The personality of brand lovers: An examination in fashion branding

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1. INTRODUCTION

In everyday conversation, people frequently talk about 'loving' products, brands, and consumption activities such as skiing or eating out at restaurants. Previous work found that talk about love is more than a colorful figure of speech (Ahuvia, 1993). There is mounting evidence that consumers use mental schemas and processes such as love not only in interpersonal contexts ("I love you") but also in consumption contexts ("I love my car") (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998; Ahuvia, 2005; Batra *et al.*, 2012). Consumers do not just 'love' some products, they love some products. Brand love is a legitimate form of love alongside romantic love, parental love, friendship love, unrequited love, and others. Henceforth, we will use the term brand love in a very general way, to refer to the love of brands (including non-profit brands), products and services, product categories (e.g., cell phones, fashion), as well as specific products (i.e. a particular consumer's cellphone).

Research on brand love began with a conceptual article by Shimp and Madden (1988), followed by the first major empirical study specifically on brand love (Ahuvia, 1992, 1993), and Fournier's (1998) now classic work on consumer brand relationships, which included brand love as one relationship type. Since then, over 100 journal and conference papers have been published on brand love, usually examining its antecedents and consequences, and sometimes suggesting new conceptualizations of the construct. In this paper, we will use the

conceptualization of brand love developed by Batra *et al.* (2012) as shown in Table 5.1, which includes seven major dimensions, three of which contain multiple sub-dimensions.

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Batra *et al.* (2012) have shown that brand love stimulates consumers' repurchase intentions, positive word-of-mouth, resistance to negative information, and brand loyalty. In addition, these authors showed that brand love may vary in its intensity and exists also at low or moderate levels. Even if a consumer does not come close to the intensity of attachment to a brand that in everyday language might be called 'true love', moving a consumer from a moderate level to a somewhat higher level of brand love can produce important improvements in a variety of managerial important outcomes (Batra *et al.*, 2012).

Because brand love relates positively to favorable consumer responses, such as brand loyalty of positive word of mouth (Batra *et al.*, 2012), a deeper understanding of its causal antecedents is paramount. Here, previous studies identified broad sets of factors, including product-related, consumer-related, and firm-related variables. For example, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) emphasize the hedonic and symbolic nature of products as determinants of brand love. Rauschnabel and Ahuvia (2014) demonstrate that a brand's level of anthropomorphism influences brand love. Other work highlights consumers' identification with a brand, their trust in a brand, and brand community as predictors of brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Albert *et al.*, 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010). In addition, store image, perceived transactional value, and corporate social responsibility have been found to influence brand love (Vlachos and Vrechopoulos, 2012).

Drawing on theory and empirical research on consumer personality, this article investigates how the big five personality dimensions influence the development of brand love. The objectives of this study are twofold. First, this study aims to connect personality literature and branding literature by unraveling what personality traits affect the development of brand love. Second, this study aims to identify psychological facilitators and inhibitors of brand love. To achieve these goals, this chapter includes an empirical study with 320 respondents. We analyzed the data using structural equation modeling.

2. PERSONALITY AND RELATIONSHIPS

Human personality is defined as "the set of psychological traits and mechanisms within the individual that are organized and relatively enduring and that influence his or her interactions with, and adaptations to, the intrapsychic, physical, and social environments" (Larsen and Buss, 2005, p. 4). According to this definition, traits represent the characteristics that describe why people are different from each other. Similarly, mechanisms refer more to the processes of personality, that is, the involved psychological processes that entail information-processing activity. For example, extraverted individuals are more prepared to notice and act on certain kinds of social and interpersonal information (Larsen and Buss, 2005).

The Big Five conception is the most widely accepted framework in personality research (Costa and McCrae, 1992). It has been developed based on the theoretical premise that all individual differences have been translated into human language during the evolution of human language (John *et al.*, 1988). Based systematic analyses of personality adjectives in lexica, and the application of factor-analytic procedures, several researchers – independent from the population they have studied – have extracted five broad dimensions of human personality:

Openness to Experiences, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism (OCEAN). Each of these dimensions (syn.: trait) consists of several sub-dimensions (syn.: facets) that describe each trait more nuanced. Table 5.2 lists these five dimensions and typical adjectives associated with high-scorers on each trait.

