

THE INFLUENCE OF SELF-EXPRESSIVE BRAND PRACTICES ON CUSTOMER LOYALTY A MEDIATION ANALYSIS OF BRAND LOVE AMONG PAKISTANI CONSUMERS

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Abstract

The aim of the paper is to look into the elements of emotional and relational process of the self expressive brand practice for building brand loyalty. The study explored emotions as the mediators and brand love as the mediators between the two variables, and the moderating effect of age in the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. The quantitative research methodology was adopted and structured questionnaire to the consumers with previous experience in using the branded products and services were used for data collection. The scales of measurement were modified on existing researches and were measured under a five point Likert scale. The PLS-SEM analysis proved that the practice of self expressive brand plays an important role in affecting consumers' emotions, which in turn affects the formation of brand love. The brand love was determined to have a strong positive influence on brand loyalty. The results further indicate that the effect of age as a moderator variable in the equation of brand loyalty exists between brand love. The paper contributes to the literature on brand relationship by developing a clear understanding of the role of the emotional nature of the relationship with the brand in creating long term loyalty as a result of brand identity-based branding strategies.

INTRODUCTION

The sense of brand loyalty in today's marketing world is not based on products' price competitiveness or their quality, or their functional superiority. Instead consumers are now more and more thinking about brands in terms of their (brand) ability to endorse a personal identity,

feelings, values or lifestyle inclinations. It is a change of transactional marketing to relational and symbolic branding where brands become an extension of the self concept of the consumer. Emotional and symbolic differentiation has turned into an essential source of sustainable competitive advantage as markets have become

saturated with products similar to each other (Fournier, 1998; Keller, 2016; Schmitt, 2022).

In this respect there has been great interest in self expressive brand practice in the branding literature. Self expressive brands enable the consumers to express who they are or what they would like to be by the use of the brand. These brands are symbols that enhance identity, social inclusion and personal significance. A positive psychological linkage could be formed because as the more the brand matches the consumer's self image and values the more self expressive the feeling would be, according to Escalas and Bettman (2017), Japutra, Ekinci and Simkin (2018) and Wallace, Buil and de Chernatony (2021). These brands are especially strong in areas where the consumption is symbolic, such as fashion products or cosmetics, technology and lifestyle products. However, the process of internal psychological mechanisms has to take place before loyalty is guaranteed by a self-expressive brand practice. One of the most significant mechanisms is emotions. Emotions are feelings that are triggered when the consumer is involved with the brand and its experiences. Emotions influence how the customers perceive the brand messages, how customers evaluate the brand meaning or how customers create long term behavioral intentions. Emotional Attachment Theory provides a theoretical basis for the emotions to be internal processes that create a long term relationship with the brand (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005; Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer, 2016; Park, Eisingerich and Park, 2021). Consumers are more likely to create affective relationships that go beyond the rational assessment when self expressive brands effectively arouse positive feelings of joy, pride, excitement or belonging. With the passage of time the emotional responses can escalate into brand love, that is, a higher order emotional state, defined by passion, attachment, affection and commitment to a brand. Brand love expresses an appreciative emotional attachment and is akin to interpersonal love and reflects a brand meaning personal meaning to the consumer. Brand love has been said to predict brand loyalty, more strongly than brand satisfaction, or even brand trust owing to

the nature of the emotions and commitment to the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006, Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi 2012, Veloutsou and Guzman 2020). In this sense, brand love serves as a mediator as it turns the emotional reactions into stable, lasting and loyal results.

Ultimately these psychological processes result in brand loyalty, which is manifested by the regular choice of a brand, willingness to re-purchase it, brand advocacy, and lack of desire to change the brand. For the organization to be sustainable, brand loyalty will help attain long-term profitability, reduce marketing costs and through positive word of mouth (Oliver, 1999, Keller, 2016). It has been shown that loyalty that is based on an emotional and identity based relationship is more robust and durable as compared to the loyalty solely based on functional or economic rewards (Malar et al., 2011; Breivik and Thorbjornsen, 2022).

These are the key relationships, but along with these relationships there are personal relationships which are also important moderators of the emotional brand processes including age. As for the consumer perception, the age has an impact on self expressive value, emotions and development of brand relationship. The younger consumers might have brands that can help them express their identities, achieve social visibility, stimulate their emotions, and older ones might have brands that can provide stability, trust and emotional security, and can be achieved with experience (Hwang and Kandampelly, 2020; Larger and Sadeh, 2021; Islam et al., 2023). As a result, brand love to brand devotion can be strengthened or weakened as a function of age.

Although emotional branding has received a lot of research, not much empirical studies have been done to determine the sequential mediating responsibilities of emotion and brand love in elucidating how self expressive brand practice results in the brand loyalty, at least when age moderates the effect. In particular, this gap can be seen in emerging markets where emotional branding and symbolic consumption is a thriving phenomenon, but has not been sufficiently theorized. Hence this research paper aims at filling this gap by incorporating the concept of Brand

Relationship Theory and Emotional Attachment Theory in a unified framework that depicts how self expressive brand practice creates brand loyalty via emotions and brand love whilst taking into consideration differences based on age.

1.2 Problem Statement

Organizations, who are operating in a competitive market in the midst of the emotional atmosphere are pouring efforts to develop their own expressive strategies to connect with their consumers more closely. Although these previous studies have demonstrated that the self expressive brand practices stimulate more interest and emotion from consumers, most brands continue to face the challenge of changing the emotional response into long-term brand loyalty. This challenge implies that even when there is no known emotional branding, there may be a need for more than that to ensure the process of their acquisition.

To some degree, the research that has already been done has verified the positive effects of self expressive branding on attitudes and feelings of the consumer. However, the literature is not precise about how these emotional reactions become more relational products such as brand love, and then into brand loyalty. The majority of the previous studies are on the effect of emotions or the effect of brand love, but not on the sequential mediating role between them in the same frame (Schmitt, 2022; Wallace, Buil and de Chernatony, 2021; Dwivedi et al., 2023). This lack of integration hinders the theoretical development process, and the application of emotional branding study in management.

Moreover, even though there is increasingly growing evidence about the role of demographic factors in the emotional processing and brand association, age has been paid little attention as a moderating variable in the process of forming emotional loyalty. The varying expressions of identity, emotional reactions and values of consumption across generations suggest that age might be one of the key factors which can help understand how emotions are cultivated to brand love and how brand love can help drive brand loyalty (Hwang and Kandampelly, 2020; Islam et al., 2023; Kemp, Childers and Williams, 2024).

Nonetheless, there is a lack of empirical researches on this moderating influence.

Therefore, the central research question is why detailed, theory based, explanations are lacking on how the self expressive brand practice triggers emotions, develops brand love, and results in brand loyalty, while the age related differentiation in the emotional brand relationship can be explained.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter will give the critical review of literature that will be a good theoretical foundation for the research study on the effects of self expressive brand practice on brand loyalty through emotions and brand love with age as a mediating variable. This chapter focuses on the theoretical and empirical studies available in the literature and their synthesis to critically examine the key concepts and identify the gaps which will not let the biases to validate the proposed research framework.

The chapter started with a discussion of the theoretical frameworks on which the research has been conducted, namely, the BRT and ET. These theories attempt to account for consumers' symbolic and emotional reactions to brands and how such reactions drive stronger consumer attachment and loyalty to brands. After the theoretical discussion, the chapter reviews past literature that discusses concepts of self expressive brand practice, emotions, brand love and brand loyalty as indicators. This mediating effect of age is also explored. The chapter will end with a statement of the research gap to be addressed in this study.

Theoretical Foundation

Brand Relationship Theory

A concept by Fournier (1998) was proposed, the Brand Relationship Theory, which provides a background view on the process of establishing a relationship between the brand and individuals as would be done in an interpersonal relationship. The theory postulates that consumers do not just buy brands because they have certain functional values but establish some significant emotional

and symbolic attachment towards it. Brands act as relationship partners which can offer emotional and identity defense and social bonding. According to this theory, a brand is an active element in the life of an individual and its use is an instrument of self-expression, values and social status. Such a point of view is quite similar to the notion of self expressive brand practice whereby brands that enable consumers to express themselves, in their way, develop stronger relations. Fournier (1998) pointed out that emotional connection, trust and commitment provide the basis of relationships between the brand and the consumer, unlike transactional relationship that often leads to failure of the relationship. Later research has expanded on the Brand Relationship Theory and the emotional aspect of consumer brand relationships has been discovered. The elements that were considered as the most important in good brand relationships were emotional proximity and affection, according to Veloutsou and Guzman (2020). Breivik and Thorbjornsen (2022) also found that "relational partners" customers are more loyal and less churn customers. These results reinforce the perspectives that affective and symbolic brand meaning is the key to the formation of loyalty.

In the framework of the current research, Brand Relationship Theory interprets the process of formation of relational processes with the help of self expressive brand practice which contributes to emotional involvement and stronger attachment. If consumers feel that a brand is a part of them, they're more inclined to fall in love with the brand and become loyal to it for the long haul. Therefore, this theory offers a solid basis of analyzing the associations between self expressive brand practice, brand love, and brand loyalty.

Emotional Attachment Theory

The Emotional Attachment Theory presents a psychological interpretation of the formation of an enduring relationship between people and entities, including brands, because of emotions. Thomson et al. (2005) have defined emotional attachment as a strong affective bond that is experienced as having feelings of affection, connection and passion. This theory states that it

is emotions, the primary process in this theory, that form and sustain the attachments over time. Emotional attachment has also been distinguished as a key influencer of brand relationships in the research of consumer behavior. Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer (2016) explain that emotions can impact on consumer experiences with a brand and trigger subsequent behaviors. Certain positive emotional reactions enhance the chances to develop close attachment, whereas negative emotions cast relational attachment. The results of the recent branding studies also add to the contributions of emotions as the mediation process in the development of loyalty. As Park, Eisingerich and Park, (2021) shown that emotional attachment enhances brand commitment and long term loyalty. Another key finding of Dwivedi et al. (2023) was the role of the emotion responses in explaining the relationship between brand experiences and relational outcomes. In conclusion, this research suggests that emotions are not just the reactions, but also the assertive force of consumer-brand relationships, based on these studies.

According to Emotional Attachment Theory (EAT), in the present research, the emotions are regarded as the first intervening variable between the self expressive brand practice and brand love. Emotional responses are not just generated when a person interacts with a brand, but when they are using self expressive, there's a basis to get into deeper emotional attachment. As time goes by, this emotional bond grows stronger, and when it gets to the point of being brand love, it becomes brand loyalty. The Emotional Attachment Theory thus offers a good theoretical foundation for this study, which is based on the sequential mediation process suggested in the above mentioned research.

Self Expressive Brand Practice.

