

Brand Love in the Scroll Economy: Emotional Dimensions of Online Consumer–Brand Engagement

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Abstract

Social media marketing has emerged as the most popular and highly effective marketing communication strategy for brands worldwide. Engagement and Reach are the new go-to solutions for start-ups and established brands. The study tactically analyses how social media engagement nurtures consumers' love for brands and how much of a role brand love plays in the consumer-brand social media relationship. The study employs a close-ended, undisguised and structured questionnaire to collect data from a sample of 810 young individuals in Delhi NCR. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25 version, which used Spearman's correlation coefficient statistic. Findings indicate that active participation behaviours such as brand content creation have strong ties with emotional brand attachment, suggesting deeper affective involvement. The study offers a nuanced understanding of the importance of emotional brands in social media spaces and contributes a multi-theoretical perspective of brand love, self-determination, social cognitive and social exchange theory. Brands using these insights to seek and nurture loyalty and advocacy within digital ecosystems could inform emotionally calibrated engagement strategies.

Keywords: brand love, consumer engagement, social media marketing, user-generated content, emotional branding, digital brand relationships

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The COVID-19 pandemic intensified individuals' dependence on smartphones and social media for validation, interaction, and entertainment (Islam et al., 2020). The digital migration redesigned brand–consumer dynamics, compelling brands towards realigning their social media strategies enhancing their reach and relevance (Hajli et al., 2017). The roles related to brand storytelling and audiences keep blurring, as consumers now hold dual identities as passive recipients and active creators (Dabbous & Barakat, 2020). Social media like Twitter and Instagram have welcomed this wave, evolving into participatory spaces of co-creation, shaping perceptions and real-time engagement (Cheung et al., 2020).

Central to conceptualising digital engagement behaviour are the frameworks distinguishing between passive and active consumers, where passive users observe, and active users post and interact (Dolan et al., 2019). Building on this, Fernandes and Castro (2020) exhibited how contributors and lurkers alter and evolve brand communities on social media. This demands focused investigation of dynamic user behaviour and their social media content that would realign with marketing practices at the intersection of consumer-brand strategy (Cheung et al., 2020). A cohesive framework addressing the emotional underpinnings of engagement behaviours remains insufficient (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016).

Studies have highlighted that emotionally charged user-brand relationships command the frequency and essence of online engagement (Dwivedi et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2014). The exact nature of the relationship between varied engagement behaviours and brand relationship constructs, such as self-brand identification and brand love, has not been fully delineated (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2016). Brand love is considered the most potent construct in the realm of emotional storytelling (Ahuvia et al., 2020; Paruthi et al., 2022). Hence, modern brand research is increasingly centred on the concept of brand love (Islam et al., 2019).

In India, due to factors like swift digitalisation, affordable data, and platform vernacularisation, the urban youth is

empowered to become advanced users of social media and shaped into becoming leading content creators and consumers (Gokarna, 2021). This demographic now uses social media not only for self-expression but also as a space for emotional performance and identity negotiation (Kuang Longani & Kulkarni, 2024). As a result, this is reflected in user-generated content embedded in aligned consumer identity and affective branding (Shulga et al., 2021). This aligns with a global trend where digital natives increasingly treat brand interaction as an act of identity expression, heightening the need to unpack emotional mechanisms behind online brand loyalty.

Despite studies addressing brand perception with consumer engagement, only few studies have taken brand love as the lens to reveal the emotional dimensions of certain engagement behaviours. Prior studies have not analysed emotional constructs like attachment, passionate desire and long-term commitment with behavioural undertones. This gap makes this research explore the nuances of online brand interactions, such as consumption, contribution, and creation, with the emotional dimensions of brand love, using a theory-driven approach.

This research study suggests that while engagement is motivated by emotional attachment, it also reinforces emotional attachment, proposing a bi-directional framework between the constructs. Grounded in digital consumer realities, this study augments the contemporary literature and expands discourse on brand love and consumer-brand engagement with an advanced emotionally and behaviourally stratified comprehension.

1.2 Research Questions

RQ 1: Does a relationship exist between consumers' feelings towards their beloved brands and their online engagement with them?

RQ 2: How effectively does consuming online brand content contribute towards affective bonds and perceptions of consumers' love towards their beloved brands?

RQ 3: How effectively does contributing to online brand content contribute towards affective bonds and perceptions of consumers' love towards their beloved brands?

RQ 4: How effectively does creating online content for beloved brands contribute towards affective bonds and perceptions of consumers' love towards their beloved brands?

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

2.1 Consumer Engagement and Emotional Attachment

With consumers participating via comments, shares, likes and user-generated content (Machado et al., 2019), online engagement is a core determining factor in the brand perception creation (Altagamma & BCG, 2019). This has granted online engagement supremacy in the transformation of brand consumption (Kumar et al., 2022). The classifications of user engagement go back to Mathwick (2002) segmenting online users as 'lurkers' and 'socialisers', to producer-participant-consumer model given by Shao (2009), representing the scope of social media user behaviour, advanced into six functions, spanning from spectators to creators (Li and Bernoff, 2011).

Hamzah et al. (2021) stressed the importance of emotional bonds in brand relationships and consumer-brand interactions, which are strongly affected by brand-related constructs. Batra et al. (2012) depict advancements in online advocacy, user-generated content creation, and self-expression for brands in instances of stronger brand love presence. Machado et al. (2019) identified and stated information, empowerment, and brand love as the three key drivers of consumption, contribution, and creation, emphasising brand love as the most potent driver.

