

**Brand Defence: Consumers' Word-of-Mouth  
Behaviour Towards a Loved Brand**

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## Abstract

The aim of this doctoral research was to 'critically explore brand love and brand defence in consumer-brand relationships by considering the question: can consumers go beyond positive word-of-mouth, and/or brand advocacy to defend their loved-brands against criticism?' In achieving the research aim, the study involved exploring, conceptualising, and measuring a novel construct in branding, namely 'brand defence' through the empirical study of consumers' word-of-mouth attributions towards a loved brand.

Brand defence has been identified, proposed, and conceptualised as a superior form of consumers' word-of-mouth behaviour attributed towards their loved brands, when their loved brands are faced with negative word-of-mouth. The conceptualisation of brand defence is developed from two theories: 1. *The Fairness Theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001)*, and 2. *Social Capital perspective of Equity Theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002)*. Moreover, consumers' brand-favourable WOM is explored in a hierarchy based on the assumptions of Means-End Theory (Guttman, 1982), which suggests brand defence is a superior WOM behaviour that supersedes brand advocacy and positive-WOM in supporting the brand against negative WOM.

Though identifying and conceptualising brand defence, this study investigated the role of brand love in promoting brand-favourable positive word-of-mouth behaviour in response to any negative word-of-mouth about the loved brand. Therefore, this study involved incorporating two important research streams; 1. word-of-mouth, and 2. consumer-brand relationships.

In order to extend understanding of the extent and nature of consumers' brand-favourable word-of-mouth behaviour towards loved-brands, the study conceptualised and categorised the brand-favourable word-of-mouth in form of a hierarchy, building on the assumptions of Means-End Theory (Gutman, 1982; Wansink, 2003). The study assigned brand defence the top vertex of the hierarchy against negative word-of-mouth about a loved brand, followed by brand advocacy, and positive word-of-mouth. Moreover, the study also involved investigating the role of brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness in mediating the impact of brand love on brand defence, advocacy, and positive word-of-mouth.

In lieu of limited empirical investigation of brand defence, and the proposed doctoral research model, this study involved mixed methods research, spanned over three research phases:

**Phase-I:** Pre-survey qualitative interviews and pre-test survey to develop the measuring scale for brand defence.

**Phase-II:** Main quantitative surveys exploring two product categories: cosmetics and consumer-electronics. The research model was refined through confirmatory factors analysis and the scale validation and research hypotheses including the hierarchy of brand-favourable WOM were tested through structural equation modelling.

**Phase-III:** Post-survey laddering interviews exploring the same product categories as main surveys, to explore consumers' values behind certain attributions through hierarchical value-maps

analysis. This is the first study to use value-maps analysis in consumer-brand relationships and word-of-mouth.

The key findings of the research suggest brand defence as the strongest and most prevalent brand-favourable WOM against negative-WOM, which goes beyond brand advocacy and positive word-of-mouth against negative-WOM. Moreover, this study also involved testing the mediating role of brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty on the relationship of brand love and the three proposed WOM behaviour. Partial mediation was found for all three constructs for brand defence, depicting a positive impact of all the three relationship constructs on brand defence, along with the direct and mediating influence of brand love. The hierarchical relationships between positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence were also found to be significant. However, the hypotheses concerning positive impact of brand love on positive-WOM were rejected, implying that in cases of negative-WOM incident, consumers tend to defend their loved brand and do not offer any lower intensity WOM behaviour. The qualitative findings concurred with this viewpoint, providing useful insight into the nature, intensity, and intent of consumer-brand relationships and their consequent positive outcomes, especially in brand defence.

Overall, this study offers both theoretical and methodological contributions to knowledge by conceptualising and measuring a new branding construct, brand defence. The major theoretical contributions of this research comprise: 1. Conceptualising and categorising brand-favourable WOM in the form of a novel hierarchy; 2. Introducing a new branding construct, 'brand defence' by observing, conceptualising, developing, and measuring the construct; 3. recognising and highlighting the importance of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love in promoting brand-favourable WOM especially brand defence in managing, counteracting, and venting negative-WOM; 4. Conceptualising the nature of brand love by evaluating existing research on consumer-brand relationships, brand love, para-social love, and interpersonal bi-directional and unreciprocated love. The major methodological contributions of this research include: 1. Developing and implementing a measuring-scale for a new branding construct, brand defence; 2. Exploring and measuring brand forgiveness by adopting an interpersonal forgiveness scale and adapting to the branding context. 3. Measuring the hierarchical relationships between positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence; 4. Conducting laddering interviews in appreciating the consumers' value structures in forming consumer-brand relationships (brand love) and their brand-focussed behavioural and psychological consequences.

Furthermore, the study also offered practical implications on how managers can mobilise brand defence by fostering consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love, in cultivating brand defence to potentially mitigate the disruptive effects of negative word-of-mouth, both offline and online.

## **List of Publications Associated to this Doctoral Study**

### **Book Chapter:**

**Javed, M.**, Roy, S., and Mansoor, B. (2015) 'Will you defend your Loved Brand? Brand Defence superseding Advocacy', in Fetscherin, M., and Heilmann, T. (Eds.), *Consumer-Brand Relationships*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, UK, pp.31-54.

### **Conference Papers and Presentations:**

**Javed, M.**, and Mansoor, B. (2014). "Brand Defence: Consumer Protective Behaviour towards their Loved Brands against Criticism" Paper to be presented at *Academy of World Business Marketing and Management Development (AWBMAMD) Conference*, August 11-14, 2014, Dubai, UAE.

Roy, S., **Javed, M.**, and Mansoor, B. (2014). "Brand Defence: When You Love It, You Defend It", paper presented at *9<sup>th</sup> Global Branding Conference*, April 9-11, 2014 Hertfordshire, UK.

**Javed, M.**, and Roy, S. (2013). "Does 'Brand Trust' foster Defence against Negative Word of Mouth?", paper presented at the *7<sup>th</sup> International ACBM Conference-Branding and Marketing in a Global Marketplace – An Asian Perspective*, November 18, 2013, Hong Kong.

**Javed, M.**, and Mansoor, B. (2013). "Will you defend your Loved Brand? Brand Defence superseding Advocacy", paper presented at *3<sup>rd</sup> International Consumer Brand Relationship Colloquium*, September 26-28, 2013 Orlando, Florida, USA.

**Javed, M.**, and Roy, S. (2013). "Brand Defence; A Hierarchy of Possible WOM Behaviour of Brand Love". Paper presented at *Academy of Marketing Conference 2013 – Marketing Relevance* -2013 July 8-11, Cardiff, UK.

**Javed, M.**, and Roy, S. (2013), "Brand as an Active Partner in Consumer-Brand Love Bonds; Brand Love Relationship Process", paper presented at *the 42<sup>nd</sup> EMAC Annual Conference (the European Marketing Academy Conference)*, Istanbul, Turkey.

**Javed, M. (2013).** "Beyond Brand Advocacy; WOM as Brand Defence paper presented at *the Consumer Brand Relationship Conference*, 15-17 May, Boston, Massachusetts, MA.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Aims of the Chapter:

This chapter introduces the reader to 'brand defence', the novel branding construct conceptualised, explored, developed, and measured in this doctoral research. This chapter provides an overview of brand defence followed by the importance of the construct concerning scholarship and practice. It further presents the research aim, conceptualisation, background, scope, focus, and context of this doctoral study, the research aims and objectives, the research contributions, and the layout of the thesis.

#### 1.2 Brand Defence; Introduction and Background:

This research defines brand defence as, *"an intensity of positive-WOM behaviour; where consumers in close consumer-brand relationships or brand love defend the brand for any criticisms"*.

Brand defence is manifested in consumers' protective behaviour in the face of negative word-of-mouth (negative-WOM) directed at their favourite brands and is rooted in the consumer-brand relationship literature, (e.g., Park et al., 2006, Park and McInnis, 2006; Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Cross and Smith, 1996).

The value of building strong consumer-brand relationships has received attention from both academics and practitioners. Much of the existing research on consumer-brand relationships emphasise customers' responses to brands, which are treated as relationship partners. In some cases, consumers and brands are strongly attached, which results in emotional outcomes. However, there is limited research examining consumers' reactions to negative information and publicity about the brands they are strongly attached to. More specifically the possibility of brand wrongdoings eliciting a defensive reaction from consumers has received scant attention (e.g. Colliander and Wien, 2013; Lisjack et al. 2012).

Customers posting positive and negative comments related to brands' evaluations on online platforms is common and well established in the marketing literature (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Xiang et al. 2017). Due to the ease of posting negative comments via the online platforms, a brand could receive a massive attack. On the other hand an increasing phenomenon is observed that other customers of the brand act as the brand's representative in order to defend the brand. For instance, there are many social media pages and videos against McDonalds (e.g. *'Why I hate McDonalds?'*), and there are several pro-McDonalds posts and videos supporting McDonalds on social media (e.g. *'Ten reasons to love McDonalds'*). Similar behaviour can be observed with iPhone users and Tesla enthusiasts, even though the consumers realise the shortcomings of the brand, or the product itself. However, while such behavioural phenomena is increasing, conceptualisation and a scale for measuring brand defence has not yet been developed.

Research has largely ignored the manifestation through which consumers defend their brands and companies (Lisjak et al. 2012). Subsequently, questions that arise are: What is brand defence? How is brand defence measured? Is it different from positive word-of-mouth (positive-WOM) and brand advocacy? And, how is it different from positive word-of-mouth (positive-WOM) and brand advocacy? This study explores these questions in justifying this doctoral research, providing important insights into the existence, conceptualisation, and measurement of brand defence.

There is a consensus in the literature that individuals defend social others who are considered as part of their self-concept (Cheng et al. 2012). However, limited research exists on the extent to which consumers defend external objects, such as brands (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Lisjak et al. 2012). Most studies focus on the value of building strong and enduring consumer-brand relationships as one of the fundamental objectives of companies (Elbedweihy et al. 2016), which has received attention from both academics and practitioners (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015). Much of the existing research on consumer-brand relationships emphasise consumers' responses to brands, which are treated as relationship partners (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012). In some cases, consumers and brands are strongly attached, which results in emotional outcomes (Park et al. 2010). However, fewer studies have examined consumers' reactions to negative information and publicity about the brands consumers strongly relate to (e.g. Donovan et al. 2012; Heinrich et al. 2012). More specifically, the possibility of brand wrongdoings eliciting a defensive reaction from consumers has received scant attention (e.g. Japutra et al. 2018). For instance, Japutra et al. (2014) notes that even if the brand disappoints the consumer, the consumer would consider it as a one-off event. This suggests consumers are defending brands by being more forgiving towards the brands that they love or are strongly attached with. Thus, the purpose of this doctoral research is to investigate this new construct of brand defence, creating a measurement instrument for it and identifying its relationships with related constructs, brand love, brand trust, brand forgiveness, brand loyalty, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM as proposed in this study.

The doctoral research conceptualised brand defence in the referential intensity of both brand-favourable WOM, as well as an outcome of the intensity of close consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love. Concerning the domain of word-of-mouth (WOM), brand defence has been observed as a superior, more intense behaviour, which has been proposed, and empirically explored, and measured to surpass the intensities of positive-WOM and brand advocacy.

Both academics and practitioners unanimously agree on WOM being any oral or written non-commercial communication about a product or brand (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Sweeney et al. 2010) which can either be positive or negative. Communication technologies, in particular the Internet and mobile, have amplified the influence of WOM over the last two decades, rendering WOM a very major influence on consumers' behaviour. (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Wang, 2011). Moreover, WOM is recognised as a highly effective influence because of its underlying premise of being unbiased and non-commercial communication. It makes both negative and positive information equally vital for brands to manage in their favour.

This has led to serious investment from organisations in creating synthetic WOM, and viral marketing (Groeger and Buttle, 2014; Kozinets, 2010), as well as, investing in online platforms and websites in facilitating consumers to offer WOM (Groeger and Buttle, 2014; Huang *et al.*, 2010, Sweeney *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, managers have been observed to engage consumers in activities promoting positive-WOM for their brands (Graham and Havelena, 2007; Groeger and Buttle, 2014; Gruen *et al.*, 2006; Henning-Thurau *et al.*, 2004). So much so, that incentives are offered to customers for reviewing products, and referral schemes are introduced to seek recommendations (Ahrens *et al.* 2013).

Such recognition of the importance of positive-WOM has led to the recognition of consumers' superior positive-WOM behaviour brand advocacy involving recommending and referrals. Consequently, researchers now acknowledge brand advocacy as a superior form of positive-WOM, in particular its service to the brand via recommendations, and the importance of treating brand advocacy as an independent consumer behaviour for research attention (Bilro *et al.* 2018; Jayasimha *et al.*, 2017; Kemp *et al.*, 2012; Parrott *et al.*, 2015; Samala and Singh, 2018). Thus, brand advocacy is commonly defined as the consumers' enthusiasm and readiness to recommend a brand or any specific products of a brand.

The WOM literature is, however, limited in providing strategies to address the negativity of negative-WOM, even though the prevalence of negative-WOM is recognised in the literature (Harrison-walker, 2001; Sweeney *et al.* 2010; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Lee and Song, 2010; van Noort and Willemsen, 2012), and its destructive effects (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009). Previous research indicates that consumers' responses to brand wrongdoings are not always negative (Einwiller *et al.*, 2006), as consumers with strong attachment to brands are highly likely to dismiss the negative information about the brands (Ahluwalia *et al.*, 2000) or counter-argue and or defend that information (Park *et al.* 2010). Consumers who are strongly attached to the brands are more likely to argue against the negative brand information and will have favourable attributions following wrongdoings by the brand (Schmalz and Orth, 2012; Trump, 2014). This is consistent with the entire consumer-brand relationships' research that suggest strong positive outcomes for loved brands, particularly concerning positive-WOM towards the brands (Albert *et al.* 2008, 2010; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.* 2012; Fetsctsherin, 2014; Fetcherin and Heinrich, 2014; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). Therefore, this research posits that consumers' defensive behaviour in the face of negative publicity reflects an intense form of customers' emotional reaction out of strong consumer-brand relationship, i.e. love for the brand. Thus, this doctoral research proposes this specific consumer positive-WOM 'brand defence' behaviour warrants further research attention as a unique construct of brand advocacy, to advance knowledge in this field.

Therefore, in this doctoral research brand defence is proposed as a superior and stronger WOM behaviour attributed towards a loved brand. Here, brand defence refers to a type and intensity of WOM behaviour; where consumers in close consumer-brand relationships or brand love, defend

the brand from any criticisms of any failure or wrongdoings, irrespective of those criticisms being true or not. Furthermore, it is suggested that brand defence supersedes positive-WOM and brand advocacy and thus can extend the conceptualisation of WOM beyond simple praising (in case of positive WOM) and complaining (in case of negative WOM) to include defending the brand in the face of criticism. The literature review presented in chapter 2 displays detailed conceptualisation, justification, and development of this construct and the theorised research model.

The next section presents the aim and objectives of the research.

### **1.3 Aim and Research Objectives of this Doctoral Study:**

This doctoral study investigated brand defence through the empirical study of consumers' word-of-mouth attributions towards a loved brand. Brand defence is a new branding construct which has been proposed, conceptualised, observed, and measured in this research study. Brand defence is proposed and conceptualised as a superior form of consumers' word-of-mouth (WOM) behaviour attributed towards their loved brands, when their loved brands are faced with negative word-of-mouth. Thus, this study investigated the role of brand love in promoting brand-favourable positive word-of-mouth (positive-WOM) behaviour in response to any negative word-of-mouth (negative-WOM) about the loved brand.

Accordingly, this research incorporated two important evolving research streams in contemporary marketing:

1. *Word-of-mouth/electronic word-of-mouth (WOM/eWOM) and*
2. *Consumer-brand relationships.*

Research suggests WOM can influence consumer behaviour either positively or negatively through positive-WOM or negative-WOM, where negative-WOM can be detrimental for brands. However, on the other hand, the literature recognises brand love for its ability to promote brand-favourable behaviour, and specifically influence consumers' positive-WOM behaviour. Therefore, acknowledging the potential of brand love in promoting consumers' positive-WOM behaviour, and considering the potential destruction of negative-WOM for brands, this study involved observing the positive-WOM attributions of brand love in response to negative-WOM incident. The intent was to examine how positive-WOM can be mobilised to mitigate the adverse effects of negative-WOM through brand love. Therefore, the aim of this study was to:

*Critically explore brand love and brand defence in consumer-brand relationships by considering the question: can consumers go beyond positive word-of-mouth, and/or brand advocacy to defend their loved-brands against criticism?*

In meeting this aim, this study offers theoretical, methodological, and managerial contributions to knowledge on consumer-brand relationships and WOM, particularly brand love, brand forgiveness, and brand defence.

To achieve this research aim, the research objectives are:

1. *To critically analyse the literature, conceptualising and characterising WOM and eWOM, the impact of WOM/eWOM, and to evaluate the importance of consumer-brand relationships particularly 'brand love' in promoting positive-WOM.*
2. *To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM and/or eWOM attributions towards their loved brands.*
3. *To develop a conceptual model of consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour including positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved-brands in a negative-WOM scenario.*
4. *To conceptualise and measure the levels and types of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour as a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM and/or eWOM attributions.*
5. (a) *To create and empirically validate a measurement scale for brand defence;*  
(b) *To evaluate the direct impact of brand love on consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence.*  
(c) *To evaluate the mediating impact of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the relationship between brand love and consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence.*
6. *To contribute to theory, methodology, and brand management concerning the role of consumer-brand relationships particularly brand love on the future WOM and eWOM research and practice, particularly concerning the role of 'brand defence'.*

The next section briefly presents the conceptualisation of the study.

#### **1.4 Conceptualising the Study:**

This doctoral study explored consumer-brand relationships using interpersonal theory, which proffers stronger potential for new psychological insights into these relationships. The study's initial focus was to explore the importance and effectiveness of consumers' WOM behaviour in the presence and prevalence of the internet and social media. This has increased the range, audibility, and audience of WOM as eWOM (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Ng *et al.*, 2010), as compared to the traditional WOM that was viewed as person-to-person communication (Arndt, 1967; Harrison-Walker, 2001). However, as the study developed, the literature indicated the importance of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love, as a critical factor in promoting several brand-favourable behaviour, with positive-WOM being the most common behavioural outcome (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998).

Following this emergent value of consumer-brand relationships in the branding literature, the critical review of the literature revealed key issues pertinent to the conceptualisation and design of this doctoral study. Firstly, consumer-brand relationships were revealed to be strategically underpinned by positive attributions, such as brand love; and in turn, the critical role of brand love in generating positive-WOM (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). Additionally, WOM, and its evolution into eWOM, is a significant influence on consumers' brand-perceptions and consumption decision-making (Arndt, 1967; Harrison-walker 2001; deMatos and Rossi, 2008). This WOM influence can be positive (positive-WOM), strengthening brands, or negative (negative-WOM) and thus destructive to brands (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016). WOM's impact is therefore influenced by the quality and closeness of consumer-brand relationships, where positive-WOM can be mobilised as brand defence against negative-WOM attributions (Park *et al.*, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2013) provided strong implications for this study.

Fewer studies have focused on the extrinsic drivers of consumers' brand defence behaviour to redress negative-WOM, while consumers' defending behaviour have been observed in the psychology literature. For example, the research of Lisjak *et al.* (2012) explored consumers' psychological behaviour in attributing brand defending behaviour to a brand they identified with. Their work highlighted the importance of consumers' self-concept, where brands are considered as part of the extended-self. Using possessions to construct one's self (James, 1890; Lisjak *et al.*, 2012), consumers can therefore take any threats to brands as personally threatening (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, such defensiveness for brands was also observed within consumers' sense of justice (Colliander and Wien, 2013), as well as, a consequence of their brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006). In this regard, the self-concept also revealed the importance of close others, relationships, and/or material objects in the extended-self. Consequently, the likelihood or inclination to defend ones' self also extends to the defence of related or loved brands. Therefore, in this study, based on the realised importance of consumer-brand relationships in attributing positive-WOM, the consumers' intensity of the different positive-WOM behaviour were explored within the context of close consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love. Brand defence therefore emerges as the conceptual focus of this study.

Accordingly, this study entailed:

1. *Conceptualising measuring and validating the evolutionary positive-WOM behaviour, brand defence as an outcome of brand love;*
2. *Characterising WOM in a novel 'hierarchy' based on the intensity of brand love. The consequent consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards their loved brands are suggested to supersede positive-WOM and brand advocacy, and lead to brand defence against negative-WOM.*

The WOM literature suggests the content of a WOM message informs its intensity (Sweeney *et al.* 2010). Therefore, based on the same notion, this study proposed three intensities of brand-favoured WOM behaviour: brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM in a hierarchy, for a superior understanding of the individual WOM constructs, in line with Reynolds and Phillips (2009).



Moreover, the literature implies that brand love potentially generates other relationship-benefits that can enhance brand defence by increasing positive-WOM efficacy against negative-WOM (Park *et al.*, 2006; Wang, 2011). These include trust (Albert *et al.*, 2009), loyalty (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), and forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012). This reinforces the importance of brand love, and other consumer-brand relationship constructs, as suggested by the existing literature.

The study is developed on the importance of consumer-brand relationships in inducing brand-favourable behaviour, which have been highly appreciated within the existing literature, particularly positive-WOM as a critical and common behavioural outcome (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, within the last decade brand love has emerged as one of the most important consumer-brand relationships constructs in the literature (Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin, 2014; Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014). This brand love concept gained increased research attention after the novel idea of anthropomorphising of brands in Fournier (1998), and the inclusion of a love construct in understanding consumers' perceptions and decision-making towards loved brands (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006).

With brand love being a strong consumer-brand relationship, it showed potential to offer multiple brand-favourable outcomes (Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin, 2014; Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014). One of the most common attributions reported for brand love has been positive-WOM (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). In the literature, brand love has been observed mostly in the inter-personal relationship context, and it has been proposed to offer similar relationship attributions as interpersonal love (Ahuvia, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). The consumer-brand relationships literature includes the conceptualisation and testing of brand love, observing several brand favoured behaviour including increased loyalty, trust (Albert *et al.*, 2009), ignoring the wrong-doings, inclination to forgive (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), and above all the higher propensity to generate positive-WOM (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace *et al.*, 2012).

On the other hand, the literature also shows the critical importance of WOM to the effectiveness of consumers' purchase decision making and developing brand relevant attitudes and perceptions (Arndt, 1967; DeMatos and Rossi, 2008; Graham and Havelena, 2007). The perceived reliability and non-commercial nature of WOM communications made it extremely impactful in consumers' minds, and its overwhelming importance in forming customer-buying choices (Allsop *et al.*, 2007; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Gershoff *et al.*, 2007), as well as the realised damaging nature of negative-WOM (Arndt, 1967; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009) has attracted extensive scholarly research into WOM. Several studies suggest that consumers perceive negative information about products as more useful compared with positive

product information (Anderson, 1965; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Fiske, 1980; Mizerski, 1982; Mittal *et al.*, 1998). Typically, consumers do not purchase a product after receiving negative-WOM about it (Ng and Rao, 2009). Moreover, the prospective harms of negative-WOM have exceptionally increased with the eWOM, as it extends the reach of WOM and removes the barriers impeding the spread of communication. Moreover, unlike traditional WOM, eWOM has become irrelevant to the relationship between the sender and the receiver of WOM, which has been a determinant of WOM effectiveness in traditional WOM (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Gupta and Harris, 2010).

The internet offers consumers higher accessibility to any type of WOM (Ng and Rao, 2009), which could be either damaging or fruitful for brands, depending on how brands manage the WOM advice pattern in their favour (East *et al.*, 2007). Moreover, the literature also suggests that the negative-WOM is not as damaging for familiar goods compared with unknown goods (Ahluwalia, 2000; East *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, it is also observed that consumers in close *consumer-brand relationships* refuse to believe negative-WOM about their brands (Park *et al.*, 2006), they forgive their brands (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), and even defend their brands (Lisjack *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006). Thus, in close *consumer-brand relationships*, brand love studies are revealed to be the most consistent in identifying positive-WOM as one of the most common attributes of brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace *et al.*, 2012).

This study therefore involved measuring consumers' behaviour towards loved-brands in generating positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence, against negative-WOM. This included the proposed importance of brand trust, and brand loyalty in promoting positive-WOM (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), and the relevance of brand forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012) to consumers' responses towards believed negative-WOM.

The next section presents the importance and contribution of this research.

### **1.5 The Importance and Contribution of this Research:**

This doctoral research is important because consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014); and WOM (Al-Alak, 2014; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Steffes and Burgee, 2009) have both been identified as two very significant research streams in branding research. This has become a critical part of brand management research and practice over the last decade. Accordingly, this study involved augmenting brand management practice and research by incorporating the two research areas of consumer-brand relationships and WOM.

Synthesis of the brand love literature (presented in chapter 2) revealed that twenty-three of twenty-eight papers published in the last decade, including five brand attachment papers, indicate consumers attribute brand-favourable behaviour towards their loved/attached brands. Furthermore,

out of the twenty-three papers, sixteen suggested positive-WOM as an outcome of brand love or brand attachment. All these studies observed the positive-WOM attributions in the context of consumer-brand relationships. For example, Heinrich *et al.* (2012) observed brand forgiveness as one of the outcomes of brand love, and Donovan *et al.* (2012) explored the role of brand relationship closeness in influencing brand forgiveness and thus consumers repurchase intentions. Donovan *et al.* (2012) also suggested that as more consumers forgive a brand, there is less likelihood they will seek revenge against the brand. However, there is limited research examining any negative situations in testing consumers' attributions towards loved brands (Donovan *et al.*, 2012). There is therefore a gap in knowledge on the role of close consumer-brand relationships in mitigating any negative effects of any brand transgressions, brand mistakes, or negative brand publicity. This study contributes towards filling this gap.

Moreover, current scholarship is limited in terms of observing consumers' WOM behaviour as an outcome of brand love, in a negative-WOM context featuring a loved brand. While several studies do confirm WOM as an outcome of brand love, a gap exists regarding WOM and its types as a focal point of any brand love study in either a negative or positive scenario. Furthermore, current literature lacks observations suggesting how to vent the damaging impact of negative-WOM communications through forming and maintaining close consumer-brand relationships and their consequent WOM outcomes.

These knowledge gaps and the growth and importance of the two research streams, their practical implications, and the perceived influence of brand love on consumers' WOM behaviour underpin this doctoral study. Moreover, even though brand love influences consumers' WOM behaviour, there is no published academic research (to date based on the author's extensive search) that explores brand love as a central construct to observe the mechanics and different intensities of consumers' WOM behaviour. Hence, this research is novel in combining the two research streams of consumer-brand relationships and word-of-mouth, and in appreciating the importance of these two critical players in shaping brand perceptions, consumers' values and the consequent consumer behaviour, and decision-making.

Therefore, this doctoral study extends knowledge on WOM communications as a consequence of brand love from a theoretical, methodological, and managerial perspective. The study strived to advance understanding of the consumers' values and motivations in providing WOM, when they love a brand. The perception of, and reaction to negative-WOM about the loved brand was observed by exploring the nature and type of the WOM attributions of the consumers. The study involved exploring literature from multiple discipline domains in addressing the research aim and objectives. These included Marketing, relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, interpersonal relationships' theory, sociology, and psychology. The research involved empirical exploration and highlighted the managerial implications of understanding the value of brand love in promoting brand defence that potentially prevent and mitigate the damages of negative-WOM. Brand defence is a new branding construct proposed, observed, and measured in this study as the

strongest positive-WOM attribution of brand love that supersedes brand advocacy and positive-WOM against negative-WOM.

Accordingly, this study contributes to theoretical, methodological, and practice-based knowledge. Firstly, it conceptualises and theorises a new branding construct, ‘brand defence’, and explores and measures this construct empirically using mixed methods. Secondly, it proposes and conceptualises three types of brand-favourable WOM behaviour and recommends viewing them in the form of a hierarchy based on the intensity and nature of WOM. Thirdly, it conceptualises the nature and reciprocity of brand love to develop an understanding of consumer-brand love relationship, its mechanisms, and consumer’s brand-favourable attributions and behaviour, particularly concerning brand-favoured WOM. The detailed contributions of this doctoral research are discussed in chapter 8. The next section presents the structure of the thesis.

**1.6 Structure of the Doctoral Thesis:**

The thesis is structured into different sections, with each chapter structured around a set of objectives to accomplish the overall aim and objectives of this doctoral research. Figure 1.1 presents the structure of the thesis.

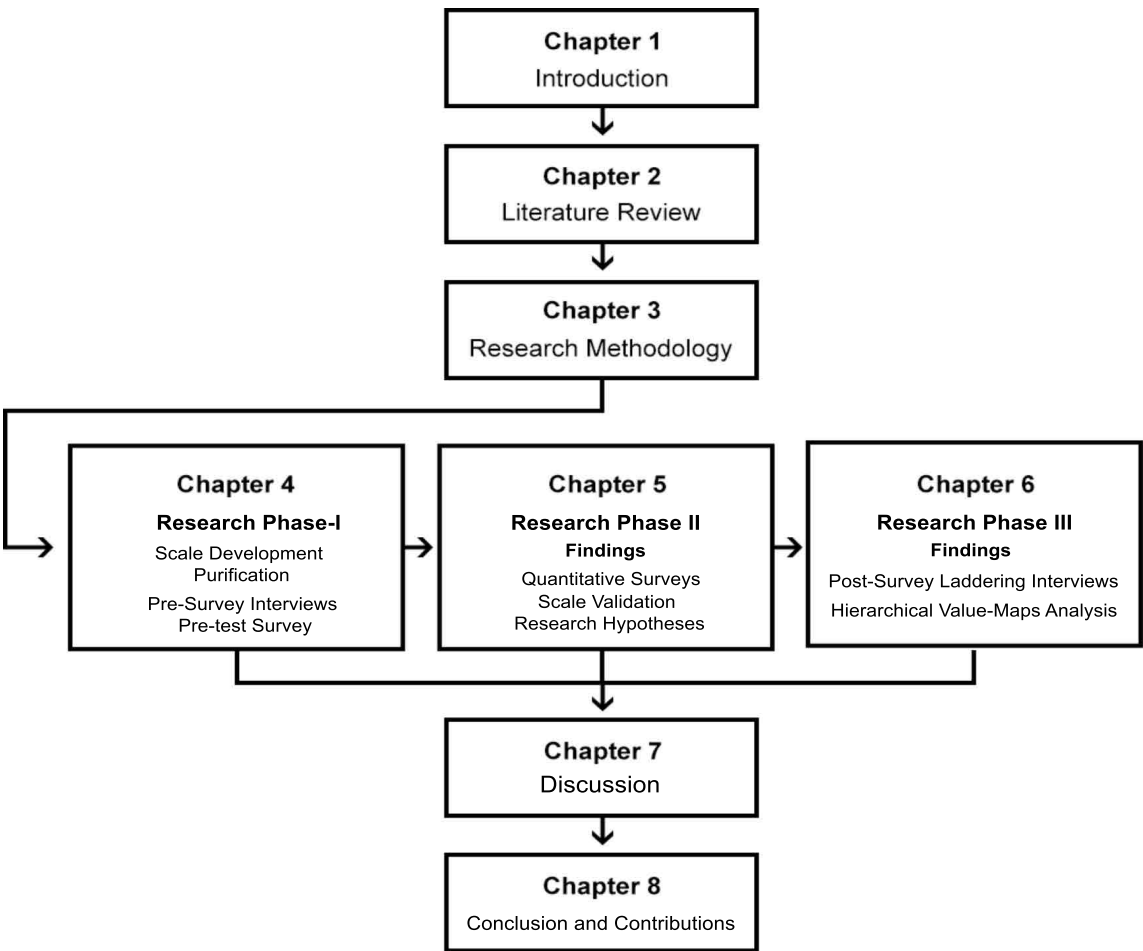


**Figure 1.1 Thesis Structure**

This thesis is organised into eight chapters as follows:

**Chapter 1: Introduction:** This chapter introduces the research, the scope, the research aim and objectives, the research focus, and the layout of this thesis.

**Chapter 2: Literature Review:** This chapter presents and appraises the existing literature in branding, including relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, and WOM. Brand love and WOM remain the focal constructs following their relevance in influencing consumer behaviour, and the influential role of brand love in promoting positive-WOM behaviour. Moreover, the chapter appraises elements of Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Sociology, and Interpersonal Relationship literature to aid understanding of the constructs and their relationships, which are explored, conceptualised, hypothesised, and tested in this doctoral work. Finally, the chapter presents the conceptualisation of research constructs used in this study, with discussion and rationale for the development of the research model and research hypotheses.

**Chapter 3: Research Methodology:** This chapter includes discussion and justification of the study's philosophical stance, methodology, and the corresponding methods and procedures used in the research to fulfil the aim and objectives. The study involved three phases of research in appreciating and materialising said research, involving both quantitative and qualitative methods.

**Chapter 4: Research Phase-I; Scale Development and Purification – Pre-Survey Interviews and Pre-test Survey Purification:** The chapter presents the results of the pre-survey semi-structured interviews and the pre-test surveys conducted to identify and purify the brand defence scale and refine the research instrument.

**Chapter 5: Research Phase II; Findings of the Quantitative Surveys – Scale Validation and Research Hypotheses:** This chapter presents the results of the quantitative findings of the final surveys on cosmetics and consumer-electronics. The chapter includes the participants' demographics, descriptive statistics, construct reliability and validity, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), followed by hypotheses test results of the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) and Sobel Test.

**Chapter 6: Research Phase III; Findings Post-Survey Laddering Interviews – Hierarchical Value-Maps Analysis:** This chapter presents the qualitative findings of the post-survey laddering interviews. The data analysis involved thematic-content analysis, followed by consumers' hierarchical value-maps.

**Chapter 7: Discussion:** This chapter presents the analysis of the three phases of the primary data collection. The chapter involved appraising the overall research outcomes with reference to the existing literature, to expound how this study extends and complements existing research.

**Chapter 8: Conclusion and Contributions:** The final chapter of the thesis focuses on drawing conclusions from the research findings, with an emphasis on the contributions of the study in extending knowledge, while providing future research prospects. The chapter also includes reflexivity on the researchers own experience, development, and learning through this process as a doctoral researcher, and future development plans with potential publications' opportunities.

The chapter finally concludes the study for its accomplishment of the research main aim.

The review of the existing literature is presented in the next chapter

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### 2.1 Aims of the Chapter:

This chapter presents the review of the relevant literature that provides the basis and development for this research study, principally the core conceptualisations of the research constructs, model, and hypotheses. Figure 2.1 presents a brief overview of the literature review.

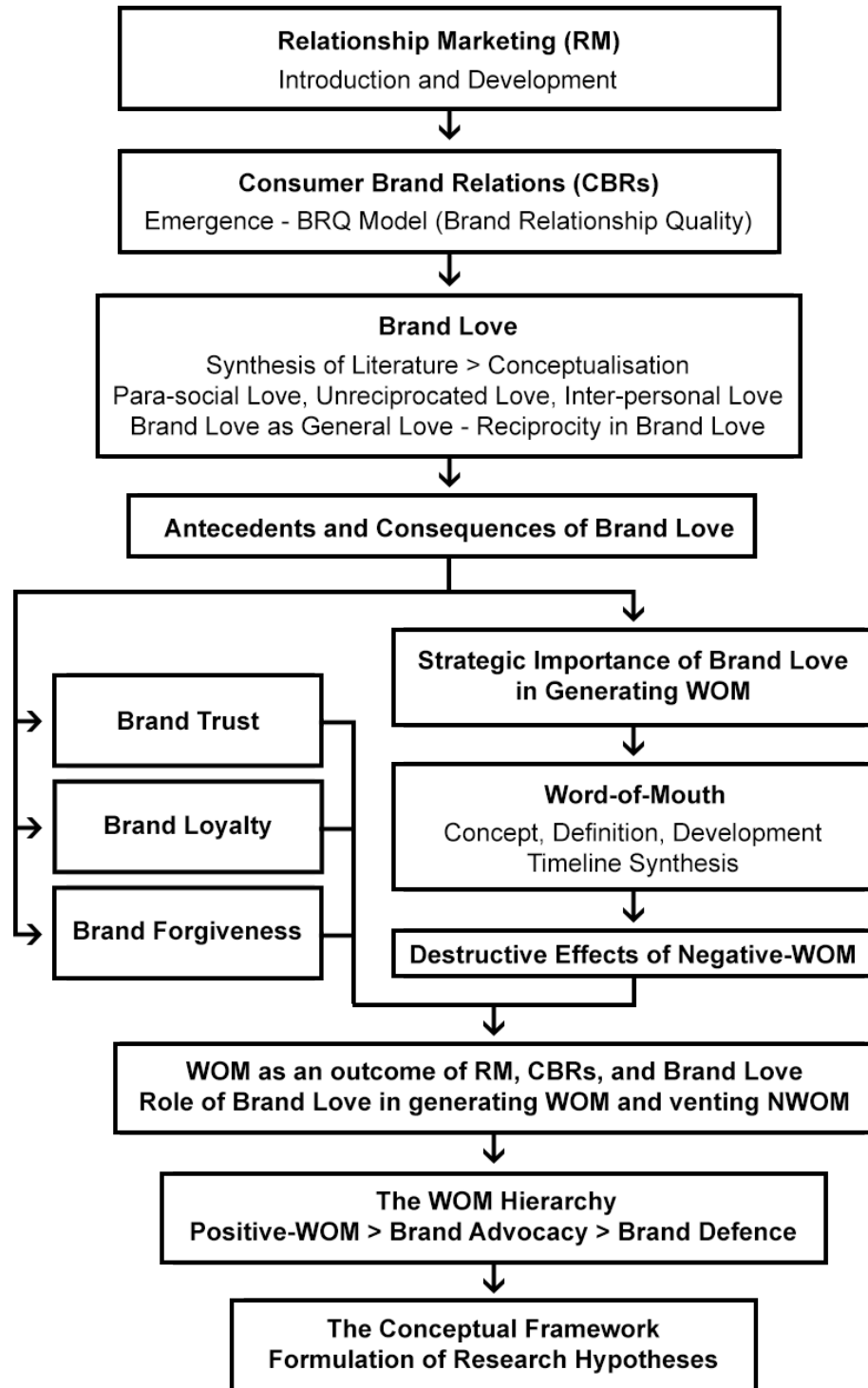


**Figure 2.1 Overview of Literature Review**

The review of the literature involved a brief overview of relationship marketing (RM) that provided roots to the development of the consumer-brand relationships (CBRs) domain. The discussion appraised the emergence of consumer-brand relationships as an important domain of Marketing, the main consumer-brand relationships constructs, the benefits of close consumer-brand relationships particularly the word-of-mouth (WOM) outcomes of brand love, and finally the WOM literature, followed by the research model and research hypotheses.

This review begins with relationship marketing because of its importance in providing foundations to consumer-brand relationships research.

## **2.2 Relationship Marketing:**

This study deals with the understanding of the modern consumer perceptions towards brands, which is based on the concept that consumers build relations with brands, and then respond in a specific manner towards their related brands (Fournier, 1998). To understand the relationship metaphors in consumer-brand relationships, it was important to explore its foundations offered by relationship marketing research and practice. Therefore, a timeline synthesis of relationship marketing research was developed, and a brief introduction is presented here to provide a background of consumer-brand relationships. The objectives of synthesising relationship marketing research are as follows;

1. *To develop an understanding of the emergence, and importance, of relationship marketing in understanding relationship metaphor in Marketing realm,*
2. *To identify the several relationship constructs, which provided basis to the market-oriented relations in the mutual benefit of the different marketing actors and stakeholders.*
3. *To identify any issues and gaps in relationship marketing research that provided basis to the consumer-brand relationships research.*

The literature revealed that it was not very old when marketers realised the importance of relationships in the marketing realm. Transactions were crowned as the major predictors of trade and businesses since the earliest marketing thoughts (Gummerson, 1998). The basic transactional model involved, “buyer wants good price – seller wants good profit” (Auruškevičienė *et al.*, 2007, p.79). However, the relationships to Marketing were introduced with the revolution in marketing theory (Clarke and Freytag, 2012; Gronroos, 1994; 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000) that involved mutual benefit assumptions with basic focus on long-term relationships and continued profitability (Auruškevičienė *et al.*, 2007; Paswan *et al.*, 2011).

The relationship marketing revealed to involve the evolution of marketing thought with the inclusion of relationships to the transactional relationships between all the stakeholders, such as buyer-seller, producer-consumer, competitors, and internal consumers or employees (Gummerson, 1998; 2004; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995a, 1995b). The relationship marketing research developed over the years described how relationship within different actors of marketing was deemed important in seeking competitive edge in the market (Kanibir and Nart, 2012; Whyatt and Koschek, 2010; Tzokas



and Saren, 2004; Zineldin, 2000). Furthermore, the marketers considered it crucial to shift their focus to consumers rather than the distributors (Kotler, 1972), after realising the benefits of repeat purchase behaviour and brand loyalty (Sheth and Parvatyar, 2000). The relationship marketing identified several relationships' constructs that served as a predictor of relationship marketing benefits for the different stakeholders in the market, as presented in table 2.1.

| <b>Table 2.1</b>                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Relationship Constructs Identified in Relationship Marketing Literature</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Relationship Constructs</b>                                                 | <b>Publications</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Satisfaction</b>                                                            | Al-Alak (2014)<br>Hennig-Thurau <i>et al.</i> (2002)<br>Kanibir and Nart (2012)<br>Levrin and Liljander (2006)<br>Miquel-Romero <i>et al.</i> (2014)<br>Raciti <i>et al.</i> (2013)<br>Vincent and Webster (2013)                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Trust</b>                                                                   | Heffernan <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Iglesias <i>et al.</i> (2011)<br>Lee and Trim (2006)<br>Lin and Lu (2010)<br>Miquel-Romero <i>et al.</i> (2014)<br>Murphy <i>et al.</i> (2007)<br>Ndubisi (2006)<br>N'Goala (2007)<br>Palmer (2000)<br>Pheng (1999)<br>Rowley (2004)<br>Vincent and Webster (2013)<br>Whyatt and Koschek (2010) |
| <b>Commitment</b>                                                              | Hennig-Thurau <i>et al.</i> (2002)<br>Iglesias <i>et al.</i> (2011)<br>Miquel-Romero <i>et al.</i> (2014)<br>Mitussis <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Murphy <i>et al.</i> (2007)<br>Ndubisi (2006)<br>N'Goala (2007)<br>Rowley (2004)<br>Vincent and Webster (2013)                                                                      |
| <b>Loyalty</b>                                                                 | Al-Alak (2014)<br>Gummerson (1998)<br>Izquierdo <i>et al.</i> (2005)<br>Levrin and Liljander (2006)<br>Miquel-Romero <i>et al.</i> (2014)<br>Ndubisi (2006)<br>Payne (1994)<br>Pheng (1999)<br>Rowley (2004)<br>Raciti <i>et al.</i> (2013)<br>Zineldin (2000)                                                                    |

The sequence of the constructs listed in the first column of table 2.1, is based on the logical development of relationships in marketing, such as satisfaction with a product fosters product/brand trust, followed by brand commitment and loyalty. Moreover, customers' satisfaction is considered as a dimension of loyalty (Fournier, 1998), and satisfaction is argued to be the lowest intensity of a relationship that consumers have with brands (Ha and Perks, 2005), which results from consumer's positive experiences (Brakus *et al.*, 2009; Garg *et al.*, 2015) that leads to brand trust and brand loyalty (Horppu *et al.*, 2008).

