

Mediatory Role of Brand Love in the Relationship between Brand Experiences and Brand Loyalty (Special Reference to FMCG Sector in Sri Lanka)

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Abstract- Retail brands pay significant attention to establish a powerful brand to distinguish in the fierce industry of today. To establish a dominant brand, current marketers are focused on providing unique and memorable brand experiences which will attach the customer to an emotional relationship that leads to brand love. Experience marketing and brand love are novel concepts in marketing and this study explores these concepts by developing a research model shaped by the brand resonance model and customer brand relationship theory to investigate how brand love serves as a mediator in the brand experience and brand loyalty relationship. The study was developed on quantitative approach. Sample consisted of 300 consumers and both multi-stage stratified sampling and systematic random sampling were used as sampling techniques. Data was collected through questionnaires and analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equations Modeling. The results of the study demonstrate a complementary partial mediation of brand love. The study concludes that brand love play a significant role in establishing a powerful beneficial connection between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Index Terms- Brand love, Brand experience, Attitudinal loyalty, Behavioral loyalty, Customer brand relationships

I. STATEMENT OF INTENDED CONTRIBUTION

This research is based on the brand resonance model and customer brand relationship theory to analyze the mediatory effect of brand love on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. The studies up to date provide limited understanding of brand love as an important mediator in the above relationship. In today's competitive world, emotions and attitudes of the customers play an important role in shaping the customers buying behaviors. Hence brands need to consider adding an emotional element to the branding strategy of the company. Creating an emotional brand is difficult for many companies as creating a strong relationship that turns into an emotional engagement with the customers is not very easy and different factors needed to be considered in that effect. The main research question addressed in this research is whether brand love act as a good mediator in establishing a meaningful relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. It is evident in the existing literature that the brand experiences provided to the customers

leads to strong emotional attachment towards the brand and hence this study analyses how those emotions can lead to customer loyalty through brand experiences. Understanding the significance of emotional relationships are will add value to the existing literature on relationship marketing as this research two important antecedent and consequence of relationship marketing by exploring the variable brand love. The findings of this study will mainly benefit the stakeholders in the FMCG industry to drive marketing strategies in today's competitive marketing landscape. The role of emotional marketing and appealing to the consumer's five senses will be explored in depth in this study and those finding will benefit the FMCG companies in establishing long term profitable consumer relationships.

II. INTRODUCTION

Competition today is as fierce as ever and international as well as local marketers strive for earning a market share in the changing retail environment. Therefore many companies are now focused to move an extra mile in fulfilling consumer needs as consumers demand greater involvement in value creation. Relationship marketing is a way markers can connect with customers that will create mutually beneficial relationships that leads to customer value.

Customer brand relationship is based on the premise that brands can be humanized in the consumer's mind. When analyzing customer brand relationships, brand love is identified as a newest contributor (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). The most intense emotion one might experience for a brand is the feeling of love for a brand, much like in an interpersonal relationship. In the new era of experience marketing many scholars argue that, brand loyalty is developed when a brand provokes a favorable experience (Brakus, Schmitt, & Zarantonello, 2009). One of the major concerns of branding in today's marketing environment is building emotional brand attachment with the customers. The relationship between beloved brands and their consumers are very important in FMCG sector because consumers will interact with the FMCG brands on a regular basis rather than other product categories.

Even though brand experience and brand loyalty are recognized in the literature as significant constructs, few studies have attempted to establish a relationship between these two

constructs by using emotional and attachment constructs such as brand love. Brand love is a complex concept that incorporates into numerous comprehensions, feelings, and behaviors. Hence studying customer brand relationships is complex, dynamic and many unaddressed issues remains in the literature ([Fournier, 2014](#)). Even as brand love has become a common marketing discipline, there is still no widely accepted definition. ([Batra et al., 2012](#); [Huber, Meyer, & Schmid, 2015](#)). Further according to [Sarkar \(2014\)](#), in particular in the context of the evolving Asian market, little exploration has been performed to comprehend brand love.

The role of brand experience and brand loyalty in the relationship with brand love is rarely acknowledged by the prior studies. Therefore there is a theoretical and knowledge gap about the formation process of brand loyalty through brand experiences and mostly about how to integrate these two concepts with brand love. This study thus full fills these theoretical, knowledge and empirical gaps, and demonstrates the important mediatory role of brand love, on the connection between brand experience and brand loyalty in the FMCG sector.

We address following research questions in our study:

- Does brand love mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty in the customer brand relationships?
- What is the relationship between brand experience and brand love and which brand experience dimensions influence the most for the brand love to be strong?
- What is the impact of brand love on attitudinal and behavioral brand loyalty and which brand loyalty dimension is impacted the most as a result of customers love towards the brand?

This study makes following contributions: First, our study outlines several managerially controllable factors that will help to comprehend the connection between customers and their beloved brands. Understanding this relationship is specifically important in FMCG sector because consumers will interact with the FMCG brands on a regular basis rather than other product categories. The impact of brand experience dimensions; sensory, affective, and intellectual experience on brand love will be explored from this study. In the competitive market place marketers can utilize these results to foster efficient marketing strategies to create better brand experiences that will drive brand love toward their brands. By outlining the key role of brand love we provide a basis for management to maintain and improve their brand relationships with the customers.