From 'customer engagement' (Brodie et al., 2013) to 'consumer engagement' (Dessart et al., 2015; Brodie et al., 2011) and 'brand engagement' (Keller, 2013), the terminologies have evolved; however, the consensus aligns with the multidimensional nature of the construct that comprises of affective, cognitive and behavioural elements (Hollebeek, 2011; Hollebeek et al., 2014). Verhoef et al. (2010) warned against restricting understanding engagement as completely transactional. Maturing as an iterative and co-creative experience (Calder et al., 2016), resulting from a fixation on a focal brand object, Hollebeek et al. (2014) define consumer engagement as a "positively valenced brand-related psychological state". Brand love and engagement function as higher-order constructs and are considered pivotal to online marketing mix (Verma, 2021).

2.2 Consumer Online Brand-Related Activities (COBRAs)

Expanding on the previous typologies provided by Mangold and Faulds (2009), Shao (2009), and Li and Bernoff (2011), Muntinga et al. (2011) validated COBRAs to acknowledge the subtleties of content engagement with brand social media pages. The COBRA framework is divided into three engagement tiers based on the ascending emotional and cognitive commitment: consumption (e.g., viewing posted content), contribution (e.g., sharing, liking or commenting), and creation (e.g., publishing unique and original content for brands).

Adopted for strategic advantage and clarity in consumer engagement research (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Schivinski, Christodoulides, & Dabrowski, 2016). COBRA levels are interdependent in nature, featuring fluid movement of users between absorbing, interacting and producing branded content, underscored by an advanced emotional investment (Pelletier et al., 2020). This allows for deeper brand attachment and ease of tailored strategies by segmenting consumers behaviourally as per the brand marketing objectives (Lamberton & Stephen, 2016). The framework of COBRAs by Muntinga et al., 2011 acquired a vital space to map user-brand dynamics while scaling up brand-related behaviours. Over time, these categories proved to be critical to understanding brand engagement depth and relationship quality (Pelletier et al., 2020). Another argument by Ashley and Tuten (2015) and Schivinski et al. (2016) supports the framework by demonstrating the intense causal effect relationships with deeper psychological engagements.

2.3 Beloved Brands

The construct of brand love, adapted to the branding literature by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Batra et al. (2012), is originally a native of romantic and interpersonal love theories (Rubin, 1973). Brand love is defined as a deep and passionate bond with a brand formed by identity alignment, emotional satisfaction and emotional resonance (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Fournier (1998) highlighted that the emotion of love turns brands into relational companions. Brand love gets nurtured by the idea that brands are either a reflection of their current or aspirational selves and extends the concept to self-image and emotional investment (Albert et al., 2008). This was evidenced in the study by Khare (2014), which demonstrated that brands also acted as identity indicators among their consumers. Consumer loyalty and engagement are heavily influenced by value congruity, which is also a core concept in brand literature (Islam et al., 2018). Deeper involvement and long-term advocacy follow this where affective attachment exists in the consumer-brand relationship (Khan et al., 2023).

While Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) recognise brand love as a prime precursor to steady consumer engagement, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) advocate that it is a competent predictor of resistance to unfavourable information and word-of-mouth. Research by MacInnis et al. (2004) presents a notion that brand experiences are aligned with self-actualisation when deeper emotional responses are triggered by attaching branding appeals to personal aspirations. This makes brand love an essential apparatus in unpacking the role of social media interactions in generating emotional engagement.

2.4 Theoretical Framework

Constructs	Theory
Consumer Online Engagement with Beloved Brands	Consumer Online Brand Related Activities (COBRAs) by Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011)
Beloved Brand Determination	Brand Love Theory by Bagozzi, Batra, and Ahuvia (2017)

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework employs two theories that explain the phenomenon of consumers interacting with their beloved brands on social media (Figure 1). The COBRA framework elaborates on the kinds of engagement that consumers involve in, such as consuming, contributing and creating multimedia content for the brands they are emotionally invested in. The Brand love theory provides depth into the intricacies of emotional attachment that consumers have with their favourite brands.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Methodology and Approach

This study is correlational research which is considered a type of nonexperimental research where when one variable changes, so does the other. Since the purpose of the study is to establish the absence or presence of a statistical relationship between the two variables, it does not manipulate the independent variable to observe a change in the dependent variable, and correlation does not imply causation. The study was originally conducted to compute the correlation between consumer-brand social media engagement and brand love.

According to the Research Onion model by Saunders et al. (2009), from an epistemological view, the study follows the philosophy of positivism, where knowledge is acquired through empirical research using measurement and observation. For Layer 2, the research uses a deductive approach, starting with a social theory and testing its implications with data. Layer 3 tells about the research style of the study. Here, we use survey method that is defined as “questioning individuals on a topic or topics and then describing their responses” (Jackson, 2003). Further, as in Layer 4, a mono method was used, i.e., quantitative research. Layer 5 stands for the time period of the study. This study uses a

cross-sectional research design, conducted on young male and female participants. Layer 6 explains the tools used by the researcher for data collection and analysis to generate meaningful results. The study employs a questionnaire for data collection.

The sampling method used for this research study was non-probability sampling. The study uses Purposive sampling by choosing respondents based on factors such as usage of certain social media and subsequent following of certain brands. It also involved filtering conditional questions based on their use of social media applications. The population targeted under the study was a young urban population in India. However, due to time and logistical limitations, the research is limited to the young population of the Delhi-National Capital Region (NCR). The sampling frame determined for the study was young population of Delhi-NCR within the age group of 18-35 years. From this, purposive or judgemental sampling technique was used to determine the right sample for this study. Also, considering this is a study that is based on the willingness of people to share their views in the form of responses, we also had to consider the non-responsiveness rate. In order to counter that, we only reached out to people in this age group to fill out the questionnaire created on Google Forms via WhatsApp, Facebook messages and Email.