Relationship marketing revealed as a broad concept, which different theorists and scholars defined differently, per their own perspective and observations, but the common aspect reflected in all the definitions was relationship building (e.g. Berry, 1983; Gronroos, 1997; Jackson, 1985; Morgan and

Hunt, 1994; s Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2000). Albeit the differences, the entire relationship marketing research suggests the need and importance of creating and maintaining relationships that have become vital for organisations to sustain competitive advantage, as the best cooperation and collaborations were revealed as the best means to compete (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Therefore, the relationship marketing research was governed by the mutual benefits of the relationships. Kotler (1991) considered relationship marketing as “helpful and fair” and therefore can support yielding win–win outcomes in marketing (Cited in Morgan and Hunt, 1994). McKenna (1991) views it as shift in the marketing from, “*from manipulation of the customer to genuine customer involvement*’ (p.68).

Although relationship marketing achieved a certain amount of stability in the Marketing theory and practice through its continual definition, development, and refinement (Østergaard and Fitchett, 2012; Palmer *et al.*, 2005), but it did receive some criticism. One of the major criticisms it received was selling an old product in new packaging. Tadajewski (2009) argued that relationships had always been a part of marketing practice, irrespective of their labelling as, exchange, transaction, or product. Secondly, relationship marketing showed limitations to explain and understand specific interactions (Østergaard and Fitchett, 2012), in contrast to its claimed benefits for consumer marketing (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995). Customers differ in terms of the type of relationships they desire, and the way they wish to transact with brands, as different situations are likely to coexist based on consumers’ individual needs and preferences, which makes it difficult to ascertain a general pattern of consumer-market relationships (Fernandes and Proenca, 2008).

Fournier *et al.* (1998) also highlighted the weaknesses of relationship marketing and its practice concerning customer relations, as:

*“Relationship marketing as it is currently practiced has not brought us closer to our customers. Instead, it has sent us further afield. Our misguided actions have sparked a consumer backlash that endangers the reputation of relationship marketing, calling into question the viability of the entire marketing discipline going forward”* (p. 51).

Therefore, by finding issues and gaps in relationship marketing regarding consumer-brand relationships and their concurrent benefits, theorists explored an entire new approach, focused merely on consumer-brand relationships, their nature, antecedents, and outcomes.

The next section explores and reviews the consumer-brand relationships research.

### **2.3 Consumer-Brand Relationships:**

This study is built on the core idea of consumer-brand relationships and their benefits for brands, particularly concerning WOM outcomes. Therefore, this section is aimed to partially fulfil the first objective of this research that involves critical analysis of the literature to evaluate the importance of consumer-brand relationships particularly ‘brand love’ in promoting positive-WOM. The other half of the objective that involves ‘conceptualising and characterising WOM, and the impact of WOM, are addressed later in this chapter. The basic objectives of exploring consumer-brand relationships literature in this study are as follows:

1. *To understand the emergence and importance of consumer-brand relationships concerning Brand Management.*
2. *To identify and explore the different consumer-brand relationships constructs observed, conceptualised, and measured in the literature.*
3. *To explore the brand-favourable behaviour, especially WOM, associated to close consumer-brand relationships.*
4. *To explore, understand, and conceptualise brand love.*

Therefore, the exploration started with the introduction and emergence of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). Consumer-brand relationships are not new, but the emphasis and enquiry of the relationships' metaphor developed on the interpersonal-relationship theory, for its acknowledged ability to provide insights into the brands' role within consumers' lives, and understanding consumers' needs (Breivik and Thorbjørnsen, 2008; Fournier, 1998) has provided new insights to the research. The ancient exchanges also offer traces to the concept of brand-relationships; however, their formal inclusion into research are found in Blackston (1992) and Fournier (1998).

Fournier (1998) denoted brand-relationships to a voluntary or forced interdependence among brands and consumers. This mutual interdependence of brands and consumers implies to have similar relationship quality (RQ) as of human relationships. Fournier (1998) suggested brands as relationship partners through brands' personification, but personification cannot serve the complete purpose unless it is anthropomorphised or humanised (Fournier, 1998). This fundamental concept of assigning human like traits to brands provided bases to several further studies exploring close consumer-brand relationships, such as, brand passion (Albert *et al.*, 2012), brand attachment (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Park *et al.*, 2006), brand romance (Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011), and brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998).

The consumer-brand relationships domain has enjoyed a quick growth after Fournier's (1998) conceptualisation of brand-relationship quality model (BRQ model). Among the consumer-brand relationships research, the brand-relationship quality model remained the most influential, and most cited relationship framework in explaining the different aspects of consumer-brand relationships (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015; Smit *et al.*, 2007). The basic assumption of the model was, "*if brands were living entities, they would have personalities, would grow and develop over time and, therefore, it would be possible to have relationships with them*" (O'Mally *et al.*, 2008, p.176). Fournier (1998) acknowledged the existence of the living traits of brands in forming consumer-brand relationships like those relationships that exist between interdependent and active partners. Bengtsson (2003) admired the conceptualisation that provided a logical conclusion to relationship thinking, though making the model a principal focus of several research studies, such as, Breivik and Thorbjørnsen (2008), Huber *et al.* (2009), Smit *et al.* (2007), and Thomson *et al.* (2005).

Fourniers' (1998) brand-relationship quality model consists of six aspects that are love/passion, self-connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy, and brand partner quality. According to

the brand-relationship quality model, love/passion, and self-connection refers to the emotional connections, and represents the socio-emotive attachments and affection between the relationship partners. The commitment and interdependence aspects of brand-relationship quality include the behavioural bonds between the consumer and the brand. However, intimacy and partner quality refer to the cognitive connections among the relationship partners and indicates supportive cognitive beliefs of the consumers. Overall, the model suggested a completely two-sided relationship between consumers and brands that laid strong theoretical foundations for the conceptualisation of brand love for this doctoral research.

The limitations associated to the brand-relationship quality model was its qualitative method that allowed theory building, while validation of the model remained unaddressed. However, this limitation of the model has been partially addressed by a quantity of empirical research that applied and measured the model (Monga and Basu, 2002; Smit *et al.*, 2007, Thorbjørnsen *et al.*, 2002; Xie and Heung, 2012). However, the major concern about the brand-relationship quality model and the overall consumer-brand relationships research is their foundations on inter-personal relationships' metaphor. The brand as personality metaphor incites a critical question that as to what extent and which brand personalities are the same as human personalities (O'Malley *et al.*, 2008). Fournier (1998) argued that with few exceptions, brands attribute humanly traits in consumer-brand partnering relations, through the people behind those brands. Therefore, irrespective of the criticisms, consumer-brand relationships domain has mostly developed on the socio-psychological interpersonal relationship theory. Researchers have applied several interpersonal social psychology theories to consumer-brand relationships, including triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986), self-expansion model (Aron and Aron, 1997), para-social love/interactions (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Whang *et al.*, 2004), and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), to augment the understanding of relationships in consumer-brand context.

In this study, the existence, importance, and viability of close consumer-brand relationships particularly brand love and its attributions provide foundations to the conceptual framework. Therefore, the sections to follow presents research concerning the conceptualisation and development of brand love.

The literature on brand love is discussed next.

## **2.4 Brand love:**

Brand love refers to a feeling of love that a consumer feels for a brand, as he/she feels for other humans (Fournier 1998; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012). The conceptualisation of brand love is embedded in the mature social psychology literature, including both interpersonal and para-social love. Table 2.2 presents a timeline synthesis of brand love literature starting from the inclusion of love construct in Marketing context by Shimp and Madden (1988), and then inclusion of love into consumption goods by Ahuvia (1993), and then formal inclusion of love construct in consumer-brand relationships research by Fournier (1998), till

the latest progression of brand love literature.

The synthesis presented in table 2.2, depicts that Shimp and Madden (1988) initiated the idea of applying and conceptualising the feeling of love for objects and/or products or brands. Ahuvia (1993, 1992) took this exploration further in comparing love for products or activities with love for money (materialism) and confirmed that people's love for products is not necessarily the love for money. The seminal work by Fournier's (1998) provided basis for the conceptualisation of love in the branding context, especially with its notion of "brands as relationship partners", and suggesting love, or passion as one of the six brand-relationship quality components. In a meta-analysis of 392 consumer-brand relationships studies published in the last two decades, Fournier (1998) revealed as the most cited and most influential publication in consumer-brand relationships (Fetscherin and Hienrich, 2015). Most brand love studies refer to Fournier's conceptualisations to develop further (Albert *et al.*, 2008; 2013; Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Fetscherin, 2014; Kang, 2015; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015).

| Table 2.2<br>Synthesis of Brand Love Literature |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Author (Year)                       | Research Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                          | Major Contributions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Shimp and Madden (1988)                         | Developed an idea of consumer-object relations and argued that like person-person relationships consumers form relations with consumption objects.                                                           | It was the first study to explore love in a Marketing context. It adapted Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love to consumer-object relations.                                                                                                                                  |
| Ahuvia (1992)                                   | Explored the relevance of materialism with love for objects.                                                                                                                                                 | The findings suggested that people do love products and activities; however, in some instances, it can be materialism, but not in all cases, so the two factors are not synonymous.                                                                                                   |
| Ahuvia (1993)                                   | Developed a grounded theory exploring people love for objects                                                                                                                                                | The doctoral study involved two sets of in-depth interviews to develop an understanding of peoples' feeling of love for objects.                                                                                                                                                      |
| Fournier (1998)                                 | The study suggested brand-relationship quality (BRQ) model.                                                                                                                                                  | The qualitative study developed the BRQ model suggesting brands as relationship-partners by brands' personification through anthropomorphising. It provided strong basis to consumer-brand relationships research. The study suggested love/passion as one of the six BRQ components. |
| Ahuvia (2005)                                   | Explored the contemporary folk Psychology to develop an improved understanding of brand love by revisiting the love prototype.                                                                               | The study suggested that brand love includes passion and attachment towards the brand resulting in consumers' positive brand evaluations, and positive consumer's emotions in response to brands' offerings, and finally result in the declaration of love for the brand.             |
| Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)                        | To answer whether brand love could explain managerially relevant variations in consumers' loyalty and positive-WOM, and whether the brand characteristics and its product categories can predict brand love. | The first study that developed a scale for brand love, and suggested that consumers' love for hedonic product brands is greater than utilitarian goods, and found brand love to antecede higher levels of loyalty and positive-WOM.                                                   |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)                       | To articulate a different theoretical construct to explain the higher-order relational behaviour significant to relationship-based Marketing exchanges.                                                      | The study defined brand attachment and suggested two important elements: 1. the connectedness of brand and the self, 2. cognitive emotional bond resulting in consumers' readiness to offer resources to brands.                                                                      |
| Albert <i>et al.</i> (2007)                     | Developed an understanding of the underlying dimensions of brand love.                                                                                                                                       | The study identified eleven dimensions of brand love emerged through simultaneous use of multiple-correspondence analysis with cluster analysis of the wordings used by respondents describing their feeling of love with brands.                                                     |
| Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2007)                      | Analysed the antecedents and consequences of brand passion.                                                                                                                                                  | The causal model of brand passion suggested that only brand-related determinants influence passion, such as prestige or uniqueness affects relevant consequential factors, i.e. purchase intentions, consumers' willingness to pay a price premium, and positive-WOM.                 |

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Heinich <i>et al.</i> (2008)    | Developed and tested a brand love model based on Sternberg's triangular theory of Love.                                                                                                                | The findings suggested commitment, intimacy, and passion to reflect brand love strength, and confirmed the suggested similarities between interpersonal love and brand love.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Pitta and Franzak (2008)        | Explored the relationship between global brands, and consumer-brand emotional connections.                                                                                                             | The study explored published works (1995-2006) in branding, global-branding, and share of the heart literature and identified the nature and application of emotional-connections to certain brands to develop an understanding of how global brands may generate emotional bonds with consumers and suggested positive emotions as the best predictor of positive-WOM and loyalty.             |
| Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)     | Developed a conceptualisation of brand love among French consumers.                                                                                                                                    | The study identified 11 dimensions of love in the branding context that included, passion, relationship duration, Self-congruity, dreams, attraction, uniqueness, beauty, trust, and declaration of affect, and suggested conducting brand love studies across different samples as the concept of love found to be culturally embedded.                                                        |
| Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)     | Developed an improved scale for brand love to address the weaknesses of existing scales.                                                                                                               | The study developed the scale and found trust, loyalty, and WOM as three positive behavioural outcomes of brand love.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2011)  | Investigated the different interpersonal antecedents of brand love in a services context.                                                                                                              | The findings suggested that consumers perceive and respond to service providers as active participants within relational exchanges and use their interactions with frontline employees as a basis to develop brand love.                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Ismail and Spinelli (2012)      | Investigated the impact of brand personality and image on brand love by developing a causal model including brand love, brand personality, brand image, and WOM to investigate the interrelationships. | The study suggested that love for fashion brands is central to consumer-brand relationships, and now brands are trying to create lovable brands, i.e. "I'm lovin it" slogan for McDonalds, but it is under researched in Marketing literature. The survey results identified only brand image as a determinant of brand love that affect brand personality, and positive-WOM.                   |
| Hwang and Kandampully (2012)    | Investigated the roles of three emotional factors (self-concept connection, emotional attachment, and brand love) in the context of younger-consumer luxury brand relationships                        | The first study that investigated importance of emotional aspects in younger-consumers, suggested three emotional factors that enhance younger-consumers' loyalty, where attachment had the strongest impact on brand loyalty, followed by self-concept connection and brand love, and self-concept connection revealed to increase brand love, and attachment.                                 |
| Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)      | Investigated the nature and consequences of brand love using a grounded theory approach                                                                                                                | The two sets of qualitative studies generating brand love elements followed by survey data identifying first-order and higher-order structural models suggested loyalty, WOM, and resistance to negative-WOM as outcomes of brand love.                                                                                                                                                         |
| Rossiter (2012)                 | Developed a contrastive measure to distinguish "brand love" from "brand liking."                                                                                                                       | The findings across four product-categories suggested that over half of the young consumers do not acquire brand love state; however, findings concerning brand's perspective suggested that consumers are likely to love around one in four brands. The rate of brand usage and positive-WOM recommendations found approximately double by those who loved the brand than who merely liked it. |
| Vlachos and Vrechopoulos (2012) | Investigated the consumers' feelings of attachment and love for retailer brands through two empirical studies involving two grocery retail brands.                                                     | The findings suggested that retailer's image, perceived transactional value, and corporate social responsibility posit positive influence on the consumer-retailer levels of love, and identified consumers' avoidant attachment style suggesting that highly avoidant individuals negatively affect consumer-retailer love.                                                                    |
| Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)   | Conceptualise and operationalised brand love by drawing on the concepts of psychology and consumer-object relations literature, and its relevance to Marketing.                                        | The study developed a brand love scale with three first order factors: passion, intimacy, and commitment. The findings suggested strong positive impact of brand love on consumers' readiness to pay a price premium and turning a blind eye to the brand mistakes (forgiveness).                                                                                                               |

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Fetscherin and Dato-on (2012)   | Developed an understanding of brand love on two alternative relationship perspectives: interpersonal love and Para-social love.                                                   | The study suggested that the concept of brand love is nested in the para-social love theory rather than theories of interpersonal relationships.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Brock and Zhou (2012)           | Developed a measure for customer intimacy in B2B context.                                                                                                                         | The study conceptualised, measured, and explored customer intimacy and suggested it as a relationship construct in relationship marketing with its influence on commitment, WOM, repeat purchase, customers' availability, and recommendations.                                                                                                                                                                |
| Albert and Merunka (2013)       | Developed and tested a brand love model including its antecedents and consequences based on a causal approach.                                                                    | The findings showed strong relationships of brand love with its antecedents (trust and identification), and its consequences (commitment, positive-WOM, paying a price premium).                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Unal and Aydin (2013)           | Investigate the effect of social-self, variety seeking, and brand image on generating brand love.                                                                                 | The findings suggested positive effects of brand image and social-self on brand love, and positive effects of brand love on brand loyalty and positive-WOM. However, variety seeking revealed to have no significant effect on brand love, and a negative effect on loyalty.                                                                                                                                   |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2013)       | Suggested a new customer-brand relationships model, namely attachment-aversion (AA) relationships with a brand.                                                                   | The study confirmed the different advantages of strong consumer-brand relationships for brands, such as, stable loyalty, increased market share, enhanced marketing efficiency through favourable-WOM, and lesser price sensitivity, suggesting managers to sustain a consistent brand attachment level over time.                                                                                             |
| Fetscherin (2014)               | Explored the nature of brand love under two frameworks, interpersonal and Para-social love, and compared its attributions concerning loyalty, purchase intentions, and WOM.       | The study suggested having better explanation of brand love using para-social love and found brand love attributions concerning loyalty, purchase intentions, and WOM to be stronger when measured through para-social love framework.                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Fetscherin and Heinrich (2014)  | Explored the consumer-brand relationships research and developed a framework involving a 2x2 matrix, considering low vs. high functional and emotional based brand relationships. | The study suggested a brand connection matrix with four quadrants depicting both negative and positive feelings towards brands, as well as weak and strong brand-relationships, suggesting satisfaction as weak; however, passion and brand love as strong relationship connections, and concerning negative feelings, brand avoidance as weak and brand hate, and divorce as strong relationship connections. |
| Castaño and Perez (2014)        | Explored how consumers transfer an original brands personality trait to the counterfeits and develop relations with the counterfeits.                                             | The findings suggested that love with original brands are stronger, while counterfeit relations depend on convenience and social purposes. It suggested managers to foster trust and build exclusive brand communities to make consumers feel privileged, and hence faithful to the original brand.                                                                                                            |
| Sarkar (2014)                   | To understand brand love using qualitative research, especially in the context of Asian markets.                                                                                  | The study developed a conceptual framework depicting the antecedents and consequences of brand love and highlighted the specific psychological phenomenon of the emerging economy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Garg <i>et al.</i> (2015)       | Explored the factors that drive brand love and the opportunities it creates for a brand in India.                                                                                 | The paper identified respect, brand experience, and brand reputation as drivers of brand love and affective commitment, consumer citizenship behaviour, repurchase intention, forgiveness, and attitude toward brand extension as brand love outcomes.                                                                                                                                                         |
| Anggraeni and Rachmanita (2015) | Based on the competitive fashion industry in Indonesia, the study involved replicating Ismail and Spinelli (2012) study in the Indonesian context.                                | The findings suggested direct impacts of excitement dimension of brand personality on brand image, and brand's image on WOM. brand love was also found to induce positive-WOM.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Huber <i>et al.</i> (2015)      | Explored the antecedents of passionate brand love with the moderating effect of relationship duration.                                                                            | The paper investigated the interdependent effects of customer perceived hedonic and utilitarian values as antecedents of passionate brand love and adapted a dynamic perspective on consumer-brand relationships by considering the moderating effects of perceived relationship duration.                                                                                                                     |

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mousa (2015)                      | Compared the founding research of brand love and brand attachment to identify the background and core conceptualisation.                                                                                                                                          | The study identified striking similarities between the two constructs and argued that that brand attachment and love are the same knowledge products offered under different brand names, only the politics of Marketing theory are keeping the two apart.                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Vernuccio <i>et al.</i> (2015)    | Explored the antecedents of brand love within online network-based communities and develop an integrative conceptual model where social identity mediates the influence of social-interactive engagement on brand love.                                           | The findings confirmed the positive influence of social-interactive engagement on brand love with the mediation of psychological effects of their social identity that how members perceive their identity based on their belonging to a social group of a brand's fan page.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Drennan <i>et al.</i> (2015)      | Investigated multi-country wine brand love and its impact on brand loyalty.                                                                                                                                                                                       | The study considered consumers' wine knowledge, experience, trust, and satisfaction as the antecedents of wine brand love; however, loyalty as an outcome. Moreover, brand experience found to positively affect trust and satisfaction as compared to the wine knowledge.                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Iyer <i>et al.</i> (2016)         | Explored the extent to which love cues targeted at multiple decision-makers in a family, especially the mother and child can benefit a brand.                                                                                                                     | The study found that functional cues dominated the ads for the brands in both functional and hedonic product categories, but love cues dominated the ads for functional brands preferred either only by moms or kids, and both moms and kids for hedonic brands.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Karjaluoto <i>et al.</i> (2016)   | Tested Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) study on the antecedents and outcomes of brand love and extend it by testing the moderating effects of experience and price on the relationships between brand love and offline WOM and brand love and eWOM.                   | The findings mainly supported the study by confirming the positive relationship of brand's self-expressiveness and trust with brand love and found positive impact of brand love on both types of WOM; however, the impact hedonic product type on brand love was not found.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Kaufman <i>et al.</i> (2016)      | To develop an understanding of the complex consumer-brand relationships through holistic exploring of the dynamics between brand love and co-creation by extensive exploration of the existing literature.                                                        | The study proposed that consumers experiencing brand love more willingly engage in actively co-creating behaviour in the brand community's context, which is moderated by product/service category and level of customer involvement, which yields a combined positive impact on loyalty.                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Zarantonello <i>et al.</i> (2016) | Examined the difference of impact of brand love, as compared to brand attitude, on actual brand performance in cross-national and cross-category context.                                                                                                         | The findings suggested that consumers share a similar concept of brand love in the USA, Russia and Indonesia, and found that brand love is more strongly related to behavioural loyalty; however, brand attitude is more strongly related to brand size.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Hegner <i>et al.</i> (2017)       | Developed an understanding of factors influencing brand love. The study applied the theory of planned behaviour to the brand love context and investigated the influence of different factors on brand love.                                                      | With involvement as a moderator, the study found a strong influence of attitude towards loving a brand on brand love for both high and low involved consumers, and a minor impact of affordability on experiencing brand love. Subjective norm was found to foster brand love for high-involved consumers, while propensity to anthropomorphise promotes higher brand love for low involved consumers. The study also confirmed the influence of brand love on brand forgiveness. |
| Huang (2017)                      | Examined the mediating roles of brand love and trust on the relationship between brand experience and loyalty and tried filling a gap in the literature by exploring the distinct dimensions of brand experience and loyalty, and their effects on brand loyalty. | The study found the mediating effects of brand love and trust on the relationships between brand experience and loyalty and suggested sensory experience as the major driver of brand love and trust, while no effects of intellectual experience on trust, and found brand love as the main mechanism in forming behavioural loyalty, and trust in developing attitudinal loyalty.                                                                                               |
| Veloutsou, and Guzmán, (2017)     | Explored the growth in brand management in the last 25 years as published in the Journal of Product and Brand Management (JPBM).                                                                                                                                  | The study highlighted the growth and shifts in the brand management literature as documented in JPBM, including, consumer-brand relationships, brand experience, brand love, consumer-brand equity, financial-brand equity, brand communities, brand hate, and brand as a person.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

As presented in table 2.2, the scholarly literature on brand love unanimously agree on the presence of the feeling of love within the consumer-brand relationships context (Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin, 2014; Fetsherin and Heinrich, 2014). The literature on brand attachment (Belaid and Behi, 2011; Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2010; Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis 2006; Park *et al.*,



2013; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011) and brand passion (Bauer *et al.*, 2007), were also included in the synthesis to develop an understanding of the literature progression in close emotional relationships in consumer-brand context.

Concerning the similarity of the emotional constructs, Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) considered brand love as the passionate emotional attachment of satisfied consumers towards certain brands and developed the first scale to measure brand love. Moreover, Vlachos and Vrechopoulos (2012) investigated both consumers' feelings of attachment and love for retailer brands. Regarding passion, Fournier (1998) used passion as an interchangeable emotion for love, as she used love/passion as a single relationship factor in presenting the six factors in her brand-relationship quality framework. Moreover, the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986) suggested passion as one of the three dimensions of love, namely commitment, intimacy, and passion. Heinrich *et al.* (2008) adopted the Sternberg's theory (1986) of love to brand love context to extend its understanding with the three dimensions as, brand intimacy, brand passion, and brand commitment.

The synthesis of the literature further suggested that the several dimensions of brand love identified by Albert *et al.* (2008) within French consumers also appear in American studies. The main studies depicting Albert *et al.* (2008) dimensions include, passion (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Whang *et al.*, 2004); pleasure (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005); dreams, fixated thoughts (Ahuvia, 2005); and positive emotions towards a brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Moreover, the duration of the relationship is relevant to the intimacy concept of few American (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005) and European studies (Brock and Zhou, 2012). Beauty, attraction, uniqueness, and self-congruity dimensions were also found in Ahuvia (1993); however, he included the exploration of love for all objects overall, and not merely brand love.

Brand love has gained noticeable attraction in the consumer-brand relationships literature within the last two decades (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012; Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Huang, 2017; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012). This research field is still emerging, and most researchers are focusing more on the dimensions (Albert *et al.*, 2008), antecedents, and consequences of brand love (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). However, the construct of brand love is still emerging, and not unanimously agreed; the debate involve, whether to conceptualise it as an analogous interpersonal love (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), a unidirectional construct as Para-social love (Horton and Wohl, 1956), or in any other form of unreciprocated love (Aron *et al.*, 1998). The basic proposition in the literature suggest that brands reciprocate in consumer-brand love relationships (Fournier, 1998, 2009; Fournier and Alvarez, 2012; Kervyn *et al.*, 2012; MacInnis, 2012). However, there are researchers who strongly believe brand love as a uni-directional construct and question the foundations of brand love laid on the bi-directional interpersonal love constructs (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012; Whang *et al.*, 2004).

This study conceptualised brand love as a bi-directional relationship construct, as discussed in the next section.

#### **2.4.1 The Conceptualisation of Brand Love:**

The feeling of love is central to the closest relationships, yet its meaning can differ, for example, love for friends, children, or a romantic partner. Therefore, researchers have worked at developing different models of love to allow differentiation, understanding, and measurement of varying love

experiences (Graham, 2011). Love is observed as one of the essential components of a successful relationship (Simpson *et al.*, 1986). Based on the relational paradigm and the notion that consumers may attribute human characteristics to brands (Fournier, 1998; Aaker, 1997), the researchers started paying attention to the conceptualisation of love in branding context as well. Over the last decade, the literature witnessed extensive increase in the research interest in the consumers' context of brand love, its dimensions, its antecedents, and outcomes. However, there is no unanimous agreement found on the conceptualisation of brand love, whether it belongs to an interpersonal domain of love, or it is embedded in the para-social relationships' metaphor. Brand love has been revealed to drive several positive behavioural outcomes for loved brands, such as, positive-WOM, increased brand loyalty (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), ignoring wrongdoings of the brand, forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), brand advocacy (Urban, 2004), and brand defence (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012).

According to Fournier (1998), "feelings of love encouraged a biased positive perception" of the brand (p.386). The consumers' attributions towards loved brands include each and everything that a lover can do for his/her loved one within a consumer-brand context. The intensities may vary based on individual demographics (Fournier, 2009). The realisation of such rewarding outcomes of consumer-brand relationships overall, and brand love in specific, has gained high attraction in the research. Therefore, it augments the need for developing an adequate conceptualisation and understanding of brand love, and its founding domain. Therefore, this study explored the concept of brand love within the three possible domains: 1. para-social Love, 2. unreciprocated love, and 3. interpersonal theory of love.

#### **2.4.2 Brand love; in the Context of Para-social Love:**

The bi-directional conceptualisation of brand love developed on interpersonal theory of love is criticised for its limitations concerning reciprocity from the brand, which makes such relationship unidirectional (Whang *et al.*, 2004). Fetscherin and Dato-on (2012) built on this notion, and explored the concept of brand love under both para-social interactions (Horton and Wohl, 1956) and interpersonal love theories. The concept of para-social love referred to a friendship, or intimacy relationship by any audience for a media figure. In this regard, para-social interactions are proposed as unidirectional, where the loved one does not reciprocate to the lover (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012), like fan-celebrity relationship (Caughey, 1984). This conceptualisation of brand love suspends the idea of 'brands as relationship partners' (Fournier, 1998), and that brands actively

participate in consumer-brand relationships (Fiske *et al.*, 2012; Fournier, 2009; Kervyn *et al.*, 2012).

The exploration of brand love within the context of unreciprocated love is discussed next.

#### **2.4.3 Brand Love; in the Context of Unreciprocated Love:**

The motivational framework of unreciprocated love by Aron *et al.* (1998) suggest that unreciprocated love initiates with the desirability and probability of making a two-sided relationship,

which denotes to the bi-directional nature of the concept. The failure in developing that bidirectional relationship, the unreciprocated love leads to negative outcomes, such as, serious distress (Smith and Hockland, 1988), or disrupted lives (Tennov, 1979), lowered self-esteem (Baumiester *et al.*, 1993) and suicide inclinations (Westefeld and Furr, 1989). However, the entire brand love literature suggests positive outcomes associated to brand love (Fetscherin and Hienrich, 2015). The interpersonal relationship literature also evidences that close relationships are governed by positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (McNulty, 2010) and even in transgressions, they empathise their partners, where kind attributions, and forgiveness prevail (Kearns and Fincham, 2005). Furthermore, in brand love, consumers love the brands knowingly that brands cannot reciprocate in the way they love the brand, and they still offer positive attributions to their loved brands and seek positive outcomes in turn.

Therefore, based on the positive outcomes and benefits of relationships realised by relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, and brand love for both consumers and brands (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014), this study chose to observe the consumer-brand relationships as bi-directional. Moreover, the shortcomings of both para-social and unreciprocated love in appreciating consumers' brand love relationships, brand love was finally observed and conceptualised within the context of interpersonal love.

The conceptualisation of brand love under the assumptions of interpersonal love as observed in this study is discussed next.

#### **2.4.4 Brand Love; in the Context of Interpersonal Love:**

Consumer-brand relationships for long have been observed in the interpersonal relationship context (Fournier, 1994, 1998), so is brand love (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Although, it has received criticism on its appropriateness in addressing the presumption of brand love, which demonstrate limitations in terms of reciprocity (Fetscherin and Dato-On, 2012), and the exact nature of human-to-human relationships (Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012). However, as depicted in the previous sections, para-social love, and unreciprocated love do not offer the canvas for observing brand love, with basic limitations and contradictions to the concept and outcomes of brand love as evidenced in the existing literature. Therefore, based on the shortcomings of the two domains in appreciating the fuller potential of brand love, it was deemed necessary to conceptualise brand love within the interpersonal relationship context.

Love is believed as an eternal feeling, and researchers believe that at least some form of love, presuming romantic love, has been present within all human groups in all eras of human history (Hatfield and Rapson, 2002). The research interest in the construct of love started in the mid-twentieth century (Maslow, 1954), and grew through the years by Harlow (1958), Bowlby (1969), Heider (1958), Berscheid and Walster (1969, 1974), Rubin (1970), Berscheid and Walster (1974), and so on. The prominent theories of love included loving and liking scale (Rubin, 1970), love-attitude scale (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986), passionate love scale (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1985), triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986, 1987), the inclusion of other in the self (Aron *et al.*, 1992), and the prototype theory of love measure (Aron and Westbay, 1996).

Meanwhile, the research in marketing and brand management also started observing consumer-brand relationships attributing similar characteristics as of interpersonal relationships (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). It led to the appreciation and inclusion of the concept of love in the branding contexts, within both academics (Ahuvia, 1993; Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998) and practitioners (Roberts, 2004). Concerning the envisioning and testing of brand love, the triangular theory of love (Sternberg, 1986, 1987) attracted most attention within branding research (Fetscherin and Dato-on 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Shimp and Madden, 1988). However, the Inclusion of other in the self (Aron *et al.*, 1992), and self-expansion theory (Aron and Aron, 1986) were also used to augment understanding of consumer behaviour in close consumer-brand relationships (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005).

Shimp and Madden (1988) were the first to explore people's love with objects using the triangular theory, introducing love to the consumer-brand realm, which later provided citations and support to many brand love studies (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Huber *et al.*, 2015). The basic assumptions of the theory suggested that love involve three main components like three vertices of a triangle that included intimacy as the top vertex; passion being the left-hand vertex and decision/commitment completes the triangle by fitting in as the right-hand vertex. Most recently, Heinrich *et al.*, (2012) based their hypothetical model on the three-component model proposed by Sternberg (1986). They developed a brand love measuring scale considering brand intimacy, brand commitment, and brand passion as the major factors of brand love, identifying the potential of brand love in providing marketing-related outcomes (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012).

There are several earlier studies as well, which involved measuring brand love in the context of the triangular theory (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Kamat and Paruleker, 2007; Keh *et al.*, 2007). Keh *et al.* (2007) developed a three-dimensional brand love scale based on the three dimensions of Sternberg's theory with eleven items, and Kamat and Paruleker (2007) modified and increased the dimensions to five. However, Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) suggested a one-dimensional scale for measuring love using ten items. All these brand love scales faced criticism, but they do provide a basis to future research, as there has been limited research that involved measuring brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin and Dato-On, 2012; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012).

Therefore, the studies that measured brand love based on Sternberg's triangular theory of love were phenomenal, but the studies further confused the conceptualisation of brand love by tangling it into different interpersonal dimensions of the triangular theory, which cannot fully apply to brand-relations. It suggested further exploration of the interpersonal love research for augmenting the understanding and developing the basic conceptualisation of brand love (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012).

Therefore, this doctoral study explored the interpersonal love literature to develop the conceptualisation of brand love, suggesting brand love as a lesser emotionally intense love relationship as compassionate love concept by (Berscheid and Walster, 1974), and conceptualised brand love as 'general love factor', based on Graham's (2011) conceptualisation of love, as general love.

Graham (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 'love' exploring the higher-order factors measured by the most popular measures of love that included, loving and liking scale (Rubin, 1970), love attitude scale (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986), the passionate love scale (Hatfield and Sprecher, 1986), and triangular love scale (Sternberg, 1997). Graham (2011) rejected the common conceptualisations of love, suggesting that the existing love measures fell into three discrete higher-order factors: love, romantic obsession, and pragmatic friendship, where most global self-report love measures appeared to tap into a single general factor of love. Graham (2011) proposed that love outcomes should be viewed in general, irrespective of how it has developed, it depicts similar impact overall.

Graham (2011) explained his conceptualisation of love in the intelligence research context, where individually identified different components of intelligence were collectively hypothesised as a single 'general intelligence factor' at a higher-order level, irrespective of the distinct standing of each intelligence component (Graham, 2011; Spearman, 1904, 1923). Therefore, like intelligence research, where intelligence could be viewed as 'general intelligence', Graham (2011) suggested viewing love as a unified general love factor. These findings also provided justifiable conceptualisation of brand love, providing the flexibility about its nature and attributions. As developed on the different theories of interpersonal love, the conceptualising, observing, and measuring of brand love, and its different antecedents yield one common conclusion that consumers attribute brand-favourable behaviour towards their loved brands (Ahuvia, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2012; Fetscherin, 2014; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012).

Therefore, brand love research remains consistent with Graham's (2011) findings of general love, which suggested that people offer a general set of positive behaviour towards the loved person, as consumers offer general set of positive behaviour towards their loved brands. Therefore, based on Graham's (2011) conceptualisation of love, this study conceptualised consumers' love for brands as the 'general brand love' factor, irrespective of the complicated dimensionalities of brand love suggested in the existing literature (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Kamat and Paruleker, 2007; Keh *et al.*, 2007; Shimp and Madden, 1988).

Moreover, based on the difference of the intense emotional content in companionate love as compared to romantic love (Berscheid and Walster, 1974), it can provide a basis to brand love more than any other theories explaining romantic love. Therefore, this study suggested observing brand love in the context of companionate type of love that is less emotive in nature but governed by the similar positive behaviour towards the loved ones (Sprecher and Regan, 1998) as general love (Graham, 2011).

Moreover, brand efforts for consumers should be viewed in the context of relationship building, as offering unique product or services (Albert *et al.*, 2008), advertising, positioning, credibility (Keller and Lehman, 2006), and/or value creation (Aaker, 1992), customer service and/or support (Fournier, 2009). Therefore, the relationship can be observed to sustain and grow bi-directionally, as of human-to-human reciprocity of love. Moreover, the concept that ‘*brands are intentional agents*’ (Kervyn *et al.*, 2012) hypothesises ‘*that brands are people, ...*’ (Fiske *et al.*, 2012, p.207) further supports the bidirectional nature of consumer-brand relationships, and so is brand love. Therefore, this doctoral study proposed a bi-directional nature of brand love that initiates with a relationship proposal by the brand through brand awareness, brand offerings, positioning, brand personality, credibility, and value creation, followed by the consumer side of relationship building through perceived trust, self-congruity, experience, dream, desirability, leading to love, loyalty, trust, etc. The relationship process, therefore, driven by both relationship partners that is mutually reciprocated, as predicted in figure 2.2.

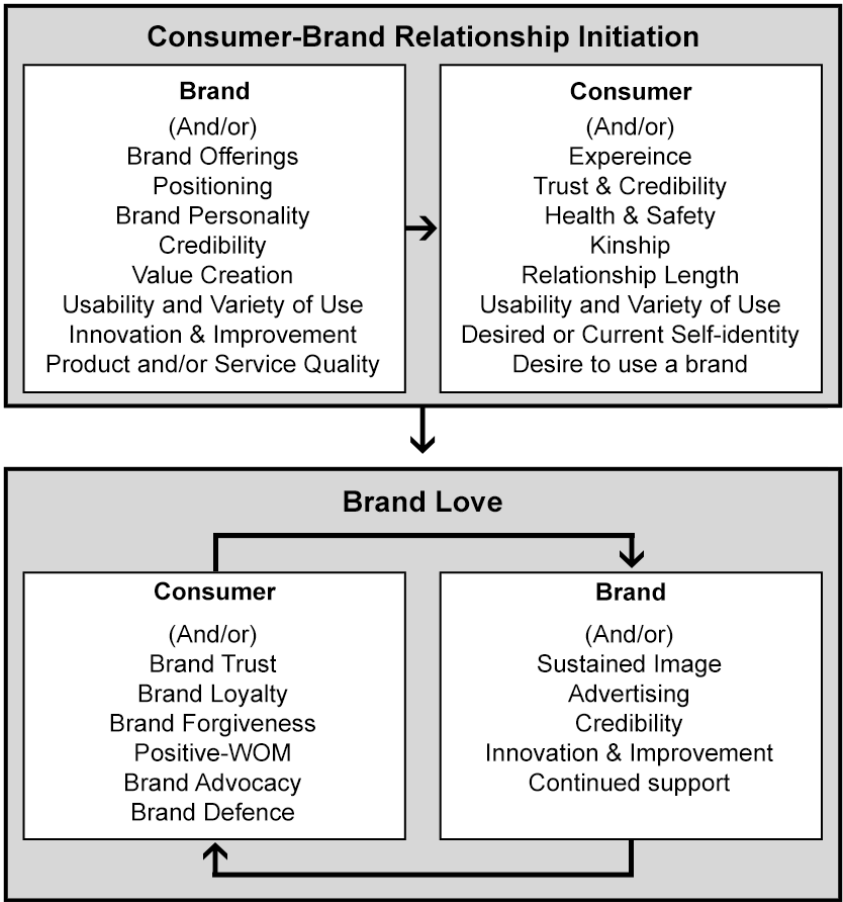


Figure 2.2 Brand Love Relationship Process

The brands require continuous efforts to sustain such relationships through sustained image, innovation, customer support, enhanced credibility, and dependability. This study hypothesised that the consumer-brand relationships result in several relationships' benefits for the brand, such as, brand loyalty, brand trust, brand forgiveness, positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence (see section 2.6).

The next section of this chapter discusses the antecedents and consequences of brand love.

#### 2.4.5 The Antecedents and Consequences of Brand Love:

There are different factors that foster, facilitate, and/or act as antecedents to consumer-brand relationships, such as brand identity, brand personality, brand image, trust, social-self, and self-expressiveness. In addition, there are certain consequences, or outcomes of close consumer-brand relationships, such as, trust, loyalty, forgiveness, positive-WOM, and advocacy. The research show overlaps in the antecedents, and consequences of close consumer-brand relationships, for example brand trust.

| <b>Table 2.3</b>                                                          |                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Antecedents and Consequences of close Consumer-brand relationships</b> |                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Publication<br/>Author (Year)</b>                                      | <b>Antecedents</b>                             | <b>Consequences</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)                                                  | Product Categories<br>Hedonic Products         | Loyalty<br>positive-WOM                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                                 |                                                | Readiness to sacrifice personal resources for brands:<br>Self-image resources (like ego, self-pride, or self-esteem) it includes public display of defence, or advocacy, for a brand.<br>Willingness of consumers to sacrifice discretionary resources, such as money, time, and energy.<br>Resistance to negative-WOM<br>Brand advocacy |
| Belaid and Behi (2011)                                                    |                                                | Trust<br>Behavioural-loyalty<br>Commitment                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Pitta and Franzak (2008)                                                  |                                                | Positive-WOM<br>Loyalty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)                                               |                                                | Trust<br>Loyalty<br>WOM                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Brock and Zhou (2012)                                                     | Trust<br>Customer Knowledge                    | Commitment<br>WOM<br>Repurchase intentions<br>Information disclosure<br>Customer availability<br>Advisor status                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2012)                                            | Gratitude<br>Partner quality<br>Social support |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Ismail and Spinelli (2012)                                                | Brand image                                    | Brand personality<br>Positive-WOM                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Hwang and Kandampully (2012)                                              | Self-concept connection                        | Loyalty                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)                                                |                                                | Loyalty<br>WOM<br>Resistance to negative-WOM                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Rossiter (2012)                                                           |                                                | Brand-purchase or usage<br>Positive-WOM<br>As compared to liking a brand, the rate of brand-purchase or usage and positive-WOM were approximately double by those who loved the brand.                                                                                                                                                   |

|                                 |                                                                            |                                                                                                                             |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)   |                                                                            | Readiness to pay a price premium<br>Turning a blind eye to the loved brand making a mistake (Forgiveness)                   |
| Albert and Merunka (2013)       | Brand trust<br>Brand identification                                        | Commitment<br>Positive-WOM,<br>Propensity to pay a price premium.                                                           |
| Unal and Aydin (2013)           | Brand image<br>Social-self<br>Variety seeking                              | Loyalty<br>Positive-WOM                                                                                                     |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2013)       |                                                                            | Stable loyalty<br>Increased market share<br>Enhanced marketing efficiency through positive-WOM<br>Lesser price sensitivity. |
| Fetscherin (2014)               |                                                                            | Loyalty<br>Purchase Intentions<br>WOM                                                                                       |
| Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014)    | Self-expressive brands (inner-self)<br>Self-expressive brands (outer-self) | Advocacy that includes:<br>WOM<br>Brand acceptance                                                                          |
| Sarkar and Sreejesh (2014)      | Self-expressiveness                                                        | Purchase intentions<br>Active Engagement                                                                                    |
| Anggraeni and Rachmanita (2015) | Excitement dimension of brand personality<br>Brand Image                   | Positive-WOM                                                                                                                |
| Vernuccio <i>et al.</i> (2015)  | Social-interactive engagement<br>Social identity                           |                                                                                                                             |
| Pedellento <i>et al.</i> (2015) | Brand-self congruity<br>Reliability<br>Attachment                          | Loyalty<br>Product irreplaceability                                                                                         |
| Drennan <i>et al.</i> (2015)    | Satisfaction<br>Trust                                                      | Loyalty                                                                                                                     |

This study more closely deals with the positive consequences of brand love for brands. However, based on the overlaps in the antecedents and consequences of close consumer-brand relationships, it was deemed important to review the antecedents of consumer-brand relationships as well. Moreover, it also helped in understanding the wider mechanism of consumer-brand relationships, especially how consumer-brand relationships yield common behavioural benefits for brands, irrespective of the antecedents of that relationship. Table 2.3 presents the antecedents and consequences of brand love.