The extent to which the brand enables consumers to identify themselves, their personalities, values and lifestyle by using a brand is called self expressing brand practice. The theory is based on self concept theory, which is that people desire consistency between their self image and various symbols which include brands (Belk, 1988). The

brands become the symbolic means of the users for self-expression and others' perception of themselves.

Research has shown that emotionally and relationally, it would be greater if derived from self expressive brands. Escalas and Bettman (2017) established that brands that were a part of the self narratives of the consumers had stronger emotional linkages. Self expressive brand perceptions lead to high level of brand identification and quality relationships, according to their research conducted by Japutra, Ekinci and Simkin (2018). Wallace, Buil and de Chernatony (2021) have also found that self expressive branding leads to a higher level of emotional involvement and would to remain loyal. In recent years, the use of self expressive brands has increased in importance due to the digital platforms and the social media. Consumers advertise brand affiliations (including online) (Schmitt, 2022) which makes the symbolic brand meaning more visible and more important. Bazi, Filieri and Gorton (2023) have found that self expressive brands provide a perception of authenticity and emotional resonance which ultimately leads to a deeper connection with the brand. However, according to researchers, self expressive brand practice is not enough to ensure loyalty. Internalisation of symbolic brand meaning should be emotional, for long term behavioural outcomes. This brings out the significance of the element of emotions as an intermediary in the process of expressing self through a branding process.

Consumer's Emotions towards Consumer Brands

Emotions have a huge impact on consumer decision making and brand relationship building. By comparison to cognitive assessments, affective responses (emotions) are those that are the most likely to garner attitudes and behavioral intentions. The Theory of Emotional Attachment proposes that emotional state is considered as an inner propellant to unite the consumers with the brands in a psychological manner (Thomson et al., 2005).

S. feelings are actually the union with the brand, such as pride, love, joy and excitement, that were identified as being beneficial to the appraisals of the brand and commitment to relationship. Malar et al. (2011) also showed an emotional attachment to enhance self brand associations and brand loyalty. Bagozzi et al. (2016) also made a leap that the behavior of consumers, influenced by emotions, should be conducted in terms of motivation and intention. This recent study revealed that emotion is a mediating variable between brand experiences and brand loyalty outcome. Dwivedi et al. (2023) emphasized that the emotional reactions can make the brand interaction convert to relational value. Kemp and Childers and Williams (2024) claim that emotional engagement would be more likely to be a antecedent for loyalty than cognitive satisfaction, specifically for expressive consumption situations. Emotions play an important role in the equation of customer loyalty, but not always the determining factor. The researchers have come to the realization that there are more emotional concepts to be explored like 'brand love' that are deeper and need research to further understand the long-term commitment.

Processor Mediation as a Processor Mediator, process the Brand Love

Brand love is a strong emotional relationship that is a feeling of affection, passion and commitment towards a brand. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) used the term "brand love" to describe the extreme level of emotional attachment to the brand that can be likened to the emotional attachment to a person. A sense of completion and depth, such as in relation does not equate to brand love.

Brand Relationship Theory outlines the human kind relationship of people with brands that meets the emotional and symbolic needs of the human. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) theorized brand love into a multidimensional construct that comprised of passion driven behaviors, emotional attachment and long term commitment. Veloutsou and Guzman (2020) determined that brand love leads to advocacy and opposition to switching.

The current empirical study documents that brand love lies in between emotional involvement and the outcome of the loyalty. Breivik and Thorbjornsen (2022) established that brand love increases the stability of relationships.

Japutra et al. (2024) also suggested that brand love is positively related to forgiveness and long-term brand loyalty.

Brand love, in the current case, acts as a processor mediator, which accumulates the emotional reactions and converts them into the long-lasting loyalty. This consecutive process throws light on the necessity to research the brand love in a wider emotional journey.

Brand Loyalty

The brand loyalty is defined as the devotion of a consumer to take a favored brand again and again despite the circumstances. Oliver (1999) defines loyalty as “beyond behaviour, emotional commitment”. Loyalty is not only on the basis of functional benefits but also emotional, as Keller (2016) emphasized, this is a stronger-minded loyalty.

Loyalty that is emotionally based is especially applicable in the symbolic consumption setting. Park et al., (2021) revealed that those who are emotionally involved with the product are more likely to be high advocates and pay more for the product. Such results confirm the thesis that the formation of long term loyalty relies on some emotional and relational processes.

Moderating Role of Age

It's not the same when it comes to how emotions are managed, how the relationship with a brand is formed and how the sense of identity is constructed by the brand, compared to how it is done in the context of a different age. While younger buyers are drawn to brands that would reflect their personal identity and give them an emotional lift, older buyers are more likely to be drawn to those brands that would give them a sense of trust and familiarity (Hwang and Kandampelly, 2020). Islam et al. (2023) proved that age intermediates the emotional engagement and the results of loyalty. Kemp et al. (2024) also

noted that the emotions responsiveness difference exists between the generations.

The results suggest that age moderates the relationship of brand love and brand loyalty through relations' emotional priorities and expectations.

Self Expressive Brand Practice is a relationship between Self Expressive Audible Practice and Emotions. Self Expressive Audible Practice is a relation to Self Expressive Brand Practice and Emotions.

This relationship of self expressive brand practice with consumer emotions is well supported in the branding and consumer behavior literature. In this case, consumers will be provided with an opportunity to witness a brand as part of their identity, values and lifestyle, with a self expressive brand practice. A consumer who self expresses attributes brand resonance, when consumers perceive that the brand is self expressive then the consumer is likely to have positive emotions when the brand interacts with the consumer. Brand Relationship Theory holds that brands, which have the capacity of facilitating self identity, are relational partners, and not products (Fournier, 1998). These brands have an emotional appeal in that they achieve psychological need to satisfy the needs which are associated with self expression and social fitting. Escalas and Bettman (2017) suggested that integrated brands in the self concepts of consumers will trigger a stronger affective response as consumers will feel emotionally connected to symbols representing the self. Likewise, it is concluded that the perception of self expressiveness of a brand is significantly related to emotions and quality of relationships by Japutra, Ekinci and Simkin (2018).

The Emotional Attachment Theory then focuses on the conceptualisation that “emotional answers are when consumers has substantive ties with the object that has emotional importance” (Thomson, MacInnis and Park, 2005). Self expressive branding was empirically demonstrated to stimulate the emotional outcomes of brand relationships through the development of pride, joy and excitement emotions by Wallace, Buil and de Chernatony (2021). The results imply that self

expressive brand practice is a very important antecedent of consumer feelings.

The link between Emotions and Brand Love

Emotions are the central part in brand love development. The presence of positive emotions forms the affective ties that slowly convert to more emotional attachment and affection towards a brand. Emotional Attachment Theory describes that it is through attachment of emotions that attachments are developed by individuals and thus attachments are powerful and long lasting (Thomson et al., 2005).

Emotions have been constantly found to be influential predictors of brand love in brand research. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) discovered that a consumer with high perceived positive emotions for a brand will be more inclined to develop an affection, passion and bond with the brand. Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012) also implied that emotional intensity, interest in emotion, are vital aspects of brand love, which is enhanced by repeated positive emotional experiences.

This association is supported by recent empirical research. Dwivedi et al. (2023) showed that emotional involvement is an important construct to create brand love because it influences the effect of stable emotional involvement. Park, Eisingerich and Park (2021) also established that emotions are an important mechanism of the connection of brand experiences with higher order emotional constructs. These findings suggest that the sense of emotions as a prerequisite to brand love.

Relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. How brand love and brand loyalty are linked

Brand Love was found to be correlated with Brand Loyalty. Brand love has been acknowledged as a good indicator of brand loyalty. Emotional connect and love for a brand translates to higher commitment from those who are emotionally connected and more repurchase intention and lesser switch intention from those emotionally connected and affectionate towards the brand. Based on the theory of Brand Relationship Theory, it could be said that the customer who is

emotionally bonded sees the brand as a partner in the relationship and his/her actions towards the brand will be in accordance with the long-term loyalty pattern (Fournier, 1998).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have created an empirical equation to illustrate the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty intention and word of mouth. Customers' love of the brand makes them more inclined to tolerate brand failures and to maintain the relationship in future, as found by Veloutsou and Guzman (2020). Breivik & Thorbjørnsen 2022 also postulated that brand love would also make the relationship more stable and enhance the loyalty beyond the functional satisfaction offered. The influence of emotion loyalty is more strong since it involves the commitment of the affective and not the transactional benefits. It's difficult for the competing companies to break the emotional connection with the customers, as Keller (2016) noted. All these findings corroborate the notion that brand love is a key part to advancing emotive attachment to the form of a lasting brand loyalty.

Relationship between Self Expressive Brand Practice, Emotions, Brand Love and Brand Loyalty

The literature generally suggests a sequential process in which the stimuli brand loyalty is achieved by emotional and brand love by a self-expressive approach to brand practice. Self expressive brand practice starts emotional reactions by uniting brand meaning and personal self identity of the consumers. These sentiments are then enhanced to brand love that eventually leads to expectant behavior.

The Emotional Attachment Theory sees emotion as the first step in attachment development and more emotional attachment is formed through repeated positive experiences (Thomson et al., 2005). Dwivedi et al (2023) highlighted that consumer's feelings are a mediator between brand experiences and brand relational outcomes like brand love and brand allegiance. Japutra et al. (2024) also established that brand love is also boosted with the help of emotional engagement and further results in long term loyalty. This is an activity that highlights the fact that no direct link

exists between the psychological and relational journey and self expressive brand practice and loyalty. The proposed conceptual framework of the study is built upon the brand love and emotions which enable symbolic brand meaning to become the final loyalties results as a series of intermediate variables.

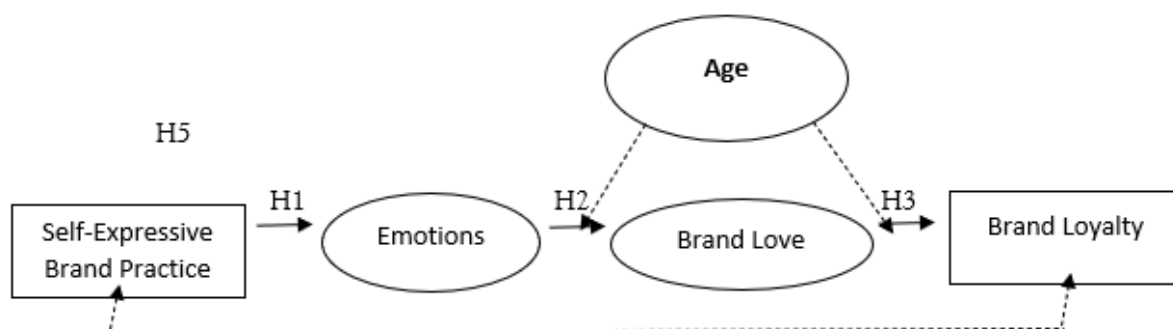
Moderating effect of age in the brand love and brand loyalty relationship

The moderating factor of emotional relationship with brand is age. The differences in life stage, identity development and emotional priorities will be used by the consumers in the process of linguistic translation of brand love to brand loyalty. Younger consumers are more interested in getting emotionally stimulated and self expressive value when using brand, whereas older consumers are usually focused on trust, familiarity and emotional security (Hwang and Kandampelly, 2020). Islam et al. (2023) have found that the ages are used to moderate the results of emotional engagement and loyalty, and hence determine the response to emotions. On the other hand, it has been noted by Kemp, Childers & Williams (2024) that there is a difference between the generations in the effect of emotional attachment on resistance of loyalty behaviors. Based on the final results, it can be concluded that there is no constant correlation between brand love and brand loyalty with the age groups. Hence, the level of emotional loyalty will be affected by another boundary condition - age. The addition of age as a moderating variable provides a more adult view of

the translation of the brand love to the loyalty of different groups of customers.

