ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF BRAND LOVE

Jyväskylä University
School of Business and Economics

Master's Thesis

2021

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Subject: Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication
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ABSTRACT

Author	
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Title	
Antecedents and consequences of brand love	
Subject	Type of work
Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication	Master's thesis
Date	Number of pages
June 2021	46 + appendices
Abstract	
Brand love is a relatively new marketing related notion, that has proven to have several desirable consequences for brand managers. The conceptualization of the construct is still in its early stages, but the amount of brand love related studies has seen an increase during the las few decades. Today, the word "love" is often used to describe objects. However, when talking about objects or brands, the word might have a different meaning for consumers compared to situations when the word is used to describe relationships with other human beings. This study aimed to contribute to the already existing brand love research by examining potential antecedents and consequences of brand love, and creating a research model including constructs that were adopted from previous studies. The purposed antecedents for brand love included in this study were brand identification, brand trust and hedonic product value. The purposed consequences were brand commitment, active engagement and willingness to pay a price premium. Quantitative research method was used. The data collected was conducted by an online questionnaire, and a sample of 108 responses was received. IBM SPSS Statistics 24 was used at first to start the process of analysing the data. After that partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 3 was used to study the research model. Two of the six hypotheses set in the research model were supported. This was mainly due to high collinearity between the original constructs. According to the present study, brand love has a significant relationship with brand commitment. Brand love was also found to impact willingness to pay a price premium. This study supports the previous knowledge and existing theories of brand love having several desirable consequences for brand managers. Both brand commitment and willingness to pay price premiums have been discovered to be consequences of brand love in previous studies, and this study supports these findings as well.	
Key words	
Brand Love, Brand Trust, Brand Identification, Brand Commitment, Active Engagement, Willingness to pay a Price Premium	
Place of storage	
Jyväskylä University Library	

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Tekijä	
Katariina Leskinen	
Työn nimi	
Brändirakkauteen vaikuttavat tekijät ja seuraukset	
Oppiaine	Työn laji
Digital Marketing and Corporate Communication	Pro gradu -tutkielma
Päivämäärä	Sivumäärä
Kesäkuu 2021	46 + liitteet

Tiivistelmä

Brändirakkaus on melko uusi markkinoinnin käsite, jolla on osoitettu olevan markkinoinnin ammattilaisten näkökulmasta haluttuja seurauksia. Brändirakkauden käsite sekä sen muodostuminen ovat vielä melko aikaisessa vaiheessa, mutta viimeisen parin vuosikymmenen aikana on ollut havaittavissa kasvua aiheen liittyvien tutkimusten määrässä. Tänä päivänä on hyvin tyypillistä käyttää sanaa rakkaus, esimerkiksi jotakin tavaraa kuvailtaessa. Kun kuluttaja kuvailee tavaraa tai brändiä sanalla rakkaus, voi tämän sanan merkitys olla hänelle kuitenkin hyvin erilainen, kuin esimerkiksi suhdetta jonkin toisen ihmisen kanssa kuvailtaessa.

Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena oli tukea aiempaa ymmärrystä brändirakkaudesta tutkimalla brändirakkauteen vaikuttavia tekijöitä sekä seurauksia. Tutkimuksessa laadittiin tutkimusmalli, jonka muuttujat olivat omaksuttu aikaisemmista brändirakkaustutkimuksista. Tutkimus toteutettiin määrällisenä tutkimuksena, kvantitatiivista tutkimusmenetelmää käyttäen. Aineisto kerättiin verkkokyselylomakkeen avulla. Tutkimukseen vastasi 108 henkilöä. Ensin aineisto analysoitiin käyttäen IBM SPSS Statistics -ohjelmistoa, jonka jälkeen tutkimusmalli rakennettiin ja analysoitiin SmartPLS 3 -ohjelmistossa.

Tutkimuksessa asetettiin kuusi hypoteesia, joista tulokset tukivat kahta. Tämä johtui lähinnä siitä, että analyysivaiheissa ei saatu kaikkia alkuperäisiä faktoreita identifioitua. Tulosten perusteella brändirakkauden seurauksia ovat brändiin sitoutuneisuus sekä halukkuus maksaa lisähintaa brändin tuotteista tai palveluista.

Tämä tutkimus tukee aiempaa ymmärrystä sekä olemassa olevaa teoriaa siitä, että brändirakkauteen liittyy useita markkinoinnin ammattilaisten näkökulmasta haluttuja seurauksia. Sekä brändiin sitoutuneisuuden että halukkuuden maksaa lisähintaa on todettu olevan brändirakkauden seurauksia myös aikaisemmissa alan tutkimuksissa.

Asiasanat

Brändirakkaus, brändiluottamus, brändi-identifikaatio, brändisitoutuneisuus, aktiivinen vuorovaikutus, halukkuus maksaa lisähintaa
Säilytyspaikka Jyväskylän yliopiston kirjasto

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1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces some of the most important previous studies related to brand love research and mentions the key constructs connected to the topic. In addition, the research aims and objectives are stated along with the motivational drivers to conduct this study. In the end of this chapter, the research structure is presented.

1.1   Research background

Nowadays the word "love" is used as often to describe objects or activities as to describe other human beings. We can hear it constantly, from "I love football" to "I love your shoes" (Ahuvia, 2005). In addition, many companies that are specialized in branding consulting and advertising, for example Accenture, have offered love results, love indicators, and love line ups for brands (Moussa, 2019). Brand managers have also started adding love related nuances in the brands that they are managing. For instance, McDonald's has a catchphrase "I'm loving it!" (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020). However, the word "love" may have a completely different meaning for consumers when describing objects compared to describing relationships or feelings toward other human beings (Moussa, 2019).

Previous literature suggests that it is possible for consumers to develop strong emotional bonds with brands (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra et al., 2012). Brand love is a notion that is related to marketing, and it has been developed quite recently. Brand love is explained as a state of intense emotional connection that a human being maintains for some brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Studies on brand love have increased during the last two decades (Ahuvia et al., 2020), due to the several desirable consequences that have been related to the construct. Examples of these desirable consequences include brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), word-of-mouth (Batra et al., 2012), brand commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013), willingness to forgive brand negligence (Bauer et al., 2009), publicly praising the brand (Batra et al., 2012) and willingness to pay a price premium (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Understanding brand love is relevant for both scholars and brand managers, because of these desirable organizational consequences.

Contributing to the already existing brand love literature by examining potential antecedents and consequences and developing and testing a conceptual research model which includes constructs that will be adapted from previous brand love related studies, are the primary purposes of this study.

1.2   Objectives of the study

In this study, the purpose is to investigate whether brand identification and brand trust, along with hedonic product value will cause consumers to love brands using a framework, where brand love is the theoretical centre of the study. Also, this study examines whether active engagement, brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium are the consequences of brand love in the context of this study. The following research questions are composed in this thesis:

RQ1. "Does brand identification impact brand love?"
RQ2. "Does brand trust impact brand love?
RQ3. "Does hedonic product value impact brand love?"
RQ4. "Does active engagement impact brand love?"
RQ5. "Does brand love impact brand commitment?"
RQ6. "Does brand love impact willingness to pay a price premium?"

It is acceptable to study this theme because of several different motives. The brand love construct is relevant, because it has proven to cause many important and desirable brand-related outcomes (Ahuvia et al., 2020). In this study, a few of those outcomes will be examined more precisely. Brand love's outcome variables that will be focused on in this study include brand commitment, active engagement and willingness to pay a price premium. In previous research, brand love related studied outcome variables have included word-of-mouth (WOM) (Batra et al., 2012) and brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), among others. Another positive end result of brand love include the possibility of gaining greater than average shareholder returns, when companies manage to initiate brand love among its customers (Baker et al., 2015). Today, organizations have already understood that when aiming to create meaningful relationships with customers, the feeling of love is an essential component in this process, and in order to make those relationships long-lasting as well, love needs to be in the core of this too. The organizations that manage to make customers fall in love with their brand become more successful than their competitors that are not able to do the same (Roberts, 2006).

In this study, the quantitative research approach will be used for the explanatory research, because it makes it possible to identify the causal relationships by gathering a large amount of data in a structured form (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 129, 131). Also, a majority of studies conducted earlier concerning brand love have been executed using quantitative methods (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020). The gathering of the data will be done by using an online questionnaire, which will be shared via the author's social media profiles (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn). The collected data will be analysed using the IBMS SPSS software and SmartPLS 3 as well.

1.3   Study structure

Five separate chapters are included in this study. In the second chapter, existing theoretical knowledge is presented. Moreover, hypotheses are proposed and the research model is presented. The methodological considerations of the study are discussed in the third chapter. The results of this study are reported in the fourth chapter. Finally, the fifth chapter presents both theoretical and managerial conclusions. In addition, the limitations of this study and recommendations for future studies are announced in the final chapter of this study.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In this chapter a theoretical framework for the study is introduced. The theoretical framework is constructed with the concept of brand love as its centre. Also, other concepts including brand identification, brand trust, hedonic product value, active engagement, brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium are presented. Hypotheses will be purposed based on these concepts and brand love studies that have been conducted earlier and are also introduced in this chapter. At the end of this chapter, a conceptual research model is presented. The research model will be built on the theory examined in the beginning of this chapter.

