Brand Love As A Mediator Between Brand Experience And Brand Loyalty

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Abstract
The purpose of this study was to propose and test an integrative conceptual model which incorporates brand experience and behavioral outcomes in form of brand loyalty through a mediator factor of brand love for Xiaomi smartphone users. The conceptual model and proposed hypotheses of the study are analyzed with a sample of 202 consumers by using a structured survey as a data collection instrument. The findings of the study demonstrate strong associations between both positive and negative brand experience that leads to brand love and results in brand loyalty, both high and low, that correlates within the variables. This study also corroborates the mediating role of brand love in form of passion, intimacy and commitment, that may differ from customer to customer. Both customers of the local market and overseas were researched that gives outcomes and background for more detailed future investigation. It is expected to contribute to the field of brand management by investigating the simultaneous impact of experience-based and non-experienced-based antecedents on brand loyalty and the mediating role of brand love on the association between brand experience and future brand loyalty which has not been addressed in the previous literature.

Keywords: brand experience, brand management, brand love, brand intimacy, brand passion, brand loyalty

Introduction
Building strong brands is probably the most essential goal of brand management nowadays. Strong brands result in higher revenue streams, both short term and long term (Aaker, 1991, 1996; Kapferer, 2004; Keller, 2003). One of the main goals for strategic brand management is to get higher customer loyalty, since only this way brand can last for decades and can leverage in different product categories and various markets (Aaker, 1996).

Functionality, price, availability, and quality are the main physical aspects of products and services that marketing has traditionally focused on (Mascarenhas et al., 2006). In recent years, researchers started to point out that advertising should move its center of attention and take into account other components such as added value creation (Webster, 1994; Ravald and Gronroos, 1996) and relationship management (Berry, 1983; Jackson, 1985). Even more recently, marketing researchers and practitioners have realized that, in the nowadays circumstances, customer experience is the crucial issue to be managed (Pine and Gilmore, 1998; Schmitt, 1999; Berry et al., 2002).

Regarding the consequence of brand love, Assael (1987) defines brand loyalty as commitment to a certain brand with commitment being defined as ‘an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship’ (Moorman et al., 1992, p. 316). Brands are recognized to have a rational and emotional component (Berry et al., 2002). However, managers have traditionally focused only on promoting functional and rational aspects, as well as on communication and advertising (Frow and Payne, 2007). Nowadays, the more recent holistic approach to brand management considers the brand as the experience (for example, Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Payne et al., 2009), thus emphasizing the importance of managing both components (rational and emotional), as well as all the brand-customer touchpoints and the different brand-related stimuli (for example, Frow and Payne, 2007; Brakus et al., 2009) in order to be able to elicit strong emotional responses from the customers (for example, Brodie et al., 2009).

Researchers have argued that true brand loyalty is different from spurious loyalty in that it is not just driven by situational exigencies such as price or convenience (Dick and Basu, 1994; Kumar
and Advani, 2005) and that it requires a certain previous degree of affective psychological attachment in order to be developed by consumer (Punniyamoorthy and Prasanna, 2007; Lin, 2010). Therefore, discoveries from this study will let marketers and specialists understanding better the roles of brand experience and brand love in creating brand loyalty. Such understandings, thus, will be basic and accommodating in picking up and holding a competitive position by upgrading brand relationship quality and in keeping clients being steadfast in this greatly competitive advertise.

This way, this study aims to research brand love as a mediate variable between brand experience and true brand loyalty, as well as to compare different categories of consumers living on the territory of China – Chinese nationalities and foreigners.

**Branding History**

Before the 19th century, manufacturers were limited to trading their products in their local markets (Jones & Morgan, 1994; Moore & Reid, 2008). Within the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, through the advancement of generation forms, transportation, and communication, the mechanical transformation is driven to the improvement of universal exchange among countries (Jones & Morgan, 1994; Keller, 2008). Local manufacturers extended their businesses to buyers in remote nations, starting to utilize a trademark for customers to recognize and to distinguish products/services from those of worldwide competitors (Moore & Reid, 2008). This way, customers both in the local market and foreign countries started being able to be aware of brands.