Conceptual Framework Explanation

The literature reviewed in this paper led to the conceptual model, which assumes the support of brand loyalty formation based on emotional and identity based processes. The level to which consumers can express their individuality and personal values through a brand is self expressive brand practice and is used as an independent variable. Emotions will be the mediating variable and it will serve as the affective reactions by the consumers as a result of contact with self expressive brands. As a processor intermediary, brand love comes in the wake of emotions and attains even greater level of emotional attachment in terms of affection, passion and commitment to the brand. This linear regression is a reflection of the emotional reactions system to consumer relations with the consumer brand. Brand loyalty is taken as the dependent variable that involves the repeat purchase intention, long term commitment and advocacy. As a moderative factor, age is used to assess the generational differences in emotional processing and development of relationships. The correlates that the framework proposes is that age impacts on the strength of relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Based on the BRt and ET, the conceptual framework is developed and presents a detailed explanation of how the sustainable brand loyalty that results from the self expressive brand practice can be explained.



H4: Sequential Mediation**Research Gap**

Despite the fact that previous studies have identified the significance of self expressive brand practice, emotions, brand love and loyalty, there are a number of gaps. To begin with, there is always a tendency to consider emotional aspects and brand love separately, without considering them as sequentially mediating variables. Second, there is scanty research that incorporates these constructs under one theoretical framework based

on the Brand Relationship Theory and Emotional Attachment Theory. Third, the moderating aspect of age in the formation of emotional loyalty is not well researched especially in the case of emerging markets. This paper fills these gaps by hypothesizing and empirically testing a moderated serial mediation model that expounds how self expressive brand practice results in brand loyalty via emotions and brand love and age based difference.

Summary of Literature Review**Table 1 Summary of Literature Review**

Construct	Definition	Source
Self Expressive Brand Practice	The extent to which a brand enables consumers to express their identity, personality, values, and lifestyle through brand usage and association.	Belk (1988); Escalas and Bettman (2017); Japutra, Ekinici and Simkin (2018)
Emotions	Affective responses experienced by consumers during interactions with a brand, including feelings such as joy, pride, excitement, and affection, which influence brand relationships.	Thomson, MacInnis and Park (2005); Bagozzi, Gopinath and Nyer (2016)
Brand Love	A deep emotional attachment toward a brand characterized by affection, passion, and commitment, reflecting a strong personal bond between the consumer and the brand.	Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi (2012)
Brand Loyalty	A consumer's enduring commitment to a brand, reflected in repeat purchase intention, advocacy, and resistance to switching despite alternative options.	Oliver (1999); Keller (2016)
Age	A demographic characteristic representing consumers' life stage, which influences emotional processing, identity expression, and the strength of brand relationships.	Hwang and Kandampully (2020); Islam et al. (2023)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**Research Approach and Type**

A study that uses quantitative research approach. The quantitative method is appropriate as the research is wanting to test the relationship between variables by the use of numerical data and statistical procedures. The quantitative research method is helping to objectively measure constructs and test hypotheses, one of the goals of this study. It is an explanatory research, since it is trying to explain the cause and effect relationships between the dependent variables of self expressive brand practice, emotions, love towards a brand,

brand loyalty and independent variable show the moderator effect of age. The methods employed in the cases are explanatory research that is used to test the hypotheses and confirm the proposed hypothesis (Sekaran and Bougie, 2020).

Research Design

The present research project is a cross sectional research design in which the respondents are being captivated by the researcher at one time. The cross sectional designs are commonly used in the marketing and consumer behavior segment where the cost of conducting the study is low and also it

is used to study the relationship between the variables without involving a significant amount of time (Malhotra, 2019). The structured questionnaire is then being used as the primary instrument in conducting the research to ensure uniformity and reliability of the responses obtained. The design is utilized to test the hypothesis with the statistical analysis techniques.

Research Population

The study subjects will consist of the consumers of the branded products/services that have learnt about the brands with self expressing nature. The target audience would be individuals who can feel a connection with the acts and be able to affiliate with a brand in the act of identity expression. The chosen population was the one because one has a greater possibility to exhibit emotions, brand love and brand loyalty which are major objectives of this study. Random sampling will be used, where everyone in the target population is fairly accessible to the Internet.

The number of samples and their sampling level

The study population includes consumers who know the name of the branded products/services which have a self expressing nature. The audience consists of people who are emotionally attaching

and/or associating to the brand via 'Identity expression'. Despite the complexity of the structural model and the number of variables in this study, however, a sample of 385 participants will be targeted to increase the validity liability of the results of the study. The population is selected because they are the ones that are more likely to display emotions, brand love and brand loyalty which is essential for the purpose of this study. A simple sampling method is being used to randomly sample customers, with everyone in the target population having reasonable access to the Internet.

Research Instrument

Self administered structured questionnaire is being used to gather data. To make the questionnaire reliable and content valid, the questionnaire was built using the measurement scales of the questionnaires that have been tested previously and were borrowed. Every one of the items is being measured on a 5 point Likert scale that is including 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire has been divided into two parts. The first one is the demographic contact that contains the age. The second section is to evaluate the study variables.

Summary of Research Instrument

Table 2: Summary of Research Instrument

Variables	Authors / Source	No. of Items	Scale
Self Expressive Brand Practice	Escalas & Bettman (2017); Japutra et al. (2018)	5	1 to 5
Emotions	Thomson et al. (2005)	5	1 to 5
Brand Love	Carroll & Ahuvia (2006); Batra et al. (2012)	5	1 to 5
Brand Loyalty	Oliver (1999); Keller (2016)	5	1 to 5
Age	Hwang and Kandampully (2020); Islam et al. (2023)		

Data Collection

By means of online and physical questionnaires that are being sent to the respondents who are meeting the selection criteria data are being gathered. The participants are being told the aim of the research and guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. It is a voluntary participation with

respondents being advised to give truth about their responses. This is one way that reduces bias in the answers and is responsible in data gathering.

Data Analysis Method

The data collected will then be analyzed using the software of Statistical Package to Social Sciences

(SPSS) and the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM). Descriptive statistics is being used to analyze the demographic data. The reliability and validity of the instruments are being evaluated by Cronbach alpha, composite, and average variance extracted (Hair et al., 2022). Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion and HTMT ratio test are being taken to determine the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015). Structural model analysis is being done to test hypotheses. The mediation and interaction effects are being used to explore the concept of moderation, and bootstrapping methods are being used to test this concept. The reason why it is chosen is because PLS SEM is appropriate when dealing with a complex model as well as non normal data (Hair et al., 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and presents the study results in detail based on the analysis of the collected data. The chapter starts with a description of all the demographic features of the respondents to profile and frame the selected sample to be used in the study.

Demographics of the respondents are presented first, followed by a discussion of the results of the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis in turn. The first step in the measurement model is to check the constructs used in the study for reliability and validity. Then, the proposed hypotheses are tested including the direct relationship, mediation, and moderation test in the structural model. It is a structured analytical process that facilitates in-depth interpretation of the results of the study based on the conceptual framework.

Demographic Characteristics

Demographic analysis is one of the key steps in the quantitative research since it will give you a good understanding of the characteristics of the respondents in the study. It provides context to the profile of the respondents and helps to identify if the chosen sample is suitable for tackling the research aims. Demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and monthly income of the household were examined to gain insight into the composition of the sample population.

Table 1 Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Items	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	168	45.8%
	Female	199	54.2%
Age Group	18-25 years	205	56.0%
	26-35 years	107	29.2%
	36-45 years	36	9.8%
	46-55 years	12	3.3%
	56 years or above	6	1.6%
Academic Qualification	Matric/O-Level	12	3.3%
	Intermediate/A-Level	75	20.4%
	Bachelor's Degree	188	51.2%
	Master's Degree	82	22.3%
	PhD and Above	10	2.7%
Income Level	Less than Rs. 50,000	41	11.2%
	Rs. 51,000-100,000	91	24.8%
	Rs. 101,000-150,000	79	21.5%

Items	Category	Frequency	Percentage
	Rs. 151,000-250,000	86	23.4%
	More than Rs. 250,000	70	19.1%

The above table shows that 367 respondents participated in this study of which 45.8% were male and 54.2% were female. Results showed that there were slightly more female respondents than male respondents with 40.3% of women and 39.7% of men. This neutral gender ratio increases the correctness of the answers by providing input from both genders on the practices of self-expression, attachment to the brand, brand love, and brand loyalty. From the age point of view, the age group 18-25 years was the more dominant age group (56.0%) with 29.2% in the age group 26-35 years. The respondents aged between 36 and 45 years accounted for 9.8% and those aged between 46 and 55 years accounted for 3.3% while those aged 56 years and above accounted for 1.6%. The results are of great relevance for the present study given that this sample was predominantly young consumers, as young consumers are more active in identity expression, emotional brand interaction and symbolic consumption behaviors. Academic qualification was mainly represented by those with a bachelor's degree (51.2%), with 22.3% of respondents having master's degrees and 20.4% having intermediate qualifications. Fewer respondents reported having matric qualifications (3.3%) and those with a PhD qualification (2.7%) were relatively small. The educational profile reveals that the respondents have generally high levels of education and therefore can be confident in their ability to comprehend the constructs presented in the survey, and respond with knowledge and understanding of the emotional brand relationship and loyalty behavior.

Household income was segmented into income groups to capture the economic differences between respondents. The highest percentage of the respondents earned Rs. 51,000 and Rs. 100,000, representing 24.8% of the total sample. This was followed by the respondents being awarded Rs. to Rs. 151,000 and Rs. 250,000 at 23.4%, and Rs. 101,000 to Rs. 150,000 at 21.5%. The respondents with above Rs. 12,000/ month

income group were 110. The respondents whose income above Rs. 12,000/ month were 110. 250,000 were 19.1% and those with income less than Rs. were 11.2% of the total. 50,000. This distribution is evidence of a rich diversity and representativeness of the sample which was able to be reached and responded to by the lower middle to upper income groups. The general study demographic data revealed that the study predominantly obtained responses from young, educated and economically diverse consumers who tend to be active in the consumption of branded products, emotionally orient towards purchasing and are more likely to respond. From a theoretical perspective, the selected profile of the respondents seems to be totally relevant and appropriate to conduct meaningful empirical analyses in the context of the current study that deals with self-expressive brand practice, emotions, brand love and brand loyalty.