2.1 Brand love

2.1.1 Brand love conceptualization

Brand love has become a relevant topic among both marketing academics and brand managers, but it is still considered a fairly new concept (Ahuvia et al., 2020). Shimp and Madden (1988) first mentioned the topic in their brief conceptual paper "Consumer-Object Relations: A Conceptual Framework Based Analogously on Sternberg's Triangle Theory of Love" in 1988. According to their work, consumers' love feelings towards brands are almost equal to interpersonal love feelings. In fact, a conceptual model called "consumer-object relationships" inspired by the triangular theory of love has been created by Sternberg (1986). In this model, three of the Sternberg's love related elements (intimacy, passion and decision/commitment) become liking, yearning and decision/ commitment in consumer surroundings.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) are the academics behind the leading papers on brand love. According to their work (2006), brand love is a bond including intense and psychological elements a pleased customer maintains for a certain brand. They also argue that brand love includes five connected features: infatuation for the brand, closeness the brand, positive assessment of the brand, maintaining positive emotions for the brand, and publicly stating love toward the brand.

Batra et al. (2012) investigated the features and outcomes of brand love, in order to uncover the different components of how consumers experience the construct, and suggested assumptions of the quality of the brand as a preceding of brand love. In addition, they suggested the following outcome variables for brand love, as well: brand loyalty, WOM and opposition to negative information. They created a higher-order model (Figure 1) with seven central features that are

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as follows: "self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviours, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, positive overall attitude valence, attitude certainty and confidence (strength), and anticipated separation distress, in order to under-stand how consumers actually experience brand love."
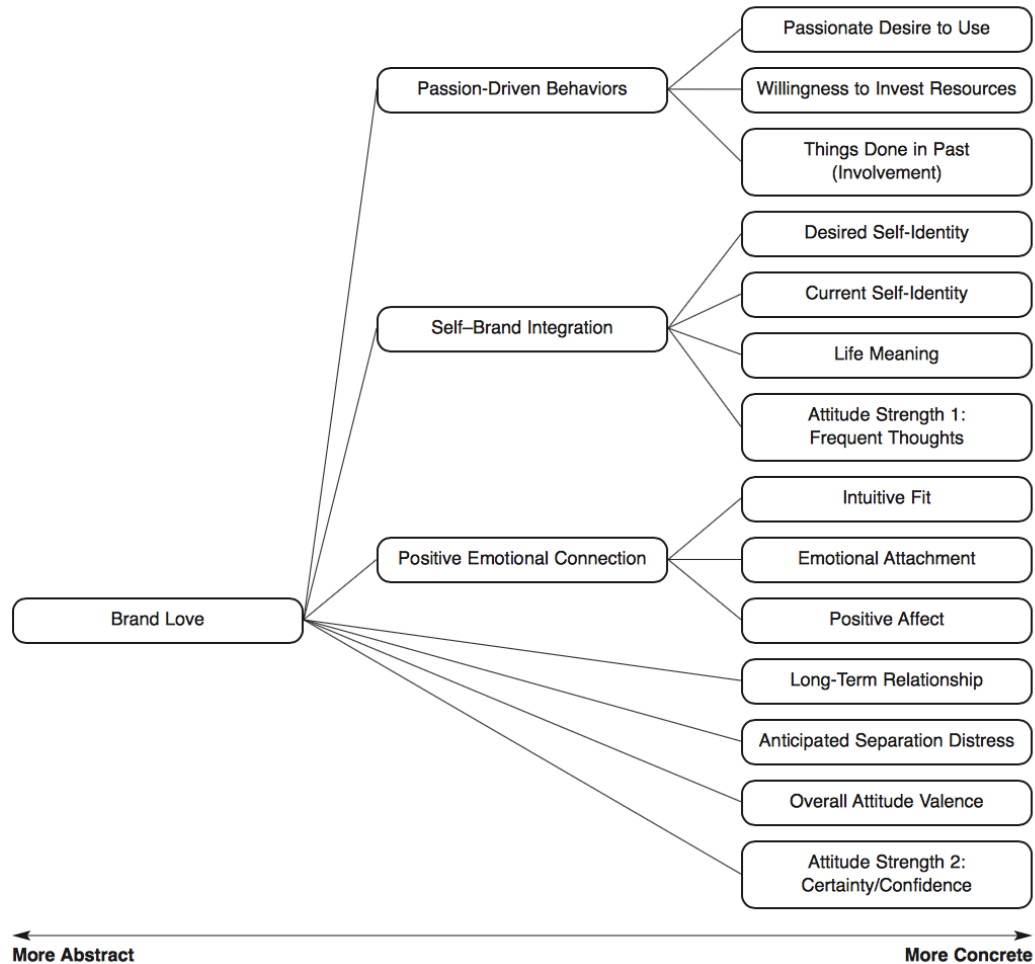
FIGURE 1   Higher-order brand love factor model by Batra et al. (2012)

Brand love has also been seen as "fanaticism" for a specific brand. What is meant by this is that consumers are influenced by the love that is maintained for a specific brand and that they will not consume alternative tradenames even though they would maintain a similar offering (Coelho et al., 2019). This phenomenon has been explained through brand communities. If a consumer belongs to a brand community, other participants may forbid the consumer of breaking bonds with the brand by resistance. It is similar to a situation when a consumer loves a brand, and it may be difficult, or even impossible, to break the bond that exists connecting the consumer and the brand. Participating in brand community activities can in some cases strengthen the affectional relationship between the consumer and the brand (Vernuccio et al., 2015).

Also, brand love differs from satisfaction. Brand love is an indication of a more powerful relationship between a customer and a brand compared to brand attitude or satisfaction (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Satisfaction is considered to be a more cognitive and logical decision, brand love is more perceptual. Moreover, brand love is a continuing partnership, and satisfaction is a consequence that is more commercial (Coelho et al., 2019). However, some scholars have determined brand love to be a state of satisfaction, and described it to be an event come across by some content customers, but not all (Albert & Merunka, 2013).

The concept of brand love has not yet been constructed strictly, and due to this, several different kinds of explanations have emerged (Albert et al., 2008). Due to this the outlines of the construct have stayed unclear, and scholars have applied various explanations and definitions related to the construct. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have phrased brand love to be an unidimensional matter, in comparison to Albert et al. (2008) who have approached brand love from a perspective that related brand love to eleven different dimensions.

Academics have also been torn by which viewpoint they choose to study brand love. Some scholars have chosen to study brand love using interpersonal love theory, others favour one-way para-social perspectives. Also, the grounded theory approach has been used to scrutinize brand love. (Palusuk et al., 2019). Like mentioned before, even though brand love is quite a new construct, still, there are several different lines of research that have been implemented on studying the construct so far. In this study, brand love is studied using an unidimensional scale by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), which is based on the interpersonal theory of love.

2.1.2 Brand love and interpersonal love

Brand love has its roots in interpersonal theory of love (Fournier, 1998). According to Fournier (1998), consumers may experience love-like feelings towards brands. She states that the consumers may be capable of developing feelings towards brands and build a deep connection with brands.

In psychology, love means an adoring relation among two human beings (Shaver et al., 1987) that have developed an extensive interpersonal bond with each other (Guerrero & Andersen, 2000) and want to maintain the relation in the future, as well (Shaver et al., 1996). In the previous academic literature related to psychology, various different modes of love have been examined (Lee, 1977; Taraban & Hendrick, 1995). A triangular theory of love that consists of three different parts have been defined by Sternberg (1986). These three different parts include: affinity, passion along with decision/commitment. Fournier (1998) argues that love tends to be the strongest form of a relation a specific tradename can establish with a customer. The connection that a customer can build with a brand may be associated with different kinds of extensions of closeness. These extensions include both non-cognitive and social-emotional extensions (love/passion and self-relation) (Fournier, 1998). Also, according to Fournier

(1998), interpersonal love is at the centre of all deep alliances that a consumer may build with a brand.

However, brand love and interpersonal love have also been described as unequal. Brand love is considered to be unidirectional whereas interpersonal love has been seen as a bifacial concept. In addition, it is not likely that consumers would feel similar feelings of passion in consumer-brand relationships that they feel in interpersonal love relationships (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Langer, Schmidt and Fischer (2015) view interpersonal love as more arousing matter compared to brand love whereas brand love is seen as a construct that holds benefits that are more logical compared to interpersonal love. Because of this they argue that interpersonal love is not the same as brand love (Langer et al., 2015).

2.1.3 Brand love in consumer-brand relationships

Research that has been conducted earlier related to relations between consumers and brands have examined various relationship constructs including brand commitment (Fullerton, 2005) and brand identification (Esacalas and Bettman, 2003). In addition, brand love, which is also a relationship related construct, has been studied in the consumer-brand relationship domain (Alber & Merunka, 2013).

