The Secret of Love

How to initiate long-lasting consumer-brand relationships resulting in brand love



Strategic Vision. Smart Implementation.

INSIGHTS

//01

By inspiring love, companies foster lifelong emotional bonds with their customers

//02

For great brands to survive, they must create loyalty beyond reason in consumers. This is key to differentiate themselves in today's overloaded world of brands

//03

Brands that consistently win "wow" moments¹ will earn a special place in consumers' hearts and minds

Introduction

The marketing practice has been dominated by terms like "loyalty," "trust," and "engagement" for many years. More recently, the term "love" was added to the vocabulary, too. But, can people really love a brand? Do they actually care that much?

This paper proves they do. Nowadays, consumers are taking certain brands more and more to their hearts. "Certain" brands are those brands like Amazon, Apple, Disney, LEGO, and Porsche—brands² that lead the way when it comes to engagement. In return, they have gained enthusiastic brand fans, enviable net promoter scores, and rising profits. Brand love has become a dominating phenomenon, and not only in the B2C segment. In the B2B sector as well, companies have understood that maintaining a long-term relationship with their clients is the key to staying successful: although B2B buying is often treated as an activity influenced solely by logical factors such as cost-benefit analyses, in reality the process is driven by the same complex mix of gut feeling, emotions, and reason that drives all human decisions. Think about craftspeople who would never exchange their Hilti machine for another brand, as they know they can rely on it in every situation. Or a pilot having always dreamed of flying for Emirates. Another example: Braun Melsungen, known as the physician's love brand for hospital supplies, as this brand stands for reliable products in every respect.

In the end, it is not about B2C or B2B; it is about the relationships a brand holds with individuals. Brands such as Apple, Google, or Amazon have already succeeded in embedding this premise in all their activities, which makes them equally successful in both the B2B and B2C sectors. In fact, when consumers face decisions, emotions from previous or related experiences can alter their preferences. Indeed, people do not buy products for purely logical reasons, but rather do so for emotional and unconscious reasons. Oftentimes, this rather intangible emotional connection between a brand and the customer has a big influence on customer retention and sales success.







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In COVID-19 times, brand love has even been strengthened

On the way to brand love, brands are facing more and more challenges such as an increasing demand for sustainability, the rise of digitalization, and-more dramatically-recent financial and social crises such as COVID-19. The scale of the current social, economic, and cultural turmoil seems unprecedented. The question that arises is what is the brand's role in this uncertain world? With an aggregate value of over 2 trillion dollars³, there is no doubt that brands have the power of macroeconomic magnitude. Their policies and actions have an impact no longer just on individual choices and nations' prosperity, but on our interconnected global society—and our planet, too. They become anchor points at times of volatility, sparking desire, delivering utility, and building trust. Ultimately, if managed right, even in COVID-19 times, brand love can even be strengthened. Crisis winners were the ones that showed empathy during COVID, thereby getting closer to their customers: brands such as Dior, Volkswagen, and Ferrari adapted their product portfolios and manufactured items such as face masks or respirators to support society by supplying products needed in this crisis. Brands like McDonalds, Audi, and Coca Cola even changed their logos and "distanced" the logos' components to show their solidarity. Audi, for example, pulled apart the four rings in their logo.

Against this background, the topic of brand love has lately gained more and more attention from researchers and practitioners. Brand love describes the most intense of all consumer-brand relations. Establishing true brand love is a big but rewarding challenge, as companies can profit immensely from it: customers buy beloved brands much more often, are willing to pay significantly more for them, recommend them much more often to their peers, and forgive them for mistakes. Overall, it can be seen that building brand love can be highly desirable for marketing practice in order to gain a loyal, high turnover and influential brand affiliation.

In this paper, Porsche Consulting describes the drivers and effects of brand love and presents four managerial strategies to successfully build up brand love in order to engage into long-lasting brand-consumer relationships. The paper ends with a self-assessment test for brands to determine a brand's stage on its path to a loved brand including first strategic recommendations of what actions it takes to become a loved brand.

How did the brand love phenomenon evolve?