The consequences of brand love are discussed next.

#### 2.4.5.1 The consequences of Brand Love:

Whilst considerable research interest has been shown in the consumers' context of brand love, its dimensions, its antecedents, and consequences, as mentioned in the synthesis of brand love literature in table 2.2. This study explored the consequences of brand love in relation to its beneficial outcomes for brands, especially the potential of brand love in generating brand-favourable WOM. Brand love literature and antecedents of brand love depicted in tables 2.2 and 2.3 suggest several positive behavioural outcomes for loved brands.

Rossiter (2012) found that the rate of brand purchase or usage, and WOM recommendations by those who loved the brand were approximately double by those, who merely liked it. Therefore, based on the realised benefits of brand love and other consumer-brand relationship constructs, this study explored the consumers' positive-WOM behaviour towards their loved brands with the



mediating impact of three consumer-brand relationship constructs, namely, brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty. These three consumer-brand relationship constructs, brand trust (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Belaid and Behi, 2011), brand forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), and brand loyalty (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia 2006; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; Pitta and Franzak, 2008; Unal and Aydin, 2013) have already been observed as the consequences of brand love within the existing literature.

Therefore, in this doctoral research, these individual constructs; brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness, which have already been identified as the benefits of brand love are brought together to explore the impact of brand love on the three constructs within the negative-WOM incident proposed in this study (the negative-WOM incident is presented in Appendices as part of the survey questionnaire). And, how brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty mediate the relationship between brand love and the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour proposed in this study; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM.

This study uses a novel research model developed on the provisions of the established benefits of brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty in consumer-brand relationships, especially in case of brand love. Within the parameters of this study, brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty, are used as individually independent construct in appreciating their mediating impact on the three WOM behaviour brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, as proposed in this study. Therefore, built on means-end theory (Gutman, 1982), the main purpose of acquiring the three constructs was to explore the nature and extent of consumers' core values in shaping behavioural and psychological consequences (the brand-oriented outcomes). The prime focus of the study is to explore the potential of consumer-brand relationships in generating brand defence, a superior WOM behaviour observed in form of a hierarchy of brand-favourable WOM behaviour, developed on the assumptions of the means-end theory (Wansink, 2003). The theory provide basis to explore the mean-end chains in understanding consumers values in attributing any brand-oriented behaviour. In this doctoral study, the consumer-brand relationship constructs are employed to explain those consumers values that are emanated from their relationship with brands, particularly brand love. The theoretical underpinnings of the hierarchical relationships of brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM and the means-end-theory are discussed in detail in section 2.10.1, and the empirical findings are presented in chapters 5 and 6.

The next sections present the conceptualisation of the three consumer-brand relationship constructs, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness.

## **2.5 Brand Trust:**

Researchers consider trust as a crucial factor in developing and maintaining long-term relationships between customers and firms (Arnott, 2007; Sekhon *et al.*, 2013). Brand trust has also been conceptualised on the idea of interpersonal reliability and trust, which further reckons the importance of interpersonal relationships in appreciating and explaining brand relationships.

However, Li *et al.* (2008, p: 821) argue, “*there is an apparent parallel between conceptualisation of general trust and that of brand trust*”. Moorman *et al.* (1993) defined brand trust as one’s willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence. The authors further defined trust as a belief, sentiment, or expectation about his/her exchange partner based on partner’s expertise, reliability, and intentionality (Moorman *et al.*, 1993). Ganesan (1994) defined such trust as credibility that results from the extent of a buyer’s faith on the supplier’s expertise. Consequently, Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alema’n (2005, p: 188) proposed,

*“a trustworthy brand is one that consistently keeps its promise of value to consumers through the way the product is developed, produced, sold, serviced and advertised, even in bad times when the brand experiences some kind of crisis”.*

This doctoral study conceptualised brand trust in line with Moorman *et al.*’s (1993) definition in conjunction with Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alema’n (2005) argument of brands consistency of keeping its promises even in the times of crisis, and consumers trusting the brand for its consistency of fulfilling its promises. Therefore, this doctoral study adopts Moorman *et al.* (1993) definition adapted to the study, and define brand trust as consumer’s willingness to rely on a brand in whom he/she has confidence. This study hypothesised exploring the mediating role of brand trust on brand love and its consequent brand-favourable behaviour in the incident of negative-WOM.

Brand trust was found to be one of the most common relational consequences in relationship marketing efforts as depicted in table 2.1, which is consistent within consumer-brand relationships studies as well, such as brand attachment (Belaid and Behi, 2011), and brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Albert and Merunka, 2013). Moreover, Pheng (1999) also suggested that trust, dedication to common goals, and realising each other’s expectations and values, serve as the basis for building and sustaining relationships. It is also observed that buyers’ willingness to co-operate with sellers depend on the seller’s image of trustworthiness in delivering promises (Palmer, 2000). Therefore, managers should plan, develop, and sustain long-term trust-based working relationships considering both organisational and national values, as successful partnership arrangements depend on mutuality and resilience, along with trust (Lee and Trim, 2006). Heffernan *et al.* (2008) also highlighted the importance of emotional intelligence and trust in relationship marketing. Lin and Lu (2010) also found significantly positive influence of relationship marketing factors on trust, with positive influence of trust on consumers’ purchase intentions. Vincent and Webster (2013) also suggested investigate relationship quality through satisfaction, commitment, and trust.

Overall, the literature revealed brand trust as an important relationship benefit. It has also been observed to influence brand loyalty (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Ndubisi, 2006). Whyatt and Koschek (2010), found that information exchange is built on trust, when the parties attempt to maintain a relationship; thereby, customers’ trust should be viewed as value for money offer. Moreover, Miquel-Romero *et al.* (2014) found customers’ experience, satisfaction, trust, and commitment to play an important role in fostering customer loyalty towards private labels, which increase consumers’ tendency to buy new categories, as well. Therefore, generating trust and commitment

to ultimately increase loyalty, is considered as retailers' strategic goal, and a source of long-term profitability (Miquel-Romero *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, in brand love and attachment studies trust is observed as a key construct. Belaid and Behi, (2011) found brand attachment to antecede trust, behavioural loyalty, and commitment; whereas, brand trust found to antecede both satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, Albert *et al.* (2009) developed a scale of brand love and found brand trust, loyalty, and WOM, as three positive behavioural consequences of brand love.

Empirical evidence also suggested that higher levels of customers' trust positively influence customers' tendency to engage in positive-WOM behaviour (Ranaweera and Prabhu, 2003). Moreover, customers only found to provide positive-WOM, if their previous experience with the firm or the brand was good, and they had confidence in the same (Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). Additionally, customers' trust in a brand reduces the social risk associated with providing positive-WOM for the brand (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002). In other words, having trust in a brand reduces the risk of being wrong in recommending that brand to others (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sichtmann, 2007).

The realised importance of trust in customer-firm relationship studies, its role in sustaining long-term relationships, influencing loyalty, positive-WOM, and brand advocacy, justified the inclusion and conceptualisation of brand trust in this study.

The conceptualisation of brand loyalty is discussed next.

## **2.6 Brand Loyalty:**

In this study, brand loyalty was conceptualised based on existing literature in marketing and considered brand loyalty as consumers' repurchase intentions for the brand, and their readiness to recommend the brand to other consumers (Fournier, 1998; Tsai, 2011). Brand loyalty has also been viewed as a relationship outcome of several relationship marketing (see table 2.1) and consumer-brand relationships studies (Fournier, 1998; Xie and Heung, 2012), particularly attachment (Belaid and Behi, 2011; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2013), and brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin, 2014; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Unal and Aydin, 2013).

Payne (1994) recognised and highlighted the importance of loyalty in relationship marketing and suggested retaining customers through relationship building, rather than just attracting new customers. Payne (1994) suggested a concept of '*customer loyalty ladder*', suggesting the progression of a relationship that a customer can have with an organisation. The ladder proposed a sequential relationship progress from prospective customer to customer, customer to a repeat purchase client, leading to a silent supporter, to an advocate, and finally to a partner. This study was phenomenal in describing the different levels and intensities of consumer-brand relationships that develops and strengthens over time. Payne (1994) not only contributed to relationship marketing, but still provides insights to the conceptualisation of relationship process in consumer-

brand relationships. This doctoral study also observed brand-favourable WOM behaviour in a hierarchical sequence based on the nature and intensity of WOM, and suggested that these intensities vary based on the intensity and closeness of the relationship a consumer have with the loved brand. Moreover, brand loyalty has also been explored as a mediator to determine the relationship of brand love and the three WOM behaviour (positive-WOM, brand advocacy, brand defence) proposed in this study.

Loyalty is one of the most important and oldest constructs in explaining customer-brand relations, and gained importance very early on, even earlier than the emergence of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998). The importance of loyalty is appreciated in relationship marketing and consumer-brand relationships equally. In relationship marketing, loyalty, customer retention, and long-term relationships were considered as the means of profitability (Gummerson, 1998). It suggested investing in customer-firm relationships, as relationship investments were found to improve relationship quality, and ultimately behavioural-loyalty. Furthermore, Henning-Thurau *et al.* (2002) integrated the research streams on relational-benefits and relationship quality in the development of a comprehensive relationship marketing model and found WOM and loyalty as two relationship marketing outcomes. Ndubisi (2006) examined the impact of relationship marketing strategy on customer loyalty, and found four constructs significant effect of trust, commitment, communication, and conflict handling on customers' loyalty.

Raciti *et al.* (2013) suggested that the ultimate success of a relationship marketing program depends on the consumers' willingness to participate in a service relationship. They found that a consumer's willingness to participate in a relationship influence his/her motivational level. The degree of confidence results in an impact on the consumer's affiliation with the service provider, which subsequently influences his/her relationship strength and satisfaction that results in consumer's desire to keep the relationship. The consumers' relationship desire found to impact their retention intentions (loyalty) indirectly, which results in loyalty (Raciti *et al.*, 2013). These findings also provided implications to observe brand loyalty in this research, as this study and relationship marketing literature collectively ascertains brand loyalty as an important predictor of brand-relationship quality, and strength, which can vary based on the varying intensities of the relationships. The basic notion of this doctoral study lies in the belief that consumers brand-favourable behaviour depend on their relationship closeness, where varied intensities can yield varied consequences.

Moreover, Al-Alak (2014) found that committed client relationships lead to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, positive-WOM, and brand promotion. Miquel-Romero *et al.* (2014) found customers' experience, satisfaction, trust, and commitment to play an important role in fostering customer loyalty that increase consumers' tendency to buy their new categories, as well, suggesting it as retailers' strategic goal and a source of long-term profitability to develop trust and commitment in fostering loyalty, ultimately.

Along with the relationship marketing literature, close consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love and attachment studies also highlighted the importance of loyalty as one of the consequences of close consumer-brand relationships. It provided justification to observe brand loyalty as one of the consequent relationships construct of brand love in this doctoral study, as well. In this regard, Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) found brand loyalty and positive-WOM, as two consequence of their brand love study. Belaid and Behi, (2011) found behavioural loyalty as one of the consequences of brand attachment. Furthermore, Pitta and Franzak (2008) explored a range of published (1995-2006) concepts in theoretical literature on branding, global branding, and share of the heart, and identified the nature and application of emotional connections to certain brands and found positive emotions as the best predictor of positive-WOM and overall loyalty. Albert *et al.* (2009) also found brand trust, loyalty, and WOM as the three positive behavioural outcomes of brand love. Batra *et al.* (2012) investigated the nature and consequences of brand love using a grounded theory approach and found that both first-order and higher-order brand love models identified in the study suggested loyalty, WOM, and resistance to negative-WOM as outcomes of brand love. Moreover, Unal and Aydin (2013) also found positive effects of brand love on brand loyalty and positive-WOM. The findings of Park *et al.* (2013) study also confirmed the different advantages of strong consumer–brand relationships for brands, such as, stable loyalty, increased market share, enhanced marketing efficiency through favourable WOM, and lesser price sensitivity. These advantages suggested managers to sustain a consistent brand attachment level over time. The literature revealed the importance of loyalty in relationship building studies and provide strong basis for the conceptualisation of brand loyalty in this study.

The next section of discusses brand forgiveness.

## **2.7 Brand Forgiveness:**

Forgiveness is a relatively new construct in brand management, and the reason for incorporating brand forgiveness within the research model is based on the perceived negative incident used in this study. The critical incident suggested if the loved brand is faced with criticism of negative rumours, or negative information to explore the potential consequence of brand love in response to the perceived negativity about the brand. Therefore, brand forgiveness was explored as a mediator between brand love and its impact on the three WOM behaviour proposed in this study based on the perceived truthfulness of the negative information.

Like other consumer-brand relationships constructs observed in this study, brand forgiveness was also observed, understood, conceptualised, and explored within the interpersonal relationships' context. Forgiveness has its roots in philosophy, theology, and social sciences; however, there has been no consensus on the definition of forgiveness (Finkel *et. al.* 2002). McCullough *et al.* (1997) defined forgiveness as,

*“the set of motivational changes whereby one becomes (a) decreasingly motivated to retaliate against an offending relationship partner, (b) decreasingly motivated to maintain estrangement (or avoidance) from the offender, and (c) increasingly motivated by conciliation and goodwill for the offender, despite the offender’s hurtful actions.”* (p. 321-322).

There scholarship suggest negative information as detrimental for consumers perceptions (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009), and such negative information can lead to negative outcomes. It is not necessary that a consumer can only feel transgressed based on personal harm, but transgressions can occur by the information indicating potential harms associated to a product, as transgressions occur on the perception of transgressions (Hoyt *et al.*, 2005). In perceived transgressions, a person anticipates certain negativity, disloyalty, and harm (Vangelisti and Young, 2000) from the other in the relationship. Therefore, perceived transgressions can lead to hurt and self-distancing from the perceived offender, and perceived intentionality of the offence is deemed harmful for relationships (Vangelisti and Young, 2000). Therefore, it is proposed that the prevalence of negative information require a sentiment of forgiveness to vent the impact of any believed negativity developed through that negative information, and whether brand love impacts the consumers' brand forgiveness intentions.

The study built on the interpersonal forgiveness literature, which suggests that individuals in high-quality relationships feel higher inclination to forgive their partners (Allemand *et al.*, 2007; Finkel *et al.*, 2002; Kearns and Fincham 2005). Even in cases of remembered offenses, individuals forgive their partners, in this regard, high-level relationship satisfaction (Allemand *et al.*, 2007), relationship quality (Kearns and Fincham 2005), and closeness of the relationship (McCullough *et al.*, 1998) govern such forgiveness. Recently researchers have begun to examine the role of forgiveness in consumer-brand relationships (Chung and Beverland, 2006; Xie and Peng, 2009; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). According to Tsarenko and Tojib (2011) there is a general agreement that,

*"forgiveness is a process rather than an act, that evolves over time; most importantly, forgiveness is regarded as an intended, deliberate activity and not merely as the dissipation of negative emotions and feelings"* (p. 382).

According to the process model of forgiveness, psychological defence is one of the variables to which forgiveness may be related (Enright and Coyle, 1998). It is also suggested that there is an important role of psychological defence in the process of forgiving, as people use defence mechanisms to initially protect themselves from the pain of events that hurt them (Enright and Coyle, 1998). Based on this argument it is proposed that forgiveness may be related to customers' defence behaviour toward their loved brands, to avoid the distress of relationship transgressions, or separation. It is also consistent with the idea that forgiveness acts as the neutralisation of a transgression towards the offending company or brand (Donovan *et al.*, 2012). Donovan *et al.* (2012) conceptualised forgiveness as, *'an emotional and/or cognitive decision, which results in the neutralisation of such a transgression'* (p.188).

On the other hand, past research on forgiveness within the interpersonal relationship literature indicated that forgiveness has positive effect on people's pro-social behaviour and motivations to follow relationship-constructive actions (McCullough *et al.*, 1998; Karremans and Lange, 2004). Similarly, in branding research, it is also suggested that consumer's forgiveness of a brand involves the release of negative emotions related to the transgression that motivates consumers to act

constructively towards the relationship (Chung and Beverland, 2006). Tang (2006) also found a positive relationship between forgiveness and customer's future behavioural intentions. Donovan *et al.* (2012) also found that consumer-brand relationship intensity moderates the relationship between brand forgiveness and customers' future behavioural intentions (Donovan *et al.*, 2012). Heinrich *et al.* (2012) also identified brand forgiveness as an important component of consumer-brand relationships.

The study adopted the widely-accepted definition of interpersonal forgiveness to brand forgiveness context and conceptualised brand forgiveness as, '*inclination to forgive a brand*'. Moreover, this study also adopted a scale of interpersonal forgiveness to measure brand forgiveness and adapted the scale to the current study (Brown and Phillips, 2005).

The strategic importance of brand love in generating positive-WOM is discussed next.

## **2.8 Strategic Importance of Brand Love in Generating WOM:**

The experience of 'love' is central to the closest relationships (Hatfield and Rapson 2002) and believed to be one of the essential components of a successful relationship (Simpson *et al.*, 1986). Therefore, with the realisation of the importance of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998), researchers also started observing love within branding context, and found brand love as one of the strongest relationship constructs in consumer-brand relationships that influence brand-favourable behaviour (Ahuvia, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin and Dato-on 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Wallace *et al.*, 2012).

Among all the different brand-favourable outcomes of brand love discussed in the previous sections, positive-WOM remains the most occurring (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace *et al.*, 2012). Along with brand love, other consumer-brand relationships constructs have also been observed to attribute higher WOM behaviour, such as brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006) and brand passion (Bauer *et al.*, 2007), which signifies the importance of relationships, especially brand love in fostering brand-favourable WOM. The consumer-brand relationships, as well as relationship marketing literature suggested an overarching importance of WOM as a relationship benefit (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Ng *et al.*, 2011), and WOM itself has been considered as a determinant of consumer behaviour and a decision-clincher (deMatos and Rossi, 2008). Therefore, the role of brand love in promoting positive-WOM behaviour and the influential nature of WOM in influencing consumer decision-making provided the basis to this research.

The next section explored the concept, development, importance, and mechanisms of WOM to draw on the existing literature that how brand love can be mobilised to expand the potential of brand-favourable WOM behaviour to fight against negative-WOM towards the brand.

## 2.9 Word-of-Mouth; the Concept and Definition:

This study explored two research streams consumer-brand relationships and WOM to conclude the benefits of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love in influencing consumers' brand-favourable WOM. The previous sections reviewed consumer-brand relationships and brand love literature and provided the conceptualisations of brand love, brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty. This section explores the development, importance, and conceptualisation of WOM. This section is important, because it is aimed to fulfil the main research objectives from objective 1-4, which involved conceptualising WOM, the intensity of WOM, benefits of brand-favourable WOM, and the destructive impact of negative-WOM. Furthermore, it involves the conceptualisation of brand defence as a superior consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour against any negative-WOM about loved brands.

The main objectives of exploring WOM literature in this study are as follows:

1. *To understand the emergence and importance of WOM concerning its perceived influence on consumers' perceptions and behaviour.*
2. *To identify and explore the valence of WOM; positive and negative, and their perceived impact on consumers' brand perceptions and brand relevant decisions.*
3. *To identify the negative impact of negative-WOM on consumers' brand perceptions and decision-making.*
4. *To identify and conceptualise three types of brand-favourable WOM in a form of a hierarchy based on the different intensities and nature of WOM towards loved brands against negative-WOM; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, brand defence.*
5. *To identify and conceptualise brand defence as a superior positive-WOM behaviour against negative-WOM about the loved brand.*

This section reviewed both WOM and eWOM in the marketing context, including the definition, development, strategic nature, and conceptualisation of WOM in the digitalised economy, and their positive and negative implications for brands. The study reviewed various definitions of WOM communications that have been developed in the process of growth and development of WOM literature. As such there was no agreed definition of WOM found in the literature, but the most accepted meaning of WOM is, 'an in-person non-commercial communication regarding a brand, product, or service'. The prominent definitions of WOM are presented in table 2.4.

The development of the different definitions of WOM reflect that how different researchers have observed and described WOM. It was Arndt (1967) who introduced, observed, and defined WOM for the first time in the research in Marketing. Arndt's (1967) definition of WOM identified three main elements of WOM communications; oral, person-to-person, and being non-commercial communication. Harrison-Walker (2001), Anderson (1998), and Buttle (1998) also counted and built on Arndt's (1967) definition. Aligned to the similar thought process, Schiffman and Kanuk (2005) tried to define WOM more thoroughly, but still depicted it as interpersonal communication with perceived non-commercial and un-biased stature based on 'no gain' associated to the giving of



WOM. Most of the definitions of WOM, conceptualised it as a form of communication, or interaction between individuals, or groups regarding any goods or services. Westbrooke's (1987) definition also depicted the similar notion and defined WOM as informal communications directed at other consumers' ownership and consumption experiences about the characteristics of goods and services. Similarly, Anderson (1998) defined WOM as an informal communication among private parties, wherein products or services are evaluated; Mazzarol *et al.* (2007) also based their study on this definition of WOM. However, in case of digitalised economies, with the Internet, and social media, WOM has not been limited to the private parties or the oral one-to-one communications any more, but the scope and audience of WOM has been amplified in its new form as electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Graham and Havelina, 2007; Ulrich and Brunner, 2014).

As discussed above, the Internet and social networks have transformed the traditional WOM landscape. It has become a norm for individuals to provide and receive product and services information online (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013). This exchange of information or informal advice through online means has been referred as eWOM (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, eWOM is defined as,

*"Any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet"* (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004, p. 39; Teng *et al.*, 2014, p. 747).

| Table 2.4<br>Timeline Definitions of WOM |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Author                                   | Definitions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Arndt (1967)                             | "An oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service" (p. 66).                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Richins (1984)                           | WOM is a type of interpersonal interactions between individuals and groups about their consumption experiences regarding any goods or services                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Bayus, (1985)                            | WOM is giving or receiving any comments about a product or service                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Westbrooke (1987)                        | Informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods, and services and/or their sellers" (p. 261).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| File, <i>et al.</i> (1992)               | Recommending the firm and the service to others, as well as communications with the firm (p. 12).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Anderson (1998)                          | Informal communication among private parties wherein products or services are evaluated                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Heckman (1999)                           | WOM advertising is people's genuine enthusiasm for a product or service conveyed to others.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Hennig-Thurau and Walsh (2004)           | All informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services or their sellers (p. 51).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Schiffman and Kanuk (2005)               | "An informal communication by parents, friends, relatives or any third person about any product or services. People often rely on informal communication sources in making purchase decisions because unlike formal sources, the sender is perceived as having nothing to gain from the receiver's subsequent actions. For that reason, word-of-mouth communications tend to be highly persuasive" (p. 317). |
| Brown <i>et al.</i> (2005)               | The positive aspect of WOM is, "making others aware that one does business with a company or store, making positive recommendations to others about a company, extolling a company's quality orientation, and so on" (p. 125).                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Lee and Youn (2009)                      | Person-to-person, oral communication between a receiver and a sender                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Fang <i>et al.</i> (2011)                | Any information regarding a target object (e.g. company, store, product or service) transferred between individuals either in person or via some communication medium (p. 89).                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

The concept and definition of traditional WOM depicted in the literature contradicts the conceptualisation of eWOM, as a form of WOM, as traditional WOM has mostly been considered as person-to-person, oral communications (Lee and Youn, 2009). The basic difference between WOM and eWOM as identified by the definition of eWOM is the multiplied reach of WOM to both known and unknown audience (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013; Gupta and Harris, 2010). However, traditional

WOM was considered to occur among individuals, who knew and trusted each other (Gupta and Harris, 2010), whereas, in case of eWOM, the Internet has facilitated the communications not only with friends, family, and co-workers, but also with unknown people (Kavanaugh *et al.*, 2005). Due to this “ease of eWOM generation and dissemination” (Gupta and Harris, 2010, p. 1042), and its impact on consumer buying behaviour (Graham and Havelina, 2007; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010, 2014) eWOM has attracted a lot of research interest over the years as depicted in table 2.5.

Moreover, the importance and impact on consumers’ attributes, attitudes, product or brand perceptions, brand judgments, and buying decision-making; both WOM and eWOM share the same reputation (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2004; Sweeney *et al.*, 2011; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). And, based on this higher scope and reach of WOM as eWOM through Internet and the latest means of telecommunications, and the realisation of similar benefits of eWOM as WOM, the researchers have started to acknowledge it as a form of WOM, communicated through electronic means (Abrantes *et al.*, 2013; Hennig-Thurau and Walsh, 2004; Zhang *et al.*, 2010).

Some traditional WOM definitions also provide the required flexibility for scholars to conceptualise eWOM, within the same domain. Bayus (1985) considered WOM as giving or receiving any comments about a product or service, which does not limit the scope of WOM communication to one-to-one communications only. Sweeney *et al.* (2010) also developed their study based on this definition. Similarly, Fang *et al.*’s (2011) definition of WOM considers WOM conveyed either in person or via some communication medium, such communication medium also provides the flexibility for the inclusion of eWOM to WOM, as it shows a clear overlap of traditional WOM and eWOM. Moreover, Heckman (1999) also defined WOM advertising as people’s genuine enthusiasm for a product or service conveyed to others. Therefore, such enthusiasm can be addressed through either WOM or eWOM.

Furthermore, Brown *et al.* (2005) defined the positive aspect of WOM as making others aware of one’s business with a company and making positive recommendations about that company. Hong and Yang (2009) built on this conceptualisation of WOM for their investigation of the positive context of WOM. The timeline of WOM definitions revealed that the most accepted definitions recognise WOM as a type of interpersonal communications regarding any goods or services. And, the definition of eWOM suggested that it can either be WOM or eWOM, merely depending on the medium of communication, as if it is in-person or through the Internet.

A few scholars have also observed WOM as recommending behaviour (File *et al.*, 1992; Hartline and Jones, 1996), and some included both exchanging any comments about a product/services, as well as recommendations within the sphere of WOM (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Maxham and Netemeyer, 2003). However, based on the specific sphere and focus of consumers’ recommending behaviour, researchers have started to study it as brand advocacy (Bilro *et al.* 2018; Du *et al.*, 2007;

Jayasimha *et al.*, 2017; Kemp *et al.*, 2012; Lawer and Knox, 2006; Parrott *et al.*, 2015; Samala and Singh, 2018; Urban, 2004). In this study, brand advocacy was proposed and conceptualised as a superior form of brand-favourable WOM to develop an improved understanding of the different intensities of the consumers' WOM offerings.

The research in WOM is reviewed in the next section.

### **2.9.1 Literature Review; Word-of-Mouth Research:**

The humans' willingness to communicate can be traced back to the beginning of the mankind, including the pictorial conversations of the cave man. WOM has also been observed as the consumers' willingness to share their consumption experiences regarding any goods and services (DeMatos and Rossi 2008; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010). In this regard, the technological advancements of information and telecommunications have provided consumers with extra means and avenues to communicate, such as the Internet and social media (Graham and Havelina, 2007). Thereby, there are several studies that have explored WOM since it was first observed by Arndt (1967), as discussed in the previous section.

Research in marketing communications experienced a shift in 1990s from basic consumer behaviour focused research to strategy-oriented research (Buttle 1998). The two streams of literature; relationship marketing and marketing research and practice identified the attraction of researchers in the strategic implications of WOM, which has continuously increased since then (deMatos and Rossi, 2008). A considerable interest of researchers was found in the investigation of the strategic role of WOM in acquiring, maintaining, and retaining customers (Gremler and Gwinner, 2008; Maxham and Netemeyer, 2003), and in enhancing firms' value (Luo and Homburg, 2007), as well. Among the recent WOM research, the perceptions of consumers regarding WOM providers, and the influence of such perceptions on the decision-making process has also gained attraction (Allsop *et al.*, 2007; Gershoff *et al.*, 2007).

The continued interest in WOM research and inclusion of eWOM with the advances in technology, the Internet, and widespread adoption of social network sites suggest the importance and scope of the latest WOM activity. Therefore, to develop an overall understanding of the WOM phenomenon, its importance, and its critical role in directing consumer behaviour; it is important to observe the development of WOM research within the recent past. Therefore, a synthesis of WOM research within the last two decades is developed and presented in table 2.5, depicting how WOM literature has evolved over time. The synthesis of WOM literature provided insights to the conceptualisation, nature, triggers, and motivations of giving and receiving WOM, as well as its impact, and effectiveness of negative and positive WOM over time. The only aspect in the timeline synthesis of WOM literature that has not changed in any of the presented studies is the increasing importance of WOM communications. The research shows that the widened scope of WOM as eWOM has made product/brand relevant communication more critical.

| Table 2.5<br>Synthesis of WOM and eWOM Research in the last fifteen years |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Publication Author (Year)                                                 | Research Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Major Contributions                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Harrison-Walker (2001)                                                    | Developed a WOM scale concerning two WOM antecedents: commitment (affective commitment and high sacrifice commitment), and service quality.                                                                                                            | The study suggested two dimensions of WOM<br>WOM Praise<br>WOM Valence<br>The findings marked their way in the literature as seminal.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Laczniak <i>et al.</i> (2001)                                             | Explored consumers' responses to negative-WOM drawn on the attribution theory.                                                                                                                                                                         | The findings suggested that the receivers' attributions depend on the manner how negative-WOM is being conveyed. The brand name found to affect consumers' attributions, the brand-evaluations decreased in cases of receivers' attributing WOM-negativity to the brand, and increased when WOM-negativity is attributed to the communicator of that negative-WOM.                                                                                |
| Hennig-Thurau <i>et al.</i> (2004)                                        | Explored the motives of eWOM based on the existing research on virtual communities and traditional WOM.                                                                                                                                                | The study found that consumers' desire for social interaction, economic incentives, concern for other consumers, and possibility to augment their own self-worth serve as the primary factors in promoting eWOM. The study suggested firms to group eWOM providers based on their eWOM motivations to encourage eWOM among their consumers.                                                                                                       |
| Gruen <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                                | Investigated the effects of eWOM as "customer-to-customer know-how exchange" and its impact on customers' perceptions of value and loyalty.                                                                                                            | The study suggested that such know-how exchanges impact customers' perceptions about a product's value and recommendations probability, but do not influence customers' loyalty.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Graham and Havelina (2007)                                                | Explored if WOM an influencer or an outcome or if it works as an independent stimulus in consumer behaviour?                                                                                                                                           | The findings suggested that advertising and brand advocacy can induce consumers to generate positive-WOM. Therefore, marketers should employ an integrated online/offline strategy.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2007)                                             | Developed a conceptual model of WOM-giving experience of consumers, by identifying the dimensions, triggers and enhancing conditions of WOM.                                                                                                           | The findings suggested WOM as a complex concept and proposed two key WOM themes, "richness of message" and "strength of implied/explicit advocacy."                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2007)                                                 | Explored the moderating effect of the product-involvement levels on consumers' purchase decisions and product sales in case of online consumer reviews.                                                                                                | The study found the quality of on-line reviews positively affect consumers' buying intentions, consumers with low product-involvement were affected by the quality rather than quantity of online reviews, and increased quantity of reviews affected consumers with high product-involvement. Buying intention increases with increase in the number of reviews.                                                                                 |
| Sen and Lerman (2007)                                                     | Explored the effectiveness of eWOM concerning trusting positive and negative reviews.                                                                                                                                                                  | The study found that consumers found negative reviews more useful for utilitarian products than hedonic products, as the negative reviews for utilitarian products were more product-specific, rather than based on personal reasons.                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| deMatos and Rossi (2008)                                                  | Developed a conceptual framework of the antecedents and moderators of WOM activity to investigate their relationships through Meta-Analysis.                                                                                                           | It is the first meta-analysis of WOM literature. It observed the impact of WOM antecedents (Satisfaction, Loyalty, Quality, Commitment, Trust and Perceived Value) on WOM, with WOM valence and activity as moderators.                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2008)                                              | Explored receivers' response to WOM about a service organisation, and the factors that may enhance the chances of a receiver acting on WOM.                                                                                                            | The study proposed a WOM impact model to understand the impact of WOM on the receiver, and suggested including sender and receiver attributes, interpersonal factors among them, situational factors including the nature of the product/service, and the message characteristics including transmission and content of WOM when evaluating WOM impact.                                                                                           |
| Park and Lee (2009)                                                       | Explored how eWOM direction, i.e. positive/negative and a website's reputation, i.e. established/un-established contribute to the effectiveness of eWOM, and the eWOM effectiveness with the moderating effect of product type i.e. search/experience. | The results suggested greater effect of negative eWOM than positive eWOM, greater effect of eWOM for established than for unestablished website, and greater impact of eWOM for experience goods than search goods, and same impact in case of website reputation.                                                                                                                                                                                |
| Doh and Hwang (2009)                                                      | Explored how consumers evaluate eWOM messages about products.                                                                                                                                                                                          | The findings suggested considerable variations across different sets of eWOM messages, more positive sets showed higher scores in numerous cases, but not in all situations particularly concerning credibility. Product-involvement and previous knowledge partly moderated the relationship between eWOM effect and ratio of messages. In the long-run, a website's and eWOMs' credibility can be damaged if entire eWOM messages are positive. |

|                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2010)          | To understand the power of individual message; message content and delivery.                                                                                                   | Developed a scale for measuring incident-specific WOM based on message characteristics, which could be generalised across both givers and receivers of positive and negative-WOM.                                                                                                                                                                            |
| Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2010)            | Explored the persuasiveness of eWOM.                                                                                                                                           | The findings suggested that consumers who evaluate products associated with consumption promotions deem positive reviews as more persuasive (positivity-bias), and consumers who evaluate products linked to consumption prevention goals deem negative reviews as more persuasive (negativity-bias).                                                        |
| Ng <i>et al.</i> (2011)               | Investigated the effects of relationship benefits on relationship quality and service quality, namely technical and functional quality, and their subsequent influence on WOM. | The findings revealed that functional and relationship quality induces WOM behaviour, so, to ensure service excellence companies must establish strong relations with their customers to enhance WOM.                                                                                                                                                        |
| Wang (2011)                           | Examined the impact of inconsistent WOM on service quality perceptions and purchase intentions.                                                                                | The results showed that the final WOM events have higher influence on service quality perceptions and purchase intentions than initial events, and positive-WOM events found as more impactful than negative-WOM.                                                                                                                                            |
| Magnini (2011)                        | Explored why some service firms disguise commercially sponsored messages as genuine WOM and debate the potentially harmful consequences for those firms.                       | The study advised firms not to present commercial messages as WOM, as it may erode customer commitment and trust in the long-run, and there are ethical and legal implications as well.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2011)             | Considering eWOM impact on consumers' online buying behaviour, the study explored the factors that influence eWOM in China.                                                    | The study found customer susceptibility to interpersonal influences as the most significant factor in eWOM effectiveness, as consumers more susceptible to interpersonal influences are more likely to be affected by eWOM, and perceived eWOM credibility significantly add to its effectiveness.                                                           |
| Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011)    | Explored the negative impact of negative product reviews on consumers' brand equity.                                                                                           | The findings confirmed the proposed harmful effects of negative online product reviews on consumer-based brand equity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Chan and Ngai (2011)                  | Conceptualised eWOM from an input-process-output (IPO) perspective.                                                                                                            | The study suggested that due to the growing use of internet; eWOM is changing consumer's behaviour and decision-making, increasing consumers' dependence on others' opinions, and eWOM also influence offline decisions.                                                                                                                                     |
| Jalilvand and Samiei (2012)           | Examined the extent to which eWOM can influence brand image and consumers' purchase intentions within automobile industry.                                                     | The findings suggested that e-WOM is one of the most effective factors that influence brand image and consumers' brand-purchase intentions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| Al-Alak (2014)                        | Examined the impact of marketing activities on relationship quality within the Malaysian banking sector.                                                                       | The results revealed that greater relational orientation between client and employees result in higher relationship quality and improved relationship continuity, and committed client relationships lead to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, positive-WOM and brand promotion.                                                                      |
| Verhagen <i>et al.</i> (2013)         | Proposed and tested a sender-oriented model, exploring the influences of emotions, and negative eWOM on re-patronage and switching intentions.                                 | This study tried providing insights to firms that why consumers involve in negative-eWOM and found that negative-eWOM is directly driven by senders' positive and negative emotions, and motivation of helping other consumers works as a behavioural moderator.                                                                                             |
| Chang <i>et al.</i> (2013)            | To explain the role of group eWOM in influencing brand community members' evaluations of negative brand-decisions, drawing on the theories of social identity and involvement. | The study found that if negative group eWOM opposes far extension, the brand community members with high identification seem to resist negative effects on the brand, and in case of positive group eWOM for far extension, members with high brand involvement get strengthened and promote favourable WOM and attenuate the negative effects on the brand. |
| Wang <i>et al.</i> (2013)             | Investigated the formation process of consumers' product attitude in eWOM.                                                                                                     | The study found different prior response effects concerning positive and negative-WOM across different products and suggested two main factors; prior responses and main message characteristics influencing consumers' product attitudes within online interactions. Positive-WOM revealed as more impactful on product attitudes than negative-WOM.        |
| Weisfeld-Spolter <i>et al.</i> (2014) | Compared B2C sponsored platform effectiveness with C2C websites.                                                                                                               | The study found that not all types of eWOM have the same persuasive effect, and C2C sponsored platforms were deemed more credible and persuasive than B2C websites, especially for many to one eWOM communications.                                                                                                                                          |

|                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2014)      | Examined the effects of interpersonal, service, and message factors on the influence of positive and negative-WOM, and the impact of WOM on changes in consumer's willingness to use a service. | The study found positive-WOM being more effective than negative-WOM. Moreover, the strength of positive-WOM and interpersonal factors had greater impact on the negative-WOM's influence, whereas brand equity was found to enhance positive-WOM and acted as a buffer in case of negative-WOM.                           |
| Ulrich and Brunner (2015)         | Explored the effects of the different options of responses to a negative consumer review.                                                                                                       | The results showed that a positive review counteracts a negative review more effectively than a positive response from the brand, whereas the strength of a brand moderates this relationship.                                                                                                                            |
| Yeh (2015)                        | Explored the role of eWOM in TV rating predictions.                                                                                                                                             | The findings suggested eWOM as a credible and impactful source of predicting TV ratings and provided practical implications for TV industry to use eWOM to predict TV program ratings.                                                                                                                                    |
| Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi (2016) | Compared the impact of negative eWOM with face-to-face negative-WOM on purchasing an untried service.                                                                                           | The findings suggested that personal negative-WOM as more effective than negative eWOM concerning consumers' purchase behaviour particularly when consumers have no personal consumption experience.                                                                                                                      |
| Choi <i>et al.</i> (2017)         | Explored the intentions of sharing eWOM on social-media based on ties' strength, temporal distance perceptions, and promotional messages' concreteness.                                         | The study found that consumers more likely share promotional messages with their strong ties than weak ties. Moreover, concrete promotional messages more strongly motivate sharing eWOM for purchases perceived to be made soon, and abstract messages more when purchases are perceived to occur in the distant future. |

The seminal work of Harrison-Walker (2001) was phenomenal in terms of providing new insights to WOM research that offered the concept of valence in WOM (deMatos and Rossi, 2008). The study found two dimensions of WOM; WOM incidence and WOM praise, or valence, and systematically developed a scale to measure WOM (Harrison-Walker, 2001). WOM incidence referred to the frequency of WOM, and WOM valence referred to positive, negative, or neutral WOM based on senders' experiences (Halstead, 2002). The concept of valence provided great inroads into the research (deMatos and Rossi, 2008), which led to seminal work in WOM (Sweeney *et al.*, 2010; deMattos and Rossi, 2008). Wang (2011) also used positive and negative-WOM as independent variables in his study.

Mazzarol *et al.* (2007) explored WOM in the giver's perspective, with the dimensions, triggers, and conditions of WOM delivery. Mazzarol *et al.* (2007) took Harrison-Walker's (2001) findings further and examined the different dimensions of WOM and identified three key WOM behavioural components that suggested WOM beyond simply valence. The study suggested signifying the richness of WOM message, which includes; depth, intensity, and vibrancy. Moreover, the second emergent theme was, "strength of implied or explicit advocacy", denoting to the way a message is conveyed that demonstrates the strength of a sender's intention of recommending (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007). The study compared the media specific advertising expenditures to the effectiveness of WOM and eWOM resulting into WOM advocacy (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007). Mazzarol *et al.*'s (2007) study provided strong basis for this doctoral research to observe and explore the different intensities of WOM as WOM advocacy and brand defence to fully appreciate the potential of WOM. Mazzarol *et al.* (2007) also explored the triggers of WOM for managers to obtain WOM benefits for business

growth. This doctoral study suggested brand love as one of the strongest triggers of brand-favourable WOM behaviour even in case of negative-WOM, as discussed and conceptualised in the later sections.

The synthesis showed that most of the earlier research had considered WOM as a uni-dimensional construct; however, Harrison-Walker (2001), and Mazzarol *et al.* (2007) found WOM as a far more complex concept than it was initially suggested (deMatos and Rossi, 2008). Therefore, deMatos and Rossi (2008) investigated the integration of the bivariate relationships that involve WOM by conducting the first meta-analysis through quantitative integration of the previous research, identifying the major antecedents and moderators of WOM.

The concept of WOM valence has received significant attention in recent research on WOM communications (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi 2016; *Chang et al.*, 2013; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2013), and researchers have studied extremely positive, and/or extremely negative-WOM attributions (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2005, 2014). Anderson (1998) argued that extremely positive, and/or extremely negative-WOM attributions could be the customers' inclinations of delivering WOM in extreme satisfactory/dissatisfactory scenarios. It indicates that highly satisfied customers have an urge to share about their positive experience (Brown *et al.*, 2005), which suggested a direct relationship between customer satisfaction and positive-WOM (deMatos and Rossi, 2008).

Similarly, the customers having unsatisfactory experiences are expected to spread negative-WOM due to the negative emotions like frustration, regret, and anger arouse from poor service experience (Sweeney *et al.*, 2005). Therefore, they spread negative-WOM to vent their negative emotions, and to get relief after communicating the unpleasant experience (Wetzer *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2005), or it could be a motivational intent of helping others (Verhagen *et al.*, 2013). However, deMatos and Rossi (2008) suggested disloyalty as a stronger driver of negative-WOM than that of dissatisfaction, providing strong implications for managers to realise the importance of loyalty and consumer-brand relationships, rather than merely focusing on product and/or services satisfaction.

The exploration of WOM valence suggested further research to investigate WOM from a receivers' perspective (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, Sweeney *et al.* (2008) carried out an empirical study exploring receivers' responses concerning the role of WOM in their consumption decisions. The study suggested significant insights for managers, who seek to enhance WOM as a promotional tool. Sweeney *et al.* (2008) suggested that firms that invest in good service management, as well as effective image promotions are more likely to receive greater WOM benefits (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, the richness of findings supported the idea of acquiring a phenomenological approach along with the positivist rigor in the WOM research. Sweeney *et al.*'s (2010) found that greater cognitive content of WOM had most significant impact on the receivers of positive and negative-WOM and the richness of content of positive-WOM makes positive-WOM to be more impactful and influential than negative-WOM.

