

THE EVOLVING LANDSCAPE OF BRAND LOVE RESEARCH: THEORETICAL, BEHAVIORAL, AND DIGITAL DIMENSIONS

RISTIANAWATI DWI UTAMI*

School of Management, Wuhan University of Technology, Management Department, Yogyakarta University of Technology. *Corresponding Author Email: ristianawati@uty.ac.id

WANG AIMIN

School of Management, Wuhan University of Technology. Email: wangam@vip.163.com

Abstract

Brand love has become a central emotional driver behind consumer decision-making in today's highly competitive markets. This study offers a comprehensive examination of the brand love literature, tracing its intellectual development, identifying key contributors, and revealing the conceptual foundations that shape the field. Employing the rigorous SPAR-4-SLR protocol, we systematically examined 314 scholarly publications from the Web of Science, covering an extensive 18-year period from 2006 to 2024. The analysis highlights the steady expansion of brand love research, showing how it has progressed from early, foundational inquiries to more advanced investigations that integrate marketing, consumer psychology, and behavioral science perspectives. Across studies, brand love consistently emerges as a decisive force that fuels customer loyalty and fosters enduring positive attitudes toward brands. One of its most valuable outcomes is authentic word-of-mouth communication: when consumers truly love a brand, they naturally advocate for it, share their enthusiasm with others, and look forward to future interactions. This organic promotion becomes a powerful, cost-effective marketing advantage. Ultimately, the review underscores that cultivating strong emotional bonds—particularly through digital platforms and interactive brand experiences—is essential for achieving meaningful consumer engagement and long-term organizational success.

Keywords: Brand Love; Consumer Behavior; Digital Platforms; Artificial Intelligence; Bibliometric.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of brand love has garnered significant scholarly interest in the dynamic realm of consumer behavior. This is not merely a transient fascination; it has evolved into a fundamental framework for understanding the profound, often implicit relationships that consumers form with companies in contemporary, highly competitive markets.

Brand love is a profound and enduring emotional connection that people establish with a brand. It is defined by meticulous evaluations and profound emotional connections [1]. Brand love is a fascinating concept, as it has a significant impact on customer loyalty, encourages people to speak up for the brand, and fosters long-term engagement.

It differs from transactional relationships in that it focuses on building deeper emotional connections. This illustrates how psychological elements and actual behavior interact when customers make decisions [2].

Existing literature suggests that brand love is often perceived as a relational construct between customers and brands, rather than merely an emotional experience.

This perspective is supported by studies examining its antecedents and consequences, including brand attachment, trust, and loyalty [1, 3]. These findings emphasize brand love as a multifaceted construct that encompasses affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions.

However, some scholars argue for a more nuanced understanding that centers on the emotional essence of brand love rather than its relational attributes [4]. The increasing scholarly interest in this domain is largely driven by brand love's capacity to generate favorable marketing outcomes, including enhanced brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and consumers' willingness to pay a premium for beloved brands [5-7].

Despite the growing body of research, a significant gap remains in the integration and systematization of existing knowledge on brand love. Much of the current literature is based on narrative reviews or isolated empirical studies, resulting in a fragmented understanding of the field.

This lack of synthesis hinders the identification of dominant themes, influential contributors, and methodological advancements. To address this gap, bibliometric analysis has gained recognition as a robust method for mapping the intellectual structure of research domains. In business research, bibliometric methods are increasingly applied to evaluate the development of academic disciplines by analyzing large volumes of unstructured publication data [8, 9].

When conducted rigorously, bibliometric analysis provides valuable insights into the evolution of knowledge, highlights influential works, reveals research trends, and identifies areas that require further exploration [10].

Applying bibliometric analysis to the brand love literature is especially pertinent due to the diversity of studies, theoretical frameworks, and publication venues in the field. Such an approach enables a systematic evaluation of research trajectories, emerging topics, and thematic clusters that are essential to advancing scholarly discourse in this area [11, 12]. Accordingly, this study aims to map the intellectual landscape of brand love research, with a specific emphasis on its development in the context of social media consumer behavior. This study addresses the following research questions:

- RQ1. What distinct publication patterns and performance define brand love research?
- RQ2. What is the science mapping in Brand Love research?
- RQ3. What promising avenues lie ahead for future research on brand love?

Given the mentioned research questions, the research objectives of this study are:

- RO1. To thoroughly explore the publication patterns and contribution performance in brand love research.
- RO2. To meticulously examine the science mapping of brand love research.
- RO3. To thoughtfully propose future research opportunities within brand love research.

This study makes significant contributions to the advancement of brand love research in several key ways.

First, it provides a comprehensive overview of the field's thematic and methodological evolution, identifying influential publications, prominent research streams, and emerging areas of interest.

Second, it outlines the practical implications of brand love for marketing strategy, particularly its role in fostering consumer loyalty, advocacy, and engagement.

Third, it presents a research agenda that can guide future scholarly efforts and deepen the theoretical and practical understanding of brand love. By tackling these goals, the study enhances our understanding of brand love as a concept and its potential to inspire creativity and drive competitive advantage in modern marketing strategies.

The remainder of this paper is structured as a clear pathway: we first lay out our materials and methods, including the specific bibliometric techniques employed and our adherence to the SPAR-4-SLR Protocol [13]. This foundation then leads into our analysis and discussion, where we directly address each of our proposed research questions. The study concludes with a concise summary of our findings, an honest acknowledgment of its limitations, and thoughtful recommendations for future research directions.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the essential preparatory steps in conducting a bibliometric analysis is developing a systematic protocol. Protocol preparation upholds research integrity by ensuring careful planning, accuracy in execution, reduced uncertainty, anticipation of potential challenges, increased accountability, and replicability.

This study adopted the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4-SLR) protocol [13], which consists of three stages and six sub-stages. Figure 1 presents the flowchart of the protocol.

2.1.1 Assembling

The assembling stage focuses on identifying and acquiring the initial dataset of relevant studies for analysis. This stage includes two sub-stages:

- Identification. This stage begins with identifying a research document. This study aims to explore the performance analysis (RQ 1) and intellectual structure (RQ 2/RQ 3) of the literature on brand love research (domain), published in academic journals (source type), and indexed in Web of Science (source quality). Since journals often undergo a higher level of peer-review examination than other sources, such as books, book chapters, and conference proceedings, the emphasis on material published in journals is justifiable. Additionally, utilizing the Web of Science Core Collection provides a robust, dependable, and adaptable foundation for scholarly research, ensuring access to high-quality literature, as well as robust analytical and reporting capabilities.

- Acquisition. In this stage, relevant literature was retrieved from the Web of Science Core Collection. The search keyword was “brand* love” with a search period from 2006 to 2024. The total number of articles returned from the acquisition stage is 381 documents.

2.1.2 Arranging

The arranging stage emphasizes the organization and purification of the collected dataset to refine it for detailed analysis.

The arranging stage consists of two sub-stages:

- Organization. In this stage, articles were organized using key attributes, including the title, author names, journal names, keywords, citation counts, and author affiliations. These attributes facilitated systematic categorization and ensured consistency in data handling.
- Purification. This step applied strict inclusion and exclusion criteria to filter the dataset. Non-relevant or duplicate records were eliminated, and only journal articles written in English were retained. Articles focusing specifically on brand love within the business and management domain were prioritized.

3.1.3 Assessing

The assessing stage involves evaluating the purified dataset through performance metrics and science mapping to derive actionable insights. Assessing stage consists of two sub-stages:

- Evaluation. This study employed two analysis methods: performance analysis and science mapping. Performance Analysis consists of publication trends, prolific authors, journal sources, and country affiliations, which were analyzed to assess the impact and contribution of studies within the dataset. Meanwhile, science mapping is an advanced bibliometric technique that includes co-citation analysis, bibliographic coupling, and co-word analysis, which are used to identify relationships between studies, thematic clusters, and intellectual structures within the field. Furthermore, thematic analysis of best practices and gaps was conducted to propose future research directions, providing a foundation for advancing the field of brand love.
- Reporting. The results of the assessment were presented using a combination of tables, figures (e.g., network visualizations), and narratives to ensure clarity and comprehensiveness. Reporting adhered to recognized conventions to enhance the transparency and reproducibility of the study. Moreover, a rigorous and insightful bibliometric review provides a roadmap for future research and practice.

