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Brand Orientation and WOM: Mediating Roles of Brand Love

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Abstract: This study has examined the association of the brand factors with the primary concentration on brand love and its impact on word of mouth (WOM) communication. Brand love is used as a mediator. The questionnaire for the study was adapted from earlier established scales and measures which were based on five points Likert Scale. The study was concentrated on the mall-going customers in the city of Karachi. The study used a sample size of 387 and data was collected non-randomly. The response rate was 86% which showed that mall customers have a high interest on the brand. Smart PLS was used for data analysis. After preliminary statistical analysis including descriptive, reliability and validity, the hypotheses results were generated through bootstrapping. The results suggest that consumers love those brands that have strong brand image, and with which they are satisfied. Contrary to earlier research, we found that brand image has an insignificant association with WOM. However, we found consumers in love with a brand become advocates of that brand. Furthermore, the results suggest that satisfied customers not only love the brand but they also become source of WOM. We also found that brand love failed to mediate brand experience and WOM. However, our results support brand love through brand image and brand satisfaction influence WOM.

Keywords: WOM, brand love, brand satisfaction, brand experience and brand image.

Introduction

Brand love refers to consumers' affective and emotional attachment towards a brand that builds sustainable relationship with the consumers (Rubin, 1973). Ismail and Spinelli (2012) have conceptualized brand as "a high order construct of cognitions, emotions, and behaviors". Huber, Meyer, and Schmid (2015) suggest that consumers who love a brand will have an emotional attachment to it.

Brand attachment is a precursor to brand love that prevents brand switching. Moreover, it enhances brand image, and evokes interpersonal love (Fournier, 1998). Consumers' emotional attachment with a brand promote positive purchase behavior and generate positive WOM communication. Similarly, Langner, Bruns, Fischer, and Rossiter (2016) suggest brand love stimulates emotional attachment with consumers and if that brand is not available they become distress. Firms that have a large loyal customer-base may have competitive edge over competitors (Vlachos & Vrechopoulos, 2012).

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Similarly, [Fournier \(1998\)](#) reiterates that customers' emotional and sustainable bonding with a brand in an extreme case may lead to obsessive buying behavior. Brand love and brand preference although are related, but they are different constructs. Brand preference indicates customer's inclination to buy a particular brand sans emotion ([Shimp & Madden, 1988](#)). On the contrary, brand love stimulates consumers' emotional attachment which positively influence their decision making process.

Moreover, [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#) argue that similarity between brand personification and consumers' personality traits promote consumers' identity that increase their self-worth. [Shukla \(2010\)](#) also refers brand love as "intimate, passionate, and committed relationship of consumers with the brand". These factors have association with consumers' satisfaction and experience that are considered precursors to brand image and brand love. Other facets of brand love are the factors that affect consumers social standing ([Unal & Aydin, 2013](#)), product involvement ([Quester & Lim, 2003](#)), self-congruity ([Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008](#)), positive sense of community ([Carlson, Suter, & Brown, 2008](#)), and brand trust ([Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012](#)), WOM advocacy ([Dellarocas, 2003](#)), brand loyalty ([Jacoby & Kyner, 1973](#)), brand commitment ([Burmam & Zeplin, 2005](#)), willingness to pay premium price ([Rodrigues & Reis, 2013](#)). Research also suggests brand love has indirect association (through satisfaction) with brand loyalty, purchase intentions as well as with WOM.

Building on the above, the aim of the study has multiple dimensions. One is to examine the direct association of "brand satisfaction, brand experience and brand image" on brand love. Two, how brand love affects brand image. Three, the mediating roles of brand love.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background