The journey from products to trademarks to brands is one of the great stories of the last century. It is a story that has had profound effects on how businesses deal with consumers and how people deal with businesses. Each step has brought consumers closer to the producer and thus closer to their need for design, quality, price, usability, availability, innovation, and safety. Each step has turned up the voice of the consumer and added weight to what is most difficult to measure: the intangibles of relationships. Products

Products

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Fig. 1. The Development of Brand Love⁴

What is brand love?



According to our Porsche Consulting understanding, brand love is defined as follows:

Brand love describes the most intensive of all brand-consumer relationships. Brands succeeding in bonding emotionally with their customers are rewarded by loyalty beyond reason.

In recent years, the topic of brand love has gained more and more attention. Hardly any advertising agency, management consultancy, or consumer goods manufacturer does not try to use the topic of love for its marketing purposes. But, what is brand love?

Brand love describes a concept that goes further than typical brand management, aiming at replacing ordinary brands with "something that creates loyalty beyond reason."⁴ One has to go beyond the brand to the emotions that take the brand

deeper into the relationship with the consumer. So, what a brand needs to be successful are "loyal users, heavy users" that "love to engage with the brand and its products."⁵ Therefore, brands should seek a "long-term love affair" with their customers to create loyalty beyond reason.

Despite notable research activities, the exploration of the brand love phenomenon is still in its infancy. According to the current state of affairs, there are no uniform bases and no consensual definition of the brand love concept.

Analogous to interpersonal love, brand love is characterized by strong positive emotions for the brand and a strong anticipation regret of a potential loss of the brand. Brand love is observable in many categories. Typically, in the B2C context, brand love is postulated. Take Netflix, for instance: especially during the pandemic, the streaming platform Netflix has managed to become one of the most beloved brands⁶ by making consumers' everyday life a better and more entertaining one. Fear of loss is presumably felt for this brand.

Ultimately, it has been proved that brand love pays off. Study results⁷ show that compared to liked brands, brand loyalty, willingness to pay a price premium, and positive word of mouth are significantly higher for loved brands (see Figure 2). Indeed, if love is felt for a brand, the loyalty for this brand is 33 percent higher than for a brand that is only liked. When it comes to the willingness to pay a price premium, the difference between a liked and loved brand is even higher: 36 percent. Moreover, the degree to which someone tells others about the good experiences with his/her loved brand is even 18 percent higher versus outspoken recommendations for a liked brand.

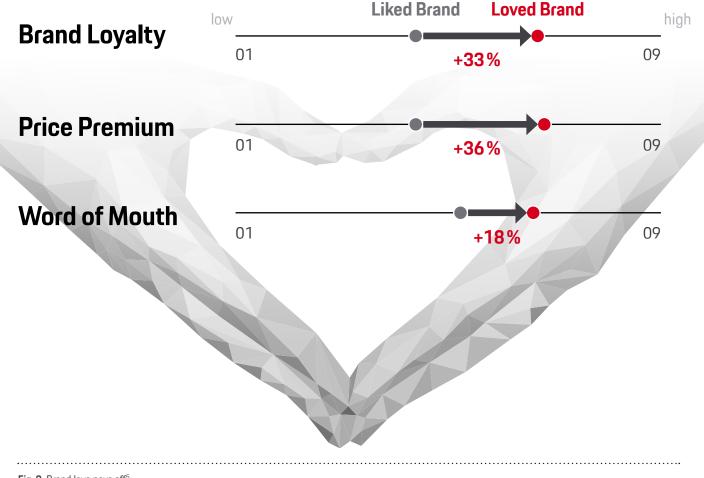


Fig. 2. Brand love pays off⁵

Why do consumers love a brand?

Beloved brands can play a vital role in consumers' lives. In many cases, consumers report emotional brand bonding, which can take the form of a love relationship. For example, some Apple fans spend days camping in front of an Apple store to be one of the first to get the latest product innovation. Some Porsche drivers are even willing to bond with the brand forever and get a tattoo of their favorite brand's logo. Even men who secretly caress their cars, or women who drape their handbags like expensive statues in their homes, also show very clear signs of brand love. This leads to the question what makes a consumer love a brand?

In a series of qualitative and quantitative studies⁸ Porsche Consulting conducted, four key drivers were identified why consumers postulate love for the mentioned brand: intimacy, identification, passion, and perceived superiority (see Figure 3).