Assessment of Outer Model: Measurement Model.

In PLS-SEM analysis, measurement model (also called outer model assessment) is a component in the analysis that determines whether the observed measurement items are valid and reliable for the latent constructs they measure. This assessment in other words is a test of the ability of the items used in the study to accurately and consistently measure the research variables as they were intended in this study. Before conducting the hypothesis test, first a strong measurement model needs to be developed because the results of the structural model may be misleading if the measurement indicators are not reliable or valid. The assessment of the measurement model is mainly to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs included in the study. Reliability is defined as the consistency between the items measuring the same construct, that is, how consistent the measurement items are with each other. Unlike other Amos tools, the Cronbach's Alpha and the

Composite Reliability (CR) are the most frequently applied measurement of reliability in SmartPLS. Typical values for 0.70 or above are considered acceptable and indicative of good internal consistency of measurement items.

Validity refers to the appropriateness of the measurements that assess the concept measured. The convergent validity specifically checks to see if the indicators of a construct are close to each other. This is typically determined by the factor loadings and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The factor loading value should be greater than

0.70 which indicates that the measurement items are good measures of the construct. Likewise, items with AVE scores above 0.50 show good convergent validity of the construct as they measure more than half of the construct's variance. For this reason, the measurement model assessment in this study is carried out to obtain factor loading, Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability and Average Variance Extracted to ensure that the constructs have acceptable reliability and validity, so as to proceed to the evaluation of the structural model.

Table 2: Reliability and Convergent Validity Analysis

Variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AGE	0.851	0.852	0.628
B. LOVE	0.743	0.765	0.500
B.LOYALTY	0.831	0.835	0.595
EMOTION	0.825	0.830	0.590
SEPB	0.850	0.853	0.625

Table 4.2 shows the outcomes of reliability and convergent validity analysis for all the constructs that were used in the study. The Cronbach's α , the Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were used to test the internal consistency and convergent validity of the constructs in the measurement model. According to the general rule of thumb of PLS-SEM analysis, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values should exceed 0.70 and 0.50 respectively, which means that they have good reliability and convergent validity.

All constructs were found to have acceptable internal consistency reliability. The Cronbach's Alpha values were ranged from 0.743 - 0.851 exceeding the recommended value of 0.70. The Cronbach's alpha values showed that the items in the measurement tools of AGE and SEBP have high internal consistency with $\alpha = 0.851$ and $\alpha = 0.850$ respectively. Similarly, Emotion (0.825) and Brand Loyalty (0.831) were in acceptable ranges and the Cronbach's Alpha for Brand Love was 0.743, which is also acceptable. In the same way, all constructs had composite reliabilities ranging from 0.765 to 0.853, which is greater than the recommended value of 0.70. SEBP with a

Composite Reliability score of 0.853 and AGE with a score of 0.852 respectively, had the highest Composite Reliability scores. Emotion and Brand Loyalty had satisfactory reliability indices other than that, which were 0.830 and 0.835, respectively. Brand Love reported a Composite Reliability of 0.765 which was relatively low but still within an acceptable range for the construct reliability.

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all the constructs were also higher than the minimum threshold of 0.50, which also suggests acceptable convergent validity. AGE had the highest AVE value of 0.628 followed by SEBP with 0.625, suggesting that these constructs accounted for a significant amount of variance in the respective indicators. Brand Loyalty and Emotion had an AVE value of 0.595 and 0.590 respectively, and Brand Love had an AVE value of 0.500 which is the minimum acceptable convergent validity. The results overall indicate that all constructs measured in the study have good reliabilities and convergent validities. The measurement items represent the latent constructs in a consistent and accurate manner indicating that the measurement model is appropriate and suitable for further

evaluation of the structural model and hypothesis testing.

The Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied to test the discriminant validity. To test the discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was used.

Discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is actually sufficiently different and distinct from other constructs that are part of the study. Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is used to assess the discriminant validity, which is to see if each latent variable is measuring a different concept and if the concept measured has too much overlap. The discriminant validity is important as its high overlap could suggest measurement problems and

decrease the accuracy of structural model results. The Fornell-Larcker criterion is one of the most frequently used techniques to test for discriminant validity in SmartPLS. According to this criterion, the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the constructs of the model should be larger than the correlation of each construct with all the other constructs in the model. The numbers along the diagonal of the Fornell-Larcker matrix are the square root of the AVE of each construct and the off-diagonal values are the inter-construct correlations. When the diagonal values are greater than the correlation values, the discriminant validity is considered to exist.

Table 3: Discriminant Validity using Fornell-Larcker criteria

VARIABLES	AGE	B. LOVE	B. LOYALTY	EMOTION	SEPB
AGE	0.792				
B. LOVE	0.632	0.707			
B. LOYALTY	0.660	0.621	0.772		
EMOTION	0.577	0.675	0.570	0.768	
SEPB	0.558	0.583	0.532	0.703	0.791

The results as demonstrated in Table 4.3 validate all constructs used in this study with a good discriminant validity. The value of each row and the value of each column diagonal (square root of AVE) is greater than the inter construct correlation value, thus satisfying the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Specifically, the value of AGE reported was 0.792 which was higher than the correlation of AGE with Brand Love (0.632), Brand Loyalty (0.660), Emotion (0.577) and SEBP (0.558). Likewise, the square root of AVE value was 0.707 for Brand Love, which is higher than the correlations with Brand Loyalty (0.621), Emotion (0.675) and SEBP (0.583). The value of the diagonal element "Brand Loyalty" also showed adequate discriminant validity with values higher than the other constructs, 0.772.

The same case was true for Emotion (which had a correlation value of 0.768 in diagonal correlation as compared to AGE, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty and SEBP). The square root AVE for the square

root of 0.791 also demonstrated good discriminant validity because it was higher than all other correlations of the construct with other constructs that were included in the model. The results of all the constructs in the study presented in this report establish the empirical distinctiveness of each construct and the conceptual distinctiveness of each construct within the study. The discriminant validity of the measure model is therefore proven and the structural model can be further tested and examined to test the hypothesis.

Assess model fit: Assess the quality of the model fit.

The model fit indices used in PLS-SEM analysis were two criteria of overall goodness of fit of the model. SRMR value is a good model fit if it is below < 0.1 (Henseler et al., 2014). In the same way, (Bentler and Bonnett, 1980) Normed fit index should be greater than 0.9 to postulate an absolute fit.

Table 4: Model Fit Indices

Latent	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.072	0.086
NFI	0.764	0.762

As seen in the Table 4.4, the values of the SRMR for both of the saturated model and estimated model are within the acceptable level. In both instances reported SRMR value was less than the cutoff value of 0.050 (Mulao et al., 2014). Both the saturated and the estimated model had an SRMR value lower than 0.050 recommended by Mulao et al., (2014) and hence both models were suitable. Both of these values are less than the recommended value of 0.10 which shows that the model is an adequate fit for the data. The results indicate that this difference between the correlation matrix of the observed and the estimated correlation matrix is not large, indicating that the proposed model is valid.

The value of Normed Fit Index (NFI) in the model was saturated model 0.764 and estimated model 0.762. The values are less than the optimal value of 0.90 proposed by Bentler and Bonett (1980), but is considered as moderate level of model fit which is acceptable for exploratory and behavioral research with PLS-SEM. Sometimes the NFI values are not as good, as in social science and marketing research, especially in complex behavioural models, and it is still acceptable that the proposed model is appropriate. In general, the result of the test of goodness of fit of the model indicates that the goodness of fit of the model proposed is good and the model can be further evaluated and tested

in the structural model. The SRMR values are specifically a measure of the quality and sufficiency of the measurement and model structure used in this study.

The R^2 (Coefficient of determination) is a measure to evaluate the value of R.

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is the one of the important measurement in this study because it measures the predictive power of structural model. R^2 measures the variance of endogenous construct explained by the exogenous constructs in the model that is associated with the endogenous construct. In simple terms it is a measure of the goodness of the fit of the independent variables to the change in the dependent variables. The bigger the R^2 (the closer it is to 1) the more variation in the data will be explained by the model and the better the model will predict the data. The value of R^2 should be positive to signify the relevance of the prediction in the PLS path model, according to Hair et al. (2014). Generally, R^2 of 0.25, 0.50 and 0.75 will be regarded as weak, moderate and substantial, respectively. Based on this, the overall effectiveness of the conceptual framework to explain the behavioural outcomes of consumers can be assessed by referring to the value of the R^2 of endogenous constructs.

Table 5: Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

	R-square	R-square adjusted
B. LOVE	0.547	0.543
B. LOYALTY	0.506	0.502
EMOTION	0.494	0.493

The structural model shows good predictive ability as evidenced in the results presented in Table 4.5. The value of R^2 was 0.547, which shows that about 54.7% of the variance in the Brand Love is predicted by the predictor constructs included in

the model. Likewise, the R^2 value for Brand Loyalty was 0.506, which indicates that the variance in Brand Loyalty can be accounted for by the related independent and mediating constructs by 50.6%. Emotion reported an R^2 value of 0.494,

which means that the predictor variables in the model account for about 49.4% of the variance in this variable. The adjusted R^2 values were also determined to be very close to the original R^2 values, which will show the stability and consistency of the model. The adjusted R^2 values for Brand Love, Brand Loyalty and Emotion were 0.543, 0.502 and 0.493 respectively. The R^2 and adjusted R^2 values are very close implying that there is not a significant over estimation and the model has a good explanatory accuracy.

In summary, the results show that the proposed model has moderate level of predictive power in explaining endogenous constructs used in the study. The R^2 values further confirm that the conceptual framework is appropriate for explaining the variations in emotions, brand love and brand loyalty of consumers, thus justifying the further hypothesis testing and assessment of the relationship between the variables in the structural model.

The student will evaluate and test the hypotheses in a structural model

Once the reliability and validity of the measurement model was established, the next step in PLS-SEM analysis is the assessment of the structural model to determine the overall model fit and discriminant validity. The structural model assesses the hypothesized relationships between constructs that are part of the conceptual model. This evaluation shows if the hypotheses are accepted or rejected by the significant and robust relationships among the variables. The most frequently used indicators to check the hypotheses in SmartPLS are the path coefficients (β), the T-statistics and the P-values generated by the bootstrapping procedure. The path coefficient indicates the direction and magnitude of the relationship between constructs, and the T-statistic and P-value indicate if the relationship is statistically significant. For the most part, if a t-statistic is greater than 1.96 and the P value less than 0.05, the relationship between the variables is significant at the 95% confidence level.