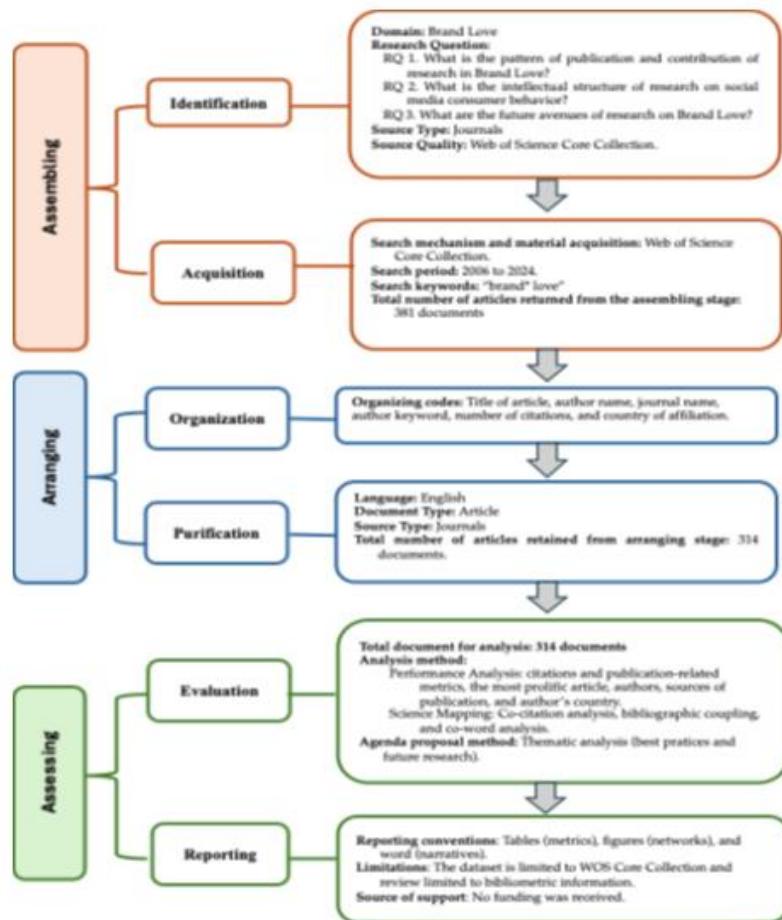


Figure 1: The SPAR 4-SLR Protocol

3. RESULTS

3.1. Performance Analysis

Performance analysis serves as a method for evaluating how different research elements contribute to a given topic. In bibliometric studies, it is frequently employed to present a detailed picture of the intellectual terrain [10, 14]. This section discusses the research profile about social media consumer behavior, including all information on the related collected data, publications, annual citation trends, most influential documents, prolific authors, prominent sources of publications, most productive countries, and distribution by study area.

3.1.1. Information Related to Collected

The search process was conducted on 3 October 2024. Table 1 provides an overview of the data on brand love research. It is worth noting that 314 documents were published during the 18-year analysis period from 2006 to 2024. These articles originated from 88 different sources, with an annual growth rate of 23.4% for these publications, and an

average citation per document of 37.26. A total of 812 authors participated, with 50% of the authors being international co-authors. Similarly, there were 23 single authors with 1044 keywords.

Table 1: Main Information about data

Description	Results
Timespan	2006:2024
Sources (Journals, Books, etc)	88
Documents	314
Annual Growth Rate %	23.4
Document Average Age	3.25
Average citations per doc	37.16
References	16673
Document Contents	
Keywords Plus (ID)	703
Author's Keywords (DE)	1044
Authors	
Authors	812
Authors of single-authored docs	21
Authors Collaboration	
Single-authored docs	23
Co-Authors per Doc	3.22
International co-authorships %	50
Document Types	
article	295
article; early access	16
article; proceedings paper	3

The trend in the number of publications and citations is evident in **Figure 2**. The bars represent the number of publications per year, while the line indicates the total number of citations. The first study on brand love was published in 2006, titled "Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love" by Carroll B.A., in Marketing Letters. Between 2006 and 2012, the number of publications remained low, with fewer than five publications per year. A noticeable increase in publications starts in 2014, with the rate of publication accelerating significantly from 2017 onwards. The peak of publications occurred in 2021, with around 60 publications. From 2014, the number of citations shows steady growth, with a more rapid increase starting in 2018. A significant spike in citations is observed from 2018 to 2021, reaching a peak in 2023 with about 2500 citations. This information revealed that the study on Brand Love is an emerging field, examining how it maintains or inspires interactions with others.

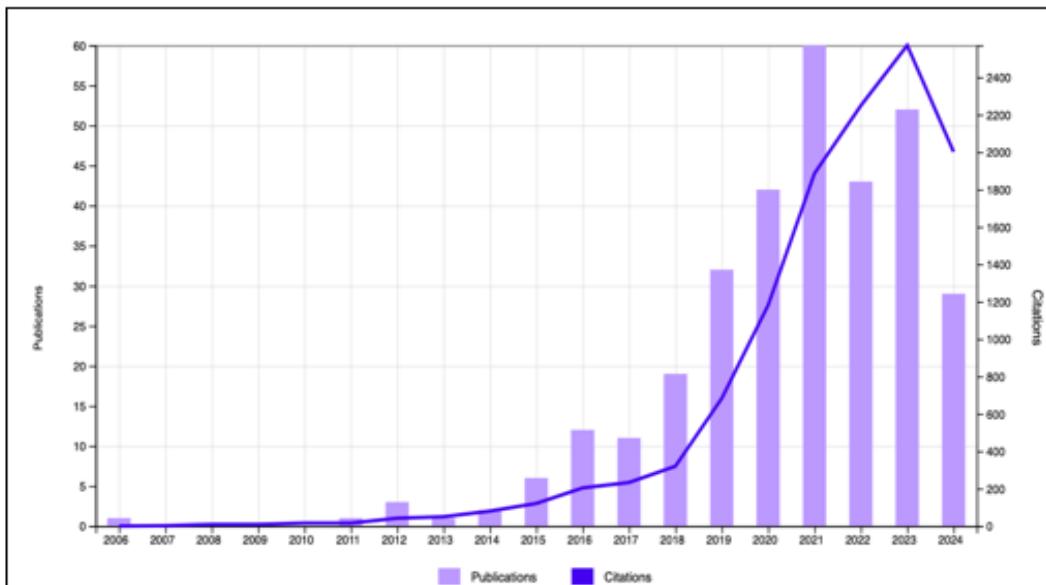


Figure 2: Times cited and publications over time

3.1.2. The Relevant Sources

Table 2 presents the top ten most prolific journals with at least five articles published on the topic of Brand Love. The Journal of Product and Brand Management has the highest number of publications, with a total of 31. The second position is Sustainability, with a total of 23 publications. This is followed by the Journal of Business Research with a total of 19 publications.

Table 2: Most Prolific Scientific Resources

Sources	Articles
Journal of Product and Brand Management	31
Sustainability	23
Journal of Business Research	19
Journal of Brand Management	15
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	14
Frontiers in Psychology	11
European Journal of Marketing	9
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	8
Marketing Intelligence & Planning	8
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	7

The most important scientific sources in the field of Brand Love can be identified by Bradford's law, as represented in Table 3. Bradford's Law was coined by Samuel Clement Bradford in 1934. This law governs the distribution of articles on a specific subject across various publications and determines the number of core sources within the research field [15]. Bradford's law categorizes the number of source titles into three distinct zones. The first zone is the nuclear zone, characterized by great productivity sources. The second

zone is characterized as moderately productive sources, while the third zone is classified as peripheral or low-productive sources [16]. Based on the total article 312 dataset, roughly one-third of the collection would be in Zone 1, another one-third would be in Zone 2, and the last one-third would be in Zone 3. The results reveal 6 sources in Zone 1, which produced 112 articles related to brand love, as shown in Table 3. The results of Bradford's law would motivate the researchers to publish in these core journals.