A consumer-brand relationship is the bond or connection between a consumer and a brand (Fournier, 1994). A brand is what the consumer thinks about when the brand's label is brought up (Aaker, 1997). Consumers often associate brands with characteristics that are similar to natures of other people (Aaker, 1997), which becomes a foundation for constructing a bond between the consumer and the brand (Fournier, 1998). Brands have several different purposes, and one of them is related relations and forming bonds between customers and the brand itself. In this function, the brand is built so as it would have a personality of its own. This personality makes it possible for the brand to construct a relationship with consumers. (Hankinson, 2004). One of the first academics to study the relationships among customers and brands was Bowlby (1979), who discovered that humans are usually very faithful and devoted towards matters they identify to be attached to and maintain love for. Successful corporations have evolved their marketing operations and switched from marketing functions that are more commercial and only focused on transactions to marketing functions that concentrate on building relationships with customers (Berry, 1995; Fournier, 1998). This is due to the various advantages a meaningful relationship between a brand and a consumer provides for corporations (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Many different types of relationships may develop between a consumers and a brand depending on how personal and close the bond is (Aggarwal, 2004). According to Albert and Merunka (2013), brand love stems from consumer-brand relationships and not only from brand characteristics.

2.1.4 Brand love in digital environments

According to Baena (2016), website development is not enough for developing brand love. However, he argues that implementing interactive social media elements for example blogs and a YouTube channel can influence fan community engagement and development. Fan communities can influence brand love. Wallace et al. (2014) state that shoppers that maintain love for a tradename may spread WOM online (eWOM) on Facebook, for example.

In fact, Mittal (2016) argues that "liking" a brand's Facebook page and brand love are connected in a positive manner. Also, according to Mittal (2016), "liking" a Facebook page of a brand is also positively connected with WOM and intentions to make purchases. Wallace, Buil and Cherantony (2017) have also studied "liking" brands online. According to Wallace et al. (2017), if a consumer feels a strong sense of identification with a brand that he or she "likes" on Facebook, this is positively connected to brand love and spreading WOM. It is proved in earlier literature that WOM is a significant antecedent of brand love (Batra et al., 2008; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). WOM is also a form of the boarded construct called active engagement (Berglvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

2.2 Research model development

In the following part of this chapter, the purposed antecedents and consequences of brand love are introduced. These proposals have their foundation in previous brand love related studies. Also, hypotheses are proposed and the research model is drawn. The antecedents and consequences proposed for brand love in this study are adopted from previous brand love related studies.

2.2.1 The antecedents and consequences of brand love

In order to fully comprehend the idea behind the brand love concept it is essential to understand its antecedents and consequences. Still today quite little is known about the notions that initiate a love relationship among consumers and tradenames, even though brand love is one of the key elements of building those relationships. Also, not a lot is known about the behavioural outcomes of these love relationships (Albert & Merunka, 2013). In other words, despite of brand love's obvious advantages, research on it is still quite limited and the concept has not been fully developed. Some of the already recognized antecedents for brand love include brand trust (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016), self-expressive brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), and brand commitment (Albert & Merunka, 2013). This study includes brand identification, brand trust and hedonic product value as the studied antecedents of brand love. The consequences purposed in this study include active engagement, brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium.

2.2.2 Brand identification

Brand identification is an emerging branding related construct that is connected to the consumer's position of identity (Kuenzel & Vaux Halliday, 2008). The concept has its roots in the identification between a consumer and an organization (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) in addition to theory that is related to social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). In the context of social identity theory, people are often times seen to strengthen their own personal recognition of their self in addition to their self-assurance, by identifying with a specific group of other people (Tajfel, 1978). Just like the groups of other people, brands are seen as enhancers of symbolic meanings, that may help consumers to achieve the needs and goals that are related to the consumers' identification with his or her own self (Donavan, Brown & Mowen, 2004; Lam et al., 2013). The extent to which a consumer feels to be equal with a certain tradename, is the formulation of the brand identification concept (Stokburger-Sauer, Ratneshwar & Sen, 2012). In addition, brands may help consumers communicate their identities to others (Stockburger-Sauer et al., 2012).

Brand identification is construct that is formative in nature, and it consists of three dimensions, which include observational dimensions, emotional outcomes of brand usage and evaluating one's identification. This third dimension is related to the estimation of the consumer of the value that his or her psychological feeling on equality with a specific brand provides (Lam et al., 2013). Sihvonen (2019) recognizes three different drivers for consumer-brand identification: personality driver, the lifestyle driver and the values driver. She states that brands and consumers both maintain personalities, purposes and values of their own. However, the consumer's personality, lifestyle and values can develop without any influence of a brand.

According to Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010), brand identification is utilized in discussions related to brands and personal identity, and the unity of these two consturcts. Brands are used as symbols of the self and ideal self by consumers. The concept of brand identification concerns brands and consumers' distinctive identity. It is possible for a consumer to use a specific tradename to describe his or her self to others (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010). Also, consumers may connect specific brands to some individuals (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Brand identification occurs when the brand image meets the consumer's image that he or she has about themselves (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Consumers tend to make brand related choices based on illustrative benefits, and not only based on other product features (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Brands are used to establish their selves, introduce themselves to others and/or achieve goals they have for their identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). A consumer can mirror his or her self and also communicate important parts of his or her identity to others by consuming specific brands (Fournier, 1998).

Different sources have been uncovered in earlier brand identification research related to the consumer's feeling of being similar compared to a specific tradename. These sources of the feeling of similarity include image of the brand,

brand personality or the values that the brand holds (Fournier 1998; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Another source related to the consumer's impression of being similar to a specific brand, is comparing themselves to the representative customer of the brand. This customer is the stereotypical customer who consumes the brand's products (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). According to Kressman et al. (2006), consumers tend to evaluate brands by examining their own perception of their selves and comparing it to a typical person that consumes the brand's products. Because this second source is related to the level a consumer identifies with the typical customer of the brand it is called "customer identification". The complete concept of brand identification includes brand identification and customer identification (Albert & Merunka, 2013).

According to Ahuvia (2005), loved objects are vital for people's sense of oneness. The more a person feels like he or she is one with a specific brand, the higher the odds of the person to also love the brand. Consumers tend to buy brand merchandise that can act as an instrument of expressing their identity (Aaker, 1996). Also, previous studies uncover that a customer that feels equal, whole or one with a specific brand, is more likely to develop emotions that are positive for that brand (Harrison-Walker, 2001). In order to experience the emotion of love, a person must feel like he or she is part of the other human being or product (Ahuvia, 1993). This idea is adopted from the self-inclusion theory of love by Aron and Aron (1986), which has also been used in marketing related research before.

For a consumer to form love emotions towards an organization, the organization must maintain similar standards and principals as the consumer does, and the organization must be able to express these standards and principals to others. Moreover, then the consumer can feel as he or she has things in common with the organization or brand. (Ahuvia, 1993; Batra et al., 2012). According to Batra et al. (2012), shoppers tend to describe the products that they love to maintain similar features and characteristics as themselves. Thus, for brand love to accrue a consumer needs to maintain an emotion of psychological proximity together with the tradename (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Brand identification influences brand love.

2.2.3 Brand trust

Trust is considered to be a core element of any valuable social interaction (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). In social science and psychology selflessness (Frost et al., 1978), thoughtfulness along with righteousness (Larzelere & Huston, 1980) are constructs often used to describe trust. Trust among human beings is an impression of dependability and a belief that the other person's behaviour will take the other person's favour in mind. Trusting an organization or a brand means that the consumer feels secure about the brand's products and services (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). The base of the feeling of trust felt by consumers

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towards brands consists of two dimensions. The other dimension is linked to the tradename's reliability evaluated from the customer's viewpoint, and the other dimension is linked to the intentions that the tradename may hold related to the consumer.

In brand reliability, the consumer believes that the tradename will respond to the shopper's needs. Answering needs in this context may refer to, for example, a certain level of quality in the brand's offering that is maintained repeatedly (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). In the context of this dimension, the brand is viewed to maintain a pledge of being consistent with quality in the future, as well (Deighton, 1992). If the brand is consistent with this, the consumers' trust for the brand will be ongoing, and increase his or her repurchase intentions each buying occasion at a time (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003). Brand intention can be connected to the reliance in that the brand, and that it will not take advantage or misguide the consumer in buying and other consumption related situations. Not offering customer service or helping the consumer when problems might arise related to, for instance, the brand's products after purchasing, is an example of a situation related to this (Delgado-Ballester et al., 2003).

When building significant relationships with brands and shoppers, trust plays a crucial part in this equation (Albert & Merunka, 2013). In these relationships between a tradename and a customer, trust mirrors beliefs about how honest and true the tradename is in the eyes of the consumer (Hess, 1995). This form of trust is constructed step by step following the consumer's experiences and encounters with the organization (Albert & Merunka, 2013). When describing relationships that are related to love, the concept of trust is often times mentioned (Fehr, 1988). Brand trust is essential when ongoing bonds between consumers and organizations are trying to be built (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Moreover, brand trust has been proven to cause several desirable consequences from the brand's perspective especially. Examples of these desirable outcomes include higher levels of commitment and loyalty (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). All in all, where there is a love relationship, there needs to be trust, as well (Albert & Merunka, 2013.) Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Brand trust influences brand love.