Table 6 Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesized Relationship	Original Sample (β)	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
AGE $\rightarrow$ Brand Love	0.377	7.574	0.000	Supported
AGE $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	0.440	7.868	0.000	Supported
AGE $\times$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	0.019	0.778	0.436	Not Supported
AGE $\times$ Emotion $\rightarrow$ Brand Love	-0.038	1.229	0.219	Not Supported
Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty	0.339	6.568	0.000	Supported
Emotion $\rightarrow$ Brand Love	0.470	10.355	0.000	Supported
SEBP $\rightarrow$ Emotion	0.703	20.604	0.000	Supported

From the results indicated in Table 4.6, it can be seen that some of the hypothesized relations of the structural model are statistically significant. The path coefficient (β) is 0.377; t-statistic is 7.574 and p-value is 0.000 that shows there is significant positive relationship between AGE and Brand Love. The result obtained is a p-value which is less than the recommended p-value of 0.05, thus the relationship is statistically significant. For consumers, age is a key factor in brand love. Similarly, AGE and Brand Loyalty relationship

was also positive and statistically significant with a path coefficient of 0.440, t-statistic of 7.868 and p-value of 0.000 respectively. The results indicated the importance of age as one of the factors affecting consumers' brand loyalty.

To examine the moderating effect of AGE on the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty, the interaction term, AGE $\times$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Brand Loyalty was analyzed. The results were obtained as follows: Path coefficient = 0.019, T statistic = 0.778 and P value = 0.436. The

moderating effect was statistically insignificant as the value of p exceeded 0.05 and the t value was below 1.96. Therefore, the findings indicate that there is not much impact of age on the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. Additionally, the moderating effect of AGE was not significant between the correlation of Emotion and Brand Love. The path coefficient, t and p value of the interaction term AGE $\times$ Emotion $\rightarrow$ Brand Love were -0.038, -1.229 and 0.219 respectively. The findings show that there is no significant difference in the emotion to brand love relationship in terms of age.

Moreover, the impact of Brand Love on Brand Loyalty was positive and statistically significant, having a path coefficient of 0.339, a T -statistic of 6.568 and a P -value of 0.000. This discovery suggests that the greater consumer brand love positively impacts brand loyalty.

There also was a significant positive relationship between Emotion with path coefficient 0.470, t value of 10.355 and p value of 0.000. This suggests that consumers' emotional attachment and emotional experiences strongly contribute toward developing brand love. The last correlation was between Self-Expressive Brand Practice (SEBP) and Emotion ($r=0.703$; $t=20.604$; $p=0.000$) and was very significant and positive. This implies that emotions experienced by consumers and their emotional relationship with brands is greatly affected by self-expressive brand practices.

The overall evaluation of structural model results shows that most of the direct relationship that is proposed in the study is statistically significant and supported. However, the effect of moderating by age was not significant. The results thus showed that the age has a significant direct effect on brand love and brand loyalty variables, but a non-significant effect on the relationships of brand love, emotion and brand loyalty in the proposed conceptual framework.

HYPOTHESIS DISCUSSION

In this chapter, a detailed account of the empirical findings the structural model analysis performed in the last chapter is given. This chapter aims to interpret the statistical findings in the context of the study's aims, theory assumptions and empirical

studies that have been conducted in the past. The results for the measurement and structural models were discussed in Chapter 4, however, the practical and theoretical implications of these results are discussed in the context of consumer brand behaviour in the present chapter. Self-Expressive Brand Practice (SEBP) was investigated in this study for its direct and moderating effect on the consumer-emotion-brand love-brand loyalty relationship and its effect on brand love and brand loyalty. Furthermore, the roles of mediation of emotion, brand love and self-expressive brand on the relationship between self-expressive branding and brand loyalty were also examined. Each hypothesis is discussed separately, to give a detailed explanation of the results and their implications in the context of the current branding literature.

Self-expressive brand practice and their relation with emotion are discussed

The findings of the research indicated that Self-Expressive Brand Practice (SEBP) has a significant positive effect on the consumers' feelings. The structural model results revealed that the path coefficient (β) is 0.703, the T -statistic is 20.604 and the P -value is 0.000 which is high level of statistical significance. Therefore, the hypothesis proposing that there exists a positive correlation between self-expressive brand practice and consumers' emotional responses is supported. The outcome reveals that the emotionality among consumers towards brands is higher if they perceived the brand as an expression of their personal identity, values, lifestyle and social image. This finding points to self-expressive branding being an important determinant in the development of emotional consumer behavior. Today, in the modern markets brands are not just products or providers, but rather symbols of identity or personal meaning. Consumers tend to select brands that fit their self image or enable them to express themselves or how they want to be viewed by other people. If the brand can successfully act out this symbolic and expressive function, the brand can gain more emotional engagement by the consumer's sense of personal relevance with the brand and psychological

attachment (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Wallace et al., 2014).

The result is congruent with the self congruity theory (Self congruity theory) and emotional branding theory which suggests that an emotional relationship will be strengthened if consumers can experience a high level of self congruity between personal identity and the brand image. Self-expression gives a sense of ownership, belongingness and emotional comfort, which, of course, has a positive emotional impact. In an image-conscious and competitive consumer world, customers are more likely to make an emotional connection with the brand that resonates with their aspirations and personalities and social identities (Malar et al., 2011; Japutra et al., 2018). This result is also in line with past empirical research which has found positive links between self-expressive brand characteristics and emotional consumer reactions. Brands with symbolic value and self-expressive value have been previously reported to be able to evoke emotional attachment, positive affect and greater consumer-brand relationships. This consistency also supports the current findings, and strengthens the idea that consumers' emotional involvement with brands is mostly a part of their sense of self-expressive brand practices which were reported by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Bairrada et al. (2018).

Needless to say, the implications for brand managers and marketers is as significant as this finding. Consumers' feelings of connection to their brand will be more suited to positioning strategies which emphasize the matching of identity, symbolic brand meaning and personal relevance than functional product features for organisations that seek to influence consumers' feeling of connection to their brand. In competitive consumer markets, emotional differences via self-expressive branding can be a strong strategic enabler to cultivate deeper and more powerful brand relationships. In general, the results validate SBP's significance for consumer emotions and its high predictive power for consumer emotional involvement. This result helps to confirm the concept of the study and the

importance of identity-based branding in consumer behavior today.

5.3 Discussion on the Relationship between Emotion and Brand Love

The findings of the study revealed that emotion had a positive effect on brand love at the level of significance of 0.05. The results of the structural model indicated that the path coefficient obtained was $\beta = 0.470$, t-statistic value was $t = 10.355$, and P value was 0.000 which are statistically significant. So the hypothesis that there is a positive relationship between consumer emotion and brand love is accepted. The findings suggest that emotional involvement and affective consumers reaction has an important role in the formation of brand love. Positive emotional engagement with brands enhances the likelihood of fostering deeper affective, attachment and emotional closeness to the brands (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

The discovery suggests that emotional experiences are an important basis for the creation of strong consumer-brand relationships. Nowadays, feelings have become more influential than any rational consideration of a product for the consumer. These positive experiences such as happiness, excitement, comfort, trust, or personal satisfaction that consumers feel when shopping for a brand gradually pave the way to more and more emotional attachment and affection. The emotional engagement grows and eventually consumers become more than product consumers – as they feel that the brand is theirs, that they love it and that it feels like an extension of their personalities (Thomson et al., 2005; Langner et al., 2016).

The finding is conceptually aligned with the emotional attachment theory which suggests that consumers' emotional attachment to brands is a result of repeated positive interactions and emotionally rewarding experiences. Emotional attachment is regarded as an essential process that results in consumers' emotions of love, intimacy and close relationships with brands. The strong emotional experiences are logical antecedent in the brand relationship building process since brand love is a higher level type of emotion which

has been built between consumers and brands (Park et al., 2010; Wallace et al., 2014).

Findings of the present study also correspond to the findings of the previous empirical studies that have observed that consumer emotions positively affect brand love. Some previous studies have suggested that emotional satisfaction, positive affective experience, and emotionally rewarding brand interaction are significant antecedents of the consumers' emotional responses towards brands and their desire to build loyal consumers' relationships. The results are consistent with the previous studies, contributing to the reliability of the study and affirming that emotional involvement is still a strong predictor of brand love in the current markets (Bairrada et al. 2018; Japutra et al. 2018).

The implications of the findings for practice suggest that organisations should seek to create more emotionally meaningful brand experiences if they want to create a stronger brand love amongst the consumers. The contribution of functional aspects to product quality in highly competitive markets, where emotional differentiation plays an increasing role in consumers' preferences, may not be enough. As such, brands must be created to generate positive emotion responses including stories, symbolism, experiential engagement and emotional engagement with the customer. Such strategies can make significant contribution both to emotional attachment and brand loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

In overall, the findings establish that emotion is an important factor in brand love. The emotional involvement with a brand is likely to result in affectionate and emotionally committed brand relationships. It is pertinent to stress the importance of this finding in terms of the proposed conceptual framework and it means that emotional branding has not only importance in developing meaningful consumer-brand relationship but also has significance in the proposed framework.

The discussion of the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty will be undertaken.

The connection between brand love, and brand loyalty will be discussed

The findings showed that the brand love positively affects on the brand loyalty. The results of the structural model obtained $\beta = 0.339$; T statistics = 6.568; P value = 0.000; which means that there is significant statistical value. Thus, the hypothesis that hypothesized a positive relationship between brand love and brand loyalty is supported. This discovery suggests that customers who allow themselves to feel a stronger emotional attachment, affection, and psychological closeness to a brand are more likely to exhibit loyal behavioral intentions and commitment to the brand in the long run (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012).

The findings showed that one of the emotional factors that influence the loyalty behavior of the customers is brand love. It's not just about performance, price, and convenience in an increasing number of consumer markets; it's an emotional connection in a competitive market. If a consumer is really passionate about a brand, he/she will become more emotionally attached to it and will have lesser chances of switching to other brands and competitors. Consumers who engage in such exchanges are not just repeat buyers but are more likely to repeat purchases and tolerate some dissatisfaction and increase their desire to promote the brand in the future (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Langner et al., 2016).

From the theoretical point of view of relationship marketing and emotional attachment theory, the finding is theoretically consistent as higher the level of emotional attachment higher the behavioral loyalty and higher the long term relationship. Brand love is a second order emotional relationship that goes beyond love, it is a feeling of being near to the brand, of passionate love, of commitment. These emotional connections naturally lead consumers to act on them, making loyalty a natural consequence of such strong emotional connections as the brand becomes a part of the consumer's identity, preferences and lifestyle. An emotional integration leads to a reduction in switching behaviour and strengthening of the continuity of

relationships in the longer term (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005).