Second, the study attempt to provide a theoretical framework to use brand love as a mediator to understand the connection between brand experience and brand loyalty. Even though these concepts are studied separately in the literature, only few attempts were made to establish a meaningful relationship between these constructs. Thus this research will be making a significant contribution to the branding literature by clarifying these concepts further and cross cultural validation of previous research findings by taking a sample of Sri Lankan customers.

Finally, a lack of appreciation of brand love on the Asian market is reported by [Sarkar \(2014\)](#). Therefore the results of this study will benefit the international companies and also the

domestic companies operating in Sri Lanka to have a better understanding about the Sri Lankan consumers brand love.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Resonance Model

Brand resonance is a concept which characterizes brand relationships and refers to the customer brand relationships, or in particular, the degree to which a person think that he or she is resonating or interacting with a brand ([K. L. Keller, 2001](#)). Brand resonance model proposed by [K. L. Keller \(2001\)](#), describes how to build strong, active customer loyalty relationships. The model of brand resonance indicates that brand resonance, including brand loyalty, can eventually be accomplished through two paths, i.e. rational and emotional ([K. L. Keller, Parameswaran, & Jacob, 2011](#)). In the current research, the researcher considers the emotional route, and considers brand love to be an important means of achieving brand resonance, i.e., brand loyalty. Based on this theoretical model, present study suggests that brand resonance is created, beginning with brand salience, following the emotional route. That is, brand loyalty (behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty) is developed through brand salience (i.e. brand experience) and this relationship is mediated by the mediator (brand love)([Huang, 2017](#)).

Customer Brand Relationships

Studies show that customers can develop a sense of affection for the brands during the interactions with brands ([Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008](#); [Batra et al., 2012](#)). According to [Aggarwal \(2004\)](#), sometimes individuals form a very close relationship with brands, and that can grow into a passion that is often only affiliated with close interpersonal relationships. The theory of customer brand relationship suggests that a brand acts as a tool to link customers and businesses ([Chang & Chieng, 2006](#); [Fournier, 1998](#)). In order to establish a consumer brand connection, a company must be prepared to offer its customers a distinctive brand experience generated in the customer's mind. ([Klaus & Maklan, 2007](#)). The three concepts of brand love, brand experience and brand loyalty all comes under the customer brand relationship paradigm, where the focus is to develop sustainable relationships with customers to create value for both parties engage in the relationship.

Brand Love

The notion of brand love was first empirically studied and initiated to the literature of marketing by [Ahuvia \(1993\)](#). He evaluated the individuals who experience love on non-human objects like products and events. However, [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#) was the first scholar to directly integrate the brand love term by measuring the customers' satisfaction through brand love. They have described brand love as the extent of a satisfied customer's enthusiasm and emotional attachment to a specific trade name. Brand love is not merely a fondness or like; it's the brand a customer chooses due to a specific reason. ([Maxian, Bradley, Wise, & Toulouse, 2013](#)). It is evident that brand love is more intense than simple liking, and occurs as a result of a strong emotional relationship([Ahuvia, 2005](#)). [Batra et al. \(2012\)](#), defined the components of brand love in a seminal article of brand love as: self-brand integration, attitude valence and attitude strength,

positive emotional connection, anticipated separation distress, long-term relationship, passion-driven behavior.

Research examining antecedents of brand love is limited in the literature. Several studies have identified, hedonic brand or a self-expressive brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), brand quality (Batra et al., 2012), brand trust and brand identification (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010), sincerity and excitement (P. Roy, Khandeparkar, & Motiani, 2016), social identity (Vernuccio, Pagani, Barbarossa, & Pastore, 2015), perceived value, brand uniqueness and prestige (Bairrada, Coelho, & Coelho, 2018) will contribute directly to brand love. Past researchers offer few consequences of brand love. Among them one important consequence is identified as the brand loyalty (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) or active involvement in a brand society (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

Brand Experience

Brand experience is a company designed strategic marketing tool, which is perceived by consumers, through brand-related stimuli which induces customer emotions. In today's world customers are looking for products that will give them distinctive and meaningful experiences (Ha & Perks, 2005). Brakus et al. (2009), defined brand experience as the sensations, emotions, mental states and psychological reactions evoked by brand-related stimuli that are created through the design, identity, packaging, and communications of a brand. From another view point, Alloza (2008) defined brand experience as the perceived engagement of the customer with the brand by means of the brand image displayed in promotions, personal contact or brand performance. Furthermore customers can experience a product directly or indirectly via brand images and events through physical contact (Alloza, 2008; Cliffe & Motion, 2005).

The literature identifies four primary dimensions of brand experience: sensory experiences, affective experiences, intellectual experiences and behavioral experiences (Brakus et al., 2009). Sensory experiences are created through brand-related stimulations such as: seeing, smelling, hearing, and tasting. Customers' experiences of emotions and moods to brand-related stimuli are the affective experiences. Intellectual experiences are the symmetric, analytical, divergent and imaginative way of

thinking evoked through brand stimulation (Schmitt, 1999). Finally, the behavioral experience includes the actions and motions (Schmitt, 1999) and physical behaviors or pragmatic reactions (Gentile, Spiller, & Noci, 2007).

Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is frequently referred to as the preference of customers to constantly purchase a specific brand. Brand Loyalty is connected to the desire and connection of the customer to the brand. Oliver (1999), defines brand loyalty as a strong commitment to consistently re-buy or re-patronize a preferred product / service in the future, resulting in repeated purchases. Further, Aaker and Equity (1991) defines brand loyalty as the measurement of customers attachment towards a brand. However according to Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) brand loyalty is the biased behavioral reactions for one or more alternative brands expressed over time by customers.

According to research on the dimensions of brand loyalty, two kinds of loyalty are identified as: behavioral and attitudinal loyalty. Behavioral brand loyalty is the behavioral or intensive repurchase by customers for a particular brand (Russell-Bennett, McColl-Kennedy, & Coote, 2007). Attitudinal brand loyalty is the degree of brand commitment related to some distinctive value. It involves measures of brand commitment and trust. Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), believed the attitudinal and behavioral loyalty connection to be inter-related, not causal. The attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of loyalty are therefore regarded to be equally critical, and better predictability can be achieved if a synthetic evaluation of attitudinal loyalty and behavioral loyalty is conducted (Bowen & Chen, 2001).

Research model and hypotheses development

As per the literature review, this study is influenced by the brand resonance model and customer brand relationship theory, and attempts to identify the mediating role of brand love on brand experience and brand loyalty. Accordingly the conceptual framework of the research and the hypothesis was developed as shown in Figure 1.

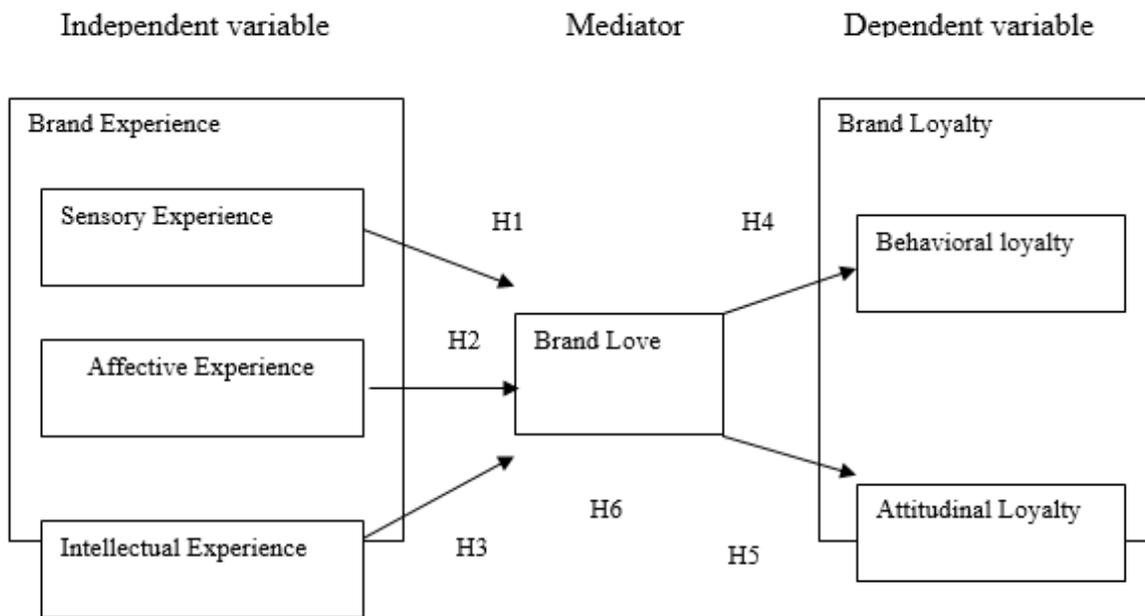


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Researcher

The Relationship between brand experience and brand love

Researchers' have identified brand love as a direct result of brand experience. Furthermore, the dimensions of brand experience (senses, emotions, behavior and intellectuals) are evaluated as linking brand experience with brand love (Huang, 2017). Japutra, Ekinici, and Simkin (2014) and Sarkar (2011) also found that brand experience affects brand love directly. Further analyzing the effect of the brand experience dimensions on brand love, Ferreira, Rodrigues, and Rodrigues (2017) has identified that sensory, affective and intellectual experiences leads to brand love, while behavioral experience has no influence. Accordingly following hypotheses were developed.

H1: Sensory experience has positive impact on brand love.

H2: Affective experience has positive impact on brand love.

H3: Intellectual experience has positive impact on brand love

The Relationship between brand loyalty and brand love

Dick and Basu (1994), suggested that under circumstances of more favorable emotional mood or effect, brand loyalty should be higher. Langner, Schmidt, and Fischer (2015), state that brand love results in powerful emotional consequences along with diverse experiences, which in turn generate effects such as brand loyalty. According to the researchers, satisfied consumers with a brand love tend to build stronger loyalty compared to the brand loyalty without brand love (S. K. Roy, Eshghi, & Sarkar, 2013). The literature reveals that brand love impacts brand loyalty positively (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Huang, 2017).

H4: Brand love has positive impact on behavioral brand loyalty.

H5: Brand love has positive impact on attitudinal loyalty.