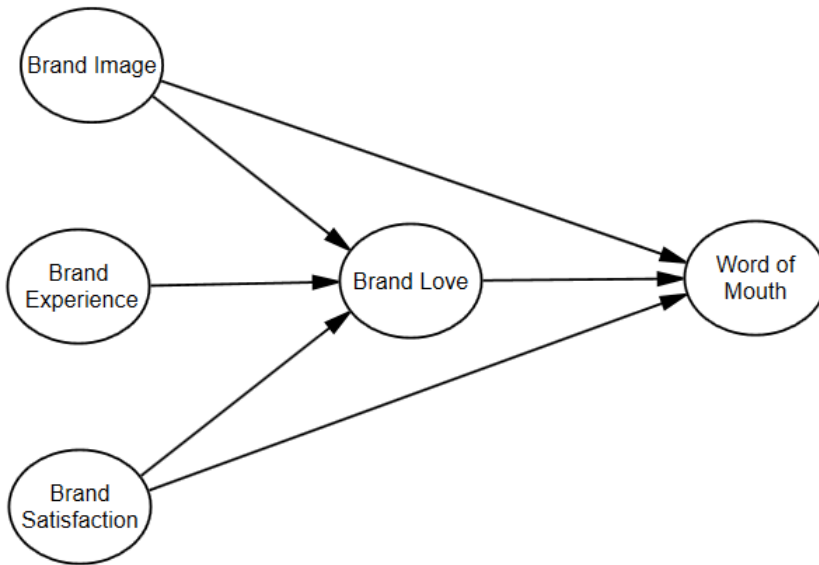
There are several theories and models that have been used for understanding dyadic relationship between brands and consumers. Many studies have used inter-personal relationship for understanding this phenomenon ([Whang, Allen, Sahoury, & Zhang, 2004](#)). On the other hand a few studies have used the brand relationship quality model that has six facets. Attachment is associated with "love / passion and self-connection", whereas "interdependence and commitment" is linked with behavioral ties, and "intimacy and brand partner quality" is connected with supportive cognitive beliefs. The aforementioned dimensions have been extracted from interdependence theory and theories of attractions ([Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003](#)). The Attachment theory covers the concepts of love and passion. Attachment theory is about parent-children relationship to the stage of adulthood, and the relationship of adults with friends and peers in romantic connotation ([Thomson, 2006](#)).

Many studies have also concluded that human attachment can be with places, animals, objects, brands and celebrities ([Yuksel, 2010](#)). Thus emotional attachment is related to "affection, passion and connection". On the other hand, [Kamat and Parulekar \(2007\)](#)

argue that the important facets of brand love are “passion, intimacy and commitment”. Ahuvia (1994) concludes that consumers falling in love with an object is akin to falling in love with a person.

Based on the above theoretical discussions, we have developed a conceptual framework that has six direct relationships and three mediating relationships, depicted in Figure 1. The literature support for the proposed hypotheses are presented in the subsequent sections.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework



Hypotheses Development

Brand Experience and Brand Love

A strong brand not only attracts consumers but it also interacts with them. Consequently, this interaction encourages customers to purchase and experience the brand (Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). Consumers experience with the brand can be pleasant or unpleasant. If their experience is unpleasant, consumers may not repurchase the brand. On the other hand consumers' pleasant experience may not only enhance their repurchase intentions but may also lead to brand love.

Similarly, Unal and Aydin (2013) suggest that consumers who love a brand are highly satisfied with it and often develop a sustainable relationship with the brand. In view of its significance many firms organize activities that provide opportunities to the consumers to experience the brand with the family, friends and inspired group (Yi, Gong, & Lee, 2013).

These brand activation activities generate consumers' positive emotions and enhance the bonding with the brand.

It has also been documented that a consumer's pleasurable experience with a brand is a source of romantic relationship due to which such consumer may ignore random bad experience, and continues to build the relationship (Sternberg, 1997). On the contrary, a consistent bad experience with the brand may end the romantic relationship and may force the consumer to switch to other brands (Sarkar, Ponnampalath, & Murthy, 2012). Many researchers are of the opinion that the factors that contribute in forming a bond between a brand and consumers are subjective in nature. However, most researchers agree that a consumer's pleasant consumption experience with a brand is the strongest predictor to brand love.

H₁: Brand experience and brand love are positively associated.

