Only one interviewee expressed thinking once of the help that he was being steered to answer in a certain way and that words were being put into his mouth. The situation was however a misunderstanding, and by explaining what the researcher meant, a mutual understanding was found quickly about the situation and about the interview subject. The incident however strengthened the researcher's need to be even more careful with the help, and how to phrase it. All in all the questions should have been less abstract and challenging to understand. Almost every interviewee asked "what was the question" at some point, because they didn't understand the question. This would have decreased the need of help.

Four out of six interviewees expressed amusement during the interviews towards the subject and content of the interviews. According to them a thought of having a relationship with a brand sounded funny. This wasn't however expressed dismissively, but with a sort of empathized and amused understanding and admittance that the interviewees really did have a relationship with a brand. The amused reaction might also affiliate with the Finns' cultural difficulty with the word 'love' that is so firmly associated with the word 'relationship', and they might not have wanted to see brand relationships as major as relationships between human beings. In addition to this five out of six interviewees said at the end of the interview that they hadn't previously realized that what kinds of feelings the brand actually evokes in them. Half of the interviewees described that the interview felt more like a therapy session. In researcher's interpretation this means that the interviewees worked hard when searching for their feelings and thoughts during the interviews, and that they learned something new about themselves.

Even though every interviewee was eventually able to empathize with the interview subject and the brand of their choice, the researcher felt that it would had been beneficial if all of the interviewees had been pre-interviewed about the brand of choice. At least two of the professional interviewees picked a brand from their work, because they knew they represented a professional sampling. Work-relatedness wasn't however a requirement for the brand choices for the professional interviewees. The researcher speculated after the interviews that could the professionals have found a better food brand in their leisure time and could the attitude had possibly been more emancipated in this situation? If so, it might have changed the

results. Also INT2 (Heinz) might have had a very different set of answers, if the brand of choice had been discussed with her in advance. The brand might have been something very different, such as champagne like INT2 herself mentioned during the interview. However, the choice was their own, and they were briefed into choosing the most obvious and important brands, so this wasn't problematized too much.

After the interview with INT4 (Parmigiano Reggiano) the definition of a brand needed to be taken a look at, as the researcher weren't sure whether Parmigiano Reggiano would actually be a brand - or that could the interview with INT4 be used in the research. Parmigiano Reggiano is actually a cheese type - Parmesan cheese - that is "a product with the Protected Designation of Origin (P.D.O.)" (Parmigiano Reggiano 2016). This means that the cheese called Parmigiano Reggiano could be manufactured only in certain areas in Italy (cp. champagne and sparkling wine).

The reason why Parmigiano Reggiano was however accepted as a brand in the research was, that there aren't any specific Parmesan brands that would stand out more than the others - unlike champagne brands (e.g. Dom Perignon, Mœt, Mumm and Veuve Cliquet). When people talk about Parmigiano Reggiano, they don't usually categorize that which manufacturer's Parmesan they mean. In addition to this Parmigiano Reggiano has its own logo for identifiability and INT4's feelings towards Parmigiano Reggiano were passionate even though any single brands weren't mentioned. Parmigiano Reggiano might not be a brand in the clearest way, but for INT4 it seemed to have the same significance, which in researcher's opinion was the most important factor when evaluating the brand.

The biggest speculation about the evaluation of the research was the interview frame, as its functionality raised some questions to the researcher during and after the interviews. At the end of the research the researcher wasn't satisfied with the interview questions and the attributes condensed from them and the sources. There should have been more questions about brand loyalty as the concept had been divided into two different types of brand loyalty (attitudinal and behavioural).

Parasociality didn't show strongly in the interview results, and with the one interviewee (INT5) that did show it rather strongly, it wasn't that clear that it really was a parasocial relationship. Those who showed even a bit

parasociality seemed to have also interpersonality in their relationships, so it wasn't easy to interpret which relationship type did they actually represent.