In the twentieth century, the purpose of branding evolved from associations with physical product features to intangible, symbolic features emblematic of personality and lifestyle (Gobé, 2001; Healey, 2008; Moore & Reid, 2008; Neumeier, 2006; Schmitt, 1999). Traditional marketing focused on creating brands that provide tangible benefits through product features and quality; whereas, modern marketing has focused on intangible aspects of branding, tapping into sensory and emotional elements of brand experience (Gobé, 2001; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999). Therefore, providing consumers with a deeply emotional experience, associated with a brand, became increasingly important for brand managers seeking to obtain positive responses from consumers (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Gobé, 2001; Healey, 2008; Roberts, 2004, 2006; Thomson et al., 2005).

Researchers, that conducted previous studies among Chinese consumers' attitude and loyalty towards local brands. Overseas researches mostly focused on the consumers of specific countries towards local or international brands. As far as we know, there is no existing research about foreigners being loyal to Chinese brands, even though of brands created in China are well-know and highly competitive both the in the People's Republic of China and overseas. In the future, this research will help Chinese marketers to identify specific features of the foreigner's category of consumers and realize whether there is any difference between it and consumers who is Chinese national.

**Theoretical background and hypothesis development**

**Brand Experience**

From the brand management view point, the experience is a takeaway impression (Carbone and Haeckel, 1994) the consumers form in their minds as a result of the encounter with the holistic an offer of a brand (Klaus and Maklan, 2007), placed at the heart of the brand-building process (for example, Schmitt, 1999; De Chernatony et al, 2006; Payne et al., 2009). Deming (2007) has claimed that 'branding is a process of creating authentic, unique, emotional experiences that yield evangelicals.' It was argued that, experiences involve, at least, four dimensions: affective (feelings), sensory (five senses), intellectual (thoughts), and behavioral (actions) (Brakus et al., 2009). Such four dimensions brand experience concept has been validated in a variety of product and service settings, for instance; tourism destinations (Beckman et al., 2013), consumer events (Zarantonello& Schmitt, 2013), coffeehouses (Choi, Ok, & Hyun, 2017) etc.

Today, consumers not only buy products and services to fulfill their needs but also to get the emotional experiences related to such purchase (Morrison & Grane, 2007; Zarantonello& Schmitt, 2010; Walter, 2013). Because of this increasing trend, marketers and designers ask themselves; how do
consumers experience a brand? What are the measurements of brand experience? -Brakus et al (2009) research these questions in their study on brand experience.

Brand experience management is defined as a strategic controlling process of all brand experiences a customer has at many touchpoints. It has influences on other constructs such as customer satisfaction, service quality, as well as customer relationship and consumer behavior.

If the result is that consumers’ perceptions about experiences at all touchpoints (Brodie et al., 2009) are positive and pleasant, it is then possible to expect that they would like to repeat them, thus becoming more loyal (Brakus et al., 2009).

Brand Love

Brand love is a concept from social psychology. Shimp and Madden (1988) propose the first work by applying Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love, while Ahuvia (1993) proposes its first empirical study. However, only few studies on brand love have been published in marketing journals (Ahuvia, 2005; Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012; Whang et al., 2004), and this construct still needs its widely-accepted definition and measurements. According to Fournier’s (1998) brand relationship quality model, there are six dimensions including attachment (love/passion and self-connection), behavioral ties (interdependence and commitment) and supportive cognitive beliefs (intimacy and brand partner quality). These dimensions are based on theories such as interdependence theory and theory of attraction and are the essential concepts in attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979).

Brand love and satisfaction are different constructs. Consistent with the thinking of Fournier and Mick (1999), brand love is conceptualized here as a mode of satisfaction, i.e., a response experienced by some, but not all, satisfied consumers. The most important point, is that, brand love includes a willingness to declare love (e.g., "I love this brand!") and involves the integration of the brand into the consumer’s identity, neither of which is requisite in satisfaction.

This way, brand love is not only a more intense emotional response than satisfaction or liking, but it also is conceptually distinct. In the field of the dyadic relationship between brand and consumer, extant studies use a relationship metaphor from interpersonal relationship theory. Findings of this theory may be discovered in other researches related to brand management and consumer psychology.