Table 3: Core Sources in Zone 1 by Bradford's Law

Rank	Sources	Freq ¹	Cumulative Freq	Zone
1	Journal of Product and Brand Management	31	31	Zone 1
2	Sustainability	23	54	Zone 1
3	Journal of Business Research	19	73	Zone 1
4	Journal of Brand Management	15	88	Zone 1
5	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	14	102	Zone 1
6	Frontiers in Psychology	11	113	Zone 1

¹Freq, publication frequency

Consistent with Bradford's Law, the Journal of Product and Brand Management has the highest impact factor with an h-index of 20 and 1735 total citations, as shown in Table 4. This journal started publishing on the topic of brand love in 2015. This is followed by the Journal of Business Research, which began publishing in this field in 2016 with an h-index of 14 and 841 total citations. The third position is held by the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, with an h-index of 12 and 7,200 total citations, which began publishing on brand love in 2019. Meanwhile, Figure 3 illustrates the growth of scientific sources over time.

Table 4: Scientific Sources Impact

Sources	h_index	g_index	m_index	TC ¹	NP ²	PY_start ³
Journal of Product and Brand Management	20	31	2	1735	31	2015
Journal of Business Research	14	19	1.56	841	19	2016
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	12	14	2	720	14	2019
Journal of Brand Management	9	15	1	279	15	2016
European Journal of Marketing	8	9	0.57	386	9	2011
Sustainability	8	13	1.14	200	23	2018
Marketing Intelligence & Planning	7	8	1	124	8	2018
Psychology & Marketing	7	7	0.58	267	7	2013
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	6	8	1.2	184	8	2020
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	5	7	0.56	166	7	2016

¹TC, total citations; ²NP, number publications; ³PY_Start, publication year start.

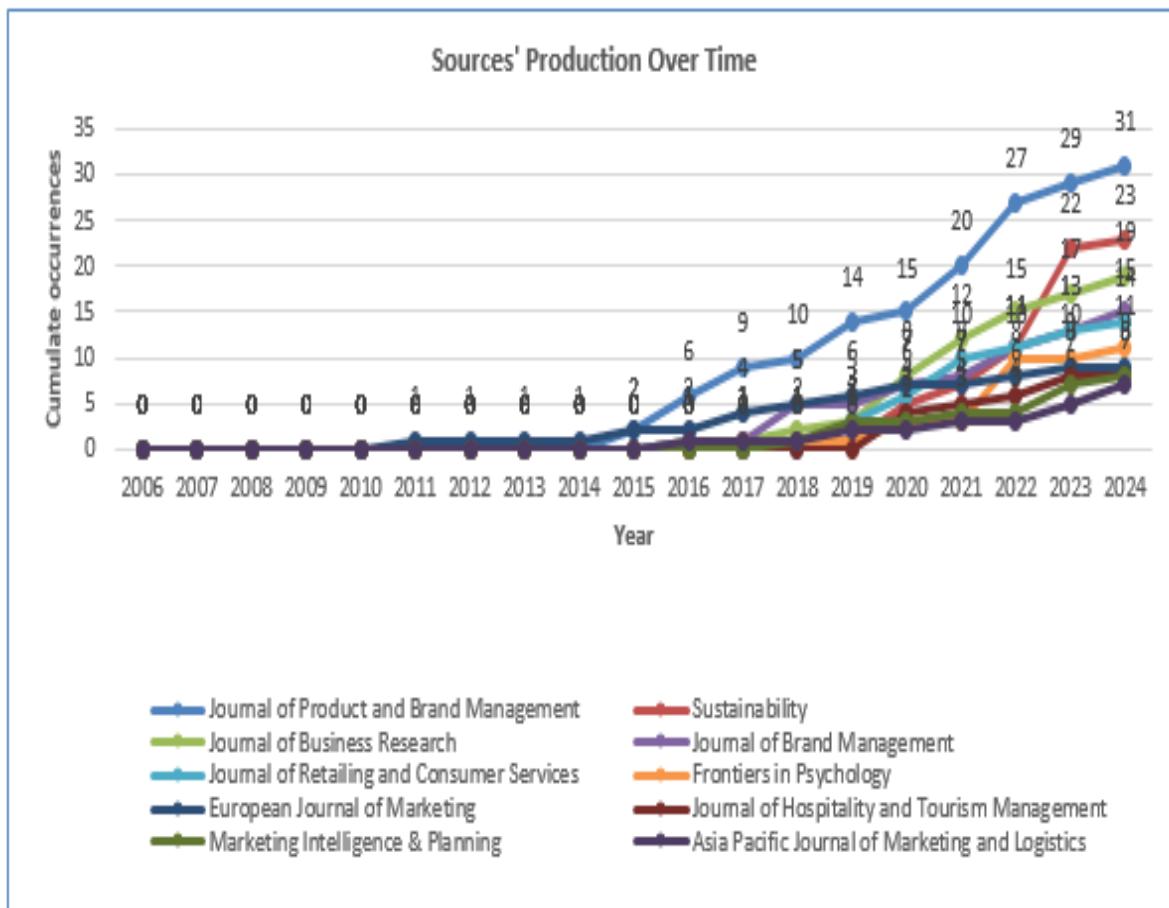


Figure 3: Growth of Scientific Sources

3.1.3. The Prominent Article

The top 10 most cited documents are shown in Table 5. The popularity of the document is determined by the total global citations [17]. The most cited article is by Carroll, B.A., and Ahuvia, A.C., which has been cited 1148 times, receiving an average of 60.47 citations per year since its publication.

This study presents a novel marketing concept called "brand love," which is used to explain and forecast variations in desired post-consumption behaviors among satisfied customers.

The second most cited article, by Batra R, et al., with 1,023 total citations, investigated the nature and consequences of the brand love phenomenon, employing a grounded theory approach. The third most cited article from Zarantonello et al. [18] has been cited 212 times. In line with brand love, this study examines brand hate as a negative sentiment that customers may experience in relation to a brand.

Table 5: The top 10 most cited articles

Authors	Title	DOI	TC	TC/Y
Carroll, B. A., & Ahuvia, A. C. (2006). [1]	Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love.	10.1007/s11002-006-4219-2	1148	60.47
Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). [2]	Brand Love	10.1509/jm.09.0339	1023	78.69
Zarantonello, L., Romani, S., Grappi, S., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2016). [18]	Brand hate	10.1108/JPBM-01-2015-0799	212	23.56
Bagozzi, R. P., Batra, R., & Ahuvia, A. (2017). [19]	Brand love: development and validation of a practical scale.	10.1007/s11002-016-9406-1	162	20.25
Karjaluoto, H., Munnukka, J., & Kiuru, K. (2016). [7].	Brand love and positive word of mouth: the moderating effects of experience and price.	10.1108/JPBM-03-2015-0834	158	17.56
Song, H., Wang, J., & Han, H. (2019). [20]	Effect of image, satisfaction, trust, love, and respect on loyalty formation for name-brand coffee shops.	10.1016/j.ijhm.2018.12.011	157	26.17
Han, H., Yu, J., & Kim, W. (2019). [21]	Environmental corporate social responsibility and the strategy to boost the airline's image and customer loyalty intentions.	10.1080/10548408.2018.1557580	146	24.33
Hsu, C.-L., & Chen, M.-C. (2018). [22]	How gamification marketing activities motivate desirable consumer behaviors: Focusing on the role of brand love.	10.1016/j.chb.2018.06.037	139	19.86
Prentice, C., Wang, X., & Loureiro, S. M. C. (2019) [23]	The influence of brand experience and service quality on customer engagement.	10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.04.020	137	22.83
Bazi, S., Filieri, R., & Gorton, M. (2020) [24]	Customers' motivation to engage with luxury brands on social media.	10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.02.032	136	27.2

3.1.4. Lotka's Law

Lotka's Law is one of the most important and notable laws in the study of bibliometrics, clarifying the relationship between authors and the number of their articles to predict an author's contribution to publications. Further, Lotka A.J. [25]defined "the number of authors making n contributions is about $1/na$ of those making, and the proportion of all the authors that make a single contribution is about 60 percent." This indicates that throughout any discipline or subject, 60% of writers generate a single publication; 15% ($1/22*60$) produce two publications; 6.67% ($1/32*60$) create three publications; 3.75% ($1/42*60$) author four publications, and so forth [26]. Figure 4 shows a plot comparing the percentage of authors based on the documents written to Lotka's prediction.