Brand love as a concept was a hard one to begin with. The interviewees might have talked quite warmly about the brands during the interviews and used really warm words, but when asked directly about brand love, the answers were a bit contradictory (e.g. INT4 and INT2). INT5 on the other hand had the opposite affect: she admitted brand love and talked openly about her feelings towards the brand, but then again the feelings didn't seem to be that deep.

The challenging of the interview frame led the researcher to consider whether the frame and the meters of each theme perhaps weren't the best possible for this research, and that they might be beneficial to re-evaluate and further investigate. However, the researcher thinks that despite the interview questions the interviews did offer good material for the analysis, and that the research truly did offer something new about the nature of brand relationships.

5.3 Implications for the future research

This research was naturally quite approximate and undetailed overview of consumer-brand relationships. It appears that the field hasn't been researched a lot in Finland yet, but other international researches (e.g. Fetscherin 2014; Albert et al. 2008) have shown that also in this subject there are cultural differences that ought to be examined more. In researcher's opinion understanding the cultural differences might help deciphering the nature of the consumer-brand relationships, and how to use them in organizational communications and public relations. It would also have a meaning for international companies that how the relationships between consumers and their brands vary around the world, and what is internationally appreciated in brand relationships.

The relationships between consumers and brands should also be investigated more deeply: motives for choosing a particular brand and maintaining a relationship with it, in what kind of situations does the consumer think about the brand, how have the brands changed consumers' lives, have they ever considered breaking up with the brand etc. In addition to his the subject that was lightly touched but not particularly discussed during the interviews was the actual communications in the relationships: in which manner does the

consumer speak to the brand and vice versa, do the consumers follow the brands in social media and engage with them, what kind of communications do the consumers appreciate from the brand, and what kind of communications are they experiencing already from the brand etc.

As neither interpersonal nor parasocial relationships don't seem to offer a so called "bullseye" answer to the nature of brand relationships (not that it would be even appropriate in science), there might be a need for more broad set of different relationship types. This research indicated that consumer-brand relationships aren't purely like interpersonal relationships between people, nor are they in researcher's opinion like parasocial relationships either. Therefore there has to be some sort of relationship type that fits better in brand relationships.

Luckily the field is growing and produces new research material quite often. The research is unfortunately focused at the moment mainly in the US, and to some extent in Europe, but the Nordic countries should definitely take part in the research more for a broader standpoint and also from other contexts than just the food brands.

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APPENDIX 1

The Interview Frame

Teema 1: INTERPERSONAALINEN SUHDE (Hendrick & Hendrick 1986; Lee 1973/1976)

- IS1 Miellätkö brändin ystäväksesi?
- IS2 Koetko, että ystävyttesi brändiä kohtaan on kehittynyt joksikin vahvemmaksikin positiiviseksi tuntemukseksi brändiä kohtaan? Osaisitko kuvailla tunnetta?
- IS3 Luuletko, että tulette aina olemaan ystäviä brändin kanssa? Miksi?
- IS4 Koetko, että syvät, positiiviset tunteet brändiä kohtaan ovat niin syviä, koska ne ovat kehittyneet alun perin ystävydestä brändin kanssa?
- IS5 Onko ystävyys brändin kanssa kehittynyt positiiviseksi tuntemukseksi ajan kanssa vai ns. ensi silmäyksellä (tai kokemuksella)?
- IS6 Onko rakkaussuhteesi brändiä kohtaan ennemmin erittäin syvä ystävyyssuhde kuin mysteerinen ja mystinen (määrittelemän) suuri tunne brändiä kohtaan?
- IS7 Koetko, että sinun ja lempibrändisi välillä on vuorovaikutuksellisuutta tai vuoropuhelua? Miten se ilmenee? (UUSI; Fournier 1998)
- IS8 Koetko mitkään seuraavista ihmissuhdemuodoista samanlaisiksi kuin suhteesi lempibrändiisi? Kerro ääneen valintasi sekä perustelu valinnalle. (UUSI; Fournier 1998)
(Järjestetty avioliitto, kasuaali kaveruus, avioliitto mukavuussyistä, sitoutunut kumppanuus, paras ystävä, lokeroitu ystävyys, sukulaisuus, laastarisuhde, lapsuuden ystävä, kosiskelu/riiuttelupari, riippuvainen, irtosuhde, salasuhde, pakkosuhde)