The questionnaire was created and sent to the participants. It was structured, non-disguised and close-ended in nature. The objective was to measure the association between the two variables, i.e. Beloved Brand determination and Consumers' online engagement with their beloved brands.

Primary data have been posited for a fixed duration over the months of October-November 2024. A significant sample size was taken for the study to check the relationship between the constructs. While the planned sample size for the research was 1000, we received a total of 810 responses for the study. However, due to the conditional questions, i.e. if the participants were regularly present on any social media platform and whether they liked or followed any brands, only 540 responses were considered for the final statistical analysis. This has been discussed in detail in Section 3.

3.2 Conceptual Framework

The framework attempts to create an understanding of whether and to what extent consumers show their appreciation and appeal towards their beloved brands. The conceptual framework is inspired by the two theories that are consumer-oriented in approach and attempt to describe the contemporary consumer, which are digital natives and digital immigrants. For them, activities that they do online are considered important and part of their everyday behaviour. Their online activities are inspired by their core set of values, beliefs and experiences that govern an emotional aspect of purchase decisions.

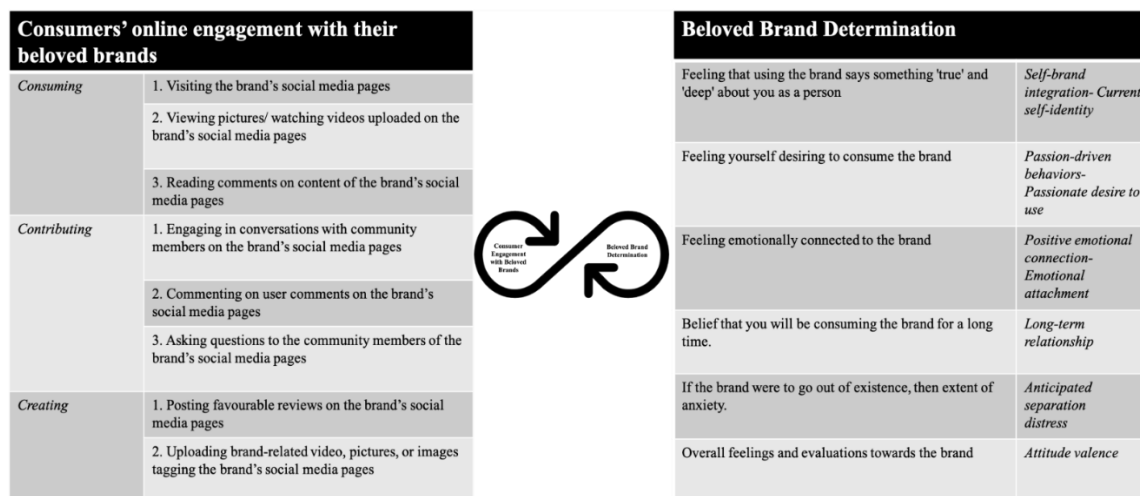


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 2) states three types of engagement, i.e. consuming, contributing and creating. These types enclose various online activities that generally engage consumers with brands. From reading and watching brand content, contributing comments to creating content about the brand for other users, the engagement might be inspired by the emotional attachment that the consumers have for the brands. On the other hand, the emotion of love as defined by six major dimensions, i.e. Self-brand integration- Current self-identity, Passion-driven behaviours- Passionate desire to use, Positive emotional connection- Emotional attachment, Long-term relationship, Anticipated separation distress and Attitude valence, is a metric that will explain the actions, words, behaviours and sentiments that consumers depict in their online interaction with the brands.

3.3 Instrumentation: *Questionnaire Design and Structure*

The study employs a questionnaire as survey method to collect data. The questionnaire consists of scales from the two theories used for the study, as mentioned in the Literature Review. The total items employed in the study to measure the two variables, i.e. consumers' online engagement towards their beloved brands and beloved brand determination are 14.

The data was collected using a well-designed questionnaire based on 7-point Likert scale (7-point "not at all" to "very much", with "moderately" as a midpoint) and 5-point Likert scale (5-point "never" to "almost always", with "sometimes" as a midpoint).

The questionnaire had two conditional questions in the beginning. Q1. Do you have a Facebook, Instagram and/ or Twitter account that you regularly access? (Yes/No), and Q2. Do you Like or Follow any brands on social media? (Yes/No). 'Yes' response to each of these questions took the respondents to the next question. 'No' response to each of these questions took the respondents to the Submit page. This facilitated filtering out respondents who are not regulars on social media and those who are present but don't follow any brands actively on social media.

The questionnaire was then divided into sections that reflected the main constructs of this research. Items measuring consuming, contributing and creating behaviours were adapted from Consumer Online Brand Related Activities (COBRAs) by Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit (2011). The items for Brand love determination were sourced from the 6-item validated scale by Bagozzi, Batra, and Ahuvia (2017) consisting of items such as 'Feeling yourself desiring to consume the brand' and 'Feeling emotionally connected to the brand' (Refer to Figure 2 for all the 14 questionnaire items). This enables a construct-level analysis while maintaining a logical and friendly flow for the respondents.

3.4 Sample and Data Collection

The questionnaire was created using Google Forms and shared online via WhatsApp, Email, and Facebook messages. This was done to make the process of data collection accessible and easier. The questionnaire was kept short and to the point in order to avoid making the respondents feel any fatigue that might lead to wrong/ unintended responses.

Purposive sampling was used for the study, as it only aimed to explore respondents who use social media and view, engage with, and follow any brands online. This filtering was done via the questionnaire provided. The respondents had to answer two questions that led them either to the Finish page or to the main questionnaire, which had the complete list of items for them to answer.