The overall number of contributions and the comparison of the proportion of authors with Lotka's prediction are presented in Table 6. According to this table, 701 authors (86.65%) contributed to a single article using the total counting approach. Eleven articles have been authored by a single individual. The number of authors who submitted more than four articles is notably limited. A total of 982 authors have contributed to the publishing of 314 documents on the Brand Love field from the Web of Science (WOS) database. The total number of contributions in this domain is 1009.

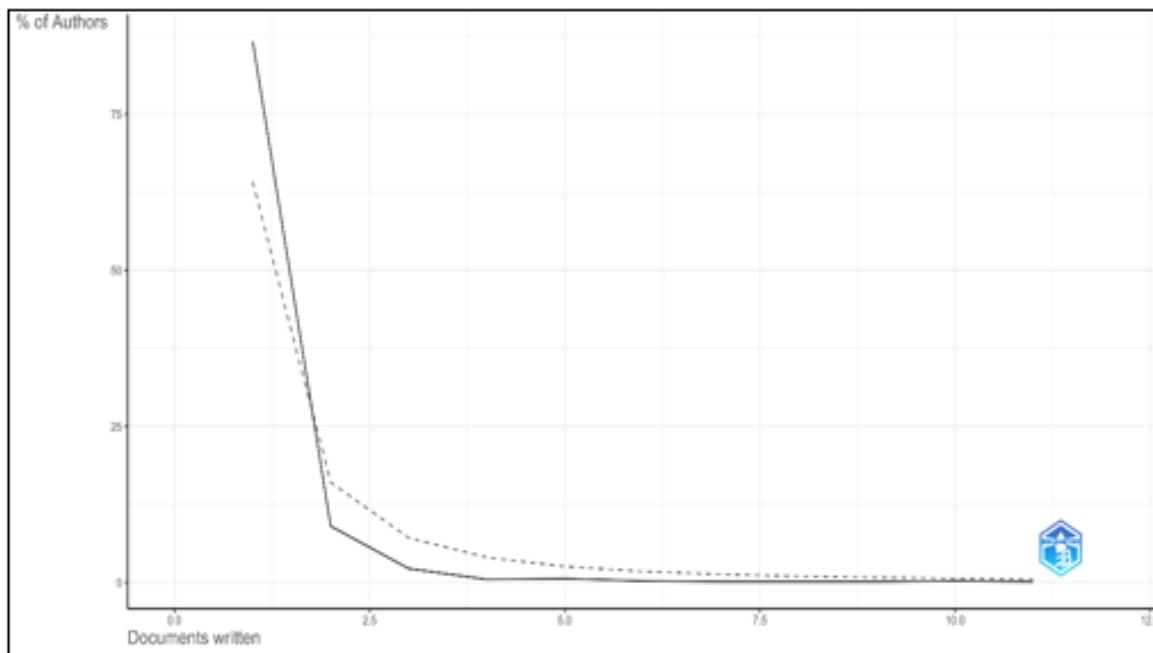


Figure 4: Author Productivity through Lotka's Law

Table 6: Productivity patterns of authors and research contributions

Articles Written	Number of Authors	Frequency	Lotka's Law Prediction	Total N. of Contributions
1	701	86.65%	60.00%	701
2	73	9.02%	15.00%	146
3	18	2.22%	6.67%	54
4	4	0.49%	3.75%	16
5	5	0.62%	2.40%	25
6	2	0.25%	1.67%	12
7	1	0.12%	1.22%	7
8	1	0.12%	0.94%	8
9	1	0.12%	0.36%	9
10	2	0.25%	0.07%	20
11	1	0.12%	0.04%	11
Total	809	100.00%	92.12%	1009

3.2. Science Mapping

Science mapping is a method for examining the intellectual structure and conceptual connections between research constituents [10, 27].

Conceptual structure is frequently used to comprehend the subject explored by the researcher and determine the most significant and up-to-date concerns [28].

In this section, the technique for science mapping encompasses co-occurrence networks, thematic evolution, bibliographic coupling, and factor analysis.

3.2.1. Co-occurrence Network

Co-occurrence analysis, also known as co-word analysis, is a technique that examines the actual content of publications to identify current or potential relationships between study topics [10].

The frequency of keywords that commonly occur together and have a thematic relationship with one another is assumed to be the co-occurrence frequency in this study [29]. Based on the minimum number of occurrences of a keyword being 4, only 53 meet the thresholds among 1044 keywords.

In this study, the highest co-occurrence keywords are “brand love” (206), “brand loyalty” (41), and “brand trust” (18). Table 7 summarizes the top 10 keywords, their occurrence frequencies, and total link strength.

Table 7: Top 10 keywords in the co-occurrences of keywords analysis

Ranking	Keywords	Occurrences	Total link strength
1	Brand love	206	272
2	Brand loyalty	41	92
3	Brand trust	18	43
4	Brand experience	16	43
5	Satisfaction	14	30
6	Social media	14	22
7	Customer engagement	12	20
8	Destination brand love	12	8
9	Brand equity	10	23
10	Consumer brand relationship	9	22

Figure 5 illustrates the network mapping representation of the keyword co-occurrence analysis, created with VOS viewer version 1.6.20. A total of 6 clusters have been formed among the 53 analyzed keywords.

The clusters indicate groups of closely related terms based on their co-occurrences in the data source. Each cluster typically represents a thematic area or concept, and its connections illustrate how these concepts are interconnected. The size of the nodes indicates the relative importance or frequency of the terms, while the lines connecting them represent the strength of their relationships.

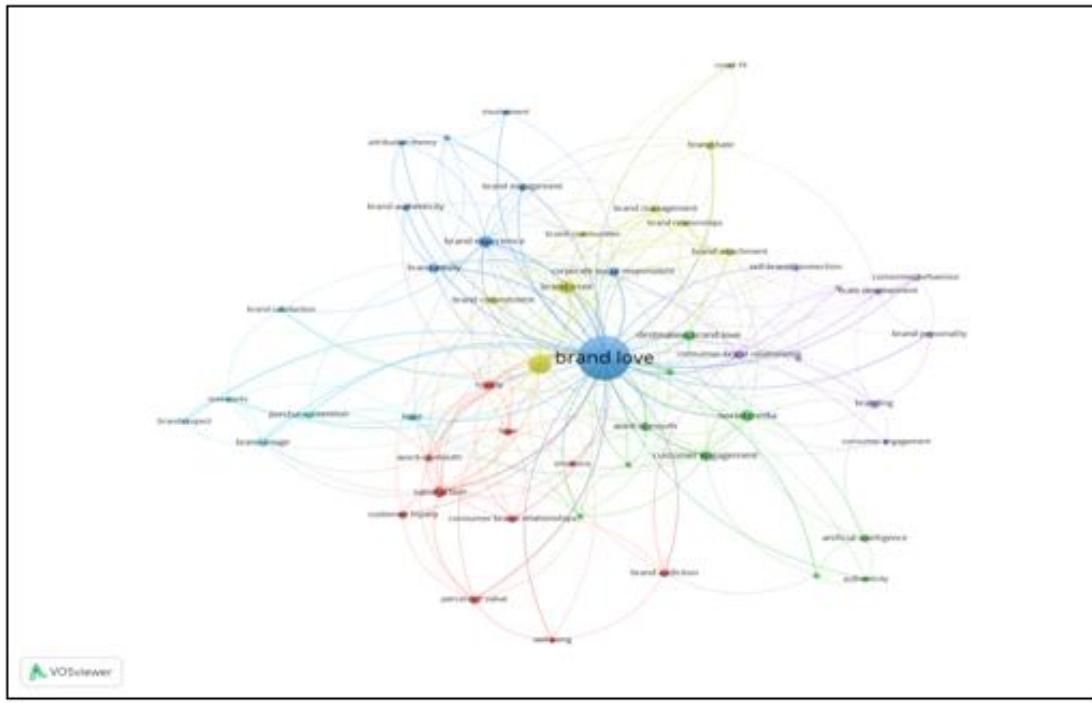


Figure 5: Co-occurrence network map of keywords

The network is successfully segmented into six distinct clusters, each representing a primary research theme. Explanations of the six clusters are provided below:

- Cluster 1 (Blue): Cognitive & Structural Antecedents

Cluster 1 represents the foundational research that addresses the rational and strategic prerequisites necessary for the emergence of brand love. It fundamentally defines what a brand must deliver and embody to earn the consumer's emotional investment. The core of this cluster is brand trust, which acts as the critical risk-mitigation factor. Consumers must believe in a brand's performance and integrity—a belief primarily established through a positive and consistent brand experience [30, 31]. Research often links these experiences to the brand's strategic market value, as quantified by brand equity, demonstrating that rational benefits precede and contribute to the emotional payoff.