Personality is a key aspect of interpersonal relationships, as some individuals with particular personality characteristics are more motivated and/or able to create and maintain relationships (Costa and McCrae, 1992; Larsen and Buss, 2005). For example, Asendorpf and Wilpers (1998) conducted a longitudinal study and found that personality traits, particularly extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, predicted various relationship specific outcomes, such as the number of peer relationships, conflicts, or falling in love. Similarly, Lopes *et al.* (2003) showed that individuals' relationship satisfaction is associated with their personality structure. Again, the authors found extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness are positively related to successful interpersonal relationships. In contrast, a negative effect was found for neuroticism.

With a focus on romantic interpersonal love, other researchers (e.g., Ahmetoglu *et al.*, 2009; Lopes *et al.*, 2005; White *et al.*, 2004) showed that individuals with high levels of extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, and low levels of neuroticism report higher levels of satisfaction with their romantic relationships. However, particularly for extraversion, some studies also showed contrary results. For example, Eysenk (1980) found that extraverted men are more likely to get divorced than introverted men, probably because extraverts are more often promiscuous.

One can interpret these mixed findings about extraversion as indicating that extraversion reflects an individual's ongoing motivation to create (new) interpersonal relationships, but not per se his or her ability to maintain them. In line with that, prior research provides mixed findings about the role of openness in social relationships. For example, Karney

and Bradbury (1995) or Shaver and Brennan (1992) found that openness had negative effects on marital stability, and relationships length, respectively. Demir and Weitekamp (2006) studied personality in the context of friendship-relationships, but did not identify any significant correlates.

The third column of Table 5.2 lists the general effects of the Big Five personality traits on individuals' relationship satisfaction/stability.

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3. HYPOTHESES

Theory of consumer-brand relationships contends that the mechanisms underlying interpersonal relationships are also active in situations in which consumers develop relationships to non-human entities such as brands (e.g., Fournier, 2009; Fournier and Alvarez, 2012; Fournier, Avery, and Alvarez, 2012; Guese, 2010; Kervyn, Fiske, and Malone, 2012). Consumers' tendency to treat brands as relationship partners builds upon anthropomorphism (Delbaere *et al.*, 2011; Kiesler, 2006; Kim and McGill, 2011; Landwehr *et al*., 2011; Puzakova *et al.*, 2013; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia, 2014), that is, consumers' predisposition to apply human attributes on non-human objects (Epley *et al.*, 2007). Although extant research has not looked at how consumer personality influences brand love, it has studied the effects of personality on consumer-brand relationships more broadly. This research has focused on what we will call *the compensatory effect*, which means that consumer brand relationships are used to compensate

for a deficit in consumers' interpersonal relationships (Lastovicka and Sirianni, 2011; Mikulincer and Shaver, 2008; Pieters, 2013; Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988).

Personality theory enters the picture, because it helps explain the origin of the deficits that consumer-brand relationships are compensating for. For example, Malär *et al.* (2011) show that consumers with low self-esteem tend to create consumer-brand relationships in order to satisfy their needs for self-enhancement. Table 5.2, column 3, is based on prior research in personality psychology, and summarizes the effects of personality traits on the satisfaction interpersonal relationships. Following the logic of the compensatory effect, we maintain that personality traits that increase a person's interpersonal relationship satisfaction, decrease their propensity for brand love.

H1: Agreeableness is negatively related to brand love.

H2: Conscientiousness is negatively related to brand love.

And vise-versa, personality traits that decrease a person's interpersonal satisfaction, increase their propensity for brand love.

H3: Openness to experiences is positively related to brand love.

H4: Neuroticism is positively related to brand love.