According to the data, 33 respondents out of 810 reported that they do not have a Facebook, Instagram and/or Twitter account that they regularly access. Of the 777 respondents, 237 respondents reported that they do not 'Like' or 'Follow' any brands on social media. A total of 540 respondents, who are active on social networks and follow brands, actively responded to the whole questionnaire with 14 items and demographic questions. This data was then processed and analysed with data analytics software by using advanced statistical tools.

3.5 Statistical Analysis

The data was analysed using the IBM SPSS Statistics 25 version available at the university. Since the data collected were ordinal in nature, the non-parametric statistic called Spearman's correlation coefficient was adopted to measure the correlation between the variables in the study. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with Principal Axis Factoring was employed to check the validity of the variables and the instrument.

3.5.1 Instruments of Study Variables

Beloved Brand Determination

For measuring and determining the beloved brands of consumers in this study, a 6-item brand love scale was adopted, developed by Richard P. Bagozzi, Rajeev Batra, and Aaron Ahuvia in 2017. The 6-item scale is a short scale covering all the dimensions of brand love.

Consumer Engagement with Beloved Brands

In this study, consumer engagement is measured by the traits identified for consumer-brand social media engagement by Daniël G. Muntinga, Marjolein Moorman and Edith G. Smit in 2011. There are three dimensions of this variable- Consuming, Contributing and Creating. The first two have three items each, and the third dimension has two items. This was based on a study by Simon and Tossan (2018). So, all eight items were used to measure this variable.

4. Results

A complete and comprehensive analysis and tabulation of the results were done in accordance with the research aims and objectives. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the data. The research used Likert scales in the questionnaire for data collection. This research studies the social media engagement of young people residing in Delhi NCR. The study aims to decipher if consumer-brand engagement has anything to do with the consumers' love for brands.

4.1 Sample Description

Table 1. Sample Description

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent	Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender			Age Group		
Female	313	58	18-25 years	400	74
Male	227	42	26-35 years	140	26
Total	540	100	Total	540	100
Marital Status			Occupation		
Married	92	17	Employed	194	36
Unmarried	448	83	Homemaker	16	3
Total	540	100	Self-employed/ Business Owner/ Entrepreneur	22	4
			Student	308	57
			Total	540	100
Location			Household Income		
Central Delhi	16	3	Below 25,000 INR per month	59	11
East Delhi	119	22	25,000 INR to 50,000 INR per month	108	20
Faridabad	22	4	50,001 INR to 1,00,000 INR per month	162	30
Ghaziabad	108	20	1,00,001 to 1,50,000 INR per month	76	14
			Above 1,50,000 INR per month	135	25
Gurgaon	38	7	Total	540	100
Noida	92	17			
North Delhi	27	5			
Outside Delhi	27	5			
South Delhi	27	5			
West Delhi	65	12			
Total	540	100			

The sample description of the respondents of this study has been presented in terms of demographic factors in Table 1.

4.2 Brand Categories

In the questionnaire, the respondents were requested to mention the brands that they consume in real life and they 'Like' and/ or 'Follow' on social media actively.

Table 2. Brand Categories reported from survey

Category	Frequency	Percent
Automobile	23	4.3
Bags & Wallets	5	0.8
Clothing/ Apparel	130	24.1
Drinks & Beverages	5	0.8
E-commerce company	14	2.5
Female Hygiene	5	0.8
FMCG	5	0.8
Food Joint/ Restaurant	14	2.5
Jewellery	5	0.8
Lifestyle	9	1.7
Luxury Beauty	4	0.8
Luxury Fashion	28	5.1
Luxury Stationery	5	0.8
Makeup and Personal Care	112	20.6
Mobile and Electronics	47	8.6
Safety & Hygiene	4	0.8
Social media company	4	0.8
Sportswear/Activewear	116	21.5
Watch & Lifestyle	5	0.8
Grand Total	540	100

The respondents mentioned various brands that were later categorised and analysed (Refer Table 2). The topmost reported categories were 'Clothing/ Apparel', followed by 'Sportswear/Activewear' and 'Makeup and Personal Care'. They are followed by 'Mobile & Electronics', 'Luxury Fashion' and 'Automobile' brands. Most frequently mentioned brands were Nykaa, Nike, H&M, MCaffeine, Puma, Adidas and Lakme.

4.3 Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables

The descriptive statistics of Beloved Brand Determination (henceforth denoted by BL in tables) and Consumer Engagement (henceforth denoted by CA or COBRAs in tables) show the minimum values, maximum values, mean, standard deviation and variance in the data collected (Refer Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3. Brand Love Descriptives

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
BL Variable 1	540	1	7	5.04	1.585	2.511
BL Variable 2	540	1	7	5.81	1.264	1.599
BL Variable 3	540	1	7	4.59	1.755	3.079
BL Variable 4	540	1	7	5.97	1.278	1.634
BL Variable 5	540	1	7	3.92	2.009	4.037
BL Variable 6	540	1	7	5.78	1.200	1.440
Valid N (listwise)	540					

From the Beloved Brand Determination data, the mean values (Refer Table 3) clearly show that four variables, i.e. variables 1, 2, 4 and 6 have outperformed variables 3 and 5. Also, variable 5 shows the highest deviation and variance in the responses, which means the responses are more spread out from the mean. This shows that the responses differ significantly for this particular construct. In contrast, most respondents answered similarly for variables 2, 4 and 6, with low levels of variance from the mean.

