The Role of Brand Love: Application of the Hierarchy of Effects Model

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Significance. Understanding the attributes that build consumer loyalty is particularly critical to fashion companies due to the prevalence of alternatives in the market with low switching costs (Jones & Sasser 1995). Among the several influencing factors of consumer loyalty (e.g., brand trust, satisfaction, perceived value), brand love, or a consumer's emotional attachment to a brand, is a relatively recent concept in the study of loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The significance of this study is extending the knowledge on the role of brand love using the hierarchy of effects model (Lavidge & Gary, 1961) in the context of fashion consumer behaviors.

Application of literature. The hierarchy of effects model explains the three main stages of the consumer buying process: cognitive, affective and conative stages. First, consumers gather knowledge about the brand. Once consumers become knowable about the brand, they develop either positive or negative feelings toward it. Then, consumers' affects are converted into actions—buying a product from the brand.

Fashion expertise refers to overall knowledge of fashion brands (Chiou & Droge, 2006). Although some researchers have reported its negative association with consumer loyalty (e.g., Chiou & Droge, 2006), under the framework of the hierarchy of effects model, knowledge of fashion brands would have a positive influence on the consumer buying process.

Brand love is one of the key factors contributing to a consumer-brand relationship, particularly in relation to conative loyalty (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Kim, Kim, Jolly, & Fairhurst, 2008). In addition, as brand love involves an integration of the brand into the consumer's sense of identity, it has been proposed to relate to the inner self and social self (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Thus, in addition to examining brand love in the hierarchy of effects model, it was examined in relation to self-concepts (i.e., self-congruity).

Methods. A questionnaire in which participants self-reported responses was created to measure the constructs of the study. Items of the seven constructs were adapted from previous studies. There was a total of 124 participants who were predominantly females (88.71%) and Caucasians (79.84%). The mean age was 21.44 (SD: 4.03).

Results. A two-step approach, a measurement and a structural model (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), was used for the statistical analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was first conducted on 11 indicators of 3 latent constructs. The results indicated an acceptable model fit: x^2/df = 2.31, p<.001, CFI= .95, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .09. In addition, a satisfactory level of measurement reliability was achieved and convergent validity and discriminant validity were verified. A structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis followed to assess the relationships between constructs. Fit indices showed an acceptable fit to the data: x^2/df = 2.34, p<.001, CFI= .95, TLI= .92, RMSEA= .09. As shown in Figure 1, fashion expertise had a significant effect on brand love (β= .33, p<.001) and brand love had a significant effect on brand loyalty behaviors (β= .54, p<.001).
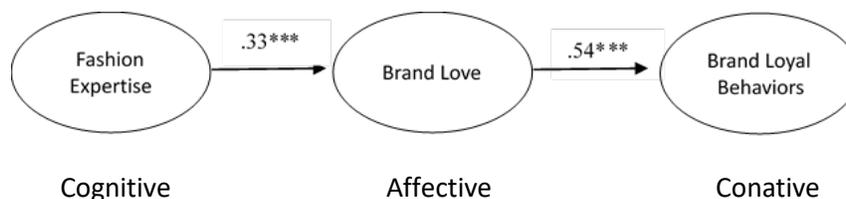

| Cognitive | Affective | Conative |

Figure 1. Summary of SEM results. (Note. ***p<.001)

In order to examine the relationship between brand love and perceptions of self-congruity associated with the fashion brand, respondents were classified into two groups based on their level of brand love. As seen in Table 1, respondents with higher level of brand love had significantly higher scores in all four measures of self-congruity than those with lower level of brand love.

Table 1. Differences in self-congruity measures between low and high brand love groups

	Means (standard deviation)		t-statistic (df)	p-value
	Low (n=61)	High (n=63)		
Actual self-congruity	3.46 (.54)	3.86 (.63)	3.82 (122)	<.001
Ideal self-congruity	3.55 (.69)	4.04 (.60)	4.21 (120)	<.001
Social self-congruity	3.48 (.66)	3.96 (.64)	4.06 (120)	<.001
Ideal social self-congruity	3.45 (.76)	3.98 (.68)	4.11 (120)	<.001

Discussion. The findings of this study provide empirical support for the importance of brand love in developing brand loyal behaviors. This study tested the relationships between fashion expertise, brand love, and brand loyal behaviors based on the hierarchy of effects model. The results indicated that consumers who know more about the fashion brands are more likely to have stronger emotional attachment to their favorite fashion brand and brand love, in turn, has a significant effect on performing brand loyal behaviors. In addition, the findings suggested that consumers perceive greater brand love when the brand has similar image to his/her self-image. Fashion marketers may focus on enhancing affective relationship with consumers by creating strategies that can associate the brand with a clear and desirable personality.

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