Similarly, Wang's (2011) study on the effects of inconsistent WOM also identified positive-WOM events being more impactful as compared to negative-WOM events. Therefore, Sweeney *et al.*'s (2010) and Wang's (2011) findings implied companies to induce positive-WOM to provoke consumers' brand perceptions and purchase intentions. It further supported this study in identifying positive-WOM as a negative-WOM contender, while considering brand love as an inducer of brand-favourable WOM.

The large body of WOM literature signifies not only a strong interest of research in the field, but also the perceived strength of consumers-generated content (WOM) in its ability to influence firms' marketing efforts, and consumers' decision-making (Chan and Ngai, 2011; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2011; Steffes and Burgee, 2009; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008; Wang, 2011). Therefore, the critical nature of WOM in directing consumer behaviour gained a common consensus in scholarship and practitioners alike.

The next section presents and discusses the strategic nature of WOM in the marketer's context.

### **2.9.2 The Strategic Nature of WOM; the Marketer's Context:**

The importance of word-of-mouth is comparable to the importance of communication, which is well expressed by this sentence, "the sophisticated nature of communication sets apart human from other creatures" (Kelson, 2010, p. xvii). The tremendous growth of WOM literature in the last two decades with increased debate on its viability and significance in comparison to other Marketing Communications (MC) show its importance (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; deMatos and Rossi 2008; Graham and Havelena, 2007; Harrison-Walker 2001; Hong *et al.*, 2016; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Magnini, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2011, Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Wang, 2011). Arndt (1967) was first to identify and recognise the importance of WOM as a more powerful decisive-factor than any other form of Marketing that later changed the whole phenomenology of Marketing and advertising research (deMatos and Rossi, 2008), and practice.

Concerning the effectiveness of WOM, Day (1971) found it almost three times more effective than that of free samples and nine times more impactful than advertising concerning customers' attitudes. There is a consensus found in the literature about WOM's greater impact as compared to advertising (Arndt, 1967; Buttle, 1998; deMatos and Rossi 2008). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) found WOM's influence on purchase decision-making twice as advertising. However, Hogan *et al.* (2004) estimated WOM three times more effective than advertising. Heckman (1999) defined WOM as WOM advertising and referred it as people's genuine enthusiasm for a product/services conveyed to others. Moreover, Villanueva *et al.* (2008) believed to expect the lifetime value of a customer twice better, when acquired through WOM as compared to the means of traditional marketing. Furthermore, the effectiveness of WOM in acquiring web clients is estimated as 30 times higher as compared to traditional media (Trusov *et al.*, 2009).

WOM has gained significant importance concerning its ability as an image promoter (Sweeney *et*



*al.*, 2008), and decision clincher (Arndt, 1967; Chan and Ngai, 2011; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Lampert and Rosenberg, 1975; Lau and Ng, 2001; Park *et al.*, 2011; Steffes and Burgee, 2009; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008; Wang, 2011), due to the perceived non-biased and non-commercial nature of WOM information (Alon and Brunel, 2006). Furthermore, WOM has gained further importance being an outcome of close consumer-brand relationships, such as brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and MacInnis, 2006), brand intimacy (Brock and Zhou, 2012; Heinich *et al.*, 2008), and passion (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). WOM has been emerged as one of the most common and prominent attribute towards the related brands (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Brock and Zhou, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006), and a strong relationship benefit (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Ng *et al.*, 2011).

The various definitions of WOM in the existing research has identified WOM as a form of communications between individuals or groups regarding any goods/services (See table 2.4). These interactions can be either positive or negative, and research confirmed both negative and positive role (valence/praise) of WOM for brands and products (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Harrison-Walker, 2001; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). The positive role of WOM revealed to put significant influence on consumers' adoption decisions for a new product (Rogers, 2003; Sheth, 1971), and the negative role revealed influencing consumers to switch behaviour (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Bone, 1992). In this regard, Sweeney *et al.* (2010) and Wang's (2011) found positive-WOM as more impactful than negative-WOM. However, another set of research suggested negative-WOM being more judgemental and influential on consumers' brand perceptions and consumption decisions (Anderson, 1965; Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Fiske, 1980; Mizerski, 1982; Mittal *et al.*, 1998; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). Overall, both sets of research suggested the critical nature of WOM in influencing consumer behaviour either positively or negatively, and/or both ways depending on the nature, intensity, and valence of WOM.

In addition, the widespread of eWOM via the Internet has further increased the strategic importance of WOM in the marketers' context. Social networks have become a "hot" topic among social scientists (Borgatti *et al.*, 2009) and research in Marketing (Bulte and Wuyts, 2007) due to its facilitation in the dissemination of WOM (Groeger and Buttle, 2014; Huang *et al.*, 2010, Sweeney *et al.*, 2012). The Internet and social media have profoundly altered the modern markets' landscape (Colliander and Wien, 2013). Social media enabled consumers to communicate with each other, and take joint actions irrespective of their locations, backgrounds, or interests (Colliander and Wien, 2013), suggesting both destructing (Kane *et al.*, 2009) , and benefitting role (Colliander and Wien, 2013) for brands.

The traditional concepts of WOM about interpersonal communications were developed in isolation with any effects of the Internet (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the

emergence of online environments has changed the mechanics and reach of WOM. In contrast to the traditional face-to-face WOM interactions, eWOM being asynchronous, anonymous, and written enjoys a physical existence, prolonged life, and amplified audience (Huang *et al.*, 2010). Researchers have examined the effectiveness of eWOM in online forums (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Bickart and Schindler, 2001), motivations for participating in eWOM (Graham and Havelena, 2007; Gruen *et al.*, 2006; Henning-Thurau *et al.*, 2004), and benefits for companies and brands (Gruen *et al.*, 2006).

The realised importance of WOM, particularly eWOM has increased companies' enthusiasm in generating synthetic WOM (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Marketers are seeking ways to overtly arouse and manage WOM with an objective of influencing consumer behaviour (Godes and Mayzlin, 2009). Such marketer induced WOM has been referred to WOM marketing, viral marketing, or synthetic WOM (Hinz *et al.*, 2011, Kozinets *et al.*, 2010, Libai *et al.*, 2010, Sernovitz, 2012, Trusov *et al.*, 2009). American investment projections in WOM marketing campaigns were \$3.04 billion in 2013 (Groeger and Buttle, 2014). Initially, companies were experimenting with WOM marketing campaigns, but lately many firms have been integrating it into their routine marketing communications (Carl, 2008). However, the research suggested that naturally generated real WOM is far more influential than synthetic WOM, even the platform of WOM/eWOM also affect the effectiveness of WOM (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Wang, 2011). The positive-WOM generated on marketers-owned websites was found to be lesser impactful than that of private customer-to-customer social networking platforms (Weisfeld-Spolter *et al.*, 2014). Moreover, the literature suggests not to disguise brand communications as WOM due to the risk of losing brand trust and commitment in the long-run (Magnini, 2011), as it is the credibility of real WOM that warrants its effectiveness (Park *et al.*, 2011).

Therefore, considering the strategic nature of WOM and increased realisation of positive-WOM being one of the most common consequences of brand love, the study aimed to explore the possible WOM outcomes of brand love in case of negative-WOM. Most of the literature discussed in this section highlighted and appreciated the positivity impact of positive-WOM, and less discussed about the destructive role of negative-WOM for brands. However, this study suggested managers to understand and mobilise the different intensities of brand-favourable WOM in defying the negativity of negative-WOM.

The next section discusses the destructive impact of negative-WOM messages on consumers' brand perceptions and behaviour.

### **2.9.3 The Destructive Effects of Negative Word-of-Mouth:**

There are fewer studies that have examined negative-WOM, its antecedents, and impact, as compared to the large literature appraising the benefits associated to brand-favourable WOM (East *et al.*, 2007); particularly, the research on brand response strategies to negative-WOM is limited (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Lee and Song, 2010; van Noort and Willemsen, 2012).

However, negative-WOM has been revealed as detrimental for brands (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009), and even more damaging for strong brands (Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). Moreover, the consumers' empowerment through their ability to provide and receive WOM as online reviews (eWOM) has changed the spectrum of WOM, and made it even more critical to manage (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015).

Arndt (1967) found negative-WOM twice effective for purchase intentions, as compared to positive-WOM. Additionally, the stronger impact of negative information over positive information has been confirmed by several studies (Assael, 2004; Kroloff, 1988; Skowronski and Carlston, 1989). Even the media publicity conventions also support the idea of negative information being more powerful (East *et al.*, 2008). Although, Buttle (1998) and Harrison-Walker (2001) talked about the concept of valence in WOM, but the impact and consequences of negative-WOM did not get enough explanation (East *et al.*, (2008). Moreover, limited research has investigated how marketers can vent the damaging impact of negative-WOM (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). East *et al.* (2008) suggested that positive and negative-WOM are similar behaviour, irrespective of the opposite impact of the two on consumers' brand purchase behaviour.

The negative information has been considered as useful evidence for unreliability of the brand, some research suggests negative information to be more effective on product/brand judgments (Anderson, 1965; Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Fiske, 1980; Mizerski, 1982; Mittal *et al.*, 1998; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014), and some found positive-WOM being more impactful (Sweeney *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, the literature reveals that both negative and positive-WOM play a significant role in effecting consumers' attitudes towards a brand and brand purchase behaviour.

It is also believed that the negative-WOM generators could also be active givers of positive-WOM for competitors' brands that makes the advice pattern more damaging for the transgressed brands (East *et al.*, 2007). Thereby, it becomes a challenge for managers to reverse such advice pattern,

when consumers advise against a brand and recommend another competitive brand as a better substitute (East *et al.*, 2007). This threat of advice for a better substitute, and the far-reaching scope of such advice over the Internet; it has become more challenging for managers, as they are losing control over such widespread of information. It is forcing marketers to inject artificial WOM disguised as actual WOM (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010; Magnini, 2011). The accessibility of eWOM by many unknown consumers, who follow WOM advice concerning purchase decisions makes eWOM critical (Ng and Rao, 2009). However, this increase of WOM audience can serve as an opportunity for brands, if managers can mobilise brand-favourable WOM. Moreover, it is also found that the impact of positive and/or negative information does not offer any significant difference on consumers' attitudes towards familiar brands (Ahluwalia, 2000; East *et al.*, 2008; Sundaram and Webster, 1999; Wilson and Peterson, 1989).

However, the negative information regarding the unknown or unfamiliar brand has been considered as more diagnostic and potent (Ahluwalia, 2002), as the advice impact reduces significantly if the receiver is familiar with the advised object (Sundaram and Webster, 1999; Wilson and Peterson, 1989). Therefore, this familiarity factor provides an important opportunity for managers to enhance brand familiarity to reduce any impact of negative advice. Moreover, it also supports the conceptualisation of this study, as if just familiarity with a brand can decrease the impact of negative-WOM, the consumers' relatedness with a brand can even reduce it further. Therefore, the literature on the frequency, impact, and damaging nature of negative-WOM shows that it is important for marketers to find ways to minimise negative-WOM, or at least the negative impact of the negative-WOM (Al-Alak, 2014; Chang *et al.*, 2013; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015).

Therefore, this study endeavoured to explore that how consumers perceive negative-WOM about their loved brands, and what kind and intensity of WOM they offer to their loved brands in response to any negative-WOM received about the loved brand. To develop the conceptual framework for this study consumers' WOM behaviour was explored within the relationship contexts, as WOM has been found as a relationship-benefit within most of the relationship-orientated Marketing literature, i.e. relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, and brand love.

The next section presents and discusses the conceptualisation of brand-favourable WOM behaviour, as suggested and categorised in this study.

## **2.10 The Conceptualisation of Brand-Favourable WOM Behaviour:**

Based on the realisation that consumers produce different types, and intensities of brand-favourable WOM towards their loved brands in different circumstances, this study suggested viewing the different intensities and levels of brand-favourable WOM as distinct WOM behaviour for further understanding of the phenomenon.

WOM is considered as an important influence in consumer's buying behaviour and, therefore, it has been extensively remaining a topic of continued research interest (Shin *et al.*, 2014; Sweeney *et al.* 2014; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Zhang *et al.* 2010). The existing research has confirmed the impactful nature of positive-WOM and the intensity of WOM messages that informs the effectiveness of WOM (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010; 2014). Moreover, literature also suggests advocacy as a superior form of WOM (Wallace *et al.*, 2012), and recently a new form of electronic-WOM has also been studied as customer rebuttals in response to negative customer reviews. However, no known research to the author's knowledge has studied the different intensities of brand-favourable WOM to develop further understanding of WOM to yield maximum benefit from any of the specific types of brand-favourable WOM behaviour.

The definition of WOM encompasses a very broad view, considering WOM as an oral, non-commercial person-to-person communication regarding a brand, product, or service (Arndt, 1967), which is consistent with comparatively recent research as well (Gruen *et al.*, 2006; Harrison-Walker,

2001; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, Bayus, (1985) simplified it even further as WOM is giving or receiving any comments about a product or service. Table 2.4 presents different WOM definitions and none of the definitions explained the depth and breadth of WOM behaviour. File, *et al.* (1992) viewed WOM within the scope of consumers' advocacy and/or recommending behaviour. Similarly, the fuller potential of eWOM has also not been realised, the concept of eWOM only differentiates eWOM with the traditional WOM based on the multitude of WOM reach facilitated by the Internet (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2012; de Maeyer, 2012; Henning-Thrau *et al.*, 2004; Jabr and Zheng, 2014). However, the existing literature suggested that consumers produce different types, and intensities of brand-favourable WOM (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014) towards their loved brands based on different levels of relatedness within different circumstances (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and MacInnis, 2006).

Therefore, this study suggested observing the different intensities and levels of brand-favourable WOM attributions as distinct WOM behaviour. Viewing brand-favourable WOM behaviour based on their different intensities will elaborate specific benefits offered by the different types of WOM, and marketers will be able to procure maximum out of it by mobilising the most appropriate WOM behaviour in a given situation. Therefore, the study suggested observing the different types of brand-favourable WOM in a form of a hierarchy, based on the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards their loved brands against negative-WOM.

The next section presents the hierarchy of brand-favourable WOM behaviour as proposed in this study.

#### **2.10.1 The Hierarchy of Brand-Favourable WOM Behaviour:**

This study examines the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM in the form of a hierarchy to enhance understanding of the role of individual constructs in supporting brands. In this study, the hierarchy of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour is founded on the assumptions of means-end theory (Wansink, 2003), built on the basic

assumptions of Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954). Wansink (2003) related the means-end theory with Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954), and suggested that means-end theory also seeks to understand humans' actions concerning purchase behaviour as a means of satisfying the different levels of their needs. The basic assumptions of the means-end theory are a hierarchical organisation of consumers' perceptions, beliefs, and knowledge in understanding consumers' behaviour (Gutman, 1982; Wansink, 2003; Young and Feigin, 1975). Therefore, this study also employs a hierarchical division of the brand-favourable WOM behaviour to understand the intensity and willingness of consumers' specific attributions towards their loved brands in the face of negative-WOM about the brand. Viewing WOM behaviour in the form of a hierarchy is valuable because it strengthens the understanding of consumers' brand-favourable WOM's intent and intensities.

The means-end hierarchy ranges from attributes to consequences to personal values. The basic premise of the means-end theory is built on the belief that individual behaviour is driven by personal values (Gutman, 1982), which are represented in a hierarchy for observable understanding. This hierarchical approach can aid understanding of consumers' behaviour towards brands with respect to their perceptions about the brand (Park *et al.*, 2006), their brand attributes, and consumption behaviour based on personal circumstances and values (Wansink, 2003). Moreover, hierarchical models are also deemed important in the internal relationship marketing approach (Peltier *et al.*, 2013). The use of hierarchical representation of important factors in understanding important phenomenon in marketing communications can also be traced back to the hierarchy of effects (Bruner and Kumar, 2000; Palda, 1966; Ray *et al.*, 1973; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Yoo *et al.*, 2004).

The implication for using a hierarchical structure for mapping human behaviour or perceptions is to allow improved understanding of distinct attributes, perceptions, or needs. The means-end theory and its offshoot laddering techniques are consistently used in understanding and explaining consumer behaviour (Carson, 1989; Phillips and Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds and Phillips, 2015; Wansink, 2003). The relationship marketing and consumer behaviour research widely used means-end theory and laddering techniques to explore consumers' choice and decision-making (Bagozzi and Dabholkar 2000; Reynolds and Phillips, 2009), product development and evaluations (Chiu 2005; Griffin and Hauser 1982; Roininen *et al.*, 2006; Wendel and Dellaert, 2005), segment markets (Reynolds, 2006), service experience (Jüttner *et al.*, 2013), salesperson behaviour, and performance (Guenzi and Panzeri, 2015), and formulation of marketing and advertising strategies (Wansink, 2003). The entire research interest in using the hierarchical interpretation and analysis suggested by the means-end theory and laddering approach involved exploring consumers' behavioural perceptions and attributions.

Wansink (2003) explained the basic hierarchy with reference to consumers' product attributes towards a diet drink leading to consumption consequences based on the consumer's value for preventing weight gain. Similarly, Reynolds and Phillips (2009) suggested that each consequence supports one or more important values in a person's life. Therefore, both the means-end theory (Wansink, 2003) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1954) seek to understand humans' perceptions and behaviour in form of a hierarchy. Moreover, more recently, a brand management study integrated relationship marketing with hierarchy of effects to develop an understanding of loyalty to sports teams (Tsiotsou, 2013). The study suggested that a hierarchy of effects approach, involving the cognition, affect, and conation stages of loyalty (Bagozzi, 1978; Fournier, 1998), can explain how strong consumers-team relationships can be developed. The consumers' team loyalty is explored with the partial mediation of team attachment in the relationship between team loyalty and the proposed cognitive components (Tsiotsou, 2013). This brand management study provided very close similarity and means of comparison to this doctoral study that suggested relevance and support for using a hierarchy in explaining brand-favourable WOM behaviour (Tsiotsou, 2013). Tsiotsou (2013) explored consumers' loyalty attributes of team involvement, trust, and team self-expression with the mediation of team/brand attachment. And,

this doctoral research involved exploring the consumers' WOM attributions in response to brand love with the mediation of brand trust, loyalty, and forgiveness. Accordingly, both prior research and this doctoral study explored consumers' behavioural attributions in the prevalence of close relationships, such as brand love and brand attachment.

This study therefore hypothesised that brand love promotes three brand-favourable WOM behaviour in terms of generating positive brand perceptions (positive-WOM), persuading others to buy the brand (advocacy), and defending the brand against any negative critic through arguments, debate, or rebuttals (brand defence). The three behaviour are proposed to be different in their content and intensity, therefore, serving a brand in its distinct purpose, driven by distinct consumers' values in different circumstances. Therefore, to understand consumers' specific WOM behaviour, and consumers' values influencing that behaviour, the three brand-favourable behaviour are proposed to be observed, tested, and explored in form of a hierarchy. In this regard, the hierarchical relationships are tested using structural equation modelling (SEM), as well as explored in the laddering interviews developed on the assumptions of means-end theory.

Moreover, observing consumer-brand relationships and their consequent behaviour towards brands in a form of a hierarchy for augmented understanding is recommended in consumer-brand relationship literature as well (e.g. Park *et al.* 2006). Therefore, this doctoral study aimed to develop an understanding of the differing levels of consumers' WOM behaviour offered to their loved brands based on the intensity of their relationship and given circumstances, particularly in response to negative-WOM. The literature suggests closer consumer-brand relationships attributing higher levels of brand-favourable behaviour (Park *et al.*, 2006; Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2015). Furthermore, scholarship also supports that consumers in close consumer-brand relationships, such as attachment, avoid listening to negative information about the brand, or negate or refuse to believe any negative information about the brand (Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis 2006), and offer higher levels of positive-WOM, including recommending and defending behaviour. However, without exploring the intent and intensity of brand-favourable WOM behaviour individually, it is not possible to understand consumers' favourable WOM behaviour towards brands.

Therefore, this doctoral research observed the different intensities of brand-favourable WOM behaviour as different types of WOM and recommended placing them in a hierarchy of WOM behaviour as depicted in figure 2.3 to make fuller use of each type of WOM behaviour. Based on the detailed rationale of viewing the three types of favourable WOM behaviour in the form of a hierarchy as discussed above, the study proposed brand advocacy and brand defence as the two superior WOM constructs.

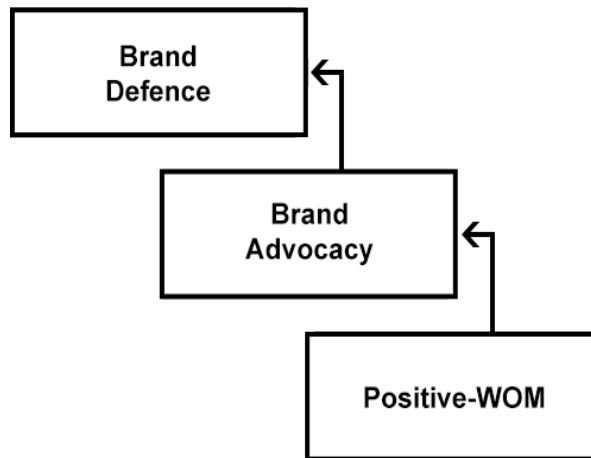


**Figure 2.3 Hierarchy of Brand-Favourable WOM Behaviour**

The next sections discuss the conceptualisation of the different levels of brand-favourable WOM; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence, as proposed in this study.

#### **2.10.1.1 Positive Word-of-Mouth; the First vertex of the Hierarchy of WOM:**

Consistent with the basic definition of WOM, positive-WOM was conceptualised as ‘any non-commercial positive communication about a brand, product, or service’. The conceptualisation included both oral or written interpersonal WOM, as well as eWOM, as within the digitalised market scenarios, WOM cannot be explored in isolation with eWOM. According to this definition of positive-WOM, the scope of positive-WOM is all encompassing, which suggests that any positive communication about a product, service, or brand, offered in person or through any other means of communication or the internet are explored as one. Therefore, based on the increased importance of WOM and particularly eWOM due to its widened range (Ulrich and Brunner 2015; Chen *et al.*, 2012; deMaeyer, 2012; Jabr and Zheng, 2014), it is important to characterise brand-favourable WOM concerning the nature and content of a WOM message and its favourable impact towards brands.

This thesis recognises that any positive communication about any brands, products or services is positive-WOM, so are brand advocacy and brand defence. However, the benefit of exploring the superior positive-WOM attributions as distinct WOM categories will help managers to make fuller use of the different levels of positive-WOM in serving the different needs of the brand in specific circumstances. It will also help managers to develop strategies in inducing and enhancing the specific WOM behaviour as and when required. The need for identifying superior positive-WOM activity has already been long recognised within academics and practice by acknowledging brand advocacy as a superior positive-WOM behaviour, which refers to recommending the brand (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008Wallace *et al.*, 2012). However, this thesis suggested to explore positive-WOM further in recognising another even superior WOM behaviour that goes even beyond brand advocacy in its intensity, intent, and purpose. It involves not just communicating positive things about any brands, products, or services,



or recommending any brands, products, or services, but defends the brands and/or products or services of a brand against negative-WOM and suggested to explore it as a new superior WOM construct; 'brand defence' as brand advocacy. And, suggested observing it within a hierarchy for enhanced understanding of the three positive-WOM constructs.

Brand advocacy is discussed next as the second vertex of the hierarchy of brand-favourable WOM behaviour.

#### **2.10.1.2 Brand Advocacy; the Second Vertex of the Hierarchy of WOM:**

In this study, brand advocacy has been observed as a superior form of positive-WOM, suggested as the second vertex of the hierarchy of brand-favourable WOM behaviour. As discussed in the WOM literature, it is suggested that it is the content, language, or manner of the WOM message informs, if it is advocacy (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). Recommendations and positive talk about a brand (positive-WOM) is defined as advocacy (Du *et al.*, 2007; Samla and Singh, 2018). Therefore, the statement, "*advocacy encompasses and extends beyond the traditional concept of WOM*" (Wallace *et al.*, 2012, p.3) seems accurate for the basic understanding of advocacy. According to Peck *et al.* (1999), "*someone who actively recommends you to others, who does your marketing for you*" (p.45) is a brand advocate. In the recent past, academics and managers, both have realised the importance of converting consumers to brand advocates (Blasberg *et al.*, 2008), and retaining brand advocates in sustaining competitiveness (Fullerton, 2011; Hill *et al.*, 2006).

Within online context, the dissemination of WOM emerges as an important phenomenon (Baldus *et al.*, 2015), yet, brand advocacy represents a step further in the intention to recommend a brand (Bilro *et al.*, 2018). It is even argued that brand advocacy offers a content of forgiveness providing another chance when something goes wrong (Bilro *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2007), offering resilience to negative information (Pai *et al.*, 2013). Brand advocates are also likely to accept new brand extensions (Du *et al.*, 2007), and co-create brands, while creating value for themselves, as well as others in the process (Lawer and Knox, 2006). It is observed that brand advocates go an extra mile in favourable consumer behaviour towards a brand that involves actively promoting the brand (Blasberg *et al.*, 2008; Du *et al.*, 2007) and even defending the brand against criticism (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Cross and Smith, 1995). Therefore, brand advocacy can be perceived as the extent to which a consumer actively recommends and supports a brand, while ignores other brands within the product category (Badrinarayanan and Laverie, 2013).

It is believed that brand advocates are the consumers with emotional bonding with the brand, and; therefore, they participate with the brand through high brand engagement (Bilro *et al.*, 2018), brand involvement and positive-WOM (Hamzelu *et al.* 2017; Wragg, 2004). Brand love is also found to drive such consumers' brand advocacy (Samla and Singh, 2018) and/or profound engagement and connectedness with a brand (Bilro *et al.*, 2018; Kemp *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, in case of negative publicity brand advocates are considered as the saviours from silent killers (Hamzelu *et al.*, 2017).

Urban (2004) considered customer advocacy as a goal for a firm to achieve its sustainable competitive position. Advocacy has been believed to have an ultimate test of consumer-organisation, or consumer-brand relationships (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Cross and Smith, 1995), so far. Therefore, based on the existing literature, this study considered brand advocacy as a superior form of positive-WOM. It is also consistent with Wallace *et al.* (2012), who suggested that advocacy encompasses, and extends beyond the traditional concept of WOM, in recommending (Peck *et al.*, 1999) and this research conceptualised brand advocacy within the same context and suggested brand defence as a next level in the hierarchical organisation of positive-WOM.

The next section presents the conceptualisation of brand defence.

#### **2.10.1.3 Brand Defence; the Top Vertex of the Hierarchy of WOM:**

In this study, brand defence is proposed as a superior and stronger WOM behaviour attributed towards a loved brand, and it is placed at the top vertex of the hierarchy of WOM behaviour. Here, brand defence refers to a type and intensity of WOM behaviour; where consumers in close consumer-brand relationships or brand love, defend the brand for any criticisms of any failure or wrongdoings, and in some instances, the defence is irrespective of the criticisms being true or not. This section aims to develop a theoretical understanding and conceptualisation of brand defence and what brand defence will mean and imply to practice. Furthermore, why positive-WOM and brand advocacy is insufficient in addressing the desired behaviour in counter fighting negative-WOM, and how the augmented understanding of brand defence will help brands? This insufficiency stems from limited prior research on negative-WOM, which has hindered the discovery and appraisal of brand defence in academic research, while brand defence behaviour is not a new phenomenon within marketing practice, though it is a new construct within academic brand research.

This doctoral study proposed brand defence as a legitimate manifestation of WOM that require further study. No research to the researcher's knowledge to date has empirically examined and measured this important construct in consumer-brand relationships and/or marketing research. However, a few researchers believe that consumers do defend brands that they feel close to (Park and McInnis, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006), or identify with brands considering the brands as a part of their extended-self (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012). Colliander and Wien (2013) suggested, consumers' defence behaviour emanates from their sense of justice and their personal needs for self-enhancement. Therefore, along with the relationships and attachment literature, the theoretical roots of brand defence behaviour were also explored within social science theories. The conceptualisation of brand defence was developed based on two main theories:

1. *The Fairness Theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001), and*
2. *Social Capital perspective of Equity Theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002).*

The detailed discussion on the development of the brand defence construct and its founding theories are discussed later in this section. Firstly, it is important to understand, what brand defence

will mean and imply to practice. Furthermore, why positive-WOM and brand advocacy cannot suffice the role, and how the augmented understanding of brand defence will help brands? Therefore, based on the existing literature, this study proposed brand defence as a legitimate manifestation of WOM that require further study. No research to the researcher's knowledge to date has empirically examined and measured this important construct in consumer-brand relationships and/or marketing research. As Colliander and Wien (2013) suggested, consumers' defence behaviour emanates from their sense of justice and their personal needs for self-enhancement. Therefore, along with the relationships and attachment literature, the theoretical roots of brand defence behaviour were also explored within two social science theories, the fairness theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001), and social capital perspective of equity theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002).

According to the fairness theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001), there are three necessary processes (would, could, should), which must occur before a situation can be interpreted as unjust. The first 'would' component is the discrepancy between the actual event and the perceived alternatives that influences people's responses to the situation. The second '*could*' component determines that who is accountable for the unjust situation. Finally, 'should' is the third component that is related to the ethical principles of interpersonal treatment. In this case, brand defence can be understood in the reference of the 'could' component of the fairness theory (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998, 2001). As, the 'could' component suggest individual to assess whether the brand responsible for the situation could have acted in a different way. However, if the brand admits that the situation could have been better, but the circumstances were unavoidable because of the situational factors, the customers facing such situation may infer it as a fair act, and might lend the brand benefit of the doubt, which may result in consumers' defence behaviour. Therefore, the '*could*' component of the fairness theory have the potential to provide support to the consumers' defending behaviour towards the brands. The '*could have*' counterfactuals are the most important part of the defender's fairness perceptions, where the defenders may perceive it as practically impossible for the brand to act as per the complainer wishes. Thereby, the defender tries to protect the brand by highlighting the '*could have*' counterfactuals to ensure fair treatment to the brand.

Alongside this, brand defence can also be understood from a social capital perspective of the equity theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002). It has been argued that physical and social capitals are equally important in the case of both goods and service exchange processes (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003). Social capital has been referred as goodwill and trust, which are engendered in the relationships between individuals, and considered as valuable resources (Adler, 2001). Per Adler and Kwon (2002), social capital lies in social-interactions between social-relations and this can be mobilised for facilitating action. There are several dimensions of social capital which are: (a) the 'items' exchanged could be goods or services for money, s, or gifts; (b) the terms of exchange are diffuse and not specific; (c) the terms of exchange are tacit and not explicit; and (d) the exchange is symmetrical in terms of getting the something in return. Therefore, concerning the importance and prevalence of relationship constructs, this theory was deemed more appropriate to

develop an understanding of consumers' defence of brands.

Based on the social capital perspective of the equity theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002), several potential motives for customers engaging in brand defence behaviour can be identified, such as: (a) the defender could be driven by consumers' self-interest, whereby he or she tries to bring down the social capital outcome of the attacker (consumers' spreading negative-WOM) by providing a counterargument to match the complaint; (b) the defender might perceive the complaint as unfair and tries to restore his/her equity by providing a counterargument in the form of brand defence behaviour to balance the complaint; and (c) the brand defender tries to increase his/her social capital relative to the brand with the tacit understanding of the exchange in the hope of getting it back from the brand in the future. The conceptualisation of brand defence based on the social capital perspective of the equity theory deemed consistent with the literature of close consumer-brand relationships and conceptualisation of brand love as a two-sided relationship that initiates and sustains with the attributions from both sides; customers, as well as brands.

It is also consistent with of Lisjak *et al.* (2012) that observed consumers' defence of brands in relation to their personal self-beliefs, based on their intrinsic and extrinsic esteem values, and how much they identify with brands. Lisjack *et al.* (2012) suggested that when consumers identify themselves with brands and start feeling them as part of their self or extended-self they take brand threats as personally threatening and defend them in person. Lisjack *et al.* (2012) found that consumer's defence of brands is consistent with self-defence driven by consumers' ego motivated by their low implicit self-esteem. However, the findings of Lisjak *et al.* (2012) do not provide any insights for brands that show such defence behaviour can be bolstered to address negative-WOM crisis, or how brands can offer brand-favoured affirmations to the consumers to motivate brand defence behaviour. Park *et al.* (2006) also suggested that consumers with high attachment levels, even ready to risk their discretionary resources by publicly defending, advocating, or promoting their brand, and ignore the associated risks of ridicule, discredit, and/or social rejection. The authors further suggested that consumers take such brand criticism personally, and the development of self-connected relations with brands out of attachment leads to an automated defence behaviour (Park and McInnis, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006).

On the other hand, consumer-brand relationships literature provides evidence that enhancing consumer-brand connection and closeness can promote brand-favourable behaviour (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, love itself has been explored within the concept of the inclusion of other in the self by Aron *et al.* (1992). Furthermore, brand love studies have also observed consumers to identify with brands (Ahuvia 2012; Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Unal and Aydin, 2013; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), and considered brands as part of their extended-self.

Ulrich and Brunner (2015), observed a similar type of eWOM in the form of customer rebuttals in response to negative online customer reviews, and customer rebuttals as more effective than brand

rebuttals to any negative reviews. However, Ulrich and Brunner (2015), did not explore such customers' rebuttals in the consumer-brand relationships context, but as a means of counteracting negative-WOM through this form of positive-WOM. Ulrich and Brunner (2015), provided three implications to the conceptualisation of WOM in this study. Firstly, they explored a form of positive-WOM based on its type and intensity against negative-WOM. Secondly, the findings suggested positive-WOM as a source of addressing the negativity of negative-WOM more than brand communications. And, thirdly the study observed customer rebuttals as a type of customers' positive-WOM in response to any negative-WOM that involve statement, argument, or debate about the negative-WOM in proving the negative-WOM wrong, which is like defending.

Colliander and Wien also identified company and brand defending behaviour as a new WOM activity and extended the conceptualising of WOM beyond just praising and complaining, because of consumers' sense of justice and self-enhancement desires. Colliander and Wien (2013), based on their netnographic study of online messages, suggested six different styles of consumers' defence behaviour, and suggested it as an important buffer to negative-WOM. The consumers' self-enhancement desire has also been observed as a motivator of all types of WOM activity (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010). However, this study observed consumers brand defence behaviour as consumers' attribution towards their loved brand in case of negative-WOM. The study aims to verify the existence and prevalence of consumers' defence of loved brands against any negative-WOM crisis, implying that such defence behaviour can be mobilised through promoting close consumer-brand relationships, especially brand love.

Moreover, Monga (2000) also explored the defending behaviour of consumers in response to negative publicity about any failure, and found an interesting manifestation of brand defence, as when consumers give their favourite brand the benefit of the doubt and shift the blame away from the brand. Monga and John (2008) suggested that negative brand publicity unlikely affect the consumers with strong brand attitudes, and found that they defend their brands by expounding pro-brand sentiments, or mounting counterarguments against the negative publicity about the brand. It results in neutralising the potential negative impact of any negative publicity about the brand (Ahluwalia, 2000; Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Pullig *et al.*, 2006). Consumer-brand relationships have been observed to amplify brand-favourable WOM activity in consumers who positively relate with brands (e.g. brand love, attachment, romance, passion) (Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014).

The literature indicated that consumer-defending behaviour exists, which suggested the need for the further conceptualisation and measurement of the construct, brand defence. Thereby, this doctoral study involved conceptualising and proposing a measure for brand defence. It is proposed that brand defence is the strongest form of brand-favourable WOM behaviour that goes beyond simple brand advocacy in case of any negative-WOM about the loved brand. It is explained as a state of positive attributions that consumers in close consumer-brand relationships make when faced with any criticisms, failure, or wrongdoings by their loved brands, irrespective of validity of such 'allegations'.

Therefore, brand defence has been conceptualised as consumers' protective behaviour against negative-WOM about their favourite or loved brands and it is rooted in the consumer-brand relationships literature (Park *et al.*, 2006, Park and McInnis, 2006; Bendapudi and Berry, 1997). Therefore, as brand defence is conceptualised as consumers' protective behaviour towards their loved brands, a definition of brand defence is developed as,

*“an intensity of positive-WOM behaviour; where consumers in close consumer-brand relationships or brand love defend the brand for any criticisms”.*

This thesis, therefore, provides new insights to WOM behaviour research and practice by differentiating brand defence from positive-WOM and brand advocacy. The proposition of conceiving brand defence lies in the importance of developing and sustaining consumer-brand relationships that would promote brand defence. Therefore, it is proposed to mobilise brand love to promote superior positive-WOM, brand defence that extends beyond brand advocacy in combating the negative publicity offline and in the social media landscape in order to sustain brand reputation. Therefore, in practice, brand defence is like deploying an army of brand defenders for countering adverse brand publicity, which is also consistent with the idea of online brand rebuttals (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015).

The next section of the chapter concludes the literature, and presents the conceptual framework of the study, followed by research hypotheses.

### **2.10.2 The Conceptual Framework:**

The review of existing literature presented earlier in this chapter presented the inclusion, realisation, and recognition of the importance of relationships in marketing and the emergence of consumer-brand relationships, highlighting the several benefits of consumer-brand relationships for brands. Here, WOM has emerged as one of the most critical benefits (positive-WOM, referrals/advocacy, defence, rebuttals), as well as a threat (negative-WOM) for businesses due to the perceived unbiased and non-commercial nature of WOM. The widened scope of WOM as eWOM is also discussed based on its amplified exposure through digitalised markets driven by communications technology and the Internet. The Internet has been fuelled by unlimited eWOM through reviews' websites, blogs, social network sites, brands' websites, etc. Therefore, the reach and impact of WOM has become more critical than ever before, and so is the need to manage such WOM in the favour of brands.

In order to address such WOM, this doctoral study proposed employing the effectiveness of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love in venting negative-WOM. Therefore, this doctoral study has explored and conceptualised that WOM can be mobilised in the favour of a brand, by fostering brand love to manage, control, or subside the eroding effects of negative-WOM. This doctoral study suggested exploring the direct and indirect impact of brand love on the three proposed consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM. It was proposed that such brand-favoured WOM behaviour are driven by the

different intensities of the relationship closeness. Moreover, to fully appreciate the potential of consumer-brand relationships in influencing consumers' WOM behaviour, and to explore if any other relationship factors influence the impact of brand love on consumers' WOM behaviour, the study also involved testing the mediating roles of brand trust, brand forgiveness and brand loyalty on the relationship. The rationale for testing the mediating relationships was based on the proposed negative-WOM scenario, as to what extent consumers' trust, loyalty, and/or inclination to forgive a brand play its role in influencing consumers WOM attributions towards the loved brand against any negative-WOM about the loved brand. The negative incident used in this research is presented in Appendix 1 as part of the online survey questionnaire and discussed in section 3.5 in chapter 3.

The conceptual model for this research was developed on the existing literature that suggested having strong positive impact of brand love on brand-favourable WOM. The positive influence of brand trust and brand loyalty on consumers' brand favoured WOM behaviour (deMatos and Rossi, 2008), and brand forgiveness as an attribution of brand love (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012) has also been identified in the existing literature. Therefore, the strength of brand love in influencing the proposed brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM was explored with and without the mediating effects of brand trust, loyalty, and forgiveness.

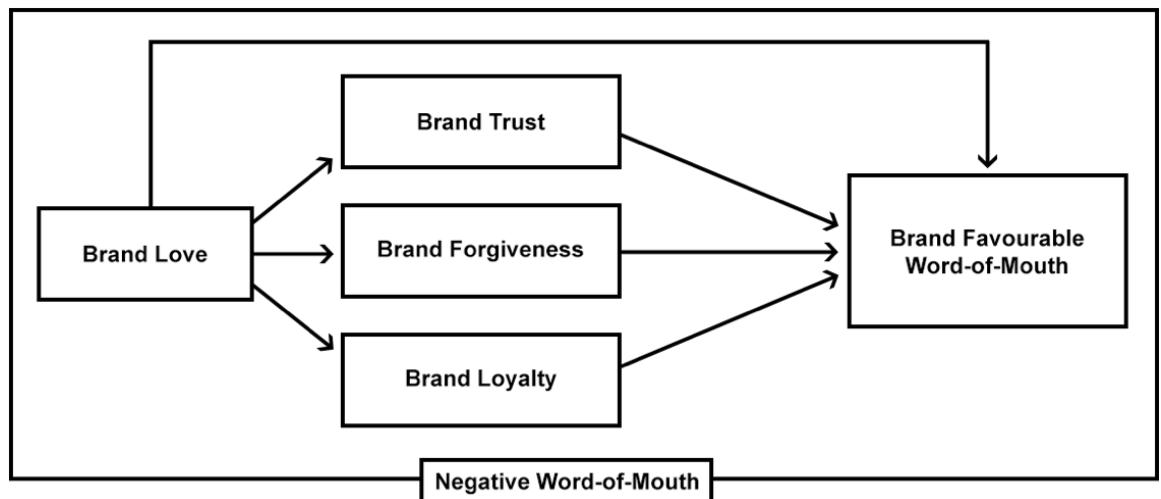


**Figure 2.4 Conceptual Model**

Figure 2.4 presents the conceptual model developed to explore in this doctoral research. Overall, the preliminary research model depicted in figure 2.4 suggests that consumers involved in a love relationship with a brand tend to promote brand-favourable WOM behaviour in response to the negative-WOM about the brand. The conceptual model proposed exploring consumers' positive-WOM behaviour as an outcome of brand love in presence of negative-WOM incident (see online survey questionnaire, appendix 1).

This doctoral study also suggested that the type and intensity of WOM behaviour depend on the relationship quality and closeness that how strong is the consumer's love for the brand. The literature evidenced positive-WOM as one of the most common attributions of brand love (Albert *et*

al., 2008, Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). Moreover, it has also been suggested that in brand love, consumers' positive-WOM behaviour can yield from brand trust (Albert *et al.*, 2009), brand loyalty (Ahuvia, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Kamat and Parulekar, 2007), and/or propensity to forgive in love relationships (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the conceptual model is supported by means of the existing literature, and thus provide an informed rationale for testing the model empirically. Moreover, the study proposed observing WOM in a form of a hierarchy developed on the assumptions of means-end-theory (Gutman, 1982). It suggested three intensities of brand-favourable WOM towards the loved brands in response to any negative-WOM about the brand, as discussed and presented in section 2.4.1. The three intensities of brand-favourable WOM behaviour based on the nature of the WOM messages suggested in this study are: brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM.