The compensatory effect is based on the idea that when a person lacks social relationships they experience a high level of motivation to form relationships; this motivation then influences their consumer behavior leading them to create consumer-brand relationships such as brand love. We note however that a lack of social relationships is just one reason why a person might have a high motivation to form relationships. Some people might have a strong social motivation simply because they are gregarious, even if they don't suffer from a lack of

interpersonal relationships. In these situations we propose that a *complimentary effect* is more relevant. This complimentary effect occurs when the desire to form interpersonal relationships reflects a broader positive orientation towards relationships in general, and hence towards consumer-brand relationships as well. In other words, some people are just relationship prone (Chang and Chieng, 2006; Mende and Bolton, 2011; Yim *et al.*, 2008). These highly relationship prone people, create both interpersonal, and consumer-brand, relationships (Rochberg-Halton and Csikszentmihalyi, 1981).

It is perhaps surprising, that the evidence is *mixed* regarding whether extraversion is linked to an increased ability to form positive social relationships (Table 5.1). These mixed findings are due primarily to the fact that extraverts sometimes neglect current relationships, as they pursue new ones, leading their pre-existing relationship partners feeling jealous or neglected. However, a brand will not react in the same way. Therefore, we would not expect extraverts' pursuit of new brand relationships to damage their existing brand relationships. Hence, we would expect extraverts' tendency to form new relationships to simply translate into more brand love. Based on the complimentary effect, we propose H5.

H5: Extraversion is positively related to brand love.

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Construct Measures

We used a standardized questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. The questionnaire contained three sections. In the first section, we presented questions about the dependent variable, brand love. Respondents were asked to answer these questions with regard

to their favorite fashion brand. In the second section, we asked for the independent variables, the five personality dimensions. The third section of the questionnaire asked for demographics.

We used existing scales to measure all constructs. To capture brand love, we used a short scale developed by Bagozzi *et al.* (2013) that measures the multidimensional structure of brand love with 28 items. We eliminated the attitude valence dimensions because of statistical concerns, as discussed in the theory section (Table 5.1), resulting in 26 items. In addition, to measure the Big 5 personality traits, we used the scales by Borkenau and Ostendorf (1993). Three items per dimension were applied. All scales were presented on seven-point Likert-type rating scales anchored in 1 = 'totally disagree' and 7 = 'totally agree'.

4.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data collection involved an online survey in fall 2012. Respondents were invited via social networks and an e-learning platform to take part in a survey about fashion brands. A lottery of amazon-vouchers was provided as incentive when respondents voluntarily provided their e-mail address at the end of the questionnaire.

In sum, 320 German respondents were surveyed and considered for the analyses. The sample consists of respondents with an average age of 28.7 years (*SD*=9.6). Females and students were overrepresented in the sample (60.9 % females; 48.8 % students). Because our theoretical framework argues based on interpersonal relationships theories, we also surveyed respondents' relationships status. 40.9 % of the respondents stated to be single.

4.3 Estimation Approach

We used structural equation modeling to analyze the hypothesized relationships, using Mplus 7.1 and a Maximum Likelihood estimator with robust standard errors (MLR). To reduce model complexity we employed item parceling for the brand love dimensions. This approach

has been repeatedly used in previous related studies (e. g., Malär *et al.*, 2011). We assessed overall model fit using a several fit indices, including CFI, TLI, RMSEA, SRMR, as well as the χ^2-statistics. In addition, we assessed local fit indices by estimating Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability and average variances extracted.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Results from the Measurement Model

Fit indices and scale reliabilities reveal a good overall model fit. Particularly, the measures of overall fit met conventional standards, suggesting that our model fits the data well [$\chi^{2}(174) = 342.09$, p < .001; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA] = .055, standardized root mean square residual [SRMR] = .061, Tucker Levis Index [TLI] = .904, and comparative fit index [CFI] = .920]. Tests for discriminant validity show no serious problems (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). In particular, for each pair of variables, the squared correlation was always lower than the average variances extracted of each of the two constructs. Furthermore, no substantial threat of common method bias is identified using a harman's single factor test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). This was reflected by a significantly worse fit of a model in which all manifest variables loaded on a single factor [$\chi^{2}(210) = 2314.80$; $\triangle\chi^2 = 1,972.71$; $\triangle$d.f. = 36; $p < .001$].