Brand Image and Brand Love

Consumers' collective perceptions (i.e. functional, emotional and symbolic) toward a brand enhance brand image and brand love (Low & Lamb, 2000). Brand image plays a key role of differentiating one brand from the other and hence it should be a basic component of every brand. Brand positioning relates to the key benefits a firm offers to its target consumers. If the offered value propositions are aligned with consumers' needs, it will enhance brand image and stimulates brand love (Cho et al., 2015). Similarly, Wood (2004) also suggest that brand image enables companies to form a strong and affective relationship with its customers that promotes positive attitude towards the brand. The image of the brand helps in attracting and retaining customers, therefore, successful companies spend significant resources for building a positive brand image. Many consumers are inspired with the personality of the brand they love due to which they make efforts to align their personality with the brand attributes. Consequently, it develops deep emotional attachment with the consumers (Sirgy et al., 2008). Similarly, Ismail and Spinelli (2012) found that all the brand attributes individually and collectively promote brand love. However, it is also found that conflicts in the brand attributes may not only confuse the consumers but may adversely affect brand love-relationship. Furthermore, it was observed that consumers align their personal attributes to the brand attributes and this linkage profoundly affect brand love (Fournier, 1998).

The connection between brand image and brand love is considered vital in all domains and all segments. But it has been documented that it is more significant in fashion apparel industry (Sallam, 2014) and in young age segments. Moreover, consumers generally love those brands whose consumption improve their self-image (Hansen & Jensen, 2009).

H₂: Brand Image and brand love are positively related.

Brand Image and WOM

Consumers often prefer to purchase a product with a strong brand image as it delivers what the brand promises. Thus a brand with a strong image plays a significant role in customer purchase decision, loyalty and generating positive WOM communication

(Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010; Whang et al., 2004). According to Kapferer (1997) a reputable brand not only command customer loyalty but motivates the customers to refer its positive attributes to their acquaintances and peers. It has been documented that most consumers are highly satisfied with the brand that has a reputable image, therefore, strong image allows companies to extend brand into other product categories. Consumers will assume that the same brand that is extended into another product category will have similar likeable attributes and they will therefore, strongly consider it for purchase decision and also recommend it to others (Ha & Perks, 2005; Javed & Khan, 2014). In the present digital world the importance of e-WOM has increased but still the effect of WOM communication cannot be ignored especially in the collectivistic society like Pakistan.

H₃: Brand image and WOM are positively associated.

Brand Love and WOM

A number of studies have found a strong correlation between brand love and WOM. Brand love not only enhances consumer engagement but also motivates consumers to generate positive WOM communication (Langner et al., 2016). This motivates consumers to become brand advocates and even brand ambassadors. Consumers who love a brand spread positive WOM for both the existing brand but also for its extended brands (Samson, 2006). Studies on brand love have revealed that consumers in love with a brand have a strong inclination and willingness to forgo any negative aspect of the brand as well.

Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) found that customers show resistance in accepting negative information and are keen to accept positive information on the brand they love. Furthermore, it is also documented that consumers who love a brand not only generate positive WOM communication but also become advocates for the brand. Fournier (1998) argues that consumers who love a brand, despite becoming dissatisfied with a particular aspect, may not generate negative WOM communication.

H₄: Brand love has a positive association with WOM.

Brand Satisfaction and Brand Love

A gap between customers' expectation and delivered values is a precursor to brand satisfaction. A higher gap promotes consumer dissatisfaction and vice versa. Marketers thus focus on exceeding the promised value (Mano & Oliver, 1993). Consequently it has dualistic effect on consumer's attitudes. One, it enhances brand satisfaction (Bennett, Härtel, & McColl-Kennedy, 2005); two, it enhances brand love (Thomson, MacInnis, & Whan Park, 2005). Similarly, Mano and Oliver (1993) stress that the customers' satisfaction stimulates consumers' emotional feelings which over a period transform into brand love.

H₅: Brand satisfaction has a positive impact on brand love.