2.2.4 Hedonic product value

Hedonic product value is something, that is personally defined by everyone (Landeira, Nique, Pinto & Borges, 2016). It is more related to the aspects of consuming products that involve symbolic and emotional aspects, compared to utilitarian product value, which is seen as more conscious with economic aspects (Babin, Darden & Griffin, 1994; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). Hedonic products, however, are often seen as fun, exciting and pleasurable. Examples of products that are associated with hedonic product value include different kinds of luxury products e.g. designer bags. In comparison, utilitarian products are often times more functional and instrumental. Examples of utilitarian products include

personal computers and microwaves (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). Typically in the hedonic evaluation of products they are not seen as merchandise alone, but also as objects that maintain symbolic benefits and pleasure, as well (Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). In addition, hedonic value may cause feelings of joyfulness and purchasing conditions that are enjoyable and exciting (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982). Hedonic value has also been proven to have a positive relationship with satisfaction. Consuming products that are seen as more hedonic than utilitarian tend to induce excitement and positive emotions which influences satisfaction (Chernev, 2004; Landeira et al., 2016).

According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), consumers maintain love that is more significant for brands that offer their customers products that are seen as hedonic. Hedonic value has been shown to affect shopping experiences and, in addition, the way the brand is assessed by consumers. Hedonic brands tend to be assessed more intuitively than utilitarian brands (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). However, if a brand's offering consists of products that are more hedonic compared to utilitarian, customers might not be as loyal to those brands compared to brands that offer utilitarian products, or products that offer both types of values. Hedonic value fulfils the needs of self-expression and status, conducting positive emotions and affection toward the brand. In previous studies hedonic value has been proven to have an effect on brand love (Karjaluoto et al., 2016). Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H3: Hedonic product value influences brand love.

2.2.5 Active engagement

According to Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010), active engagement consists WOM, frequently checking the brand's website, and consuming the brand's offering. Situations where active engagement occurs include scenarios where consumers are willing to use their time, energy and funds in the brand outside of purchase or consumption situations (Keller, 2003). The reason for adding active engagement in this study instead of WOM alone, which has been used more commonly as an outcome variable in brand love studies (e.g. Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016) is that according Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010), WOM may not be as relevant or achievable to all brands compared to active engagement depending on product categories, for example. As an example, according to Chung and Drake (2006), WOM might be more relevant and achievable for self-relevant rather than utilitarian products. Because active engagement is used in this study, a wider display of behaviors that may be significant to different types of product categories and brands are captured (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

As mentioned before, WOM is one form of active engagement (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). WOM is an informal form of communication between two consumers evaluating goods and services (Chung & Drake, 2006). Nowadays, WOM takes place in online environments, in addition to face-to-face

communication (Bilgihan et al., 2015). Online interaction between people has become part of our daily lives on social media sites, for example. This has offered a larger scale for consumers to interact with each other as well (Bilgihan et al., 2015). This form of WOM is called eWOM. From the perspective of brand managers, WOM is a very desirable outcome for brand love, since several positive outcomes are related to WOM. For example, WOM increases sales of brands operating in many different product categories (Chung & Drake, 2006). WOM is not easy to achieve for brands. Even though a customer would be satisfied with the brand and its offering, it still does not mean that the consumer would express this satisfaction to other consumers in the form of WOM (Chung & Drake, 2006). According to Chung and Drake (2006), the self-relevance of a brand can influence the amount of WOM the brand may receive.

Another form of active engagement is visiting the brand's website. Digitalization has made the brand's website more relevant and accessible for all consumers (Müller & Chandon, 2003). According to Müller and Chandon (2003), if a consumer maintains positive thoughts about the brand's website, the consumer's thoughts on the brand become even more positive, as well. Also, these positive thoughts about the website can make the brand seem more sincere and trustworthy. From the brand's perspective, consumers visiting its website may have several positive outcomes. In addition to engaging with the consumer (Bilgihan et al., 2015) and possibly increasing positive attitude (Müller & Chandon, 2017), the brand will gain more traffic to its website, which is highly beneficial from a digital marketing perspective (Berman & Katona, 2013). One of these benefits include better rankings on the search engines' research pages (Berman & Katona, 2013).

According to Ahuvia (2005), loved items tend to urge for a significant investment of time and energy. Also, Batra et al. (2012) find that talking about a brand to other people or even thinking about a specific tradename frequently is a significant aspect of brand love. In their study, all of their respondents found that the time they invested in just thoughts on the brand increased the amount of love they had for it. WOM, which is a disclosure of active engagement has been proven to have effect brand love in a positive manner (e.g. Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016), and Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) found a connection between active engagement and brand love, which was positive in nature. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Brand love influences active engagement.

2.2.6 Brand commitment

According to Fournier (1998), it is possible for customers to maintain an attachment for brands and build bonds with them. What is meant by brand commitment is that a consumer obtains a positive way of thinking about the brand and wants to maintain an ongoing partnership with it (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Evanschitzky et al., 2006). In other words, the consumer feels an

attachment towards the brand (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005). Consumers that feel strongly connected to a brand identify and trust the brand more, and also maintain an emotional bond with the brand compared to consumers that do not feel connected with the brand (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). It is important to observe brand commitment, because there are several positive outcomes related to the matter, which makes it a desirable aim for brand managers, and an interesting research object for academics. For example, according to Ahluwalia et al. (2000), consumers that maintain an attachment for a brand, tend to show refusal to accept unfavorable pieces of information related to the brand. In addition, Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) discovered that brand commitment has a positive connection with brand loyalty and repurchase behaviors. Affective commitment is also found to be a stronger driver for brand loyalty, compared to continuance commitment (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001).

Previous literature offers several conceptualizations for the different dimensions related to brand commitment (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Evanschitzky et al., 2006). One of the most influential conceptualizations related to commitment is by Allen and Meyer (1990). Their conceptualization includes three dimensions: affective, continuance and normative commitment. Also, Albert and Merunka (2013) have studied brand commitment in the context of brand love, including the components of affective and continuance commitment in their research. Affective commitment is seen to associate with the emotional connection that a consumer holds for a brand whereas continuance commitment refers to the potential costs of switching brands or even a perceived obligation to remain as a customer (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Albert & Merunka, 2013). In other words, continuance commitment is built, for example, based on cost related calculations, which causes a commitment to take place, not because the consumer feels that he or she specifically wants to maintain a bond with the brand (Evanschitzky et al., 2006). Continuance commitment might also be caused by a lack of options, ownership of the brand's loyalty card or even external pressure of some sort (Evanschitzky et al., 2006).

According to King and Grace (2009) continuance commitment alone might not cause favorable consumer behavior from the perspective of the brand to take place. Therefore, they suggest to add affective commitment, as well, to the conceptualization of brand commitment. Affective commitment is related to internally oriented attachments, while continuance commitment is more related to attachments that are externally oriented (King & Grace, 2009).

According to Fullerton (2005, 101), changing to another tradename due to expenses related to either financial resources or emotional resources are at the core of continuance commitment. From the consumer's perspective this can mean, for example, that other brands are not as interesting or switching brands would be too costly (Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Fullerton, 2005). In comparison, similar principals, identification, reliance and the feeling of closeness are at the core of affective bran commitment, since it is more related to the emotional aspects. (Fullerton, 2005, 100). According to Albert and Merunka (2013), affective

commitment and its emotional connection influence consumer behaviors like brand repurchase and WOM. Also, if a customer maintains an intense affect for a specific tradename, he or she should be willing to stay committed to that tradename and continue the relationship (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Albert and Merunka (2013) also found in their study a connection between brand love and brand commitment, that was positive in nature. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Brand love has an influence on brand commitment.

2.2.7 Willingness to pay a price premium

Aaker (1996) states that an organization or a brand maintains a price premium when the amount of money that consumers are willing to invest in the brand's offering is greater than the amount of money that they are pleased to invest in the brand's competitor's products. Price premium is possibly the best way to measure brand equity (Aaker, 1996), and it has also been considered as a mean of brand strength (Netemeyer et al., 2004). In this study, willingness to pay a price premium is investigated as a possible consequence of brand love. Even though price premium is quite a popular construct in the theory of branding, still there is relatively little research on which brand components price premium is a consequence of (Munir et al., 2017).

Product quality alone cannot explain the price shoppers feel comfortable investing for the brand's offering, however, some consumers might associate higher prices with higher quality (Anselmsson et al., 2014). In this study, price premium is related to the willingness to pay, and not reflecting real and current prices necessarily. Price premium is a reflective construct, and it is extremely relevant for all brands, since consumers might be willing to pay more of one tradename's products compared to another tradename's offering in the same genre of products (Anselmsson et al., 2014). Several positive and desirable outcomes for brand managers have been associated with willingness to pay a price premium. According to Doyle (2001), price premium is the key benchmark for creating stakeholder value, since no head-on expanses are created when aiming to ask for higher prices.