Teema 2: PARASOSIAALINEN SUHDE (Perse & Rubin 1989)

- PS1 Harmittaako sinua, jos kuulet negatiivisia uutisia lempibrändistäsi? Miten reagoit niihin?
- PS2 Saako lempibrändisi tuntemaan olosi mukavaksi, ikään kuin olisitte ystäviä? Millä tavoin ja miksi?

- PS3 Näetkö lempibrändisi luonnollisena, helposti lähestyttävänä ja maanläheisenä henkilönä? Näetkö lempibrändisi jonkinlaisena muuna henkilönä?
- PS4 Koetko, ettet malta odottaa, että pääsisit jälleen tekemisiin lempibrändisi kanssa?
- PS5 Kaipaanko lempibrändiäsi, kun näet muita samankaltaisia brändejä?
- PS6 Koetko, että lempibrändisi ymmärtää, mitä tarvitset elämässäsi?
- PS7 Jos lehdessä olisi juttu lempibrändistäsi, niin lukisitko sen?
- PS8 Koetko lempibrändisi koskaan saavuttamattomaksi ja etäiseksi? (UUSI; Horton & Wohl 1956)
- PS9 Koetko, että sinulla on hankaluuksia kehittää suhdettanne yhdessä tasavertaisesti lempibrändisi kanssa eteenpäin? Miten? (UUSI; Horton & Wohl 1956)
- PS10 Koetko, että lempibrändisi ajattelee samoin sinusta kuin sinä hänestä? Millä tavalla koet brändin ajattelevan sinusta? (UUSI; Horton & Wohl 1956)

Teema 3: BRÄNDIHISTORIA (Albert et al. 2008)

- BH1 Minkälaisia muistoja lempibrändisi herättää sinussa? Voit kertoa yksittäisiä muistoja.
- BH2 Koetko suhteenne kestäneen jo kauan lempibrändisi kanssa?
- BH3 Onko lempibrändisi koskaan pettänyt luottamustasi? Miten?
- BH4 Kuinka kauan olet tuntenut lempibrändisi?
- BH5 Koetko käyttäneesi lempibrändiäsi pitkään?
- BH6 Kun mietit lempibrändiäsi, niin tuleeko mieleesi nostalgisia muistoja lapsuudestasi?

Teema 4: BRÄNDILOJAALIUS (Quester & Lim 2003)

Attitudinal brand loyalty

- BLa1 Koetko olevasi sitoutunut lempibrändiisi ja uskollinen sille? Miten se ilmenee?
- BLa2 Kiinnitätkö enemmän huomiota lempibrändiisi kuin sen kilpailijoihin tai muihin vastaaviin brändeihin?

Behavioral brand loyalty

- BLb1 Koetko tärkeäksi valita ja käyttää lempibrändiäsi muiden brändien sijaan? Miksi?
- BLb2 Ostatko lempibrändiäsi aina, koska pidät siitä niin paljon?

BLb3 Oletko suositellut tai voisitko kuvitella suosittelevasi lempibrändiäsi muille? (UUSI; Fetscherin 2014)

Teema 5: BRÄNDIRAKKAUS (Albert et al. 2008, Rubin 1970)

- BR1 Oletko viehättynyt lempibrändistäsi?
- BR2 Koetko sinulla olevan vahvoja tunteita lempibrändiäsi kohtaan?
- BR3 Koetko olevasi rakastunut lempibrändiisi?
- BR4 Tuntisitko olosi surkeaksi, jos et voisi enää käyttää lempibrändiäsi?