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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN BRAND LOVE
AND POSITIVE WORD OF MOUTH**

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Abstract

Being able to create strong emotional bonds between consumers and brands can be seen as an important goal of today's brand management. As in interpersonal relationships also in product and brand context love is presented to be the strongest stage of emotional attachment a consumer may have. Brand love is previously discovered to have several desirable outcomes from marketing perspective but the understanding of this phenomenon still remains in its infancy.

The objective of this research was to gain a better insight of the construct of brand love by observing how the three following phenomena, self-expressiveness of a brand, brand trust and hedonic product type affect brand love. In addition, the study investigates whether brand love would have positive effects on word of mouth (WOM) both in traditional and online environment (eWOM).

As the objective was to examine the relationships between the particular constructs, a quantitative research method was applied. A questionnaire was developed on the basis of previous brand love literature and a survey was conducted with the target audience of Finnish consumers. The data of 342 responses was analyzed in SPSS Statistic 22 program and further on partial least squared structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) program SmartPLS 2.0.

The results of this study indicate that self-expressiveness, trust and hedonic product type all have significant positive effects on brand love. According to the findings, the strongest predictor of brand love seems to be self-expressiveness of a brand. Moreover, brand love is found out to lead to positive WOM and eWOM.

The findings suggest that marketers should aim at creating trust, communicate the self-expressive characteristics and emphasize the hedonic features of their trademarks in order to create love between consumers and their brands. The theoretical contributions of this study can be stated to be observing the new-found topic in a different cultural environment as well as supporting the findings of previous brand love studies.

Keywords
Brand love, consumer-brand relationship, word of mouth, online word of mouth

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1   INTRODUCTION

1.1   Research background

Being able to create powerful brands can be presented as one of the most significant objects of product and brand management (Esch, Langner, Schmitt & Geus, 2006). The benefits of achieving long lasting and strong bonds with consumers have fairly been recognized in the marketing literature. However, the motives of customers' engaging in ongoing relationships with products, brands and companies do also require attention. (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995.)

To ease the selection process and reduce the set of brand and product choices consumers have a tendency to engage in continuous relationships with marketers. Yet, repeated purchases can be seen only as the precursor of a relationship (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995) and partly due to the limited amount of options available for the consumer (Albert & Merunka 2013). Already in 1982 Hirschman and Holbrook (1982b) stated that consumption is not only a task oriented activity. It involves emotions and can be experienced as a source of enjoyment. While differentiation on functional benefits and product performance has become increasingly challenging, offering also emotional value to the customers (Pawle & Cooper 2006) and creating emotional attachment between a consumer and a brand can be seen significantly crucial in modern marketing (Esch et al. 2006).

Consumer's motives can be divided into functionality/utilitarian and symbolic/expressive motives (Bhat & Reddy 1998). Although emotional and rational factors both affect consumer' behavior and decision making, the choice whether to maintain a relationship with a brand is commonly rather emotional than based on rational evaluation (Nobre 2011). Especially in the case of conflict emotions do have a strong influence and even a dominant role (Pawle & Cooper 2006). In conclusion, the strongest consumer-brand relationships are stated to be emotional (Pawle & Cooper 2006). Also, as Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) note, today's competitive environment requires more than simple customer satisfaction. To achieve a stage where consumers bond emotionally with a brand or product marketers need a better understanding of the

antecedents and reasons behind the multidimensional phenomenon (Grisaffe & Nguyen 2011).

While brands are being animated, humanized and to some extend personalized, they can be seen capable of achieving a state of an active relationship partner (Fournier 1998) and consumers are able to create even remarkably close emotional bonds with them (Thomson, MacInnis, Park 2005). In most extremes, brands and products can be classified as a partner similar to another human being (Fournier 1995). Moreover, it is found that consumers can develop a relationship with a brand that evokes a feeling of love (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006; Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence 2008).

Human characteristics can be associated to brands by a company for instance by using spokespersons in advertising. In addition, consumers most likely have personal memories linking certain brands to people they know. Thus, brands are mostly experienced subjectively. (Fournier 1998.) Furthermore, several researchers such as Schultz, Kleine and Kernan (1989) suggest that brands are used as symbols of ourselves and the types of person we are desired to be.

In recent years the interest towards brand love as an important consumer-brand relationship construct has increased (MacInnis, Park & Priester 2009; Batra, Ahuvia & Bagozzi 2012) but research on it still remains in its infancy (Albert & Merunka 2013). Most of the brand love studies have been adapted from the interpersonal love and relationships theories from the field of psychology (Batra et al. 2012). Like in interpersonal relations also in the context of brand love the beloved product or a brand is perceived to be an integrated part of consumer self-identity. The usage of a certain brand might help the consumer to express him or herself to others as the image and symbols of the brand also reflects the identity of the consumer. (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006.) Other authors such as Albert et al. (2008) agree with the concept of self-congruity and the match between the product-image and consumer's self-image when talking about beloved brands. In recent research the significant role of brand trust as another antecedent of brand love has also been presented (Albert & Merunka 2013). To conclude, it is noted that the product type might influence the brand relationships. Researchers propose that hedonic products are more likely to be loved in contrast to products that are considered to offer mainly utilitarian value (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Batra et al. 2012; Thomson et al. 2005).

The findings of several desirable outcomes of brand love and emotional attachment to brands such as brand loyalty, positive word of mouth (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006; Albert & Merunka 2013) purchase intention (Pawle & Cooper 2006), separation avoidance, (Grisaffe & Nguyen 2011) forgiveness in the case of failure and willingness to pay a price premium (Fredorikhin, Park & Thomson 2008; Thomson et al. 2005) present brand love as a desirable state for a brand to achieve. Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich and Iacobucci (2010) even define it as the ultimate managerial goal for a customer-brand relationship. The better understanding of love based relationships between consumers and brands

would help marketers to create stronger bonds between their brands and customers more effectively (Fredorikhin et al. 2008). Moreover, while majority of the brand love research is U.S origin and cross-cultural differences most likely occur, it is important to study the topic in other cultural environments as well (Albert et al. 2008; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence 2009).

As widely agreed, consumers find other consumers' reviews and suggestions highly important in the process of their purchase decisions (Chen & Xie 2008). Hence the relationship between brand love and word of mouth (WOM) can be perceived as an interesting research topic. In addition, consumers are increasingly utilizing web-based communication channels on which they are basing their brand and product choices (Kozinets 2002). In contrast to traditional WOM where the product and brand suggestions are primary told to the circle of acquaintances, the reviews made online (eWOM) are seen by exponentially bigger number of consumers and its role as a marketing communication tool is continuously growing (Chen & Xie 2008). Thus, observing the impact of brand love on eWOM requires attention as well.

The better understanding of the antecedents of brand love and its effects on WOM both in the traditional and online environment can be considered as an important and topical research subject. The research objectives and questions are further discussed in the following chapter.

1.2   Research objectives and problems

According to Metsämuuronen (2005) the formatting of research questions should be adjusted according to the availability of previous literature of the observed topic. In case of fair amount of existing information, which can be stated to be the case in this context, the research topic can be approached by analysing the relationships between the discussed constructs.

The main objective of this research is to get a better insight of the phenomenon of brand love and its antecedents and outcomes. Thus, according to Hirsjärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2008) the nature of this study is explanatory and comparative. In order to reach the presented goal, the effects of three potential constructs of brand love, self-expressive brand, hedonic product type and brand trust will be first observed. Secondly, the potential outcomes of brand love will be discussed by looking into the relationships between brand love and WOM both in traditional and online environment. The research problems are formed in the following manner:

- *How do self-expressive brand, brand trust and hedonic product type explain brand love?*

- *How does brand love affect positive WOM in traditional environment?*

- *How does brand love affect positive WOM in online environment?*

The study is conducted utilizing quantitative research methods, which are suitable when observing cause-effect relationships, theory and model testing (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008). Based on the previous theory and literature, hypotheses regarding the relationships can be presented (Bryman & Bell 2007). Hirsjärvi et al. (2008) define hypotheses as "sophisticated guesses", which most often are formed basing on previous literature and theories. The specified hypotheses of this study will be presented and justified along the literature review.

1.3 Research structure

The paper is divided into six different chapters. Chapters two and three provide an overall literature review beginning with the presentation of the concept of brand love in chapter two. In this chapter we first discuss the concept of love in general and then in a more detailed manner in product and brand context. Also, brand love will be distinguished from other related marketing constructs. Chapter two will close with the introduction of three selected potential antecedents of brand love, self-expressiveness of a brand, brand trust and hedonic product type.

The literature review continues in chapter three focusing on the discussion of both WOM and eWOM. In addition, viral marketing, consumer's motives to engage in WOM and the benefits of WOM from marketing perspective are observed. Chapter four is devoted to the research methodology where the selection of the chosen methods are presented and justified. Evaluation of the reliability and validity of the measurement model will also be presented. Next, the results of the research are observed. The study will close with the discussion including theoretical and managerial contributions. Limitations and potential further research objectives will also be presented in the end of this paper.

1. Introduction

-background
- objectives
-structure

2. Brand love

- love in product and
  brand context
- antecedents of brand love

3. WOM

- traditional and eWOM
- benefits of WOM from
  marketing perspective
- research model

4.Research methodology

- research approach
- data collection
- data analysis

5. Results

- background factors
- factor analysis
- structural model

6. Discussion

- theoretical and managerial
  contributions
- research evaluation
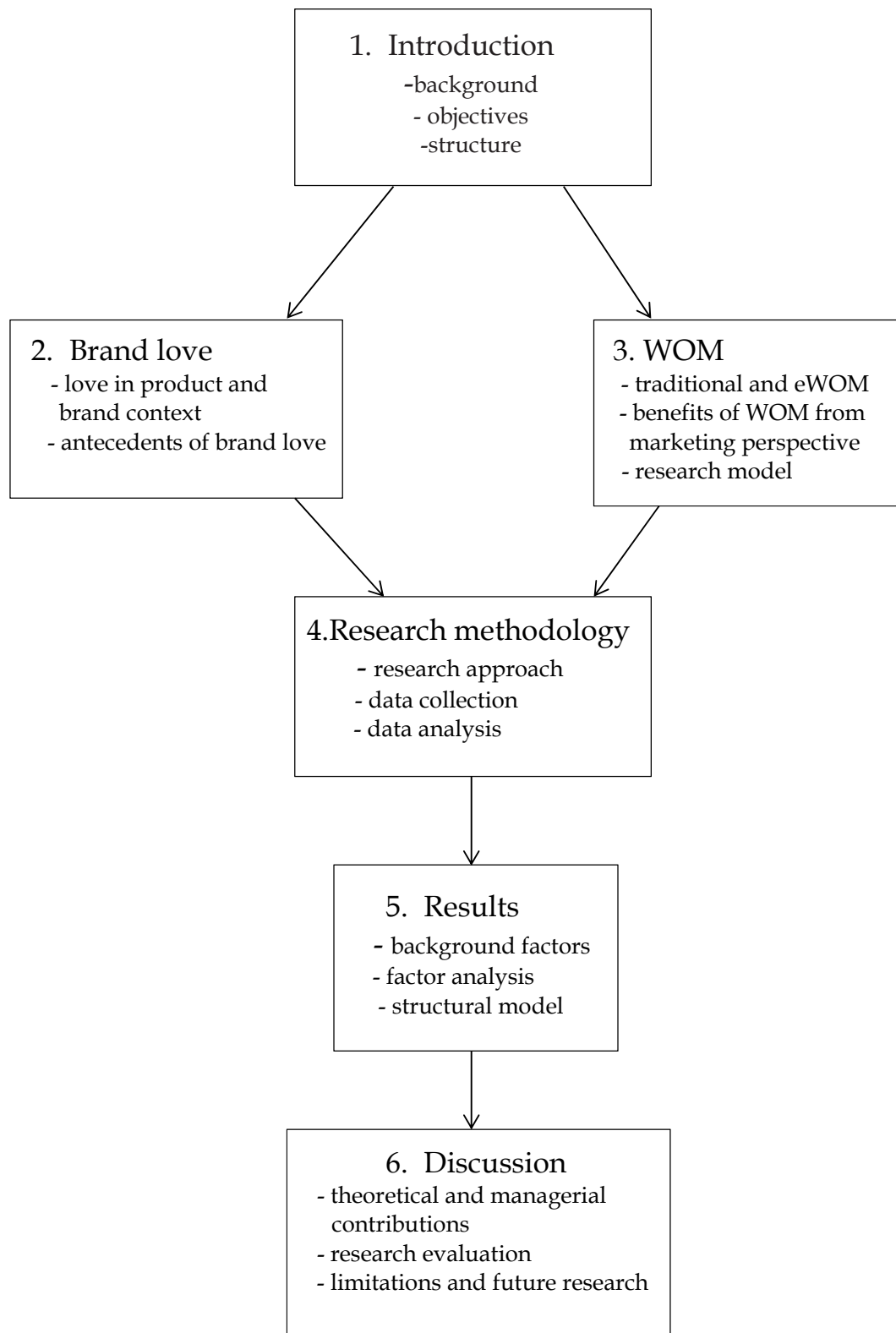- limitations and future research

FIGURE 1 Research structure

2 BRAND LOVE

This chapter begins with the discussion of how the concept of love has been introduced and evolved in the marketing literature which is followed by the special features of love in the product and brand context. Next, we point out some differences between brand love and other related marketing constructs. The chapter ends with the concentration on the three possible antecedents of brand love: brand-self connection, brand trust and hedonic product type.