Karjaluoto et al. (2016) state that prices and price judgements have an important influence on buying behavior and loyalty formations, and price perception has also been discovered to have an impact on such consumer behaviors. According to Xia et al. (2004) price impacts customer behavior in a different way if the consumer is either loyal or disloyal to the brand. Aaker (1991) suggests that if a customer truly appreciates a brand he or she is accepting towards price increasements, as well. A consumer would be more accepting to changes in the prices, because losing a loved brand would be expensive as well, since it would be very stressful and could make the consumer feel anxious (Ahuvia, 1993; Thomson et al., 2005). Also, because a brand that is loved is appreciated and seen as distinctive (Albert et al., 2008), a customer ought to be

accepting to increases in prices, because there are no other options available for him or her, and he or she wants to maintain the positive emotions linked to the loved brand in the future as well. Thus, the following hypothesis is presented:

H6: Brand love influences willingness to pay a price premium.

2.3 Research model

The aim of the last part of this chapter is to draw a research model, that has its foundation in previous literature by adapting the measuring items from brand love related studies conducted earlier. Following the theoretical framework and presenting the hypotheses of this study the conceptual model and hypotheses are presented in Figure 1.
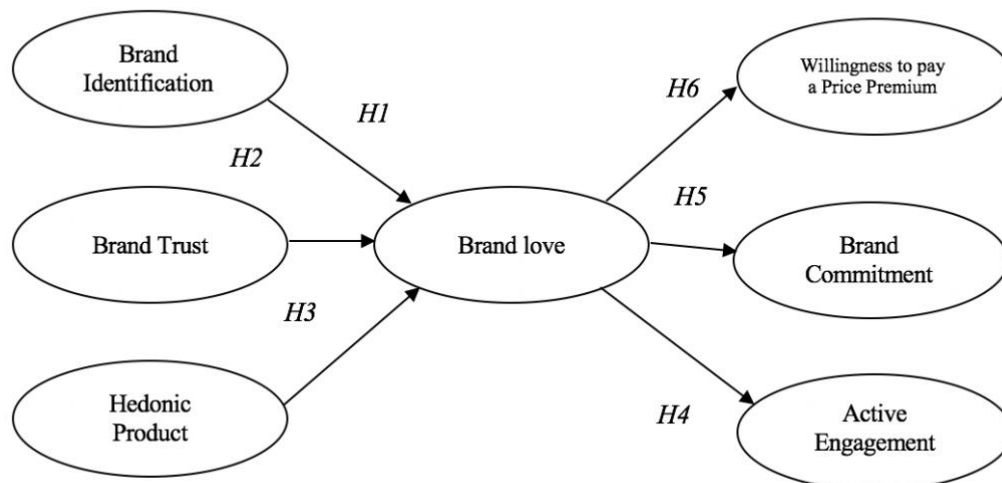
FIGURE 2   Research model

The purposed research model includes the hypotheses developed earlier in this chapter, and also, the literature that supports these hypotheses were introduced earlier in this chapter. The developed hypotheses are in line with the aims that were set for this study, and they predict the potential outcomes. Table 1 provides a summary of key supporting literature of the hypotheses.

TABLE 1   Key supporting literature for the hypotheses

Hypotheses	Key supporting literature
H1: Brand identification → Brand love	Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010) Albert & Merunka (2013)
H2: Brand trust → Brand love	Albert & Merunka (2013)
H3: Hedonic product → Brand love	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) Karjaluoto et al. (2016)
H4: Brand love → Active engagement	Begkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010)
H5: Brand love → Brand commitment	Albert & Merunka (2013)
H6: Brand love → Willingness to pay a price premium	Thomson et al. (2005) Albert & Merunka (2013)

3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the methodology used in this study. The data collection, items and scales used are presented. In addition, the choices and decisions made are justified in this chapter, and explained how they are in line with the objectives formed for this study.

3.1 Quantitative research

In order to reach the aims set for this thesis as discussed in the first chapter, quantitative research method was chosen as the research method. The data collection is conducted using an online survey. Quantitative research method is a popular research method in social sciences (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 139). In quantitative research, the focus is on explaining the studied phenomena by evaluating the relationships of studied variables. This method offers a general perception of the relationships and differences of the studied variables. (Vilkka, 2007, 13-14). Conclusions presented in previous studies, previous literature and theories, proposing hypotheses and defining relevant constructs are essential in quantitative research (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 140). According to Vilkka (2007, 14) in quantitative research, information is examined in a numerical manner, and the studied phenomena and its features are described using numbers. Collecting data using a survey questionnaire is a popular data collection method, since in quantitative research, the researcher's goal is to be objective throughout the research process and not to influence the results by interrupting the data collection (Vilkka, 2007, 13, 16). Conducting an online survey, where the researcher is not present while the questionnaire is answered supports the neutrality of the research process and results, which is also characteristic for quantitative research (Vilkka, 2007, 16). All in all, the objectives of quantitative research include designing a research problem that predicts the result (hypotheses), utilizing existing theories in measuring, and discovering and explaining differences between the variables as causal relationships (Vilkka, 2007, 18).

Using quantitative research method in this study is justified because this study aims to understand the relationships between brand love and its proposed antecedents and consequences. Quantitative research aims to offer a generalized perception of the causal relationships and differences of chosen variables (Vilkka, 2007, 13). Quantitative research is also a suitable research method for this study because when using a survey, achieving a large sample size is possible. Also, in a survey, it is possible to ask more questions from the respondents than compared to an interview, for example (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 195). In addition, most prior brand love research has been quantitative in nature (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020).

3.2   Data collection

In this study, data is collected using an online survey. Surveys are typically used to gain information on behaviours, values, attitudes and opinions (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 197). Using an online survey is beneficial for several reasons. For example, when the researcher is not present while the questionnaires are being answered, he or she cannot have an effect on the answers or interrupt the situation by his or her voice, facial expressions or manners (Valli, 2015, 44). In survey research, it is also typical that the sample size is relatively large (Vilkka, 2007, 17), which supports the aim of quantitative research of gathering a generalized idea of the studied phenomena (Vilkka, 2007, 13). Also, answering an online survey is easy and time sufficient for the respondents and inexpensive for the researcher (Valli, 2015, 44). In a survey, the form of the questions asked is standardized so that all of the respondents are asked the identical questions, in matching order and in the same way (Vilkka, 2007, 27). However, there are some potential issues related to online questionnaires. When the researcher is not present, misunderstandings may take place, since the respondents cannot ask questions if they, for example, cannot understand some of the questions (Valli, 2015, 45). In addition, respondents might not take answering the survey seriously. Also, survey data is sometimes considered superficial (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 197).

One way of disrupting an online survey to respondents is to post it on a social media channel (Valli, 2015, 49). In this study, the survey was in fact distributed to respondents by posting it on a few of the author's social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn). Posting the online survey on a social media channel offers an opportunity to gain a reliable sample size (Valli, 2015, 49). The preferred sample size for a survey is at least 100 responses (Vilkka, 2007, 17).

3.3   Measurement scales and survey development

All of the questions in this study were reconstructed from earlier studies, because a survey should not be a gathering of random questions, but it should measure exactly what is studied, and that is why it is justifiable to use complete measuring scales (Vilkka, 2007, 70, 75). The items measuring brand love (BL) where adopted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The brand love scale consists of ten items, which means that a total of ten questions were asked about brand love. The scale measuring brand trust (BT) was adapted from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001). The questionnaire had three brand trust related questions. The brand commitment (BC) scale consists of three items measuring affective commitment and three items measuring continuance commitment. The brand commitment scale was adopted from Fullerton (2005), and a total of six questions concerning the topic were included in the questionnaire. Hedonic product value (HP) was

measured using a sematic differential scale adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The questionnaire included five hedonic value related questions. Willingness to pay a price premium (WPP) questions were adopted from Netemeyer et al. (2004). Altogether four questions regarding price were included in the questionnaire. The active engagement (AE) related questions were adopted from Keller (2003) and four active engagement question were asked in total. Finally, the measure for brand identification (BI) was adopted from Bergami and Bagozzi (2000). All of the questions are presented in Table 2, and the picture and scale related to the brand identification question can be seen in Figure 3.