Table 4. COBRAs Descriptives

Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
COBRA var1	540	1	5	3.22	1.195	1.428
COBRA var2	540	1	5	3.57	1.128	1.273
COBRA var3	540	1	5	2.83	1.360	1.848
COBRA var4	540	1	5	2.16	1.303	1.697
COBRA var5	540	1	5	2.12	1.307	1.707
COBRA var6	540	1	5	1.97	1.315	1.730
COBRA var7	540	1	5	2.32	1.355	1.837
COBRA var8	540	1	5	2.10	1.288	1.659
Valid N (listwise)	540					

From the data of Consumer Engagement measures, variables 4, 5, 6 and 8 have the lowest mean of response (Refer Table 4). Variable 6 has the lowest mean which shows that a significantly low number of respondents have asked questions to the community members on brand social media pages. Variables 3 and 7 have the highest variance, as compared to others, showing wider range of responses.

4.4 Reliability of Scale Statistics

4.4.1 Cronbach's Alpha

To assess the internal consistency and reliability of survey items meant to collect data, researchers use a statistical parameter named Cronbach's alpha. With efficiency in determining the effectiveness of a set of questions measuring a certain construct or variable, such as beliefs, attitudes and perceptions, Cronbach's alpha test provides a coefficient that ranges from 0 to 1. The values closer to 1 indicate higher internal consistency.

Table 5. Cronbach's Alpha Statistic

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha	Alpha (Standardised Items)	N of Items
Brand Love (6 items)	0.790	0.810	6
COBRAs (8 items)	0.899	0.898	8

The Cronbach's alpha 0.790 for the Beloved Brand Determination instrument and 0.899 for the Consumer Engagement instrument (Table 5), indicate a high level of internal consistency for the scales used in this research study (Cortina, 1993).

4.4.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis

To further assess the dimensional and construct validity of the scales, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was performed on the data using Principal Axis Factoring along with Oblimin rotation, as the factors are understood to be correlated and belong to the realm of social science research where aspects of abilities, behaviours and perceptions are measured.

Table 6. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.874
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity - Approx. Chi-Square	4336.927
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity - df	91
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity - Sig.	0.000

The Sampling Adequacy shown by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure (Table 6) was 0.874, indicating appropriate suitability for factor analysis with Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at $\chi^2(91) = 4336.927$, $p < .001$, validating the suitability of correlation matrix.

Table 7. Total Variance Explained

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings	
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	
1	5.919	42.282	42.282	5.544	39.597	39.597	4.563	
2	2.216	15.826	58.108	1.821	13.011	52.607	3.405	
3	1.236	8.831	66.939	0.799	5.705	58.313	3.560	
4	0.849	6.061	73.000	—	—	—	—	
5	0.612	4.372	77.372	—	—	—	—	
6	0.598	4.271	81.643	—	—	—	—	
7	0.490	3.503	85.146	—	—	—	—	
8	0.414	2.959	88.104	—	—	—	—	
9	0.401	2.866	90.971	—	—	—	—	
10	0.359	2.563	93.534	—	—	—	—	
11	0.310	2.213	95.747	—	—	—	—	
12	0.251	1.796	97.543	—	—	—	—	
13	0.234	1.674	99.217	—	—	—	—	
14	0.110	0.783	100.000	—	—	—	—	

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring.

a. When factors are correlated, sums of squared loadings cannot be added to obtain a total variance.

As shown in the Table ‘Total Variance Explained’ (Table 7), the first two factors hold eigenvalues greater than 1, i.e., 5.919 and 2.216, which accounts for 42.282% and 15.826%, respectively, adding to a cumulative of 58.108%.

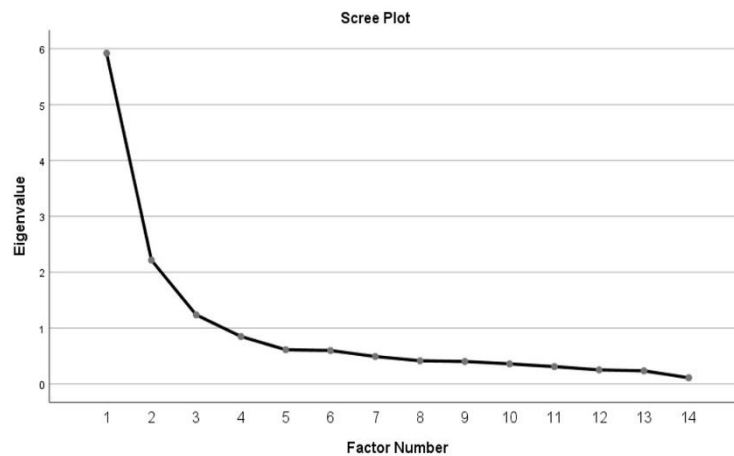


Figure 3. Scree Plot showing two-factor solution

We see a significant gap and clear elbow after the second factor in the scree plot (Figure 3), pointing out a two-factor solution. Although there was extraction of three factors that consider a cumulative variance of 66.939%, the additional contribution of 8.831% from the third factor was modest, and the loadings within it were less consistent.

Table 8. Pattern Matrix

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
BL1	0.204	0.588	0.161
BL2		0.682	
BL3	0.209	0.608	
BL4		0.698	
BL5	0.103	0.302	-0.356
BL6	-0.177	0.724	-0.210
CONS1			-0.737
CONS2			-0.749
CONS3	0.239		-0.600
CONTRI1	0.751		-0.151
CONTRI2	0.953		
CONTRI3	0.902		
CR1	0.723		
CR2	0.646	0.102	

Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring

Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization

a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations

The Pattern Matrix (Table 8), which represents the unique contributions of each variable to the factors after calculating for inter-factor correlations, was assessed to analyse a factor structure. Only loadings with absolute or greater than 0.3

were considered substantial for inclusion in the factors.