The mediating effects of brand love

Brand love is a principle arising in the context of this experiential consumption. Literature facilitates the selection of brand love as a mediator to loyalty. Huang (2017), who has studied the mobile phone customers' brand love in the Taiwan context has confirmed brand love as a strong mediator in the brand experiences and brand loyalty relationships. As a result of the high-order structure that include complex feelings, brand love is appropriate as the mediator in this study (Batra et al., 2012).

H6: Brand love has mediating effects on the relationships between brand experience and brand loyalty.

IV. METHODOLOGY

Data collection

Consumers of the fast moving consumer goods in Sri Lanka were taken as the population of this study. The study employs a total of 300 respondents out of the targeted population. The researcher adopted multi-stage stratified sampling and the systematic random sampling techniques to derive the sample out of the population. According to the [Department of Cesus and Statistics \(2016\)](#) Household Income and Expenditure Survey in Sri Lanka, Western Province shows more percentage of spending on FMCG compared to other provinces. Therefore, at the first stage the Western Province is chosen among other provinces. At the second stage, the three districts of the Western Province; Colombo, Gampaha and Kaluthara, were identified with the respective average monthly household expenditure. At the third stage the sample size of 300 is divided proportionately to the monthly average household expenditure for the three districts (117-colombo, 93-gampaha, and 90-kaluthara). At the last stage the sample of respondents from the three districts are selected on the systematic sampling method, making a systematic selection of customers, selecting the first customer at a group of ten customers leaving the store, to answer the questionnaire. The respondents are asked to participate for the survey at three main supermarkets; Cargills Food City, Keells Super and Arpico, which are having largest concentration of outlets in the western province ([Fitch Ratings, 2017](#)). To collect the information from participants, a self-administered written questionnaire was used.

Measurement scale

All items are taken from existing measurement scales that were found in literature and measured with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree". The Brand experience scale, ([Brakus et al., 2009](#)), Brand love scale ([Batra et al., 2012](#)), Brand loyalty scale ([Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001](#); [Lau & Lee, 1999](#)) were adapted to the study from previous studies.

A pilot test was performed to verify the questionnaire's validity and reliability. The original brand love and brand experience scale was developed and tested in a foreign context which was culturally as well as demographically different from the current research context and further brand loyalty scale was created by merging two existing scales therefore checking the questionnaire's reliability and validity was mandatory. After completing the pilot survey the questionnaire was evaluated for reliability test, time required for a one respondent, ambiguous questions, words which need further explanations. Based on the reliability statistics the required eliminations and amendments were made for further enrichment of the data collection tool prior to next stage of survey.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to display and analyze the respondents' demographic profile. The sample contains 300 respondents and consists of 61.3 percent of females and 38.7 percent of males. The sample age breakdown shows that the vast majority of participants are within the age group 31-40 (35 percent), another 25.3 percent of respondents within the age group ranging from 41-50, and 20 percent from the age group of 21-30. The data collected show that nearly 61.7 percent of participants

hold a bachelor degree, 16 percent of them hold a masters degree or higher and another 16 percent are students. In terms of employment, 52 percent of respondents are private employees, 21.3 percent are self employed and 15.7 percent are public employees. 42 percent of their income ranges from Rs.60 000-Rs.79 999, and also considerable percentages of income falls under income categories ranging from Rs.40 000-Rs.59 999 (25.7 percent) and above Rs.80 000 (22 percent).

The reliability and validity of the information collection was verified using SPSS 20.0 before performing the partial least squares (PLS) analysis. All the items from the brand experience scale and the brand loyalty scale were confirmed to have high reliability exceeding the threshold, inter-item correlation above 0.4, and the scales' Cronbach's α above 0.7. While two items were removed from the brand love scale were due to the low reliability (this brand reflects the "real me", this brand is fun). Exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation was conducted on the items which were confirmed from the reliability analysis. Two items from the brand love scale (This brand reflects the 'real me', this brand is fun) were removed from the scale due to poor factor loading (<0.5). The items in the brand love scale were loaded in to a single factor representing the overall brand love as suggested by [Bagozzi, Batra, and Ahuvia \(2017\)](#). All items in the brand experience and brand loyalty scales showed higher factor loading which was above the threshold. (>0.5), and they loaded respectively for the dimensions as suggested in the literature.

According to [Chin \(2010\)](#) and [Joe F Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt \(2011\)](#) the thumb of rule for PLS path modeling is 1 to 10 times of arrows pointed to a variable in the model. The research model consists of five arrows in which the rule demands only a sample of 50 cases where the sample size is well above the minimum requirement. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value was (KMO=0.942), confirming sampling adequacy for the test. The Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($X^2 = 6748.557$, $p < 0.001$) conforming item correlation standards required for the analysis.

V. RESULTS

Measurement model

As shown in the Table 1 below higher composite reliability was showed in the constructs in the model ranging from 0.8862 to 0.9316 which is above the threshold 0.7 ([Joseph F Hair, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2013](#)). Out of the 30 items which was confirmed from the exploratory factor analysis, three items from brand experience scale, one item from brand love scale and one item from brand loyalty scale were removed from the confirmatory factor analysis due to the poor loading, and considering the impact of removal of the items on the composite reliability and the convergent validity as suggested by the scholars. All AVE values of the measurement model (0.5763 to 0.8719) as shown in the Table 1, were above the standard requirement for robust PLS model loadings.