TABLE 2   Measurement Items

Item	Adapted from
BRAND LOVE BL1: This is a wonderful brand BL2: This brand makes me feel good BL3: This brand is totally awesome BL4: I have neutral feelings about this brand (-) BL5: This brand makes me very happy BL6: I love this brand! BL7: I have no particular feelings about this brand (-) BL8: This brand is a pure delight BL9: I am passionate about this brand BL10: I'm very attached to this brand	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
BRAND TRUST BT1: I rely on this brand BT2: This is an honest brand BT3: This brand is safe	Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001
HEDONIC VALUE This particular product category: Is functional / Is pleasurable Affords enjoyment / Performs a task Is useful / Is fun Is a sensory experience / Does a job Is a necessity / Is an indulgence	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT AE1: To what extent do you follow news about this brand? AE2: How often do you talk about this brand to others? AE3: How often do you visit the brand website? AE4: Would you be interested in buying merchandise with the brand name on it?	Keller, 2003
BRAND COMMITMENT *Affective Commitment* BC1: I feel emotionally attached to the brand BC2: The brand has a great deal of personal meaning for me BC3: I feel a strong sense of identification with the brand *Continuance Commitment* BC4: It would be very hard for me to switch away from this brand right now even if I wanted to BC5: My life would be disrupted if I switched away from this brand BC6: It would be too costly for me to switch from this brand right now	Fullerton, 2005
WILLINGNESS TO PAY A PRICE PREMIUM WPP1: The price of (brand name) would have to go up quite a bit before I would switch to another brand of (product) WPP2: I am willing to pay a higher price for (brand name) brand of (product) than for other brands of (product) WPP3: I am willing to pay _% more for (brand name) brand over other brands of (product): 0% 5% 10% 15% 20% 25% 30%, or more WPP4: I am willing to pay a lot more for (brand name) than other brands of (product category)	Netemeyer et al., 2004
BRAND IDENTIFICATION B1: Imagine that one of the circles at the left in each row represents your own personal identity and the other circle at the right represents the brand's identity. Please indicate which one case (A, B, C, D, E, F, G or H) best describes the level of overlap between your and the brand's identities. Choose only one letter on the following scale	Bergami and Bagozzi, 2000

FIGURE 3   Brand identification scale

3.3.1 Online questionnaire

Data was collected using a survey or an online questionnaire to be specific. The survey questions were adapted from previous studies, to make sure that they would actually measure what was aimed to be measured. All of the questions were related to the topics studied in this study (brand love, brand identification, brand trust, hedonic product, active engagement, brand commitment and propensity to pay a premium price). Questions regarding brand love, brand trust, brand commitment and three out of four items concerning willingness to pay a price premium were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). Hedonic product value was measured using a sematic differential scale. Questions regarding active engagement consisted of two different types of answer scales, both by Rossiter (2002). In one question "To what extent do you follow news about the brand?" the answer scale used consisted of four options (1 = Not at all, 4 = Extremely). In the remaining three questions related to active engagement a scale of four answer options was used (1 = Never, 4 = Always). Brand identification was measured by the perceived overlap between the respondent's self-concept and the identity of the brand. A scale of eight answer options was included (A = Far Apart, H = Complete Overlap).

In the first question of the online questionnaire, respondents had to name a brand they were familiar with and already had some encounters with. This question was an open-ended question, where the respondents could choose their answer freely (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 198). The remaining questions in the questionnaire concerned that specific brand of the respondents' choice. The questionnaire consisted of 33 questions to measure the items and their

relationships as presented in the research model. It is typical that surveys contain personal questions about the respondents as well (Hirsjärvi et al., 2007, 197). Two demographic questions were added to the questionnaire (age and gender). The most difficult questions were asked first to make sure respondents were as focused as possible while answering them. The respondents were not rewarded in any way or they did not have the chance to win something by taking part. The questionnaire was in Finnish, because the respondents were Finnish speakers.

4   RESULTS

This chapter reports the results of the present study. The data analysis process and assessment of the research model will be discussed. The first part of the chapter explains how the data was analysed, and overviews the sample by presenting some demographic facts about the respondents. After that the factors, Cronbach's Alphas, composite reliability, AVE values and t-statistics will be presented and analyzed. At the end of the chapter, the research model will be assessed and critiqued and the results related to the purposed hypotheses discussed.

4.1   Data analysis

The data was gathered using a survey and reporting tool called Webropol. In the beginning, the data was exported from Webropol to IBM SPSS Statistics 24 software, where the data was analyzed by conducting the factor analysis first. After that the final parts of the analysis were conducted using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 3.

4.2   Demographic and background information

The online questionnaire was posted on the author's social media accounts (Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn) and it received 108 responses. The questionnaire contained two demographic questions: age and gender of the respondent. Respondents had to mention a brand they were pleased with and had some experience of. During the rest of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to think about that specific brand while answering the questions.

A clear majority of 75,9% of the respondents were female, and only 23,2% were male. One of the respondents (0,9%) did not want to state their gender. 66,7% of the respondents were between the ages of 26 and 35 making that the most popular age group. The least popular age group was over 76-year-olds, since none of the respondents belonged to that age group. The second least popular age group was 36-45-year-olds, since only 1,8% of the respondents belonged to that group, as can be seen from Table 3.

TABLE 3   Demographic information of the respondents

Gender	N	%
Female	82	75,9
Male	25	23,2
Do not want to answer	1	0,9
Total	**108**	**100%**
Age	**N**	**%**
15-25	25	23,1
26-35	72	66,7
36-45	2	1,8
46-55	4	3,7
56-65	2	1,9
66-75	3	2,8
>76	0	0
Total	**108**	**100%**

The most popular brand among the respondents was Marimekko with 12 mentions (11,1%), as can be seen in Table 4. The second most popular brand was a tie between Apple with 9 mentions (8,3%) and Nike with 9 mentions (8,3%). The third most popular brand was Fazer with four mentions (3,7%). The most popular product category of all the brands mentioned was fashion. All together 47 of the respondents mentioned a fashion brand which equals to 43,5% of the responses.

TABLE 4   Most popular brands among the respondents

Brand	N	%
Marimekko	12	11,1
Apple	9	8,3
Nike	9	8,3
Fazer	4	3,7
Adidas	3	2,8
Volvo	3	2,8
Louis Vuitton	3	2,8

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4.3   Factor analysis

To start the data analysing process the factor analysis was used to examine if the data set included any problematic items that should be deleted. The core idea of a factor analysis is to expose the fundamental arrangement of a sizeable assembly of items. The factor analysis can be completed if the survey consists of at least 100 responses (Karjaluoto, 2007). This study gained 108 responses which is acceptable for factor analysis. In the present study, the factor analysis was executed using IBM SPSS Statistics 24. At first, the Keiser-Meier Olkin (KMO) test was conducted to make sure the data would be suitable for factor analysis (Metsämuuronen, 2005, 624). The KMO value should be between .70 and .90 for the data to be fitting for factor analysis (Karjaluoto, 2007). This study gained a KMO value of .790, providing good preconditions to proceed to the factor analysis, as can be seen from Table 5. In addition, the Bartlett's test was found to be significant, since the Sig. value must be <0.1-0.5 to meet the recquirements for the factor analysis, and the correlations between the variables to be enough (Karjaluoto, 2007). It was discovered in this study that the Bartlett's test Sig. value was <0.000.

TABLE 5   KMO & Bartlett's test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measuring of Sampling Adequacy		.790
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity		
	Approx. Chi-Square	1178.394
	df	300
	Sig	.000

After that, the chart with the communalities are expressed in was studied to determine whether the variables could be used in the factor analysis (Karjaluoto, 2007). All of the variables had a communality value of > 0.3. The communality values measure how much of the variance between the variables in the data set can be explained by the different factors (Metsämuuronen, 2005, 625). Because all of the variables held a communality value higher than 0.3, all items were suitable for factor analysis, based on this information.

However, when looking at the Rotated Factor Matrix it was discovered that there were no clear factors that followed the original factors adopted from previous literature. What is meant by this is that the items did not load on the factors that they were supposed to, according to theory implemented in this study. This indicated potential problems for the confirmatory factor analysis phase. Also, at this stage a few items needed to be deleted from the data set, including BL2, BL5, BT2, AE4, and WPP1.

4.4   Measurement model assessment

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 3. Partial least squares equation modeling (PLS-SEM) is popular in many different disciplines of social sciences, including marketing management (Hair et al., 2012). PLS-SEM is usually utilized to evaluate statistical causal models (Starstedt et al., 2017). PLS-SEM has become a widely used method because it is possible to assess compound models that include several different constructs, indicator variables and structural paths without forcing distributional assumptions on the data (Hair et al., 2018). Using PLS-SEM for model assessment and evaluating PLS-SEM results includes two stages. In the first stage, the measurement theory is examined, including assessment of the constructs' reliability. The second stage examines systematic theory, that consists of assessment of the structural relationships and determining their potential meaningfulness, and hypotheses testing (Starstedt et al., 2014).

At first, the model was drawn into the SmartPLS, including seven factors along with the proposed relationships of the variables based on previous theory. The latent variables were named Brand Identification, Brand Trust, Hedonic Product, Brand Love, Brand Commitment, Willingness to pay a Price Premium and Active Engagement. To examine the model, the reliability and validity was measured using the following aspects: factor loadings (reliability of the indicators), Cronbach's Alpha (the internal consistency reliability), CRs (composite reliability), and AVE (average variance extracted).

According to Hair et al. (2014), in evaluating reliability, factor loading values between 0.60 and 0.70 can be seen as acceptable, however, values between 0.7 and 0.95 are seen to be between satisfactory and good. In addition, values higher than 0.95 are problematic (Drolet & Morrison, 2001). All of the loadings were <0.95, except for Brand Identification (1.000). This factor consisted of one construct only, which is not recommendable on PLS-SEM (Starstedt et al., 2011). Also, all of the other factors had loadings which were greater than the acceptable 0.6, except for HP3 (0.569). The Cronbach's alpha along with the CRs (composite reliability) were measured in order to examine internal consistency reliability. When Cronbach's alpha and CR values are greater than 0.70, they are considered good. In this study, two factors had Cronbach's alpha calculations were below the suggested 0.70. These factors were Brand Trust (0.604) and Active Engagement (0.545), and because of this they had to be deleted. All the other factors had Cronbach's alpha values that were >0.70. The significance of the factor loadings were measured by examining the t-values. A factor loading is considered significant when the t-value is >1.96. According to the results, all of the t-values were above 1.96. HP3's t-value was just at the suggested level (1.961). BC1 had the greatest t-value, which was 33.987. All in all, all of the loadings were significant, as can be seen from Table 5.