The Pattern Matrix presented three factors: Factor 1 was largely defined by contribution and creating measures, including CONTRI1 (0.751), CONTRI2 (0.953), CONTRI3 (0.902), CR1 (0.723), and CR2 (0.646). Factor 2 was essentially characterised by Brand love items such as BL1 (0.588), BL2 (0.682), BL3 (0.608), BL4 (0.698), BL5 (0.302), and BL6 (0.724). This symbolises a clear and distinct factor linked with behavioural and latent measures related to brand love. Factor 3 exhibited less consistent and less intense loadings, including BL5 (-0.356), BL6 (-0.210), CONS1 (-0.737), CONS2 (-0.749), CONS3 (-0.600), and CONTRI1 (-0.151). The negative loadings of Consuming variables 1 to 3 were significant, but since the overall magnitude is lower than that of Factors 1 and 2, Factor 3 represents a residual dimension. For the purpose of interpretation, we see a two-factor solution based on the Exploratory Factor Analysis, as Factor 1 and Factor 2 have consistent and higher loadings, and Factor 3 has weaker and less consistent loadings. This interpretation aligns with the eigenvalue criterion and the scree plot's elbow at two factors. We see that the usage of Oblimin rotation has further supported the Oblique factor structure and has been justified by the moderate inter-factor correlations. Hence, a two-factor analysis is recommended for further analysis to enhance the scale's construct validity along with the previously established reliability.

Table 9. Factor Correlation Matrix

Factor	1	2	3
1	1.000	0.319	-0.464
2	0.319	1.000	-0.426
3	-0.464	-0.426	1.000
Extraction Method: Principal Axis Factoring			
Rotation Method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization			

The Factor Correlation Matrix (Table 9) formulated from the Exploratory Factor Analysis using Principal Axis Factoring with Oblimin rotation and Kaiser normalisation offers an understanding of the relationships among the three factors extracted in the analysis. It is evident from the Factor Correlation Matrix that there is a moderate positive correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 2 (0.319), showing a moderate degree of variance among them. A moderate negative correlation was found between Factor 3 vis-à-vis the other two factors, with correlation measuring (-0.464) and (-0.426), respectively. This might mean that Factor 3 here holds for an inversely related construct when measured for correlation with Factor 1 and Factor 2. Since the correlations deviate from zero, the use of Oblimin rotation is supported by these findings as it allows for correlated factors. The oblique structure of the factors here accentuates the appropriateness of the selected rotation method and emphasises the distinct yet interrelated nature of these factors, ultimately supporting the overarching two-factor solution.

4.5 Correlation Result of the Study Variables

4.5.1 Overall Correlation

The Likert scale employed in the survey is considered ordinal in nature for statistical analysis because the respondents mark their preferences on a scale that ranges from the lowest to the highest. For ordinal data analysis, the Spearman correlation coefficient is used to decode the relationship between two or more variables (Lau & Kuziemy, 2017).

Table 10. Combined Correlation Coefficient Result

Variable (Brand Love items)	BLtotal	CAtotal
Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.491**
Sig. (2-tailed)	—	0.000
N	540	540
Variable (COBRA items)		
Correlation Coefficient	0.491**	1.000
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	—
N	540	540

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results showed that the inter-construct correlation coefficient is 0.491. (Refer Table 10). The p-value 0.000 is significant at the 0.01 level, which clarifies the underlying assumption that there is a correlation between the constructs. The correlation coefficient at 0.491 is positive and moderately strong, which means that consumer online brand-related activities and brand love are strongly and positively related.

4.5.2 Detailed Correlation Results

The detailed Spearman correlation statistics show that there is no negative relationship between brand love and consumer online engagement statistics, which means that an increase in one relates to an increase in another.

Table 11. Correlation Matrix

Brand Love Dimension	Consuming 1 Visiting the brand's social media pages	Consuming 2 Viewing pictures/watching videos uploaded on the brand's social media pages	Consuming 3 Reading comments on content of the brand's social media pages	Contributing 1 Engaging in conversations with community members on the brand's social media pages	Contributing 2 Commenting on user comments on the brand's social media pages	Contributing 3 Asking questions to the community members of the brand's social media pages	Creating 1 Posting favourable reviews on the brand's social media pages	Creating 2 Uploading brand-related videos, pictures, or images tagging the brand's social media pages
Brand Love 1 (Self-identity)	.244**	.184**	.156**	.220**	.273**	.216**	.258**	.281**
Brand Love 2 (Desire to use)	.302**	.243**	.166**	0.050	0.061	0.077	.136**	.139**
Brand Love 3 (Emotional attachment)	.316**	.350**	.253**	.291**	.350**	.316**	<u>.395**</u>	.273**
Brand Love 4 (Long-term relationship)	.317**	.280**	.136**	.181**	<u>.101*</u>	<u>.106*</u>	.203**	.127**
Brand Love 5 (Separation distress)	<u>.471**</u>	.383**	<u>.398**</u>	.291**	.337**	.282**	.379**	.252**
Brand Love 6 (Attitude valence)	.353**	.300**	.291**	.118**	.161**	<u>.101*</u>	.202**	.147**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Underlined values are the three highest and three lowest coefficients.

Three relationships from the Correlation Matrix (Table 11) are ignored for analysis as their p-values are above the 0.01 or 0.05 levels of significance. These are 0.050 (between Contributing 1 and Brand Love 2), 0.061 (between Contributing 2 and Brand Love 2) and 0.077 (between Contributing 3 and Brand Love 2).

It is found that there are some weakest and strongest relationships. These relationships are between Brand love variables 3, 4, 5 and 6, corresponding with Consuming 1, 2, Contributing 2, 3 and Creating 1. These have the weakest and the strongest relationships from a total of the 48 relationships found to be correlated. As tabulated below, the strongest relationship is between Anticipated separation distress (Variable BL 5) and Visiting the brand's social media pages (Variable Consuming 1), with a correlation coefficient of 0.471. The other two strong relationships are Anticipated separation distress (Variable BL 5) with Reading comments on content of the brand's social media pages (Variable Consuming 3) showing a correlation coefficient of 0.398, and Positive Emotional Connection – Emotional Attachment (Variable BL 3) with Posting favourable reviews on the brand's social media pages (Variable Creating 1) showing a correlation coefficient of 0.395.