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is one of the most-cited concepts in marketing literature, and the range of benefits derived from it is accepted by both academic and practitioners. A favorable state of mind formed by a positive utilization encounter leads to brand loyalty, characterized in terms of attitudinal and behavioral points of view (Dick & Basu, 1994). Regarding the consequence of brand love, (Assael, 1987) defines brand loyalty as commitment to a certain brand with commitment being defined as “an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship” (Moorman et al., 1992).

Aaker (1991) identified five levels of brand loyalty in the brand loyalty pyramid. The bottom loyalty level is so-called switchers, who are not loyal to the brand. These consumers may continuously explore for assortment, or are touchy to cost and purchase the brand on a deal. The next level of loyalty is routine buyers, who tend to proceed to purchase the brand not looking for elective brands. The third level is fulfilled buyers with switching costs. They are unwilling to alter to a substitute brand, due to necessity to spend time, cash, and the probable risk. The fourth level comprises of buyers who like the brand, due to enthusiastic connection. These buyers shape a companionship with the brand, based on a positive long-term relationship. The top loyalty level is committed buyers. They will proceed to buy the brand notwithstanding of cost or alter since they are more closely tied to having or utilizing the brand than buyers who as it were just like the brand (Aaker, 1991).

Brand loyalty facilitates customer retention efforts (Reichheld and Schechter, 2000) and creates resistance for loyal consumers to switch because of competitive strategies (Dick and Basu, 1994). Furthermore, brand loyalty can help increase market share, and brand-loyal customers are willing to pay a premium as a result of the higher value they perceive (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001).

However, up to now the discussion on brand loyalty is still around marketing academics and practitioners. For instance, pro-longed repurchase behavior could be driven only by convenience, thus invalidating this measure as an indicator of true brand loyalty. These traditional behavioral factorsshow
only the static outcome of a dynamic process and, as a result, can’t find a way to truly understand the real factors of brand loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). The aim of this study is to find truly loyal consumers and track its relationships with their prior brand experience through a mediator of brand love.

Relationship between variables (brand experience, brand love, and brand loyalty)

The link between brand experience, brand love, and brand loyalty constructs included in this research are evident.

First of all, brands that are capable of delivering a superior brand experience can achieve preference over and differentiation from other brands and build brand loyalty (Brakus et al., 2009). It has been proposed that brands capable of delivering a unique and distinctive experience by managing emotional and functional parts of the offering (Berry et al., 2002; Haeckel et al., 2003; Morrison and Crane, 2007) and assuring consistency in all touchpoints between the brand and its customers (Shaw and Ivens, 2002; Meyer and Schwager, 2007) can lead to brand love, build brand loyalty and even generate evangelism (Schmitt, 2003; Pullman and Gross, 2004; Deming, 2007).

Brand Loyalty is an intention to repeat purchases and support the satisfying brand of customers, which enables the business to maintain customers and avoid spending resources to acquiring new customers (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Kazemi et al., 2013). Marketers aim to get the maximum number of highly loyal customers, which is evidently and mentioned above connected with customer's previous brand experience, and leads to Hypotheses 1:

H1. Brand experience has a positive effect on developing brand loyalty.

Secondly and as mentioned before, brand love is defined as a passionate, emotional connection of customers to a particular brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). It is improbable for the customer to meet brand love without any prior experience with the brand. Moreover, the negative brand experience can not cause brand love, which is a strong positive emotion, that connects consumers and the product.

Through literature review, this study believes that brand love refers to the emotional separation of love from interpersonal relationships, with passion and intimacy as the main emotional colors, showing emotional dynamics such as fanaticism, attachment and worship, and involving positive cognitive and emotional attributes. The premise of brand love is to pay attention to the emotional experience of consumers. So it is based on the study of the interaction between consumers and brand experience perspective, emphasizing the positive feelings of consumers towards the brand, that end up in brand love. Customers who feel passionate and have an emotional connection with a brand will not include expectancy disconfirmation to their evaluation on the brand consumption experiences. Therefore, we can formulate Hypotheses 2:

H2. Brand experience has a positive impact on brand love.

If consumers love the brand, they might feel higher brand loyalty, desire to use, willingness to invest more resources to purchase the brand, i.e., behavioral loyalty, to be more involved, and to spread positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and attitudinal loyalty (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012). Regarding the consequence of brand love, Assael (1987) defines brand loyalty as commitment to a certain brand with commitment being defined as ‘an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship’ (Moorman et al.).