2.1 The development of the love-concept in marketing literature

Several brand love studies have adapted interpersonal love theories from the field of psychology (Batra et al. 2012). A couple of which most significantly have affected brand love literature will be next presented.

Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) extended the styles of loving originally developed by Lee (1973) in the early seventies. The authors confirmed that love does not only exist in one type but rather in six different styles: 1. eros, 2. ludus, 3. storge, 4. pragma, 5. mania and 6. agape. Eros love style presents love as strong attraction, passion and romance between the relationship partners. Ludus type refers to love as game playing with multiple different partners and may include manipulative characteristics. Storge love on the other hand is described as down-to-earth, stable or even as love between friends whereas pragmatic lover evaluates the match between self and the potential love partner by the result of rational calculation, also referred as "shopping-list love". Mania love style on the other hand retains insecurity, jealousy and strong emotions. It can also be classified as dependent. Finally, agape is seen as all-giving and selfless style of loving. Besides their different features, the five love styles also differentiate by their emotional intensity. Eros and mania are found to involve strong emotions, agape is seen as somewhere in between while ludus, storge

and pragma do not include such strong emotional reactions. (Hendrick & Hendrick 1986.)

Also another noteworthy love research was conducted in 1986 when Stenberg introduced the well-known triangular theory of love, which presents love as a construct of three fundamental components: intimacy, passion and commitment.

Intimacy
Closeness, connectedness

Commitment
Decision to maintain
the love

Passion
Romance, physical
attraction
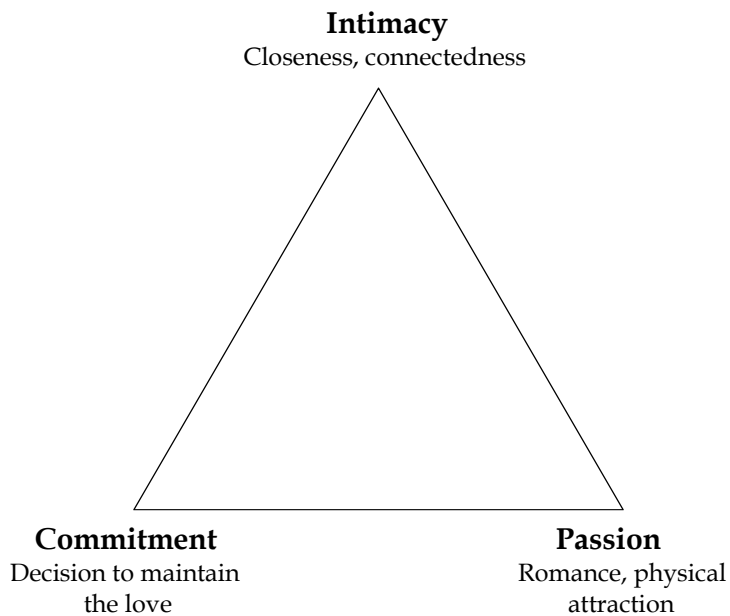
FIGURE 2 Triangular theory of love (Stenberg 1986)

Intimacy refers to closeness and connectedness between two partners, passion to the drivers leading to romance such as physical attraction and commitment to the decision of maintaining the love. Stenberg presents that from these components passion can be ignited in a relatively short order whereas intimacy and commitment require more time to develop (Reis & Resbult 2004). Eight different kinds of love occur depending on the presence or absence of each component: 1. nonlove 2. liking 3. infatuated love 4. empty love 5. romantic love 6. companionate love 7. fatuous love and 8. consummate love. The relationship which does not include any of these three components can simply be described as nonlove. Liking on the other hand occurs when only intimacy is presented in the relationship. Infatuated love or "love at first sight" requires only passion to exist while empty love is the outcome of the relationship being based only on commitment. Romantic love consists of intimacy and passion but lacks commitment while companionate love includes commitment and intimacy and can be characterized as love between friends. Fatuous love on the other hand is the combination of passion and commitment. Finally, consummate love or

complete love is a stage where all of the three components are presence. (Stenberg 1986.) The triangular theory of love is widely accepted and several other authors such as Aron and Westbay (1996) have also confirmed love being a construct and subjectively experienced combination of the dimensions of intimacy, passion and commitment.

Aron, Paris and Aron (1995) on the other hand suggest that falling in love such as other close relationships include an integration of the other to the self. The feeling of integration affects the person's self-concept for instance by increasing the feeling of self-worth and self-efficiency. They also suggest that falling in love is most often a positively felt experience. Overall, interpersonal love is found to be a highly dynamic bi-directional interaction between two partners and therefore a challenging research object (Whang et al. 2004).

As a deeply rooted need and a biological function of a child building an attachment bond to the mother (Bowlby 1977) also adults have the desire to pursue security by having a connection not only to other humans but also to brands (Grisaffe & Nguyen 2011). Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) state that consumers have a natural tendency and interest to be engaged with products and brands for several reasons. A continuous relationship is presented to ease the selection process, minimize uncertainty, risks and even psychological tension. In addition, being part of an ongoing relationship can be seen as a natural state for consumers.

It is discovered that consumers engage in relationships with brands in a similar manner than they might connect with other people (Esch et al. 2006). Grisaffe and Nguyen (2011) define attachment in the product and brand context as the need to pursue security, minimize separation and switching. Researchers have agreed that consumers are able to experience love towards their favourite brands and possessions (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012) and in recent years the interest towards brand love as a significant consumer-brand relationship construct has grown (MacInnis, Park & Priester 2009; Batra et al. 2012). Matzler, Pichler, Fuller and Mooradian (2011) suggest that regarding branded objects the product and its brand go hand in hand when talking about attachment to either. For example, love for one's iPad can be assumed to represent love to Apple as well. In contrast to interpersonal relationships, in the context of an object or brand love becomes unidirectional and less dynamic. Thus, when compared to interpersonal love, love in product and brand context can be seen as a more manageable research object. (Whang et al. 2004.) In the following chapter the concept of love is further observed from this point of view.

2.2 Love in product and brand context

Besides declaring love to our loved ones the word "love" is also commonly used when talking about products and brands. Phrases such as "I absolutely love this bag!" or "I love Coca Cola!" are quite often heard. (Ahuvia 2005.)

However, it must be noted that consumers have a tendency to use the expression more lightly when talking about commercial products than other human beings. In addition, it should be noted that cultural differences appear in the usage of the word love. For example, Americans tend to use it relatively lightly in the product context while French consumers rather choose expressions such as like or adore when talking about their beloved brands. As also noted in the interpersonal love theories, love does not always have to be a romantic emotion. (Albert el al. 2008.) Overall and despite of the cultural differences, it is argued that consumers' positive emotional feelings towards their beloved possessions must be defined beyond liking (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006).

Despite the strong interest towards brand love in the marketing literature, it seems like there is not yet an unambiguous way of defining the concept. The pioneers of the brand love research have primary aimed at defining the concept of love in the product and brand context. In recent years the main focus has shifted towards measuring the feeling of love towards a brand (Albert et al. 2009). As there are various types of love in the interpersonal relationships, also in the product and brand context the experienced love may be represented in several different forms (Batra et al. 2012).

Shimp and Madden (1988) utilized the ideas of Stenberg's triangular theory of love analogously in consumer-object relationships being the first authors introducing the term of love to the marketing literature and enabling a better understanding of the concept (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence 2009). In their consumer-object context intimacy became liking and passion turned into yearning. The concept of commitment is the only one which is presented in both of these relationship models. Correspondingly to the triangular theory of love, also in Shimp's and Madden's model eight different relationships types exist depending on the presence or absence of each component. The presented consumer-object relationships are the following: 1. nonliking, 2. liking, 3. infatuation, 4. functionalism, 5. inhibited desire, 6. utilitarianism, 7. succumbed desire and in case where all three dimensions are presented, 9. loyalty (Shimp & Madden 1988). The combinations of the components leading to certain relationships are visually presented in the following Figure 3.

Kind of relation	Component		
	Liking	Yearning	Decision/ Commitment
1. Nonliking	-	-	-
2. Liking	+	-	-
3. Infatuation	-	+	-
4. Functionalism	-	-	+
5. Inhibited desire	+	+	-
6. Utilitarianism	+	-	+
7. Succumbed desire	-	+	+
8. Loyalty	+	+	+

Cell entries present the presence (+) or absence (-) of each concept-defining component.

FIGURE 3 Eight kinds of consumer-object relations (Shimp & Madden 1988)

Correspondently, Fournier (1998) categorized brand relationship quality as passion/love, commitment, intimacy, self-connection, interdependence and brand-partner quality. In her research several different types of relationships could be identified and were further developed into a typology of fifteen relationships forms: 1. arranged marriage, 2. casual friends/buddies, 3. marriages of convenience, 4. committed partnerships, 5. best friendships, 6. compartmentalized friendships, 7. kinship, 8. rebounds/ avoidance-driven relationships, 9. childhood friendships, 10. courtships, 11. dependencies, 12. flings, 13. enmities, 14. secret affairs and 15. enslavements. As can be seen, the forms of relationships are strongly comparable with and inspired by interpersonal relationships.

Other authors, such as Nobre (2011), also agree passion being an important indicator of relationship strength. The author describes passion with three attributes: fun, excitement and independence. Yet, if the relationship is only based on passion, it is more likely that for instance in the case of a brand or product failure the consumer might more lightly develop a new passion relationship with another trademark. Thus, passion alone is not enough to create long lasting bonds between a consumer and a brand.

Despite some researchers question the interpersonal theories' abilities to capture all the emotions involved in this complex phenomenon of brand love (Albert et al. 2008; Batra et al. 2012) findings suggest that several types of interpersonal love do apply to the product context (Whang et al. 2004). Consumers are able to experience romantic feelings towards objects as the findings of Whang et al. (2004) in their research of bikers relationships towards their Harley Davidson motorcycles indicate. In their study the previously

presented interpersonal love style theory which was further developed by Hendrick and Hendrick (1986) was directly applied in product and brand context. The researchers found that the bikers experienced attachment in three types: 1. eros, which indicate passionate love 2. mania, referring to possessive emotions and 3. agape or in other words selfless love. Interestingly and in contrast to interpersonal love theories it was discovered that consumers were open to have multiple partners, in other words emotional bonds with more than one bike. Furthermore, consumers are found to link feelings of nostalgia and positive memories to their beloved brands which are characteristics not addressed in the interpersonal theories (Albert et al. 2008).

Although there undeniably are considerable similarities between love in interpersonal and brand context (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006) the adaption of only one specific interpersonal theory should be critically approached when observing consumer-brand relationships (Albert et al. 2009) as love in brand and interpersonal context do anyway have some differences (Batra et al. 2012). It should also be noted that however a consumer might have strong emotions towards a product, the object itself is not capable of starting the relationship or loving the consumer back. In this sense, love towards a product can be portrayed as unidirectional and at least partly different from interpersonal relationships. (Shimp & Madden 1988.) On the other hand, marketers try to animate products and associate human traits to brands. This can be implemented by attaching personality traits to brands and communicating them to the consumers or for example by using a spokesperson whose personal features will eventually be associated to the brand or product as well. A brand with a personality will enable consumers to consider the product or a brand as somewhat an active relationship partner. (Fournier 1998.)

Albert et al. (2008) identified the following eleven dimensions as possible constructs of brand love: 1. passion, 2. long duration, 3. self-congruity, 4. dreams, 5. memories, 6. pleasure, 7. attraction, 8. uniqueness, 9. beauty, 10. trust and 11. declaration. However, for a loving consumer-brand relationship to exist, not all features must be simultaneously present. Batra et al. (2012) on the other hand presented seven antecedents of brand love in their high order brand love factor model, which is constructed of second order and first order factors together defining the third order factor of brand love. In their findings four following variables were discovered to present the second order factors: 1. passion driven behaviour and willingness to invest resources, 2. passionate desire to use the brand and things done in the past, 3. self-brand integration including the current self-identity, desired self-identity and life meaning and intrinsic rewards and finally 4. positive emotional connection or in other words intuitive fit, emotional attachment and positive affect. Respectively, the remaining three following variables 1. long-term relationship, 2. anticipated separation distress, 3. overall attitude valence and certainty/confidence were defined as first order factors. Together these seven items construct the third order factor; brand love.

Without direct reference to interpersonal love, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name". It includes passion, attachment, positive evaluation of a brand and willingness to declare love towards the brand. In their research the authors develop a brand love scale including ten items to measure the feelings, attachment and passion towards the brand they were satisfied with. Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005) have also created a measurement scale for emotional attachment to brands. Albert et al. (2009) propose that this scale also deals with the concept of love rather than only emotional attachment which is slightly a lighter emotional state. Also in their research, Thomson et al. (2005) classify the stage of strong emotional attachment as love.

Although the beloved brands only represent a small portion of the entire amount of purchased brands (Batra et al. 2012) consumers create strong bonds with their favorable products and they have a special role in the lives of consumers' (Ahuvia 2005). It is argued that beloved brands are more likely to be purchased compared to neutral brands (Pawle & Cooper 2006; Grisaffe & Nguyen 2011; Esch et al. 2006) and their loss is experienced unpleasant (Ball & Tasaki 1992) or in most extreme they are considered irreplaceable (Fournier 1998). In addition, consumers might be biased to evaluate their favorite trademarks (Albert & Merunka 2013). Interestingly, it is also stated that the opposite of brand love is rather neutral feelings, indifference or lack of emotions towards the brand rather than actual hatred (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006). Consumers are also found to be more willing to invest resources in their beloved brands (Batra et al. 2012).