5.2 Results from the Structural Model

Figure 1 presents the standardized coefficients of the hypothesized structural model. In particular, neuroticism (H4: $\gamma = .355$; $p = .001$) and extraversion (H5: $\gamma = .218$; $p = .030$) are both positively related to brand love. Thus, the results support H4 and H5. In contrast,

agreeableness (H1: $\gamma = .047$; $p = .526$), conscientiousness (H2: $\gamma = .080$; $p = .289$), and openness (H3: $\gamma = .065$; $p = .391$) were not found to be significantly predicting brand love. These findings reject H1, H2 and H3. In total, personality explains 9 % of the variance of brand love in our model.

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5.3 Additional Exploratory Analyses

Because we assume that brand love should be affected by a person's interpersonal relationship situation, we also investigated the effect from a consumer's relationship status on brand love. In line with Lastovicka and Sirianni (2011), we assume that an individual's relationship status reflects his or her current interpersonal relationship situation. The compensatory affect thus would assume that singles score higher on brand love, whereas the complementary effect would assume that engaged consumers tend to love their favorite fashion brand more.

The results of an ANOVA show that singles score higher on brand love than couples do ($m_{single} = 3.42$; $m_{couples} = 3.23$; $F = 3.09$, $p = .080$). Further analyses revealed that relationship status only effects the brand love dimension self-brand-integration ($m_{single} = 2.91$; $m_{couples} = 2.62$; $F = 5.29$, $p = .022$; the effect was not significant for the other brand love dimensions; all $p > .10$).

5.4 Robustness Tests

To assess the stability of our findings, several robustness tests were conducted. First, because younger respondents and females were overrepresented in our sample, we analyzed the extent to which brand love is affected by these two demographic variables to assess the magnitude of this potential threat. We did not identify any significant effects (all p-values > .10).

Second, one could argue that the effects reported above might be biased due to the fact that some personalities are more focus more on brands than others. We assessed this potential threat by including a measure of consumer's overall importance of brands while shopping clothing as a control variable (Fischer *et al.*, 2010). Including this variable did not affect the aforementioned findings substantially.

Third, we replicated the analyses using different methodologies. For example, we estimated a second structural model without modeling the covariances between the personality traits. Additionally, we ran a multiple linear OLS regression analysis. These methodological replications lead to similar results and thus underline the stability of the findings.

6. DISCUSSION

To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study investigating the influence of the Big Five personality traits on brand love. Therefore, our study contributes to the understanding of the psychological mechanisms that lead to brand love. The results show that extraversion and neuroticism drive brand love. However, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness were not found to be significantly related with brand love.

On the one hand, our results provide partial support that consumers may apply their interpersonal relationship abilities on brands, what has been termed as the complementary effect. This complementarity effect occurs when people are strongly inclined to form

relationships, and this inclination needs to both more interpersonal relationships, and more consumer-brand relationships. The complementarity effect received support from the fact that extraversion, which includes a propensity to form interpersonal relationships, was positively related to brand love. Particularly extraverts, that is, consumers with a high motivation to create interpersonal relationships, are more likely to create higher levels of brand love as compared to their introverted counterparts. However, no significant effects were identified for openness and agreeableness, what is somehow in line with Matzler *et al.*s' findings (2007), who found no significant effects from openness on brand passion, but from extraversion.

Our findings provide mixed support for the compensatory effect, in which brand love is used to compensate for social deficits. In support of the compensatory effect, being neurotic decreases a person's social success, and this study found, increases their brand love. Furthermore, singles (as opposed to respondents who were married or in a steady dating relationship), tended to have higher levels of brand love, perhaps to compensate for a lack or interpersonal romance.