Related studies also demonstrate the significant effects of these emotional components, e.g., attachment, on brand loyalty (Aurier and de Lanauze, 2012; Davis-Sramek et al., 2009; Fuchs et al., 2015; Johnson et al., 2006). Satisfied consumers who also express brand love are more confident in their relationship with the brand; they consider that the brand is reliable.

Thus, customers with a high level of brand love tend to be highly loyal customers, which leads to Hypotheses No.3:

H3. Brand love has a positive impact on brand loyalty.
Finally, as stated at the beginning, the main aim of this study is to identify two common mechanisms to brand loyalty. As mentioned, brand experience is selected due to its high-order, including various types of dimensions, while brand love is due to its importance as a mediator in prior literature. The proposed model presents brand love feelings as a central construct. In this study we conceptualize the brand love feelings as the passion, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions in response to the brand and declaration of love for the brand, as proposed by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) for love brand.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have studied the influence of brand love in the context of the fashion brand and found that the brand which consumers recognize as the hedonic product has a positive influence on brand love. Furthermore, brand love has a positive influence on brand loyalty, being mostly and primarily based on brand experience. Therefore, the following hypotheses is proposed.

**H4. Brand love act as mediate between brand experience and brand loyalty.**

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**The choice of the brand and customer category**

The consumer market of People Republic of China is one of the most dynamic, fastest-changing market in the world and the biggest market of Asia. The consumer in China is the most digitized consumer in the world and the companies innovating the digital market (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent, and others) are much more innovative and have more investment power than most other tech companies in the world.

Therefore, consumers are much more willing to try and adopt new technologies and new digital services. Also, since of the sheer estimate of the advertise developments that would stay a simple craze somewhere else rapidly advance into feasible commerce models in China. Online payments (e-cash - Alipay, Wechat wallet), live streaming, and e-shopping (Taobao) are cases where China is essentially ahead of other parts of the world – and these will have a gigantic affect on how brands will be sold within the future, either online or offline.

For all mentioned above digital products, the consumer in China needs a tool – in this case Xiaomi smartphone, which is chosen as a branded product for this research.

Xiaomi, a Chinese electronics company founded in 2010, mainly manufactures mobile phones and smart hardware and software and provides internet services to consumers. The company has achieved success by pioneering online flash sales, pricing its products relatively low, and cultivating loyal consumers called "Mi Fans," who enthusiastically give feedback on product design, technology and commercials (Dong and Zhang, 2016).

The Chinese mobile revolution has expanded the significance of the client experience. Consumers now expect brands to avail themselves within the digital ecosystem and deliver a seamless journey across retail, social and e-commerce touchpoints. Very soon, the awareness about Xiaomi was spread to the markets out of China. In March 2018, Xiaomi was operating in 74 countries and regions, with about 36.2% of its revenue coming from overseas markets (Xiaomi, 2018).
The innovation of our research is to study brand experience, brand love and brand loyalty not only of the customers of the same origin with the brand but the foreigners temporarily or permanently residing on the territory of Peoples Republic of China, using the products of Xiaomi brand on an everyday basis. Most of the researches until today was mainly conducted about international brands trying to win Chinese consumers, while it is crucial to understand how Chinese brands (e.g., Xiaomi) are rapidly taking over foreign customers.

Methods
Participants and data collection
This study used a survey as a method to evaluate the correlation between brand experience and brand love using the example of Xiaomi products, specifically smartphones. The specific research method was applied for data collection. The study included an e-questionnaire, which is administered in an electronic way via e-mail or websites. The advantages of e-questionnaires are the low costs involved, as well as the possibility of wide geographical distribution. The downsides are the often-low response rates combined with concerns about confidentiality (Kempf-Leonard, 2005). This inquiry was shared in electronic form via link to an online questionnaire on the social media platform WeChat. The goal was to reach some customers who are not regionally centered. The constructs investigated in this study are operationalized through the literature review. The questionnaire was built based on literature reviews and previous researches. Five-point Likert scale was used in the questionnaire, ranging from strongly disagree (point 1) to strongly agree (point 5).