Crucially, this cluster underscores the moral and relational aspects of modern consumption, characterized by the prominent presence of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and brand authenticity. These factors suggest that consumers evaluate brands based on their ethical footprint and perceived authenticity [31]. For many, brand love is conditional upon the brand's commitment to societal values, not just product quality. The inclusion of attribution theory confirms the cluster's focus on the consumer's internal cognitive process—how they interpret the causes of brand actions. This research stream provides the managerial blueprint, detailing the specific non-emotional levers

(value, consistency, ethics) that marketers must activate to build a resilient platform for deep emotional attachment [32].

- Cluster 2 (Red): Deep Emotional Outcomes and Psychological Consequences

This cluster examines the profound, internal psychological outcomes and affective responses that result from a consumer experiencing brand love, transcending traditional marketing metrics such as loyalty.

Positioned to reflect the deepest level of personal impact, the cluster is anchored by intense concepts such as well-being, which analyzes the positive, life-enhancing role strong brand relationships play in a consumer's life [33]. Crucially, it provides a critical counterpoint with the presence of brand addiction, signaling a vital and growing research stream dedicated to the potentially pathological, compulsive, or negative consequences of overly intense brand devotion [34].

The co-occurrence of perceived value, satisfaction, and core emotions demonstrates that these fundamental evaluations are the necessary precursors leading to these powerful psychological states [35]. Research in this area utilizes advanced psychological frameworks to measure the intensity and nature of these affective outcomes. Cluster 2 is crucial for offering a comprehensive, humanistic perspective on brand-consumer relationships, ensuring that the field examines both the beneficial aspects and the potential dark side of consumer passion.

- Cluster 3 (Green): Digital and Contemporary Facilitators

Cluster 3 focuses on the intersection of technology, interactivity, and consumer sentiment, representing cutting-edge studies that examine brand love within the modern digital landscape. This cluster essentially defines how intense emotional connections are formed and sustained in a networked world. The foundational term here is social media, which is no longer just a communication tool but the primary ecosystem where brand love is both expressed and challenged. Research in this area examines phenomena such as viral advocacy, managing crises in real-time, and the role of online brand communities in fostering deeper emotional bonds [36].

Closely connected is customer engagement, which measures the active behavioral contributions of consumers in the digital space. This concept reinforces the idea that love is not a passive state, but rather requires tangible, ongoing effort, such as sharing brand content, providing feedback, or defending the brand against detractors. The most forward-looking concept is artificial intelligence (AI). Its inclusion highlights the emerging necessity for research into algorithmic brand management.

Scholars are critically evaluating the extent to which hyper-personalized, AI-driven interactions can maintain perceived authenticity and whether consumers can develop emotional attachments to brands whose interactions are increasingly non-human. This cluster confirms the contemporary nature of the brand love literature and its immediate relevance to today's digital marketing challenges [37].

- Cluster 4 (Yellow): Core Behavioral Commitment and Traditional Outcomes

Cluster 4 is strategically the most action-oriented group, representing the direct behavioral manifestation and measurable outcomes of the intense emotional state of brand love. Its close proximity and strong connections to the central "brand love" node confirm its status as the most frequent and immediate consequence studied in the field. The cluster is anchored by loyalty and word-of-mouth (WOM). Loyalty signifies the necessary behavioral commitment of repurchase and retention, establishing the financial value of the emotional bond. WOM, conversely, represents active advocacy, which is often considered the most powerful expression of brand love, transforming satisfied consumers into enthusiastic brand champions [7, 38].

Functionally, Cluster 4 acts as the pivot point in the overall model. It proves the utility of the emotional theories by linking them to traditional managerial goals. Research within this segment rigorously tests the mediating effect of brand love, demonstrating that deep emotional attachment is a superior predictor of long-term, resilient consumer behavior than cognitive evaluations alone. This focus provides the empirical justification necessary for marketing and brand strategists to prioritize investment in emotionally resonant brand building.

- Cluster 5 (Purple): Broader Consumer Psychology and Methodology

Cluster 5 provides the theoretical and methodological foundation for the entire landscape of brand love research. Positioned in the upper-right area, it links the core emotional concepts to broader principles of consumer psychology, ensuring scientific rigor and context within established marketing theory. The cluster integrates fundamental psychological constructs, such as consumer behavior and Brand Personality. The study of brand personality is vital, as it examines how consumers assign human traits to brands, a process essential for forming deep, relational concepts like love [39]. By grounding itself in consumer behavior, this research ensures that the emotional findings can be systematically explained and integrated into predictive models. Crucially, the presence of scale development highlights the field's commitment to methodological precision. This term refers to the creation and validation of reliable measurement instruments, which is a necessity when dealing with intangible concepts like brand attachment and self-brand connection. These concepts are often studied as proximal relatives or precursors to brand love, emphasizing the psychological mechanisms through which a consumer integrates a brand into their self-identity. Cluster 5 ensures the brand love literature is both theoretically sound and empirically measurable, providing the validated tools and established psychological frameworks that underpin the entire network's findings.

- Cluster 6 (Pale Yellow): Crisis and Negative Affect

This peripheral cluster, defined by keywords such as COVID-19 and brand hate, represents a vital, emerging area of research focused on brand vulnerability and the full spectrum of intense consumer emotions—including antagonism. The presence of COVID-19 makes this cluster temporally specific, signaling a necessary shift in the literature to study how powerful, global crises impact established consumer-brand bonds

[40]. Research in this area is crucial for understanding brand resilience, as it examines the conditions under which consumers maintain or sever their emotional connections when brands face severe operational or ethical challenges. The co-occurrence of brand hate confirms the field's maturity by acknowledging the destructive counterpart to brand love [41]. Studies in this cluster examine how disappointment, perceived betrayal, or misalignment with a brand's actions during a crisis can lead to a rapid and intense transformation from love to loathing. This focus provides valuable insight into the limits of emotional marketing and helps strategists identify the crucial triggers that can turn fervent loyalty into active antagonism.

3.2.2. Co-citation Analysis of the Author

Co-citation analysis is a primary technique in bibliometric analysis for developing the intellectual structure of a research domain. This analysis explores the relationship and networking among articles or cited reference works through title, author's name, keywords, and journal. According to Aria and Cuccurullo [28], co-citation refers to the situation when a third article cites two articles simultaneously. This study utilized Vosviewer Software to conduct co-citation analysis. A minimum of 30 citations per author was applied. A total of 46 authors met the threshold, forming four clusters, as seen in Figure 6. The map displays the frequency of author citations in the scholarly literature, highlighting clusters that indicate notable authors and thematic research areas. Authors are represented by the nodes, while co-citations are indicated by the links connecting them. The closer the authors are related to one another, the more often they are cited together.