TABLE 5   Cronbach's alphas, CRs, factor loadings and t-values

Factor	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	Item	Standardized loadings	T-value
Brand Love	0.846	0.882	BL1	0.647	9.739
			BL4	0.739	10.833
			BL6	0.825	23.782
			BL7	0.662	6.950
			BL8	0.611	7.972
			BL9	0.817	26.538
			BL10	0.720	13.009
Hedonic Product	0.708	0.805	HP1	0.621	2.229
			HP2	0.701	2.634
			HP3	**0.569**	**1.961**
			HP4	0.711	2.977
			HP5	0.752	3.564
Brand Commitment	0.792	0.852	BC1	0.845	**33.987**
			BC2	0.852	32.830
			BC3	0.678	11.444
			BC4	0.579	6.051
			BC5	0.683	8.925
Willingness to pay a price premium	0.721	0.878	WPP3	0.811	22.892
			WPP4	**0.887**	14.581

Next, the convergent validity of the reflectively measured constructs was investigated. According to Starstedt et al. (2014, 109) "the convergent validity measures the extent to which a construct converges in its indicators by explaining the items' variance." In this study, convergent validity was examined by average variance extracted (AVE). The AVE value is the mean of the squared loadings for all of the constructs' indicators. If the AVE value is 0.50 or greater, it is tolerable,

because it shows that on average, the factor or latent variable describes at least 50% of the variance of its items (Starstedt et al., 2014). In this study, all of the AVE values were greater than the tolerable 0.5, except for HP (0.454). Next, the discriminant validity of the constructs was examined. According to Starstedt et al. (2014, 109), discriminant validity regulates the extent "to which a construct is empirically distinct from other constructs in the path model, and how much it correlates with other constructs". In this study, discriminant validity was studied using the Fornell and Larcker criterion. In this method, AVE values' square roots are compared to the variable correlations. The values of the AVE need be higher than the correlation values among the other constructs (Starstedt et al., 2014). These values can be seen on Table 6.

TABLE 6   AVE & Fornell and Larcker

	AVE	BL	HP	BC	WPP
BL	0.520	**0.721**			
HP	0.454	0.250	**0.674**		
BC	0.540	0.751	0.086	**0.735**	
WPP	0.782	0.383	0.143	0.322	**0.884**

4.5   Structural model assessment

When assessing the measurement model, if it is finished on a acceptable level, at least, the second stage of the PLS-SEM evaluation process can be taken into action. The second stage includes the examining the structural model. This phase consists of examining the structural relationships and their significance and testing the purposed hypotheses. In this study, the quality of the research model was examined with path coefficients (β) and the coefficients of determination (R^2) (Sarstedt et al., 2014). The path coefficients' significance were assessed and the values related to them studied by using the bootstrapping method. The values should usually be between -1 and +1 (Hair et al., 2018). In this study, bootstrapping was ran using 500 subsamples with significance level of 0.05 (5%). With a significance level of 5%, the p-values between the constructs should be <0.05 for the relationships among the variables to be significant (Hair et al., 2018). In this study, the p-values were <0.01, expect for H3, which had the p-value of 0.066.

In the purposed research model, relationships among the constructs are communicated by the path coefficients (β) values (Hair et al., 2017). The β-value can usually be found somewhere between -1 and +1. If the values are negative, a

conclusion that the relationships are negative can be done. In comparison, if the values are positive, a conclusion of positive relationships can be done (Hair et al,, 2017). The R^2 value (coefficient of determination) measures the research model's predictive accuracy. This value should be between 0 and 1 (Starstedt et al., 2014). Roughly, R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 can be considered as "substantial", "moderate" and "weak" (Hair et al., 2011). However, the R^2 values may vary depending on the studied model and the values should be evaluated in the context of the study. These values can be seen on Table 7.

TABLE 7 Hypotheses acceptance, path coefficients & t-statistics

Hypothesis	β	f^2	T-statistics	Supported
H3: Hedonic Product → Brand Love	0.205	0.044	1.845	No
H5: Brand Love → Brand Commitment	0.751	1.293	23.410	Yes
H6: Brand Love → Willingness to pay a price premium	0.383	0.172	4.525	Yes
	R^2			
Brand Love	0.042			
Brand Commitment	0.564			
Willingness to pay a price premium	0.147			

In this study, the highest value of path coefficients was found between Brand Love → Brand Commitment (β = 0.751, p <0.01, t-value 23.410). Therefore, H5 is supported. The second highest examined value of path coefficients was discovered between Brand Love → Willingness to pay a price premium (β = 0.383, p <0.01, t-value 4.525). Therefore, H6 is supported. The lowest path coefficient value was found between Hedonic Product → Brand Love (β = 0.205, p = 0.066, t-value 1.845). These values indicate that a significant relationship between Hedonic Product and Brand Love did not emerge, and therefore, H3 is not supported. Brand Identification factor was removed after bootstrapping, because no significant relationship was discovered between Brand Love and the factor. Bran Identification's t-value was 0.00 meaning.

5   DISCUSSION

The aim of the thesis was to examine brand love and the purposed antecedents and consequences related to it. More precisely, the objective was to examine whether brand identification, brand trust and hedonic product value are antecedents of brand love, and whether active engagement, brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium are consequences of brand love, in the context of this study. In addition, another objective that was set for this study was to create a research model, that would have its foundation in previous studies and research. The research model was used to study potential relationships among brand love, its purposed antecedents and consequences.

In this chapter, the theoretical and managerial implications based on this study are included. After that, the limitations of this study are discussed and the reliability and validity evaluated. Finally, future research suggestions are made.

5.1   Theoretical and managerial implications

According to Ahuvia et al. (2020), brand love is still a quite a new concept, but the studies related to the matter have increased during the last two decades. The aim of the present study is to contribute to the research on brand love, and to propose and test three antecedents (brand identification, brand trust and hedonic product value) and three consequences (brand commitment, active engagement and willingness to pay price premium) of brand love, and include these constructs on a structural research model. All of the constructs were adapted from previous studies, but they have not been studied together before. This study contributes to existing brand love literature by presenting this research model. The results indicate that brand commitment and willingness to pay a price premium are consequences of brand love, but hedonic product value is not an antecedent of brand love in the context of this study. The three remaining hypotheses set for this study could not be examined properly, because during the data analysis all of the original factors could not be identified and some of them (brand identification, brand trust and active engagement) had to be removed from the model. In other words, the three research questions related to these constructs were not answered.

In this study, brand commitment was discovered to be a consequence of brand love. This finding supports previous studies that have found brand love to be positively related to brand commitment (e.g. Albert & Merunka, 2013). Brand commitment suggests that a consumer feels attached to a brand (Burman & Zeplin, 2005). According to Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), consumers that feel very connected to a brand identify and trust the brand, and also feel more connected to it on an emotional level. In this study, brand commitment was studied as a notion that consists of two dimensions including both affective and

continuance commitment. Affective commitment is related to the consumer's emotional attachment with the brand whereas continuance commitment refers to the potential costs of switching brands (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Albert & Merunka, 2013). Some of the most popular brands mentioned in this study among the respondents included Marimekko, Nike and Apple. Out of these three, especially Apple is a brand that a consumer might have trouble switching away from, since Apple's products include mobile phones and computers, which are quite expensive and they are meant to last for a long time. Marimekko is a brand that respondents might be emotionally attached to, since it is a Finnish brand and the respondents were Finnish.

In the context of this study, willingness to pay a price premium was discovered to be a consequence of brand love. This discovery adds to earlier studies that have discovered the construct to be positively related to brand love (Albert & Merunka, 2013). Quality alone does not explain the amount of investments a consumer is willing to make in a product (Anselmsson et al., 2014). Because losing a loved brand would be stressful, a consumer should be able to invest more for the loved brand than to another tradename (Ahuvia, 1993; Thomson et al., 2005).

In this study, it was not discovered that hedonic product value would have a direct significant effect on brand love, and hypothesis H3 was not supported. In previous studies however, it has been proven that hedonic product value positively associates with brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). According to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), consumers' love tends to be more significant for brands that maintain offerings that are seen as hedonic and generate more values related to status or other symbolic benefits. The three most popular brands mentioned in this study were Marimekko, Apple and Nike. Examples of products that are associated with hedonic product value include designer bags and watches. In comparison, utilitarian products are often times more functional and instrumental. A computer is an example of an utilitarian product (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Dhar & Wertenbroch, 2000). It is possible that the most popular brands in this study offer the respondents more utilitarian value than hedonic value. For example Apple manufactures mobile phones, computers and headphones, which are not considered as luxuries nowadays, but necessities. However, because there were some issues with the research model and factor loadings, this probably had an effect on the results, because before hedonic value has been measured with the same measuring scale as used in this study. In the previous studies which used the same measuring scale as used in this study, it has been discovered that hedonic product value is related to brand love in a positive manner (e.g. Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Like mentioned before, the three remaining hypotheses (H1, H2, H3) could not be studied properly due to high collinearity between the original constructs, and the remaining research questions (RQ1., RQ2., RQ4.) could not be answered.