We selected the respondents based on convenience sampling mostly among students of Shanghai University (Shanghai, China), as well as foreign and Chinese students of other Universities, Shanghai local residents and Xiaomi users in other cities of China. They were given a self-administered questionnaire in the English language. The respondents were requested to select their preferred digital brand from the list of brands and then provided the questionnaire to fill-up their responses. Based on the theoretical research, customers tend to develop a deep emotional attachment with a particular digital brand (Rageh Ismail & Spinelli, 2012). To identify these brands, a pilot study was conducted with thirty respondents above the age of 18 years. To reduce gender bias, the equal number of male \((n = 15)\) and female \((n = 15)\) respondents were selected and were asked to choose one smartphone brand from the top fourteen brands based on familiarity. The familiarity was assessed through a pilot survey with a sample size of 30 on a 7 point scale (1-not at all familiar, 7-very familiar). After receiving 30 responses, the mean was calculated. The Chinese brand with the highest mean rating - Xiaomi, was retained for the study. Smartphone brands were identified based on brand popularity and respondent familiarity.

The data collection was conducted from August 1 to August 28, 2019. A total of 204 responses were received over a 4-week period. Finally, 202 responses were used for subsequent analyses after 2 invalid responses were excluded due to several answers from the same respondent.

Table 2 summarizes the demographic information of the final sample. The responses were balanced in terms of gender distribution (male: 48%, female: 52%) and with 27.7% of respondents married, 29.7% dating and 42.6% single. The majority of respondents’ incomes per month were between 3000 and 9000. Since the research also covered both foreign and Chinese nationals, the majority of respondents are foreigners (71.3%, European, American nationals), with 28.7% Chinese nationals.

We evaluated responses in the first 2 weeks and consecutive 2 weeks to evaluate non-response bias (Armstrong and Overton, 1977). A t-test between the sample groups showed that there were no significant differences in the crucial research variables and demographic variables in the research framework between the subjects from the first 2 weeks and the consecutive 2 weeks.
<table>
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<th>Measures</th>
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<td>The constructs in our study were measured using pre-developed instruments from the marketing literature. These scales were contextualized and Appendix A provides list of the items. In order to measure brand experience, we utilized scale suggested by Brakus et al. (2009). Their study proposed that brand experience may be considered as the second order construct having affective, behavioral, sensorial, and intellectual dimensions. Hence, in the present study we also used brand experience as a second order reflective measure.</td>
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<td>A 12 brand love scale, including subscales for passion (5 items) and intimacy (7 items), and was adapted from Lastovicka and Sirianni (2011). Brand loyalty was measured by scales proposed by Keller (2001) with 7 items and adjusted to Xiaomi smartphone as a topic of current research. See Appendix A.</td>
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<td>Based on past studies (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011; Dong et al., 2018), five control variables were included to take into account their potential effects on brand loyalty. Respondents’ gender (1 1/2 Male; 2 1/2 Female), material status (1 1/3 married; 2 1/3 dating; 3 1/3 single), monthly income, nationality and education were included based on the evidence indicating that brand love feedback may vary based on these characteristics (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011; Wang et al., 2014).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyses and results</td>
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<td>Table 1</td>
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<td>Scale</td>
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<td>Brand Experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Love - Passion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brand Love - Intimacy</td>
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<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
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Confirmatory factor analysis was performed to assess the reliability and validity of the scales. The results indicated that the Cronbach’s α value of all the constructs were above 0.73 (Table 1), which were higher than the threshold level of 0.7, as suggested by Nunnally (1967) we say the survey has good internal consistency. The results from the following table showed that the survey has good reliability.
Correlation Analysis

Zero-order correlations are provided in Table 2. As can be seen, brand experience is significantly positive correlated with brand love - passion ($r = 0.705, p < 0.001$), brand love - intimacy ($r = 0.671, p < 0.001$), and brand loyalty ($r = 0.588, p < 0.001$).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Table 2.</th>
<th>Correlation analysis</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Brand Experience</td>
<td>3.12 (0.67)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Brand Love - Passion</td>
<td>2.92 (0.83)</td>
<td>.705***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Brand Love - Intimacy</td>
<td>3.27 (0.70)</td>
<td>.671***</td>
<td>.690***</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>3.06 (0.83)</td>
<td>.588***</td>
<td>.635***</td>
<td>.678***</td>
<td>1</td>
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</table>

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Mediation Effect

The Independent variable in our research - Brand Experience should significantly predict dependent variable - Brand Loyalty, after control demographic information. Also, Independent variable - Brand Experiences should significantly predict mediator variable - Brand Love.