The square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than the largest correlation of the construct with any other construct in the model, as per the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The findings showed that each construct's square root of AVE is considerably greater than the squared correlations between the other constructs as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Measurement Model Estimation

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE	AE	ALY	BLO	BLY	IE	SE
AE	0.888	0.932	0.872	0.934	0	0	0	0	0
ALY	0.890	0.924	0.710	0.496	0.842	0	0	0	0
BLO	0.920	0.931	0.576	0.589	0.734	0.759	0	0	0
BLY	0.861	0.890	0.669	0.432	0.689	0.726	0.818	0	0
IE	0.840	0.902	0.821	0.611	0.469	0.602	0.349	0.906	0
SE	0.849	0.886	0.796	0.567	0.554	0.626	0.572	0.483	0.892

Note: AVE= Average Variance Extracted, BE= Brand Experience, BLO= Brand Love, BLY=Brand Loyalty, Diagonal items: \sqrt{AVE} .

Evaluation of structural model and hypothesis testing

The researcher needs to examine the structural model for collinearity before progressing into the analysis. The collinearity of the independent variables were assessed by using IBM SPSS Statistics 21, and the results indicated that the three independent variables; sensory experience, affective experience, and intellectual experience are free from collinearity issues. The Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), of the predictor variables was below 5.0, and tolerance levels were above 0.2 for all the variables. The standard error that is obtained through bootstrapping determines whether a coefficient is significant or not. Therefore, the PLS iterative bootstrapping procedure was conducted by generating 5000 sub samples with 300 cases. The below Table 2 exhibits outcomes of the PLS bootstrapping procedure in evaluating proposed structural model relationships. The outcomes of the bootstrapping procedure suggested that all path coefficients are significant at 0.01 levels. Accordingly, all the proposed hypotheses were confirmed in the research.

Main effects

The hypothesis 1 (H1) proposed a positive relationship between sensory experience and brand love. H1 was supported with a significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.374, t = 7.546, p < 0.01$)

indicating a positive relationship. Similarly, the hypothesis 2 (H2) suggested a positive relationship between affective experience and brand love, was supported with significant path coefficients ($\beta = 0.179, t = 3.194, p < 0.01$). The third hypothesis (H3) proposed was the positive relationship between the intellectual experience on brand love, this hypothesis was supported with significant path coefficients ($\beta = 0.311, t = 6.380, p < 0.01$). The sensory experience exerts its greatest impact among the other three dimensions of brand experience. This finding is consistent with the literature, where [Huang \(2017\)](#) and [Ferreira et al. \(2017\)](#) found that, among other dimensions, the sensory experience is the main driver of brand love.

The proposed connection between brand love and brand loyalty was presented by the hypothesis 4 and hypothesis 5. The positive relationship between brand love and behavioral loyalty (H4) was significant ($\beta = 0.726, t = 24.559, p < 0.01$) indicating a robust effect. Further the positive relationship between brand love and attitudinal loyalty was supported with significant path coefficients ($\beta = 0.734, t = 26.225, p < 0.01$). The Table 2 below illustrates the standardized path coefficients (predictive relevance) and relevant t-statistic of relationships obtained through PLS bootstrapping performance.

Table 2: Results of Proposed Model (using PLS-SEM)

Hypothesis	Variables	Path Coefficients	t-statistics	Status
H1	Sensory Experience- Brand Love (+)	0.374	7.546***	Supported
H2	Affective Experience – Brand Love (+)	0.179	3.194***	Supported
H3	Intellectual Experience – Brand love (+)	0.311	6.380***	Supported
H4	Brand Love- Behavioral Loyalty (+)	0.726	24.559***	Supported
H5	Brand Love- Attitudinal Loyalty (+)	0.734	26.225***	Supported

Note: The significance levels are determined through bootstrapping analysis (Hair et al, 2013) *** = Significant at $p < 0.01$ level

The structural equation model illustrated by the Figure 2 was assessed by coefficient of determination (R2) of endogenous latent variables. The research model explains 52 percent of variance of brand love (BLO), 52 percent of variance of behavioral loyalty

(BLY) and 53 percent of attitudinal loyalty (ALY) as illustrated in the following figure. The brand experience, in total explains approximately 52.26 percent of brand love, and brand love

approximately explains 52.7 percent of behavioral loyalty and 53.8 percent of attitudinal loyalty.