Brand Satisfaction and WOM

A product is the combination of benefits that are offered to customers to satisfy their needs. When customers are satisfied with the performance of the delivered benefits, it

results in brand satisfaction which is a precursor to brand loyalty and WOM (Bennett et al., 2005). Hence, delivering customer satisfaction has become the key focus in the marketing literature. Satisfied customers not only show a strong inclination to future repurchase of the brand, but they also tend to refer the brand to others (Samson, 2006). Past studies also show that strong reference and good WOM are the most cost effective means for sales growth as compared to cost intensive promotional tools (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). It is not necessary that all the non-satisfied customers may generate negative WOM. Perhaps there could be two reasons for this exception. One, the customer might be a loyal to the brand. Two, the customer might be of the opinion that switching to other brands may be more risky (Ha & Perks, 2005).

H₆: Brand satisfaction has a positive association with WOM.

Indirect Effect

Brand Experience, Brand Love and WOM

Brand experience gained popularity in the marketing literature after Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, and Greenleaf (1984) discussed theory of experience that was adopted in the marketing text books. Brand experience is the result of the combination of internal subjective feelings and cognitions of the customer and the behavioral responses on sensory, affective and behavioral dimensions. Sensory dimension relies upon the five human senses. How the brand appears on the sensory dimension increases or decreases the positive experience. Affective is linked with the customers' emotions as well as customers' feelings which a brand evoked (Whang et al., 2004).

Behavior is related with long term relationship which is linked to the brand for purchase and repurchases decision. Customers generate behavioral responses not only on sensory, but also on affective, as well as behavioral and social dimensions on the basis of brand experiences (Brakus et al., 2009) and positive brand experiences generally lead to the formation of strong union between the consumer and the brand. A pleasant brand experience may lead to customer developing love for the brand especially if that brand consistently delivered the stated promises in the shape of superior benefits. Positive brand experience also makes a customer to consume the product over and over again and refer the brand to others which is a reflection of brand love. Many studies have recognized that positive brand experience is a necessary element in the development of love for the brand (Sarkar et al., 2012).

Many studies in the field of marketing have found that brand love and WOM have strong and positive connection (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) as brand love causes high engagement among its customers. Many studies have focused on how brand love perform a vital role in making the customer a strong advocate for the brand that helps in bringing new customers to the referred brand. On the other hand, studies have also examined on how the current customers are inclined to try other products of the company under the same brand name (Shukla, 2010). Brand love is the factor that creates strong bonding between the brand and the customers that allows sales growth in terms of new product as well as new customers under the loved brand name.

Consumers holding beliefs on symbolic, functional and emotional dimensions on a brand constitute brand image (Low & Lamb, 2000). Consumers tend to communicate self-image to others through brand. Congruency between brand and self-image establishes strong brand connection with that brand as it helps in portraying the self-image to the outside world and it serves as personification of one's self-image (Sirgy et al., 2008). Positive brand image is created when customers find the promised value delivered and exceeded by the brand and that results in brand satisfaction. Long term satisfaction results in the development of intense emotional bonding in the shape of brand love (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012). Past studies have indicated that customers associate human personality traits with the brand attribute, which corroborate psychological association and bonding with the brand as with other human beings. Hence strong emotional ties on positive terms are the cause of the development of brand love (Hollebeek, 2011).

H₇: Brand love mediates brand experience and WOM.

Brand Image, Brand Love and WOM

The image of the brand helps in attracting and retaining customers, therefore, successful companies spend significant resources for building a positive brand image (Cho et al., 2015). Many consumers are inspired with the personality of the brand they love due to which they make efforts to align their personality with it.

WOM is generated when customers are highly engaged with the brand (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Positive emotional engagement becomes the basis for brand passion that leads towards brand advocacy and persuades others to use the brand. Past studies have identified strong bonding between WOM and brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

H₈: Brand love mediates brand experience and WOM.

Brand Satisfaction, Brand Love and WOM

Satisfied customers exhibit dualistic effect on attitudinal aspect. It enhances brand satisfaction and also promotes brand love (Thomson et al., 2005). Similarly, Mano and Oliver (1993) stress that the customers' satisfaction stimulate their emotional feelings which over a period transform into brand love.

Batra et al. (2012) found that customers show resistance in accepting negative information and are keen to accept positive information on the brand they love. Furthermore, it is also documented that consumers who love a brand not only generate positive WOM communication but also become advocates for the brand.