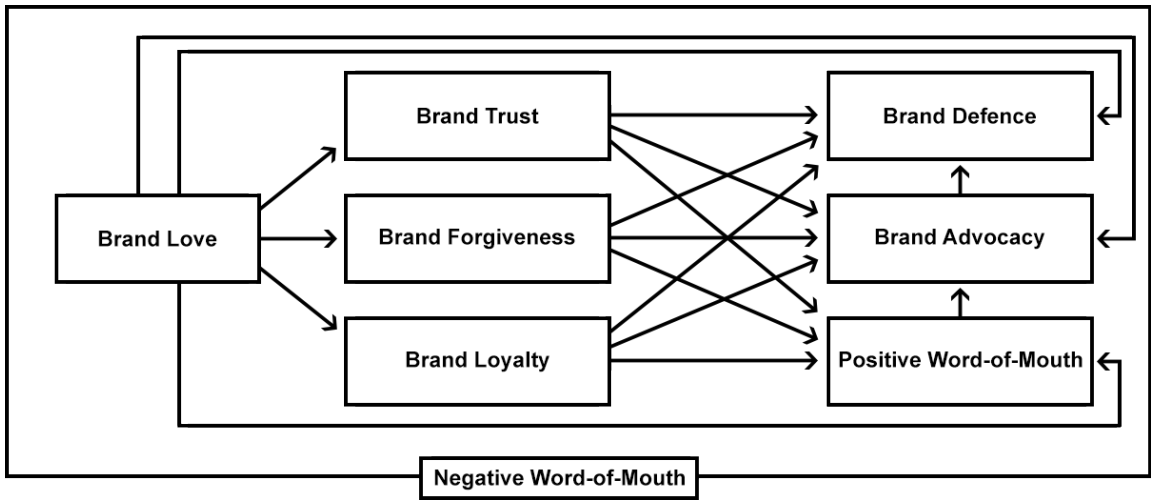


**Figure 2.5 Conceptual Framework**

The next section presents the research model and hypotheses tested in this study.

The hierarchy of the three WOM behaviour in Figure 2.3 shows that brand defence has been suggested as the strongest brand-favourable WOM behaviour by consumers towards their loved brands, in response to any negative-WOM crisis for their brand. Therefore, based on the differing levels of WOM attributions the conceptual research model is further modified and presented in figure 2.5. Therefore, the conceptual framework presented in figure 2.5 indicates the proposed effects of brand love with and without the mediating effect of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the three proposed WOM behaviour: brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM.

### 2.11 Working Research Model and Research Hypotheses:

The research model for this doctoral study has been developed on the exploration of one of the most occurring and recognised consumer-brand relationships' benefits, 'word-of-mouth', and its varied intensities towards the loved brands. The WOM attributions have been explored using negative-WOM incident, to observe the participants' defensive or protective behaviour towards their loved brands. The study aimed to address the question of whether consumers can go beyond



simply positive-WOM, and/or brand advocacy and defend their loved brands against criticism. The research began by the exploration of existing literature that signified the importance of WOM (Arndt, 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008), and WOM being one of the most common attribute of most consumer-brand relationships constructs (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and MacInnis, 2006).

WOM has gained extraordinary importance concerning image promoter (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008), and decision-clincher (Arndt, 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Graham and Havelena, 2007), for its perceived non-biased, and non-commercial nature of information. WOM is also believed to be stronger than any other form of Advertising (Arndt, 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008) or any brand communications or responses to negative-WOM (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). The tremendous attention to WOM in the literature with the realisation of its effectiveness regarding consumers' beliefs and perceptions, and WOM being true and unbiased information (Arndt, 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001) provided WOM a significant standing in practice and research.

Moreover, the emergence of consumer-brand relationships as an important marketing domain (Fournier, 1998) encouraged researchers to apply interpersonal relationship constructs to consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Park *et al.*, 2006). It was proposed that like interpersonal relationships among humans; individuals also form relationships with brands (Fournier, 1998) that yield mutual benefits for consumers and brands. Additionally, it is evident from the literature exploration in a timeline synthesis of brand love (See tables 2.4 and 2.5) that WOM has been found as one of the most common benefits of most of the consumer-brand relationships studies, especially brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis, 2006).

Concerning consumers' context, WOM provides the opportunity for consumers to speak out their opinions, whether positive or negative about any products, services, or brands (Harrison-Walker 2001). Consumers can get information about any brand, product, or services even before experiencing them, and such information has become even more accessible, and convenient with the widespread of telecommunications and the Internet (Chen *et al.*, 2012; Jabr and Zheng, 2014; Ng *et al.*, 2010). Consumers consider such information useful and such advice impact consumers' attitudes and purchase decisions (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; de Matos and Rossi, 2008), which make such advice patterns crucial for brands and marketers to use in their favour (East *et al.*, 2007).

The literature, therefore, suggested both benefits and drawbacks of WOM for brands, depending on the nature of the WOM messages, if these are positive or negative. The major benefits of WOM for brands include the increased knowledge about consumers' perceptions about their brand offerings without spending huge amounts of money on marketing surveys and research. Moreover, the positive-WOM including consumers recommending behaviour does the free marketing for the

brand (Peck *et al.*, 1999). It is revealed that both negative and positive-WOM play their role regarding consumers' attitude towards a brand and purchase behaviour (Charlett *et al.*, 1995; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010). It is suggested that negative-WOM about a brand can result in sales slashes, as many studies have confirmed the influential impact of negative information over positive information (Assael, 2004; East *et al.*, 2008; Kroloff, 1988; Skowronski and Carlston, 1989). The negative information has been observed as useful evidence for unreliability of the brand, which suggests negative information to be more effective on judgments (Anderson, 1965; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Fiske, 1980; Mittal *et al.*, 1998; Mizerski, 1982). However, most importantly the research suggesting positive-WOM as the most effective source of counteracting negative-WOM (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015) makes positive-WOM more impactful. Therefore, the role of both, positive and negative WOM depicted in the literature suggested the critical importance of WOM, which served as a motivation for this study.

The existing literature showed scant research on negative-WOM, particularly how to avert negative-WOM crisis (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). Moreover, developed on the existing literature, the consumers' WOM behaviour were observed in a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM attributions, and suggested brand advocacy as a superior form of positive-WOM, and brand defence being the strongest form of positive-WOM that supersedes brand advocacy, particularly in response to any negative-WOM about a loved brand (see figure 2.3). Therefore, based on the strategic nature of brand love in generating brand-favourable WOM, and to observe the three types of brand-favourable WOM behaviour proposed in this study, the three primary hypotheses developed for the direct impact of brand love on consumers' WOM behaviour against negative-WOM were as follows:

**H1:** *Brand love has a positive impact on brand defence in response to any negative-WOM about the loved brand.*

**H2:** *Brand love has a positive impact on brand advocacy in response to any negative-WOM about the loved brand.*

**H3:** *Brand love has a positive impact on positive-WOM in response to any negative-WOM about the loved brand.*

Secondly, as developed and discussed in sections 2.10.1, 2.10.1.1, 2.10.1.2, and 2.10.1.3, it is suggested to observe the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour in form of a hierarchy for a better understanding of each construct for their distinct implication and role for the brand. Moreover, as this thesis involved conceptualising, developing, and measuring a new construct, 'brand defence', and proposed it as a superior WOM construct that extends beyond brand advocacy in supporting the loved brand against any negative-WOM incident. The thesis conceptualised brand defence in the referential intensity of both brand-favourable WOM, as well as, an outcome of the intensity of close consumer-brand relationships particularly brand love. The enquiry involved using a negative incident in acquiring participants' responses in both quantitative and qualitative studies, as discussed earlier in the section. Therefore, in order to establish that brand defence serves as a superior, more intense behaviour than simply positive-WOM and brand advocacy; it was deemed

important to test the referential impact of positive-WOM on brand advocacy and so is the impact of brand advocacy on brand defence. Moreover, scholarship also suggest intense consumer responses to any negative events (Park *et al.*, 2006; Lisjalk *et al.*, 2012) which exceeds the consumers' general behavioural attributes offered in normal circumstances. Moreover, not merely negative-WOM, but any wrongdoings of brand also elicit a defensive reaction from consumers (Colliander and Wien, 2014; Japutra *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, the following hypotheses are developed to test the impact of positive-WOM on brand advocacy, followed by the positive impact of brand advocacy on brand defence.

**H4:** Positive-WOM has a positive impact on brand advocacy.

**H5:** Brand advocacy has a positive impact on brand defence.

Moreover, as mentioned before, brand love does not only promote WOM activity, but also posits several other behavioural attributes that further promotes positive-WOM attributions. This study, therefore, suggested investigating brand trust (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012), brand forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012) and brand loyalty (Ahuvia 2012) as the attributions of brand love that can further result in promoting brand-favourable WOM.

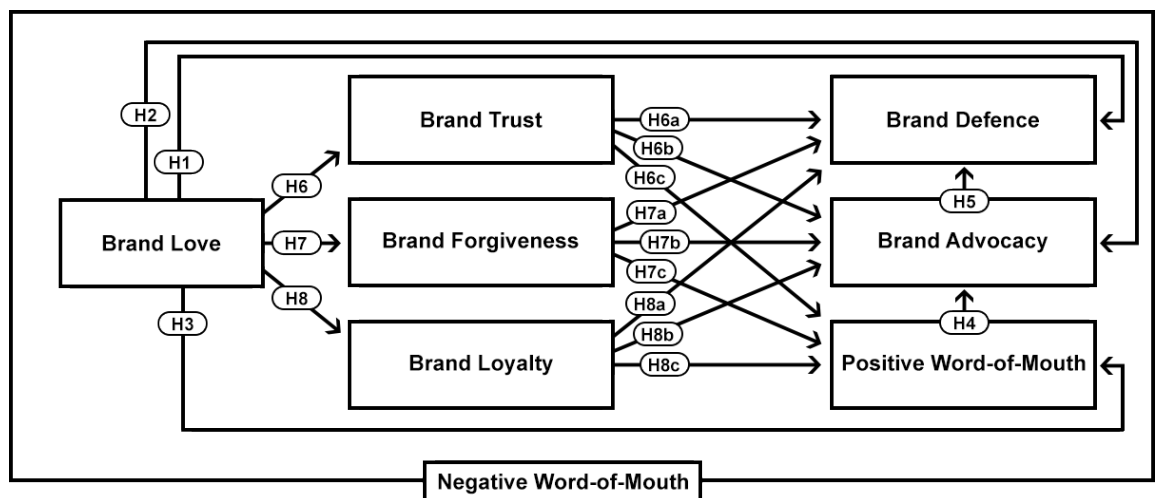


**Figure 2.6 Research Model with Research Hypotheses**

The first set of the hypothesis suggested that brand love antecedes brand trust, and brand trust further antecedes the three facets of WOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. It is proposed that close consumer-brand relationships foster brand trust and confidence (Bauer *et al.*, 2012; Bruhn *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, trust has been considered as one of the objectives that can describe the feeling of love (Albert *et al.*, 2007). Consumers loving a brand have been observed declaring that the brand has never disappointed them and express their satisfaction with the brand (Albert *et al.*, 2007). Trust has been suggested as one of the antecedents of positive-WOM behaviour (deMatos and Rossi, 2008), and so is brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia 2006). Therefore, based on the existing research, brand love has been suggested to antecedes both brand trust and positive-WOM. Moreover, Park *et al.* (2006) suggested that consumers do not believe the negative information about the brands

they are attached to, and not only disbelieve the information, but defend the brand. In Batra *et al.* (2012), trust is considered as one of the dimensions of brand love, where they found WOM as an outcome of brand love. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

**H6:** *Brand love has a positive impact on brand trust.*

**H6a:** *Brand trust positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand defence.*

**H6b:** *Brand trust positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand advocacy.*

**H6c:** *Brand trust positively mediates the relationship between brand love and positive-WOM.*

As depicted in figure 2.6, the second set of the research hypotheses developed in this study tested the impact of brand love on the consumers' propensity to forgive a loved brand and how such brand forgiveness mediates the proposed brand-favourable WOM. The brand forgiveness construct has also been developed on the interpersonal relationships and social psychology literature and adapted to this study.

Regarding forgiveness in interpersonal relationships' literature, the individuals in high-quality relationships suggest having higher inclination to forgive their partners (Allemand *et al.* 2007; Finkel *et al.* 2002; Kearns and Fincham 2005; McCullough *et al.*, 1998). Even in cases of remembered offenses, individuals forgive their partners; however, higher levels of relationship satisfaction govern such forgiveness (Allemand *et al.*, 2007), such as, relationship quality (Kearns and Fincham 2005), and closeness of relationship (McCullough *et al.*, 1998). It has been observed that individuals in higher quality relationships tend to empathise more with their partner and attribute softer or more positive behaviour towards their partners' mistakes or transgressions that posit greater forgiveness ultimately (Kearns and Fincham 2005; McCullough *et al.*, 1998).

Like interpersonal relationships, researchers also applied the concept of forgiveness to consumer-brand relationships, as well (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). The rationale for using brand forgiveness in this thesis based on the proposed negative incident used in this thesis. The existing literature suggest that the perceived negative information is detrimental for consumers perceptions (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Dawar and Pillutla, 2000; Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold, 2011; Vermeulen and Seegers, 2009), , even if it is not a proven transgression. This is also identified in the literature that negative information can lead to negative outcomes and it is not necessary that a consumer can only feel transgressed based on personal harm, but transgressions can occur by the information indicating potential harms associated to a product. Sometimes transgression occur on the perception of transgressions (Hoyt *et al.*, 2005), where a person anticipates negativity, disloyalty, and harm (Vangelisti and Young, 2000). Such perceived transgressions lead to hurt and self-distancing from the perceived offender and perceived intentionality is detrimental for relationships (Vangelisti and Young, 2000).

Therefore, it is proposed that the prevalence of negative information require a sentiment of forgiveness in order to vent the impact of any believed negativity developed through that negative

information. Moreover, Donovan *et al.*'s (2012) study investigated brand forgiveness and future behavioural intentions in case of brand relationship closeness, and found that brand forgiveness based on brand relationship closeness plays a key role in moderating future brand behaviour. Heinrich *et al.* (2012) also investigated forgiveness as one of the consequences of brand love and found supporting evidence. Moreover, brand advocacy is also found to offer a content of forgiveness providing another chance when something goes wrong (Bilro *et al.*, 2018; Du *et al.*, 2007), and offer resilience to negative information (Pai *et al.*, 2013),.

Therefore, in this study, brand forgiveness has been observed as one of the mediators for post-love consumers' behaviour in the case of negative-WOM. Brand forgiveness has been proposed to posit positive-WOM attributes towards the loved brand out of higher inclination to forgive the loved brand, even if consumers believe in the negative information. Therefore, based on the preceding discussion, following hypotheses were developed:

**H7:** *Brand love has a positive impact on brand forgiveness.*

**H7a:** *Brand forgiveness positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand defence.*

**H7b:** *Brand forgiveness positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand advocacy.*

**H7c:** *Brand forgiveness positively mediates the relationship between brand love and positive-WOM.*

The third of research hypothesis explored the impact of brand love on brand loyalty and the subsequent mediation effect of brand loyalty on the relationship of brand love and the three brand-favourable WOM outcomes; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM. Brand loyalty has been one of the most studied and important constructs in materialising intangible benefits of consumer-brand relationships for brands. According to Fournier (1998:343), "The brand loyalty literature is perhaps most capable of informing theory concerning consumer-brand relationships". Brand loyalty refers to consumers repurchase intentions of the brand and readiness to recommend it to other consumers (Fournier 1998; Tsai, 2011).

The definition of brand loyalty itself identifies the prospective nature of brand loyalty in generating a superior WOM behaviour that is recommending (advocacy). Therefore, brand loyalty has been revealed to attribute positive behavioural intention towards the brand a consumer is loyal to. However, on the other hand, several studies have confirmed that brand loyalty increases as an outcome of brand love (Ahuvia 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Carrol and Ahuvia 2006; Kamat and Parulekar 2007). According to the meta-analysis of WOM research by deMatos and Rossi (2008), the most WOM studies were focused at loyalty, commitment, trust, and perceived value, suggesting a direct relationship between loyalty and positive-WOM. Moreover, Henning-Thurau *et al.* (2002) also found WOM and loyalty as the relational benefits. The preceding literature suggest that consumer-brand relationships including brand love promote brand loyalty and positive-WOM

behaviour, as well as brand loyalty itself promotes positive-WOM attributions. Therefore, the following hypotheses were developed:

**H8:** *Brand love has a positive impact on brand loyalty.*

**H8a:** *Brand loyalty positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand defence.*

**H8b:** *Brand loyalty positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand advocacy.*

**H8c:** *Brand loyalty positively mediates the relationship between brand love and positive-WOM.*

As discussed above, the research hypotheses for this study were developed based on the conceptual framework established on the existing literature, which is tested using structural equation modelling. The detailed research paradigm, research design, and methodology are discussed in chapter 3.

## **2.12 Chapter Summary:**

This research involved joining two important research literature streams consumer-brand relationships and WOM, investigating the brand-favourable WOM outcomes as the relationship benefit of brand love. Therefore, the literature review has also been divided in two main domains followed by the development of research model. This started with the inclusion of relationships in Marketing literature, and presented the highlights of the relationship marketing literature, followed by consumer-brand relationships, and the importance and inclusion of close interpersonal relationship constructs in branding. Furthermore, a detailed conceptualisation of brand love being the focal construct of the study has been developed based on the existing consumer-brand relationships and interpersonal relationship literature. The literature further included the importance of close consumer-brand relationships, especially brand love concerning consumers' positive attributions towards brands, particularly brand-favourable WOM.

Furthermore, WOM literature was explored in detail, including the benefits of positive-WOM and the detrimental effects of negative-WOM. Based on the existing literature of WOM and consumer-brand relationships, a hierarchy of WOM was developed, suggesting brand defence as superior WOM followed by brand advocacy and positive-WOM based on the different intensities of brand-favourable WOM. The other constructs used in the research model were also explored within the existing literature, such as, brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty. Finally, the existing literature was concluded to develop the research model and research hypotheses for this doctoral study.

The next chapter presents the overview, comparison, and justification of the research methodology used in this study.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Research Methodology**

#### **3.1 Aims of the Chapter:**

This chapter presents the discussion and justification of the philosophical paradigm adopted in this study. It includes reviewing the research in WOM and consumer-brand relationships to investigate research trends to identify and address any potential gaps in the literature. This chapter provides a detailed justification of selecting the research paradigm, followed by research design and methodology, including the different research strategies used to accomplish the different objective of the doctoral research.

This study involved three phases of empirical research involving mixed methods approach. Figure 3.1 presents an overview and structure of the methodology chapter.

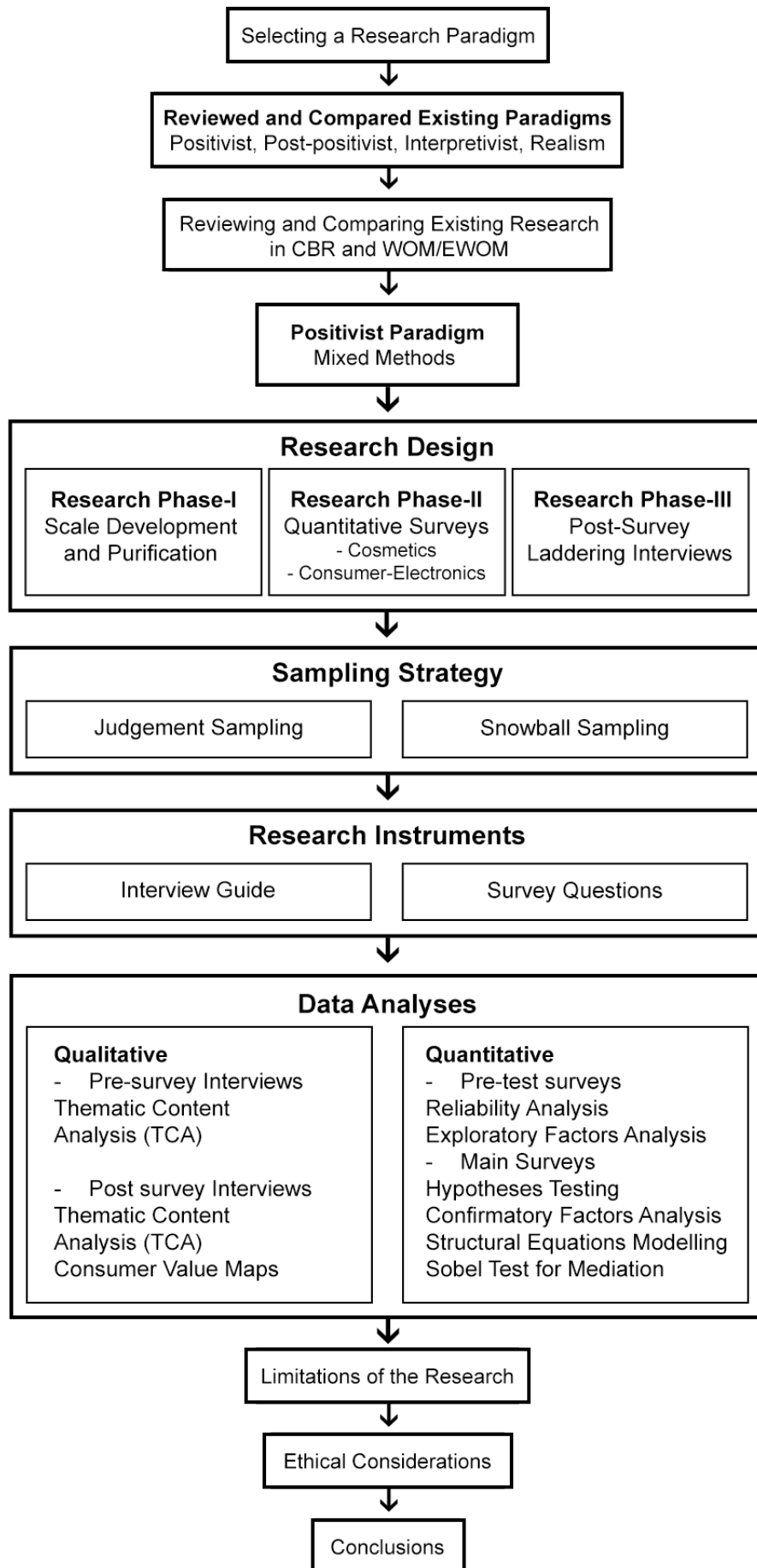


**Figure 3.1 Overview Research Methodology**



The selection of the appropriate research paradigm is discussed next.

### **3.2 Selection of an Appropriate Research Paradigm; Positivist or Interpretivist:**

Concerning a research paradigm, it is a "basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator" (Guba and Lincoln 1994:105). A researcher needs to work within a research paradigm as it defines the research approaches, boundaries, and outcomes, of the research. A paradigm determines how knowledge should be perceived and developed (Grix 2004), and the consequent methods and procedures used in a research process (Baker, 2002).

In general, different paradigms prevail in social sciences research (Rubin and Rubin, 2011); however, within the research in Marketing, positivist and interpretivist paradigms have been predominant, and the choice between these paradigms has been dependent on the nature of the research problem, and the methods' preference of the researcher to address a research problem (Grix 2004). However, based on the recent debate about the inclusion and applicability of realism, and post-positivist approaches based on the limitations surrounding positivist and interpretivist paradigms, realism and post-positivism research stances were also considered.

The interpretivist, positivist, realism, and post-positivism research paradigms were compared based on their basic philosophical, meta-theoretical assumptions, perceived advantages and disadvantages, their relevance and viability to the current research aim and objectives, and their applicability and support within the subject area of the current research.

The basic assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm have its roots in the hermeneutics philosophy (Mertens, 2005), which argues that meaning is hidden, and by deep reflection, it must be brought to the surface (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). The interpretivist approach offers to understand "the world of human experience" (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p.36), based on the basic interpretive assumption as, "reality is socially constructed" (Mertens 2005, p.12), and builds in an individual's mind, instead of any externally developed single entity (Hansen, 2004). Therefore, research following the interpretivist paradigm depends on the "participants' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p.8). Moreover, contrary to the positivists' approaches, interpretivist research does not start with the exploration of theory, rather "inductively develops a theory or pattern of meanings" (Creswell, 2003, p.9); therefore, considered as an anti-positivist approach. Similarly, realism relies on multiple perceptions about a single reality (Healy and Perry, 2000), whereas, post-positivism is more relevant to positivist view. A post-positivist paradigm advocates methodological pluralism, based on the assumption that the method to be applied in a particular study should be selected based on the research question being addressed (Wildemuth, 1993). In post-positivist research, a social researcher takes up a learning role rather than a testing one (Agar, 1988). Moreover, post-positivist research offers the flexibility of an open-ended, exploratory character (Ryan, 2006). Therefore, the critics of the positivist objects the positivist assumption of singular reality, the one and only truth, which is out there waiting to be discovered by objective inquiry warrants only quantitative research methods.

Moreover, in realism reality is considered as intransitive (existing independently of humans) and stratified (arranged in separate layers) (Bhaskar, 1997), which is not possible in consumers behaviour research, where realities are mutually constructed through human experiences, behaviour and observed through human responses. On contrary, interpretivist and realism believe that there is no such thing as a single objective reality and for that reason they favour qualitative research methods (Creswell *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, the fundamentally opposed paradigms traditionally have been positivism/post-positivism and constructivism/interpretivism (Creswell *et al.*, 2007).

According to Ponterotto (2005, p.128), “the primary goal of positivistic inquiry is an explanation that (ultimately) leads to prediction and control of phenomena”. Therefore, it is widely suggested that positivist paradigm is built on the values of reason, truth, and validity, with a pure focus on facts, where the facts collected through direct observation and experience for empirical testing through quantitative methods, such as surveys or experiments involving statistical analysis (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2008; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). Based on the scientific and systematic foundations of positivism, Lastrucci (1963, p.6) defined the paradigm as, “an objective, logical and systematic method of analysing the phenomenon, devised to permit the accumulation of realistic knowledge”. On the other hand, the interpretivist research depends on the qualitative methods of data collection and analysis (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008). However, the positivist paradigm builds more on the quantitative stance that offers quantifiable data and provides generalisability that provides a greater justification for the study. Moreover, the realisation of the importance of mixed methods research (Jogulu and Pansiri, 2011) and realisation that data collection and analysis techniques are not associated with the paradigms alone (Sandelowski, 2001) offer a wider scope of selecting an appropriate research stance irrespective of the method’s specific paradigm.

Moreover, the main assumption of the realism research philosophy that reality is independent from the human mind, offer more towards a scientific approach to the development of knowledge. Therefore, realism was evaluated and discounted owing to the main assumption of the realism research paradigm that reality is independent from the human mind. In social sciences, research is focused more on human behaviour and perceptions and cannot be observed independently to human thoughts. In addition, post positivism was explored but was considered not to offer any further additions to the chosen positivist paradigm for this mixed methods study. Furthermore, none of the research in WOM or CBR as presented in tables 3.1 and 3.2 has used post positivism, and thus using positivism enabled me to compare my data with existing positivist body of work.

The major strengths of positivist research include clear theoretical focus, enhanced validity and reliability, easily replicable and comparable data, and controlled research process that facilitates inexpensive and easy to collect huge amount of data within lesser time (Denscombe, 2014). Moreover, the positivist research approach enjoys a reputation for increased generalisability, reliability, and validity of the research findings, and thus recommended for doctoral studies (Denscombe, 2014; Jogulu and Pansiri, 2011).

Moreover, the positivist research dominates the consumer-brand relationships and WOM research, as shown in the next section. Therefore, this doctoral study used a positivist-dominant mixed methods research to achieve both generalisability and validity, as well as addressing the limitations of a perfectly quantitative-focused positivist approach by incorporating semi-structured qualitative interviews. The detailed rationale of the mixed methods research and the specific methods used in this study are discussed in sections 3.4, 3.5, and 3.6.

The next section provides an overview of the research methodologies, and methods used in the WOM and close consumer-brand relationships research.

### 3.3 Research Methodologies Used in Close Consumer-Brand Relationships and WOM Research:

The relevant literature was reviewed in identifying the popular research methodologies, in selecting an adequate methodology for this doctoral research. As, a review of the existing literature 'reflects the consensus of previous work' (Locke and Golden-Biddle, 1997, p. 1029), that support building own decisions, whether it involves filling the gap, extending, or replicating the existing research in a newer context (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2011). Therefore, the doctoral study reviewed the methodologies of close consumer-brand relationships and WOM research published in the leading journals, book chapters, and the leading conferences of the field. The review suggested that overall the consumer-brand relationships and WOM research is highly dominated by positivist research stance as presented in tables 3.1, and 3.2.

| Table 3.1                                                                    |                             |                                                |                                                                    |                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Approach, Methods, and Sample Sizes in Consumer-Brand Relationships |                             |                                                |                                                                    |                                                                                        |
| Publication (year)                                                           | Research Approach           | Research Methods                               | Analysis Strategy                                                  | Sample Size                                                                            |
| Fournier (1998)                                                              | Interpretivist, Qualitative | Phenomenological interviews                    | Grounded theory approach                                           | 3                                                                                      |
| Ahuvia (2005)                                                                | Interpretivist, Qualitative | In-depth interviews                            | Case study                                                         | 10 interviews<br>2 cases                                                               |
| Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)                                                     | Positivist                  | Survey                                         | SEM (LISREL 8.3)                                                   | 334 adult consumers age 21 and up.                                                     |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                                    | Conceptual paper            | Literature Review                              | Literature Review                                                  | N/A                                                                                    |
| Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2007)                                                   | Positivist                  | Online Surveys                                 | SEM (LISREL 8.72)                                                  | Pretest= 42<br>Main study= 969                                                         |
| Heinich <i>et al.</i> (2008)                                                 | Positivist                  | Survey                                         | SEM (LISREL 8.72)                                                  | 299                                                                                    |
| Pitta and Franzak (2008)                                                     | Conceptual paper            | Literature Review                              | Literature Review                                                  | N/A                                                                                    |
| Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)                                                  | Positivist                  | Online survey                                  | Image Projective method, correspondence analysis, cluster analysis | Snowball sample=843                                                                    |
| Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)                                                  | Positivist                  | Online surveys<br>Paper and pencil survey      | CFA, SEM                                                           | 825                                                                                    |
| Grisaffe and Nguyen (2010)                                                   | Interpretivist              | Elicitation method to extract written data     | Grounded theory approach                                           | Student sample<br>Initial sample=579<br>Code development sample=20<br>Final sample=108 |
| Long-Tolbert and Gammoh (2011)                                               | Positivist                  | Between-subjects design, Experimental scenario | Psychometric tests, regression analysis                            | Randomly selected student sample=210                                                   |

|                                        |                             |                                     |                                               |                                                                                                                                           |
|----------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, (2011) | Positivist                  | Survey                              | EFA, CFA                                      | Study 1: Convenience sample=9 adults<br>Study 2: Student Sample=99<br>Study 3: Student Sample=112<br>Study 4: Student Sample=500          |
| Ismail and Spinelli (2012)             | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM (AMOS 16.0)                               | Student Sample 250                                                                                                                        |
| Hwang and Kandampully (2012)           | Positivist                  | Online Surveys                      | SEM and Multi-dimensional scaling             | Student Sample Pretest= 47<br>Main study=243                                                                                              |
| Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)             | Interpretivist, Qualitative | In-depth interviews                 | Grounded theory approach and McCracken (1988) | Study 1: Telephone interviews= 70<br>Follow-up In-depth interviews= 10<br>Study 2: 18                                                     |
| Rossiter (2012)                        | Positivist                  | Survey                              | C-OAR-SE method                               | Student sample= 291                                                                                                                       |
| Vlachos and Vrechopoulos (2012)        | Positivist                  | Face-to-face interviewing           | PLS-SEM                                       | Study 1: 215<br>Study 2: 465                                                                                                              |
| Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)          | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM (LISREL 8.72)                             | 299                                                                                                                                       |
| Fetscherin and Dato-on (2012)          | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM                                           |                                                                                                                                           |
| Albert and Merunka (2013)              | Positivist                  | Survey                              | Partial Least Square (PLS) SEM                | 1,505 consumers                                                                                                                           |
| Unal and Aydin (2013)                  | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM (SPSS 16, AMOS 16)                        | Student Sample 400                                                                                                                        |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2013)              | Positivist                  | Survey                              | CFA, SEM, ANOVA                               | Study 1: Student Sample=191<br>Study 2: Student Sample=367<br>Study 3: Loyalty card members of a retail store=793 (total contacted= 2500) |
| Fetscherin (2014)                      | Positivist                  | Survey                              | EFA, CFA, SEM                                 | Student Sample from two countries<br>Pilot study= 20 each<br>US=180 Japan=225                                                             |
| Sarkar (2014)                          | Positivist                  | Semi-structured In-depth interviews | Grounded theory approach                      | 600 (30 interviews each from 1 interviewer)                                                                                               |
| Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014)           | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM (SPSS 19 and EQS 6.1.)                    | 256                                                                                                                                       |
| Sarkar and Sreejesh (2014)             | Positivist Mix Methods      | In-depth interviews and 3 Surveys   | SEM (LISREL 8.72)                             | 25 (Interviews)<br>56 (Scale purification survey)<br>130 (Scale validity)<br>320 (SEM)                                                    |
| Castano and Perez (2014)               | Positivist                  | Survey                              | Regression analysis, t-test, one-way ANOVA    | Study 1 and 4 =332<br>Study 2=187<br>Study 3=138                                                                                          |
| Pedeliento <i>et al.</i> (2015)        | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM (LISREL 8.8)                              | 317                                                                                                                                       |
| Anggraenia and Rachmanitab (2015)      | Positivist                  | Survey                              | Regression analysis (SPSS)                    | 155                                                                                                                                       |
| Vernuccio <i>et al.</i> (2015)         | Positivist                  | Online survey                       | EFA, CFA, SEM, Mediation test                 | Facebook selected brand pages 387                                                                                                         |
| Drennan <i>et al.</i> (2015)           | Positivist                  | Online survey                       | CFA, SEM (AMOS 19)                            | Pretest sample=20 Total sample= 3462<br>Australian= 1175<br>Chilean=299<br>French=330<br>Mexican=1279<br>Portuguese=379                   |
| Kang (2015)                            | Positivist                  | Survey                              | SEM                                           | Stratified random student sample = 160                                                                                                    |

The review showed a negligible research involving interpretivist research, however, no research was found using post-positivism or realism approaches. Moreover, only a few papers were found

involving mixed methods approach (such as, Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010), but these were also positivist dominant. The review of research methodologies used in consumer-brand relationships and WOM research as presented in tables 3.1 and 3.2 suggested that only 4 out of 32 studies adopted an interpretivist approach in consumer-brand relationships and only 3 WOM papers involved interpretivist exploration out of 33 reviewed papers. Moreover, there are only 3 studies reviewed in both categories depicted to use mixed methods that suggest a clear gap in the literature to capture qualitative insights in consumer-brand relationships and WOM and/or eWOM research.

| Table 3.2                                                    |                   |                                                                                                              |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Research Approach, Methods, and Sample Sizes in WOM and eWOM |                   |                                                                                                              |                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                       |
| Publication (year)                                           | Research Approach | Research Methods                                                                                             | Analysis Strategy                                                                          | Sample Size                                                                                                                           |
| Pheng (1999)                                                 | Conceptual Paper  | Literature Review                                                                                            | Offer a loyalty ladder approach and suggest merging relationship marketing and partnering. | N/A                                                                                                                                   |
| Harrison-Walker (2001)                                       | Positivist        | Survey                                                                                                       | SEM                                                                                        | Total sample=471<br>Two product categories: Veterinary Hair saloon                                                                    |
| Laczniak <i>et al.</i> (2001)                                | Positivist        | 3- negative-WOM × 2-Brand name strength full-factorial experiment                                            | MANOVA                                                                                     | Student sample<br>Study1: 192<br>Study 2: 259                                                                                         |
| Hennig-Thurau <i>et al.</i> (2004)                           | Positivist        | Online survey                                                                                                | CFA, SEM                                                                                   | 2,063                                                                                                                                 |
| Gruen <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                   | Positivist        | Survey                                                                                                       | SEM                                                                                        | Software product Forum users=659                                                                                                      |
| Mazzarol <i>et al.</i> (2007)                                | Interpretivist    | Focus groups, CIT technique                                                                                  | Thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994)                                               | Focus groups=6 of 9 respondents each<br>CIT forms= 100+                                                                               |
| Sen and Lerman (2007)                                        | Positivist        | Empirical observation study, 2 (review valence: positive, negative) × 2 (product type: utilitarian, hedonic) | Dummy variable regression model,                                                           | Study 1: Total items=100<br>Utilitarian=50<br>Hedonic=50<br>Reviews=100<br>Study 1: Student sample=137<br>Study 2: Student sample=137 |
| deMatos and Rossi (2008)                                     | Positivist        | Meta-Analysis                                                                                                | Literature search, Regression analysis                                                     | Initial search= 349 papers of which 242 quantitative papers<br>Independent sample=162 papers<br>Effect size=348<br>Subjects=64,364    |
| Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2008)                                 | Interpretivist    | Focus groups, CIT technique                                                                                  | Thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994)                                               | Focus groups=6 of 9 respondents each<br>CIT forms= 103                                                                                |
| Monga and John (2008)                                        | Positivist        | Experimental design, survey.                                                                                 | One-way ANOVA, 2 × 2 repeated-measures ANOVA, Regression analysis, Dunnett's test          | Pretest=45<br>Student sample=44                                                                                                       |
| Park and Lee (2009)                                          | Positivist        | 2 × 2 × 2 between-subjects factorial design                                                                  | ANCOVA                                                                                     | Pretest: males=20<br>Females=20<br>Main experiment=440<br>Treatment conditions=8 (55 respondents each)                                |

|                                    |                                   |                                                                      |                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Gupta and Harris (2010)            | Positivist                        | Experimental design                                                  | ANOVA                                                                         | Student sample=198                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Doh and Hwang (2009)               | Positivist                        | Experimental design                                                  | ANOVA                                                                         | Student sample=143                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2010)       | Positivist dominant Mixed Methods | Focus Group, Survey                                                  | CIT, Experts as judges of the scale, Multi-group CFA, Correlations.           | Stage 1: Six Focus groups of 9 respondents= 54<br>Stage 2: EFA=252<br>CFA=248<br>Stage 3: 501<br>Stage 4: Positive-WOM receiver= 495<br>Negative-WOM receiver= 505                                         |
| Lin and Lu (2010)                  | Positivist                        | Survey                                                               | Regression Analysis                                                           | Convenience sample<br>Pre-test=50<br>Final=458                                                                                                                                                             |
| Zhang <i>et al.</i> (2010)         | Positivist                        | 2 × 2 Between-subjects design                                        | 2 × 2 ANOVA, coefficient estimates                                            | Student sample<br>Pre-test 1= 23<br>Pre-test 2= 75<br>Study 1= 150<br>Study 2= Amazon reviews of 25 best sellers with 27,985 reviews of final data-set, and 14,589, and 13,399 for two product categories. |
| Wang (2011)                        | Positivist                        | Between-subjects Experiment                                          | Pair-wise comparison test                                                     | Student sample<br>Pilot study=51<br>Set 1=201<br>Set 2=94                                                                                                                                                  |
| Lang (2011)                        | Positivist                        | 2-service × 3-satisfaction levels full factorial experimental design | ANOVA                                                                         | Pilot study=35<br>Main study=281<br>2 Product/Services categories                                                                                                                                          |
| Magnini (2011)                     | Conceptual paper                  | Literature Review                                                    | Literature Review                                                             | N/A                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Park <i>et al.</i> (2011)          | Positivist                        | Survey                                                               | SEM (AMOS 7.0)                                                                | 209                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Bambauer-Sachse and Mangold (2011) | Positivist                        | Group experiments                                                    | Independent samples t-test                                                    | Pretest=20<br>Main study=216<br>4 groups of 54 people each.                                                                                                                                                |
| Chan and Ngai (2011)               | Conceptual paper                  | Systematic Literature Review                                         | IPO perspective                                                               | Articles=94<br>Timeframe= 2000-2009                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Jalilvand and Samiei (2012)        | Positivist                        | Survey                                                               | SEM (AMOS)                                                                    | 341                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Verhagen <i>et al.</i> (2013)      | Positivist                        | Online questionnaire sent within 3 hours of negative-WOM             | PLS SEM                                                                       | 95                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Chang <i>et al.</i> (2013)         | Positivist                        | 2×2×2×2 Between-subjects Experiment                                  | ANCOVA                                                                        | Pretest=62<br>Main sample=273                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Wang <i>et al.</i> (2013)          | Positivist                        | Online Reviews                                                       | A hierarchical Bayesian ordinal choice model, Markov Chain Monte Carlo method | Product reviews=26 with 40-50 responses each.<br>Total observations= 1,173                                                                                                                                 |
| Hutter <i>et al.</i> (2013)        | Positivist                        | Online survey posted on car brand Mini Facebook page                 | SEM (AMOS 18)                                                                 | 311                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Daugherty and Hoffman (2014)       | Positivist                        | Between-subject Experiment, Brief online survey                      | Behaviour eye-tracking, ANOVA                                                 | Pretest=56<br>Main experiment=28                                                                                                                                                                           |

|                                       |                                   |                                                                                        |                                        |                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Daugherty and Hoffman (2014)          | Positivist                        | Between-subject Experiment, Brief online survey                                        | Behaviour eye-tracking, ANOVA          | Pretest=56<br>Main experiment=28                                   |
| Weisfeld-Spolter <i>et al.</i> (2014) | Positivist                        | 2 (Sponsor: B2C, C2C) × 4 (Content: MC and MC+3 eWOM type) Between-subjects Experiment | ANOVA                                  | Pretest=243<br>Student sample=160<br>Users' provided reviews=2,005 |
| Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2014)          | Postivist                         | Online survey                                                                          | CFA, SEM                               | Positive-WOM receiver= 495<br>Negative-WOM receiver= 505           |
| Ulrich and Brunner (2015)             | Positivist                        | Survey                                                                                 | Linear Regression                      | 465                                                                |
| Yeh (2015)                            | Positivist                        | Online reviews                                                                         | Hybrid model<br>Paired 2-tailed t-test | 70 movies                                                          |
| Ponjit and Beise-Zee (2015)           | Positivist                        | 3 × 3 experiment design                                                                | ANOVA                                  | 645                                                                |
| Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi (2016)     | Positivist dominant Mixed Methods | In-depth interviews, Online surveys                                                    | Dependent paired sample t-test         | Preliminary Study in-depth interviews=6<br>Main study=336          |

Therefore, to address this gap in the literature with regards to the qualitative insights to both consumer-brand relationships and WOM research, the study used a mixed methods approach to data collection and analysis based on the flexibility in the positivist paradigm offered by the existing research in WOM (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010) and consumer-brand relationships (Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014).

The next section provides the rationale for using the mixed methods approach in this doctoral study.

### 3.4 Mixed Methods Research Approach to Data Collection and Analysis:

The aim of this section is to outline the methods, procedures, and tools utilised in collecting and analysing data. Simmons *et al.* (2011) considered it as a researcher's job "to discover truths about the world" (p.1359) through generating hypotheses, collecting data, and examining the consistency of data with the hypotheses' findings.