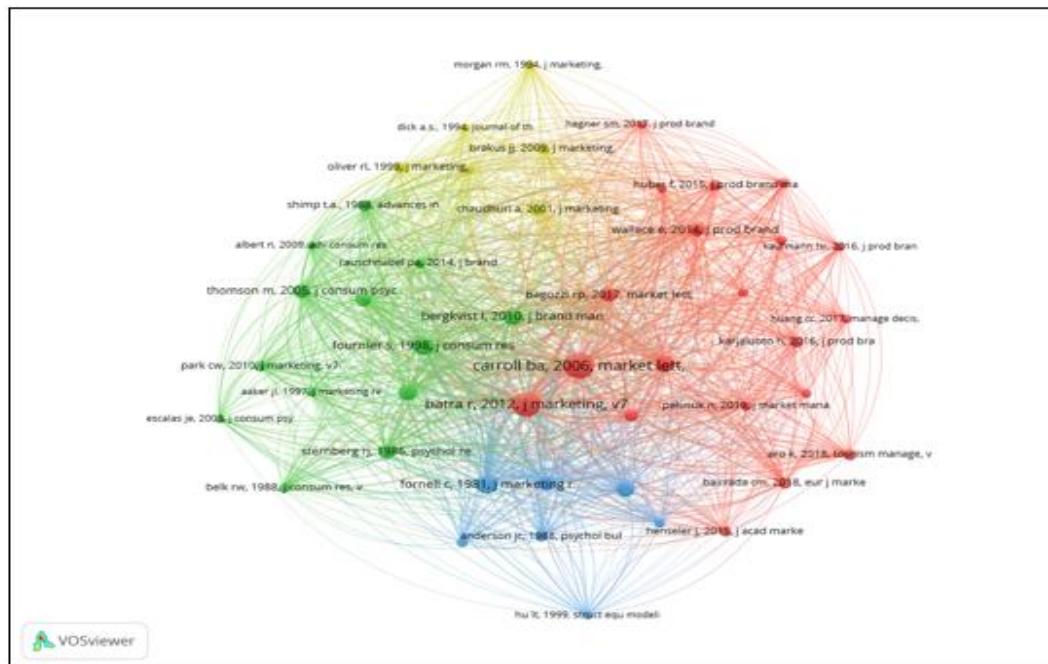


Figure 6: Co-citation Analysis of the Author on Brand Love

Table 8 displays the top ten leading references with the most citations and total links. It's followed by the discussion of the theme in each cluster. To determine each cluster's label based on the authors' inductive interpretation and qualitative concerns, the publication contents are examined using the abstract, key findings, and methodological elements.

Table 8: The top ten documents with the highest co-citation and total link strength

Rank	Reference	Local Citations	Total Link Strength	Cluster
1	Carroll, B. A., & Ahuvia, A. C. (2006). Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. <i>Marketing Letters</i> , 17(2), 79-89. [1]	269	2515	1 (Red)
2	Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand Love. <i>Journal of marketing</i> , 76(2), 1-16. [2]	141	2317	1 (Red)
3	Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and Their Brands: Developing Relationship Theory in Consumer Research. <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i> . [42]	136	1531	2 (Green)
4	Fornell, C., & Larcker, D. F. (1981). Evaluating structural equation models with unobservable variables and measurement error. <i>Journal of Marketing Research</i> , 18(1), 39-50. [43]	136	1383	2 (Green)
5	Bergkvist, L., & Bech-Larsen, T. (2010). Two studies of consequences and actionable antecedents of brand love. <i>Journal of Brand Management</i> , 17, 504-518. [44]	112	1340	2 (Green)
6	Albert, N., Merunka, D., & Valette-Florence, P. (2008). When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions. <i>Journal of Business Research</i> , 61(10), 1062-1075. [45]	104	1281	2 (Green)
7	Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Whan Park, C. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. <i>Journal of consumer psychology</i> , 15(1), 77-91. [46]	108	1255	2 (Green)
8	Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. <i>Journal of applied psychology</i> , 88(5), 879. [47]	88	1105	3 (Blue)
9	Sternberg, R. J. (1986). A triangular theory of love. <i>Psychological Review</i> , 93, 119-135. [48]	85	1005	2 (Green)
10	Babin, B., Hair, J., Hair, J., Anderson, R., & Black, W. (2010). Multivariate data analysis: A global perspective. <i>Pearson, Prentice Hall</i> . [49]	86	1004	3 (Blue)

The Red Cluster functions as the uncontested intellectual anchor of the entire co-citation network, embodying the conceptual and empirical core of the Brand Love literature. Dominated by the seminal works of Carroll and Ahuvia [1] and Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi [2], this cluster exhibits the highest total link strength and local citation frequency, signifying its critical status as the primary foundation for research in this field. Carroll and Ahuvia's paper established the initial formalization of the brand love construct, identifying

key antecedents and outcomes, thereby opening a crucial avenue in consumer psychology. Meanwhile, Batra and colleagues' contribution further solidified this by offering a more comprehensive and refined theoretical framework, detailing the construct's multiple dimensions. Research on this cluster primarily focuses on operationalizing, testing, and applying the concept of brand love, often utilizing advanced empirical models to examine passionate consumer devotion, emotional loyalty, and behavioral consequences, such as willingness to pay a premium or engage in positive word-of-mouth. Additionally, this cluster looks at the causes and effects of brand love on consumer-brand relationships. A "deep and enduring" relationship, brand love is closely tied to other key concepts, including brand identification, brand trust, and brand commitment [50].

The Green Cluster represents the essential theoretical scaffolding upon which the brand love construct (Red Cluster) is built, primarily anchoring the research in established Consumer-Brand Relationship (CBR) theory. This cluster provides the necessary depth to move beyond simple satisfaction metrics and explore deep emotional connections. Fournier's [42], work is paramount here, offering the foundational framework for viewing consumer-brand interactions as genuine relationships that require specific theoretical lenses. Furthermore, this cluster integrates critical psychological insights, such as Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love [48], demonstrating the field's systematic adaptation of established interpersonal models to the brand context.

Crucially, the Green Cluster also contains key methodological references for quantifying these emotions, notably Thomson et al. [46], which focuses on measuring the strength of emotional attachments. Papers like Albert et al. [45] and Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen [6] further elaborate on the dimensions and consequences of these attachments. Collectively, the green cluster suggests that brand love is not merely a state of high satisfaction, but a complex, multidimensional emotional tie, providing the theoretical justification for the highly cited empirical work found in the Red Cluster.

The Blue Cluster defines the rigorous quantitative standards that underpin the empirical claims within the brand love domain. Unlike the conceptual focus of the red and green clusters, the blue cluster is devoted to the procedures of verification and analysis. Its presence confirms that the research methodology is highly formalized and relies heavily on advanced statistical testing. The undisputed cornerstone of this cluster is Fornell and Larcker [43], the essential citation for evaluating the validity and measurement properties of Structural Equation Models (SEM). This reference suggests that the majority of studies in this network utilize SEM to investigate the intricate relationships between brand attachment, love, and subsequent outcomes. Equally vital is Podsakoff et al.'s [47], work on common method biases. Citing this reference demonstrates a community-wide commitment to methodological vigilance, actively addressing potential threats to internal validity in survey-based research. Finally, comprehensive guides like Babin et al. [49], provide the practical reference for executing multivariate analyses. In essence, the blue cluster ensures that the theoretical constructs examined in the other clusters are tested using reliable, bias-controlled, and statistically defensible analytical techniques.

4. DISCUSSION

In this discussion, we synthesize key themes from recent analyses, particularly a bibliometric study spanning 2006–2024, to propose a future research framework for brand love. The framework identifies three broad domains shaping the next chapter of brand love research: theoretical, behavioral, and digital dimensions. Within each domain, we highlight specific emerging themes (illustrated conceptually in a hub-and-spoke model of “Future Research Directions in Brand Love,” with six primary spokes). These thematic areas include Cross-Cultural Insights, Brand Addiction and Emotional Risk, Online Brand Communities, Lifespan/Longitudinal Trajectories, AI and Algorithmic Relationships, and Emerging Contexts (such as B2B markets and AR/VR experiences). Below, we discuss each of these themes in detail, clustering them by domain (theoretical, behavioral, digital) and analyzing their implications for advancing brand love research.