H₉: Brand love mediates satisfaction and WOM.

Methodology

Participants and Procedure

The scope of the study was limited to the customers who shop in the leading malls in Karachi and generally younger in the age group. This research population was selected

as it is more conscious towards brand image and vulnerable to subjective norms. The sample size for the study was 387 and was calculated at 95% confidence and 5% margin of error. Five enumerators were recruited from a private university. The enumerators were initially told about the purpose and objective of the study. The enumerators, prior to collecting the data, informed the respondents that the collected data will be used for academic purpose only. Moreover their identity will not be disclosed.

Respondent Profile

The respondents profile represents those individuals who regularly visit shopping malls. Of the 387 respondents 56% were males, and 44% were females. 53% respondents were married and the rest 47% were single. Their ages ranged between 18 to 50 years. 45% respondents were between the age of 18 and 30 years, 33% ranged between the ages 30 to 40 years, and another 22% ranged between the ages 41 and 50. 45% respondents had bachelor's degrees, and around 22% had Master's Degree.

Scales and Measures

In the developed conceptual framework, we have five latent variables and 36 indicator variables. Each construct is based on five point Likert scale. The value 1 shows very low agreement, and the value 5 shows very high agreement. The constructs used in this study are described below:

Brand Image Scale

The perception that consumers hold for a brand on given dimensions, and the brand's performance on meeting or exceeding on those dimensions such as quality, style or history constitute brand image. Brand image is carefully crafted by the companies based upon their positioning strategies. Accordance between brand image and consumer image push a consumer to use that brand and recommend it to others. The scale and measures on brand image has four items adapted from [Yoo and Donthu \(2001\)](#).

Brand Experience Scale

Individual consumer experience is formed when a consumer uses the brand. A positive brand experience is the result of that brand meeting consumer expectations and exceeding it. A favorable attitude is developed as an outcome of positive brand experience. On the other hand, negative experience of the brand is formed when the brand is unable to meet a consumer's minimum expectation and fails on important criteria ([Fam, de Run, Shukla, Shamim, & Butt, 2013](#)). The scale and measures on brand experience has seven items adapted from [Haase and Wiedmann \(2018\)](#).

Brand Satisfaction Scale

Brand satisfaction is achieved when consumers' expectations from the brand is matched or exceeded. In addition, positive brand experiences of a consumer on a continual basis lead to brand satisfaction. Satisfaction will also result in repurchase of the brand and relationship building with the brand (Thomson et al., 2005). Strong emotional bonding is formed with the brands that satisfy consumers. The scale and measures on brand satisfaction has seven items that are adapted from Reimann, Castaño, Zaichkowsky, and Bechara (2012).

WOM Scale

When customers are happy with the performance of the brand they tend to recommend the use of the brands to others. WOM represents the referral value of the brand by the current customers to others. This is not a promotion by the company but instead a form of promotion by the current customers. Since it is not a paid form of communication by the sponsoring company for its brand, WOM represents a higher acceptance value for the new users in comparison to the company's efforts in the form of paid communication. The eight items were adapted from the questionnaire developed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006).

Brand Love Scale

Love is a strong emotional attachment that exists in the form of positive feelings and long lasting bonding between two people or between people and objects. Brand love is developed when consumers form strong emotional attachment and develop positive feelings for the brand. It's a human characteristic that is linked with other human of close relationship, but is also attributed to brands. A total of 10 items were taken in to consideration from questionnaire developed by (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Data Analysis and Results

Smart PLS software was used for generating measurement and structural model.