The weakest relationships from the Correlation matrix are Long-term relationship (Variable BL 4) with Commenting on user comments on the brand's social media pages (Variable Contributing 2) carrying a correlation coefficient of 0.101; Long-term relationship (Variable BL 4) with Asking questions to the community members of the brand's social media pages (Variable Contributing 3) showing a correlation coefficient of 0.106; and Attitude Valence (Variable BL 6) with Asking questions to the community members of the brand's social media pages (Variable Contributing 3) showing a correlation coefficient of 0.101.

Additionally, the Means of Correlation Coefficients were also studied. Five variables have the highest Means. Of the 14 variables, Variables Brand Love 5, Brand Love 3, Consuming 1, Consuming 3 and Creating 1 have the strongest correlations with other variables with Means of 0.349, 0.318, 0.333, 0.233 and 0.262 respectively.

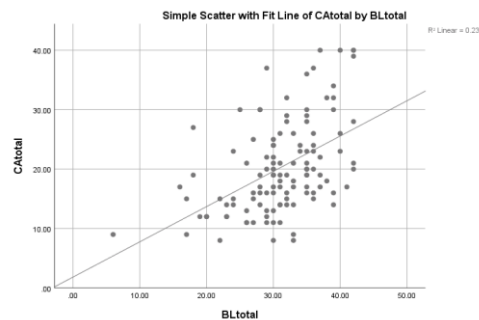


Figure 4. Scatter Plot showing correlation between constructs

The Scatter plot shows positive relationship between the consumer online brand-related activities and brand love. Most of the pointers are wound tightly along the line, which means the correlation is high (Refer Figure 4). The correlation is positive because the scatter plot shows an uphill pattern. The graph is in the positive X-axis and Y-axis quadrant, showing strong positive correlation between the two primary constructs of the study. The data are plotted in the diagram in a way that resembles a straight line, which means a strong relationship between the constructs of this research study.

5. Discussion

5.1 Conceptual Context and Significance

Social media platforms are responsible for shaping the perceptions and interactions in the contemporary digital landscape, with the effect spanning generations from digital natives to digital refugees (Chen, 2023). The factors that define consumer-brand communication are attention scarcity, emotional dependence and content virality quotient, which are also central to carving new-age identity ecosystems (Odoom, 2023). This has led to the creation of a participatory space where co-creation dominates passive content consumption of brand messages (Shulga et al., 2021). Primarily, the brand love constructs that have gained importance in academic and practitioner deliberations are passionate desire, emotional attachment, identity alignment, and long-term relational orientation, where deeper and sustained associations are built by embedding these concepts in social media strategies (Choi, Xu, & Min, 2024).

5.2 Answering Research Questions

Based on the primary data from urban Indian consumers from Delhi NCR, the study addresses four research questions that illustrate the relationship between brand love and consumer-brand engagement.

5.2.1 RQ 1: Does a relationship exist between consumers' feelings towards their beloved brands and their online engagement with them?

The outcomes indicate that consumers emotionally engaged contribute more actively, extending consequences to brand advocacy and brand retention, which is marked by a moderately strong positive correlation ($r=.491$) (De Oliveira Santini et al., 2020). Instances of higher correlations include those between content creation and current self-identity ($r = .281$) and emotional attachment ($r = .273$), and strong emotional attachment was highly correlated with commenting on community peer comments ($r = .350$). These relationships are corroborated by EFA variance (58.1%), which confirms constructs with dynamic engagements (Dolan et al., 2019). Steady with prior research on social media that recognises emotional brand attachment as central to behavioural engagement (Choi et al., 2024), fluid emotional expression is determined by genuine interaction conditions (Bazi et al., 2020).

5.2.2 RQ 2: How effectively does consuming online brand content contribute towards affective bonds and perceptions of consumers' love towards their beloved brands?

The outcomes demonstrate that the act of content consumption has a moderate impact on emotional attachment ($r = .316, .350$), separation distress ($r = .471, .383$), and attitude valence ($r = .353, .300$), however with weaker relationships with current self-identity ($r = .244, .184$) and passionate desire ($r = .302, .243$), validating the strength of passive engagement in initiating than combining emotional brand bonds. This is supported by studies that verify the impact of content consumption in identity affirmation and validation (Hawkins & Thyroff, 2023) and interactive tactics with a higher impact on building engagement compared to exposure (Ma, Ou, & Lee, 2022). In existing connections, emotional commitment is reinforced via frequent exposure with the aid of resonant content (Lin & Xu, 2017). Parasocial tendencies surface by the correlation between separation distress and reading comments ($r=.398$), and internalised engagement reflects a weak link of reading comments with identity (Dhaoui & Webster, 2021).

5.2.3 RQ 3: How effectively does contributing to online brand content contribute towards affective bonds and perceptions of consumers' love towards their beloved brands?

Validated by significant correlations between contribution-based behaviours and emotional attachment ($r = .291, .350, .316$) and separation distress ($r = .291, .337, .282$), commenting, posing questions and peer content engagement indicate the strength of these behaviours. Electronic word-of-mouth and conversations are emotionally guided activities (Brandão & Ramos, 2023; Zheng & Xu, 2024). These findings coincide with the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), maintenance observances mentioned in Consumer Brand Relationship theory (Fournier, 1998), and confirm identity and sense of belonging in brand communities via engaging in conversations (Kuo & Hou, 2017).