The results obtained from the present study are also similar with the earlier empirical findings which indicated that brand love is one of the most significant factors that affect the brand loyalty. Past research has shown that such customer responses and behaviors like repeat purchases, word-of-mouth, advocacy, and long-term brand commitment are more prone to occur when customers feel attached to a brand. The results obtained in the present study are in line with the results obtained in the studies previously conducted, which confirms the credibility of the current study and further validates the results obtained by Bairrada et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2014, which states that emotional affection is a strong brand lever in a branding context for the creation of loyal consumer behaviour.

Based on the managerial perspective, the results indicate that companies with the intention of improving customer loyalty need to go beyond transactional marketing and focus on emotional brand relationship building. Providing meaningful brand experiences and emotional stories, designing symbolic identity alignment, and designing the interactions with customers that will lead to emotional satisfaction and affection will be critical to building brand love. The brands that can build emotional bond with the consumers are likely to be able to build loyal and lasting markets and will be able to secure their loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

In conclusion, it is clear that brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty among consumers. The more consumers like a brand, the more loyal they will be in their purchases and interactions with the brand. The finding was in line with the conceptual approach and reinforced the importance of emotional relationship formation to consumer loyalty in the long run (Batra et al., 2012; Park et al., 2010).

The researchers will concentrate on the impact of age on brand love and discuss the results. The results on the link between age and brand love will be presented.

According to the results of this study, age is significantly positively related to brand love. The

results obtained from the structural model showed that the path coefficient = 0.377, $t = 7.574$ and $P = 0.000$ are statistically significant. The hypothesis that shows the positive relationship between age and brand love is thus supported. This finding suggests that there are important differences between consumers' emotional love and attachment to brands among the different ages, and that age is an influential factor in the brand love development (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010; Holbrook & Schindler, 2003).

The finding suggests that age can have a great impact on the emotional association that people have with brands. Consumer behaviour can vary across the different life stages as their consumption motives, values, emotional preferences, and lifestyle priorities change. Familiarity, trust, accumulated experiences and long-term satisfaction can foster brand affection among older consumers, while symbolic expression and peer influence, plus touching their aspirations, can foster brand love among younger consumers. It then appears that age could influence consumers' emotional processes of forming affectionate relationships with brands (Moschis, 2012; Lin et al., 2021).

It is also theoretically significant since the influence of the characteristics of a group upon individual behavior (in this case, age) has always been believed to be important in consumer behavior and in emotional decision-making. Consumer's emotional bond with brands is not just formed with the brand itself, but is shaped by their personal experiences, maturity, social identity and psychological needs which can differ among age groups. Variations in brand love intensity and the type of brand love (Solomon, 2018; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019) can also be there as a result of different life stages and their associated brand expectations and brand evaluation/comparison criteria.

The findings are also consistent with other empirical research which have found age to influence emotional brand relationships and consumer attachments. Existing research has suggested that consumers age may impact their emotional involvement, brand commitment, purchase motivation and brand attachment to the

brand. Older consumers are more brand loyal and loyal to the brands they are familiar with and trust, while younger consumers are more extreme and expressive with their brands and identities. Based on the present findings, the importance of demographic characteristics in investigating the emotional consumer-brand relationship (Aro et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2021) was reinforced.

The findings have marketing implications for marketers of products to be aware of the differences between these different age groups when designing emotional marketing campaigns. The emotional attachment and brand love is different among different age groups, so organisations should refrain from applying a one size fits all branding. Younger consumers might react more to appeals based on their identity and aspirations, or appeals that are socially expressive, whilst older consumers may react more to appeals of trust, consistency, emotional familiarity and relational satisfaction. Knowing about these differences can facilitate the development of more purposeful and emotionally resonant brand communication strategies by organizations (Moschis, 2012; Solomon, 2018).

In general, the results indicate that the age has a significant effect on brand love from consumers. This indicates that there are some demographic differences in terms of life stage and maturity that influence emotional attachment towards brands. The findings further reinforce the conceptual groundwork of the study and emphasize the importance of demographic variables in the study on emotional consumer-brand relationships (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Lin et al., 2021).

Discussion on the Relationship between Age and Brand Loyalty

On the basis of the result of the study it was concluded that the age group has positive and significant impact on brand loyalty. According to the structural model results, the coefficient of path $\beta = 0.440$, the statistic $T = 7.868$ and the P-value of 0.000 showed a strong statistical significance. So, the hypothesis expecting positive correlation between Age and Brand loyalty is accepted. This result points out the importance of age as a factor that affects consumer loyalty behavior, which means it can exacerbate the loyalty tendency of the

various age groups because of their emotional maturity, purchasing experience, and attitude towards brand relationships (Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010; Moschis, 2012).

The findings of this study indicate that the satisfaction and emotional responses of consumers with product plays an important role in consumer loyalty behavior, but other demographic and life/age factors may also influence consumer's loyalty behaviors. Older consumers are likely to have greater brand loyalty, be more satisfied with their current brand and purchase more in the same manner, whereas younger consumers are more exploratory and willing to switch brands when it suits them. Older consumers may exhibit greater loyalty due to the importance of familiarity, trust, consistency, and a decrease in decision uncertainty, whereas younger consumers may value novelty, social trends, and experimentation. The age difference in the current study seems to be in line with the above-mentioned behavioral differences in order to understand why the age variable is significant in the current study (Solomon, 2018; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

The findings are conceptually consistent with theories of consumer behavior that focus on the importance of the demographic profile in the decision making process, in consumer buying behavior, and in the relationships between the two. Loyalty may be correlated with the amount of consumer experience, with consumers' purchases, with their satisfaction level over time and with the emotional familiarity they have with the product or service, and may be strengthened as it is reinforced over time. The more the consumer experiences in the marketplace, the more resilient and stable his loyalty is likely to be, and the more acceptable his loyalty relationship with the brand. Hence, differences between the loyalty patterns of consumer segments can be attributed to age (Holbrook & Schindler, 2003; Moschis, 2012).

The results are also in line with the findings of other empirical studies that showed that age is a significant factor on brand loyalty behavior. Previous research indicated that older customers are more likely to re-purchase, have stronger commitment to the relationship and less likely to switch to customers in other organizations than

younger customers. This can be attributed to familiarity with the brand, emotional comfort and less risk tolerance to switch their preferred brand. The consistency is also good which increases the credibility of the study and the practical implications, as the age of the person is a determinant in brand loyalty (Aro et al., 2018; Lin et al., 2021).

The findings show that age segmentation should be considered for customers' retention and loyalty measures from a managerial perspective. The action of loyalty varies across age groups, so brand communication and loyalty programs need to be tailored to the needs of each. Younger consumers may be more likely to be influenced by tactics which elicit feelings of excitement and innovation, personalisation and social relevance, whereas older consumers may be more likely to be influenced by tactics which elicit feelings of trust, consistency, service reliability and value of the relationship. These tailored strategies can be used to improve the strategy for building loyalty among various types of consumers (Solomon, 2018; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

Overall, the results indicate that age is an important factor in determining brand loyalty of consumers. This reflects a moderate level of maturity and experience of the consumers influencing their loyalty behaviour and changing expectations of the relationship. The findings confirm the conceptual framework adopted in the study and reinforce the role of demographic variables in comprehending LTCBR. The findings corroborate the conceptual framework adopted in the study, and highlight the importance of demographic variables in understanding LTCBR (Moschis, 2012; Lambert-Pandraud & Laurent, 2010).

Discussing the impact of Age on the correlation between 'Brand Love' and 'Brand Loyalty'. Discuss about the moderating role of age between brand love and brand loyalty.

According to the results of the study, the moderating effect of the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty in terms of age is not statistically significant. Path coefficient (β) was 0.019, T-statistic was 0.778 and P-value was 0.436 suggesting that the moderating relationship is not

statistically significant. Thus the hypothesis stating that the age has a moderating effect between brand love and brand loyalty is not supported. This finding suggests that, though age has a direct effect on brand love and brand loyalty, it has no significant impact on the correlation between brand love and brand loyalty (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Hair et al., 2019).

The data indicates that brand love has the same positive impact on brand loyalty across the age groups. The way older consumers' loyalty behavior occurs appears similar to younger consumers' loyalty behavior once consumers have developed a positive emotional attachment to the brand. Emotional attachment and affectionate brand relationships can be a rock solid loyalty enabler that are not appreciably different according to demographic differences in age. This implies that the emotional strength of brand love could be significant enough to consistently impact two separate groups of consumers (younger and older) and their loyalty actions (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

The finding is theoretically significant as the moderation effects are theoretically predicted if the strength or direction of the relationship varies according to another variable. In the current study, it was hypothesized that age would moderate the brand love-brand loyalty relationship. The relatively small result, however, indicates that at least from the perspective of emotional involvement, the commitment to brands may be a universal or general behavior, not as much related to age differences. Although age could have a direct impact on emotional attachment and loyalty tendencies, this does not mean that emotional attachment and loyalty would affect the creation of loyal behavior (Hayes, 2018; Hair et al., 2019).

This outcome is different from some of the existing ideas in consumer segmentation research that assume that the demographic attributes affect the level of the relationship between psychological constructs. Comparative interpretation: One can say that, in this context of brands, the attachment to a brand is becoming more prevalent among consumers of all ages. No matter their age, modern consumers are often targeted with emotional

brand approaches via digital channels, social networks, experiential marketing and symbolic brand communication. As a result, it can be assumed that there might no difference between the effect of brand love to brand loyalty in different age groups (Japutra et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2014).

It could also be argued that emotional attachment may have a stronger psychological impact than segmentation of the market in predicting the loyalty behavior. As consumers acquire emotional attachment, love and passion for a brand, their age might be less relevant to loyalty results. Relationship emotions between the brand and the consumers can go beyond the difference in terms of the demographics and the emotions formed by the relationship can foster brand loyalty among different groups of consumers (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). The conditions of practice suggest that organizations wouldn't need to set very specific strategies for age targeting if the goal is to ensure increased brand love and loyalty. The emotional impact of brand love on loyalty seems to be similar across ages, so there is a need for marketers to shift their attention away from age-specific emotional brand relationship mechanisms and towards more general emotional brand-building strategies. But, there could be other ways for communicating, product positioning, or interaction with customers where age segmentation is still applicable (Solomon, 2018; Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019).

Overall, the results suggest that age is not an important moderating factor between brand love and brand loyalty. Although both constructs are greatly affected by age, brand love does not impact brand loyalty. The implication from this finding for preserving emotional brand relationships among various demographic groups is valuable, and will enhance the knowledge of the nature of consumer-brand relationship behaviors (Hair et al., 2019; Hayes, 2018).