Descriptive Analysis

The results related to descriptive analysis are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1
Descriptive Analysis

| Constructs | Mean | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis | Cronbach's Alpha |
|--------------------|-------|-------|----------|----------|------------------|
| Brand Experience | 4.630 | 1.220 | -0.890 | -0.780 | 0.848 |
| Brand Image | 4.150 | 1.150 | -0.870 | -0.500 | 0.770 |
| Brand Love | 5.000 | 0.970 | -0.460 | -0.820 | 0.887 |
| Brand Satisfaction | 4.650 | 1.030 | -0.170 | -1.050 | 0.896 |
| Word of Mouth | 4.430 | 1.060 | -0.500 | 0.870 | 0.893 |

The results indicate that the adapted constructs Cronbach's alpha values are at least 0.7, indicating acceptable internal consistency (Leech, Barrett, & Morgan, 2014; Sharif & Bukhari, 2014). Additionally, all the Skewness and Kurtosis values ranged between ± 1.5 , indicating that adapted constructs fulfill the requirements of univariate normality (Looney, 1995).

Convergent Validity

The results related to convergent validity are depicted in Table 2.

Table 2
Convergent Validity

| | Mean | SD | Composite Reliability | AVE |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-----------------------|-------|
| Brand Experience | 4.630 | 1.220 | 0.908 | 0.768 |
| Brand Image | 4.150 | 1.150 | 0.853 | 0.592 |
| Brand Love | 5.000 | 0.970 | 0.918 | 0.690 |
| Brand Satisfaction | 4.650 | 1.030 | 0.928 | 0.762 |
| Word of Mouth | 4.430 | 1.060 | 0.922 | 0.704 |

The findings depict that all the composite reliability values are at least 0.70, and the values of average variance extracted are at least 0.40, confirming that adapted constructs fulfill the requirements of convergent validity.

Discriminant Validity

The results related to discriminant validity are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3
Discriminant Validity

| | BE | BI | BL | BS | WOM |
|--------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Brand Experience | 0.876 | | | | |
| Brand Image | 0.447 | 0.769 | | | |
| Brand Love | 0.587 | 0.639 | 0.831 | | |
| Brand Satisfaction | 0.506 | 0.435 | 0.594 | 0.873 | |
| Word of Mouth | 0.441 | 0.594 | 0.645 | 0.386 | 0.839 |

The results presented in Table 3 reveal that the square root of average variance explained values depicted diagonally are greater than the rest of the values which are square

of each pair of correlation. This confirms that all the constructs used in the study are unique and distinctive (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Raza, Isa, & Rani, 2019).

Results Related to Developed Hypotheses

In this study, we have proposed six direct hypotheses and three indirect hypotheses. The summarized results are presented in table 4. The results show that all the hypotheses were accepted except hypothesis 6 which is on the association between brand satisfaction and WOM.

Table 4
Path Coefficients

| | Beta values | T Stat. | P Values | Results |
|--|-------------|---------|----------|----------|
| Direct Relationship | | | | |
| Brand Experience ->Brand Love (H1) | 0.264 | 10.448 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Image ->Brand Love (H2) | 0.396 | 16.06 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Image ->WOM (H3) | 0.310 | 10.91 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Love ->WOM (H4) | 0.459 | 13.57 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Satisfaction ->Brand Love (H5) | 0.289 | 12.51 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Satisfaction ->WOM (H6) | -0.022 | 0.784 | 0.217 | Rejected |
| Indirect Relationship | | | | |
| Brand Experience ->Brand Love ->WOM (H7) | 0.121 | 8.526 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Image ->Brand Love ->WOM (H8) | 0.182 | 10.28 | 0.000 | Accepted |
| Brand Satisfaction ->Brand Love ->WOM (H9) | 0.132 | 8.945 | 0.000 | Accepted |

Discussion

Based on the theoretical grounding, we have proposed 9 hypotheses. Out of 9 hypotheses, 8 hypotheses were accepted and 1 was rejected. The relevance of the results with earlier studies follows:

The hypothesis on brand experience and brand love was accepted. Brand love is developed when consumers experience favorable results from the brand that also tend to bring back the consumers to the same brand. Earlier research identified positive brand experience leading to the development of bonding with the brand in the shape of brand love (Kaufmann, Loureiro, & Manarioti, 2016).

The hypothesis on brand image leading to brand love was accepted. Earlier research on brand indicated that brand has the capacity to act as a reflection for a consumer's personality and such brand that reflects a consumer's personality and image are favored and loved by its user. This leads to the formation of the inference that brand image stimulates brand love.