Concerning the data collection and analysis strategies, this doctoral study utilised mixed methods approach, with a quantitative dominance to address the core tenets of the positivist paradigm. The research involved an extensive review of the existing literature to develop the research model, generate the research hypotheses, and collecting and analysing data to achieve the research aim and objectives concerning the development of brand defence scale, hypotheses testing, and validating quantitative findings through qualitative insights. It is consistent with Mertens (2005, p.12), "*although qualitative methods can be used within this paradigm; quantitative methods tend to be predominant*". It is also known as data triangulation involving more than one data collection and analysis methods within a study (Denzin, 2010). Selecting a 'paradigm' concerns with the researcher's philosophical intent, but it does not limit the scope of using the data collection methods (Mackenzie and Knipe, 2006). However, some researchers consider 'mixed methods' as a new third path (Gorard and Taylor, 2004), a third 'research paradigm' (Denscombe, 2008; Johnson and

Onwuegbuzie, 2004), or 'third methodology' (Hall and Howard, 2008; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003), and believe that the time has come for mixed methods research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

It is suggested that combined, or mixed-methods research is a "key element in the improvement of social science" (Gorard, 2004, p.7) aided by strengthened research offered by a variety of methods. Further, the significance of triangulation in research lies in its ability to reduce researcher's bias, augment validity, and strengthen the potential of the interpretation of the research outcomes (Denzin, 2010). Moreover, it strengthens findings (Malina *et al.*, 2013; Pansiri, 2009), which subsequently strengthens the inferences a researcher makes (Jogulu and Pansiri, 2011) that are not possible with a single method. Moreover, the mixed methods complement each other and reduce limitations of a research (Denscombe, 2014). Therefore, qualitative, and quantitative methods can be viewed as complementary when considering the most adequate method for a study (Creswell, 2003). It is recommended to draw on the specific strengths of one method and pairing that against the weaknesses of another method to warrant a researcher's assertions on a specific social phenomenon (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004), to complement a research's findings (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Whiteman, 2015).

Data collection and analysis techniques are not associated with the paradigms alone (Sandelowski, 2001) and can be combined to seek the different outcomes offered by the different premises (Wiersma, 2000). However, the analytical treatment of the facts may vary (Sandelowski, 2001) as, "researcher's theoretical orientation has implications for every decision made in the research process, including the choice of method" (Mertens, 2005, p.3-4). Every research aims to explore the underlying reality, and it is suggested that mixed methods support in revealing the relevant reality with minimal limitations (Denscombe, 2014; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It is argued that social sciences' research could never, and probably will never be able to develop "the type of explanatory and predictive theory that is the ideal and hallmark of natural science" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p.4). However, it is believed that the methodological pluralism or eclecticism in mixed methods research often results in superior research as compared to single-method research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The arguments in favour of mixed methods research suggest that the application of "both qualitative and quantitative methods creates some sort of improvement to "capture" social phenomena" (Loo and Lowe, 2011, p.25).

It has been widely accepted in social sciences research that "mixed methods have complementary strengths and no overlapping weaknesses" (Jogulu and Pansiri, 2011, p.689). Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) advocated the use of mixed methods in doctoral research in management as a "*possible methodological design that rigorously integrates statistical and thematic data to expand and enhance the findings*" (p. 688). Mixed methods research provides more flexibility, integration, and holistic view through their investigative techniques (Powell *et al.*, 2008), which allows addressing a range of complex research questions (Harrison and Reilly, 2011). Qualitative studies typically address the "how" and "why" questions, and quantitative studies addresses "how often" and "how



many” of the research enquiries (Malina *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, it provides a justification for employing a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods, which “can be fruitful for obtaining profoundly new empirical insights” (Malina *et al.*, 2013, p.61).

Mixed methods research suggest considering the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods or data sources in addressing the research questions and/or aim and objectives of a research (Cameron and Molina-Azorin, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Harrison and Reilly, 2011; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Loo and Lowe, 2011; Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). Harrison and Reilly (2011) suggests the inclusion of both deductive and inductive logic in the research within marketing allow a more holistic view of a given marketing issue, rather than following a strictly positivist or interpretivist stance. However, most articles in the marketing literature using mixed methods approach were found to have a positivist orientation (Bahl and Milne, 2006), and so is in consumer-brand relationships and WOM research reviewed in the previous section.

Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) also advise doctoral students to use mixed methods to learn and master the art of the different ways of collecting, analysing, and interpreting information that is more holistic in providing an understanding a research problem. Moreover, the scale development procedure suggested by Churchill (1979) also suggest a positivist study, involving mixed methods to develop and validate a new construct. Therefore, based on the preceding discussion, this study employed a mixed methods approach with positivist orientation to address the research questions and to satisfy the aim and objectives of the research.

The research design, the data collection techniques, procedures, and their sequence followed in this doctoral study are presented next.

### **3.5 Research Design; Data Collection Strategies and Sequence:**

The study adopted a sequential mixed methods approach (Cameron and Molina-Azorin, 2011) to data collection and analysis, i.e. it involved a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyse data involving a sequential manner, rather than simultaneous. In this study, the research was carried out in three phases as depicted in figure 3.2 and table 3.3.

This research involved developing and testing a scale for a new branding construct, brand defence; it followed Churchill's (1979) procedures for scale development. Therefore, the first phase of the research involved addressing the scale development and purification, the second phase involved scale validation, and testing of the hypothesised relationships, and the third phase of the research involved post-survey interviews to compare and validate survey findings.

In order to explore the consumers' intent and extent of brand defence behaviour towards their loved brands, critical incident technique was employed and a perceived negative incident was used. The negative incident was adopted from Donovan *et al.* (2012) and significantly adapted to the study to

incorporate the main aim and objectives of this thesis. The same incident was used for all the three quantitative surveys; pre-test and main surveys, conducted in this thesis. In the quantitative surveys, the negative incident was placed after the questions concerning brand love, and participants were asked to respond to the questions regarding dependent variable, brand trust, brand loyalty, brand forgiveness, positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence, only if they feel that they have certain relationship with one or more brands within that category (see appendix 1 for online surveys questionnaire. The surveys were designed based on the basic condition of the conceptual model that suggested the three relationship, and the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour as a consequence of brand love in case of negative incident. Therefore, the structure of the online surveys was also constructed in alienation of the research model.

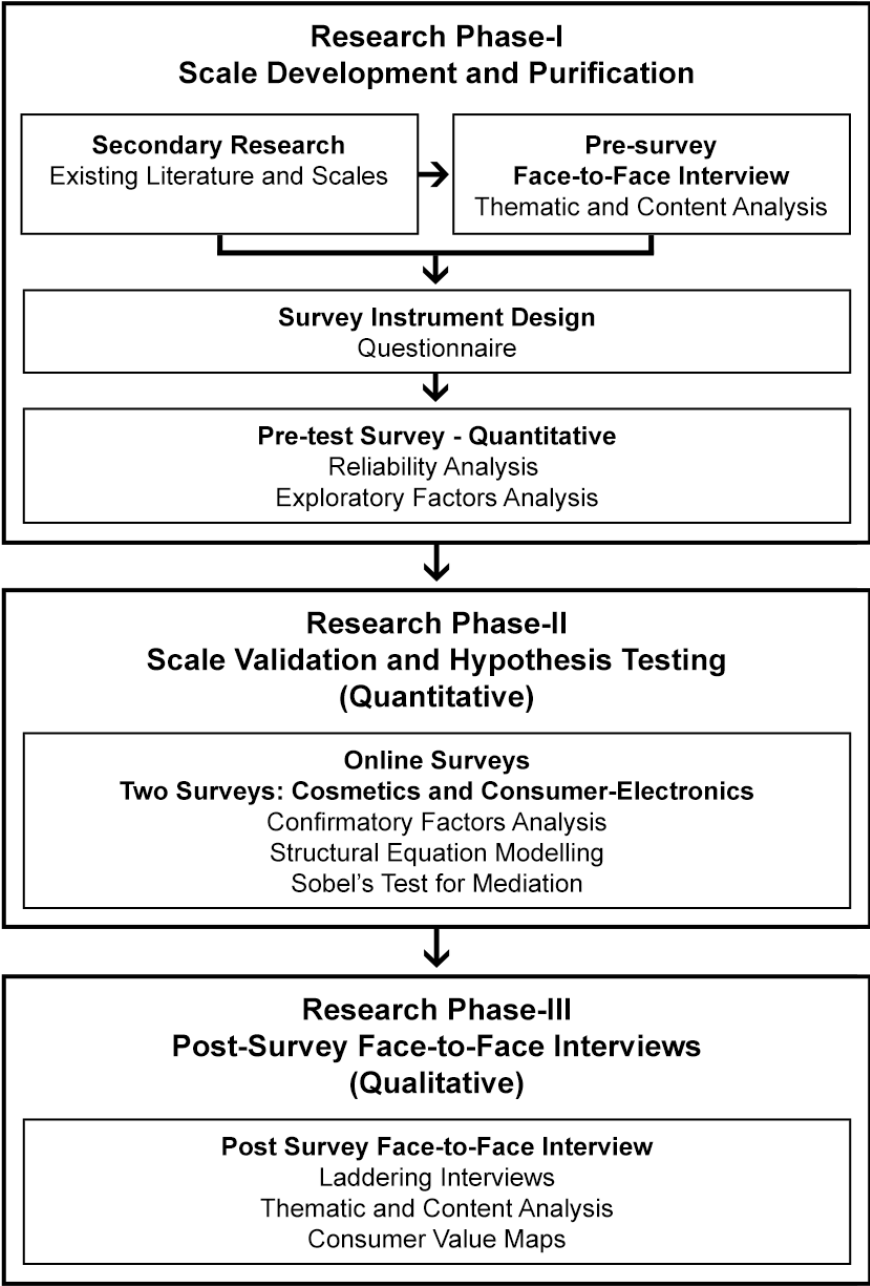


**Figure: 3.2: Overview: Research Design - Data Collection and Analysis Methods and Sequence**

The scale development and purification phase involved, secondary research, semi-structured pre-survey pilot face-to-face interviews, and a pre-test pilot survey as suggested by Churchill's (1979) scale development procedure. The secondary research involved collecting, collating, and analysing the relevant literature to generate themes for the brand defence scale and to develop the research instruments for pre-survey pilot face-to-face interviews, and a pre-test pilot survey. The data analysis techniques used for the first phase were thematic and content analysis for literature review and semi structured interviews, and reliability and exploratory factors analysis (EFA) for the pre-test surveys.

| <b>Table 3.3</b>                                                                                     |            |                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                     |                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Overview: Data Collection and Analysis Methods</b>                                                |            |                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                     |                                                                         |
| <b>Research Phase</b>                                                                                | <b>No.</b> | <b>Data Collection Method</b>                                                    | <b>Methodological Objectives</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <b>Data Analysis</b>                                                                | <b>Sample Size</b>                                                      |
| <b>Phase I</b><br><i>Scale Development and Purification</i>                                          | 1          | Secondary Data Collection<br><br>Literature Review<br><br>Existing Scales        | To explore the existing literature to develop an understanding of the relationship constructs and WOM as conceptualised in this study.<br>To identify the different facets of WOM as relationship outcome<br>To identify the different scales for the constructs used in the research model.<br>To theorise the WOM outcomes of close consumer-brand relationships and how they can help vent the negative impact of negative-WOM.<br>To generate a pool of scale items for brand defence. | <b>Deductive approach</b><br><br>Literature Review<br><br>Review of Existing Scales | N/A                                                                     |
|                                                                                                      | 2          | <b>Qualitative</b><br><br>Face-to-Face Interviews                                | To theorise the WOM outcomes of close consumer-brand relationships and how they can help vent the negative impact of negative-WOM.<br>To identify and refine scale items for the development of brand defence scale.<br>To identify the themes and insights to consumers' behavioural attributions towards favourite brands in response to negative-WOM about the brand.<br>To identify the product categories for pilot study and main study                                              | Thematic and Content Analysis                                                       | <b>3</b> (Fournier 1998)                                                |
|                                                                                                      | 3          | <b>Quantitative</b><br><br>Pilot Study                                           | To theorise the WOM outcomes of close consumer-brand relationships and how they can help vent the negative impact of negative-WOM.<br>To test and refine the survey instrument.<br>To test the reliability of the instrument.<br>To identify the underlying factors (constructs) capturing each scale item.<br>To assess the reliability of the developed scale.                                                                                                                           | Content Validity Analysis<br><br>EFA<br><br>Reliability analysis                    | <b>128</b>                                                              |
| <b>Phase II</b><br><i>Online Surveys Scale Validation Hypotheses Testing</i>                         | 4          | <b>Quantitative</b><br><br>Main Surveys<br>- Cosmetics<br>- Consumer Electronics | To further purify and validate the research measure through CFA.<br>To test the research Hypotheses through SEM.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | CFA<br><br>SEM                                                                      | Cosmetics Survey= <b>469</b><br>Consumer Electronics Survey= <b>418</b> |
| <b>Phase III</b><br><i>Post Survey Interviews Complementing and Validating Quantitative findings</i> | 5          | <b>Qualitative</b><br><br>Face-to-Face Laddering Interviews                      | To complement the quantitative findings for further insight and detail of the phenomena.<br>To facilitate comparison between quantitative and qualitative findings.<br>To validate the quantitative findings.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Laddering Interviews<br><br>Thematic and Content Analysis                           | <b>10</b>                                                               |

The second phase comprised of quantitative data collection involving a set of two main surveys (cosmetics and consumer electronics) for the scale and research model validation and hypothesis testing. Confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) were employed for data analysis. Table 3.3 presents an overview of the research, the data collection methods, data analysis techniques, and sample sizes employed at each phase of the research, and their methodological objectives. Subsequently, table 3.4 presents the relevance of the data-collection phases with the main research objectives to express how the research methods used in this study address this doctoral study's aim and help accomplish the research objectives. The detailed explanation and justification of each research phase and their corresponding methods are discussed as follows.

| <b>Table 3.4</b>                                                                          |            |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Data Collection and Analysis Methods in the Fulfilment of main Research Objectives</b> |            |                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Research Phase</b>                                                                     | <b>No.</b> | <b>Data Collection Methods</b>                                               | <b>Main Objective of the Study (For each method and phase)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Phase I</b><br><br><b>Scale Development and Purification</b>                           | 1          | Secondary Data Collection<br><br>Literature Review<br><br>Existing Scales    | To critically analyse the literature related to the conceptualisation, nature, and impact of WOM and eWOM in relation to the importance of consumer-brand relationships, and consumers' development of 'brand love'.<br>To develop conceptual model of consumers' WOM behaviour those including, positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved-brands in negative-WOM. |
|                                                                                           | 2          | <b>Qualitative</b><br>Face-to-Face Interviews                                | To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards and against their loved brands.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                           | 3          | <b>Quantitative</b><br>Pilot Study                                           | To create and empirically validate a measurement scale for brand defence and examine the impact of brand love with and without the mediating impact of brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness on consumers' WOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence.                                                                                                     |
| <b>Phase II</b><br><br><b>Online Surveys</b>                                              | 4          | <b>Quantitative</b><br>Main Surveys<br>- Cosmetics<br>- Consumer Electronics |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Phase III</b><br><b>Post Survey Interviews</b>                                         | 5          | <b>Qualitative</b><br>Face-to-Face Laddering Interviews                      | To conceptualise the levels and types of consumers' WOM behaviour in the form of a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM attributions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

The Research Phase-I involving scale development and purification is discussed next.

### 3.6 Research Phase-I: Scale Development and Purification:

This doctoral study involved developing and testing a scale for a new construct brand defence. Scale development is a complex process and needs critical consideration, as a social phenomenon, which is unobservable without identifying assessable and/or quantifiable items that explains that phenomena (Yalley, 2012). Scale development process is aimed at generating and selecting items to measure a construct, where a construct refers to "a conceptual term used to describe the phenomenon of theoretical interest" (Edwards and Bagozzi, 2000, p.156-157). It is believed that the nature of constructs is related to theoretical abstracts without an objective reality, and are defined as "abstractions that social and behavioural scientists discuss in their theories" (Judd *et al.*, 1991, p.42). Therefore, such unobservable theoretical abstractions known as constructs are measured through observable scale items, developed through systematic procedures (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2004), including multiple items in a scale to express the complete meaning of that construct (DeVellis, 2003).

A few scale development procedures have been used in the research in marketing (Churchill 1979; Netemeyer *et al.*, 2004). However, Churchill's (1979) procedure for scale development has been widely accepted for developing and validating construct scales in the research in marketing, branding, and consumer behaviour research (Brocato *et al.*, 2012; Brun *et al.*, 2014; Choi and Lotz, 2016; Mittal *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, this study adopted a standard procedure of scale development proposed by Churchill (1979) which was further augmented by several researchers such as Anderson and Gerbing (1988) and Garg *et al.* (2014), among others.

The scale development and validation method involve two main phases: the first phase deals with generating scale items; whereas, the second phase involve confirmation of the scale (Joo and Lee, 2011). In this regard, the first phase utilises qualitative methods to find and generate items, while the second phase uses quantitative methods to check scale reliability and validity (Fatma *et al.*, 2016; Garg *et al.*, 2014). Churchill (1979) provided systematic sequence of achieving this two-phased scale development procedure (Garg *et al.*, 2014) in eight steps, which are adhered in the same sequence and spirit in this doctoral study.

The Churchill's (1979) eight-step scale development procedure followed in this study is presented in Figure 3.3. The first three steps involved the initial qualitative phase of scale development, fourth step involved scale purification through pre-test pilot survey, followed by the four steps involving data collection and analysis of the main surveys addressing the scale validation. As suggested by Churchill (1979), the scale development procedure started with the specification of construct domain based on the literature review, followed by exploratory research to find, and generate scale items. Therefore, this doctoral study conducted pre-survey face-to-face pilot interviews to develop and refine the scale and the research instrument for pre-test pilot survey. The scale validation was carried out using a set of two main surveys with two product categories cosmetics and consumer electronics to satisfy the Churchill's split-half reliability, and validity measures. Finally, the results were compared for the two surveys instead of developing norms as suggested by Churchill (1979), as if only two components are being compared, it is not necessary to develop norms statistically. Therefore, in this study, the scale development, purification, and validation involved primary data at three stages, which has been recommended for improved reliability of the measure (Churchill, 1979). Moreover, the results of the main surveys were also compared and validated with the post-survey face-to-face laddering interviews' findings conducted in the third phase of the research.

The next section presents the collection, collation, and analysis of the secondary data used in this doctoral study.

### **3.6.1 Secondary Research – The Collection, Collation, and Analysis of Literature Review:**

Churchill's (1979) methods for scale development suggest using the existing literature and scales to develop new scales. The study, therefore, reviewed the existing literature to define and generate a sample of items for the scale development. In this regard, brand defence was entirely a new scale and there was no existing scale to review or refine for this study. Therefore, the item generation for

brand defence scale involved semi-structured pre-survey face-to-face pilot interviews. However, the initial themes for the brand defence scale, as well as the construction of semi-structured interview guide in collecting appropriate data for generating and refining the scale items and finalising the pre-test pilot survey questionnaire, the review of relevant literature has been critical. It is also recommended to identify theoretical relationships between the newly proposed constructs with other conceptually related, yet distinct concepts (Churchill, 1979; Pillai *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, the constructs relevant to brand defence and other relationship constructs forming the research model and research hypotheses were explored to develop relevant themes and scale items for brand defence. In this regard, the literature on multiple research domains were explored; relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, WOM, interpersonal-relationships, and social psychology literature, as discussed in detail in the literature review chapter.

The study involved thorough synthesis of the two main research domains shaping this research; consumer-brand relationships and WOM, as well as explored the relevant interpersonal-relationships and social psychology literature that provide basis to the consumers' brand-favourable behaviour in close consumer-brand relationships. Moreover, the literature review also involved inquiring the inclusion of relationship constructs into early marketing thoughts, followed by relationship marketing literature, and its importance in the evolution of consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1998) and realisation of WOM being a relationship benefit (Henning-Thurau *et al.*, 2004).

Synthesising the main research streams relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, and WOM in a timeline manner provided a detailed overview of the research developed over time, and how the literature has been constructed and reconstructed in forming different concepts. Research synthesis not only provide descriptive, informative, and evaluative, review of concepts, but also their connectives (Mays *et al.*, 2005). The literature synthesis included both quantitative and qualitative studies to avoid missing the content that is desirable from a thesis literature review (Boote and Beile, 2005).

Along with identifying themes for conceptualising and measuring brand defence scale the literature review tried addressing all the expectations from a doctoral thesis, which included, but not limited to Hart (1999) recommendations, as follows:

- “1. *distinguishing what has been done from what needs to be done;*
2. *discovering important variables relevant to the topic*
3. *synthesising and gaining a new perspective;*
4. *identifying relationships between ideas and practices;*
5. *establishing the context of the topic or problem,*
6. *rationalising the significance of the problem*
7. *enhancing and acquiring the subject vocabulary;*
8. *understanding the structure of the subject;*
9. *relating ideas and theory to applications;*
10. *identifying the main methodologies and research techniques that have been used;*
11. *placing the research in a historical context to show familiarity with state-of-the-art developments”* (p. 27)

Therefore, based on the systematic review of literature as presented in chapter two and section 3.2 appraising the methodologies used in consumer-brand relationships and WOM research, this study made informed inferences about the research's conceptual and hypothetical models with construct's conceptualisation, development, and validation. The overview of the construction and collation of the literature review is presented in figure 2.1, in chapter 2.

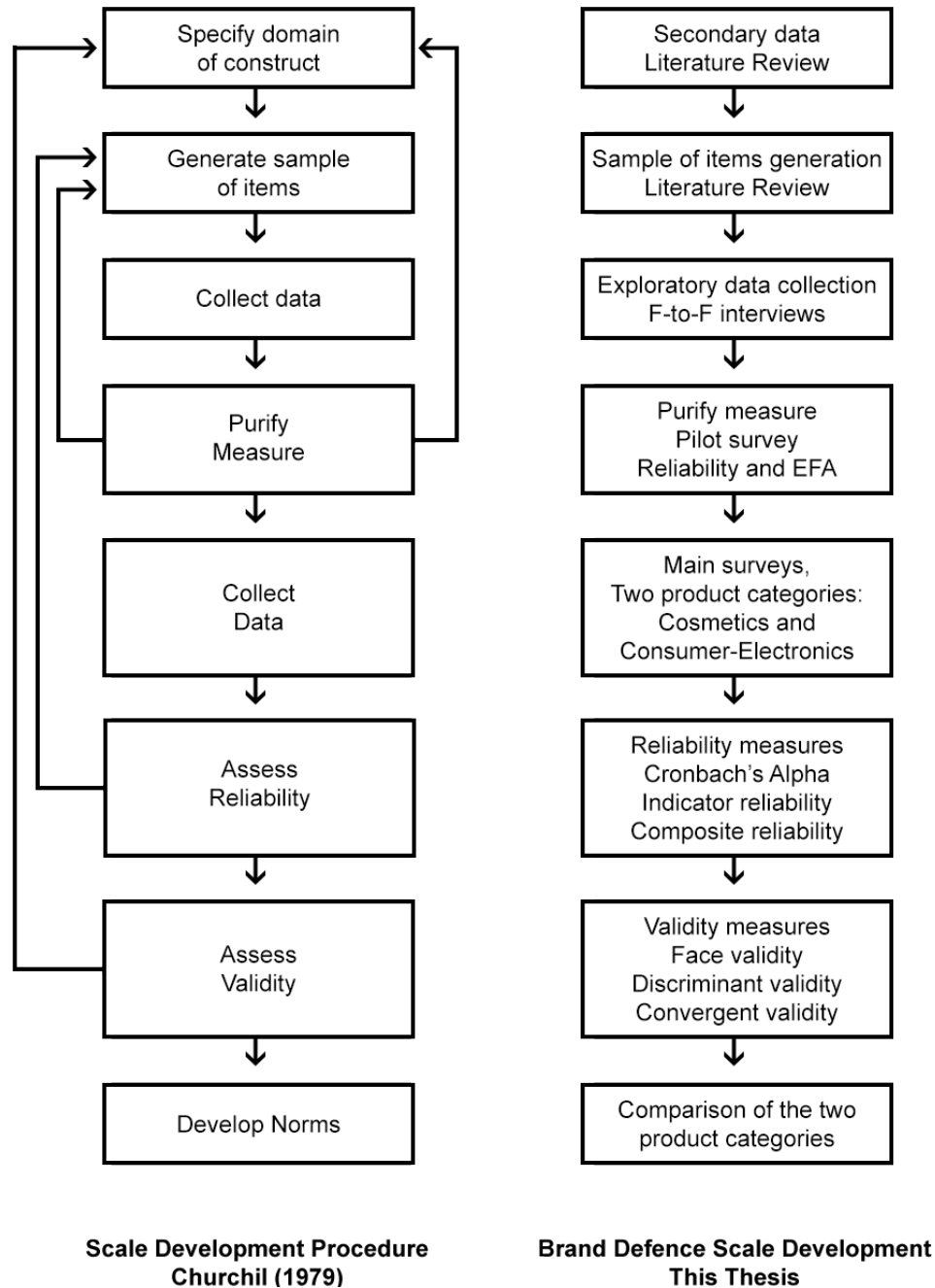


**Figure 3.3: Scale Development Procedure in alienation with Churchill's (1979) Method**

Concerning the development of themes for brand defence scale, WOM and close consumer-brand relationships literature was screened for relevant clues that support the existence and prevalence of consumers' defending behaviour towards brands (Ulrich and Brunner, 2014; Colliander and Wien, 2013; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006). The concept of 'rebuttals' by Ulrich and Brunner (2014), and 'defence of companies' by Colliander and Wien (2013) was very like the concept of

brand defence proposed in this study. However, both these studies involved observing consumers' behaviour in responses specific to online negative reviews alone and did not provide any implications to mobilise such behaviour. On the other hand, this study observed brand defence as a superior WOM behaviour which is offered as a relationship attribution towards loved brands in response to any type of negative-WOM. Brand defence indications are also found in the literature of brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006), and WOM (Bendapudi and Berry, 2003). The detailed conceptualisation of brand defence and other relationship constructs used in the study has been presented in chapter 2 of this thesis.

Moreover, based on the Churchill's (1979) recommendations for scale development, the study involved developing and identifying themes through two main sources, existing literature and qualitative data collected through primary research. Therefore, to collect qualitative data to generate and refine scale items for brand defence, pre-survey semi-structured pilot interviews were conducted, using the relevant literature as the main source of developing the semi-structured interview guide to capture the fuller understanding of the phenomenon. The quantitative research instrument was also developed based on the existing scales, except brand defence. Furthermore, the guide for post-survey laddering interviews was also developed based on existing literature (see table 3.9).

The rationale and procedures of the pre-survey semi-structured face-to-face pilot interviews are discussed next.

### **3.6.2 Pre-survey Face-to-face Interview:**

Following secondary research, pre-survey face-to-face interviews were used to identify and refine the scale items to develop the survey questionnaires for the pre-test study. Pre-survey interviews guide was prepared on the existing literature to be able to acquire insights to the entire phenomenology of consumer-brand relationships and the consequences of brand love, particularly exploring brand-favourable WOM and identifying themes for brand defence. The pre-survey interviews guide is presented in table 3.5. Moreover, the pre-survey interviews also involved improving the post-survey interviews' guide based on the experience of the pre-survey pilot interviews, and laddering principles governed by the means-end theory (Gutman 1982; Phillips and Reynold, 2009; Reynolds and Phillips, 2015).

The face-to-face interviews provide an opportunity to gain detailed in-depth insights to beliefs and feelings (Rowley, 2012). An interview is a way of gathering information through verbal exchange between an interviewer and interviewee, where the interviewer draws information by asking questions from the interviewee (Denscombe, 2014). Interviews are the most widely used method for qualitative research, and are categorised as in-depth, semi-structured, and structured (Black, 1999) and seek to identify and express meanings and themes through the living experience of participants.



| Table 3.5                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pre-survey F-t-F Guideline Questionnaire based on the Brand Love Antecedents and WOM Attributions |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Guideline Questions                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | References                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Introduction and consent</b>                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Initial questions</b>                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5.<br>6.<br>7.<br>8.                                                      | Really liking some particular brands<br>Enlisting them<br>Asking reasons<br>If any brands have special place in your life<br>If yes/no, Why?<br>Name special brands<br>Feel same or different for all the special brands<br>Rating the brands in a hierarchy with the most favourite at the top.                                                                                               | Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Fetscherin and Dato-On (2012)                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Relationship specific question</b><br><b>Brand Love Indicators or Consequences</b>             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 9.<br>9.1<br>9.2                                                                                  | <b>Passion-driven behaviour</b><br>Passionate desire to use the brand<br>Explaining this feeling<br>Recalling an experience                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2007)<br>Fournier (1998)<br>Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)                                                                                                           |
| 10.                                                                                               | <b>Willingness to invest resources</b><br>Time, money, paying a premium price, fuel, postage, etc.<br>How?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2007)<br>Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                                                                                                           |
| 11.<br>11.1                                                                                       | <b>Experience-based stimuli</b><br>Feeling of love or attachment to the brand out of any past-experience.<br>Recalling and explaining                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Grisaffe and Nguyen (2010)                                                                                                                                                          |
| 12<br>12.1<br>12.2                                                                                | <b>Kinship and/or childhood associations or memories</b><br>Based on any involvement of any close person with the brand<br>Due to any memories of kinship<br>Any memories of the childhood                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Fournier (1998)<br>Grisaffe and Nguyen (2010)                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 13.<br>13.1<br>13.2<br>13.3<br>13.4                                                               | <b>Self-brand integration</b><br>If the brand represents or adds to the desired Self-Identity<br>If yes, how?<br>If the brand represents or adds to the Current Self-Identity<br>If yes, how?<br>Feeling the brand as a part of yourself<br>If yes, how?<br>If the brand gives meaning to your life in any way<br>If yes, why?<br>Frequently thinking about the brand                          | Anggraeni and Rachmanita (2015)<br>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Albert and Merunka (2013)<br>Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Hwang and Kandampully (2012)<br>Unal and Aydin (2013)<br>Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014) |
| 14.<br>14.1<br>14.2                                                                               | <b>Positive emotional connection, brand attachment, affection</b><br>Feeling that the brand is an Intuitive Fit for you, based on some personal instinct or emotional connection with the brand<br>If yes, how?<br>Feeling of Emotional Attachment with the brand<br>If yes, how?<br>Feeling Affection for the brand<br>If yes, how?                                                           | Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006, 2010, 2013)<br>Pedeliento <i>et al.</i> (2015)                                                                                                               |
| 15<br>15.1                                                                                        | <b>Relationship duration</b><br>Long-Term Relationship with the brand<br>Intention to develop or sustain a long-term relationship with the brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Ahuvia (1993, 2005)<br>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Brock and Zhou (2012)<br>Gummerson (1998)                                                                                                                    |
| 16.<br>16.1<br>16.2                                                                               | <b>Feeling of distress on separation</b><br>Feeling distress when this brand is missing<br>Assuming if the brand or the product of the brand discontinues<br>Expressing the feelings                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Pedeliento <i>et al.</i> (2015)                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 17                                                                                                | <b>Brand trust</b><br>Trust the brand<br>Having confidence on the brand<br>Explaining the feeling                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Albert and Merunka (2013)<br>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)<br>Belaid and Behi (2011)<br>Brock and Zhou (2012)<br>Drennan <i>et al.</i> (2015)<br>Roy (2013)                                                          |
| <b>Declaration of Love</b>                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 18                                                                                                | Loving the brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)<br>Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>Attributions towards Loved Brands in the Negative-WOM scenario</b>                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 19.<br>19.1<br>19.2<br>19.3                                                                       | <b>Response to any negative information about the loved brand</b> (such as friends criticising the brand, or hear any negative thing about the brand, rumors, truth, etc.)<br>Reaction to negative-WOM – How?<br>Respond to negative-WOM – Why and How?<br>Keep quiet and ignore the information - Why<br>Believe the negative-WOM and provide negative-WOM by himself/herself, as well – Why? | Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Park and McInnis (2006)                                                                                              |

| <b>Enquiring WOM attributions in Two Behavioural Scenarios or Responses to Negative-WOM</b><br>Refusing to believe negative-WOM out trust or forgiving the brand for any believed offenses |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Refuse to believe the Negative-WOM or turning a blind eye towards the loved-brand</b>                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Park and McInnis (2006)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Brand Forgiveness: Believe in the information but forgive the brand</b>                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2012)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Positive-WOM – any positive oral or written non-commercial communication about the brand</b>                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 20                                                                                                                                                                                         | Disbelieve or refuse to believe the negative-WOM and provide positive-WOM – Why and how?<br>Believing the negative-WOM but forgive the brand and support the brand through positive-WOM – Why and how?           | Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)<br>Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Belaid and Behi (2011)<br>Brock and Zhou (2012)<br>Fetscherin (2014)<br>Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2010)<br>Unal and Aydin (2013)<br>Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006, 2010, 2013)<br>Pitta and Franzak (2008) |
| <b>Brand Advocacy – Referrals and recommending behaviour</b>                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 21.                                                                                                                                                                                        | Disbelieve or refuse to believe the negative-WOM and support the brand through Advocacy – Why and how?<br>Believing the negative-WOM but forgive the brand and support the brand through Advocacy – Why and how? | Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Kim <i>et al.</i> (2001)<br>Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014)                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Brand Defence – Defend the brand for any criticisms</b>                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 22.                                                                                                                                                                                        | Disbelieve the negative-WOM and defend the brand against negative-WOM – Why and how?<br>Believe the negative-WOM but forgive the brand and defend the brand against negative-WOM – Why and how?                  | Ulrich and Brunner (2014)<br>Colliander and Wien (2013)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 22.1                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

The study adopted a semi-structured interview method for this study for both the piloting and scoping data collection, as well as the qualitative, post-survey validation part of the data collection. Semi-structured interviews were adopted based on their flexible approach, allowing new questions or information emerging during the interviews in generating themes, while, allowing the researcher to have control over the interview at the same time (Campbell *et al.*, 2013). Rowley (2012) considered semi-structured interview as a suitable tool for capturing a person's perception about a phenomenon.

Open-ended questions were included in the interview enabling participants to give their detailed opinions (Rowley, 2012). There are both advantages and disadvantages associated to interviews as presented in table 3.6. However, irrespective of the disadvantages associated to interview method, both interviews and surveys are suggested as, “necessary and useful; they supplement each other, especially if the survey and the in-depth interviews were done separately, each following the assumptions of its own paradigm” (Rubin and Rubin 2011, p.18). Therefore, this study used both semi-structured face-to-face interviews, as well as online surveys to address any probable limitations.

| <b>Table 3.6</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Advantages and Disadvantages of Interview Method</b>                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Advantages</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <b>Disadvantages</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Flexibility to enquiry<br>Allow themes to emerge<br>Rich, unique, and detailed information.<br>Clarity of questions<br>Opportunity of non-verbal observations<br>Ability to establish rapport to motivate participants. | Time-constraining for both data collection and analysis.<br>Contradicting findings, due to different personal perceptions.<br>Data collected are in a haphazard fashion due to unexpected emergent themes.<br>Issues of data coding and analysis.<br>Unavoidable interviewer bias. |

Source: Yalley (2012)

The next section presents the procedures used to conduct the pre-test pilot surveys in this study.

### 3.6.3 Pre-test Pilot Survey:

Following Churchill's (1979) procedures of scale development, this doctoral study involved conducting a pre-test pilot survey to test and purify the construct scale (Pillai *et al.*, 2016) for brand defence, and to revise the final surveys' instruments. The data for the pre-test pilot survey was collected regarding consumers' perceptions about their favourite mobile phone brands, while the two main surveys involved exploring favourite cosmetics and consumer electronics brands. The product categories for the pre-test and main surveys were decided based on the existing literature (Albert *et al.*, 2008; 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012), and the pre-survey face-to-face interviews.

| Table 3.7                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Existing Measuring Scales Used in the Pre-test Pilot Survey |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                 |
| No.                                                         | Items                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Source                                          |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5.<br>6.<br>7.<br>8.<br>9.<br>10.   | <b>Brand love</b><br>Wonderful mobile phone brand<br>This brand makes me feel good<br>This brand is totally awesome<br>I have neutral feelings about this brand<br>This brand makes me very happy<br>I love this mobile phone brand<br>I have no particular feelings about this brand<br>This brand is a pure delight<br>I am passionate about this brand<br>I am very attached to this brand.                                                   | Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)                        |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.                                        | <b>Brand Trust</b><br>I know my brand, refuse to believe the negative information<br>I trust my brand, refuse to believe the negative information<br>I believe the information but I will not blame my brand<br>My brand always fulfils the promises that it makes to its customers                                                                                                                                                              | Roy (2013)                                      |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.                                              | <b>Brand Loyalty</b><br>I will prefer my present brand provider to others in future<br>I will not switch from this brand to try another brand<br>I feel a strong sense of identification towards this brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Roy (2013)                                      |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5.<br>6.<br>7.                      | <b>Brand Forgiveness</b><br>I forgive my favourite brand<br>I feel angry toward this brand<br>Even though the negative information hurts me, I do not feel ill-will toward my favourite brand<br>I dislike the brand out of negative information<br>I feel warmly toward this mobile phone brand<br>I hope this brand gets what's coming to it for what the brand did to me.<br>If I saw this brand again, I would try to avoid using the brand. | Brown and Philips (2005)                        |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.                                        | <b>Positive-WOM</b><br>I will tell more people about the experience of the mobile phone brand than any other mobile phone brand.<br>I will seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about the experience of my favourite mobile phone brand.<br>When I tell others about my experience of the mobile phone brand, I tend to talk about it in great detail.<br>I will say positive things about the mobile brand                                 | Lang (2009)<br><br>Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2010) |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.                                              | <b>Brand Advocacy</b><br>I will share my experience about the mobile brand.<br>I will recommend my mobile brand.<br>I will ask people to try the mobile brand themselves                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Kim <i>et al.</i> (2001)                        |

The pilot survey questionnaire was developed based on a critical incident approach, where consumers were asked to recall or assume a scenario involving any negative criticism about their loved brand (see appendix 1). Critical incident (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008; 2010) and experimental designs have been very popular in WOM (Lang, 2011; Wang 2011) and consumer-brand relationships (Long-Tolbert and Gammoh, 2011) research as depicted in tables 3.1 and 3.2. This study involved a critical incident of negative-WOM in a sequential mixed methods research approach based on Cameron and Molina-Azorin (2011).

All the constructs' scales used in the research process were validated through the existing branding literature, except brand defence, and brand forgiveness. The research model involved a total of seven constructs to test the hypothetical research model, the five existing scales were used to measure brand love (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), brand trust (Roy, 2013), positive-WOM (Lang, 2009; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010), brand advocacy (Kim *et al.*, 2001), and brand loyalty (Roy, 2013). For brand forgiveness, a scale from the interpersonal psychology research (Brown and Phillips, 2005) was used and adapted to the branding context. Table 3.7 presents the existing scales used in the pre-test pilot survey. However, brand defence was a new branding construct, which was conceptualised and measured in this study. A full explanation and description of the scale development and purification is presented in chapter 4.

The development of the research instrument in this doctoral study consisted of three stages; firstly, a thorough exploration of literature was used to identify and define the basic research model and its related constructs. Secondly, the constructs with existing scales were identified and selected according to the aim and objectives of this research, basic assumptions of the research model, and the conceptualisations of the constructs as conceived in this doctoral study. The third stage involved developing scales that did not exist in the branding literature, such as brand defence and brand forgiveness.

Based on Churchill (1979) suggestions for scale purification and research instrument refinement, pre-test pilot surveys were analysed for construct reliability and validity to purify brand defence scale and refine the research instrument. Cronbach's Alpha was used to test reliability of the research constructs, and exploratory factors analysis (EFA) was used to test construct validity. In this study, SPSS 20 was used to conduct Cronbach's Alpha reliability, and exploratory factors analysis. The pre-test pilot survey results are presented in chapter 4.

Following the Churchill's (1979) sequence, the next section presents the procedures and execution of the research phase-II involving scale validation and hypotheses testing.

### **3.7 Research Phase-II: Scale Validation and Hypotheses Testing:**

Preceding the scale development and purification through pre-survey pilot interviews and pre-test pilot survey, two quantitative surveys across two product categories cosmetics and consumers-electronics were conducted to validate brand defence scale and test the research hypotheses. Surveys are a common strategy for data collection in the research in marketing (Evans and Mathur, 2005), and considered as an important data collection tool that includes rigid scales and questions in different forms, such as, attitude scales, checklists, and rating scales.

Brace (2008) identified two questionnaire survey methods that included self-completion questionnaires and interviewer-administered questionnaires, where Self-completion questionnaires have two categories paper-based surveys and electronic-based surveys. There are both advantages and disadvantages associated to interviews as presented in table 3.8.

To address the research limitations, the study adopted mixed methods research involving both surveys and face-to-face interviews, complementing on individual strengths of each methods while addressing each other's limitations. This study used interviewer-administered online surveys to conduct both the pre-test study and main study to seek high response rate, minimised bias, and to acquire quantifiable results for improved generalisability.

| Table 3.8                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Surveys                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| Major Strengths                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Major Potential Weaknesses                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Global reach<br>B-to-B and B-to-C appeal<br>Flexibility<br>Speed and timeliness<br>Convenience<br>Ease of data entry and analysis<br>Question diversity<br>Low administration cost<br>Ease of follow-up<br>Controlled Sampling<br>Large sample easy to obtain<br>Control of answer order<br>Required completion of answers<br>Go to capabilities<br>Knowledge of respondent vs. non-respondent characteristics | Perception as junk mail<br>Skewed attributes of Internet population: upscale, male, etc.<br>Question about sample selection and implementation.<br>Respondents lack of online experience or expertise<br>Technological variations<br>Unclear answering instructions<br>Impersonal<br>Privacy issues<br>Low response rate |

Source: Evans and Mathur (2005 p.197)

The questionnaire was improved after pilot testing by revising the scale items based on their reliability and factor loadings. The detailed description and explanation of the research instrument refinement, and brand defence scale development and purification is discussed in the next chapter.

The research sample used for online surveys are discussed next.

### 3.7.1 Research Sample; Online Surveys:

This doctoral study involved the inquiry of British consumers as the representative sample for the entire research, as discussed before. The survey participants were not selected on the bases of ethnic differences, specific race, or culture, but as mixed British residents. The United Kingdom is a multicultural society; therefore, the selection of British consumers provided the opportunity to get a diversity of opinion through the people belonging to different cultures, backgrounds, ethnicities, and/or traits. It provided diverse cultural data representing common residing traits due to living within the same market conditions.

The snowball sampling technique was used to access the large sample sizes required for the online surveys (Black, 2010; Brady *et al.*, 2012; Malhotra *et al.*, 2012), based on the popularity of quantitative surveys within the research in marketing (Brady *et al.*, 2012; Malhotra *et al.*, 2012).

The snowball samples are diverse in nature as the social circle of the first respondent might be completely different from the respondents in the beginning due to a continual chain referral (Berg, 1988). The main drawbacks associated with convenience sampling are concerned with the generalisability of the findings.

To address the limitations associated to snowball samples concerning generalisability, it is suggested to use larger samples (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). Moreover, the samples were observed if they were representative of the population concerning age and gender. The detailed demographics of the survey participants are presented in chapter 5, section 5.2.

The data analysis techniques used for the research phase-II are discussed next.

### 3.7.2 Quantitative Analysis; Main Surveys:

The doctoral study involved a three-phase research; the first phase involved scale refinement at the pre-test survey stage through exploratory factors analysis (EFA) and Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis as suggested by Churchill (1979). The second phase included the main study involving main quantitative surveys aimed at scale validation and testing the research model through hypotheses testing. The third and final phase involved post-survey face-to-face laddering interviews to validate the quantitative findings.