Intimacy Level to which a consumer feels connected to the brand	~ 80 %
Identification Level to which a brand reflects current/desired self	~75%
Passion Level to which a consumer feels attracted by the brand	~45%
Perceived Superiority Level to which a consumer regards the brand superior to the competition	~ 35 %

Fig. 3. Antecedents of brand love

Intimacy is the most prominent component when evoking brand love. If someone feels a close relationship with a specific brand, he or she can even compare it with feelings for a best friend.

Moreover, when consumers feel deep connections to their beloved brands, they often reveal that they can **identify** with the values and attributes the brands stands for. They feel either that the brand fits their current identity or expresses their desired identity. That is the reason why brands are regularly used as status symbols. By wearing luxurious watches, driving premium cars, or wearing high-quality clothes, individuals often try to transfer the desirable brand characteristics to their own selves as a form of self-expression. Analogous to interpersonal love, **passion** and the feeling of attraction are also associated with brand love. Consumers explain that they feel attracted by their beloved brand, i.e., they develop the desire to use or even possess their beloved brand. Consumers love their brand for the fact that it always surprises them—be it through innovations or new launches, as Zara does with its seasonal new fashion collections. These recurring delighting peaks keep the brand attractive and desirable for customers.

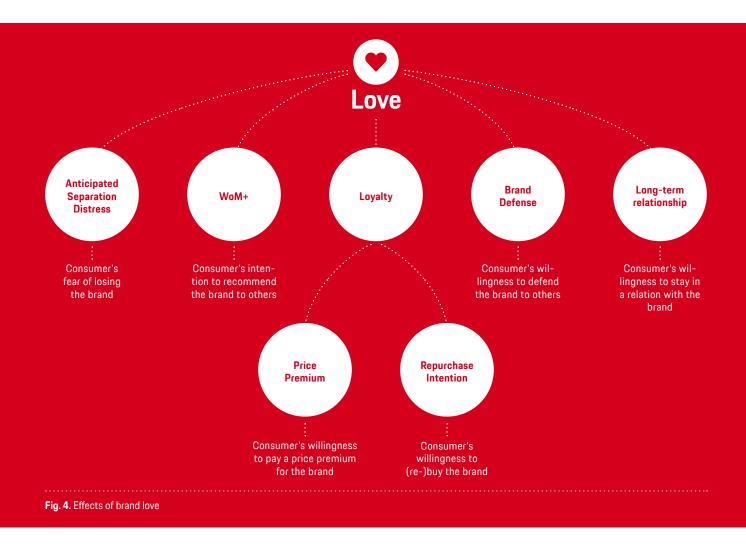
In addition to meeting high quality standards, **perceived superiority** is an important differentiator to competing brands and a significant driver of brand love. This is the reason, for example, why IKEA has now been successful for years. IKEA has democratized design, offering state-ofthe-art designer-like pieces of furniture that are regarded superior to the ones from the competition in the same price category.

In a nutshell, both emotional and non-emotional components are important for consumers to develop brand love. However, the study results also reveal that not all four dimensions must be simultaneously present for a loving consumer-brand relationship to exist.

Why does brand love matter?

Against the background of the strong behavioral effects, the attention the subject receives is more than justified. Study results⁹ show that customers who love a brand are willing to pay significantly more for it, are more willing to (re-)purchase the brand, and are willing to defend the brand to others. After all, customers more often recommend their beloved brand to others (positive word of mouth). This can even lead to some customers developing a veritable passion for conversion, with the aim of inspiring as many of their friends and acquaintances as possible for the beloved brand.

Consequently, brand love has strong and positive economic effects. Consumers who love their brands show higher loyalty, resulting in a willingness to pay a price premium or to (re-)purchase the brand, want to stay in a long-term relationship with the brand, thereby fearing to be separated from their brand. Consumers who love their brands speak positively about the brand in public and may even defend the brand to others (see Figure 4). Thus, brand love can become a key competitive advantage for companies.



In fact, the phenomenon of brand love has a direct impact on brand success and thus constitutes a significant economic value for companies. Coca-Cola, for instance, has already recognized the importance of brand love as a success indicator and initial measurement methods have been used to monitor success. Coca-Cola uses a proprietary tracking tool to analyze brand love, interviewing a total of 115,000 customers each year in 70 markets worldwide¹⁰.