The hypothesis on brand image on WOM was accepted. This particular finding is consistent to earlier studies that suggest brand image and WOM are positively associated. Brand image also helps customers to have trust in product quality and promises. Hence, brand image is a crucial factor in customer purchase decisions and long term loyalty to

the company. According to [Unal and Aydin \(2013\)](#), the loyalty factor not only influences customer repurchase intentions but also affects WOM communication.

The hypothesis on brand love and WOM was accepted. Other studies have also supported brand love and WOM association. In fact a significant link was found between brand love and positive spread of the word to others by the customers. Furthermore, customers do repeat purchase when they love the brand and suggest brand to others for purchase ([Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010](#)).

The hypothesis on brand satisfaction and brand love was accepted. It is widely believed that customer will show the intention of repurchase if the product satisfies expectation that was promised ([Thomson et al., 2005](#)). The feeling of satisfaction for the customer leads to strong emotional and sustained bonding with the brand that leads to brand love ([Mano & Oliver, 1993](#)). This goodwill becomes part of brand in the shape of equity.

The hypothesis on brand satisfaction and WOM was rejected. Our result is contrary to earlier literature that suggests satisfied customers not only show an inclination to repurchase the brand in the future but also leads to positive word of mouth ([Thomson et al., 2005](#)). Our findings indicate that brand love needs to be developed first from brand satisfaction to become a source of word of mouth and satisfaction directly does not influence word of mouth. Brand satisfaction is the basis of forming sustained customer-relationship based on brand love.

The results suggest that brand experience through brand love affects WOM communication. This finding is consistent with earlier studies. Earlier research has illustrated that positive brand experience leads to consumer's frequent consumption of that product from the same brand and suggests the brand to others which can be attributed to brand love ([Sternberg, 1997](#)). Hence, the connection of brand love and WOM was expected and forecasted. Studies have also identified that customers who love a brand become engaged with that brand and refer it to others ([Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010](#)).

We found that brand love mediates brand image and WOM. The earlier studies have also documented that brand image has a direct association with brand love ([Wood, 2004](#)), and brand love is an antecedent to WOM ([Low & Lamb, 2000](#)). The results point out that brand image positively affects WOM through brand love.

The results indicate that brand love mediates brand satisfaction and WOM relationship. Past studies have indicated that brand satisfaction is a core ingredient of brand love ([Reimann et al., 2012](#)), and brand love generates positive WOM communication.

Conclusion

The results suggest that consumers love those brands that have strong brand image, and with which they have pleasant experience. Contrary to earlier researches, we found that brand satisfaction has insignificant association with WOM. However, we also found that consumers become advocates for the brand they love. Furthermore, the results suggest that brand satisfaction through brand love influence customers to become source of WOM. We also found that brand love does mediate brand experience, and WOM. Our results also support that brand love through brand image influence WOM positively.

Implications

Brand love appears to perpetrate considerable influence on different facets of brand equity and WOM. Companies must establish customer oriented strategies and policies that cause brand love to develop and sustain. This will provide an umbrella against the rivals' brands that are seeking to take the customers away. Our results indicated that brand love always play a vital role in every condition of generating brand equity. In fact, our results showed that brand love mediate brand experience, image, brand satisfaction, and WOM. Hence, the focus on brand love shall enhance the organizational performance in terms of brand acceptance. We therefore suggest that marketers need to develop a strategy by incorporating appropriate mix of brand elements of brand experience, brand image, and brand satisfaction but give utmost importance to develop brand love for long-term acceptance of the brand.

Limitations and Future Research Implications

This study has few limitations. It was limited to mall-going customers of Karachi who generally are more concerned about synergy between the attributes of brand and self-personality traits. Future studies maybe extended to other demographic groups including other income group and older population and other geographical regions. The concept of brand image and brand love is highly complicated; therefore, future studies may take holistic approach by incorporating more variables in studies. We in the study have three mediating roles of brand love. Other studies may incorporate other brand related constructs as a mediators and moderators.

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