One key limitation of this research is that it utilizes a non-representative sample, so the generalizability of the findings is not given. Furthermore, brand love was measured specifically with regard to favorite clothing brands, so it is possible that some of the effects found in the study may be attributable to differences in respondents' involvement in fashion, rather than difference in their general propensity for brand love. These concerns are somewhat lessoned due to the findings regarding gender. Given that women tend, on average, to have a stronger interest in fashion than do men, if the brand love data significantly reflecting a general interest in fashion, we would have expected to see higher level of brand love from women than from men. But fortunately, no direct effect from gender on brand love was found. Similarly, controlling for consumers' importance of brands in fashion did not affect our results.

This study also highlights several avenues for future research. Besides addressing the limitations by extending the findings on more heterogeneous samples and other product categories, future studies should explore whether another aspect of neuroticism, such as anxiety, accounts for some of its relationship with brand love. Terror management theory (Rindfleisch *et al.*, 2009) has already shown that anxiety is positively associated with materialism. So it is quite plausible that the anxiety inherent in neuroticism may be driving some of the relationship between this personality trait and brand love. Additionally, fear of rejection could be another interesting construct in the interplay between social relationships and consumer-brand relationships. This is due to the fact that one core difference between consumer-brand relationships and interpersonal relationships is that humans can reject another person (that is, deny a relationships), whereas the likelihood of being rejected from a brand in generally not existent.

In line with that, future research should also focus on the personality profiles of brand lovers. This in an important contribution, as Percy (1976, p. 123) has argues that traits are "less effective than personality profiles in predicting specific consumer behavior." Future studies should investigate effects of personality profiles on the usage behavior. The application of the fs/QCA-methodology could be a way to address this (e.g., Leischnig *et al.*, 2014).

7. CONCLUSION

Brand love is an important topic both for managers and scholars. Our study provides more insights about the personality of brand lovers and provides deeper insights into the interplay between social relationships and consumer-brand relationships. The findings, especially from the complementary effect, suggest that we look at brand love not only as an emotional booby

prize, that is a prize given to the person who finishes last in a contest, to help reduce his or her

bad feelings, used to compensate for interpersonal deficits.

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Table 5.1. Brand Love (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012)

Major Dimension	Sub-dimension(s)
Positive Attitude Valence	The consumer evaluates the love object positively, using whatever criteria are most relevant for that type of thing.
Positive Emotional Connection.	The consumer experiences (a) a sense of "rightness" or *intuitive fit* between him- or herself and the love object, (b) *positive affect* when thinking about or using the love brand, and (c) *emotional attachment* to the love brand.
Self-Brand Integration.	The love brand is integrated into the consumer's (a) *current self-identity* and (b) *desired self-identity*. It represents deeply held values and group identities that help create (c) *life meaning and other intrinsic rewards*, rather than simply being a tool to accomplish a goal. This strong incorporation of the love brand into the consumer's self is supported by (d) *frequent thoughts[a)]* about the love brand.
Passion-Driven Behaviors.	The consumer has a high level of (a) *things done in the past* (aka past involvement and interaction) with the love brand, (b) a current *passionate desire to use* it, and (c) a *willingness to invest resources* such as time and money in it.
Long Term Relationship.	The consumer wishes the love brand to be a part of his or her life for a long time to come.
Anticipated Separation Distress.	If the love brand were to disappear, it would be emotionally painful for the consumer.
Attitude Strength b)	The consumer has a high degree of certainty in, and confidence about, his opinions regarding the love brand.

Source: Rauschnabel and Ahuvia (2014); c.f. also Batra et al (2012); Rauschnabel (2014).

a) In previous studies this has been called "attitude strength 1".

b) In previous studies this has been called "attitude strength 2". Research that has used the Batra *et al.* (2012) brand love conceptualization (Bagozzi et al 2013; Rauschnabel and Ahuvia 2014) have reported statistical concerns with the attitude strength dimension (low alpha and small AVE-values). Similar issues were encountered in this data. Hence we have dropped this dimension from the brand love construct, and to save space we have omitted any discussion or analysis of it.