How to become a loved brand

Managerial guidance on how to build up brand love

In the following, Porsche Consulting reveals the key levers needed to become a loved brand. The brand love recipe's ingredients are fourfold, and need to be mixed in equal shares. All four dimensions must be simultaneously present for brand love to be developed (see Figure 5).

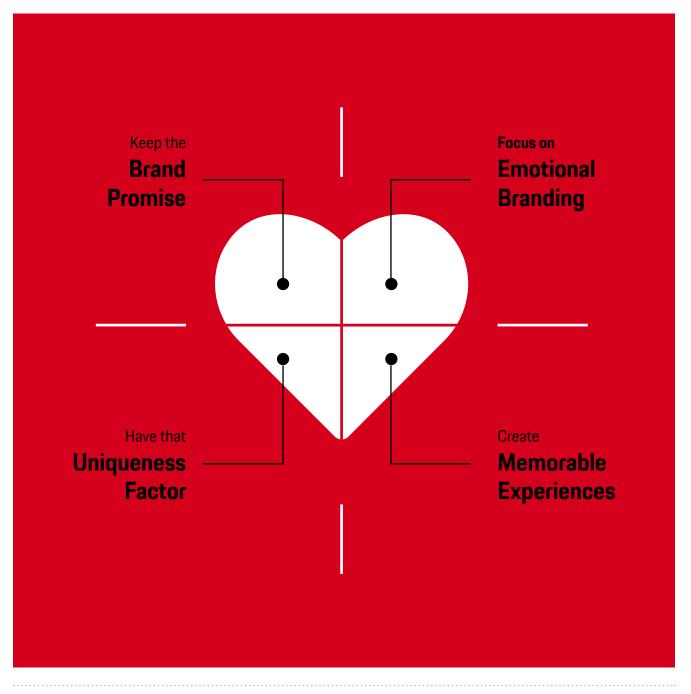


Fig. 5. Guidance to build up brand love

01 // Have that uniqueness factor

First of all: at the core of every beloved brand are outstanding and unique products. In contrast to interpersonal love, brand love usually has a clear cost-benefit relation: consumers love the special taste and nougat-like creaminess of Nutella, the unique go-kart feeling of a Mini, or the special wearing experience of UGG boots. It is the brand's task to find its USP to stand out from the jungle of brands.

When respondents¹¹ talked about their most beloved brand, each of them emphasized their uniqueness. The brand as a love object was often described as extraordinary and incomparable. Due to the clear differentiation from the competition, it was also experienced as difficult to substitute. Interestingly enough, the exclusivity of the brand was also emphasized in this context.

02

// Focus on emotional branding

In marketing practice, many have already recognized that emotions are crucial to consumer behavior. The purely rational deciding customer does not exist. Even if customers think rationally, they unconsciously follow their emotions. Although it has been assumed for a long time that thinking and actions are geared primarily to this ratio, it must now be recognized that emotion is also highly relevant. Whether it is deciding on a new car or the question of which brand to take off the shelf in a supermarket, uncontrollable, unconscious behavioral drivers always play a very important role for us.

The trend of emotional branding has become established in order to realize a clear market differentiation and a sustainable competitive advantage-above all through emotional factors. Emotionalizing is implemented in numerous logos, claims, and various advertising campaigns. There are many examples of this, where the idea of love is quite obviously played. McDonald's worldwide and years-old slogan is "I'm lovin' it," Häagen-Dazs communicated "I love Dazs," and Mini asked the rhetorical question "Is it love?". Langnese has integrated a heart into its logo design as an expression of love, and Landliebe includes this strong emotional form in the brand name. In Merci's ongoing advertising campaign, images of family, relationships, and friends as well as sentimental music also convey strong feelings in the form of a love motif. Ferrero's

chocolate brand Kinder even introduced a reward program where customers could collect Lovebrand stickers. Moreover, even Lufthansa, in their worldwide campaign "Say Yes to the World," asked customers to tell their stories why they "loved the world."