When independent variable and mediator variable are put in one model, mediator still significantly predict the dependent variable. If the coefficient of independent variable no longer significant, we call it full mediator effect, if the coefficient is still significant but with a smaller number, we call it partial mediator effect.

In order to get a better understanding of the relationships, demographic information was controlled in the model. For ease of interpreting the magnitude of the effects, we standardized all predictor variables into $z$-scores prior to analysis ($M = 0$, $SD = 1$). All categorical variables are dummy coded.

IV $\rightarrow$ DV

Linear regression has been conducted in this study. Results showed that independent variables have significant variation in the outcome, $R^2 = 0.62$, (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.60$), $F(13,188) = 23.963$, $p < 0.001$. Results showed that controlling for demographic variables, brand experience has a positive significant relationship with brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.49, p < 0.001$).

IV $\rightarrow$ Mediator

For this study, results showed that independent variables have significant variation in the outcome, $R^2 = 0.54$, (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.51$), $F(11,190) = 20.329$, $p < 0.001$, and controlling for demographic variables, brand experience has a positive significant relationship with brand passion ($\beta = 0.54, p < 0.001$).

Results also showed that independent variables have significant variation in the outcome, $R^2 = 0.53$, (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.50$), $F(11,190) = 19.412$, $p < 0.001$, brand experience has a positive significant relationship with brand intimacy ($\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$).

Later, linear regression has been conducted. Results showed that independent variables have significant variation in the outcome, $R^2 = 0.40$, (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.37$), $F(11,190) = 11.530$, $p < 0.001$, where brand experience has a positive significant relationship with brand intimacy ($\beta = 0.43, p < 0.001$).

IV+mediator $\rightarrow$ DV
For this study, results showed that independent variables have significant variation in the outcome, $R^2 = 0.57$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.56$), $F(13,188) = 20.469$, $p < 0.001$. Results showed that controlling for demographic variables, passion ($\beta = 0.33$, $p < 0.01$) and intimacy ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$) have positive significant relationship with brand loyalty. However, brand experience no longer significantly predicts brand loyalty when brand experience and brand love were entered into the regression together ($p > 0.05$). While all three factors of brand love had significant influences on brand loyalty indicating that brand love is fully mediating the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Results showed that independent variables have significant variation in the outcome, $R^2 = 0.58$ (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.6055$), $F(12,189) = 21.534$, $p < 0.001$.

Results showed that controlling for demographic variables, passion has a positive significant relationship with brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.001$) and intimacy ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.001$).

\[ \beta = 0.43 \quad \text{Brand Love – Passion} \]
\[ \beta = 0.49 \quad \text{Brand Experience} \]
\[ \beta = 0.43 \quad \text{Brand Love – Intimacy} \]

Therefore, all of the hypotheses were supported, which is shown in the Table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypothesis No.</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Supported or No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1</td>
<td>Brand experience has a positive effect on developing brand loyalty</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2</td>
<td>Brand experience has a positive impact on brand love</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3</td>
<td>Brand love feeling has a positive impact on brand loyalty</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4</td>
<td>Brand love act as mediate between brand experience and brand loyalty</td>
<td>Supported</td>
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</table>

**Theoretical Implications**

The current study makes important contributions to research. First, we extend the literature on the brand love specifically as a mediator between brand experience previous findings and researches and brand loyalty, which is one of the key points of brand management.

We have explored existing academic knowledge on brand experience and we have tried to connect the different streams of research on brand management, customer experience, brand love and loyalty in order to offer a comprehensive understanding of this new concept and its possible relationships with other marketing constructs. Therefore, the main contribution of our study is that it provides empirical evidence that high or low brand love completely mediates the suggested relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Finally, the current study has future theoretical implications for research between Chinese brands and overseas brands, difference of attitudes and data of brand’s local markets consumers and from the overseas markets. As a following research we consider more deep investigation of difference of brand love and loyalty campaigns toward local consumers and of different nationalities/worldwide markets.