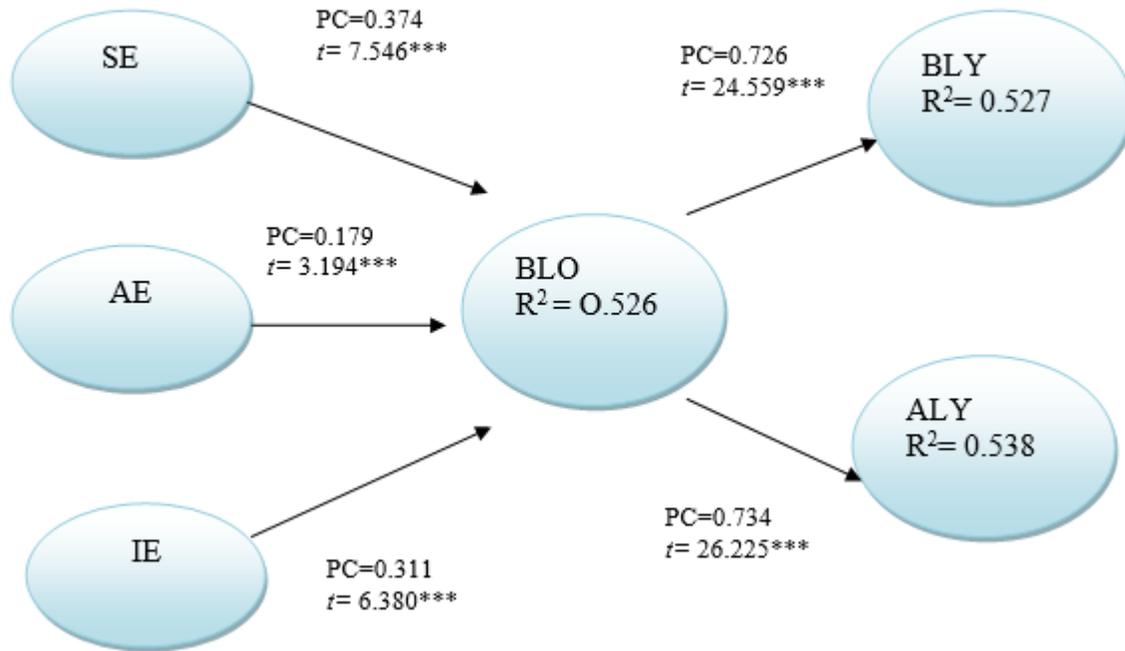


Figure 2: Estimated Structural Equation Model

Note: PC= Path Coefficient or Predictive Relevance, t= t-statistic, *** = Significant at p<0.01 level, R2= Coefficient of Determination, SE=Sensory Experience, AE=Affective Experience, IE= Intellectual Experience, BLO= Brand Love, BLY=Behavioral Loyalty, ALY=Attitudinal Loyalty.

Researchers should also examine the Q2 value of Stone-Geisser in relation to assessing the magnitude of the R2 values as a criterion of predictive accuracy. The Q2 value is obtained by using the blindfolding procedure for an omission distance of 7(D=7). As per the threshold points, all the Q2 values higher than zero ensured path models' predictive relevance for respective endogenous constructs. Model's predictive relevance (Q2) for reflective endogenous variables namely brand love (Q2=0.3029), behavioral loyalty (Q2= 0.3503) and attitudinal loyalty (Q2= 0.3797) were satisfactory indicating the path model's predictive relevance for the three constructs.

Mediator analysis

The method suggested by [Preacher and Hayes \(2008\)](#) and [Shrout and Bolger \(2002\)](#) was followed when analyzing the mediating effect in PLS.

The bootstrap procedure in the PLS software (SmartPLS version 2) provide bootstrap results only for the direct effects. However, to calculate the indirect effects and for a more detailed analysis of mediation, bootstrapping results for all the 5000 sub samples were calculated with the help of Microsoft Excel. The standard deviation, which is equal to the standard error in bootstrapping ([Chernick, González-Manteiga, Crujeiras, &](#)

[Barrios, 2011](#)) was computed for the results of the multiplication of the path values from brand experiences to brand love, and brand love to brand loyalty using the Microsoft Excel.

Using the calculated standard error, a pseudo t-test is calculated to test whether the indirect effect is statistically significant. The original value divided by the bootstrapping standard error provides the empirical t value of for the indirect effect. The Table 3 provides results of the analysis of the indirect effect. Accordingly brand love is identified as a compensatory partial mediation in brand experience and brand loyalty relationships.

Table 3: Mediation analysis

Path	T-Statistics (Indirect effects)	T-Statistics (Direct effects)	Type of Mediation
SE→BLO→BLY	6.833***	7.985***	Complementary Partial Mediation
SE→BLO→ALY	7.058***	6.002***	Complementary Partial Mediation
AE→BLO→BLY	3.150***	.883*	Complementary Partial Mediation

AE→BLO→ALY	3.170***	2.815***	Complementary Partial Mediation
IE→BLO→BLY	6.438***	0.4961	Full Mediation
IE→BLO→ALY	6.259***	6.002***	Complementary Partial Mediation

Note: T= t-statistic, ***, * = Significant at p<0.01 level, Significant at p<0.10 level respectively, SE=Sensory Experience, AE=Affective Experience, IE= Intellectual Experience, BLO= Brand Love, BLY=Behavioral Loyalty, ALY=Attitudinal Loyalty.

VI. DISCUSSION

As per the results, all three dimensions of brand experience have a positive influence brand love and sensory experience has the most impact. This finding is compatible with the literature. [Ferreira et al. \(2017\)](#) and [Huang \(2017\)](#) have also evident that the sensory experience is a main driver of brand love. Prior literature offers evidence that customers make purchasing choices based on the brand's perception which is created as a set of stimulations from the sensory receptors. Sensory brand experience appeals to these sensory receptors and seduces the consumer by using his / her senses to manipulate emotions towards the brand, which will evolve into brand love.