The completion of emotional branding is seen in beloved brands. Those charismatic brands exert an extremely strong emotional appeal. In a challenging competitive environment, these brands have managed to build an intimate and long-lasting bond with the consumer, creating an admirable aura that sets them apart from the competition. The often-beloved brands Mini, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany, and IKEA are just some of the prime examples that impressively demonstrate the success of emotional brand managementbe it in their advertisements, in the products and services they are offering, or how they interact with their customers. These lovemarks show that companies in many industries can benefit immensely if they see it as a goal of brand management to anchor an affective, unique position in the minds and hearts of consumers and even tap into their dreams. Dreams create action and action inspires dreams. Tapping into dreams is a powerful way of showing people that we understand their desires and can transform them into delight. Porsche for instance, has lately updated the core of its brand, calling it "Driven by Dreams." 12

03

// Create memorable experiences

Outstanding product quality and inspiring stories are still not enough. In over 90 percent of the relationships Porsche Consulting investigated, consumers had other, usually highly emotional, personal experiences with the brand in addition to a unique product experience¹³. In many cases, consumers relate nostalgic childhood memories in the context of the beloved brand or they reveal that the brand triggers feelings of home. Memorable experiences consumers have with their beloved brands are thus an important precursor to brand love.

Give customers a great experience and they'll buy more, be more loyal, and share their experience with friends. If that is what every company strives for, why are so many consumers still disappointed? Call it experience disconnect: companies tout the latest technologies or snappy design, but they haven't focused on—or invested in—the aspects of customer experience that are the most meaningful. Most of the fastest-growing brands today focus intensely on winning these "moments of truth." They are in touch with consumers, not as demographics or psychographics, but as people-as individuals. Strong brands such as Porsche have very emotional, aspirational equities. Porsche, for instance, puts its Porsche Experience Centers at the heart of the customer experience strategy. "Porsche stands for emotions, passion, and genuine experiences,"14 emphasizes Detlev von Platen, Member of the Executive Board for Sales and Marketing at Porsche AG. "The Porsche Experience Center [...] is intended as a point of contact for customers and enthusiasts from all around Europe. This is where they can experience what the 'Porsche feeling' represents and meet the Porsche community."14 To strengthen the Porsche brand love, couples can even marry in the Porsche Experience Centers.

04

// Keep the promise

The final ingredient of the brand love recipe is trust. Just like in interpersonal relationships, trust is a key success factor for a relationship to remain stable over time. When consumers are asked for possible reasons why they might eventually no longer love their beloved brand, they name the non-fulfillment of the brand's promise and thus experiencing a disappointment. Hence, the fulfillment of this last part of the brand love formula is as simple as follows: a brand that keeps its promise and thus leads to a positive brand experience lays the basis for long-term brand-consumer relationships¹⁵. Keeping the promise entails staying authentic, trustworthy, and honest at every touchpoint the brand has with its customers.

Can any brand become a loved brand?

The answer is yes—any brand can become a loved brand.

The "brand" comprises not only its products and services, corporate image, values, quality, customer service, and of course the overall performance of the company, but also the attitude of employees, their dress, if they smile, if they pay personalized attention, and even the knowledge employees have about the product. As of course the customer experience. For long-term success, there should be consistency among all brand attributes, creating a positive strong image. No matter in which industry, segment or price level the brand is positioned, if the brand has done its homework and established itself on the market as a strong differentiated brand and has managed to become irreplaceable for the customer through emotional bonding and positive customer experiences, all prerequisites are fulfilled for the brand to succeed in becoming a loved brand.

Today, many brands are transforming their customer relations and re-adapting their marketing strategy to gain access to the status of brand love. However, upstream efforts to become a loved brand are considerable. Brands that choose to seek this status must respond in a deep and very targeted way to their customers' needs. Being a loved brand is about being memorable: understanding customers' emotional asperity so that no other alternative can be considered. The world may be changing, but the core principles of developing consumer connections will continue to remain the same.

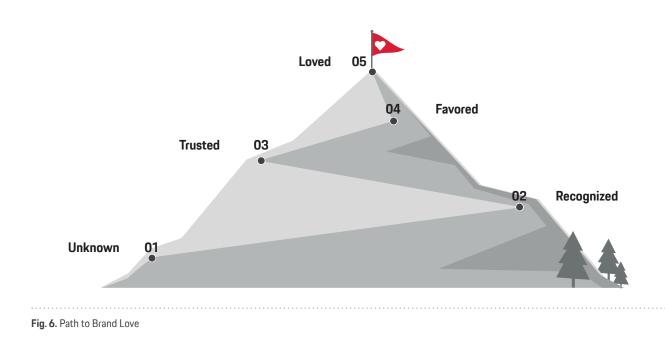
Brand Love Quick Check

Consumer-brand relationships have natural stages—from initial touchpoints with a brand all the way up until the ultimate stage of brand love (see Figure 6).