Moderating effect of age between Emotion and Brand Love is discussed

The Moderating effect of Age between Emotion and Brand Love is discussed

The study findings showed that the moderating effect of age on the relationship between emotion and brand love was not statistically significant. The results from the structural model indicated that the path coefficient (β) was -0.038 while the T-statistic was 1.229 and the P-value was 0.219, which indicated that there was no statistical significance in the interaction effect. It is concluded that the hypothesis that age will moderate the relation between emotion and brand love is not accepted. The results reflects that the effect of a consumer's sentiments on the development of brand love is not significantly different across age groups and therefore, there is not a great difference in the impact of the age difference in consumers. (Hair et al., 2019; Hayes, 2018).

The results of this study indicate that emotional experiences lead to the development of brand love in a relatively similar way across all age groups. For customers with positive brand attitudes, there appear to be equal opportunities to everyone to form a loving emotional connection, by age. From the customer's perspective, the emotions of happiness, excitement, trust, comfort and emotional satisfaction could be viewed as general influencing factors in the context of brand love, as suggested by Batra et al. (2012) and Albert & Merunka (2013).

Moderation effects are expected when the relationship between two constructs is influenced by a third variable in terms of its magnitude and/or direction. Since this is the current study, it was hypothesized that such a relationship between emotional experiences and brand love would differ by age. The small results, however, indicate that emotional bonding mechanisms may be similar for different age groups of the population. This was suggesting that the emotional attachment formation process can be applied to a wider level of psychology rather than demographically by age (Hayes, 2018; Hair et al., 2019).

This may be because of the growing relevance of emotional branding in today's market settings for

all consumer age groups. Regardless of age, today's consumers have plenty of opportunities to engage with emotionally driven brand messages, from social media to experiential campaigns, from digital to storytelling, and from symbolic brand positioning. The emotional responses to brands therefore can trigger similar psychological responses, resulting in a lesser role of age as a possible moderator in this relationship (Japutra et al., 2018; Wallace et al., 2014).

Or, emotional attachment processes might be social (rather than demographic) in nature more generally. Perceptions of the positive emotions translated into the affectionate bond with the brand can be relatively constant, although other aspects of consumption, such as spending priorities, communication styles or age may have an impact. It's a sincere one and consumer brand attachment can be created due to universal emotional mechanisms rather than age-specific ones (Park et al., 2010; Thomson et al., 2005).

Results in the present work contradict the demographic-segmentation based assumptions found in the consumer behaviour literature that demographic characteristics would be significant predictors of emotional response and relationship building. But absence of a moderating effect does not mean that age is irrelevant, per se. On the other hand, it indicates that age might influence brand attitudes or brand loyalty but probably not the way brand love is built, as in the context of the current study (Schiffman & Wisenblit, 2019; Solomon, 2018).

A management implication is that the strategy of emotional branding that aims to make people 'love brands' can be applied to different age groups with only marginal differences in the way that the emotional engagement is done from age to age. Once an organization has created a brand experience that resonates with all consumers, they can focus on the processes of creating a brand experience for different age-market segments, without having to tailor the brand experience for the various communication styles and channel preferences of each age-market segment (Solomon, 2018; Moschis, 2012).

Overall, the data indicates that there is no significant difference between the relationship

between emotion and brand love across age groups. Emotions continue to be a powerful and consistent brand love predictor, irrespective of age differences in the demographic. This is one of those findings which contributes to knowledge about emotional consumer-brand relationship development and suggests that there may be common emotional attachment mechanisms across consumer ages (Hair et al., 2019; Hayes, 2018).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The present study was aimed at investigating how Self-Expressive Brand Practice (SEBP) affects the outcomes of consumer-brand relationship, namely emotion, brand love and brand loyalty. Brands these days are not evaluated on the basis of the functional features, but only quality, price or convenience. Rather, consumers are finding more and more meaning, symbolic relevance, and a connection to themselves in the brands they select. Organizations that want to create sustainable competitive advantage and a long-term customer relationship, are more and more relying on emotional branding and brand strategies of self-expression.

The primary purpose of the research was to gain insight into the role of self-expressiveness related to brand practices in influencing consumers' emotions and the role of these emotions in fostering brand love and brand loyalty. Additionally, the study examined the direct impact of age on the levels of brand love and brand loyalty, and the moderating effect of age on the examined relationships between consumer and brand. Moreover, the mediating function of the serial model that combine emotional responses and brand love intervening between self-expressive branding and brand loyalty was investigated.

This method used was quantitative research method and data collection technique were done by using structured questionnaire to 367 respondents. The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was developed by SmartPLS was used in the study to analyze the measurement model and the relationship between the constructs. It was found

that the reliability, convergent validity, discriminant validity and model fit and assessment of structural model were statistically sufficient and appropriate for hypothesis testing, so the conceptual framework suggested was adequate.

The results of the study showed some points of significance about consumer brand behaviour. The findings validated that Self-Expressive Brand Practice is positively influenced on consumer emotions which has a strong positive relationship with statistical significant test that measures the strength of the relationship between two variables, the results showed that Self-Expressive Brand Practice has a strong positive relationship with consumer emotions. This indicates that brand strategies that involve symbols and identities are important to the emotional engagement of consumers.

The study also revealed that emotion is one of the influencing factors on "brand love", and "satisfying brand experiences" are one of the significant factors in establishing a "love brand-consumer relationship". Consumers who have a greater feeling of emotional connection to a brand are more likely to have a feeling of being attached to the brand, falling in love with the brand and feeling close to the brand. In this way, it is yet again proving the importance of emotional branding for enhancing the relationship between brands and consumers.

Similarly, the research uncovered that brand love is indeed a strong positive predictor of brand loyalty. This implies that emotionally attached consumers are more likely to demonstrate repeat-buying behaviour and a greater commitment and brand loyalty to their desired brands. The findings showed that emotional affection is significant system that organizations could implement to increase their customers' loyalty and competitive advantage.

The results also showed that age is also significantly positively related to brand love and brand loyalty. It means that the emotional attachment of consumers, the buying loyalty of consumers differs with age, which produces different preferences of consumers in buying and different buying relationships from different stages of life. The moderation effect of age on

brand love and brand loyalty and its moderation effect between emotion and brand love, however, were not statistically significant. This implies that age is a factor that affects consumer behaviour independently, but does not have a significant effect on the emotional relationship pathways in the proposed model.

Furthermore, the results of the mediation in the serial mediation indicated that the relationship between self-expressive brand practices and brand loyalty was mediated by emotional engagement and brand love. This implies, the brand does not only have the capability to make the consumers loyal but the reinforcement of identity is also a psychological process which involves emotional response to the brand, brand love, and brand loyalty. The overall finding from the study is the fact that a self-expressive brand is a boon to build an emotional relationship with the brand and enhance long-term loyalty. Emotional engagement and brand love proved to be significant psychological factors in the roll-out of consumer loyalty, whereas age was found to be a significant direct demographic factor, but not one that moderated the situation. The findings show the growing importance of symbolic branding and emotional attachment and identity as part of the consumer interaction in today's competitive markets.

The study is a valuable addition to the knowledge on the impact of emotional and symbolic branding on the consumers' behaviour particularly in the context of current brand relationship management. The results offer both theoretical and practical understanding of how brands can develop more emotional connections and create a loyal clientele in the long run.

Theoretical Implications

The present study received several implications in theoretical aspect in the branding and consumer behavior and relationship marketing field. In the view of the study, the first attribute is that this was a study which aimed at empirically proving the significant impact of Self-Expressive Brand Practice on consumer emotions, which in turn would add to the current knowledge in the field of self-expressive branding. The findings will help to

build on existing theories about brands as functional consumption tools and as a symbolic tool to represent identities and to build psychological self-representations. The results support the idea that consumers today are actively looking for brands that match their values, aspirations and social identity, thereby supporting the strength of the symbolic consumption theory and the self-congruity approach to the study of consumers' behavior.

Second, it adds to the emotional branding literature by highlighting the important positive relationship between emotion and brand love. The find would support a theoretical notion that emotional experiences are the triggers for deeper brand-consumer relationships. The results of the present study confirm emotional attachment theory, suggesting that repeated positive emotional experiences result in affection, psychological closeness and long-term commitment. The findings thus contribute to the existing knowledge on the emotional pathways consumers follow from emotional involvement to higher levels of brand relationship outcomes.

Thirdly, the study adds to the literature of brand relationship by empirically validating the positive and significant impact of brand love on brand loyalty. Previous studies have many times indicated that emotional attachment leads to loyalty behaviour, however, the current results add further empirical proof of the role of affectionate consumer-brand relationship in maintaining long-term loyalty. This is yet another validation of the relationship marketing perspective which holds that loyalty should be understood as an emotional and psychological state as well as a behavioral state, related to satisfaction, and functional value.

Another contribution of the nature of the theoretical study is the study of the role of age as a moderating variable and a direct variable. The results indicated that age is an important factor in terms of brand love and brand loyalty, so the maturity of the demographics is still relevant to the consumer behaviour in relation to the brand. This is a continuation of the work carried out in the field of demography segmentation and confirms the importance of age as a key factor in the explanation of consumer behaviour in the realm

of feelings and loyalty. But these small moderating effects are an extremely important theoretical contribution too. The results indicate that age has an independent impact on consumer attitudes, but is not necessarily influencing psychological mechanism of emotional engagement and loyalty build. This helps in understanding the nuance in the study of the influence of demographics on branding studies.

Furthermore, the study has important contributions since it examines the serial mediation between Self-Expressive Brand Practice, emotion, brand love, and brand loyalty. The study indicates that symbolic branding per se is not enough to create consumer loyalty; it builds up in a multi-layered psychological process through emotional involvement and affectionate attachment to the brand. This will complement the mediation-based consumer behavior research and will give deeper insight into the inner psychological processes that lead to longer term behavior outcomes as a result of symbolic brand strategies. The results are beyond the scope of merely direct effect models and help to develop more comprehensive models of consumer relationship.

Moreover, the present study is also valuable for the branding literature in the emerging market's context. Previous research on emotional branding, love and loyalty to brands was carried out primarily in the context of the developed economy. The study provides a context-specific theoretical lens on these relationships in the context of a developing market, which further builds on branding theories to a broad range of consumer contexts. Consumer motives and feelings, and socio-economic factors, may vary between different cultures and different economic conditions and therefore this contribution is important for the expansion of consumer knowledge across cultures and economic conditions.

Overall, the study contributes to theory by bringing together four constructs – symbolic branding, emotional involvement, demographic influence, and relationship outcomes – in a general theoretical framework. The results offer further insights into the complicated relationship

among these three constructs – consumer identity, emotional experiences and psychological attachment – that impact consumer loyalty behaviors, and are of scholarly value for the field of branding and consumer relationship studies.

Practical Implications

Based on the findings of this study, the implications for practice and management are numerous and significant for organizations, brand managers, marketing professionals and businesses that seek to enhance the long-term character of their relationships with consumers as they play increasingly competitive roles in the marketplace. However, in today's consumer environment, functional quality might not be sufficient to create a competitive advantage. In today's world, consumers seek meaning, meaning, and meaning when selecting brands: emotional, symbolic, and personal. Thus, the results of this study provide practical advice on how to construct more emotional consumer-brand relationships and long-term loyalty in organizations.