Although there are a great number of products in our lives only a limited amount of them are loved (Ahuvia 2005). In addition, the degree of involvement might not always reflect the experienced emotion while some disliked objects are part of our everyday lives and other beloved possessions are not used even in monthly basis (Ahuvia 2005). Furthermore, it seems that some product categories are more strongly associated with the feeling of love. Recent research suggest that especially shoes, cars, lingerie, watches, perfumes, food items, music, cigarettes and furniture are evoking strong emotions. (Albert et al. 2008.) However, Kleine, Kleine and Allen (1995) state that product class or possession type does not directly predict the possible attachment. Despite the emphasis on material possessions seems to decrease with age, it still remains strong throughout our lives since products and brands build our self-image, include memories and are used when seeking happiness (Belk 1988). It is found, that the brands the consumer feels special attachment towards are somehow considered and valued superior in contrast to the competitors (Grisaffe and Nguyen 2011).

2.3 Brand love in relation to other marketing constructs

In this chapter brand love is distinguished from three constructs: positive brand attitude, brand loyalty and brand satisfaction which all can be seen as marketing constructs related to brand love. However, it is important to understand the difference between these phenomenons in order to get a deeper insight of why brand love actually is a stronger and more desirable state between a brand and a consumer from marketing perspective.

It is evident that consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand or a product also have a positive attitude towards it (Thomson et al. 2005). Yet, while emotional connection and brand attitude strength do have similar features such as brand purchase, repeat purchase and brand recommendation, they are stated to be different constructs. It is argued that compared to brand attitude emotional attachment to a brand is a stronger predictor of consumer's future behavior (Park et al. 2010) because it often indicates loyalty and willingness to buy a brand also in the case of a price incensement (Thomson et al. 2005). Thus, brand love can be classified as a stage beyond positive brand attitude (Fredorikhin & Thomson 2008) leading to more desirable outcomes from the marketer's point of view.

In addition, positive attitude does not necessarily require a long relationship with a brand (Park et al 2010) or even a direct contact or personal experience with it, which in contrast is often the case with strong emotional brand relationships. In addition, if offered a product with equally good features, the consumer with only positive attitude towards the brand of the previous product would more likely be willing to replace the old product with a new one. Instead, a consumer with a strong emotional attachment to the old product and its brand would more likely consider it irreplaceable and thus is reluctant to make a change. (Thomson et al. 2005). Finally, positive attitude is not only a lower emotional state but also a different concept since love involves an integration of the brand into the consumer's self-identity which is not a prerequisite for positive attitude (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006; Thomson et al. 2005). In conclusion, brand love presents a more advanced stage of a relationship when compared to brand attitude (Park et al. 2010).

Brand loyalty instead can be defined as a behavioral intention towards a brand or a pattern of repeated purchases. It can also include both. (Matzler et al. 2011.) Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) apply the widely accepted division of loyalty: attitudinal and behavioural loyalty. Attitudinal loyalty presents the positive evaluation of the brand and mental commitment to it whereas behavioural loyalty is only a tendency or a manner of repurchase. Oliver (1999) presents loyalty as a process of four different phases: 1. cognitive loyalty, 2. affective loyalty, 3. conative loyalty and 4. action loyalty. In his definition, loyalty can only reach the stage of satisfaction, preference and liking of the brand. While the commitment to be loyal can be defined as consumer's choice to remain the relationship, brand love is more of an intense feeling (Albert &

Merunka 2013). Nevertheless, the authors have discovered that brand love correlates with both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty thus indicating long-term relationship between the consumer and the beloved brand.

Finally, brand love will be compared to brand satisfaction. Oliver (1999) defines satisfaction as "a fairly temporal post-usage state for one-time consumption or a repeatedly experienced state for ongoing consumption that reflects how the product or service has fulfilled the purpose". In general, satisfaction is most commonly defined by the confirmation/disconfirmation paradigm which can be described as a result of cognitive evaluation between the expectations and experienced delivery. Consumers have certain standards and expectations towards products or services they are consuming. If these standards are met during the consumption process, the consumer will experience satisfaction. In this case, however, the satisfaction does not necessarily evoke any particular emotions in the consumer. High satisfaction on the other hand will result from exceeding the expectations of the consumer. In other words, high satisfaction can also be named as positive disconfirmation. Finally, dissatisfaction is the outcome of underachievement or negative disconfirmation. Satisfaction can be either, an evaluation of one specific occasion or consumption or it might be developed over time and as a sum of several different experiences. (Oliver & Swan 1989.) Overall, satisfaction can be presented as an outcome of cognitive evaluation the consumer makes when consuming a product or a service (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) argue brand love being "a random variable within a population of satisfied customers." Although satisfaction might have an effect on brand love and strong emotional affection also these two still are defined as different constructs (Thomson et al. 2005). A satisfied consumer experiences the relationship rewarding (Esch et al. 2006) by the result of a cognitive evaluation (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006). Opposite to love, satisfaction is in a way delivered to the consumer by the firm. Like positive brand attitude, neither satisfaction requires an ongoing relationship with a brand in contrast to brand love. In addition, satisfaction is rather an outcome of cognitive evaluation while love is presented as an emotionally laden construct. (Thomson et al. 2005.). To be satisfied, the consumer does not have to experience a connection between the self and the brand. Satisfaction alone does not include readiness to declare love towards the product or a brand which on the other hand is a typical act regarding brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006).

However, some authors argue that satisfaction should be seen as more of a context-related and dynamic process. For example, Fournier and Mick (1999) present satisfaction involving various motives, emotions and meanings besides the cognitive evaluation. In their research the authors were able to identify five distinct modes of satisfaction: 1. satisfaction as awe 2. satisfaction as trust 3. dissatisfaction as helplessness 4. satisfaction as resignation and finally 5. satisfaction as love. When satisfaction reaches the level of love, which can be classified as the most extreme form of satisfaction, the satisfaction is presented to involve passion, feelings of uniqueness, sense of caring, obsessive attachment

and overlapping selves. (Fournier & Mick 1999.) As we can see, this definition is highly in line with the brand love literature.

2.4 Self-expressive brand, brand trust and hedonic product as antecedents of brand love

However some authors in the field of psychology have suggested that falling in love is out of our control and rather being something that happens to us (Whang et al. 2004) it is agreed that there are several antecedents of love which marketers have the possibility to contribute. Next, three of these are presented and observed in a more detailed manner.

Pawle and Cooper (2006) present intimacy as an indication of the self-relevance of the brand and trust as key constructs of brand love. Albert and Merunka (2013) claim that besides their research the relationships between brand trust and brand love hasn't been studied in the marketing literature although trust is identified as an important factor in consumer-brand relationships. Also Albert et al. (2008) see brand trust as a one possible construct of love.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) agree with the statement that brand love involves an integration of the brand into the consumer's self-identity. It has been also suggested that the characteristics of a product or a brand might have an influence on brand love. For instance, hedonic products are found to be more loved than products offering only utilitarian benefits (Batra et al. 2012; Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001). In addition, symbolic characteristics of a brand have illustrated to have a positive influence on emotional attachment (Pawle & Cooper 2006).

The following chapters are devoted to a further discussion of the concept of brand-self connection or in other words brand's self-expressiveness, hedonic product type and brand trust.

2.4.1 Brand-self connection

First we observe the reasons behind the phenomenon of consumers connecting and identifying brands to themselves. Kleine et al. (1995) define self-identity as a life story which is a sum of four perspectives: who one is now, has previously been, will possible be in the future and the way one no longer is. Consumers pursue both affiliation and autonomy. At the same time they are motivated to be part of a group or a community but also pursuing to be their unique self. The concept of self can also be divided into two parts: social and inner-self (Ball & Tasaki 1992) and real and ideal-self (Joji & Ashwin 2012). While social self is public and aims at approval of the reference groups, the inner self is private and seeks for individual achievement (Ball & Tasaki 1992). Correspondingly, the real-self is how the consumer actually considers him or herself and the ideal-

self is the one he or she wishes to be like (Joji & Ashwin 2012). Resulting from their symbolic nature, brands can be used in both purposes; to support our self-images (Matzler et al. 2011) and help us to aim at the desired ones. Overall, consumers pursue consistent and favourable self-identity. (Escalas and Bettman 2003.)

Besides physical body and consciousness, which are presented to be obviously the main constructs of our self-image (Ahuvia, Batra & Bagozzi 2009) also possessions can be used to symbolize our identity and the person we are desired to be (Schultz et al. 1989; Belk 1988; Albert et al. 2008; Matzler at al. 2011). They are also constructs of maintaining our self-concept (Ball & Tasaki 1992). We see ourselves through what we own and in most extreme as a sum of our possessions (Belk 1988). The products one owns and has possessed before can be considered as a residue of the identity development process (Kleine et al. 2005). Matzler et al. (2011) highlight that products and brands which consumers are emotionally attached to are not only in harmony with the consumers personality but are also capable of communicating it to others. Consumers value symbolic products because their attributes and images reflect the owner as well (Thomson et al. 2005). Although strong bonds are especially created with self-relevant products and brands, consumers most likely identify to more brands that they are in love with (Albert & Merunka 2013). To develop an emotional connection, a consumer must have a feeling of psychological proximity with the particular brand (Albert & Merunka 2013) which results when he or she perceives the brand's traits similar to his or her own personality (Joji & Ashwin 2012). Stenberg states (Reis & Resbult 2004) that happy perceived close relationships most often are formed between people who are similar to each other. This seems to apply analogously in the brand context too. Consequently, the brands personality traits and values should be well communicated to the consumers (Albert & Merunka 2011).

When Batra et al. (2012) asked the respondents of their research to describe how their loved object would be like if it was a person, it was common that the portrayed personal features were similar to the respondent's own characteristics. This can be explained by the cognitive and emotional experience that a certain brand is being part of the self (Park et al. 2010). Ahuvia (2005) also claims that objects can help a person to move from an undesirable past identity towards a desirable one. Thus, loved objects can be seen as parts of the self which include different dimensions such as affect or change the way one is, express the self and have a shared history with oneself (MacInnis et al. 2009). Several advertisements aim at appealing to our real and ideal self-concepts. However, it is observed that stronger emotional connections can be achieved when the consumer experiences harmony between the symbolism of the advertisement and one's real self rather than the desired one. (Joji & Ashwin 2012.) Also, as gifts are noted to be associated to the giver they can also be used as self-extensions (Belk 1988; Thomson et al. 2005). For example, when the receiver of the gift memorizes the giver the brand characteristics of the product are associated to him or her.

The connection to some items is stronger than to others and a favorable attitude towards a product or a brand doesn't alone imply self-relevance (Fredorikhin et al. 2008). The most valued possessions are described to have two basic self-development tasks: differentiating self from others and integration of self with others, in short individuation and integration. Time, energy (Schultz et al. 1989) and resources are more likely invested into these beloved objects in the process of self-expansion (Park et al. 2010). Steenkamp, Van Heerde and Geyskens (2010) present that if usage of a particular product or a brand will help the consumer to fulfil social, functional and psychological needs he or she will be more willing to pay a price premium. Thus, a product or a brand involvement can be expected to lead to an acceptance to pay a higher price. Also, when the product is perceived as part of identity, its loss is experienced highly unpleasant (Ball & Tasaki 1992) and might cause distress, (Thomson et al. 2005) regret and sorrow (Esch et al. 2006).

Interestingly, Escalas and Bettman (2003) found out in their studies that brand-self connections occurs more likely when there is a match between the brand image and the reference group and as well between the reference group and the consumers self-image. In addition, Albert and Merunka (2013) suggest that besides the congruence between a brand and the self also being able to identify to a typical brand user influences the consumer's experience of brand-self congruity. During a selection process the consumer chooses a product or a brand he or she believes his or her reference group or aspiration group members in a particular field would possibly select. In this manner, a consumer verifies his or her self-concept by integrating to a prototypical brand user. (Escalas & Bettman 2003.) Batra et al. (2012) also suggest that brand-self connection might go beyond consumer-brand match or the possibility for self-expression. For instance, a consumer may most highly appreciate if a brand connects to one's primary values and the sense of life's meanings. To conclude, it can be perceived that brand-self connection is altogether constructed by several different components. Regardless, brand-self connection or in other words self-expressiveness of a brand can be seen as a significant component of brand love and a brand which enables a consumer to express him or herself is more likely to be loved (Park et al. 2010). Thus, we present our first hypothesis:

H1: *Self-expressive brand has a positive effect on brand love.*

2.4.2 Brand trust

Like the brand love literature, also the brand trust discussion is primary derived from interpersonal relationship context from the field of psychology. (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001) where it is assessed as the most desired feature of love (Mikulincer 1998). Besides love, trust is also stated to lead to other positive outcomes such as brand loyalty and commitment (Albert & Merunka 2013).

In interpersonal context trust can ban be described as the belief of other person's genuine and honest intentions to achieve the wellbeing of one's

relationships partner. Respectively, when a consumer trusts a brand he or she expects the brand to meet the consumption expectations (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001) and can be classified as an affect-based experience (Esch et al. 2006). Albert and Merunka (2013) define brand trust as the rooted expectations a consumer has about the brand's honesty, altruism and reliability. In a similar manner, Morgan and Hunt (1994) argue that trust exists "when one party confidence in exchange partner's reliability and integrity". The authors also state that having similar values between the other part of the relationship is an important prerequisite in order to achieve trust. Consumer's trust towards a brand is gradually built by the experiences and encounters he or she has with it. In other words, trust can be also defined as a result of overall satisfaction with a particular brand. (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001.)