The path to brand love shows the change in consumers' feelings towards a brand as they move through five stages: from unknown to recognized, trusted, favored to finally reach the status of being loved.

In the starting phase, when a brand is relatively new in the market, it appears to be completely unknown to consumers. The brand's focus should lie on compelling messages to keep consumers from walking by without even looking. To achieve some success, the priority is to be noticed in the overloaded world of brands. Therefore, the brand's strategy should be on building up a clear brand positioning and increasing communications to the market. In the recognized phase, the brand is already established in the consumers' minds, i.e., consumers are aware of the brand. In order to leverage the next stage, the brand should focus on being considered. Consumers are to be convinced that choosing the brand is the right choice. Thus, the brand needs to focus on strengthening its brand positioning by outspeaking its brand promise, thereby trying to drive consideration. In the consumers' minds, the brand needs

to be perceived as better, different, or cheaper. Otherwise, the brand will not gain acceptance. Brands that reach the trusted stage experience the first signs of business success. Your consumers perceive the brand as fulfilling their needs. However, the lack of an emotional connection leaves the purchase to chance. Consumers will still switch brands indiscriminately. Brands in the "trusted" phase should emphasize keeping the brand promise as much as consumers are willing to re-experience the brand. At the favored stage, consumers have become loval customers due to either functional or emotional reasons. Consumers see the brand as a favorite choice. They are loyal and build the brand into a routine. These brands should now focus on tightening the bond with their most loyal consumers. By emphasizing brand experiences and memorable moments that are kept as stories in consumers' hearts, the favored brand is likely to become loved. The loved stage is where the brand becomes iconic, with a core base of heavy consumers who cherish and defend the brand. Consumers who have become brand lovers crave the brand and cannot live without it anymore. At the "loved" stage, the brands must hold their close connection with their base by creating magical experiences that inspire brand lovers. In addition, constant innovations, thereby bringing news to the market, remains key to stay attractive.



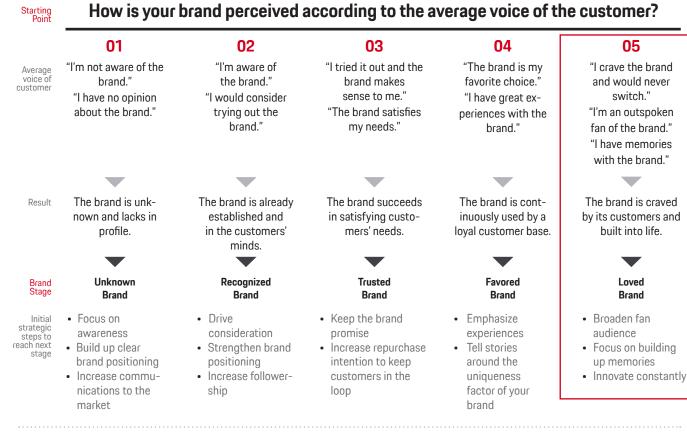


Fig. 7. Brand Love Quick Check

Porsche Consulting proposes a quick check for brands to figure out what stage of a relationship they hold with their customers and recommends first strategic implications to reach the next level on their way to become a loved brand (see Figure 7).