The second hypothesis of the research proposed a positive impact of affective experience on brand love. Thus, affective experience includes emotions that are experienced by a consumer upon using products of a particular brand. These emotions help in developing a deep, long-lasting, cherished emotional connection to the brand that goes beyond material satisfaction ([Gobe, 2001](#)). In correspondent with the findings of [Ferreira et al. \(2017\)](#), the study proposed a positive impact of intellectual experience on the brand love. The empirical finding endorsed this hypothesis strongly ($\beta = 0.311$, $t = 6.380$, $p < 0.01$).

As hypothesized, the brand love influenced positively to induce behavioral loyalty. And it is a significant driving force to provide loyal purchase behavior. Brand love, identified as a romantic short-term emotion, directly drives short-term behavioral loyalty, such as purchasing ([Huang, 2017](#)). Further, The significant path coefficient ($\beta = 0.734$, $t = 26.225$, $p < 0.01$) supported the hypothesized relationship of the positive impact of brand love on attitudinal loyalty.

Through the results of the mediator analysis of PLS SEM, the hypothesized mediatory effect was verified indicating that brand love has complementary partial mediation, on the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty. These outcomes are parallel with [Huang \(2017\)](#)'s findings, who observed the mediatory role of brand love in the mobile phone industry.

It can be stated as a summary of the results of this study that brand love acts as a partial mediator in the relationship among brand experience and brand loyalty. The brand experiences consumers receive through sensory, affective and intellectual experiences has a significant positive effect to create brand love

among the customers. Among the three dimensions studied in this research, the sensory experience is confirmed to have the greatest impact to create brand love. The customer brand relationships formed as a result of brand experiences and brand love has a positive impact on crating brand loyalty in the customers. Brand loyalty which is studied under the two dimensions; attitudinal and behavioral loyalty is driven as a result of brand love in the customers. The brand love is confirmed as a main driver of attitudinal loyalty than the behavioral loyalty.

Implications for Research

[K. Keller \(2013\)](#), suggested the model of brand resonance, proposing a rational and emotional path to brand resonance. This study followed the emotional route to brand resonance by identifying brand love as a route to achieve brand resonance. This research reflects this model by further illustrating the validity of the brand resonance model, especially in Sri Lanka's FMCG sector.

This study further validate the brand relationship quality model proposed by ([Fournier, 1998](#)), which is one of the most popular theories in customer brand relationships paradigm. . Brand love which is identified as a central component of brand relationship quality model act as a good predictor of both behavioral and attitudinal loyalty, by further validating brand relationship quality theory specifically in the FMCG sector.

This study provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the impact of brand experiences on brand love which is a still an under developed research area in the marketing literature ([Huang, 2017](#)). Hence this study confirms the prior research finding on this two constructs, theorizing that sensory, affective and intellectual experiences have positive impact in developing brand love among the customers. In addition, this research regarded brand love as a higher-order construct with multiple , complicated emotions and evaluated it using the higher-order brand love scale created by [Batra et al. \(2012\)](#). The results of this study further validate that scale's ability to measure brand love and provide a good emphasize to measure brand love in the FMCG sector. And further as suggested by [Sarkar \(2014\)](#) there is a lack of understanding about brand love in the Asian market. Hence, this study further provides good cross cultural validation of brand love concept, and extends the existing brand love theories proving its applicability in the Asian context, and more specifically in the FMCG sector.

Implications for Practitioners

This research provide insights into how a company can focus on the experiential marketing perspectives to induce the consumers emotional side and achieving brand loyalty by appealing to the consumer emotions. If a company wants to encourage customers to behave loyal, the company should provide authentic and relevant arguments for the consumers to engage in such a relationship. If the company can provide valuable brand experiences, the consumers will develop brand love, and finally the companies will benefit from the customer loyalty derived as a result of value exchanges.

FMCG industry can mainly provide sensory experiences, which will delight the customers' five senses and achieve behavioral and attitudinal loyalty, via brand love. This is more practical in the FMCG sector, because customers can be attracted

for the products by designing attractive packing, designs, shapes; eye catching colors and logos; incorporating unique and delightful tastes, smells etc.

Customers can experience a service or product directly through physical contact, or experience it indirectly through brand images and activities. Therefore, marketers of the FMCG industry, should consider developing brand experience not only via the product attributes, by also with every encounter customer meet the brand such as, promotional and advertising programs, endorsements, brand identity creating, etc.

FMCG brands should consider the induction of positive and strong feelings towards the brand as an important step in promoting customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. A FMCG brand that the consumer nourishes strong feelings, like love, will facilitate and enhance both attitudinal and behavioral loyalty.