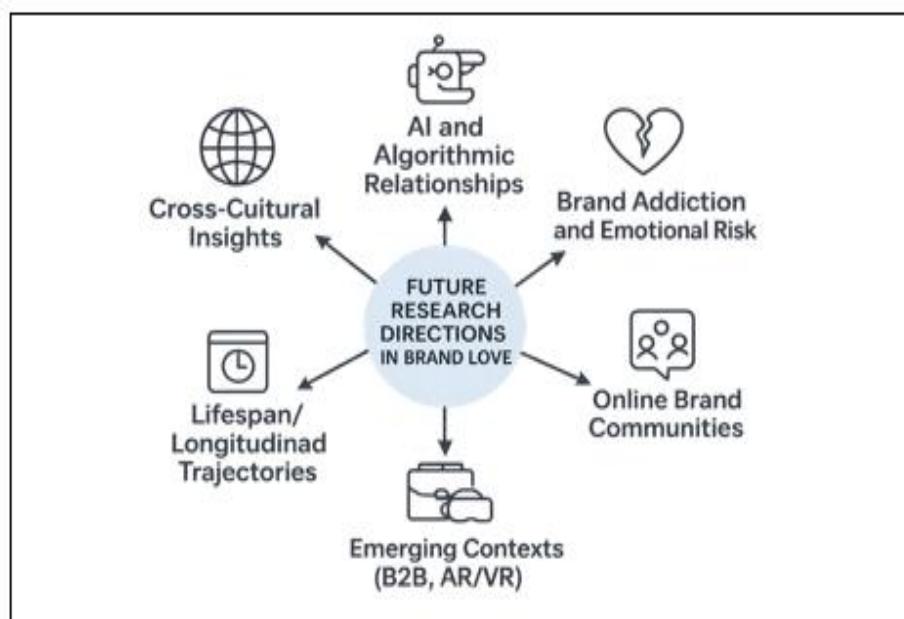


Figure 7: Future Research Direction in Brand Love

4.1 Theoretical Dimensions: Extending Brand Love Theory

4.2.1. Cross-Cultural Insights in Brand Love

One fertile avenue for theoretical advancement is the exploration of brand love across diverse cultural contexts. Most foundational studies of brand love have been conducted in Western consumer markets, implicitly assuming that the construct's meaning and impact are universal [1, 2, 51]. Yet cultural values and norms can fundamentally shape emotional consumer–brand relationships. For instance, brand love may manifest differently in individualistic cultures, which emphasize personal passions and self-expression, compared to collectivistic cultures, which emphasize family, community, and normative loyalty. Initial research has begun to scratch the surface of this issue. For

example, studies have examined brand love in non-Western settings, such as the Chinese smartphone market [30] and the Asian hospitality sector [20]. These studies confirm that brand love is observable across cultures, enhancing loyalty in contexts ranging from technology products to coffee shops. However, cross-cultural comparisons remain scarce[52]. Cross-cultural research will also support the validation of measurement scales for brand love in diverse languages and contexts [6, 53], ensuring that definitions are not biased by Western assumptions. Ultimately, incorporating cultural perspectives can enrich brand love theory and reveal how consumers across societies form “deep and enduring” brand attachments [54]. Future research directions might include the following:

- How do cultural values (such as power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, or uncertainty avoidance) influence the formation, expression, and intensity of brand love among consumers in different societies?
- Do the typical antecedents of brand love (e.g., brand personality, nostalgic memories, service quality, or product aesthetics) carry the same weight across cultural contexts, and what cultural factors might explain variations in which drivers are most effective in fostering brand love?
- How does culture moderate the impact of specific consumer emotions or motivations on brand love development?

4.2.2. Brand Love in Emerging Contexts (B2B and AR/VR)

Another theoretical frontier is extending brand love to emerging contexts that have been relatively neglected. One such context is business-to-business (B2B) markets. Traditionally, brand love has been studied in B2C settings, such as retail, luxury, and service brands [7]. B2B relationships, in contrast, are often viewed as transactional and grounded in economic evaluations rather than emotional attachment [55]. This raises a provocative theoretical question: Can brand love exist in B2B contexts? If so, what form does it take? It is conceivable that business customers develop affective bonds with supplier brands, especially as B2B brands increasingly cultivate personified identities and long-term partnerships. Future research could investigate whether constructs analogous to consumer brand love, such as organizational brand attachment, exist among firms and influence outcomes, including loyalty and partnership longevity. Addressing these questions will broaden brand love theory beyond consumer markets and refine the construct for complex, multi-stakeholder decision environments.

In addition to B2B, technological advancements open new experiential contexts for brand love. One notable area is immersive technology, such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), which is transforming the way consumers interact with and experience brands. AR/VR can create rich, interactive brand experiences, such as virtual try-ons or immersive brand storytelling [56, 57]. These environments may enable emotional engagement by blurring boundaries between virtual and physical interactions. Future research should examine how brand love develops within AR/VR contexts. As AR/VR becomes more common in marketing, researchers should develop frameworks for

technology-mediated brand love, integrating human–computer interaction theories and experiential marketing perspectives [37]. Investigating brand love in emerging contexts, from B2B to virtual worlds, will push the boundaries of existing theory and ensure relevance as branding practices evolve. Future research directions might include the following:

- Does brand love manifest in B2B (business-to-business) relationships between firms and their client organizations, and if so, how might the drivers and outcomes of brand love in a professional procurement context differ from those established in consumer markets?
- What is the impact of integrating augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) technologies into brand experiences on the development of brand love, and how do these immersive, interactive encounters compare to traditional brand interactions in their ability to foster deep emotional bonds with consumers?
- In emerging virtual realms like the metaverse, how do consumers form and express brand love for virtual brand avatars, experiences, or communities, and does this “virtual brand love” translate into tangible loyalty or engagement with the brand outside of the VR/AR environment (bridging the virtual–real gap in brand relationships).

4.2 Behavioral Dimensions: Psychological Outcomes and Trajectories

4.3.1. Brand Addiction and the “Dark Side” of Emotional Bonds

While brand love is typically associated with positive outcomes, researchers are increasingly acknowledging a dark side: extremely intense brand attachment can sometimes tip into maladaptive behavior or emotional vulnerability. The concept of brand addiction has emerged as a critical counterpoint to the mostly positive narrative of brand love. Brand addiction refers to a pathological or compulsive consumption behavior wherein a consumer’s attachment to a brand becomes obsessive, uncontrolled, and potentially detrimental[58]. Junaid et al. [34], provide empirical evidence of this phenomenon, examining how strong brand love can escalate into addiction-like dependency and lead to negative consumer behaviors. Future research should investigate the antecedents of brand addiction: What causes a healthy brand love to cross over into an unhealthy obsession? Potential factors may include personality traits (e.g., proneness to compulsive behavior), social influence (such as peer pressure within fan communities), or brand tactics (brands that deliberately foster dependency or exclusivity). It is equally important to study the consequences of brand addiction on consumer well-being, such as guilt, stress, or interpersonal conflict arising from over-consumption [59].

Closely related to brand addiction is the concept of emotional risk in brand relationships – the idea that when consumers invest their heart in a brand, they also expose themselves to the risk of deep disappointment or betrayal. If a beloved brand fails to meet expectations or violates trust (for instance, through a scandal or a drastic change in values), the consumer may feel a sense of personal betrayal akin to heartbreak. Recent scholarship on brand hate demonstrates this flip side: the stronger the initial love, the

stronger the potential fury or hatred if that love is betrayed [60]. In future research, scholars should explore emotional resilience and coping in the context of brand love – essentially, what happens when “love goes wrong.” Studying these scenarios will provide a more balanced understanding of consumer–brand bonds, highlighting that emotional attachment can amplify both positive behaviors and negative backlashes. Overall, by investigating brand addiction and emotional risks, future research will enrich behavioral theories of brand love with insights into its potential downsides, aligning with broader consumer psychology literature that acknowledges both the bright and dark facets of consumer emotions[61]. Future research directions might include the following:

- How does intense brand love sometimes lead to negative outcomes like compulsive buying, excessive consumption, or risky behaviors, and what factors (e.g., consumer self-control, attachment style) moderate this potential “dark side” of brand love?
- What role do individual differences (e.g., personality traits like materialism, narcissism, or susceptibility to addiction) play in determining whether a consumer’s brand love remains positive or turns into an unhealthy brand addiction?
- How can marketers and brand strategists strike a balance between cultivating strong emotional bonds with customers and addressing the ethical concern of not encouraging unhealthy attachments or emotional over-reliance on the brand?

