

# Customer Connections

Subjects: Behavioral Sciences

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Brand experience, brand love, and brand behavior outcomes hold significant importance in management research. Their relevance extends to shaping strategic decision-making, fostering a customer-centric approach, and providing insights into the competitive landscape. These concepts are pivotal in understanding the complex dynamics of consumer-brand relationships, enabling organizations to make informed decisions, prioritize customer satisfaction, and stay competitive in the market.

Keywords: brand behaviour outcomes (BBO) ; brand experience (BE) ; brand love (BL)

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## 1. Introduction

In the contemporary and fiercely competitive retail environment, businesses are actively working towards attracting customers and establishing enduring connections with them. Central to achieving this objective are the concepts of Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Love (BL).

As retail brands grapple with the escalating challenge of setting themselves apart and fostering strong emotional bonds with consumers, the examination of the potency of these constructs and their interconnections has become imperative. Furthermore, the impact of Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Love (BL) extends to consequential Brand Behaviour Outcomes (BBO), including Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM), as demonstrated in previous research ([Rodrigues and Brandão 2021](#)).

The landscape of retail brands has undergone a transformation, shifting from an emphasis on the functional aspects of products to prioritizing the creation of a memorable and valuable Brand Experience (BE) for customers ([Brakus et al. 2009](#)). This evolution has given rise to a new retail paradigm where brands can establish emotional connections through positive customer experiences. Consequently, there is a growing interest in exploring how brands can leverage a robust identity and a strong client-brand bond to drive profitability ([Sohaib et al. 2023](#)). Nonetheless, there are limited validated tools available in Portuguese or Czech for evaluating these dimensions.

## 2. Constructs Conceptualization

The concept of Brand Experience (BE) is not a recent development, with initial studies introducing this concept emerging in the late 1990s ([Gilmore and Pine 1999](#); [Schmitt 1999](#)). Contemporary researchers often embrace the definition put forth by [Brakus et al. \(2009\)](#). They conceptualize Brand Experience (BE) as a subjective and internal consumer response encompassing emotions, sensations, thoughts, and behavioral reactions generated by stimuli associated with a brand. These stimuli can include elements like brand identity, design, communication, and environments. The resulting responses vary in strength and intensity, leading to positive or negative effects that endure over time and shape consumer behavior ([Brakus et al. 2009](#)). Despite alternative proposals (e.g., [Schmitt and Rogers 2008](#)), these researchers identify four types of Brand Experience (BE): sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral.

A memorable Brand Experience (BE) has the potential to cultivate deep Brand Love (BL). According to [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#), Brand Love (BL) is defined as the intense emotional connection a satisfied customer develops towards a brand. Brand Love (BL), characterized by an affective focus arising from a customer's enduring bond with a brand, involves a disposition to declare love and includes integrating the brand into the customer's identity ([Rather et al. 2021](#)).

Although Brand Love (BE) is significant in the marketing realm, its definition lacks consensus among scholars ([Batra et al. 2012](#)). Recent research acknowledges that consumers may develop emotions akin to love toward brands ([Gumparthy and Patra 2020](#)). The construct of Brand Love (BL) was introduced by [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#) to provide a comprehensive and quantitative perspective on contented consumers while enhancing the understanding of post-consumption behaviors, such as Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM) recommendations (the extent to which customers express their admiration for

the brand to others) and Brand Loyalty (BLYT) (the level of consumer commitment to repurchasing the brand) (Han et al. 2018). Alshreef et al. (2023) discovered that the importance of customer value lies in its pivotal role in enhancing various aspects of brand affection, namely intimacy, passion, and commitment. Their findings indicate that utilitarian value has a greater impact than hedonic value on the sub-dimensions of brand love. Moreover, these sub-dimensions significantly contribute to influencing customer loyalty. Han and Choi (2019) highlighted the significance of the self-expressive function of brands by confirming the relationship between self-congruity and brand love. Consumer loyalty is crucial, as it is associated with various business benefits (Yi and La 2004), including reduced marketing costs, increased per-client profit, a steady stream of profit, decreased operational costs, higher price premiums, and increased recommendations (Reichheld and Teal 1996). Loyal customers are less susceptible to competitors' promotional efforts, further underscoring the importance of client loyalty in today's highly competitive business landscape (Bae and Kim 2023; Na et al. 2023; Yi and Jeon 2003).

Oliver (1999) proposed a framework with four phases leading to customer loyalty. The cognitive phase involves customers relying on previous experience and knowledge when a brand comes to mind. The affective phase is driven by positive feelings and attitudes toward a brand developed through satisfying occasions. Cognitive loyalty involves the customer's intention to continue purchasing in the future, making it more resilient than affective loyalty. The final stage, action loyalty, translates the customer's motivated intention into a readiness to take action (Oliver 1999). Loyal customers are likely to exhibit Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM) and purchase intention (Ahmad and Akbar 2023; Yi and La 2004; Wang and Omar 2023).