Initial strategic steps to become a loved brand. Whether it is a new brand that is starting out, a brand that is fighting to be on top, or a brand that is already there, it's important to know "who you are" as a brand so that consumers do, too. Staying true to a brand's core and revealing why the brand exists will infect customers with that same passion. The basis for a brand on its path to a loved brand is to establish itself as a differentiated and strong brand. The homework the brand needs to do in this regard is to clearly define its brand identity, brand values, brand competences, brand personality, and brand promise—resulting in the overall brand positioning that guides brand communications and sets the stage for brand experiences.¹⁶ In the past, companies communicated—for example, via TV commercials—to get consumers to run to the store and then buy the advertised product. This two-way pattern has been broken by the digital revolution. That's because interactions between brands and people now take place in more diverse ways. Treading these paths is the challenge that marketing has to face today. People get their information not only from TV spots, but also from forums, social media sites, or even far from the digital world-from the neighbor next door. Every channel is now a medium that can carry messages that marketing departments and agencies can also use. It's also important to remember that people can also consume a brand indirectly. Think about Starbucks, for example. First and foremost, people go to Starbucks for their coffee. But the brand experience includes not only the beverage itself, but also the atmosphere in the stores and the time people spend or work there. It's all part of consuming the Starbucks brand. Brands like Starbucks that succeed in demonstrating consistency throughout emotion-driven brand experiences, and thus deliver on their brand promise at every customer-brand touchpoint, are very likely to be rewarded with brand love.

Conclusion: Are you ready for brand love?

The paper shows that brand love is not a concept of marketing practice only, but a significant phenomenon that should no longer be neglected in corporate practice. In addition to the positive direct sales impact of brand love, the special and exclusive mechanism of forgiveness is also highly meaningful, as it acts as a protective cover in case of potential brand failure such as product flops, quality issues, or negative headlines. Brand love therefore means the combination of longterm revenue security and risk minimization for the company.

Creating brand love is not straightforward. Nonetheless, brands that succeed in bonding emotionally with their customers are rewarded with loyalty beyond reason. This is a key differentiation factor in today's overloaded world of brands.



Brand love is the most intense of all consumer-brand relationships.

- Brand love is evoked in consumers when they can identify with the brand, feel connected to the brand (intimacy), feel attracted by the brand (passion), and perceive the brand as superior to the competition.
- Consumers who love a brand show higher loyalty, resulting in a willingness to pay a price premium, to (re-)purchase the brand, to speak positively about the brand in public and may even defend the brand to others.
- Companies striving for building up brand love should follow four dimensions: Having a uniqueness factor; focusing on emotional branding; creating memorable experiences; and finally, keeping the promise in order to prevent dissatisfied customers.

See also



Brand Evolution or Revolution?



The Art of Building Customer Ecosystems



Customer Experience Excellence



Thinking from the customer's point of view

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Appendix

Sources

(01) For more information, please have a look at the Porsche Consulting publication "Customer Experience Excellence": https://www.porsche-consulting.com/en/press/insights/detail/white-paper-customer-experience-excellence/

(02) Brand names and benchmarks mentioned in the paper are based on Porsche Consulting expert assessments.

(03) Interbrand (2020)

(04) Kevin Roberts, Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands (2005)

(05) Kevin Roberts, Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands (2005)

(06) https://morningconsult.com/most-loved-brands-2020/

(07) Dr. Danne Medien & Marketing, Lovebrands (2018)

(08) The studies asked for the brand love phenomenon for hedonic brands in general; thus, the studies' results are not industry-specific. The target group were the Young & Affluents, aged between 18–25. The objective was to find out how to "seed" brand love in prospects (a brand's future target group) to increase their future willingness to possess the brand

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(10) https://www.warc.com/newsandopinion/news/coca-cola-focuses-on-brand-love/26428

(11) The Porsche Consulting studies asked for the brand love phenomenon for hedonic brands in general; thus, the studies' results are not industry-specific. The target group were the Young & Affluents, aged between 18–25. The objective was to find out how to "seed" brand love in prospects (a brand's future target group) to increase their future willingness to possess the brand

(12) https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/2020/digital/porsche-deniz-keskin-what-new-luxury-means-for-Porsche-21857. html

(13) See Porsche Consulting publication "Customer Experience Excellence": https://www.porsche-consulting.com/en/press/insights/detail/white-paper-customer-experience-excellence/

(14) https://newsroom.porsche.com/en/2019/company/porsche-experience-center-hockenheimring-opening-sportscar-together-day-18890.html

(15) For more information, have a look at the Porsche Consulting publication "Brand Evolution or Revolution": https://www.porsche-consulting.com/en/press/insights/detail/white-paper-brand-management/

(16) In the white paper "Brand Evolution or Revolution," Porsche Consulting has described what needs to be done in the individual phases: https://www.porsche-consulting.com/en/press/insights/detail/white-paper-brand-management/

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