The main quantitative study comprising of two online surveys; cosmetics and consumer-electronics, used a two-step structural equation modelling (SEM) method suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). The first step involved using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to establish the validity and reliability of the scales proposed to measure the constructs. The second step involved the hypotheses testing; the hypotheses testing in this study was carried out using structural equation modelling (SEM) and Sobel's test for mediation. The quantitative analysis for this study involved using two statistical software packages, SPSS 20 (Cronbach's Alpha and EFA), and AMOS 21.0 (CFA and SEM).

The EFA, Reliability and Validity measures, and SEM analysis to test the research hypotheses are discussed next.

#### 3.7.2.1 Reliability Measures:

The construct reliability measures taken for this analysis included Cronbach's alpha, indicator reliability, and composite reliability analysis.

- a. Cronbach's Alpha:** Cronbach's alpha has been a widely-accepted construct's reliability analysis to evaluate a research instrument (Hair *et al.*, 2006). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for all the constructs measured in this study.
- b. Indicator Reliability:** The squared multiple correlations (SMC) measures indicator reliability that involves measuring the strength of the relationship of the dependent variable to the set of all independent variables. This study used Fornell and Larcker's (1981) formula, with at least 0.5 cut off value for SMC to warrant indicator's reliability (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).
- c. Composite reliability (CR):** It measures the internal consistency of a construct, and it involves measuring the overall reliability of a heterogeneous item pool, but the items for similar measurement (Carmines and Zeller, 1988). In this study, Fornell and Larcker's

(1981) formula was used to measure CR, and considered 0.6 as the minimum acceptable value to consider a construct having composite reliability (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The higher CR values indicated the existence of internal consistency, which shows that the given measuring items represent the same latent constructs.

### 3.7.2.2 Validity Measures:

Validity measures have been used to test the construct validity that to what extent a group of measurement items measure the constructs that are supposed to be measured. Therefore, the study used face validity, discriminant validity, and convergent validity to measure construct validity.

- a. **Face Validity:** The content validity refers to, “the extent to which an instrument covers the range of meanings included in the concept” (Babbie, 1992:133). The constructs’ face validity needs to be established prior to the theoretical testing (Hair *et al.*, 2010). It is not measured statistically, but it is established on the existing research and based on the expert judgment of the subject expert or practitioner.
- b. **Discriminant Validity:** Discriminant validity is used to assess the extent to which a construct differed from other constructs used in a study (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Discriminant validity is examined by comparing the average variance extracted (AVE) with the corresponding inter-construct squared correlations (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), the higher AVE values represent higher discriminant validity.
- c. **Convergent Validity:** Convergent validity measures the degree or proportion to which a construct’s measurement variable converged or shared a common variance (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The study calculated construct’s convergent validity by examining the AVE, and factor loadings for each construct (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). A construct’s AVE value needs to be 0.5 or more to conclude if a construct is convergent valid (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and factor loadings should also be significant at 0.5 or greater.

The analyses used for research hypotheses testing are discussed next.

### 3.7.2.3 Hypotheses Testing; Structural Equation Modelling and Sobel Test:

In this study, the research hypotheses were tested using structural equation modelling (SEM), followed by Sobel’s test of mediation. Structural equation modelling has been a widely accepted statistical analysis in management research to test hypothetical models (Davcik, 2014). In this regard, a two-step approach was adopted that involved separate estimation using confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) of the measurement model before the final SEM analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). As, “It makes little sense to relate constructs within an SEM model if the factors specified as part of the model are not worthy of further attention” (Thompson, 2004, p. 110). The two-step approach to SEM (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) has been widely used in marketing including consumer-brand relationships (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Park *et al.*, 2013; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2011; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015) and WOM research (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2004; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014). See tables 3.1 and 3.2 for the research methodologies used in consumer-brand relationships and WOM research.

The Sobel's test of mediation is used to test the mediating role of constructs on any hypothesised relationships (Jiménez and Martín, 2014; Sobel, 1982; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015). One of the major benefits of Sobel Test (1982) is that it provides a procedure that directly test the significance of indirect paths, and it has been a very popular test for mediation across branding (Algharabat, 2017; Cassia *et al.*, 2017; Delgado-Ballester and Sabiote, 2015; Fang *et al.* 2013; Kemp and Bui, 2011; Solimun and Fernandes, 2018; Tuškej and Podnar, 2018), and business management research (Coetzer, 2016; Pappu and Quester, 2016).

Sobel test has been regarded to have a greater statistical power than any other formal test for mediation, particularly Baron and Kenny's (1986) method involving a series of regression tests to identify the mediating effects (Sundram *et al.*, 2016). However, Preacher and Hayes (2004) highlighted the shortcomings of the Sobel's test and proposed the bootstrapping approach for more accurate results and argue that Sobel's test may be misleading within a small sample study. However, Sobel test is considered an appropriate measure for achieving the goals of a study with moderate to large samples, such as, sample sizes equal 200 or more (Hawass, 2016; Mackinnon *et al.*, 2002). Moreover, a number of studies in the recent past have used both Sobel's test and bootstrapping in their studies for more robust results concerning their mediation hypotheses and found no conflict or differentiation (e.g. Gkorezis, 2016; Gyensare *et al.*, 2016; Lopez and Rodriguez, 2018; Liu, *et al.*, 2015; Mohan *et al.*, 2018; Taba, 2018; Yazdanparast *et al.*, 2016; Yazdanparast *et al.*, 2015).

Therefore, provided the large sample size for both the main surveys, Sobel's test was used to test the research hypotheses that involved testing the mediating role of brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty on the relationships of brand love and the three proposed WOM outcomes; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence.

The next section presents the justification and methods used for the research phase-III, involving post-survey qualitative interviews to validate the quantitative findings.

### **3.8 Phase III; Post-Survey Face-to-Face Laddering Interviews:**

As discussed above, the study adopted the positivist approach overall for required generalisability, reliability, and validity of findings but based on the importance and realised benefits of mixed methods approach (Harrison and Reilly, 2011), post-survey face-to-face interviews were conducted. The basic reason for conducting the post-survey interviews was to eliminate the maximum possible limitations of the research (Denscombe, 2014) and strengthen the findings by complementing and validating quantitative results.

This study used laddering approach based on the means-end theory (Gutman, 1982) to conduct the face-to-face interviews. Having developed a conceptualisation and measurement of WOM attributions in the form of a hierarchy, it was deemed appropriate to explore the phenomenon using laddering interviews. Laddering is a qualitative research tool that has been widely used to reveal the drivers of consumers' decision-making (Phillips and Reynolds, 2009). Laddering interviews and



means-end theory has been used for decades to address marketing research questions concerning product design and development (Wagner, 2007), market segments (Reynolds, 2006), strategy making (Parry, 2002), brand equity (Wansink, 2003), services experience (Jüttner *et al.*, 2013), and consumer preferences and decision-making (Amatulli and Guido, 2011; Bagozzi and Dabholkar, 2000; Zeithaml, 1988).

The basic assumption of the means-end theory is the hierarchical organisation of consumers' perceptions, knowledge (Gutman, 1982), and values (Ilicic and Webster, 2015; Overby *et al.*, 2004). In this study, the consumers' WOM behaviour was explored concerning their relationship values, based on brands/product attributes. Like Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1954), "means-end theory seeks to understand human actions... as means of satisfying different levels of needs" (Wansink, 2003, p.112). Moreover, the means-end theory suggested that product attributes translate into self-relevant abstractions out of high-end personal values (Reynolds and Philips, 2009). The means-end theory conceptualised a top-down process involving the evaluation of products and services, suggesting that it is the higher-level values that provide meaning to the lower-level attributes (Philips and Reynolds, 2009), with bottom-up interviewing technique using consumers' behaviour ladders.

The main objective of laddering interviews is "to obtain a hierarchical network of meanings (i.e. ladders and/or means-end chains (MEC) consisting of attributes, consequences, and values) using a bottom-up process of questioning that begins with questions about lower-level attributes and ends with questions to uncover the higher-level values," (Phillips and Reynolds, 2009, p.84). Therefore, it made laddering interviews a suitable choice for the post-survey validation interviews, to understand the intensity of participants' brand love, and the consequent levels of consumers' WOM attributions towards their loved brands. It was fully aligned with this doctoral study's objectives of investigating the consumers WOM behaviour (consequences) out of their love for the brand (higher-level values) out of concrete product attributes (lower-level attributes).

The laddering interviews attempted to organise the individuals' beliefs and behaviour in a systematic way while identifying their personal values (Amatulli and Guido, 2011). Most importantly, the method has been widely used in marketing to reveal consumers' latent cognitive structures involving the hierarchical constructs that are not directly apparent (Amatulli and Guido, 2011; Reynolds and Phillips, 2015). Therefore, one of the major reasons for adopting this method was based on this doctoral study's fourth objective to conceptualise and measure the hierarchical levels of consumers' WOM behavioural attributes towards loved brands, along with the insights to their relational motivations and personal values for providing them. Moreover, laddering is a theory driven approach developed on means-end theory (Gutman, 1982), and unlike other qualitative methods the systematic approach of eliciting consumers' distinct cognitions (Reynolds and Phillips, 2009) allows better observable data. The study involved interview-based soft laddering technique, conducting semi-structured face-to-face interviews guide. Table 3.9 presents the summarised guide of post-survey laddering interviews used in this study.

| Table 3.9                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Post-survey Laddering Interviews Guide                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Guideline Questions                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | References                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Introduction and consent</b>                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Initial questions</b>                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1.<br>2.<br>3.<br>4.<br>5.<br>6.<br>7.<br>8.                                    | Liking some particular brands<br>Enlisting them<br>Asking reasons<br>If any brands have special place in your life<br>If yes/no, Why?<br>Name special brands<br>Feel same or different for all the special brands<br>Rating the brands in a hierarchy with the most favourite at the top.                                           | Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Fetscherin and Dato-On (2012)                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Relationship specific question<br/>Brand love Indicators or Consequences</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 9.<br>9.1<br>9.2                                                                | <b>Passionate Desire to use the brand</b><br>Explaining this feeling<br>Recalling an experience                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2007)<br>Fournier (1998)<br>Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)                                                                                                           |
| 10.                                                                             | <b>Willingness to invest resources</b><br>Time, money, paying a premium price, fuel, postage, etc. – How?                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2007)<br>Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)                                                                                                                           |
| 11.                                                                             | <b>Experience-based Stimuli</b><br>Relationship based on past-experience – How and why?                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Grisaffe and Nguyen (2010)                                                                                                                                                          |
| 12<br>12.1<br>12.2                                                              | <b>Kinship and/or childhood associations or memories</b><br>Based on any involvement of any close person with the brand – Who and why?<br>Due to any memories of kinship – How and why?<br>Any memories of the childhood – How and why?                                                                                             | Fournier (1998)<br>Grisaffe and Nguyen (2010)                                                                                                                                                                      |
| 13.<br>13.1<br>13.2<br>13.3<br>13.4                                             | <b>Self-Brand Integration</b><br>Adds to the desired Self-Identity – How?<br>Adds to the Current Self-Identity – How?<br>Feeling the brand as a part of yourself – How?<br>Gives meaning to your life in any way – How?<br>Frequently thinking about the brand – Why and how?                                                       | Anggraeni and Rachmanita (2015)<br>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Albert and Merunka (2013)<br>Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Hwang and Kandampully (2012)<br>Unal and Aydin (2013)<br>Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014) |
| <b>Declaration of Love</b>                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 14<br>14.1<br>14.2<br>14.3<br>14.4                                              | <b>Brand Specific Stimuli</b><br>A wonderful brand – Why?<br>Makes you feel good in anyway – How?<br>The brand is totally awesome – Why?<br>Makes you very happy by any means – How?<br>It is a pure delight – How?                                                                                                                 | Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)<br>Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)                                                                                                                                                             |
| 15<br>15.1                                                                      | <b>Relationship Duration</b><br>Long-term relationship with the brand – Why?<br>Intention to develop or sustain a long-term relationship – Why?                                                                                                                                                                                     | Ahuvia (1993, 2005)<br>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2008)<br>Brock and Zhou (2012)<br>Gummerson (1998)                                                                                                                    |
| 16.<br>16.1<br>16.2                                                             | <b>Feeling of distress on separation</b><br>Feeling distress when this brand is missing<br>Assuming if the brand or the product of the brand discontinues Expressing the feelings – Why?                                                                                                                                            | Pedeliento <i>et al.</i> (2015)                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 17.<br>17.1<br>17.2<br>17.3<br>17.4                                             | <b>Positive Emotional Connection, Brand Attachment, Affection, Passion, Love</b><br>It is an Intuitive Fit for you, based on some personal instinct or emotional connection - How?<br>Emotional Attachment with the brand - How?<br>Affectionate for the brand - How?<br>Passionate about the brand - How?<br>Love the brand - How? | Carrol and Ahuvia (2006)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006, 2010, 2013)<br>Pedeliento <i>et al.</i> (2015)                                                                                                               |
| <b>Brand Trust</b>                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 18.<br>18.1<br>18.2<br>18.3<br>18.4                                             | Know the brand<br>Believe or refuse to believe the negative-WOM about the brand – Why?<br>Trust the brand – Why?<br>Believe the negative-WOM: blame the brand or will standby for the brand – Why?<br>The brand always fulfils the promises it makes to its customers                                                               | Albert and Merunka (2013)<br>Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)<br>Belaid and Behi (2011)<br>Brock and Zhou (2012)<br>Drennan <i>et al.</i> (2015)<br>Roy (2013)                                                          |

| <b>Brand Loyalty (repurchase intentions)</b>                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 19                                                                                                      | Prefer the brand to others in the future - Why?                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Attributions towards Loved Brands in the Negative-WOM scenario</b>                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|                                                                                                         | <b>Response to any negative information about the loved brand</b> (such as friends criticising the brand, or hear any negative thing about the brand, rumours, truth, etc.)                                      | Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Park and McInnis (2006)                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 20.                                                                                                     | Reaction to negative-WOM – How?                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 20.1                                                                                                    | Respond to negative-WOM – Why and How?                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 20.2                                                                                                    | Keep quiet and ignore the information - Why                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 20.3                                                                                                    | Believe the negative-WOM and provide negative-WOM by himself/herself, as well – Why?                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Positive-WOM attributions are explored in two Behavioural Scenarios or Responses to Negative-WOM</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Refusing to believe negative-WOM out trust or forgiving the brand for any believed offenses             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Refuse to believe the Negative-WOM or turning a blind eye towards the loved-brand</b>                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Park and McInnis (2006)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Brand Forgiveness: Believe in the information but forgive the brand</b>                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Heinrich <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Donovan <i>et al.</i> (2012)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Types of WOM Generated based on the two different Responses to Negative-WOM</b>                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Positive-WOM</b> – any positive oral or written non-commercial communication about the brand         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 21.                                                                                                     | Disbelieve or refuse to believe the negative-WOM and provide positive-WOM – Why and how?<br>Believing the negative-WOM but forgive the brand and support the brand through positive-WOM – Why and how?           | Albert <i>et al.</i> (2009)<br>Batra <i>et al.</i> (2012)<br>Belaid and Behi (2011)<br>Brock and Zhou (2012)<br>Fetscherin (2014)<br>Sweeney <i>et al.</i> (2010)<br>Unal and Aydin (2013)<br>Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014)<br>Park <i>et al.</i> (2006, 2010, 2013)<br>Pitta and Franzak (2008) |
| <b>Brand Advocacy</b> – Referrals and recommending behaviour                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 22.                                                                                                     | Disbelieve or refuse to believe the negative-WOM and support the brand through Advocacy – Why and how?<br>Believing the negative-WOM but forgive the brand and support the brand through Advocacy – Why and how? | Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Kim <i>et al.</i> (2001)<br>Wallace <i>et al.</i> (2014)                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Brand Defence</b> – Defend the brand for any criticisms                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| 23.                                                                                                     | Disbelieve the negative-WOM and defend the brand against negative-WOM – Why and how?                                                                                                                             | Park <i>et al.</i> (2006)<br>Colliander and Wien (2013)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| 23.1                                                                                                    | Believe the negative-WOM but forgive the brand and defend the brand against negative-WOM – Why and how?                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |

The semi-structured guide for the laddering interview was also developed on the core recommendations of the systematic bottom-up approach, which was focused at enquiring the ‘why’ of the consumer perceptions and behaviour, which is typical to laddering interviews (Amatulli and Guido, 2011; Jüttner *et al.*, 2013; Phillips and Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds and Phillips, 2009; Wansink 2003). The interview guide was developed on the assumptions and considerations of the basic laddering technique based on the means-end theory (Gutman 1982). The post-survey interview guide involved entire pre-survey interview and quantitative survey questions with additional questions based on the laddering approach encompassing all the constructs used in the research model.

The pre-survey pilot questionnaire was only focused at understanding consumers’ feeling of love for brands and their consequent WOM behaviour, which particularly aimed at generating themes for brand defence scale. However, the aim of laddering interviews was validating the quantitative findings and adding value to the overall research. Therefore, all the post-survey interview participants were asked about all the relationship specific questions, with their why and how aspects for at least one brand from each product category i.e. cosmetics and consumer electronics.

The research sample used for face-to-face interviews are discussed next.

### 3.8.1 Research Sample – Laddering Interviews:

Based on the main objectives of the study, this study adopted sequential mixed methods research involving both surveys and interviewing, conducted in three phases. The proposed representative samples for the entire inquiry was British consumers for both quantitative and qualitative data-collection as presented in table 3.3.

This doctoral study used non-probability purposive sampling method for both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Snowball-sampling technique was used for quantitative surveys for larger pool of data (Brady *et al.*, 2012), and pre-judgmental samples were used for pre-survey and post-survey face-to-face interviews to access required information from the participants (Black, 2010).

This study used British consumers as the represented sample throughout the three phases of primary data collection. The decision to interview and survey British consumers was based on a limitation in the literature regarding the research samples in WOM, relationship marketing, and consumer-brand relationship studies (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Gronroos, 1994). British consumers constitute a mixed race and multi-national society that can offer wide generalisability to quantitative findings and can offer further insights through qualitative findings. Moreover, most research in the fields of WOM (Harrison-Walker 2001; Kozinets *et al.*, 2010), relationship marketing and consumer-brand relationships (Carrol and Ahuvia 2006; Gronroos 1994; Fournier 1998) are carried out with North American samples. Albert *et al.* (2008), suggested to investigate brand love and outcomes of brand love using samples from different cultural backgrounds as the factors are culturally grounded and can yield differing findings; therefore, investigating British consumers could help provide new insights.

In this study, judgment sampling was acquired for both pre-survey and post-survey face-to-face interviews. According to Black (2010), in judgment sampling “elements selected for the sample are chosen by the judgment of the researcher. Researchers often believe that they can obtain a representative sample by using a sound judgment, which will result in saving time and money” (p.225). Therefore, due to the limited time and resources in an academic doctoral research project, judgment sampling was deemed appropriate.

The judgement sampling helped employing a relevant sample, which has been suggested as critical in laddering interviews. According to Reynolds and Phillips (2009), “*the sample of respondents must be relevant to the research objective as the laddering methodology would not be appropriate if no attributes were meaningful or distinctive*” (p.84). Moreover, a review of research published in ‘International Marketing Review’ from 1983 to 2011 revealed that personal interviews and content analysis studies often use judgment samples (Malhotra *et al.*, 2012). Some of the latest marketing journals also used judgment sampling (Fillis, 2015), as well as the major laddering research recommends judgment sampling (Reynolds and Phillips, 2009, 2015).

Therefore, the participants were selected within the social circle of the researcher with the anticipation of accessing fruitful findings due to the confidence between the interviewees and the interviewer. Moreover, the interviewees' frankness with the interviewer also plays its role in developing a friendly research relationship and chemistry with the interviewee and results in more information (Malterud *et al.*, 2015).

Concerning the sample sizes in qualitative interviewing in social science research, there is high ambiguity, as most researchers do not suggest a specified sample size (Mason, 2010). However, due to the concept of saturation in qualitative data, there are different recommendations found in the literature, as it differs from case to case and interviewers' ability and quality of interview (Malterud, 2015; Mason, 2010). Cresswel (1998) suggested 5 to 25 interviews, and Morse (1994), recommended 6 as the least number of interviews. Malterud *et al.* (2015) suggested that when a study has been developed on existing information, the power does not lie in a larger sample in qualitative interviews to achieve saturation. Moreover, a strong and clear communication between the interviewer and the interviewee requires fewer participants to acquire enough information as compared to ambiguous dialogue (Malterude *et al.*, 2015). In this regard, a well-organised semi-structure interview guide was developed based on the recommendations of the laddering interviewing techniques (Reynolds and Phillips, 2009, 2015) to avoid any ambiguity in communication.

Moreover, the provision of smaller samples in qualitative research are twofold; firstly, qualitative research is concerned with meaning and not testing generalised hypothesis (Crouch and Mckenzie, 2006; Mason, 2010). Secondly, qualitative research is labour intensive, therefore, analysing a larger sample can be highly time consuming and often simply impractical (Mason, 2010). This doctoral study; therefore, involved 10 participants (Malterude *et. al.* 2015) for post-survey laddering interviews (Reynolds and Phillips, 2015), using judgment-sampling technique (Fillis, 2015; Malhotra *et al.*, 2012). Each interview involved questioning the participants' feelings of brand love, and consequent WOM attributions about at least one favourite product or brands each within the two main product categories used for the main surveys (Harrison-Walker, 2001; Lang 2011; Zhang *et al.*, 2010). The findings for the two product categories were acquired and reported separately, which resulted in providing parallel insights about two different types of products in complementing, validating, and comparing findings.

The qualitative data analysis methods used in this study are discussed next.

### **3.8.2 Qualitative Analysis; Face-to-Face Interviews:**

This study involved two sets of qualitative interviews involving pre-survey and post-survey semi-structured face-to-face interviews. To analyse the interview data, two data analysis techniques were employed; 1. thematic-content analysis, and 2. consumers value-maps analysis. Thematic-content analysis was adopted for this study to analyse both pre-survey and post-survey interviews' findings;

however, the consumers hierarchical value-mapping was used to analyse the response ladders identified through the post-survey laddering interviews.

The rationale for selecting thematic-content analysis is discussed next.

### **3.8.2.1 Thematic-Content Analysis:**

In this doctoral study, thematic-content analysis was used for analysing both pre-survey and post-survey face-to-face interviews conducted in the research phase-I and phase-II. Regarding the pre-survey interviews, items generated from all the three interviews were compared, and common items and/or themes were selected to generate scale items for brand defence scale. Tables 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5 in chapter 4 and table 6.6 and 6.7 in chapter 6 present the themes generated through the thematic-content analysis of the interviews' data of the pre-survey and post-survey interviews.

Thematic analysis involves the search for themes that emerge as being significant to report the phenomenon (Daly *et al.*, 1997). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), "Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p.6). The procedure involves identifying themes through "careful reading and re-reading of the data" (Rice and Ezzy, 1999, p.258). The reading and re-reading of data used to be time consuming; however, "it provides the bedrock for the rest of the analysis" (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.17). It is suggested that the researcher should immerse with the data through repeated reading in finding meanings and patterns (Rowley, 2012), which also provides basis to the initial code development (Braun and Clarke, 2006). A systematic thematic analysis with careful thematic (derived from the philosophical framework) and inductive coding (themes that emerge from participant's discussion) can provide rigor to the findings, which is not expected of qualitative research (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

The findings of the thematic-content analysis of the pre-survey interviews helped generating themes for the brand defence scale development, augmenting understanding of consumers' perceptions and behaviour towards loved brands and guided the selection of product categories for the pilot and final surveys. Regarding the post-survey interviews analysis, the content analysis was used to develop codes and ladders for the consumers' value-maps analysis to find consumers' main values that drive consumer behaviour (Phillips and Reynolds 2009, 2015).

Thematic-content analysis is considered as an extensive form of content analysis that can be described as a descriptive presentation of qualitative information (Anderson, 2007). It is a research technique used to generate valid and replicable inferences through text and speech, in a relevant useful context (Krippendorff, 2004). The method facilitates the researcher identifying themes and items emerging from an interview through provided text (Anderson, 2007; Rowley, 2012). Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006, p.4) consider the method as a, "form of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes become the categories for analysis".

Therefore, the researcher transcribed both sets of interviews manually using the interview recordings, as to carry out a thematic analysis the data is required in a written format (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In interpretative qualitative research transcription of data itself is regarded as a “key phase of analysis” (Bird, 2005, p.227). Data transcribing is an important mean of getting familiar and acquainted with your dataset (Braun and Clarke, 2006, Rowley, 2012). After developing the transcripts, the thematic-content analysis is used to identify the emergent themes and items and their association with the relevant constructs (Krippendorff, 2004; Rowley, 2012; Ryan and Bernard, 2003). Moreover, in case of semi-structured interview guides, the interview questions can provide good basis for the key themes (Rowley, 2012). Therefore, items were identified through keywords used by each participant, the number of times a specific keyword repeated, the key word’s relationship with the construct/constructs, and the content of participants’ comments on the different constructs.

Moreover, merely reading the transcripts in isolation with the audio recordings can result in missing important information that is not conveyed within words, but can be revealed through vocal expression, the pauses, and gestures. Therefore, it is deemed important to examine the details of a conversation to identify the significant features of the conversation for a fuller understanding, such as pauses, overlaps, and various non-linguistic features (i.e. laughter) (Potter and Hepburn, 2012). Therefore, the interviews should be represented “in a way that captures action” (Potter and Hepburn, 2012, p. 559). In analysing interview data, “students are usually amazed to see how much more than words can be conveyed in a transcription” (Roulston, 2016, p.75). In analysing interview data by incorporating both verbal responses, as well as the other features of a conversation can provide theoretically and methodologically coherent findings (Roulston, 2010, 2016). Table 4.3 in chapter 4 presents a worked example of how thematic-content analysis was used in this study to develop themes for the brand defence scale.

The rationale for using hierarchical value-maps analysis in this study is discussed next.

### **3.8.2.2 Consumers’ Hierarchical Value-Maps Analysis:**

In this study, laddering interviews were analysed using both thematic-content analysis in identifying themes and basic codes and value-map analysis to understand consumers’ values that drive brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards loved consumer-electronics and cosmetics brands in the incident of negative-WOM.

It is already established in the literature that consumers derive personally relevant meaning from product and/or brand elements, which reflects on their decision-making (Ilicic and Webster, 2015). The laddering interviews were conducted in this study to explore consumers’ values in providing brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards their loved brands based on the key assumption of the means-end theory that consumers’ values are of hierarchical nature (Overby *et al.*, 2004).

The laddering interviews were therefore analysed using bottom up value-mapping technique in the

attempt of graphically explaining consumers' WOM behaviour in hierarchical value-maps, also known as consumer decision maps (CDMs) (Phillips and Reynolds, 2009).

The means-end theory suggests that consumers' knowledge structures consisting of concrete brand attributes based on more abstract benefits attached to the brand that are driven by relevant consumers' values ultimately (Ilicic and Webster, 2015). As discussed above, laddering interviews has been a useful way to identify consumers' values, brand attributes, and how consumers translate these into meaningful associations and how these values finally drive consumers' decision making (Phillips and Reynolds, 2009; Gutman, 1982; Reynold and Phillips, 2009, 2015). The hierarchical value-maps graphically project these identified ladders depicting consumers' desired brand attributes and the underlying consequences and values related to those attributes (Ilicic and Webster, 2015; Phillips and Reynolds, 2009; Reynold and Phillips, 2008, 2015).

Therefore, this method directly supported the basic research model of this study that suggest consumers' different levels of WOM attributes towards their loved brands. However, the brand attributes, the relevant functional and psychosocial consequences, and the consumers' values involved in driving brand-favourable WOM, especially brand defence required exploring. Moreover, this is the first study in the consumer-brand relationships domain and WOM research that used laddering interviews and value-map analysis in an attempt of explaining consumers' values in attributing brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards the loved brands. The findings of the value-map analysis conducted in this study is presented in chapter 6.

The ethical issues and the considerations are discussed next.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations:**

The research ethics involve two main components: procedural ethics and ethics in practice (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). The procedural ethics are dealt with the ethics committees prior to conducting a research (Bell and Bryman, 2007; Jamrozik, 2004) and the practical ethics are dealt by the researcher (Johnson, 2014; Shaw, 2008).

In this study, ethics approvals for the research phase-I and phase-II were acquired from Coventry University Ethics Committee, and the ethics approval for the research phases-III was acquired from Oxford Brookes University. With regards to dealing with the ethics in research practice, throughout the research process all the conditions were complied with, as approved by the research committees.

The interview participants were provided with participants' information sheet, and formal consent was acquired in addition to the oral consent acquired in the start of each interview. However, survey questionnaire included an introduction of the research with the consent paragraph before the start of the survey questions, stating the rights of the participants. The participants for both quantitative and qualitative studies were clearly informed that they have no obligations to participate in the study, but with their free will, and on completely voluntary basis, and they could withdraw from their



participation at any time. Moreover, this study involved systematic pre-structured data collection and analysis procedures to minimise the researcher's bias in interpreting and reporting the research findings, as recommended in social sciences research (Denscombe, 2014).

### **3.10 Conclusion:**

This chapter discussed and justified the philosophical paradigm, the methodological approach, and the corresponding methods for data collection and analyses acquired in this study. It also included discussion on the selection of main product categories for scale development, scale purification and the main study. The validity and reliability measures, and ethical considerations relating to this study were also covered. This chapter also included how literature was collected and collated in developing this research and how previous research in marketing and consumers' behaviour, especially consumer-brand relationships, and WOM inform and guide the development and implementation of the research model.

The next chapter reports the findings of the research Phase-I that involved pre-survey interviews and pre-test survey in developing and refining the brand defence scale and the overall research instrument for the main surveys.

## Chapter 4

### Research Phase-I; Scale Development and Purification

#### 4.1 Aims of the Chapter:

This chapter presents the development and purification of brand defence scale. The data collection and analysis in this study were carried out in three phases as explained in the previous chapter. The first phase involved scale development and purification that entailed secondary research, semi-structured interviews, and a pre-test pilot survey for construct validity and exploratory factor analysis. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the scale development and purification procedures followed in this study. The first step of collection and collation of the existing literature to develop the research model was included in the literature review presented in chapter 2.

| Table 4.1                 |                                                                           |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |             |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|
| Overview Research Phase I |                                                                           |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |             |
| No.                       | Data Collection Methods                                                   | Data Analysis Methods                                                               | Objective /Rationale (For each method)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Relevance with the Study Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Sample Size |
| 1.                        | Secondary Data Collection<br><br>Literature Review<br><br>Existing Scales | - Literature Review<br><br>- Review of Existing Scales                              | - To explore WOM as a relationship outcome.<br>- To identify the different facets of WOM.<br>- To identify the significance of both negative and positive-WOM.<br>- To theorise the WOM outcomes of close consumer-brand relationships and how they can help vent the negative impact of negative-WOM.<br>- To identify and select the existing scales to measure the proposed research model.<br>- To generate a pool of items for brand defence scale. | - To critically analyse the literature, conceptualising and characterising WOM and eWOM, and its impact and to evaluate the importance of consumer-brand relationships particularly 'brand love' in promoting WOM.<br>- To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards and against their loved brands.<br>- To develop a conceptual model of consumers' WOM behaviour including positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved-brands in a negative-WOM scenario.<br>- To conceptualise the levels and types of consumers' WOM behaviour as a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM attributions. | N/A         |
| 2.                        | Pre-Survey<br>Face-to-Face Pilot Interviews                               | Thematic and Content Analysis                                                       | - To identify scale items for brand defence scale development.<br>- To identify the product category for pilot study and main study                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | - To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards and against their loved brands.<br>- To develop a conceptual model of consumers' WOM behaviour including positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved-brands in a negative-WOM scenario.<br>- To create and empirically validate a measurement scale for brand defence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | 3           |
| 3                         | Pre-test Survey Pilot Study                                               | - Content Validity Ratio<br>- Exploratory Factor Analysis<br>- Reliability analysis | - To test and refine the survey instrument.<br>- To identify the underlying factors (constructs) capturing each scale item.<br>- To assess the reliability of the developed scale.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | - To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards and against their loved brands.<br>- To create and empirically validate a measurement scale for brand defence                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | 128         |

The next section presents the findings of the pre-survey pilot interviews.

#### 4.2 Pre-Survey Face-to-Face Interview:

This study adopted a semi-structured interview method for this study owing to its flexible approach, which allowed new questions or information emerging during the interviews to develop themes and facilitated the researcher to have control over the interview at the same time. Based on Fournier (1998) and Sweeney and Chew (2000), three British female consumers were interviewed to explore the different themes, and patterns of WOM behaviour in the context of brand love. The demographics' profile of the interviewees is presented in table 4.2. Each interviewee was requested for one hour's appointment, however two interviews took longer than one hour as presented in table 4.2. The justification of using pre-survey face-to-face interviews, the sampling, and analysis procedures has been provided in chapter 3. The basic purpose of the interviews was to develop the brand defence scale, and to select the product categories for the pilot study and the main surveys. Figure 4.2 provides an overview of the complete pre-survey interviews process.

| Table 4.2                                              |        |     |                  |                   |             |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------|-----|------------------|-------------------|-------------|
| Post-survey Laddering Interviews Participants' Profile |        |     |                  |                   |             |
|                                                        | Gender | Age | Interview length | Ethnicity         | Nationality |
| Interviewee-1                                          | Female | 23  | 80 mins          | White English     | British     |
| Interviewee-2                                          | Female | 34  | 71 mins          | Pakistani British | British     |
| Interviewee-3                                          | Female | 42  | 52 mins          | White European    | British     |

Regarding brand defence scale items, it was not possible to explore them in isolation with the other consumer-brand relationships' constructs, particularly brand love, as they provide potential intent to consumers' positive-WOM behaviour, particularly brand advocacy and brand defence. Therefore, the interview findings were organised and presented under different sections for coherence and understanding.

The researcher transcribed the interviews manually using the interview recordings for thematic-content analysis to identify the emergent themes and items from the interviews and their association with the relevant constructs in the fulfilment of the basic research objectives. Therefore, to prioritise important information, the transcribed interviews were read, as well as listened to reflect upon and judge that what type of information required reporting.

The next step followed in this study was classifying and coding the interview data. With regards to the data coding, semi-structured interview guide and the emergent themes depicted through thematic-content analysis were used as the basis for assigning the codes to the interview data. Therefore, an interview guide was developed based on the existing literature to explore the intensity and willingness of the interviewees' WOM attributions towards their loved brands. The interview guide carefully included items to cover all aspects and constructs that were relevant to this research (see table 3.5 in chapter 3).

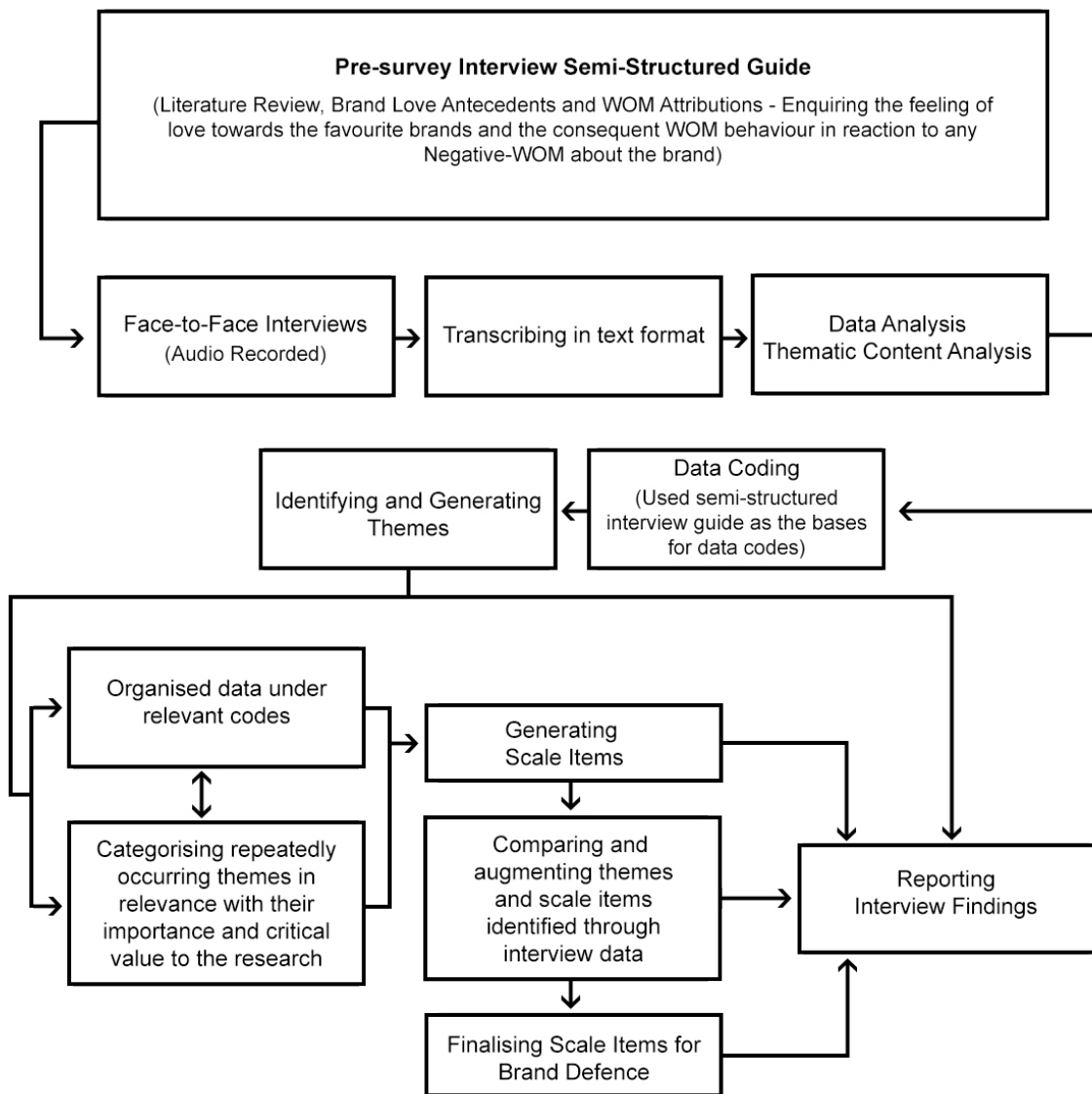


**Figure 4.2: Scale Items Identification and Development Process through Pre-Survey Face-to-Face Interviews**

The themes and sub themes generated in the interview responses and, the participants' vocal expressions about a certain theme or incident played a key role in assigning codes. The key themes depicted in the interview data were clearly divided in three distinct groups,

1. *The general motivations leading to consumer-brand relationships,*
2. *The themes, which reflected specific consumer-brand relationships construct, such as, brand love, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness, and*
3. *The consumers' WOM behavioural attributions towards the concerning/loved brands.*

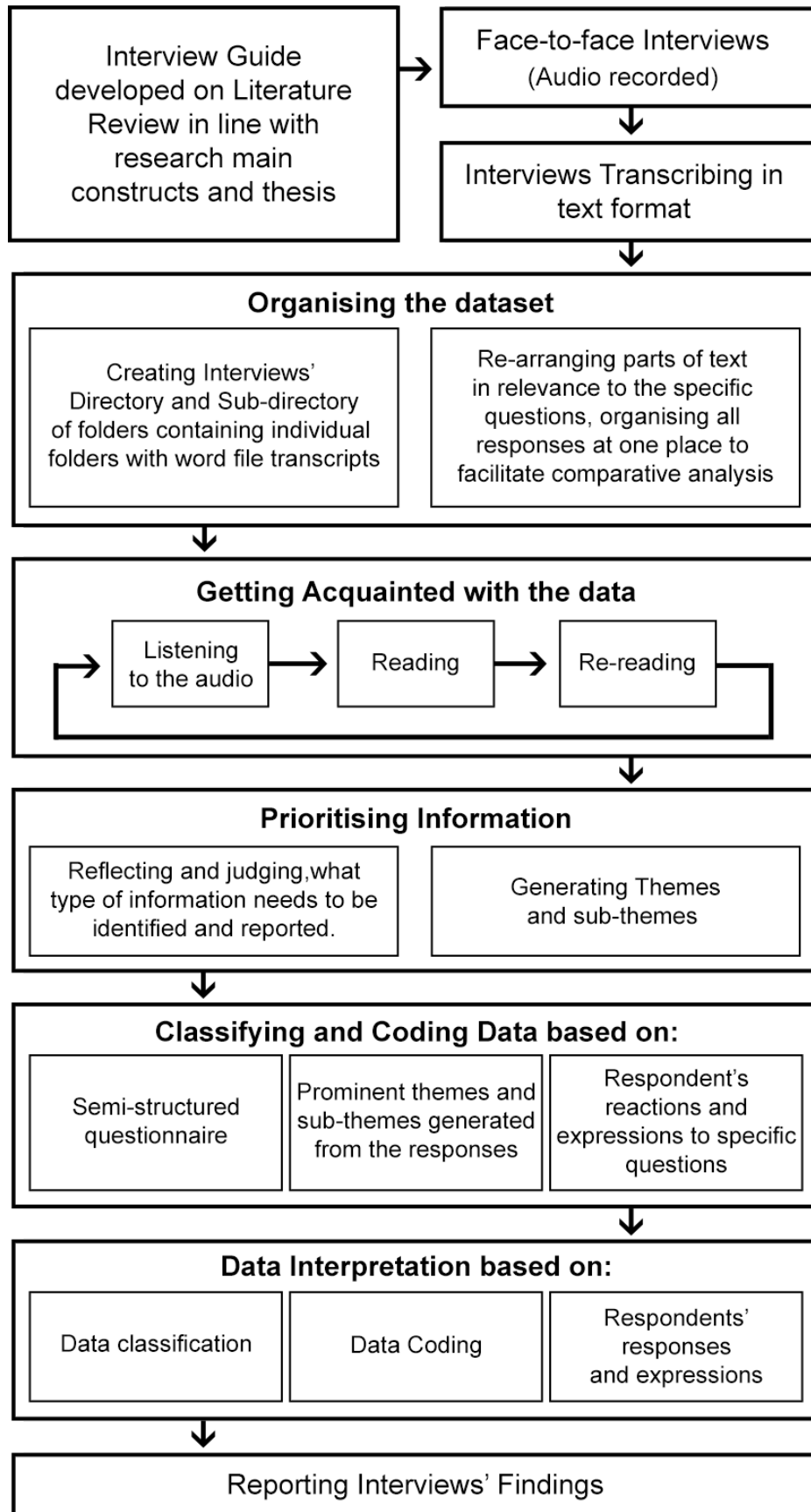


**Figure 4.3 Pre-Survey Interviews Data Analysis Procedure using Thematic-Content Analysis**

Followed by the sub-groups involving the specific constructs used in this study; brand love, brand trust, brand forgiveness, brand loyalty, WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. This division of the key themes was also apparent in the findings of the post-survey interviews, which also provided clear basis for constructing consumers' hierarchical value-maps, as presented in chapter 6. The main themes and their corresponding sub-themes identified in the pre-survey pilot interviews are presented and discussed in sections 4.2.1, and 4.2.2.

| Table 4.3                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |               |                 |                                                                                       |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Themes Identification for the Scale Items – Example of the Analytical Process |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |           |               |                 |                                                                                       |
| Construct                                                                     | Verbatim                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Frequency | Theme Valence | Theme Intensity | Theme Description                                                                     |
| Brand defence                                                                 | I think I am right, and I would like to defend that position that I hold                                                                                                                                                          | 1         | Positive      | Strong          | Brand defence based on self-threat                                                    |
|                                                                               | I would probably disbelieve it on the spot if someone says and I would try to defend it                                                                                                                                           | 1         | Positive      | Moderate        | Defence based on trust                                                                |
|                                                                               | I would also try to look up what they have said and try to find out why did they say that and try and see and try and find further points to disapprove                                                                           | 1         | Positive      | Moderate        | Defence based on rationality and sense of justice                                     |
|                                                                               | I wanted to defend ... I wasn't happy with the idea and I remember telling my mum that actually these people are just defaming ... for no reason when actually the product is great.                                              | 1         | Positive      | Strong          | Defence based on trust                                                                |
|                                                                               | I wouldn't ignore the information or keep quiet, I think I would quiet actively want to defend the brand itself                                                                                                                   | 1         | Positive      | Strong          | Active defence                                                                        |
|                                                                               | I would probably try to sell the positive points of it and try to brush away the perceived negatives about it.                                                                                                                    | 1         | Positive      | Strong          | Counter fighting the negative information                                             |
|                                                                               | I don't disbelieve the negative information; I don't think the negatives are enough to overlook the positives... and I think ... is one of those products whose positives are much greater than any of the negatives that it has. | 1         | Positive      | Strong          | Defence based on rationality, sense of justice, weighing the positives and negatives. |
|                                                                               | Because obviously to me ... is the greatest thing in the world and I would want other people to think that as well.                                                                                                               | 1         | Positive      | Strong          | Defence based on Personal perception and relationship with the brand                  |
|                                                                               | I will defend...                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 5         | Positive      | Strong          |                                                                                       |
|                                                                               | I tried to defend...                                                                                                                                                                                                              | 1         | Positive      | Moderate        |                                                                                       |

The interpretation of the data was based on the data codes assigned using the semi-structured interviews questions, as well as the richness of responses. The main themes and sub-themes were identified through keywords and/or phrases used by each participant, the number of times a specific keyword/phrase repeated, the theme's valence and/or intensity, the keyword's relationship with the constructs, and the content of participants' expressions and comments on the different constructs. Items generated from all the three interviews were compared, and common items or themes were selected to benefit for the scale development. The different themes were generated based on common participants' comments that fall into similar meanings, table 4.2 presents an example of the analytical process used in this study to identify the themes for the scale items.