Word of mouth involves interpersonal and informal communication about services and goods (Godes and Mayzlin 2004). As consumers engage with brands, they gather crucial information influencing their decision to endorse or not endorse a specific service or product (Zeithaml et al. 1993). An extended and favorable Brand Experience (BE), measured in terms of the product usage duration, has been shown to enhance Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM) (Karjaluoto et al. 2016). Studies demonstrate that Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM) is strongly predicted by Brand Love (BL) (Batra et al. 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia 2006). Furthermore, Alshreef et al. (2023) observed that the impact of the two forms of customer value on brand love sub-dimensions was influenced by electronic word of mouth (eWOM). In a separate study, Anastasiei et al. (2023) discovered that negative electronic word-of-mouth intent is affected by centrality and density, with a more pronounced effect at elevated levels of network usage. Consequently, individuals with greater influence in the network are more likely to generate unfavorable electronic word of mouth.

Purchase intention is a crucial variable explaining consumer behavior (Peña-García 2020). It signifies an intention to purchase or consume a service or product (Gupta et al. 2014). During the formation of purchase intention, customers assess claims regarding BL and brand engagement, which influences their decision-making (Verma 2021). Cognitive appraisals of performance over time can produce affective attachment, leading to Affective Commitment (AC). Affective Commitment (AC), a psychological disposition where individuals show an emotional relationship toward the brand, is positively related to brand attachment, shared values, identification, and trust (Albert and Merunka 2013; Fullerton 2005). Higher Affective Commitment (AC) correlates with lower switching intentions and higher advocacy of brand intentions (Fullerton 2005).

Albert and Merunka (2013) highlight the substantial impact of Brand Love (BL) on Affective Commitment (AC). Their research underscores the significance of Brand Love (BL) for brand management, indicating its profound influence on long-term brand relationships. Active Engagement (AE), another critical outcome of Brand Love (BL) and Brand Loyalty (BLYT) (Bairrada et al. 2019; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010), encompasses a range of consumer behaviors, from purchasing brand merchandise to following brand news, talking about the brand, or visiting brand websites. Active Engagement (AE) occurs independently of the product's relevance to individuals (Bairrada et al. 2019; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen 2010).

Perception of Attitudes Towards (PAT) a brand, such as LIDL, is also a crucial Brand Behaviour Outcome (BBO). This construct represents an individual's perception of the balance between what the brand offers and what individuals receive. For example, it reflects an individual's general belief regarding the brand's pricing practices for the quality of its products (Sweeney and Soutar 2001).

### **3. Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Love (BL): Their Relationship with Other Variables**

Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Love (BL) have emerged as essential concepts explaining several consumer outcomes, including Brand Loyalty (BLYT), Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM), (Re)purchase Intention (RI), Affective

Commitment (AC), Active Engagement (AE), and Perception of Attitudes Towards a Brand (PATB). Previous studies ([Anggara et al. 2023](#); [Bairrada et al. 2019](#); [Bıçakcıoğlu et al. 2018](#)) indicate that Brand Love (BL) has a positive influence on Brand Loyalty (BLYT). Higher Brand Love (BL) levels correlate with a higher tendency among consumers to exhibit Brand Loyalty (BLYT). [Maduretno and Junaedi's \(2022\)](#) study suggests an indirect effect of Brand Experience (BL) on Brand Loyalty (BLYT) via Brand Love (BL). Thus, Brand Experience (BL) relates to Brand Love (BL) first, and Brand Love (BL), in turn, relates to Brand Loyalty (BLYT).

Recent studies (e.g., [Bairrada et al. 2019](#); [Bıçakcıoğlu et al. 2018](#); [Dam 2020](#)) also show that Brand Love (BL) positively correlates with Positive Word of Mouth (+WOM). This relationship can be explained by Brand Love (BL) stimulating behaviors that involve spreading positive information about the brand. In essence, when consumers love their brands, they are inclined to express positive sentiments and recommend the brand to others ([Bıçakcıoğlu et al. 2018](#)). Furthermore, Active Engagement (AE) is more likely when consumers have a strong affection for their brands, as found in previous research by [Bairrada et al. \(2019\)](#).

Purchase intention is another direct and indirect effect of Brand Love (BL) supported by several previous studies (e.g., [Aureliano-Silva et al. 2022](#); [Garg et al. 2015](#)). These studies demonstrate that emotionally involved consumers (i.e., with higher Brand Love) are more likely to purchase and continue purchasing the same brand.

Regarding Affective Commitment (AC), the findings of studies by [Albert and Merunka \(2013\)](#) and [Garg et al. \(2015\)](#) suggest that customers with a deep love for a brand are more likely to exhibit a higher Affective Commitment (AC). There is, therefore, a positive relationship between Brand Love (BL) and Affective Commitment (AC). Furthermore, consumers become part of the brand, creating an emotional connection between them; this connection can result in positive purchase decisions ([Vrtana and Krizanova 2023](#)).

Beyond the previously mentioned outcomes, the stimulus provided by the brand from the client's experience can generate positive memories, leading clients to form a positive Perception of Attitudes Towards a Brand (PATB) ([Nayeem et al. 2019](#)). Consequently, a positive relationship can be expected between Brand Experience (BE) and the Perception of Attitudes Towards a Brand (PATB), such as LIDL. In conclusion, previous studies provide insights into the indirect effect of Brand Experience (BE) on several outcomes through the mediating role of Brand Love (BL).

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