The brand identification factor had to be removed from the analysis because it was found problematic. This might be because the questionnaire had only one

brand identification related question. A factor that has only one indicator is not recommendable (Starstedt et al., 2014). However, the same item has been studied as an antecedent of brand love before by Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010). In their study it was clearly indicated that brand identification is an antecedent of brand love. Brand identification is related to feeling psychological proximity with a brand (Ahuvia, 2005; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Albert & Merunka, 2013). According to Albert and Merunka (2013), their research demonstrates that a consumer's love for a brand is dependent on both brand identification and identification with other people that consume the brand's offering. As mentioned before, the scale used to measure brand identification in this study consisted from only one question, which was more related to the respondent's identification with the brand, rather than other consumers and customers of the brand.

Due to high collinearity, the effects of brand trust on brand love could not be examined either. This factor was removed during measurement model assessment because of its Cronbach's alpha value. However, previous studies have discovered a positive effect between brand trust and brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016). In these studies, the same measurement scale was used to study brand trust as in this thesis.

In addition, the effects of brand love on active engagement could not be examined properly due to high collinearity. This factor too was removed during the model assessment phase, because of its Cronbach's alpha value. However, active engagement as well has been proved to be positively affected by brand love (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) used the same measurement scale in their study that was used in the present study.

Even though an answer was not discovered to all of the research questions, some managerial implications can still be made. The implications of this study emphasize the positive outcomes related to brand love. Previous studies have already proven that brand love is connected to several positive and desirable outcomes for brand managers, and this study strengthens this view by confirming that brand commitment and willingness to pay price premium are consequences of brand love. Both of these constructs are related to several positive situations, from the perspective of brand practitioners. Brand commitment is positively related to brand loyalty and repurchase behaviours (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). In addition, consumers that are committed to a brand usually show greater resistance to negative information related to the brand (Ahluwalia, 2000). Willingness to pay price premiums is also associated with positive outcomes for brand managers, since price premium is the key indicator for creating stakeholder value (Doyle, 2001).

When examining from a managerial point of view, the present study purposes that it would be favourable for brand managers to invest in brand love, since it is associated with several desirable outcomes.

5.2 Evaluation of the research

5.2.1 Limitations and evaluation of the study

This study has some limitations. Firstly, the main limitation of this study was that the factory analysis did not work as suggested in the original purposed research model. This was due to the high collinearity between the original constructs. During the factor analysis, it was discovered that the items did not load clearly to the factors they were related to. This initiated some problems for the measurement and structural model assessments. As it turned out, some factors had to be removed from the model, because the model did not work like the author had anticipated it to work.

Secondly, the items that were used in the online questionnaire were extracted from earlier brand love research conducted in English language, but because this study was conducted in Finland and for Finnish consumers, the questionnaire had to be in Finnish. This means that the items were translated from English to Finnish. This might cause some issues and the items translated into Finnish might not measure exactly the same thing that they would measure in English.

Thirdly, because the questionnaire was posted on the authors social media accounts, most of the respondents are probably acquaintances of the author, since they belong to the author's personal networks. In addition, even though the sample size was fulfilled (n=108), this sample size is still relatively small and not very diverse, since a clear majority of the respondents were women. All in all, because of these reasons the sample size might not be enough for generalizing the results.

When conducting research, it is crucial to evaluate it to be certain it is reliable. The hypotheses proposed in this study were all developed based on previous research and theory related to brand love. Also, all the items were adapted from research that has been conducted earlier.

Reliability and validity is often used to evaluate research. Reliability is related to the how consistent the study is, which investigates the whether the study could be repeated or not providing more consistent results. Validity, on the other hand, is related to how accurate the research is and it is used to examine whether the used constructs measure what they are meant to be measuring (Hair et al., 2015). In order to do this, the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values of the factors were examined. Also, after examining these values, actions were taken, in order to make the study more reliable. Two factors were removed from the model because of low Cronbach's alpha values: Brand trust (0.604) and Active engagement (0.655). After these changes all of the Cronbach's alpha and CR values were above the suggested 0.70 (Hair et al., 2015). AVE (Average Variance Extracted) was used to measure convergent validity in this study. According to Starstedt et al. (2014), the AVE values are considered acceptable when they are above the suggested 0.50. This means that 50% of the

variance of its items are explained by the construct on average. All of the AVE values were greater than the suggested 0.50, except for HP.

All in all, even though the Cronbach's alpha and the CR values were on an acceptable level, the results of the present study are not consistent with previous brand love studies. Also, due to for example translating the research items freely from English to Finnish it might not be certain that the study measured adequately the key constructs, even though the measuring items were adapted from previous studies.

5.2.2 Future research

In the future, it would be intriguing to see if this model would work with a larger and more diverse sample. A professional translator could also be used to make sure that the items would measure the key constructs adequately. This model could also be examined with moderators (e.g. age and gender) and with different brand categories. Also, with a more diverse sample, cultural comparisons could be made, in order to discover whether there are some differences related to brand love behaviour between different cultures. Also, because this model did not work very well in this study, the model could be refined by adding more factors into it. Not only would this possibly improve the conceptual model, but it would also enhance the explanatory power of it.

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APPENDIX 1   Survey Questionnaire

Additional information or large tables can be presented in appendices.

1. Nimeä jonkin brändi, johon olet tyytyväinen ja jonka tuotteista tai palveluista sinulla on jonkin verran kokemusta

2. Katso alla olevaa kuvaa ja kuvittele, että yksi vasemmalla puolella olevista ympyröistä kuvastaa sinun henkilökohtaista identiteettiäsi ja toiset ympyrät oikealla puolella kuvastavat valitsemasi brändin identiteettiä. Ole hyvä ja valitse, mikä vaihtoehdoista (A, B, C, D, E, F, G tai H) parhaiten kuvastaa sinun ja valitsemasi brändin identiteettien päällekkäisyyttä. Valitse vain yksi kirjain

3. Valitse sopivin vaihtoehdoista kuinka samaa tai erimieltä olet väittämän kanssa (1 = Täysin eri mieltä, 5 = täysin samaa mieltä)

   Tämä brändi saa minulle hyvän olon
   Olen valmis maksamaan tästä brändistä paljon enemmän kuin muista brändeistä samassa tuotekategoriassa
   Turvaudun tähän brändiin
   Samaistun tähän brändiin voimakkaasti
   Olisi liian tyyristä vaihtaa brändiä
   Minulla ei ole mitään spesifejä tunteita tätä brändiä kohtaan
   Tämä brändi on ilahduttava
   Tämä brändi on rehellinen
   Tunnen olevani henkisesti kiintynyt tähän brändiin

4. Valitse sopivin vaihtoehdoista kuinka samaa tai erimieltä olet väittämän kanssa (1 = Täysin eri mieltä, 5 = täysin samaa mieltä)

   Tämä on ihana brändi
   Tämän brändin hintojen täytyisi nousta melko paljon ennen kuin vaihtaisin toiseen brändiin samasta tuotekategoriasta
   Samastuin tähän brändiin voimakkaasti
   Rakastan tätä brändiä!
   Tämä on turvallinen brändi
   Minun olisi haastavaa vaihtaa brändiä vaikka haluaisinkin tehdä niin
   Tämä brändi saa minut hyvin iloiseksi

5. Valitse sopivin vaihtoehdoista kuinka samaa tai erimieltä olet väittämän kanssa (1 = Täysin eri mieltä, 5 = täysin samaa mieltä)

   Tämä brändi merkitsee minulle henkilökohtaisesti paljon

Olen hyvin kiintynyt tähän brändiin
Tunteeni tätä brändiä kohtaan ovat neutraalit
Elämäni häiriintyisi, mikäli vaihtaisin brändiä
Olen intohimoinen tätä brändiä kohtaan

6. Valitse kuvaavin vaihtoehto koskien valitsemasi brändin tuoteryhmää:

   Käytännöllinen / Nautinnollinen
   Tuottaa iloa / Suorittaa tehtävän
   Hyödyllinen / Hauska
   Aistimuksellinen kokemus / Tekee tehtävänsä
   Välttämättömyys / Hemmotteleva

7. Valitse sopivin vaihtoehdoista (1 = En koskaan, 4 = Aina)

   Kuinka usein puhut tästä brändistä muille?
   Kuinka usein vierailet tämän brändin verkkosivuilla?
   Voisitko ostaa brändin tuotteen, jossa lukee brändin nimi?

8. Valitse sopivin vaihtoehdoista (1 = En ollenkaan, 4 = Erittäin paljon)

   Missä määrin seuraat tähän brändiin liittyvää uutisointia?

9. Olen valmis maksamaan _% enemmän (brändin nimi) brändistä kuin muista brändeistä samassa tuotekategoriassa

   0%
   5%
   10%
   15%
   20%
   25%
   30%
   Tai enemmän

10. Ikä

    15-25
    26-35
    36-45
    46-55
    56-65
    66-75
    >76

11. Sukupuoli

Mies
Nainen
En halua vastata