On the other hand Li, Zhou, Kashyap and Yang (2008) see trust as more complex phenomena and a second-order factor. They claim that trust is a multidimensional concept where different aspects individually contribute to overall brand trust such as trust on brand competence and good will. For example, a consumer might have faith on the quality of the brands products without trusting the brands actions in some other sector. Having a trusted brand as an option increases the consumer's insecurity in a situation where he or she feels uncertain about which brand to select (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) also claim that brands themselves are not capable of actively creating trust but rather having a potential to elicit it for consumers. The authors see brand trust as the consumer's willingness to rely on the performance of a particular brand by having faith on the communicated brand promises. Using a trusted brand reduces the consumer's uncertainty and a trusted brand will be more likely purchased.

To conclude, in relation to brand love brand trust is defined more of a rational process of consideration whereas affect towards a brand is a sentimental experience and developed spontaneously (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001). Although the relationship between trust and love has mainly been in discussion regarding interpersonal relationships, Albert and Merunka (2013) claim that trust has a significant role in the development of love in the product and brand context as well. Based on this statement, the second hypothesis of this study is formed:

H2: *Brand trust has a positive effect on brand love.*

2.4.3 Hedonic product

As mentioned, consumers are not only carrying out rational tasks when consuming but they are also seeking for fun and amusement (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982b). Consumer's brand and product choices (Dhar & Wertenbroch 2000) and consumer experiences are thus affected both by utilitarian and hedonic considerations (Babin, Darden & Griffin 1994). While utilitarian values refer to functional benefits of a product, hedonic characteristics produce benefits related to aesthetics, experiment and enjoyment (Joji & Ashwin 2012).

In brand context functional brands are chosen when satisfying immediate and practical needs while symbolic brands fulfil the needs of self-expression and prestige (Bhat, & Reddy 1998).

Hirschman and Holbrook (1982a) state that hedonic product and brand consumption consists of three different dimensions; multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects. By multisensory they refer to senses such as tastes, sounds and visual images which may result besides the present experience also as memories from the past events. Fantasy instead presents the imagined associations the consumer creates to the product or brand without having a previous personal experience. Together these two previous will result in emotional arousal such as joy or happiness. Positive emotional arousal is stated to be the primary motivation for the hedonic consumption. (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982a) Thus, reaching hedonic pleasure might actually be the ultimate goal of some shopping experiences (Babin et al. 1994).

It is possible for a product to include both, utilitarian and hedonic values in a different intensity (Joji & Ashwin 2012). For example, a watch may help one monitoring the time but can still be primarily worn as a stylish accessory or vice versa. Nonetheless, there are also products which consumers categorize either hedonic or utilitarian (Dhar & Wertenbroch 2000). Bhat and Reddy (1998) carefully suggest that instead of manifold associations marketers should rather select whether a brand is positioned to tap consumers' functional or symbolic needs and then communicate the selected values clearly to the consumers to achieve a distinct brand image. Yet, they also remind that brands such as Apple and Nike have succeeded in achieving a reputation of both; superior performance and possibility to express one-self in an enjoyable way.

Products which are purchased in order to achieve hedonic benefits provide favourable feelings such as pleasure. They can thus be stated to be affect-rich (Suh 2009) and are experienced rather subjectively (Babin et al. 1994). It is also stated that consumers may have the tendency to be less loyal to products in the hedonic category (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006). In a purchase situation hedonic products are evaluated fairly intuitively in contrast to utilitarian products, which usually involve a stronger cognitive evaluation and search for information (Suh 2009). Utilitarian products are mainly expected to carry out functional tasks (Dhar & Wertenbroch 2000). Interestingly, Sethuraman and Cole (1999) found out in their research that consumers are more willing to pay price premiums from products and brands that fulfil their hedonic needs.

It is argued that products in a hedonic category have considerable positive effects on the experienced brand affection (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001) and in these categories the hedonic values should be emphasized in the marketing communications (Suh 2009). Thomson et al. (2005) discovered in their studies that consumers were more attached to brands that offered symbolic and hedonic values in contrast to low involvement and functionally associated brands. Also Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) discovered that love towards a product or a brand is higher in the category of hedonic products when compared to

possessions delivering utilitarian value. These suggestions lead us to develop our third hypothesis:

H3: *Hedonic product type has a positive effect on brand love.*

3 WORD OF MOUTH

This chapter begins with the definition of traditional WOM which is followed by a discussion of the special features of WOM in online environment. In addition, the concept of viral marketing is presented and the consumer's possible motives to engage in WOM are specified. We will also discuss the phenomenon of viral marketing and demonstrate the benefits of positive WOM from marketing perspective. The chapter will close up with a presentation of the research model of this study.

3.1 Word of mouth in traditional environment

Steffes and Burgee (2009) describe traditional WOM as an immediate intimate conversation where the sender and the receiver of a message are familiar with each other. Thus, the receiver has the ability to judge the sender's credibility which naturally increases trust towards the message. However, the pool of potential receivers is relatively minor considering WOM in traditional environments. (Huang, Cai, Tsang and Zhou 2011.) A traditional WOM conversation is mainly motivated by the intention to do a favour to the receiver (Steffes & Burgee 2009) as well as serving one's social needs by being in contact with others (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995). A consumer may either actively seek for WOM information or also be exposed to it randomly (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995).

Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki and Wilner (2010) present that the influence of WOM on consumer's decision making process has been recognized for decades. With an objective of achieving commercial advantages marketers have later on started to actively influence the process of consumers spreading the word. Sheth and Parvatiyar (1995) underline the consumer's tendency to adapt to the opinions of one's reference groups to minimize social risks by conforming to group norms. A reference group does not necessarily have to be a group of which a consumer is concretely part of such as family or a work team but rather a group with one can share values and normative standards with. The

marketing literature has also emphasized the importance of so called opinion leaders and their influence to the masses (Huang et al. 2011). Without a doubt, WOM is continuously increasing its importance as a marketing tool (Kozinets et al 2010) and harnessing it to commercial purposes has increased (Lang & Lawson 2013).

Although the reasons behind WOM's effectiveness are various, (Lang & Lawson 1013) it can be said that especially for consumers who do not have much experience with a particular product category do find other consumers' views important when making a decision between brands or products (Chen & Xie 2008). In general, a consumer often uses WOM information to avoid and minimize potential risks (Steffes & Burgee 2009).

As previously presented in the chapters discussing the construct of brand love, we already know that consumers are keen to spread the word of their beloved brands. Thus, brand love is expected to predict directly positive WOM. (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006; Batra et al. 2012.) This leads to the presentation of our fourth hypothesis:

H4: *Brand love has a positive effect on positive WOM.*

3.2   Word of mouth in online environment

Due to the internet, today's consumers have an enormous amount of information available just a click away from them (Steffes & Burgee 2009). Offering a bi-directional channel to communicate, (Dellacoras 2003) internet offers numerous possibilities for consumers as well as companies to spread information and opinions to millions of other internet users all around the globe (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels 2009a) and to getting access to other's opinions as well (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler 2004). Social network sites such as Facebook and MySpace constructed from personal user profiles, (Trusov et al. 2009a) web-based opinion platforms, (Hennig-Thurau 2004) or channels such as online forums, bulletin boards and newsgroups offer consumers the ability to share their ideas, experiences and knowledge about products, brands, companies and services with other online users (Dellacoras 2003). It has been found that participation to these web-based channels does have an influence on consumer behavior (Bickart & Schindler 2001; Steffes & Burgee 2009) and attitudes, (Lang & Lawson 2013) new customer acquisition, (Trusov et al. 2009a) consumer purchase decisions and eventually on product sales (Chen & Xie 2008). It is also stated, that consumers consider these channels more informative when compared to the information offered through traditional advertising (Lang & Lawson 2013). Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) condense the idea of eWOM as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or a company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet".

In contrast to traditional WOM where product and brand suggestions are primary told to the circle of acquaintances the online reviews are seen by exponentially more consumers (Chen & Xie 2008). In addition, the online message is not conditional on space and time (Steffes ans Burgee 2009). Consumers evaluate the trustworthiness of WOM information by the credibility of the channel the message is heard from and by the network it has been travelling through (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995). Importantly, consumers generally consider the information on internet forums more trustworthy than marketer-generated communication since the reviews and opinions are written by other consumers and are not commercially motivated (Chen & Xie 2008). WOM in general can be stated to also have a higher relevance (Bickart & Schindler 2001) and user orientation in contrast to seller-created information, which is often experienced rather product oriented because it mainly includes technical and performance based information (Chen & Xie 2008). Anyway, compared to traditional WOM where a receiver of the message personally knows the sender, in some online applications the consumer may not have the ability to evaluate the sender's credibility due to anonymity (Steffes & Burgee 2009). This might be the case for example with online forums. Lang and Lawson (2013) also recall that although consumers do recognize traditional advertising being marketer generated, it might not always be possible to identify whether a WOM message is motivated by a marketer or by an honest opinion of another consumer. Therefore, there also lies an ethical question in commercial eWOM.

3.2.1 Viral marketing

Consumers may spread their opinions and comments on one's one initiative in the online environment such as previously mentioned online forums (Yuping 2012). Besides this so called naturally born eWOM, companies or websites can also actively encourage consumers to express their experiences. By company created online feedback mechanisms, consumers have a possibility of rating products. Websites such as Amazon and eBay are well known for utilizing online feedback tools. Online feedback mechanisms can be seen as channels to acquire and retain customers, create trust and strengthen the brand image. (Dellacoras 2003.) Authors such as Kozinets et al. (2010) and Yuping (2012) also use a term of a "seeding" campaign which means giving a product for free to opinion leaders such as popular bloggers who are expected to write about it to their readers in a favorable manner. In a case like this, the message is also commercially motivated although it is technically written by a non-marketer.

Companies can also actively aim at creating a buzz of eWOM or better known as viral marketing. Viral marketing can be presented as an intention to affect the communication between one consumer to another by marketing techniques. (Kozinets et al. 2010.) Bampo, Ewing, Mather, Stewart, and Wallace (2008) define viral marketing as "a form of peer-to-peer communication where individuals are encouraged to pass on promotional messages within their social networks." It can be also seen as an attempt to increase the popularity of a brand (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004) or spreading a marketing message with the

help of individual consumers. As a marketing tool, viral marketing rather utilizes pull-techniques than pushes the message to consumers, which in contrast is often the case when implementing traditional marketing communication channels such as advertisement in mass medias. (Yuping 2012.)

Bampo et al. (2008) present the concept of network structure when talking about viral marketing. The authors see network as a combination of nodes, which present the population receiving the viral message, and edges as communication links which connect the nodes to one another. Thus, edges can be understood as the possible contacts an individual has to spread the message such as a friend or a professional connection. As viral marketing takes action in online environment, consumers may spread the word also to total strangers which in contrast is not often the case regarding WOM in traditional environments (Yuping 2012). In addition, some of the consumer's contacts may only exist in digital platforms. The individuals whole set of digital connections is called the underlying social network. After receiving a message for example in a social media environment, a consumer has to make a decision whether to pass it further and if so, to which online connections (Bampo et al. 2008).

Trusov et al. (2009a) argue that social networking sites are constantly increasing their popularity and gain of new users. Previous users are encouraged to invite nonmembers from their network to join a particular social networking service which offers its users the possibility to broaden their network of friends and professional contacts. Thus, marketers should not underestimate the power of internet when talking about WOM.

3.2.2 Motives to engage in word of mouth

Next, we will take a closer look at some possible motives consumers may have regarding WOM. Lang and Lawson (2013) present two possible motives to engage in WOM: 1. altruism and 2.involvement to the product, brand or service. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) on the other hand specify five different motives of why consumers spread the word of a brand or a product especially regarding the online environment. These following five motives are: 1. focus related utility, 2. consumption utility, 3. approval utility, 4. moderator related utility and 5. homeostase utility. Focus related utility refers to a consumer's aims at offering help to other members of the particular online environment by sharing valuable information of a product or a brand. Approval utility is divided into self enhancement and economic rewards. In this case, the consumer might pursue approval of others and strengthen his or her status by presenting oneself as an expert. On the other hand, a consumer may also be motivated by possible economic rewards provided by the operators of the online platforms if the consumer engages in WOM. Moderator related utility is described as the motivation for a consumer to write the feedback to an online channel rather than directly to someone in the company since it is considered as a more effective way of making a statement and to be heard and receive answers. The authors state that consumption utility can be described as a search for information and advice about the product or a brand after the actual purchase.

The consumer might for example ask for help or recommendations when facing a problem. Finally, homeostase utility is defined as a basic need of a consumer to share positive and successful experiences with others and correspondingly unload negative feelings. According to the authors, the discussed five motives may be presented individually as well as overlap. Lang and Lawson (2013) also point out that enjoyable and entertaining messages are more likely to be forwards. Consumers tend to also evaluate the credibility of the discussion forum, the information quality and how interesting the content is when deciding whether to engage in WOM (Huang et al. 2011).

3.3 The benefits of positive word of mouth from marketing perspective

Due to the revolution of the internet, consumers have more power than ever as more and more variable information is easily accessible. It is crucial for companies and brands to be seen in an environment where consumers spend a significant part of their time (Trusov et al. 2009a). Due to the fact that marketing messages may be forwards by consumers rather than marketers themselves, successful viral marketing (Hinz, Skiera, Barrot, & Becker 2011) and WOM can at its best be a truly cost efficient way for a company to spread a word about their products and brands. Overall, positive WOM should be considered as a powerful tool of marketing communication.