4.3.2. Lifespan and Longitudinal Trajectories of Brand Love.

Another pivotal behavioral dimension for future research is the temporal trajectory of brand love. How do consumer–brand relationships form, evolve, and sometimes dissolve over time? Most existing studies capture brand love at a single point, often surveying consumers about a brand they are currently attached to [2]. Yet, by nature, love (even towards brands) is a dynamic experience that can deepen, plateau, or fade across a consumer’s lifetime or along the brand lifecycle.

Therefore, scholars advocate for longitudinal approaches to understand the lifespan of brand love [55]. A research framework for this could borrow from interpersonal relationship theories (which outline stages like infatuation, growth, maturity, and decline in love relationships) and adapt them to brands [58]. Generational analyses also suggest differences in how enduring brand love. One study found that the effects of brand love on loyalty can vary by generation, suggesting that younger consumers may have distinct relationship patterns with brands compared to older consumers[59, 60].

Moreover, lifespan research on brand love should consider the various life stages of consumers. A young adult might form passionate attachments to brands that resonate with identity or status, whereas an older adult’s brand loves might be more rooted in comfort, nostalgia, or long-term quality satisfaction [61]. Longitudinal research can examine how major life events (like starting a family, career changes, and aging) affect brand relationships. Ultimately, mapping the lifespan of brand love will help answer whether “true love” for a brand can endure and what fosters such enduring loyalty, thereby bridging short-term consumer behavior with long-term relationship marketing outcomes.

Future research directions might include the following:

- How does a consumer's brand love evolve over time during the course of a long-term consumer–brand relationship, and what stages might be identified in a brand love lifecycle (e.g., initial attraction, growing attachment, maturity, potential decline or rejuvenation)?
- Do different generational cohorts exhibit distinct patterns in developing and sustaining brand love over time? For instance, might younger consumers (Gen Z or Millennials) cycle through or switch beloved brands more rapidly, whereas older generations maintain fewer but more enduring brand loves? And how would such differences inform our theories of consumer–brand bonding?
- What research designs and analytical approaches are most suitable for capturing the dynamic trajectories of brand love?

4.3 Digital Dimensions: Technology-Mediated Brand Love.

4.3.1. AI and Algorithmic Brand Relationships

The digital revolution, particularly advances in artificial intelligence (AI), is rapidly transforming how consumers interact with brands, raising pressing questions about brand love in an era of algorithms and automation [62].

Traditionally, brand love has been nurtured through human-like brand personalities, storytelling, and customer service interactions. Now, with AI-driven chatbots, recommendation engines, and personalized algorithms, many brand touchpoints are automated. Can consumers form emotional attachments to brands through AI-mediated interactions? Early indications suggest that they can, but this area remains largely uncharted and represents a cutting-edge research direction. Future research on this theme should explore algorithmic relationships – essentially, how the design and transparency of AI systems impact brand love [63].

Another angle is the ethics of AI in brand love; there is a moral dimension if algorithms manipulate emotions or create addictive usage patterns [64]. Ultimately, integrating AI into brand love research will update the construct for the digital age, where “algorithmic brand management” and maintaining “perceived authenticity” in non-human interactions emerge as crucial challenges [62].

This direction ensures that brand love theory remains relevant as brands increasingly act through intelligent systems, rather than solely through human representatives. Future research directions might include the following:

- Can consumers develop emotional attachments (brand love) to AI-based brand agents or chatbots, and what theoretical frameworks explain the formation of such human–AI brand bonds?

- How do hyper-personalized, AI-driven brand interactions influence the development of genuine brand love, and can consumers form authentic emotional bonds with brands through non-human, algorithmic touchpoints?
- How can brands leverage artificial intelligence to foster personalized “brand love journeys” while maintaining the human-like relational qualities (such as empathy and authenticity) that theories of emotional attachment suggest are necessary for love?

4.3.2. Online Brand Communities and Social Engagement

Digital platforms have also given rise to online brand communities – networks of consumers who share enthusiasm for a brand and interact with each other on social media, forums, or brand-hosted platforms. These communities are powerful incubators of brand love, as they provide arenas for consumers to collectively express their passion, share stories, and engage in rituals surrounding the brand [65]. Research has shown that active customer engagement, such as sharing user-generated content, leaving reviews, and defending the brand in discussions, is both a symptom and driver of brand love in online settings. Engaged consumers often act as brand evangelists, indicating not only satisfaction but a deeper love that motivates them to take initiative and “actively advocate” for the brand [66].

Future research could investigate community dynamics that most foster brand love. Additionally, the content shared in communities is crucial; recent studies emphasize the importance of entertainment value on social media as a factor that stimulates engagement and subsequently fosters brand love [36]. Methodologically, social network analysis and netnography are promising approaches for observing how brand love manifests and spreads among interconnected consumers. In essence, brand love in the digital era may be viewed as co-created by communities of fans as much as by the brand’s actions. Capturing this in future models will provide a richer understanding of how collective brand love emerges, is sustained, or sometimes falters in the noisy environment of social media.

Beyond AI and communities, the digital domain will continue to present new platforms that could alter brand love dynamics. Emerging technologies, such as the Internet of Things (IoT), voice assistants, and future developments in social media (including decentralized platforms or the metaverse), all pose questions for brand relationships. Similarly, as brands experiment with metaverse presences (virtual stores, events, games), researchers should investigate if these highly immersive brand interactions lead to stronger emotional outcomes than traditional media [67]. Importantly, the trade-offs between privacy and personalization in digital technology can influence brand emotions. Consumers might love the convenience a brand provides through technology, but fear or resent the overuse of personal data – a tension that future studies should examine [64]. By remaining vigilant to emerging digital contexts, researchers can proactively extend brand love theory to keep pace with technological innovation. In summary, the digital dimension of brand love is a rapidly evolving frontier. Research focused on AI relationships, online communities, and new tech contexts will elucidate how “intense

emotional connections are formed and sustained in a networked world", thereby updating the brand love construct for the 21st-century digital consumer[68]. Future research directions might include the following:

- How do online brand communities facilitate the development and maintenance of brand love, and which community dynamics (such as shared rituals, peer support, or co-creation activities) most effectively strengthen consumers' emotional bonds with the brand?
- In what ways does active participation in an online brand community amplify a consumer's emotional attachment to the brand and translate into loyalty behaviors (e.g. positive word-of-mouth, brand advocacy or even defense of the brand against criticism)?
- How can the interactive dynamics of online brand communities (peer influence, user-generated content, communal problem-solving) be strategically leveraged to transform satisfied customers into passionate brand lovers, and what are the theoretical implications for consumer engagement models?

5. CONCLUSIONS

The future research framework for brand love outlined above paints an exciting and complex picture of where this field is headed. By clustering future directions into theoretical, behavioral, and digital domains, we see that brand love research is poised to transcend its earlier boundaries. The theoretical domain requires a deeper understanding of the nature of brand love across cultures and contexts, potentially redefining the construct itself. The behavioral domain urges us to consider the full emotional spectrum and lifecycle of brand–consumer bonds, from uplifting loyalty effects to cautionary tales of addiction and hate, over time. The digital domain underscores the need to adapt to technological evolution, examining how brand love can thrive in environments mediated by algorithms, social networks, and immersive technologies. Together, these domains and their key themes (AI, brand addiction, communities, cross-cultural, longitudinal, and new contexts) serve as a roadmap for scholars. Addressing these areas will not only fill crucial gaps – such as how “hyper-personalized, AI-driven interactions” influence authenticity, or how brand love endures over a customer’s lifetime – but will also ensure that the concept of brand love remains dynamic and relevant in the face of changing consumer realities.

Crucially, this expanded inquiry into brand love stands to benefit practitioners by providing richer insights into building genuine emotional connections with customers in a sustainable way. As the research community pursues the outlined directions, we anticipate a more nuanced understanding of how to foster brand love across different cultures, guard it against pitfalls, and harness new technologies to enhance it. In short, the evolving landscape of brand love research – spanning theoretical nuance, behavioral depth, and digital innovation – promises to deepen marketing knowledge on one of its most captivating phenomena. By embracing this multifaceted future research agenda,

scholars and managers alike can better grasp how consumers come to not just buy, but truly love brands, and how those precious bonds can be initiated, strengthened, and preserved in the years to come.

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