These are thus extremely important contributions with managerial implications because they suggest that brands need to improve of the direction of their entire company and barns campaign, create affective relationship with their customers on all levels in case want to generate more loyal customers. Following are the managerial implications found on the study.
Managerial Implications

This study offers managerial solutions to develop customers’ brand loyalty strategies, particularly in the industry of branded communication devices, such as smartphones, mobile phones and other related gadgets.

The key managerial question is how brand managers can turn brand experience into loved brands and maintain loyalty over long period of time. Research model presented in this study can assist managers in showing how more lower-level, concrete subcomponents can be targeted to influence the higher-level and more general consumer perceptions that usually shapes a consumer’s feeling, which is called “Brand Love”. Further you can find several ways of managerial implications.

- Companies aiming to increase their revenues should emphasize a sensory experience strategy. Such a strategy may be implemented by delivering values which could appeal to one of a combination of sensations (i.e. sight, emotion, touch). A pleasing usage of mobile device, such as smooth outer surface, exciting interface, unique shape and features could be a significant help to increase brand experience feedback.

- No device is irreplaceable or impossible to sell/change, but the aim of managerial work (specifically for Xiaomi brand in this case) is to create special ecosystem for Xiaomi smartphone users, that would be harder for them to leave, that would follow to higher brand loyalty. Customers need to feel that the brand symbolizes what they are; this contributes to the customer’s image and helps to develop a sense of belonging. This way, customers will be more likely to re-buy products of the same brand, to recommend it to others, to choose the brand over another and even to depreciate a problem if it occurs.

Limitations and future research

At the moment there were no prior studies based on interpersonal love theories for band love in brand management. Some of the previous researched did include several aspects of the brand love model developed by authors, but our aim was to conclude that the inter-love theories that have been used as the basis for past work still can’t provide a full theoretical foundation for brand love research. In the future research we consider discussing other theories related to brand love and that we applied to our research model.

Since consumers’ love for brands have been researched before and Sternberg’s(1986, 1997) triangular theory is the most frequently adopted framework, we found it suitable to be discussed. The theory states that combination of passion, intimacy, and commitment creates brand love. It is believed that brand passion is the least problematic aspect of Sternberg’s theory. Passionate feeling for consuming the brands translates easily into brand passion management term. On the other hand, intimacy is related feelings, thoughts, and actions that are connected to the experience of warmth, and closeness in loving interpersonal relationships.

More work is needed to determine how the components of brand love identified here interact with each other and acting as a mediator factor. In particular, further conceptual and empirical work, as well as researching more theoretical background is needed to be done to more definite understanding of the role of brand love strength within the current model.

Moreover, future work includes but is not limited to researching different types of consumer types facing local and overseas brand, where through their interpersonal attitude based on Aaker’s theory they may or may not show higher loyalty with similar brand experience.

Conclusion

Currently, the brands need to operate in a developed economic environment. They face fierce competition, especially in developed countries and in one of the most fast-growing market of technologies and mobile systems. The possibility of differentiating brands often correlates with their ability to deliver top consumer experiences, which is the only way to engage bigger number of highly loyal consumers in such environment. People have easy access to a huge number of such brand’s
competitors and their advertisement campaigns, that makes brand loyalty one of the most important factors of success.

The aim of this study was to research the mediation between the two features – brand love as a mediator between brand experience and brand loyalty. Moreover, this study provides empirical support for the usefulness of the brand love construct for considering differences in satisfied consumers’ emotional responses to brands. For marketing managers, we have shown that brand love is a meaningful factor of consumer satisfaction and is linked to desirable post-consumption behavior resulted in brand loyalty. This way, brand love may offer marketers a measurable strategic aim that extends recent practitioner thinking about the importance of developing emotional relationships with consumers and finding the ways to get these objectives (Reichheld, 2003; Roberts, 2004).

For marketing academics, this research introduces a multi-item measure of brand love and refines our understanding of this phenomenon. Moreover, it contributes relatively simple validated model that uses brand love both a predictor variable and an outcome variable in a number of consumers with positive brand experience. Our study also shows that brand love is not only a single variable, but it’s concepts of passion and intimacy and they have different relations with the brand loyalty. This research shows the significant role of brand love in branding theory and practice, so our current contributions are only a beginning, and a great deal of work remains.

References

39. Xiaomi (2018), Xiaomi IPO Prospectus, 2018