5.2.4 RQ 4: How effectively does creating online content for beloved brands contribute towards affective bonds and perceptions of consumers' love towards their beloved brands?

The strongest association between creation constructs and emotional attachment ($r = .395, .273$) and separation distress ($r = .379, .252$) is underscored by heightened relational intensity, confirming instances of content creators exhibiting extreme brand love (Choi et al., 2024). Transcending transactional motivation (Shulga et al., 2021) and rooted in

emotional branding, user-generated content is a symbolic act of love and identity signalling, which is evidenced by the desire to project self-brand narratives (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The extremely weak correlation of creation constructs with passionate desire ($r = .136$), long-term orientation ($r = .203$), and attitude valence ($r = .202$) are significant of greater emotional stake that transcends mere aspiration and liking (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012).

5.3 Theoretical Implications: A Multi-Theory Framework

By linking a behavioural continuum of digital engagement to Bagozzi, Batra, and Ahuvia's (2017) brand love framework dimensions, the study repositions the concept of brand love as both affective and performative. Reinforcing that emotional reciprocity—identity affirmation and peer validation successfully drive content creation (Sasono et al., 2024) and affirming digital identity performance satisfied the need for autonomy and relatedness (Cassia & Magno, 2024), the study builds on Blau's (1964) Social Exchange theory and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) respectively. By expanding Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura (1986) it also unpacks how mirroring peer and creators' behaviours builds emotional inclination (Razmus & Fortuna, 2022). The study proposes a multi-theory framework- where intrinsic motivation, emotional reciprocity and social modelling combine into a 'digital expression of brand love' while laying the groundwork for a more emotionally nuanced theory of consumer-brand engagement.

5.4 Practical Implications

By synthesising the results and implications of this research, we propose a roadmap for strategists to advance consumers from passive to co-creator strata, called an 'Emotionally Calibrated Brand Engagement Framework' (Refer Figure 5) where first segmentation is performed based on the emotional markers, mapping passive observers to creators on a spectrum (Choi et al., 2024). This is followed by the detection of budding brand lovers and personalising outreach with the use of AI-powered sentiment analysis.

Strategic Lever	Mapped Emotional Construct	Applied Tactics
Emotional Progression Mapping	Passionate Desire, Long-Term Relationship	- Track progression from consumption → contribution → creation. - Segment users by emotional trajectory and relationship depth.
Behavioural Signal Amplification	Emotional Attachment	- Use AI/NLP tools to flag emotionally rich feedback. - Detect early affective signs in low-engagement users.
Narrative Personalisation Loops	Current Self-Identity	- Build evolving content arcs that reflect users' identity growth. - Personalise tone to align with self-perception cues.
Emotionally-Driven Community Structuring	Emotional Attachment, Current Self-Identity	- Organise micro-tribes based on shared emotional themes. - Promote loyal users as mentors or community champions.
Aspirational Future Anchoring	Ideal Self-Identity, Long-Term Relationship	- Use aspirational storytelling to reflect future-self visions. - Position the brand as enabler of success, growth, or lifestyle progression.

Figure 5. Emotionally Calibrated Brand Engagement Framework

The third step aims to elevate emotional congruence by mirroring consumer values by brands via lifestyle-aligned content and re-sharing of UGC (Wallace et al., 2021). The next step involves the creation of emotional cues-led brand cluster communities where the leading contributors are given autonomy to manage them and become exclusive brand voices (Mulyati et al., 2024). The fifth and final step aims to build lasting emotional chords by disseminating messaging involving storytelling that demonstrates themes of social achievements, fitness and career resonating with the self-identities of the audience (Wallace et al., 2021).

5.5 Limitations and Future Research

While emotional engagement may differ across collectivist and individualist societies, further temporal analysis might justify the assumed linear movement from consumption to creation. Cultural generalizability might be hindered due to the study's focus on Delhi NCR. Future research should explore unreported emotional responses via triangulation of qualitative methods such as digital diary and sentiment analysis where platform-based behavioural tracking can be performed. As evidenced by the results, future studies should explore how specific kinds of UGC convey emotional variance conceptually and quantitatively, while progressive techniques such as facial coding and galvanic skin response could exceed the current underpinnings of emotional branding in social media environments.

6. Conclusion

This research study enhances the understanding of the emotional dimensions of brand love, translating into categorised forms of consumer-brand engagement in online environments. The research provides a fine-grained view of how consumers' love for brands manifests behaviourally by breaking down engagement into consuming, contributing and creating behaviours, aligning them with core emotional constructs of brand love, i.e. passionate desire, emotional attachment, current and ideal self-identity, anticipated separation distress attitude valence and long-term relational orientation. The findings demonstrate that although passive consumption holds foundational relevance, it is the active participation, particularly content creation for brands, that symbolises deeper emotional involvement and bears the potential to nurture long-term brand advocacy behaviours. This affective-behavioural mapping enriches existing

frameworks of consumer-brand relationships while substantially contributing to theoretical models of brand love theory, social exchange theory, social cognitive theory and self-determination theory.

From a managerial perspective, the study provides a roadmap for the identification of emotional depth in consumer behaviours and translating them into actionable, targeted engagement strategies. Stronger emotional ties can be fostered by recognising high affection behaviours and aligning them with user-identity narratives and brand messaging while creating emotionally resonant community structures. Hence, as digital and social media ecosystems continue to shape identity, behaviour, and belonging, this study, through its nuanced conceptual and empirical lens, addresses the critical role of emotional calibration in brand engagement strategies. It invites future enquiry into more culturally adaptive and longitudinal explorations on how love for brands is expressed and embraced in the scroll economies of tomorrow.

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