VII. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This research should be considered with having several limitations which are worthwhile mentioning. In this study the behavioral experience dimension is not considered as a dimension of brand experience because the literature proves it has low impact on brand love (Ferreira et al., 2017). According to K. Keller (2013) there are two routes to achieve brand resonance; the emotional route and the rational route. This study analyzed the brand resonance by utilizing the emotional route. Hence future researchers can study the impact of the rational route on brand resonance as well. Also this study analyzed only the mediatory role of brand love in the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty in the customer brand relationships. However the brand resonance model indicates other appropriate variables to be used as mediators, such as brand attachment, brand community, brand engagement, and product efficiency, so further researches could use these significant factors as mediators (Huang, 2017; K. Keller, 2013). Further the behavioral brand experience dimension was excluded from the study due to the prior research findings of that dimension's irrelevance with brand love. Hence, future research can focus on developing better measures to capture that dimension more reliably. Finally, one of this study's limitations is that the sample was limited only to one province in Sri Lanka (Western province) and only to one product category. Therefore, future researchers can take better efforts to survey sample segments other than this study and further examine this theoretical models' applicability in other industries and sectors apart from the FMCG sector.

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Appendix I

Table A: Demographic Profile of the Respondents (n=300)

Variable	Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	116	38.7
	Female	184	61.3
Age (Years)	16-20	19	6.3
	21-30	60	20.0
	31-40	105	35.0
	41-50	76	25.3
	51-60	31	10.3
	over 60	9	3.0
Education	Secondary	19	6.3
	Undergraduate	48	16.0
	Graduate	185	61.7
	Post graduate & above	48	16.0
Occupation	Student /non employee	33	11.0
	Public employee	47	15.7
	Private employee	156	52.0
	Self Employee	64	21.3
Monthly income (Rs)	Rs.20 000-Rs.39 999	31	10.3
	Rs.40 000-Rs.59 999	77	25.7
	Rs.60 000-Rs.79 999	126	42.0
	Above Rs.80 000	66	22.0

Table B: KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity (n=300)

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.942
	Approx. Chi-Square	6748.557
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	df	496
	Sig.	.000

Table C: Measurement Model Estimation: Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable/ Item	Standardized Loadings	T- Statistics	Composite Reliability	AVE
Sensory experience			0.886	0.796
BE1- The taste/smell/sight/touch/sound of this brand makes a strong impression on my senses	0.877	57.881***		
BE3- This brand appeals to my senses	0.907	75.108***		
Affective Experience			0.932	0.872
BE5- I have strong emotions for this brand	0.932	77.094***		
BE6- This brand is an emotional brand	0.936	87.145***		
Intellectual Experience			0.902	0.821
BE7- I engage in a lot of thinking when I encounter this brand	0.898	60.634***		
BE8- This brand makes me think	0.898	75.402***		
Brand Love			0.931	0.576
BLO2- This brand does the exact thing I want to get done by this product	0.640	24.569***		
BLO3- This brand contributes in doing something important and meaningful in my life	0.796	35.083***		
BLO4- I frequently find myself thinking about this brand	0.760	32.648***		
BLO5- I am willing to spend lot of money in buying complementary products for this brand	0.720	21.248***		
BLO6- I feel myself desiring this brand	0.8129	33.732***		
BLO7- I have interacted with this brand in the past	0.762	27.903***		
BLO8- I feel there is a natural “fit” between me and this brand	0.805	42.313***		
BLO9- I am emotionally connected with this brand	0.805	35.692***		
BLO12- I will feel sad if this brand goes out of existence in the market	0.734	28.475***		
BLO13- My overall feelings and evaluations of this brand is positive	0.640	16.707***		
Behavioral Loyalty			0.890	0.669
BLY1- I will buy this brand the next time I shop for this product	0.844	40.915***		
BLY2- I intend to keep purchasing this brand	0.872	64.880***		
BLY3- If another brand is having a discount, I will not generally buy that brand instead of this brand	0.798	33.353***		
BLY5- If this brand is not available in the store when I need it, I will buy it another time	0.753	22.533***		
Attitudinal Loyalty			0.924	0.710
BLY6- I am committed to this brand	0.807	32.482***		

BLY7- I would be willing to pay a higher price for this brand over others	0.793	35.189***		
BLY8- If someone makes a negative comment about this brand I would defend it	0.860	51.005***		
BLY9- I usually tell friends how good this brand is	0.883	67.628***		
BLY10- I would recommend this brand to someone who cannot decide which brand to buy in this product class	0.866	61.004***		

Note: Level of significance extracted from Bootstrapping Analysis *** Significant at 0.01 level. Key: AVE= Average Variance Extracted, BE= Brand Experience, BLO= Brand Love, BLY=Brand Loyalty

Table D: Structural Model's Predictive Relevance (Q²)

Endogenous Variable	SSO	SSE	Q ²
Brand Love	3000	2091.251	0.303
Behavioral Loyalty	1200	779.612	0.350
Attitudinal Loyalty	1500	930.387	0.380

Note: The Predictive Relevance (Q²) is determined through blindfolding (Hair et al, 2013)

Table 0.1: Indirect effect from Brand experiences to Brand loyalty through Brand Love

Path	T-Statistics (Indirect effect)	Significance
SE→BLO→BLY	6.833***	Significant
SE→BLO→ALY	7.058***	Significant
AE→BLO→BLY	3.150***	Significant
AE→BLO→ALY	3.170***	Significant
IE→BLO→BLY	6.438***	Significant
IE→BLO→ALY	6.259***	Significant

Note: T= t-statistic, *** = Significant at p<0.01 level, SE=Sensory Experience, AE=Affective Experience, IE= Intellectual Experience, BLO= Brand Love, BLY=Behavioral Loyalty, ALY=Attitudinal Loyalty.