Table 5.2. Big 5 Personality Traits

| Dimension (Traits)	Adjectives, which describe typical high scorers:	Effect on interpersonal relationship satisfaction
Conscientiousness	Effective, organized, dutiful, ambitious, prospective	In general positive
Agreeableness	Trustworthy, altruistic, sincerely, self-sufficient, tender-minded.	In general positive
Openness	Creative, innovative, sensitive, experimental, analytical, exposed.	In general negative
Neuroticism	Anxious, frustrated, depressive, ashamed, compulsive, prone to stress.	In general negative
Extraversion	Expansive, sociable, decisive/dominant, active, adventurous, hilarious.	Mixed findings
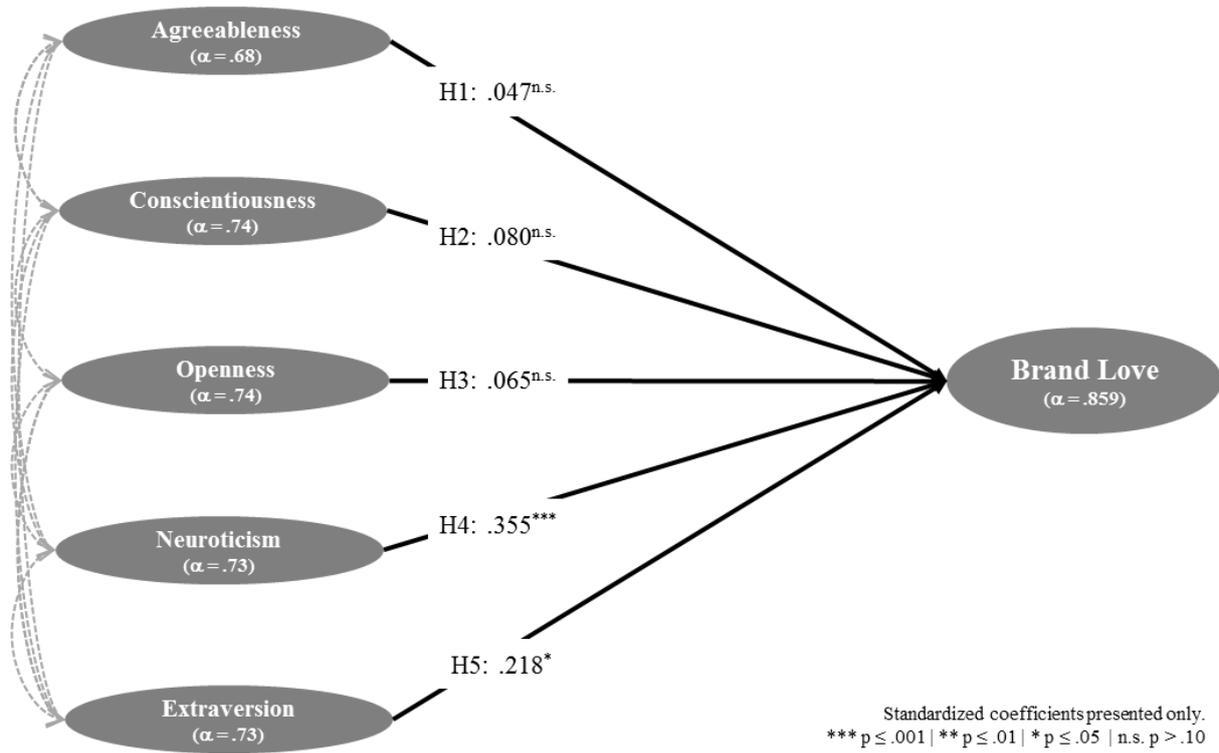
Figure 5.1. Results of the Study

Notes: