

**Beyond Loyalty: Unleashing Brand Love for Competitive Supremacy****Erica Adriana***erica.adriana@machung.ac.id*

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Abstract *Establishing a strong brand is crucial for firms to achieve a competitive advantage in today's global marketplace. Strong brands, characterized by valuable assets, unique differentiation, and favorable associations, drive profitability and ensure business sustainability. Brand love, representing a deep emotional connection between consumers and brands, has become a key concept in marketing. Marketers employ brand positioning strategies to foster this emotional connection, recognizing its power to enhance customer loyalty, build strong relationships, and create sustainable competitive advantages. This systematic literature review synthesizes existing knowledge on brand love, focusing on strategies and practices that cultivate it as a source of competitive advantage. The review examines the antecedents, drivers, and outcomes of brand love, addressing how companies can leverage digital marketing to foster brand love, and how brand love contributes to a firm's competitive advantage.*

Keywords: Brand love, competitive advantage

Introduction

In an increasingly competitive global marketplace, establishing a strong brand is paramount for firms seeking to achieve and sustain a competitive advantage. A strong brand is a valuable asset (Hanaysha, 2024), acting as a key differentiator in the market (Sharp *et al.*, 2024, in Mirzaei *et al.*, 2024), providing a foundation for brand-based competitive advantage (Baumann *et al.*, 2017) and ultimately drive profitability. Strong brands hold favorable associations that are exclusive to the brand in the product category, which is crucial for business success and sustainability (Mühlbacher *et al.*, 2016)."

Among the various constructs in branding, brand love has emerged as a critical concept, representing the degree of emotional connection a consumer has with a brand. The concept of "brand love" has gained considerable attention in recent years, highlighting its growing relevance in marketing literature (Haq *et al.*, 2024). In response to this trend, marketers have developed innovative strategies for brand positioning that align with evolving consumer expectations to raise brand love (Hanaysha, 2024). Establishing a distinct brand identity and delivering a compelling value proposition are essential for fostering strong emotional connections with consumers.

When consumers form a profound emotional attachment to a brand, this connection acts as a powerful barrier against competitors. Such brand love significantly enhances customer loyalty and encourages repeat purchases, as individuals consistently favor the brands they are emotionally invested in over alternative options (Le et al., 2025). Moreover, cultivating brand love is essential for establishing robust customer relationships. In particular, when customers are passionate about ethical brands, their engagement, satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment to the brand are notably strengthened (Dahrouj et al., 2025). Such efforts not only differentiate brands but also create sustainable competitive advantages—key indicators of long-term success and resilience in highly competitive markets (Baumann *et al.*, 2017). By recognizing and strategically utilizing these advantages, brands can secure ongoing growth and maintain their market presence over time (Mirzaei *et al.*, 2024).

Recognized and distinct brands play a crucial role in market success. While trust, loyalty, and value remain fundamental elements for building a successful brand (Rua & Santos, 2022), it is equally important to acknowledge that brands serve as key differentiators among competing products or services in the marketplace. As Beig and Nika (2019, p. 1) in (Rua & Santos, 2022) emphasize, “*brands are critical for the firm’s success as they become the major source of differentiation between other competitive offerings in the market.*” Consequently, brands assume a central position in shaping sustainable and distinctive international strategies that can drive long-term competitive advantage.

Previous research has explored various factors that contribute to the development of brand love. These include the role of digital marketing in facilitating direct engagement between consumers and brands (Mayasari et al., 2023), the importance of authenticity in cultivating strong emotional bonds (Wu, Tan, & Aw, 2023), as well as customer satisfaction and memorable brand experiences (Le et al., 2025). Other influential elements are corporate social responsibility initiatives (Hanaysha, 2024) and brand anthropomorphism. Brand love has been shown to drive repurchase intentions (Mayasari et al., 2023), encourage brand advocacy and resistance to negative information (Haq et al., 2024), and foster enduring loyalty among customers (Le et al., 2025). However, few previous studies have examined how brand love can be strategically leveraged to create

unique customer experiences and emotions that empower brands to outperform competitors in the marketplace.

This systematic literature review aims to synthesize existing knowledge on brand love, with a specific focus on identifying strategies and practices that organizations can employ to cultivate brand love as a sustainable source of competitive advantage. This review will focus on several internationally published academic journals within the last five years (2020-2025) that examine the antecedents, drivers, and outcomes of brand love and its relationship with building competitive advantage for business. This review seeks to answer the following key research questions: What are the key factors that contribute to the development of brand love? How can companies strategically leverage digital marketing to foster brand love? In what ways can brand love contribute to a firm's competitive advantage? Understanding these factors is essential for recognizing brand love not merely as an emotional connection, but as a strategic tool that managers can intentionally cultivate to help brands succeed in competitive markets.

Literature Review

2.1 Brand love

The term brand love was first introduced by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, as cited in Robertson, Botha, Ferreira, & Pitt, 2022) to describe “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has” toward a brand. Since then, brand love has become a central focus in marketing research due to its significant impact on consumer behavior. It is broadly defined as the strong emotional connection and attachment that satisfied customers develop with brands (Le *et al.*, 2025).

Brand love encompasses multiple dimensions including intense desire for the brand, deep devotion and loyalty towards it, positive evaluations of its attributes or performance, favorable emotional responses elicited by the brand itself, as well as explicit expressions of affection for it. This phenomenon mirrors how individuals form emotional attachments to loved ones or meaningful objects—highlighting that consumers can develop similarly profound bonds with brands (Le *et al.*, 2025).

As an evolving construct within marketing literature, researchers have identified several psychological components underlying brand love. These include positive emotions associated with the brand; favorable cognitive evaluations; passionate feelings;

and declarations of love directed at the brand. Robertson et al. (2022) conceptualize these into three core aspects:

1. Cognitive Brand Love: Beliefs or thoughts related to the brand
2. Affective Brand Love: Emotional feelings connected to the brand
3. Conative Brand Love: Behavioral intentions such as willingness to invest resources in or use the brand

Moreover, Mayasari et al. (2023) emphasize that consumers' feelings triggered by meaningful experiences contribute significantly to developing this bond. Empirical studies further demonstrate that strong emotional attachment through brand love leads not only to enhanced loyalty but also behavioral outcomes like resistance against negative information about the brand—manifested through active defense—and advocacy behaviors where consumers promote their favored brands enthusiastically (Haq et al., 2024). When consumers fall deeply in love with a brand emotionally, this creates an enduring bond which acts as a formidable barrier against competitors by fostering repeat purchases driven by preference rather than external influence (Le et al., 2025).

Building on the conceptualization of brand love, Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) employed a grounded theory approach to develop a higher-order model that identifies seven core elements defining brand love. These elements include:

- Self-brand integration, where consumers incorporate the brand into their self-identity
- Passion-driven behaviors reflecting intense enthusiasm for the brand
- Positive emotional connection between consumer and brand
- Long-term relationship signifying enduring commitment
- Positive overall attitude valence, indicating favorable feelings toward the brand
- Attitude certainty and confidence (strength) representing firm belief in one's positive evaluation of the brand
- And finally, anticipated separation distress, which captures consumers' anxiety or discomfort at the thought of losing access to or being separated from the brand.

Recent research highlights how powerful this connection can be: beyond simply encouraging loyalty alone—brand love enhances customer engagement levels while transforming loyal customers into vocal advocates who influence others positively toward the same brands (Robertson et al., 2022). The genuine affection cultivated through these

relationships builds trust and strengthens long-term commitment between customers and brands.

2.2 Brand competitiveness

Brand competitiveness describes a state where a brand effectively meets customer needs through its value proposition and secures a strong position within the marketplace. This is achieved through the brand's ability to compete using its distinct characteristics, encompassing internal features, external image, and even local relevance. Ultimately, brand competitiveness involves integrating market presence with the capability to generate value, enabling the brand to gain recognition and cultivate a positive and strong overall image (Gupta, Gallear, Rudd, & Foroudi, 2020).

The primary purpose of cultivating brand competitiveness is to enhance the overall performance of a business. By strategically managing its unique marketing skills and resources, a brand aims to gain a significant competitive advantage within its industry. Achieving strong brand competitiveness yields several key benefits. Firstly, it enables a brand to outperform its rivals in the marketplace, securing a stronger market position (Leckie, Dwivedi, & Johnson, 2023). Secondly, it allows the brand to create superior value for its customers, fostering loyalty and positive perceptions (Gupta, Gallear, Rudd, & Foroudi, 2020). Furthermore, a competitive brand is better positioned to build a strong and easily recognizable image in the minds of consumers (Rua & Santos, 2022). Ultimately, all these factors contribute to the overarching goal of improving the brand's business results and ensuring long-term success.

2.3 Competitive advantage

Despite its prevalence in business literature as a driver of superior performance, a universally clear definition of competitive advantage and its determinants remains elusive. Early definitions, like Ansoff's focus on superior organizational characteristics, paved the way for Porter's influential view emphasizing superior customer-perceived value through either premium features at market price or cost leadership with comparable benefits. Barney highlighted the implementation of unique, value-adding strategies that are difficult for competitors to replicate, leading to sustained profits. Newbert and Sigalas et al. further refined this by emphasizing the ability to exploit opportunities, neutralize threats, and reduce costs more effectively than competitors. Ultimately, competitive

advantage, aligned with Resource-Based Theory, arises from the strategic optimization of both tangible and intangible resources to achieve higher profits, expand market share, and ensure long-term success. Today, it's understood as the organization's capacity to effectively respond to market opportunities and optimize resources to meet current and future customer needs, backed by strong organizational capacity and management commitment (Rua & Santos, 2022).

Methodology

This research employs a systematic literature review (SLR) methodology, which involves systematically collecting, selecting, and analyzing relevant secondary data to gain comprehensive insights and synthesize knowledge about a specific topic or phenomenon (Tam & Lung, 2025). Utilizing this approach, the study focuses on academic journals published over the past five years (2020–2025) that address the concept of brand love. The literature search was conducted in April 2025 using electronic databases such as Science Direct and ProQuest. After screening articles based on their titles, abstracts, and keywords for relevance, 15 papers were selected for detailed analysis due to their focus on brand love and its connection to competitive advantage.

Discussion

Fig. 1 Factors that can determine Brand Love

Researchers	Antecedent Variables	Moderating Role	The Impact
(Bazi, Filieri, & Gorton, 2023)	Attitude: Cognitive (Rejected), Affection, Activation	-	Brand Love
(Osorio, Centeno, & Cambra-Fierro, 2023) (Wu, Tan, & Aw, 2023)	Authenticity	-	Brand Love
(Vernuccio, Boccalini, & Patri, 2025)	Brand anthropomorphism	Brand Love	Purchase Intention
(Hanaysha, 2024)	Information Quality; System quality, Perceived security; Visual Appearance	Brand Love	Word of Mouth
(Mayasari, Haryanto, Hutagaol, Ramadhan, & Amir, 2023)	Social Media marketing	Brand Love	Brand Centrality, Repurchase Intention
(Dahrouj, Itani, Hollebeck, Eslami, & Kassar, 2025)	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)	Brand Love	Brand Engagement
(Haq, Tseng, Cheng, Chiu, & Kuo, 2024)	Brand Authenticity, Intrapersonal Authenticity	Brand Love	Behavioral Outcomes: Brand Defense, Brand

			Advocacy, Resistance to Negative Information
(Le, Vu, Le, & Luu, 2025)	Customer Satisfaction, Brand Experience, Brand Image	Brand Love	Brand Loyalty

Based on the reviewed research, brand love is influenced by a variety of antecedent variables, highlighting its multifaceted nature. These antecedents encompass customer attitudes (cognitive, affective, and activation), perceived authenticity, brand anthropomorphism, information quality, system quality, perceived security, visual appearance, social media marketing, corporate social responsibility (CSR), brand authenticity, intrapersonal authenticity, customer satisfaction, brand experience, and brand image. These factors collectively shape how consumers feel and connect with a brand.

Furthermore, the research consistently indicates a significant impact of brand love on various positive consumer behaviors and brand outcomes. Specifically, brand love is shown to drive purchase intention, word-of-mouth advocacy, brand centrality, repurchase intention, brand engagement, behavioral outcomes such as brand defense and brand advocacy, resistance to negative information, and ultimately, brand loyalty. This underscores the crucial role of fostering strong emotional connections with consumers, as brand love translates into tangible benefits for the brand, reinforcing its position and driving long-term success.

Fig. 2 Dimensions of Brand love according to researchers

(Wu, Tan, & Aw, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniqueness • Pleasure • Intimacy/Idealization • Memories/Dreams
(Osorio, Centeno, & Cambra-Fierro, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emotionally connected • The beliefs about the brand • Overall feelings and evaluation about the brand • Admiration

Based on the provided research, brand love is a multifaceted construct characterized by distinct dimensions. Wu, Tan, & Aw (2023) identify uniqueness, pleasure, intimacy/idealization, and memories/dreams as key components, suggesting a blend of positive affect and deep personal connection. Similarly, Osorio, Centeno, & Cambra-

Fierro (2023) describe brand love through emotional connection, beliefs about the brand, overall positive feelings and evaluation, and admiration. These dimensions highlight that brand love is not merely liking but a more profound emotional attachment encompassing positive feelings, strong beliefs, a sense of uniqueness and pleasure derived from the brand, and even nostalgic or aspirational elements. Understanding these dimensions is crucial for brands aiming to cultivate strong consumer affection and loyalty.

Fig. 3 Brand and competitive advantage

Researchers	Independent Variable	Moderating Variable	The Impact
(Rua & Santos, 2022)	Brand	Positioning; Market orientation	Competitive advantage (Product quality, Differentiation, Innovation)
(Gupta, Gallear, Rudd, & Foroudi, 2020)	Brand differentiation (Benefits, uniqueness, effectiveness, brand pull)	Brand value, Marketing orientation, Strategic orientation	Brand competitiveness
(Mühlbacher, Raies, Grohs, & Koll, 2016)	Brand's favorability, uniqueness, and consensus of brand association		Brand strength
(Asari, Mahmudah, & Handayani, 2024)	Brand Equity		Competitive Advantage

Based on the research summarized in the image, a strong brand can be a significant source of competitive advantage in several ways. Key brand elements such as positioning, differentiation (through benefits, uniqueness, and effectiveness), and overall brand equity contribute directly to a company's ability to outperform competitors. Furthermore, these brand elements, when effectively managed, lead to positive outcomes like brand competitiveness and brand strength. The impact of a strong brand extends to tangible results, including enhanced product quality, differentiation, and innovation. Factors like brand favorability, uniqueness, and the consensus of brand association contribute to a powerful brand image. In essence, a well-defined and managed brand, with strong differentiation and equity, allows companies to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage by creating value in the eyes of the consumer, leading to enhanced market position and overall business success.

Conclusion and Further Study

This present study contributes to the existing body of literature on brand love and its relevance within business market contexts. By synthesizing previous research, it aims

to provide a clearer understanding of the factors that cultivate brand love and its subsequent impact on key consumer behaviors such as purchase intention, brand loyalty, and other supportive actions. Based on the summarized research, it's evident that while brand love is a significant factor, it's not the sole determinant of a business's competitive advantage. Many academic sources consider brand love as an integral component of the emotional dimension of brand equity. Although direct or indirect impacts of brand love on a company's competitive edge require further empirical investigation, existing research strongly suggests that a well-defined brand strategy is crucial. Such a strategy enables the creation of a brand with a more robust market position, fostering meaningful differentiation from competitors and ultimately cultivating a sustainable competitive advantage.

Companies aspiring to leverage brand love as a strategic tool for achieving competitive advantage can employ the following four strategies, which are formulated based on the summarized previous research provided:

1. **Companies can strategically enhance their brand competitiveness by deeply incorporating the emotional side of their brand into their positioning efforts.** By crafting a brand narrative and identity that resonates with consumers on an emotional level, companies can cultivate genuine brand love. This emotional connection fosters a stronger perceived brand value in the eyes of consumers, as they develop a deeper affinity and loyalty beyond mere functional attributes. This heightened brand value, driven by emotional resonance and brand love, ultimately serves as a powerful catalyst for enhancing the brand's overall competitiveness within the marketplace, creating a distinct advantage over rivals who may focus solely on rational or functional benefits.
2. **Strategically incorporating brand love as a key differentiator can be a powerful approach to building brand competitiveness.** By focusing on the emotional benefits and the unique feelings that the brand evokes in consumers, companies can create a distinct value proposition that goes beyond functional attributes. This emotional differentiation fosters a deeper connection with the target audience, cultivating brand love and loyalty. As consumers develop strong positive feelings and identify uniquely with the brand, this emotional bond translates into perceived value, strengthening the brand's position in the

market and establishing a significant competitive advantage over rivals who may not prioritize these emotional connections.

3. **Cultivating strong brand associations that evoke positive emotions in customers is a vital strategy for building substantial brand strength.** When consumers connect with a brand on an emotional level through positive associations, it fosters deeper loyalty and affinity. This enhanced brand strength, rooted in positive emotional connections, can then translate into a significant competitive advantage in the marketplace. Brands that successfully nurture these emotional bonds often enjoy greater customer preference, resilience to competitive pressures, and the ability to command premium pricing, ultimately solidifying their competitive standing.
4. **Recognizing brand love as a crucial element within the emotional dimension of brand equity highlights its potential as a cornerstone for building sustainable competitive advantage.** When consumers deeply love a brand, this emotional connection fosters strong loyalty and advocacy that are difficult for competitors to replicate. This enduring affection, embedded within the overall brand equity, creates a resilient brand, capable of withstanding market fluctuations and competitive pressures, thereby contributing significantly to the establishment of a long-term and sustainable competitive advantage.

This paper primarily explores the conceptual framework of how brand love can serve as a strategic tool in contributing to a business's competitive advantage. Due to the time constraints associated with completing this research, the findings presented herein may still contain inherent biases and necessitate further in-depth exploration and investigation in future studies to ensure a more comprehensive and robust understanding. Further empirical research is necessary to specifically investigate the mechanisms and intentional strategies for cultivating brand love with the explicit goal of building sustainable competitive advantage in the long term.

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