Being able to create a ripple effect for example from a marketing campaign more coverage can be achieved without additional costs (Huang et al. 2011). Also several other authors such as Trusov et al. (2009a) agree that by the utilization of eWOM expenses can be cut down and word can be spread more rapidly thorough internet when compared to traditional marketing communication channels. WOM-marketing can also be seen as a way of building trust (Dellacoras 2003) and credibility between a brand and consumers (Yuping 2012). In contrast to traditional advertising, viral marketing is experienced more targeted and intimate. Thus, it may be harnessed to reach the audience and attention of potential consumers who would normally be challenging to get to. (Bambo et al. 2008.) As a conclusion, consumers consider WOM messages fairly personal and especially WOM in online environment has the possibility of reaching high numbers of people effectively (Lang & Lawson 2013).

As marketers have understood the advantages of WOM and viral marketing, it is evident that the amount of commercially motivated campaigns has increased. This on the other hand results in to a battle for the attention and interest of the consumers (Hinz et al. 2011). Kozinets et al. (2010) highly suggest that the message of a viral marketing campaign should fit the selected online environment context. Secondly, the message should be relevant to the users in the chosen forum and respect its norms. In a social media context, it is also

important to recognize the users who get most of the attention of others and have the highest influence on them (Trusov, Bodapati & Bucklin 2009b). It should be noted, that the most influential consumer is not always simply the one with the greatest amount of online contacts (Yuping 2012). Nevertheless, Hinz et al. (2011) found out in their research that selecting consumers with high amounts of connections as the "seeds" in the initial stage of a viral campaign will most likely lead to a higher overall coverage. In addition, in order for the consumers to share the viral message, it should be actively encouraged to be forwards (Yuping 2012). Bickart and Schindler (2011) argue that the consumer's interest towards a product category more likely increases when he or she is exposed to online conversations of other consumers. Online conversations have found to have more effect to consumers interest than when the product information is searched from marketer-generated sources only. Thus, the authors propose that companies may also offer an online forum in their own website or direct links to already existing conversation of their products. Finally, managers should also approach eWOM from consumes' perspective and consider what the benefits of eWOM are for them (Steffes & Burgee 2009).

From managerial point of view, the fact that consumers are increasingly active in the online environment has a lot of potential. In contrast to traditional WOM conversations, the discussion between consumers in online channels gives marketers better opportunities to follow the discussion the consumers are having about their products and brands and also tools to react to them in a required manner. (Huang et al. 2011.) In addition, marketers do have more concrete techniques for example to measure the cost-effectiveness of their online marketing campaigns in contrast to similar efforts performed in the traditional environments. Overall, measuring the effectiveness of eWOM's is significantly easier when compared to actions made in traditional marketing communication channels. (Trusov et al. 2009a.)

As positive eWOM can be seen desirable from marketing perspective we are interested to observe whether brand love has a positive effect on positive eWOM. While brand love is expected to have a direct positive effect on positive WOM in traditional environments (Carroll & Ahuvia 2006) we also anticipate that this applies in the online context. Hence, the fifth and final hypothesis of this study is presented in the following manner:

H5: *Brand love has a positive effect on positive eWOM.*

3.4 Research model

The presented research model in Figure 4 is applied from the previous marketing and brand love literature presented in this paper. Developing a research model based on earlier findings and discussions is a typical manner for a quantitative research (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008). Our model defines brand love as a multidimensional concept with its antecedents and behavioural outcomes

which can also be seen as the managerial aspects of the phenomenon. In our model, self-expressive brand (brand-self connection), brand trust and hedonic product type are expected to positively be associated with brand love following the findings of previous literature. Brand love in the other hand is anticipated to have a positive direct effect on both WOM and eWOM in addition being in line with former studies.

Three control variables were used regarding WOM and eWOM: age, gender and the length of experience the respondent has had with the selected brand. These three constructs have been linked with WOM in previous literature (Sago 2010; Zhang, Feick & Mittal 2014; Ranaweera & Menon 2013). Variables age and gender were selected in order to observe whether basic demographic differences would have an effect on the willingness to spread positive WOM. Experience length on the other hand was found as an interesting control variable since the previously presented theory carefully presents that consumers are more likely in love with products and brands they have has a long relationship with. In our model, we were interested to observe whether the relationship length would increase the consumer's willingness to engage in positive WOM. The previously presented hypotheses are marked in the following Figure 4.
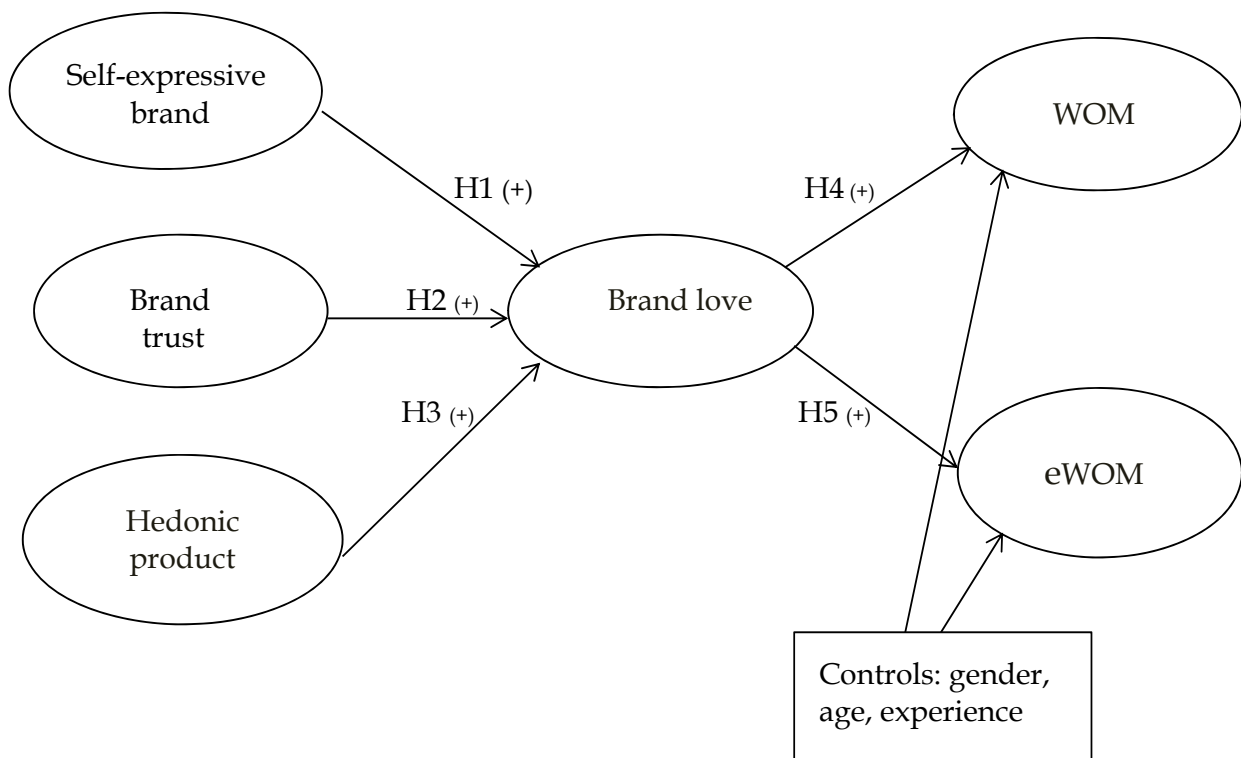

FIGURE 4 Research model

4   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter is devoted to the research methods implied in this study. First, the nature of quantitative research is shortly discusses followed by a more precise observation of data collection, questionnaire development and practical implementation. The chapter closes up with the presentation of utilized data analysing methods.

4.1   Research approach and quantitative research

In the process of choosing a suitable research strategy, the purpose of the particular research should be clearly specified (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008). The perspective of this study is strongly based on previous literature from the discussed research topic. The objective is to observe the relationships between selected constructs which have presented to be in certain relation to each other. In addition, hypotheses of these relationships are formed in a consistent manner with the presented theory. In order to being able to achieve the presented research objectives, this research is conducted by implying quantitative research methods as quantitative research is stated to be strongly influenced by previous theory and its' testing (Bryman & Bell 2007).

Quantitative research has a deductive view point which can be portrayed as the logic of certain causes leading to certain effects (Metsämuuronen 2005). By quantitative methods, the causality and relationships between different constructs can be observed and measured (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008). Based on the findings and theories of the previous literature, the researcher may present hypotheses and tests them empirically (Alkula, Pöntinen & Ylöstalo 1994). If the empirical findings do support a certain hypothesis, it can be confirmed. Respectively, if a hypothesis cannot be confirmed, it will be dismissed. (Metsämuuronen 2005). Overall, it must be noted that the researcher must clearly indicate the utilized background literature and adapted theory in order

to validate the perspective of the research and the formation of the presented hypotheses (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008).

Quantitative research aims at objectivity and generalization at least to some extent. Due to the nature of quantitative research, the researcher and the people participating to the study often have a distant relationship. The quantitative research data on the other hand can be classified as "cold" or "hard". (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008.) In conclusion, quantitative research can be stated to aim at illustrating the reality as external and objective and it is highly positivistic in its nature (Bryman & Bell 2007).

4.2   Data collection

When selecting an appropriate data collection method in the process of conducting a quantitative research, it must be noted that the data should be suitable for quantitative processes (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008). In this study the research data is collected by utilizing a survey method which according to Alkula et al. (1994) is defined as a pre-structured data-collection method. A survey can be classified as an efficient and economical way of collecting information as the costs and resources are relatively low and fairly easily predictable (Alkula et al. 1994). Also, a large amount of respondents can be reached with reasonable efforts (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008).

As any other research method, also surveys do have certain limitations and challenges. Regarding questionnaires, Alkula et al. (1994) state that questions concerning facts such as age or occupation are estimated fairly easy to answer and in this sense the given responses can be considered rather trustworthy. Instead, questions considering more abstract phenomenons such as attitudes and opinions do more likely include inaccuracies and might even be affected by the prevailing mood of the respondent (Alkula et al. 1994). In spite of careful pretesting, there is always a risk that the respondents misunderstand some of the questions. In addition, it is challenging to estimate whether the respondents have completed the questionnaire with a careful and honest manner. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008.) In the process of developing questions for the questionnaire attention should be paid to the avoidance of ambiguity in order to minimize miss-understandings in order to increase validity. Also, a clear appearance and a reasonable length of a questionnaire are found to increase the willingness to respond. If possible, exploiting pre-tested question batteries and scales is recommended. (Metsämuuronen 2005.) In case of abstract phenomenons, the use of several indicators is recommended in order to minimize random errors (Alkula et al. 1994).

After developing and testing the questionnaire used in the survey, the researcher must select which sampling method to apply. Sampling methods can be divided into two different categories: random and non-probability sampling. When sampling randomly, each observation has an equal possibility to be selected as a respondent from the observed population. (Bryman & Bell 2007.)

In this sense, random sampling is generally stated to increase the reliability of the research and enables generalization to some extend (Metsämuuronen 2005). However, random sampling requires a fair amount of resources, preparation and costs in order to be conducted (Bryman & Bell 2007). Thus, in some cases a non-probable sampling method can be justified. In this research we utilize convenience sampling which is defined as a non-probability sampling method where the sample is easily accessible for the researcher. Although the findings cannot be generalized, the advantages of a convenience sampling are the probability to achieve a greater amount of research data and reduce resource requirements. Despite the limited possibilities of generalization, the research can still fill its purpose of supporting previous studies and in addition inspire further research. (Bryman & Bell 2007.)

4.2.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed to fit the objectives of this research and by adapting available measurement models of previous research about the topic. The questionnaire begins with a short introduction presenting the purpose of the study being a research about the relationships between a consumer and a brand he or she is satisfied with. Highlighting the confidentiality of the survey, it was clearly stated that individual responses could not be linked to a particular respondent. The required time to conduct the questionnaire was estimated to be between five to ten minutes. After the introduction, the respondents were asked to recall and name a specific brand they are satisfied with and which they have had experience with. The following questions in the questionnaire where asked to be completed with reference to this particular brand.

The first actual question is a multiple choice question regarding the relationship length the respondent evaluates of having with the particular brand. Afterwards, the total of 29 five-point Likert scale questions are presented including ten questions about brand love, eight about self-expressiveness of the brand (divided into questions regarding both inner self and social self) four about the willingness to engage in positive WOM about the brand and three about the willingness to engage in positive eWOM regarding the brand and four questions about brand trust.. The questions were presented in a random order. The brand love, self-expressiveness of the brand, and willingness to engage in positive WOM are based on scales developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). The questions measuring the willingness to engage in positive WOM in the internet environment were developed and adapted from the Carroll's and Ahuvia's (2006) scale regarding WOM. The brand trust questions on the other hand are derived from Chaudhuri's and Holbrook's (2001) brand trust scale. (For specific survey items, see appendix 1) All the utilized questions were translated and adapted from the original language of English into Finnish as the research was conducted in Finland and the respondents were Finnish consumers.

The second question battery of the questionnaire, also adapted from Carroll's and Ahuvia's (2006) article, was a five point semantic differential scale regarding six questions about whether the respondent considers the selected brand representing either hedonic or utilitarian product category. In addition, an open ended question is presented offering a possibility to describe one's relationship with the selected brand with own words. In the end of the questionnaire demographics about respondent's age and gender are asked.

As several authors, also Hirsjärvi et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of pre-testing the questionnaire before publishing. As the majority of the utilized questions were derived from previous studies and were already carefully tested by the foregoing researchers, pre-testing of the research model was not considered necessary. However, as the questions were translated from the original language of English into Finnish, the fluency and intelligibility of the questionnaire was initially asked to be evaluated by three potential respondents. Also, as the consistent presentation, clear appearance and reasonable length of the questionnaire together with an understandable formatting of the questions and instructions are highlighted as important factors, (Bryman & Bell 2007) the opinions regarding these were also asked. Before publication, the survey was also inspected by a third party.

4.2.2 Practical implementation

The survey was conducted online in early March 2014 using Webropol 2.0 program. An event was created on Facebook where initially 347 members of the author's Finnish online connections were invited to participate by answering to the questionnaire. In the event-site, a short introduction of the research was presented and a link to the online survey was offered. In addition, in order to reach enough respondents, the invited members were encouraged to share the event, forward the link to the survey and invite their Facebook-connection to participate as well. As a result of initially invited people sharing the event to their own connections, a total number of 574 people were eventually invited through Facebook to participate to the survey. The survey was open for one week and a total number of respondents was 342.

4.3 Data analysis

After the complete data collection in the Webropol 2.0 network environment, the data was transferred to IBM SPSS Statistics 22 program. As all the questions despite the open ended question about the brand relationship were mandatory, no missing values occurred.

Initially, required preparations and measurements were conducted in the SPSS Statistic 22 program to ensure that the data was suitable for conducting a factor analysis. Factor analysis is a suggested method for data processing, when the objective is to observe correlations between different variables in a

condensed manner (Alkula et al. 1994). First, exploratory factor analysis was conducted in the SPSS Statistic 22 environment to prepare the data for confirmatory factor analysis. In order to categorize the data in a more effective manner, the variables were named according to the factors they were expected to load on. After conducting a rotated factor matrix, the factors were named in consistence with the utilized background theory. Poorly functioning variables were removed.

After the required preparations, confirmatory factor analysis was performed with PLS-SEM using SmartPLS-2.0 (Ringe, Wende & Will 2005). The structural equation modeling enables the researcher to perform measurement testing and test the predictive and causal hypothesis (Bagozzi & Yi 2012).

5   RESULTS

This chapter is devoted to the observation and presentation of the results. First, the demographic and background factors of the respondents are discussed. Next, the specific characteristics and requirements of a factor analysis are discussed alongside with the prerequisites of the data for factoring. The steps in the process of forming a structural equation modelling are also observed. Subsequently, the hypotheses are tested with PLS-SEM. In the end of this chapter we will also take a quick look at how some of the respondents described their relationship with their beloved brands in their own words.

5.1   Demographic and background factors

From the total number of 342 respondents, 59,4% were female. Most of the respondents were under the age of 35 as 51,2% of the respondents were between the age of 18-25. The latter can be mainly explained by the utilization convenience sampling method as this age group was the most easily accessible for the researcher. The sample demographics are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Demographic factors

Demographic factors	Frequency	Valid percent
Gender		
Male	139	40,6
Female	203	59,4
Total	342	100
Age		
Under 18	4	1,2
18-25	175	51,2
26-35	55	16,1
36-45	34	9,9
45-55	57	16,7
56-65	11	3,2
Over 65	6	1,8
Total	342	100,0

Generally, a large variety of brands were named as the respondents were free to choose any brand they felt satisfied with. The total number of different brands was 142 as some of the brands were selected by several respondents. The most popular brand appeared to be Apple with the frequency of 38 (11,1%). The secondly most named brand was Nike which was chosen by 25 (7,3%) of the respondents. The thirdly named brand was also a sports brand, Adidas, with the frequency of 16 (4,6%).

When asked about the years of experience the respondent has had with the selected brand, no specific trend arose from the answers. Majority of the respondents indicated of having at least two years of experience with the brand as only 4,4% named a brand of which they only had had a one year experience with. Gaining most of the answers, 29,2% of the respondents reported to have a relationship of 2-6 years with the named trademark followed by almost equally the option of "over 16 years" with 27,2% of the total responds. In addition, 23,7% indicated to have a relationship between 7-11years with the brand they identified. For more specific information, see Table 2.

TABLE 2 The experience with the brand

Experience in years	Frequency	Valid percent
0-1	15	4,4
2-6	100	29,2
7-11	81	23,7
12-16	53	15,5
Over 16	93	27,2
Total	342	100

5.2 Factor analysis

In order to compress the data and test the presented hypotheses a factor analysis was utilized (Karjaluoto 2007). The required amount of data in order to run a factor analysis successfully is presented to be over 100 observations (Karjaluoto 2007). With the total number of observations being 342, the size of the data can be seen as perfectly suitable for conducting a factor analysis. Furthermore, the value of .922 in the Keiser-Meyer Olkin's test illustrated excellent potential in proceeding with the analysis as the limiting value for excellent preconditions is stated to be greater than .90. (Karjaluoto 2007.) To ensure a required amount of correlation between the variables, the measurement of zero hypotheses was performed by using Bartlett's test. As the required Sig. value of the test is presented to be greater than .01 (Karjaluoto 2007) the Sig. value being 0,000 indicated good conditions to continue with the factor analysis.

The communality value of the variable indicates how big of a portion of the variable's variety can be explained by the factor (Alkula et al. 1994). The closer the communality value is to one, the more the variable variances are due to the factor. Variables with a value lower than .30 are recommended to be removed from the further analysis. (Karjaluoto 2007). The communality value regarding each remaining variable is greater than .30. The justification of removing few variables will be presented in the following paragraphs.

With the objective of pre-testing the reliability of the measurement model and variables loading on a single factor only (Bagozzi & Yi 2012), exploratory factor analysis was initially performed. Utilizing factor analysis, several different variables can be combined in order to form a latent construct, a factor, which later is suggested to be named in a way that mostly represent the specific phenomenon (Metsämuuronen 2005). However, it should be noted that as a factor analysis should be theory based, the factor names should be in respect of the background theory (Karjaluoto 2007). Confirming the pre-assumptions, six

following factors were indicated complying with the presented theory: self-expressiveness (SELF), trust (TRUST), hedonic product (HED), love (LOVE), WOM (WOM) and eWOM (eWOM). Note, that the reversely presented questions (see appendix 1) were re-coded in order to be comparable with all the other variables.

In the process of running the exploratory factor analysis, only a total number of three variables were removed as a result of their low loadings to any factors. These poorly functioning and removed variables were HED5, HED6 and LOVE1. Although no specific limiting values for factor loadings exist, a loading greater than .50 can be indicated as satisfactory. However, a clear factor structure might appear in spite of lower loadings of some variables. (Alkula et al. 1994.)

Next, we will shortly present the variables which reached the highest mean values regarding each scale in order to give an idea about which particular variables have especially essential roles in each measurement scale. (To observe all the mean values, see appendix 1) We will first take a look at the questions measured with 5-point Likert scale where 1 presents strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree. These scales consider the phenomenons of self-expressiveness, trust, brand love, WOM and eWOM.

Observing the self-expressiveness scale, SELF3, This brand is an extension of my inner self, reached the highest mean value with an average answer of 3,65. In the brand trust scale, TRUST1, I trust this brand, reached a relatively high mean value of 4,49, Regarding brand love, the most significant question seems to be LOVE2, This brand makes me feel good, as respondents averagely answered the value of 4,07. WOM1, I have recommended this brand to lots of people, seems to be the most viable question in the WOM scale with a mean value of 4,42. Interestingly, eWOM1, I 'talk up' this brand in online environment, achieved the highest mean value in the eWOM scale but only with an average answer of 2,46.

The hedonic product type was measured with a 5-point differential scale. Regarding this scale, it is difficult to emphasize the importance of any of the variables as no particular statement seems to reach a significantly higher mean value in contrast to others items. All of the mean values were mutually closely around 3.

5.3 Measurement model

Following the exploratory factor analysis, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed in the structural equation modeling program of SmartPLS 2.0 where the relationships between different constructs can be observed in a more detailed manner (Bagozzi &Yi 2012). Based on the information received in the exploratory factory analysis, the remaining variables were divided according to the factor loadings in the following way: SELF1, SELF2, SELF3, SELF4, SELF5, SELF6, SELF7 and SELF8 indicating self-expressiveness, TRUST1, TRUST2,

TRUST3 and TRUST4 as variables for trust, HED1, HED2, HED3 and HED4 for hedonic product type, LOVE2, LOVE3, LOVE4, LOVE5, LOVE6, LOVE7, LOVE8, LOVE9 and LOVE10 as variables for brand love, WOM1, WOM2, WOM3, WOM4 for indication of WOM and finally eWOM1, eWOM2, eWOM3 in order to measure eWOM.

As at this point it was assured that all of the variables load on a single factor only, Cronbach's alpha could be used in order to measure the consistency of the utilized indicators and overall reliability of the measurement model. Although Cronbach's alpha is a very commonly used method in the evaluation of the measurement model's reliability (Metsämuuronen 2005) its' limiting value appears to be to some extend inexact (Alkula et al. 1994). As Bagozzi and Yi (2012) present the limiting value for reliability being greater than .70 other authors such as Metsämuuronen (2005) suggest that values greater than .60 can be classified as satisfactory. As only the value of factor trust appears to be slightly lower than .70 but still greater than .60, the reliability of the measurement model can be stated to have achieved the level of acceptability. The specific values for Cronbach's alpha are presented in Table 3 as well as the standardized loadings received from the confirmatory factor analysis conducted in the SmartPLS2.0 program. In addition, t-values are presented in order to evaluate the significance of the loadings. As all the t-values are greater than the required level of 1.96, all the variables can be considered significant.

TABLE 3 Standardized factor loadings, Cronbach's alphas and t-values

Factor	Cronbach's alpa	Item	Standardized loadings	t-value
Self-expressiveness	,913	SELF1	,742	25,52
		SELF2	,837	48,69
		SELF3	,722	26,33
		SELF4	,732	23,89
		SELF5	,885	70,67
		SELF6	,682	18,55
		SELF7	,857	54,31
		SELF8	,842	55,07
Trust	,686	TRUST1	,659	12,29
		TRUST2	,649	10,70
		TRUST3	,783	26,46
		TRUST4	,768	25,35
Hedonic product-type	,787	HED1	,776	24,14
		HED2	,833	26,36
		HED3	,680	12,80
		HED4	,872	24,34
Brand love	,906	LOVE2	,710	23,25
		LOVE3	,773	32,05
		LOVE4	,829	46,16
		LOVE5	,742	26,60
		LOVE6	,718	25,61
		LOVE7	,661	16,85
		LOVE8	,784	31,84
		LOVE9	,740	27,05
		LOVE10	,838	47,78
WOM	,846	WOM1	,787	29,05
		WOM2	,878	52,89
		WOM3	,823	38,39
		WOM4	,818	39,72
eWOM	,931	eWOM1	,930	105,42
		eWOM2	,944	120,93
		eWOM3	,939	132,16

In Table 4, average variance extracted (AVE) values and factor correlations are presented in order to estimate the convergent validity of the measurement model. Fornell and Larcker (1981) state that the AVE-value should exceed .50 in order to ensure that the possible measurement errors are lower than the actual variance due to the construct. As the AVE-values are greater than .50 regarding all factors, the measurement model can be evaluated as valid. Discriminant validity can on the other hand be estimated by the squared AVE-values, which in order to reach the satisfactory level, should be greater than the AVE (Fornell & Larcker 1981). As all the squared AVEs do exceed the AVE-values, the discriminant validity of the measurement model can be confirmed.

TABLE 4, AVE, squared AVE on the diagonal and factor correlation matrix

Factor	AVE	eWOM	HED	LOVE	SELF	TRUST	WOM
eWOM	,88	**,93**					
Hedonic product	,61	,08	**,78**				
Love	,57	,38	,32	**,75**			
Self-expressiveness	,63	,44	,14	,68	**,79**		
Trust	,51	,21	,09	,52	,36	**,71**	
WOM	,68	,50	,09	,57	,50	,39	**,82**

5.4 Structural model

As the structural model has been proven to be satisfactory regarding reliability and validity, the following step is to evaluate the results. Thus, we will next observe the relationships between different constructs. To evaluate the relationships strength between the different constructs, the values of path coefficients (ß) are evaluated (Bagozzi & Yi 2012). As the path coefficient values do not alone indicate the significance of the relationship strengths, t-values are observed by running bootstrapping algorithm in SmartPLS 2.0 in order to estimate the significance of the relationships.

In addition, R^2 values are observed. R^2 values describe the percent level which the factors can altogether be explained by the variables (Metsämuuronen 2005). As seen from Table 5, 60% of the factor love can be explained by the utilized variables. Thus, a minority of the factor is left without explanation. WOM on the other hand can be explained to the level of 38%. The lowest explanation rate is 21% as almost only one fifth of the eWOM factor can be explained. In Table 5, structural model results are presented and in Table 6, total effects and their levels of significance are shown.

TABLE 5 Structural model results

	β	R^2
Self-expressiveness -> love	,542***	
Trust -> love	,303***	
Hedonic product -> love	,216***	
Love -> WOM	,577***	
Love -> eWOM	,401***	
Gender -> WOM	,025 ns	
Gender -> eWOM	,073 ns	
Age -> WOM	,175***	
Age ->eWOM	,267***	
Experience -> WOM	-,221***	
Experience -> eWOM	-,083 ns	
Love		0,596
WOM		0,383
eWOM		0,210

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$, ns: not significant

In Table 6 the path coefficient values of the total effects and their significances are presented. Although the total effect relationships seem also to have reached the level of significance, it appears that WOM and eWOM can still be better explained by the whole constructs of brand love rather than the individual constructs of self-expressiveness, trust or hedonic product alone.

TABLE 6 Total effects

	WOM	eWOM
Self-expressiveness	0,313***	0,217***
Trust	0,175***	0,122***
Hedonic product	0,125***	0,089***

Notes: *** $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$

Next, the previously presented hypotheses are individually observed in a detailed manner.

H1: *Self-expressive brand has a positive effect on brand love.*

The path coefficient value between self-expressiveness and brand love is .542 and t-value 14.94, which indicate a strong significant positive relationship between these two constructs. The result also reveals that self-expressiveness of

the brand is the most important predictor of brand love from the three observed constructs. In conclusion, H3 is supported.

H2: *Brand trust has a positive effect on brand love.*

The path coefficient value between trust and brand love is .303. T-value between these two constructs being 7.21, the relationship can be classified as statistically significant. Thus, consumers who consider a brand trustworthy may more likely to evolve a love based relationship with the brand. Thus, H4 is supported.

H3: *Hedonic product type has a positive effect on brand love.*

When compared to self-expressiveness and trust, hedonic product type was the weakest predictor of brand love. Regardless, the path coefficient value between hedonic product type and brand love being .216 and the t-value 5.79, there is also a significant relationship between these two constructs. In conclusion, H5 is confirmed.

H4: *Brand love has a positive effect on positive WOM.*

The path coefficient value between brand love and intention to spread positive WOM is .577 and t-value 15.55. These results remark a strong significance between these two constructs. In conclusion, a consumer, who is emotionally attached to a brand, will more likely tell positive things about it. To conclude, H6 is also supported.

H5: *Brand love has a positive effect on positive eWOM.*

Regarding the relationship between brand love and intention to spread positive eWOM about the brand is also indicated to be significant as the path coefficient between these two constructs is .401 and t-value 8.74. Brand love significantly affects the willingness to engage in positive WOM also in online environment. Thus, our final hypothesis, H7, is supported as well.

5.5   Control variables

It appeared that two of the control variables had a significant effect. The path coefficient value between experience and WOM being -.221 and t-value of 4.90 indicates significant negative effect between these two variables. Interestingly, the longer the relationship has been between a brand and a consumer, the less one is actually spreading a word about the brand in traditional environment. However, this relationship was not significant with respect to eWOM.

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Other significant effects were indicated between age, WOM and eWOM. The path coefficient value between age and WOM is .175 and t-value 4.36. Regarding the relationship between age and eWOM the value considering path coefficient is .267 and t-value 5.26. According to these results the older respondents are more active in engaging WOM both in traditional and online environment. The third control variable, gender, did not have significant effects on either WOM or eWOM. In the following Figure 5, the structural model is visually presented including the path coefficient and t-values of all the variables.
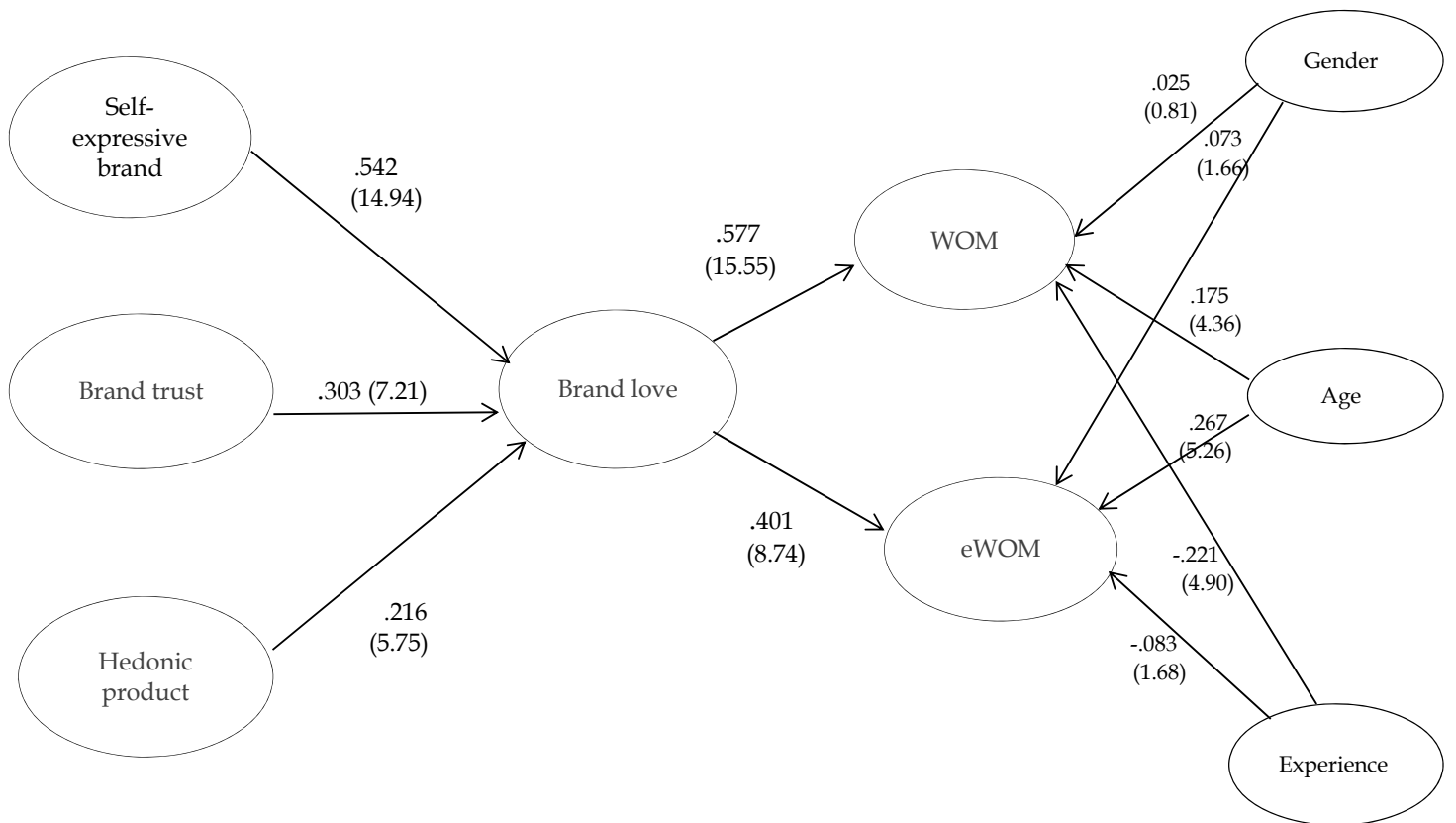

FIGURE 5 Empirical model (t-values presented in the parentheses)

5.6 Open ended questions

In the end of the questionnaire, the respondents had the opportunity to describe their relationship with the brand they had selected by using their own words. Although this material is too limited allowing us to make too strong conclusions, it is interesting how the respondent's descriptions do have some interlinks to the brand love theory presented earlier in this paper. Next, we take

a closer look at some of the answers of those respondents who indicated high emotional attachment to the brand they named to be satisfied with.

One respondent described her relationship with the Finnish food and bakery brand, Fazer, in a following manner: "*A traditional part of Finnish identity. Especially the Fazer-blue chocolate. Elegant advertising. Easy to identify with.*" As Park at al. (2010) and the recent results of our study presents, brand-self connection is a significant predictor of brand love. Besides mentioning herself, the respondent also refers to Finnish identity in general. This may have a link to Albert's and Merunka's (2013) suggestion that besides the congruence between the brand and the self also being able to identify to a typical brand user influences the consumer's experience of brand-self congruity.

As presented in our findings, being able to trust a brand does also have a significant influence on brand love. Another respondent refers to the trustworthiness of a Finnish design company, Iittala, with the following words: "*A wonderful brand whose quality you can always count on!*" A Nike-user on the other hand states that: "*In every sport, I trust Nike!* Albert and Merunka (2013) propose that consumers might be biased to evaluate their beloved brands. This can be seen in one response where the respondent describes his relationship with his beloved brand, Nokia: "*I don't compare my brand neutrally to other brands. I consider my brand as the most reliable one.*"

The third brand love construct discussed in this study, hedonic product type, was presented in the answers as well. Describing her relationship with the Gant-brand, the following statement was expressed by one respondent: "*For me, this is everyday luxury!*" As argued in previous studies (Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001) and confirmed with our recent results, a product delivering hedonic values does have a considerable positive effect on the experienced brand relationship.

Also few responds could be classified in line with the partnership aspect of love. A Finnish private label brand, Rainbow, was considered as "*Part of everyday-life.*" by one respondent who was identified of having a strong emotional connection with the brand. Another respondent portrayed her relationship with a food processor Thermomix: "*An excellent device both in everyday life as well as in special occasions. Worth of its expensive price.*"

6 DISCUSSION

In the final chapter of this study, theoretical contributions of this study will be first presented alongside with the managerial implications of our findings. In addition, the research is evaluated by certain criteria and limitations of this study are indicated. Our final chapter will close up with suggestions for potential future research objectives.

6.1 Theoretical contributions

The objective of this research was to get a better insight of the phenomenon of brand love as well as its outcomes. Thus, we firstly observed how the following three constructs, self-expressiveness of the brand, hedonic product type and trust towards a brand affect brand love. Secondly and in order to understand the outcomes of brand love, the relationship between brand love and both WOM and eWOM were under observation. The research questions of this study were formed in the following manner:

- *How do self-expressive brand, brand trust and hedonic product type explain brand love?*

- *How does brand love affect positive WOM in traditional environment?*

- *How does brand love affect positive WOM in online environment?*

In previous studies brand-self fit, hedonic product type and brand trust have been stated to be some of the predictors of brand love as Albert and Merunka (2013) claim that brand trust has a significant role in brand love development and Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have identified positive relationships between brand's self-expressiveness and brand love and hedonic product type and brand love. The authors have also stated that brand love results in several

favorable outcomes such as positive WOM. However, as the brand love discussion is still a relatively new-found topic in the marketing literature and it is still claimed to be in its infancy (MacInnis et al. 2009; Albert & Merunka 2013), the outcomes of our research can be justified topical. In this study, the relationships between the ability to express one-self, being able to trust a brand and the product type of the brand being hedonic were all identified to affect to brand love in a positive manner which was in line both with the previous literature as well as the presented hypotheses.

Several authors such as Schultz et al., (1989) Belk (1988) and Albert et al. (2008) suggest that possessions can be used as symbols of our identity and the kind of person we are desired to be. In order to achieve a state of emotional attachment with a brand, the consumer not only has to consider the brand harmonious with one's personality but the brand also has to be capable of communicating the personal features to others (Matzler et al. 2011). Thus, regarding self-expressiveness of the brand both inner- and social self were taken into consideration in this research. As a finding of our study, self-expressiveness was found to have a significant positive effect on brand love and in relation to the other two constructs it appeared to be the strongest predictor of brand love.

Trust as an antecedent of love has on the other hand mainly been under discussion in the field of psychology (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001). However in the research of Albert and Merunka (2013) the authors observed trust in the context of brand love claiming to be the first researchers to bring the concept of trust in to the brand love conversation. In line with their findings, our research also suggests a significant positive correlation between these two constructs. Thus, as well as the previous literature, also our research confirms that being able to trust a brand will positively affect the ability to create a strong emotional bond with it.

It is widely agreed in the marketing literature that products offering hedonic values will more likely be loved (Suh 2009; Chaudhuri & Holbrook 2001; Carroll & Ahuvia 2006). Consumers are in general discovered to be more attached to brands they considered hedonic when compared to functionally associated brands (Thomson et al. 2005). Thus, our results regarding the positive relationship between hedonic product type and brand love are consistent with the previous theory. Although, hedonic product type was the weakest predictor of brand love according to our findings it can still be agreed that a product offering hedonic pleasure will more likely evoke a strong emotional attachment.

Apart from the potential antecedents of brand love, we were also interested in the favorable outcomes of the phenomenon. As widely recognized in the marketing literature, WOM has a strong influence in the decision making process of consumers (Zhang et al. 2014). As several authors such as Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Batra et al. (2012), suggest brand love being a predictor of positive WOM, we were interested in observing this relationship as well. In line with the previous literature, the findings of our research also confirmed that

brand love does have a positive effect on positive WOM. Moreover, due to the constantly increasing power of internet in the decision making process of consumers (Steffes & Burgee 2009) and eventually on product sales (Chen & Xie 2008) the effects of brand love on WOM in online environment were also considered as an important question as it also yet remained unexplored at least to our knowledge. According to our findings, brand love does have a positive direct effect on positive eWOM as well. In conclusion, a consumer who is in love with a brand is more willing to spread positive word about it both in traditional and online environment.

As noted, the majority of the previous brand love research is conducted in the U.S. However, cross-cultural differences regarding the phenomenon are likely (Albert et al. 2009). For example, consumers from different cultural backgrounds are found to have differences regarding how they feel comfortable in using the word love (Albert et al. 2008). Thus, studying the topic also in another cultural environment can be seen important. Being able to confirm the presented hypotheses also in Finland, which can be at least to some extend consider culturally different to U.S, gives positive signals to carefully apply the previous brand love literature in some other cultural environments as well.

6.2   Managerial implications

Besides theoretical contributions, also managerial implications of a research may be presented. Yet, it should be noted that suggested managerial implications are often subjective ideas of a researcher rather than theoretical contributions. (Metsämuuronen 2005.) In the end of this chapter some potential ways of applying the received results in practice will be discussed. Most of them are theory based but applications made by the researcher are presented as well.

It is widely accepted that marketers should aim at creating strong and durable bonds with consumers. In order to achieve these continuous relationships, it is crucial to understand the consumer's reasons and motives to be engaged with products and brands. (Sheth & Parvatiyar 1995.) The consumer's decision making process is known to be a combination of rational and emotional factors. However, the choice whether to maintain a particular relationship is more often based on emotional evaluation rather than resulting from a rational cognitive process. (Nobre 2011.) Thus, being able to create emotional attachment between a consumer and a brand are thus seen as crucial objective in today's marketing management (Esch et al. 2006). In conclusion, as brand love is presented to correlate with both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty yet involving a stronger emotional commitment (Albert & Merunka 2013) achieving a stage where consumers are in love with a brand can even be stated to be the ultimate goal of brand management. In order to be capable of creating love based bonds between their brands and consumers, marketers do need a

better insight of the predictors behind the complex phenomenon (Fredorikhin et al. 2008; Grisaffe & Nguyen 2011).

As widely agreed, consumers find other consumers' reviews and suggestions highly important in the process of their purchase decisions (Chen & Xie 2008). In addition, consumers are increasingly utilizing web-based communication channels on which they are basing their brand and product choices (Kozinets 2002). Thus, as brand love has an effect on the engagement of positive WOM and eWOM, there are even more motivations for marketers to better understand the phenomenon. Due to a better knowledge about the antecedents of brand love, marketers have better possibilities to build the love based bonds between consumers and their brands.

As brand-self connection is a strong indicator of brand love, marketers should aim at creating closeness between their brands and consumers. By communicating the brand values and brand's personality traits, a consumer may be more capable to identify with a brand. As the self-expressiveness of a brand also includes the capability to express one's personality to others, a brand should have a clear and strong brand image and symbolic meanings in order to enable a consumer to send a message to others by using the brand. Batra et al. (2012) also suggest that a truly self-expressive brand should also be able to touch the deeper values and meanings of life. Thus, the core values of the brand should be communicated as well.

As trust towards a brand is also a meaningful predictor of brand love, marketers should carefully ensure that their brand always delivers what it has promised. In order to create trust between a consumer and a brand, the consumption expectations of consumers must always be fulfilled. Thus, exaggerated promises should be avoided in the marketing communications in order to keep consumers' expectations in a realistic level and to avoid unnecessary disappointments. Brand trust is defined as an overall satisfaction with a brand and as a gradually achieved state summing all of the experiences a consumer has had with it (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán 2001). Thus, it should be ensured that the brand delivery is consistent regarding every encounter a consumer will have with it.

As consumers will more easily experience love towards products and brands which represent pleasure, amusement and fun the hedonic characteristics of a brand should be emphasized. This should also be considered in the context of utilitarian products and brands as it is possible for a product to include both, utilitarian and hedonic values in a different intensity (Joji & Ashwin 2012). As it is known, positive emotional arousal is stated to be the motivation for the hedonic consumption (Hirschman & Holbrook 1982a). Thus, besides the utilitarian characteristics, the enjoyment and the awakening of positive feelings in the consumption process of the particular product should be emphasized in the marketing communications.

6.3   Evaluation of the research

In order to evaluate the conducted research, two different criteria must be observed: reliability and validity. First, we will take a closer look at the reliability of this research followed by the observation of research validity.

Reliability refers to the repeatability of the research. Thus, a reliable research gives non-random results and if repeated, similar kinds of results will be received again and again. (Hirsjärvi et al. 2008.) This study is strongly influenced by the research made by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) as a large variety of the measurement model is based on their developed and carefully evaluated measurement scale. The findings received in this study are in line with Carroll's and Ahuvia's results which can be seen as an indication of good reliability. Different phases, methods and measurement scales of this research are thoroughly documented to ensure that the study would be possible to repeat by another researcher as well. As the measurement scales were translated and adapted from English to Finnish, the conducted Finnish survey is offered in the appendix to ensure the possibility for other researchers to replicate this study in the exact similar manner.

Research validity in general is observed in order to evaluate whether the study actually observes the intended phenomenon. Validity is often divided into external and internal validity. External validity indicates, whether the results may be generalized and if yes, to what groups. Inner validity on the other hand refers to the reliability of the research itself. It answers to questions such as are the observed concepts correct, is the observed theory selected carefully and whether the measurement model is truly capable of measuring the desired phenomenons. (Metsämuuronen 2005.)

The respondents of this survey were Finnish consumers. Though, due to the utilization of the convenience sampling method, the generalization of the results must considered limited considering the whole Finnish populations. The limitations regarding the generalization will be further discussed in the following chapter in a more detailed manner.

As stated by Metsämuuronen (2005), a proper conduction of the previous theory the research validity can be increased. As earlier presented, the conducted research is strongly based on previous brand love literature as well as the earlier findings of similar studies. Overall, the inner validity of the research can be stated to be strong. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981) the values regarding average values extracted (AVE) should exceed .50 in order to exclude measurement errors. All the AVE values in this research are greater than .50. In addition, discriminant validities of the utilized scales are confirmed as all the squared AVEs are greater than the AVE-values. Thus, the measurement model reaches the stage of validity.

The measurement model was also evaluated concerning its reliability by observing the values of Cronbach's alpha. As all the values exceeded the satisfactory level of .60 the measurement model can be considered reliable as

well. However others finds values greater than .60 satisfactory (Metsämuuronen 2005), it should be noted that some authors such as Bagozzi and Yi (2012) suggest that the Cronbach's alpha values should be greater than .70. The lowest value regarded the factor trust by the value of .689.

6.4   Limitations

Next, the limitations of this study will be discussed. It can be stated that the greatest limitations regarding this research consider the limited possibilities to generalize the received results. Hirsjärvi et al. (2008) suggest that the objective of a quantitative study is to reach a level of generalization by selecting a representative sample from the observed population. As the sample of our research was collected by a non-random sampling method of convenience sampling, the results cannot be generalized to the whole population of Finnish consumers as the observed population did not have equal possibilities to be selected as a sample. In addition, as the sample was collected by utilizing the Facebook connections of the researcher and their networks, the sample may to some extend involve only certain types of respondents. Anyway, the research can still be stated to have reached its purpose of supporting the findings of previous brand love studies (Bryman & Bell).

The reliability and validity of the measurement model were evaluated by observing the Cronbach's alpha - and AVE-values. Both, reliability and validity of the measurement model did reach the level of satisfactory. However, it should be noted that three of the original variables had to be removed due to the low loadings to any factor. Thus, the original measurement model was slightly adapted which should be noted when evaluating the results although the modification can be considered relatively minor.

As the original language of the utilized questions scales was English, the questions needed to be translated into Finnish in order to conduct the survey in the native language of the respondents. The translation process always involves pitfalls, as it is important to capture the true nature of the observed phenomenons taking cultural differences into account as well. Thus, the questions were translated carefully and pretesting of the survey was conducted.

6.5   Further research

Brand love is still a relatively new found topic in the marketing literature and it undoubtedly still requires more investigation. Overall, a deeper understanding of the development of brand love is needed both from theoretical and managerial perspective.

As love towards a brand, as any other emotional experience, is subjectively perceived it might be interesting to get a better insight of what it

actually means to a consumer to be strongly emotionally attached to a product or a brand. Thus, besides quantitative research, applying also qualitative research methods with the objective of getting a better understanding of the meanings and motives behind love in this context could be justified. Moreover, as the characteristic of self-expressiveness seems to strongly affect brand love, it might be interesting to observe, how the ability to be able to identify not only with a specific trademark but also with a typical user of a particular brand affects the consumer-brand relationship.

In addition, as the digitalization and new digital marketing communication channels are constantly increasing their importance as a marketing communication- and brand management tools, their role in the emotional consumer-brand relationship should be observed. Thus, potential further research objectives could consider how the love connection between a consumer and a brand could be harnessed in web-based environments such as online brand communities or through social media. In conclusion, it can be stated that the phenomenon of brand love will offer several interesting and topical research questions also in the future.

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF SURVEY ITEMS IN ENGLISH

Brand love		Mean
LOVE1	This is a wonderful brand.	3,25
LOVE2	This brand makes me feel good.	4,07
LOVE3	This brand is totally awesome.	3,82
LOVE4	I have neutral feelings about this brand. (-)	2,75
LOVE5	This brand makes me very happy.	3,85
LOVE6	I love this brand!	3,54
LOVE7	I have no particular feelings about this brand. (-)	2,40
LOVE8	This brand is a pure delight.	2,98
LOVE9	I am passionate about this brand.	3,26
LOVE10	I'm very attached to this brand.	3,31

Self-expressive brand		
SELF1	This brand symbolizes the person I really am inside.	2,85
SELF2	This brand reflects my personality.	3,33
SELF3	This brand is an extension of my inner self.	3,65
SELF4	This brand mirrors the real me.	2,94
SELF5	This brand contributes to my image.	2,93
SELF6	This brand adds to the social 'role' I play.	2,58
SELF7	This brand has a positive impact on what others think of me.	3,03
SELF8	This brand improves the way society views me.	2,75

Brand Trust		
TRUST1	I trust this brand.	4,49
TRUST2	I rely on this brand.	3,98
TRUST3	This is an honest brand.	3,91
TRUST4	This brand is safe.	4,14

Word of mouth		
WOM1	I have recommended this brand to lots of people.	4,42
WOM2	I 'talk up' this brand to my friends.	4,00
WOM3	I try to spread the good-word about this brand.	3,48
WOM4	I give this brand tons of positive word of mouth advertising.	3,56

Word of mouth in online environment		
eWOM1	I 'talk up' this brand in online environments.	2,46

eWOM2	I give this brand tons of positive word of mouth advertising in the internet environment.	2,33
eWOM3	I try to spread the good-word about this brand in the internet environment.	2,29

Hedonic product type

This particular product category:

HED1	Is functional / is pleasurable	2,89
HED2	Affords enjoyment / performs a task (-)	3,20
HED3	Is useful / is fun	2,08
HED4	Is a sensory experience / does a job (-)	3,30
HED5	Is a necessity / is an indulgence	2,99
HED6	Is a 'must' in life / is one of life's 'rewards'	3,04

Brand love, self-expressive brand, trust, word of mouth and word of mouth
in the internet environment were measured with a 5-point Likert scale
ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree.
Hedonic product was measured with 5-point differential
scale.

Scale sources: brand love, self-expressive brand, word of mouth and
hedonic product by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006). Brand trust by Chaudhuri & Holbrook (2001).
Word of mouth in online environment is adapted from Carroll's & Ahuvia's word
of mouth scale.

APPENDIX 2

SURVEY IN FINNISH

1. Valitse seuraavaksi sellainen brändi, johon olet tyytyväinen ja josta sinulla on kokemusta. Vastaa kaikkiin tässä kyselyssä esitettyihin brändiin liittyviin kysymyksiin nimeämäsi brändin osalta.

2. Arvioni mukaan minulla on kokemusta tästä brändistä

0-1 vuotta
2-6 vuotta
7-11 vuotta
12-16 vuotta

3. Arvioi seuraavaksi tämänhetkistä mielipidettäsi brändistä alla esitettyjen väittämien avulla Vastaukset asteikolla: 1= Täysin eri mieltä 2= Melko eri mieltä 3 = Ei eri eikä samaa mieltä 4 = Melko samaa mieltä 5= Täysin samaa mieltä

Kehun tätä brändiä ystävilleni.

Suhtaudun neutraalisti tähän brändiin.

Tämä brändi on edullinen suhteessa muihin vastaaviin brändeihin.

Kehun tätä brändiä internet-ympäristössä.

Tämä brändi on osa imagoani.

Tämä on rehellinen brändi.

Tämä brändi saa minut tuntemaan oloni hyväksi.

Tämä on ihana brändi.

Olen suositellut tätä brändiä useille ihmisille.

Olen antanut tälle brändille paljon positiivista suusanallista mainontaa internet-ympäristössä.

Voin turvautua tähän brändiin.

Tämä brändi tekee minut erittäin onnelliseksi.

Tämä brändi kuvastaa persoonallisuuttani.

Tämä brändi on turvallinen.

Tämä brändi on yhdenmukainen sosiaalisen roolini kanssa.

Tämä brändi on aivan mahtava.

Olen erittäin kiintynyt tähän brändiin.

Minulla ei ole erityisiä tuntemuksia tätä brändiä kohtaan.

Tämä brändi vaikuttaa positiivisella tavalla siihen, miten muut ajattelevat minusta.

Olen antanut tälle brändille paljon positiivista suusanallista mainontaa.

Suhtaudun intohimoisesti tähän brändiin.

Yritän levittää hyvää sanaa tästä brändistä internet-ympäristössä.

Tämä brändi kuvastaa todellista minääni.

Tämä brändi on silkkaa nautintoa.

Tämä brändi parantaa sitä, miten yhteiskunnassa suhtaudutaan minuun.

Rakastan tätä brändiä!

Tämä brändi symboloi sellaista henkilöä, joka sisimmiltäni olen.

Yritän levittää hyvää sanaa tästä brändistä.

Tämä brändi on sisäisen minäni jatke.

4. Arvioi seuraavaksi tuotekategoriaa, jota tämä brändi mielestäsi edustaa.

On käytännöllinen   1 2 3 4 5   On miellyttävä

Tuottaa nautintoa   1 2 3 4 5   Suorittaa tehtävän

On hyödyllinen   1 2 3 4 5   On hauska

On aistimuksellinen kokemus 1 2 3 4 5 Tekee tehtävänsä

On välttämättömyys 1 2 3 4 5   On hemmottelua

On välttämätön elämässä 1 2 3 4 5 On yksi elämän palkinnoista

5. Kuvaile halutessasi suhdettasi brändiin omin sanoin.

Vastaajan tiedot

6. Ikä

Alle 18

18-25

26-35

36-45

46-55

56-65

Yli 65

7. Sukupuoli

Nainen

Mies