The most important management implication of this study is related to the strategy of self-expressive branding. The results showed that Self-Expressive Brand Practice has a strong impact on the consumer's feelings, which means that branding has to be more than a functional and useful way to communicate. Consumers are more interested in linking their identity, values, personality and their lifestyle to a brand. Consequently, marketing managers must focus on developing brand positioning strategies that bring to the fore symbolic messages, brand identity relevance and emotional connection. Brands that can connect to consumers' own identity will more likely elicit a greater emotional response and psychological connection.

Also, the results suggest that emotional involvement should be a goal of marketing rather than a second priority. With emotion and brand love so closely connected, it is important that business invests in creating an emotionally resonant consumer experience through storytelling, experiential marketing, personalization and emotionally effective communication. The branding programs that

trigger emotion, excitement, comfort, trust, belonging or inspiration can have a significant impact on improving the emotional connections consumers feel toward brands. In particular, in markets where emotional differentiation has grown more important for consumer decisions.

Another practical implication is related to customer loyalty management. The study revealed that brand love represents one important criterion that influences brand loyalty, hence it is not a single-off event that occurs once a company has gained a customer's satisfaction. Besides competitiveness and product performance, emotional attachment and psychological relationship strength are becoming a key driving force for long-term loyalty. Businesses must be more creative in the way they relate with their customers and develop campaigns which generate feelings, trust, emotional engagement and genuine moments with their brand, not just short sales.

The results for age are also of management value. Given that age proved to be a major determinant in both brand love and brand loyalty, there is a possibility of organisations looking at demographic segmentation when creating their customer engagement strategies. Consumer response to initiatives of relationship building, appeals to feelings and a branding message can vary depending on life stage. For younger consumers they may be sensitive to a symbolic brand, identity-based, aspirational and socially expressing brands; for older consumers they may prefer a brand with a longer-term history of trust, consistency, familiarity and relationality. So segmentation by age may be useful to the effectiveness of brand communications and to customer retention.

The small age differences in the modulating factors suggest that emotional relationships have a fairly stable pathway within the age groups. This implies that communication style and targeting may vary between different age groups, but that there might be fairly consistent communication mechanisms in play regarding emotional brand love and brand loyalty formation. For the managers, this appears to be a great opportunity as they can utilize emotional branding initiatives with a wider group of consumers without the

requirement to build particular emotional relationship structures for various generations.

The findings of the serial mediation are additional and important implications for strategy as well. The study suggests that symbolic brand positioning does not directly affect the consumer's loyalty, but rather a psychological process of engagement and brand love. It is important to note that there is no one-to-one relationship between self expression or symbolic identity alignment and loyalty. Instead, it's up to marketers to create experiences for consumers that are emotionally fulfilling and that create a loving relationship between the consumer and the brand that will drive increased levels of loyalty. This shows the need for integration of symbolic positioning and emotional relationship building approaches for a strong branding strategy.

The results highlight that a business must invest in brand relationship management in a more long-term basis if they are operating in a very competitive market where consumers are the target. Consumer emotional relationships can result in higher consumer retention, repeat purchase and consumer loyalty in terms of brand switching and other consumer recommendations. Creating emotional attachment and brand love can then help organizations to build more meaningful and lasting customer loyalty and a competitive success in the long-term.

The results of this study will have strong implications in practice: (1) the relevance of identity in successful brand strategies; (2) the importance of emotions in engagement; (3) the role of relationship building between consumer and brand; and (4) the consumer's demographic profile. In competitive markets, these elements can be strategically integrated into a company's branding and customer relationship management, making them more likely to foster consumers' emotional connections with the brand and establish lasting loyalty.

There are some limitations to the Study

Like all empirical research, the present study is subject to the limitations which should be brought to the attention of the reader when reading the results. It is important to know these drawbacks as

they allow transparency of the scope and boundaries of the research and guide future research in the same area.

One of the main limitations was the geographical area studied. The research was conducted in a specific market environment and specific respondents were asked in a limited market environment. Consumer behaviour and the emotional attachment and relationship between brands and consumers can be very distinct at the cultural, regional and economic level. Therefore, the findings of this study would have limited applicability in different international contexts, or in other markets of significantly varying characteristics. The second limitation has to do with the type of cross-sectional research design employed. The study was conducted at a single cross section, as a result of which it is not possible to capture the evolution of consumers' attitudes, brand love and loyalty behavior over time. Consumer-brand relationships are not a fixed, snapshot situation but can evolve over time as a result of many interactions with the brand, market experiences, changes in preferences, and brand performance. A longitudinal design provided more insight into the development and dynamics of emotional attachment and loyalty links.

The study also relied on self-reported data – responses to questions asked on a questionnaire can also suffer from response bias. Respondents provided their answers based on their perception and subjective assessment and this may have resulted in some answers being socially desirable, answers which could not be recalled, answers which were interpreted differently by the respondent or differences in interpretation. As such, the findings are not necessarily an actual picture of consumer results, but merely consumer perception of consumer results.

One of the restrictions is the approach of sampling and sample composition. This study applied the PLS-SEM method and the sample size is sufficient for this method, yet this sample was divided in two groups, younger and relatively educated consumers. The results may not be representative of other groups of consumers, particularly older adults or consumers who are less used to digital

consumption. There may be varied emotional consumers' behaviours and loyalty predispositions across more varied consumer segments.

Furthermore, there were only few constructs in the study: Self-Expressive Brand Practice, emotion, brand love, brand loyalty, and age. Many other factors were shown to have an impact on consumer behaviour which for the purposes of the present study and the conceptual framework were not considered relevant. Other factors such as customer satisfaction, trust, brand image, consumer personality, perceived value, social influence and cultural orientation also can have a strong influence on emotional branding result and loyalty action.

However, another limitation is that only age differences are controlled for in the study. Several other moderating factors such as gender, income, lifestyle orientation, product involvement, and even brand frequency of use can be effective in explaining the dynamics of the consumer-brand relationship. If more of the moderation factors could be added, it might be able to provide a better overall picture of the differences in relationships. Moreover, the study employed quantitative research method using PLS-SEM which was suitable for testing the structured relationship between constructs. However, quantitative techniques might not fully explain the deeper emotional meaning, motivations and interpretations of brand relationships. An in-depth understanding of the psychological and experiential nature of emotional consumer-brand attachment might be gained by using a qualitative or mixed-method approach. Lastly, the study did not focus on a particular industry or product category but on a generic branding situation. There is a huge variation in emotions and loyalty, depending on product category and category type, such as fashion, technology, cosmetics, or automobiles and luxury goods. So the conclusions should not be regarded as conclusions for the industry but rather as a part of the consumer branding context.

Despite these limitations, the research provides both academic and practical implications with regard to understanding the concept of emotional branding, symbolic consumer behavior, and brand

relationship development. The limits do not take away any significance of the study, they rather set out the scope and limits of the study and provide the field for more study.

Future Research Directions

The findings from the present study can give valuable insights into the relationships between Self-Expressive Brand Practice, emotion, brand love, brand loyalty and age, but there are still a number of opportunities for future academic research in this field. The present study has its own constraints and scope that can be expanded by future researchers in some beneficial ways to augment the existing knowledge on consumer-brand relationships.

First, future studies can extend the geographic scale of research to explore these relationships at other cities, regions, or countries. Social norms, economic factors, cultural values and maturity of the marketplace can also have an impact on consumer behaviour, and this may differ markedly between locations. Comparative studies in other geographical settings would give more insight into the issue of whether emotional branding and symbolic consumer behaviour is similar in various consumer settings.

Second, future researchers can use longitudinal research designs to better understand the development of the emotional consumer-brand relationships over time. This study adopted the cross sectional design approach that is used to collect consumers' perceptions at one particular time. Emotional attachment, brand love and brand loyalty, however, are dynamic phenomena that can strengthen, weaken, and even be fostered, developed, and created as a result of repeated consumer-brand interactions. Longitudinal studies would give a more comprehensive understanding of the emotional brand relationships at various stages of consumer experience.

Third, the study of future research could expand beyond the psychological and behavior variables to use more comprehensive conceptual frameworks. Future studies might incorporate factors like customer satisfaction, brand trust, perceived value, consumer involvement, brand image, customer

engagement, or social influence, in addition to the variables presented in the present study; Self-Expressive Brand Practice, emotion, brand love, brand loyalty, and age. The use of more constructs may give more details about the mechanisms affecting loyalty behavior.

Another direction for future research is to look at other moderating variables. Further research could explore the influences of gender, income, level of education, lifestyle orientation, personality traits, digital engagement or product involvement as they may moderate the results of the present study. These variables might provide more insight into the disparity between consumers' emotional consumer-brand relationship behaviors between segments.

The conceptual framework proposed may also be explored in specific industries or product categories in future. The present study examined consumer-brand relationships in a general branding framework, while bonding and loyalty between consumers and brands might vary according to product categories like fashion, cosmetics, technical devices, luxury goods, motorized vehicles, hospitality, or fast-moving consumer goods. Industry specific studies would enable a deeper understanding of the processes of the emotional branding in specific industries.

Further, in the future, qualitative or mixed methods research methods can be used to supplement quantitative results. Quantitative methods can provide useful statistical understanding of structured relationships; however, qualitative methods can help uncover consumers' emotional experiences, meanings, motives for expressing identity and psychological attachment toward a brand. The synergic use of both might offer more holistic insights into emotional branding phenomena.

Research is another promising avenue that could focus on the role of digital and social media branding environments. Today, consumers engage with brands digitally, via influencers, through social communities and experiential interaction online. The study can be extended to investigate how digital brand interaction, social media engagement or virtual brand communities affect emotional attachment, brand love and loyalty

behavior in more and more technologically driven consumer markets in the future.

The need for research comparing different demographic groups is also crucial. The significant direct effects of age and lack of evidence of moderation effects in the present study warrants further investigation by future researchers to determine if other demographic or psychographic groups exhibit different emotional patterns of relationships. Comparative analysis between the younger market segment and the older, between man and woman, or between the different cultural consumer segments may yield more complex understanding of the dynamics of consumer-brand relations.

Finally, future researchers can explore further mediation pathways that include other psychological pathways. The emotion and brand love mediation examined in the present study are not the only factors that can mediate the relationship between self-expressive branding and consumer loyalty outcomes; other mediators such as trust, satisfaction, emotional attachment, customer engagement or perceived authenticity can have meaningful roles in explaining the relationship between self-expressive branding and consumer loyalty outcomes. Looking ahead, the results presented here have tremendous potential for further expansion in their contexts, depth of conceptual models, methods, and diversity of consumer segments. This ongoing research will help to enhance academic knowledge about the process of emotional branding, symbolic consumption, and the development of consumer-brand relationships over time.

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