The proceeding two sections discusses the pre-survey findings concerning consumer-brand relationships and the three consequent WOM behaviour (positive-WOM, brand advocacy, brand defence) separately for coherence.

#### **4.2.1 Consumer Responses to Consumer-Brand Relationships:**

The semi-structured interviews involved many questions focused on consumer-brand relationships, their inclinations, their feelings, emotions, attitudes, intensity, and their levels of attachment, or love for the brands. The consumer-brand relationship constructs explored in this research involved brand love, brand loyalty, brand trust, and brand forgiveness. The findings of the interviews suggested that we can treat loyalty, trust, and forgiveness as consumer-brand relationship constructs, as well as the attributions or outcomes of close consumer-brand relationships. It was observed that in some cases brand loyalty and brand trust serve as an antecedent of consumer-brand relationships, and in some instances the love of the brand constitutes the sense of loyalty and trust for the brand. However, forgiveness was observed as an outcome of consumer-brand relationships in most scenarios.

The pre-survey interviews revealed that brand love is relevantly different in intensity and core feeling from that of love for humans, but humans do carry a feeling of love for items and brands like those of humans if not the same. The participants did not consider all close relations they have with brands as brand love but agreed that those brands are an indispensable part of their lives, such as some food brands like packaged breads and vegetables, children, and fashion clothing brands. The qualitative interview findings helped generate several themes that helped understand the different aspects and motivations of consumer-brand relationships and their consequent brand-favourable WOM behaviour. The main themes are depicted in tables 4.3 and 4.4.

The findings suggested that a brand and/or product attributes add to the acceptance and use of that product or brand. Moreover, most of the consumer-brand relationships depend on the consumers' personal experience, usability, and quality of the products that whether a brand/product is giving the desired results, how helpful the product is for the user, its reliability, availability, and/or the level and ease of the service provided by the brand. Furthermore, the branding elements also mattered, such as, the name, promotion, and or placement of a product. The responses based on a brand and/or product attributes were recorded as follows:

*"...I like ...because it's reliable, it's quite popular and it's given me results... Because every time I have messed up or every time something has happened to my phone, I can ring up the people that are relevant and they'll always help me... I know it's given me the results, so I definitely do be inclined to use it"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

It was revealed from the interview findings that closer consumer-brand relationships are built with brands that are used in regular day-to-day routines. One of the responses to the question about liking some specific brands was,

*"I have a few that I do like a lot and they are used very frequently on a regular basis actually..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

Another comment also reinforced the importance of regular use of a product in forming close consumer-brand connections as,

*"it forms a major part of my life, ...obviously, you eat every day, so it is definitely something that's always on my mind..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

The interviewee further expressed her thoughts as,

*"... it has definitely become a part of who I am, and it has become part of my daily routine... so definitely its always there as part of my life..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

Interviews also revealed that some brands become a habitual part of consumers' life, such as mobile phones, some food brands, or some cold drinks that you cannot resist. And it adds an eternal bonding to the relationship that foster reliance, and dependability on the brand. It not only builds emotional attachment, but also encourages consumers to become loyal to the brand. Based on the dependability of consumers on a brand and getting used to it, a participant responded as follows:

*"...It's going to be difficult for me to go back to any other phone now, just because I am so used to it now, it's been a huge part, I am definitely emotionally attached to my... and it has definitely become a part of who I am and it has become part of my daily routine"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

This everyday encounter with a product makes a brand an essential part of life. All the above quoted comments referred to different brands and/or products, but each comment highlighted the day-to-day dependability and reliance on the brand. Furthermore, apart from the everyday routine, long-term relationship with a product also strengthens consumer-brand relationships, as participants revealed to be more enthusiastic and more attached to brands that they were using for a long time. The responses revealed that it was hard for participants switching from brands that they used for years; they had become used to and developed a sense of loyalty with those brands. This sense of long-term relationship was revealed to be developed either through personal use, or through a close person using that product or brand, such as,

*"...I have had quite a longish relationship with it and having seen my brothers and dad with it, it's kind of grown on me and I want to keep that alive ...I mean 17-18 to now 23 so it's a historical relationship that I have kind of experienced and I have fallen in love with and I have stayed with and I am still happy with it... I was exposed to it at a younger age and ever since than my mum would continue taking me there... I developed an interest for it a bit more and I saw that it changed over the years and it was trendier... I can see myself continue using this brand and the products"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

The above-mentioned responses by interviewee-1 suggested two factors promoting loyalty, the long-term relationship, and continuous improvement of the brand over time. It refers to the mutuality of the relationship, where consumers' expectations with the brand also exist. The responses further revealed that the ability of brands in providing quality, usability, availability, and reliability play critical role in forming close consumer-brand relationships, such as attachment, affection, and love for brands. The importance of the quality, usability, and availability of a brand was well explained through the following response,

*"...It's got good quality products ...a range of sizes and things and its always available... I know I can turn to... for anything because it's got good quality products... I think it's the quality... I know*



*that what it says on the box is what it actually has in the product and I like reliability in a brand... its reliable, it's quite popular and it's given me results..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

| Table 4.4                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main Relationship Motivations Themes Generated through Face-to-Face Interviews |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Product Attributes:</b>                                                     | Usability<br>Reliability<br>Quality<br>Image<br>Helpfulness<br>Branding<br>Customer Service<br>Results from the product                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Social Influences:</b>                                                      | Kinship<br>Social connectivity<br>Means of social connectivity<br>Impression<br>Image                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Personal Preferences:</b>                                                   | Self-identity<br>Personality<br>Personal Experience<br>Familiarity with the brand<br>Habitual relationship<br>Becoming used to something<br>Dependability<br>Self-confidence that I am doing it right<br>Happiness<br>Reliance on the product<br>Lifestyle |
| <b>Relationship Length and Rotation:</b>                                       | Long-term relationship<br>Intentions of having long-term relationship<br>Everyday encounter<br>Part of day-to-day routine                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Distress on separation</b>                                                  | Assumptions if the product discontinues<br>Need for substitute                                                                                                                                                                                             |

Moreover, the findings further revealed that the variety of use offered by a product/brand also play an important part in providing means of dependability on the product or brand leading to dependable relationships. Such dependability is apparent from the following responses,

*"...I found that it was quite useable, easy to use ...got a lot of applications on it that I can use for my medical studies, ...games, ...text books, ...so, it has very wide application on it... I can use, ...communicate with my friends, ...video talking, ...music, ...the fact that it's got so many features on it that I can use, ...take pictures, ...take videos, ...in my hand bag the only thing I would have is my phone because its reliable..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

Furthermore, the love for brands also emanate from social influences, such as kinship. Kinship refers to a close family member or friend using a product or brand, and it is appreciated in the literature as one of the means of developing consumer-brand relationships (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006). The interview responses also depicted that kinship used to induce acceptability, familiarity, liking, and even love for the brand. It is apparent from the following responses,

*"My mother is very close to the brand; she was the one that introduced me to... I found that whenever my mum loves someone or something I automatically love that thing because obviously that thing is making my mum happy... she is always buying things from there, so I (definitely) have a strong passion for it... I know that my mother loves it; therefore, I have to automatically love it as well"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

*"...My first encounter was through my brothers ...I wanted to have a look at it myself... To be honest, I think partly why I use ...over the other phones, ...again because a lot of my family uses it, my friends use it, ... think that this is the best basically because other people are using it. I suppose I haven't done a lot of research into, but what? When I did use it, I did like it... when I was younger and ever since then I liked that feeling of being on the same level as my brothers and my*

*dad and this is the kind of technology that they use, and I am happy and its continued because they have continued with ...and I have continued with it...*" (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

*"My husband has been using it since its first model was launched, ...I got too used to see him using it, praising its functions and usability, technical innovations, and advances that when I needed to change my phone, I didn't give a second thought and just bought..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-3, March 18, 2013).

In addition to kinship, some other social influences also revealed to affect or promote consumer-brand relationships, such as, social interactions, personal image, personality, impression, and self-identity, as depicted in table 4.3. Personal preferences involved personal choices, personality, self-identity, brand experience, familiarity with the brand, habitual relationships, becoming used to something, dependability, self-confidence that I am doing it right, feeling happiness, relying on a product, and/or adopting something as your lifestyle. The social preferences involve how someone wants to portray him/herself socially concerning their image or impression he/she wants to give, and sometimes some brands and/or products of some brands help them build that image or impression. Both personal and social preferences were deemed important in the interview responses. The interview responses of each interviewee are presented separately in quotes for coherence and understanding that how each participant responded to certain factors. The personal consumer preferences are recorded as follows:

*"...I am very much solely depending upon... Because I love it, ...I kind of depend on it really... I knew that I could rely on it... I have had such a good experience ...I want to continue with my... so yeah, definitely... I feel really high tech now..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

*"I tried a few and it was only ... that suited me really well out of the products, the moisturiser, the facewash everything. And since then I haven't yet had any skin problems so far (touchwood) so that's why, it has a very special place in my life... I do think that I am getting used to... and... and... as well, but the others I think I can change if I have to... I think I do feel emotionally connected to it, and I think that's one of the reasons why I put it on the top of my list when you asked me to grade it because it is quiet personal, I don't know if it's because it's a personal use that something is obviously going on my skin or my eyes, or whatever and probably portrays me as a person, or who I am now, but I think yes it does"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-2, March 13, 2013).

The interviews revealed that how social preferences play their part in forming consumer-brand bonds, such as:

*"...it definitely adds to that image, because I want to be the person that people look at and say Wow! ...So, it definitely adds to my image, or desired image that I want"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

*"I don't know if it's because, it's a thing that everyone has... I think it's a status thing as well now, for example before... I used to have an MP3 player which started to look a little bit odd in the gym, where everyone else had either the..., or the... and I started to feel like that okay the MP3 player shouldn't exist anymore, so It was a bit of pressure"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-2, March 13, 2013).

*"Of course, when we survive in a social setting, we have to keep up a social image, a self-identity, and social status that we carry, and of course... it adds to the full package"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-3, March 18, 2013).

Furthermore, these social influences revealed as significant in enhancing importance of brands/products, which facilitate social image and connectivity . All the three pre-survey interview responses revealed to have a personal mobile phone brand, as one of the most loved brands and

the reason provided was its facilitation in connectivity with friends and family. Consumers believe their mobile phones as being part of themselves as their mobile phones, as a product facilitated in many ways within their social life. The widespread of the Internet and social media sites has enhanced sociability and personal desires of being socially connected. This factor is observable through the following responses:

*“...My phone is a part of who I am, and that’s because it obviously keeps me in touch with people that I love... I am able to keep in contact with them throughout... I am always thinking about my phone. I wonder who has messaged me now or I wonder what email I have got now, so definitely its always there as part of my life, and you know, everything is part of it”* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

*“I feel I am very connected to everybody, and there are lots of other things work wise that I can do as well. So, it does give me a very satisfactory feeling when I am using these things”* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-2, March 13, 2013).

*“I am not a social freak, but it helps me connect to the ones I love, and the apps facilitating free calling and accessibility to long distant family members... makes it more valuable for me”* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-3, March 18, 2013).

These responses reflected again that it is the usefulness and viability of a product that fosters a consumer’s relationship with a brand. The interview findings; therefore, suggested the existence and prevalence of close consumer-brand relationships that lead brand benefitting behaviour, where we found loyalty, trust, forgiveness, and different intensities of WOM attributions towards the loved brands. The main relationship themes generated from the interviews are presented in table 4.4.

| <b>Table 4.4</b>                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Main Relationship Themes Depicted through Face-to-Face Interviews</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Brand love Attachment</b>                                             | I love it<br>I do have love and a special place for it in my life<br>I have experienced, and I have fallen in love with, and I have stayed with and I am still happy with it.<br>There is a level of attachment for it.<br>I became attached to it<br>I am (definitely) emotionally attached to ...<br>I do feel affection for<br>I have loved it now<br>There is a sense of affection<br>I feel affection with this brand |
| <b>Brand loyalty</b>                                                     | I am just like I am going to go for the... products and I don't really look at anything else.<br>I can see myself continue using this brand<br>You know how like an addiction, it's just that I have always had it<br>I think that's a long term and ever since ... I am quite happy to continue.                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Brand trust</b>                                                       | I know the brand<br>Its reliable<br>I personally believe it<br>Definite confidence and definite trust in this<br>I know that it's so good for me<br>I trust it enough for me to continue drinking it.<br>I (definitely) trust it now<br>I (definitely) have confidence<br>I trust ... I have had lots of good experiences with it.<br>I know I can turn to... for anything because it's got good quality.                  |
| <b>Brand forgiveness</b>                                                 | Yes, I would forgive... because obviously, I said I do love... and if I loved a human being, I would have a kind of level of forgiveness for them<br>I forgive it<br>If my mum made a mistake, I would be quite happy to just forgive her mistake and just forget it and move on, taking that everyone can make mistakes.                                                                                                  |

All the relationship items were generated through the existing literature as depicted in the interview guide in table 3.5 in chapter 3, and most items were supported and elaborated by the interview participants. However, one of the brand love’s indicators ‘meaning to life’ (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol

and Ahuvia, 2006) was not fully supported in the pre-survey interviews. The responses towards the question about meaning to life from interviewee-1 and interviewee-3 are presented as follows:

*"I mean wouldn't go as far as to say that it gives meaning to my life, but I think it forms a basic foundation to my life, because obviously meaning to my life is a bigger thing for me, my family, my religion, but in terms of giving a basic foundation to who I am... I suppose, meaning to my life, not really no, ..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-3, March 18, 2013).

*"Hmmm, No, I can't say if it gives meaning to my life, it is a small canvas and meaning to my life is at large, a material can't bring that meaning to my life, of course not"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-3, March 18, 2013).

Regarding the brand-favourable WOM outcomes of brand love, the next section discusses in detail that how consumers provide positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards their loved brands.

#### **4.2.2 Consumer Responses to Positive-WOM, Advocacy, and Defence:**

The pre-survey interview findings revealed very important and interesting insights to consumers' willingness to attribute WOM, in cases of close consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love. The findings are consistent with the literature, such as, Carrol and Ahuvia (2006), Batra *et al.* (2012), Albert *et al.* (2008, 2009), Ismail and Spinelli (2012) that when consumers love a brand, or feel some brand connection, or attachment towards that brand, they attribute positive-WOM towards that brand. The findings suggested that WOM intensities vary with the levels of consumer's relatedness with a brand, the closer the consumer-brand relationships, the higher, and more positive are the WOM attributions. There are several interesting themes generated with regards to the different intensities of WOM, such as, positive-WOM, advocacy, and brand defence as presented in table 4.5. The brand-favourable WOM behaviour found to be positively related to consumer-brand relationships, stronger relationships revealed higher willingness of consumers to generate positive-WOM for the brand.

The interviews' findings were twofold with regards to believing the negative information about a loved brand. A mixed response was found to this question; two interviewees portrayed that they will not believe any negative information about their loved brand, but the first interviewee gave a very interesting answer. While talking about a loved brand, she said,

*"I don't disbelieve the negatives, but I don't think that the negatives are enough to overcome the positives ..."* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

Interviewee-1 (March 10, 2013) referred to humans and argued that if no human is perfect, then how should we expect the brands to be perfect. She took a stance that even if she believed the negative information, she would defend her loved brand. Thereby, the findings suggested that consumers who carry a feeling of love for certain brands either refuse to believe any negative information about the brand, or even if believe the negative information, they rationalise the information with the positives of the brands, and still defend their loved brand. This finding is consistent with Heinrich *et al.* (2012) observations that consumers put a blind eye on the mistakes of their loved brands and forgive the loved brand for any wrong doings.

Moreover, the most important finding of this doctoral study overall, and the pre-survey interviews is that consumers offer brand defence to their loved brands against negative-WOM. The interview findings revealed that, in case of criticism about the loved brand, consumers bring in counter arguments in the favour of the loved brand.

The following response demonstrated strong brand defence behaviour, *... it has its positives to it... I would quite actively want to defend the brand... I probably try to sell the positives points of it.*” She further added, *“...and try to kind of brush away the perceived negatives about it”* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013). Another comment was also consistent with the above thought, she said, *“I’ll try to sell the benefits of...”* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013). Similarly, Interviewee-2 expressed her feelings in this regard as, *“No, I don’t think I will ignore it, unless I experience the negative things myself, I wouldn’t believe in them...”* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-2, March 13, 2013).

| Table 4.5                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main WOM Themes Depicted through Face-to-Face Interviews |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Positive-WOM</b>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...products are tasty</li> <li>...I like the quality</li> <li>...it helps</li> <li>...great quality</li> <li>...value for money</li> <li>...its reliable</li> <li>...easy to use</li> <li>...its good</li> <li>...try spreading positive word.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Brand Advocacy</b>                                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>...try to advocate the positive sides of it because I think what I am doing is right</li> <li>...Its reliable... I (definitely) recommend</li> <li>...try to promote it with other people that actually yeah, it's a good phone and it's probably going to help you with other aspects of your</li> <li>...like to promote it because I personally believe it, it's really good and it might have some negatives, but the positives are far more.</li> <li>...still recommend the brand yeah, even though it might be some negatives in it.</li> <li>...try to promote the fact that this is such a good brand.</li> <li>...try to advocate the positive sides of it</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>Brand Defence</b>                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I want to defend...</li> <li>...I would like to defend that position that I hold.</li> <li>I mean I would (probably) disbelieve it... try to defend it</li> <li>I would also try to look up what they have said... and find further points to disapprove</li> <li>I wanted to defend...</li> <li>I wouldn't ignore the information... I would quiet actively want to defend the brand</li> <li>I would (probably) try to sell the positive points... and try to brush away the perceived negatives about it.</li> <li>Obviously to me... is the greatest thing in the world... I would want other people to think that as well.</li> <li>I don't disbelieve the negative information; I don't think the negatives are enough to overlook the positives... and I think... is one of those products whose positives are much greater than any of the negatives.</li> <li>I will try to sell the benefits of...</li> </ul> |

The most important WOM themes identified through literature and personal wisdom supported through these interviews were the consumer behavioural responses to the negative information about their loved brands that provided strength to the initial conceptualisation of brand defence. The consumers' brand defence behaviour was conceptualised as consumers' 'inclination to defend their loved brand for any mistakes or wrong doings, or any rumours or criticisms', which is also consistent with Donovan *et al.* (2012), Park *et al.* (2006), and Park and McInnis (2006).

The consumer-brand relationships literature emanated from the social psychology literature on attachment (Bowlby, 1979) supports the idea that consumers tend to defend brands in close Consumer-brand relationships (Lisjack *et al.*, 2012; Park and McInnis, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006). However, brand defence has not been explored and measured in the branding or consumer-brand relationships context.

A limited research suggested that WOM (Colliander and Wien, 1996) and brand advocacy (Bendapudi and Berry, 1996) may include defence behaviour and rebuttals (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015), but brand defence has never been explored in the context of consumer-brand relationships research, or as an independent WOM behaviour. The findings from the interviews proposed that consumers do not defend, advocate, or recommend every brand they feel related to, but the level of WOM attributions varies with the intensity of love they feel for the brand, and the type of product category they are in love with, and the nature of negative-WOM. Therefore, the interviews' findings suggested clear clues to develop and refine brand defence themes and offered insights to the females' perceptions towards the brands they feel emotionally attached or close.

Interviewee-2 also expressed her feeling for defending a brand in such words:

*"... I would actually try to protect it by standing against the rumours"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-2, March 13, 2013).

And, interviewee-3 reflected on her probable attitude towards any negative-WOM or criticism about her loved brand as:

*"I would take such criticisms as personal, as its being a loved one being criticised, and for nothing, why? It would be a question on my own selection and preference of the brand, I will not let it go like this, I will take it seriously and go beyond just saying the positives but will fight for my brand, ...offer some counter arguments as I know my brand. It's me who has experienced it first hand, so I won't let anyone get away with just believing or forwarding a nonsense rumour"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-3, March 18, 2013).

One more interesting thing revealed from the interviews was the intensity of positive-WOM, which revealed to differ based on the nature of the product category, regardless of the consumer's love for that brand. An interesting example came up with the case of Pepsi Max. One of the interviewees, claimed to have a strong feeling of love and attachment to Pepsi Max, and she felt distressed on its absence. She also claimed that she cannot live without it, but she refused to offer any brand advocacy or defence to the brand, because the product is unhealthy. However, her love and urge for the brand was apparent from the following quote, but she also reasoned her reluctance in defending it:

*"I wouldn't regularly defend it because I think I know that science tells me that it's not good for me. So, I would (probably) accept people's point of view but that wouldn't really stop me for liking it. There is a part of me for some reason I know that it's not good for me, but I would just continue doing it because I like it so much and I haven't seen the problem with it. You can even link it for like smokers, you know how smokers smoke, they know that it's not good for them, because of the public and they will never ever turn around and say that actually what you are saying is wrong, smoking is actually good for me, I think that I am like that. Because they know smoking is not good, but it hasn't affected them negatively they will carry on doing it so I suppose that's how I think of Pepsi max, I would accept peoples' negative comments about it, but I wouldn't stop the way that I continue my relationship with Pepsi max. I will just continue with it because it has been good with*

me so far. I probably wouldn't turn around and say you are wrong, I would probably just accept it and just continue doing what I am doing with it" (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

Even then she was not willing to believe or accept any baseless blame, in such a case she might also defend the brand, such as,

*"I will believe the negative information, but I will check, if they say something completely ridiculous then I would probably try to challenge them. If they suddenly say that it's going to cause you cancer in two days, I would (definitely) challenge that because that's ridiculous, but if they start saying things that are a bit more believable, like it might not be good for your teeth because of the carbon dioxide or whatever in it. I would more readily believe that, and I would keep quiet, and (maybe) just say yes you are (probably) right. But if there is something completely ridiculous that I know it's not true, then I would (probably) defend it"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

Here, the interviewee was somehow ready to defend the brand against any pointless criticism, but still refused to recommend it, as she felt it threatening for her personal image.

*"I don't particularly go around promoting Pepsi Max because again like I said I don't think it's the image that I want to give of myself because it's not really that healthy as a fizzy drink I think"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

And, it was also a decision made on her conscience, which made her avoid recommending something that is not good for one's health,

*"... because I know it's not that good for you, I would probably not promote it that positively all the time"* (Pre-Survey Interviewee-1, March 10, 2013).

| Table 4.6                                                                    |                                                                                                            |                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Brand Defence Scale items refined and developed from Face-to-Face Interviews |                                                                                                            |                         |
| No.                                                                          | Items                                                                                                      | Source                  |
| 1                                                                            | I will take their criticism as personally threatening and will refuse to believe the negative information. | Face-to-Face Interviews |
| 2                                                                            | I will take their criticism as personally threatening and will argue for my brand.                         |                         |
| 3                                                                            | I will try to protect my brand against criticism                                                           |                         |
| 4                                                                            | I will refer to the strong points of my brand                                                              |                         |
| 5                                                                            | I will convince them on the strong points of my brand                                                      |                         |
| 6                                                                            | I will protect my brand against any criticism                                                              |                         |
| 7                                                                            | I will not let people criticise my brand                                                                   |                         |
| 8                                                                            | I will make people realise that my brand has better features                                               |                         |
| 9                                                                            | I will defend my brand                                                                                     |                         |

Therefore, the findings also revealed that there are cases where consumers can even defend a brand based on specific reasons, but avoid recommending those brands, based on the knowledge or perception about the brand being harmful or unhealthy. Overall, this example suggests that brand defence behaviour might not prevail in the cases of strong love with the brand/product, when a consumer is not convinced of the positive benefits of that product/brand. Therefore, it became more important to decide on the appropriate product categories, to test consumers' WOM attributions towards their loved brand. The interview findings helped develop and refine the brand defence themes initiated based on the existing consumer-brand relationships literature. The brand defence scale developed for this study based on existing literature, personal astute, and the pre-survey face-to-face interviews is presented in table 4.6.

The product categories for the pre-test and main surveys were also selected using the pre-survey interview responses and the existing consumer-brand relationships literature, which is discussed next.

#### 4.2.3 Product Category for the Pre-test and Final Surveys:

The pre-survey interviews' were also used to decide on the product categories for the pre-test and final surveys. The idea was to select a product category based on both secondary and primary findings for an appropriate decision. With this regard, initially the existing literature was explored in the field and identified a few product categories used in consumer-brand relationships research, such as, mobile phones, and cars (Bruhn *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012), packaged goods (Carol and Ahuvia, 2006), consumer-electronics (Batra *et al.*, 2012), and fashion brands (Ismail, and Spinelli, 2012). Moreover, Albert *et al.* (2008) had also suggested many product categories that they found strongly associated to the feeling of love that included cars, shoes, lingerie, watches, food items, perfumes and personal care, cigarettes, music, and furniture.

The pre-survey interview responses also depicted some similar product categories as of the existing literature. The brands and product categories cited in the interviews are presented in table 4.7. To make an informed decision the participants were asked to categorise their favourite brands in form of a hierarchy based on their liking, such as most liked or loved on the top and then second, third, fourth, and/or fifth. Enlisting all the brands cited in the interviews in a hierarchical manner in a tabular form also helped generating a pool to choose the most appropriate product categories for the pre-test and the two main surveys.

| Table 4.7                                         |                                            |                                               |                          |                          |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Favourite Brands cited in Face-to-Face Interviews |                                            |                                               |                          |                          |
|                                                   | Favourite, Loved, or Liked Brands/Products | Interviewee-1                                 | Interviewee-2            | Interviewee-3            |
| 1.                                                | <b>Most Favourite</b>                      | Weight Watchers, food, and healthy lifestyle. | Channel cosmetics        | Apple iPhone, Mac Laptop |
| 2.                                                | <b>Second</b>                              | Pepsi Max                                     | Apple iPhone, iPod, iPad | BMW for cars             |
| 3.                                                | <b>Third</b>                               | Apple iPhone                                  | Next for clothing        | E-45 Cream and Lotion    |
| 4.                                                | <b>Fourth</b>                              | Mac makeup                                    | Kellog's                 | Next for clothing        |
| 5.                                                | <b>Fifth</b>                               | Dorothy Perkins for clothing                  | Mulberry for handbags    |                          |
| 6.                                                | <b>Sixth</b>                               | Next clothing                                 |                          |                          |

All the three interviewees were asked to reflect on their four to five most favourite brands to facilitate comparisons of their behaviour towards the different brands based on their connection, or association with the brand. The findings revealed that participants mostly loved a brand based on some specific product of that brand, they are involved with. Association with a certain product makes consumers love a brand overall, further highlighted the importance of selecting appropriate product categories for the exploration. The list of participants' favourite brands and/or products as depicted in table 4.7 revealed that each participant considered their mobile phone brand as one of the favourites, then cosmetic, and clothing brands were also common in the three participants. Therefore, mobile phone, cosmetics and clothing turned out to be the common product categories in all responses. Two participants indicated other consumer electronic devices, such as, tablet and



laptop, as well as food brands. However, handbags and cars were mentioned by only one participant each.

Moreover, interview findings also suggested some common categories in relevance to consumer-brand relationships literature, particularly brand love. Therefore, for pre-test surveys mobile phones were considered, as mobile phone is claimed as one of the most liked product categories by all the three participants. Moreover, all the three participants claimed that they loved their mobile phone brand, and they were ready to spend their resources for the brand and were inclined to provide positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence in response to any negative criticism about their mobile phone brand. It was also consistent with the brand love literature as Bruhn *et al.* (2012) had used mobile phones for their inquiry. Therefore, mobile phone was decided as the main product category for the pre-test survey.

Concerning the product categories for the two main surveys, the most cited product categories in the pre-survey face-to-face interviews were mobile phones, consumer-electronics, cosmetics, and fashion clothing, followed by food items, and finally one respondent mentioned cars, and one mentioned handbags. This decision was accompanied by the increasing research interest in cosmetics within brand management research (Aoun and Tournois, 2015; Azar *et al.*, 2018; Kim and Lee, 2011; Liu *et al.*, 2015; Papista and Dimitriadis, 2012; Shabib and Ganguli, 2017). Moreover, international market research also suggested a global awareness and consciousness for good quality cosmetics products, particularly skincare goods (Euromonitor, Accessed 16, June 2016), which makes cosmetics a good choice for enquiry involving a negative critical incident. Therefore, consumers' brand love for a cosmetic's brand and consumers' raised awareness and consciousness concerning quality are deemed a good combination for getting valuable inferences from the findings relevant to brand defence and the overall research model. Accordingly, based on the findings of pre-survey interviews, existing literature in brand management and brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012), and emerging market trends, cosmetics and consumer-electronics were selected as the main categories for enquiry for the final surveys and post-survey laddering interviews.

The reason for not including clothing for any of the surveys was that the participants were not devoted or felt related to clothing brands as they do with the phone/consumer-electronics brands or they felt related to cosmetics. Moreover, consumer-electronics as the product category would give the participants a choice to reflect on a range of favourite products. Therefore, the final study involved two surveys exploring two significantly different product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics to cross validate results across two product categories. The same product categories were used for the laddering interviews to facilitate qualitative insights, in comparing and validating the quantitative findings for a better understanding of consumer-brand love and other consumer-brand relationship constructs used in the research and their consequent behaviour in terms of positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence.

The findings of the pre-test survey are discussed next.

### 4.3 Pre-test Survey Results – Scale Purification:

After the secondary research, the pre-survey face-to-face interviews were used to identify and refine scale items to develop the brand defence scale and refine the pre-test survey questionnaire.

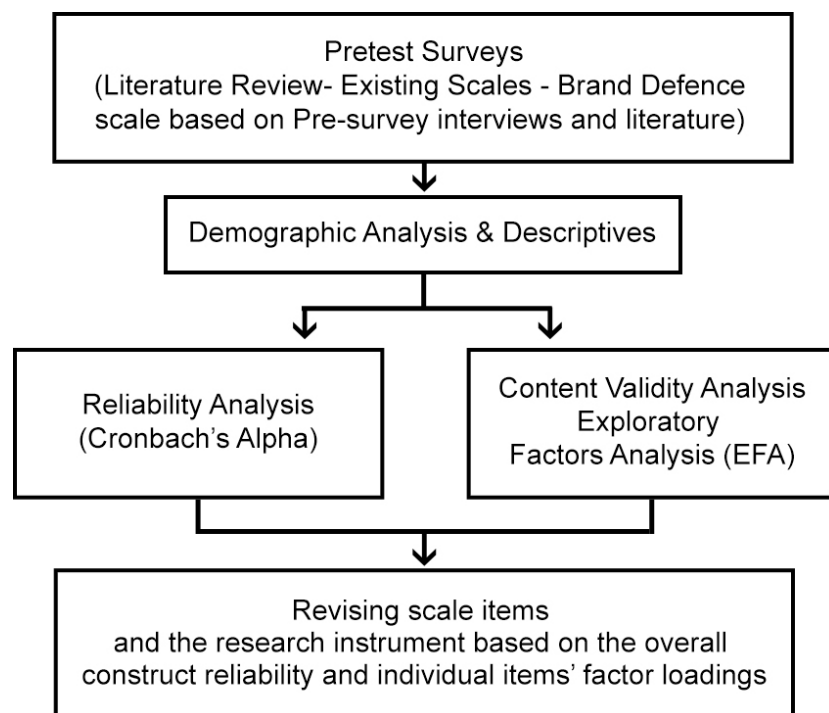


**Figure 4.3 Overview Pre-test Survey**

This study used an online survey to collect data for the pre-test study. The online survey was conducted using the Bristol Online Surveys due to it being offered by by Coventry University to their staff and students for collecting and storing online surveys data. Figure 4.3 presents an overview of the pre-test surveys conducted in this study.

The demographics and descriptive statistics of the pre-test survey is discussed next.

#### 4.3.1 Pre-test Survey Demographics and Descriptive Statistics:

Out of the total number of 200 survey requests sent, the number of received responses for the pre-test survey was 141, with a response rate of 70.5%. However, 13 surveys were incomplete; therefore, the total number of the valid surveys considered for the pre-test analysis was 128, which made a response rate of 64%. The analysis of the demographic characteristics of the pre-test survey is presented in table 4.8.

The demographics information presented in table 4.8 shows that 53.1% males and 46.9% females have responded to the pre-test survey, which slightly deviate from the population of the United Kingdom, which constitutes of 49.32% male and 50.68% female population (Office for National Statistics UK, 2018). However, it might be due to the fact that based on National Statistics UK 2016 data, more ratio of males use internet as compared to females (89% and 86% respectively), which has been even lower for females in the previous years, and as data for pre-test survey was collected in 2012, the sample is suggested to be representative based on the gender and use of the Internet.

| Table 4.8                              |                            |                                             |                               |
|----------------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Respondent Demographic Characteristics |                            |                                             |                               |
| Demographics                           | Category                   | Actual Number of Responses (Based on N=128) | Percentage % (Based on N=128) |
| Age                                    | 18-25 years                | 67                                          | 52.3                          |
|                                        | 26-30 years                | 36                                          | 28.1                          |
|                                        | 31-35 years                | 15                                          | 11.7                          |
|                                        | 36-40 years                | 6                                           | 4.7                           |
|                                        | 41-45 years                | 1                                           | 0.8                           |
|                                        | 46-50 years                | 3                                           | 2.3                           |
| Gender                                 | Male                       | 68                                          | 53.1                          |
|                                        | Female                     | 60                                          | 46.9                          |
| Annual Household Income                | £20,000 or less            | 25                                          | 20.0                          |
|                                        | £21,000-£30,000            | 49                                          | 39.2                          |
|                                        | £31,000-£40,000            | 37                                          | 29.6                          |
|                                        | £41,000 or above           | 15                                          | 11.2                          |
| Level of Education                     | Up to Higher School        | 12                                          | 9.4                           |
|                                        | Under Graduates            | 85                                          | 66.4                          |
|                                        | Post Graduates             | 29                                          | 22.7                          |
|                                        | Others                     | 2                                           | 1.6                           |
| Occupation                             | Student                    | 38                                          | 29.7                          |
|                                        | Employed in Public Sector  | 30                                          | 23.4                          |
|                                        | Employed in Private Sector | 36                                          | 28.1                          |
|                                        | Self-employed              | 15                                          | 11.7                          |
|                                        | Others                     | 9                                           | 7.0                           |

Furthermore, regarding age, the responses were received from all age groups, but the highest number of respondents were aged between 18-35 years, which is consistent with the stats of UK Internet users identified by a survey on internet usage in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2012 to 2016, by age group. According to that survey, it was found that 97 percent in the group of respondents between 25 to 34 years of age used the internet, and Internet access was higher among younger individuals in 2016 with 98 percent of responding adults aged 16-24 reported to use a device to access the Internet in any location. Moreover, a general trend was also identified that those in older age groups were less likely to use the internet than those in younger age groups, which is also suggest that the pre-test sample is also a good representative of the population by age group.

The descriptive statistics presented in table 4.9 shows that the data is approximately normally distributed and does not have kurtotic issues for most items. While the data had a slight negative skew but within the accepted range of  $\pm 2$ . Moreover, this is a normality issue for most Likert scale data because of its ordinal nature (Creswel, 2008; Jamieson, 2004). However, as the pre-test analyses did not require a parametric analysis with basic assumption of normality (Jamieson, 2004; Subedi, 2016), such as, structural equation modelling (SEM), the data was therefore deemed appropriate to test the reliability and uni-dimensionality of the preliminary scale.

All the scale items were analysed for reliability and internal validity of scale items through Cronbach's Alpha to refine the research instrument. Moreover, exploratory factor analysis was also conducted. The reliability results for the scale items are discussed next.

| Table 4.9                                      |      |        |      |                |          |                        |          |                        |
|------------------------------------------------|------|--------|------|----------------|----------|------------------------|----------|------------------------|
| Descriptive Statistics – Pre-test Survey N=128 |      |        |      |                |          |                        |          |                        |
| Items                                          | Mean | Median | Mode | Std. Deviation | Skewness | Std. Error of Skewness | Kurtosis | Std. Error of Kurtosis |
| BL1                                            | 5.99 | 6.00   | 6    | .866           | -1.416   | .250                   | 4.191    | .495                   |
| BL2                                            | 5.76 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.067          | -1.484   | .250                   | 3.274    | .495                   |
| BL3                                            | 5.88 | 6.00   | 6    | .976           | -.761    | .250                   | .621     | .495                   |
| BL4                                            | 2.37 | 2.00   | 1    | 1.634          | 1.299    | .250                   | .686     | .495                   |
| BL5                                            | 5.75 | 6.00   | 6    | .880           | -1.053   | .250                   | 3.127    | .495                   |
| BL6                                            | 5.78 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.020          | 1.564    | .250                   | 4.800    | .495                   |
| BL7                                            | 2.29 | 2.00   | 2    | 1.529          | 1.563    | .250                   | 1.984    | .495                   |
| BL8                                            | 5.86 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.089          | -1.675   | .250                   | 4.718    | .495                   |
| BL9                                            | 5.92 | 6.00   | 6    | .947           | -1.025   | .250                   | 2.048    | .495                   |
| BL10                                           | 5.87 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.191          | -2.035   | .250                   | 5.667    | .495                   |
| BT1                                            | 5.61 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.074          | -.677    | .250                   | .476     | .495                   |
| BT2                                            | 5.57 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.047          | -.567    | .250                   | -.102    | .495                   |
| BT3                                            | 5.63 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.159          | -.1.084  | .250                   | 1.485    | .495                   |
| BT4                                            | 5.62 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.151          | -1.097   | .250                   | 1.234    | .495                   |
| BLY1                                           | 5.74 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.020          | -.650    | .250                   | .613     | .495                   |
| BLY2                                           | 5.56 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.550          | -1.412   | .250                   | 1.358    | .495                   |
| BLY3                                           | 5.68 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.278          | -1.443   | .250                   | 2.388    | .495                   |
| BLY4                                           | 5.88 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.051          | -1.364   | .250                   | 2.852    | .495                   |
| BF1                                            | 5.68 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.162          | -1.036   | .250                   | 1.082    | .495                   |
| BF2                                            | 2.30 | 2.00   | 1    | 1.509          | 1.235    | .250                   | .851     | .495                   |
| BF3                                            | 5.48 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.221          | -1.444   | .250                   | 3.091    | .495                   |
| BF4                                            | 3.39 | 2.00   | 1    | 2.202          | .361     | .250                   | -1.519   | .495                   |
| BF5                                            | 5.59 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.144          | -1.053   | .250                   | 1.850    | .495                   |
| BF6                                            | 2.23 | 2.00   | 1    | 1.533          | 1.515    | .250                   | 1.659    | .495                   |
| BF7                                            | 2.11 | 2.00   | 1    | 1.880          | 1.664    | .250                   | 2.482    | .495                   |
| WM1                                            | 5.46 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.115          | -.749    | .250                   | 1.105    | .495                   |
| WM2                                            | 5.49 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.039          | -.402    | .250                   | -.439    | .495                   |
| WM3                                            | 5.49 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.230          | -.918    | .250                   | 1.177    | .495                   |
| WM4                                            | 5.44 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.202          | -.798    | .250                   | .282     | .495                   |
| BA1                                            | 5.72 | 6.00   | 6    | .864           | -.350    | .250                   | .046     | .495                   |
| BA2                                            | 5.74 | 6.00   | 6    | .883           | -.432    | .250                   | .046     | .495                   |
| BA3                                            | 5.84 | 6.00   | 6    | .936           | -.727    | .250                   | .526     | .495                   |
| BD1                                            | 5.69 | 6.00   | 6    | .921           | -.616    | .250                   | .757     | .495                   |
| BD2                                            | 5.17 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.592          | -1.098   | .250                   | .497     | .495                   |
| BD3                                            | 5.25 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.572          | -1.193   | .250                   | .864     | .495                   |
| BD4                                            | 5.49 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.167          | -1.267   | .250                   | 2.264    | .495                   |
| BD5                                            | 5.80 | 6.00   | 6    | .984           | -1.044   | .250                   | 2.060    | .495                   |
| BD6                                            | 5.60 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.181          | -.958    | .250                   | 1.535    | .495                   |
| BD7                                            | 5.45 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.184          | -.745    | .250                   | .482     | .495                   |
| BD8                                            | 5.20 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.449          | -1.023   | .250                   | .611     | .495                   |
| BD9                                            | 5.66 | 6.00   | 6    | 1.128          | -1.186   | .250                   | 2.327    | .495                   |

#### 4.3.2 Scale Reliability:

The essence of scale purification is to identify items that reliably measure a single underlying construct (Li *et al.*, 2002). The reliability of the scale items was analysed using Cronbach's Alpha. Cronbach' Alpha was measured using IBM SPSS Statistics 20. The Cronbach's Alpha for all the scale items for the original pre-test instrument is presented in table 4.10.

| Table 4.10                      |                   |                             |                  |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Initial Scale Items Reliability |                   |                             |                  |
| S. No.                          | Scale             | No. of Original Scale Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
| 1                               | Brand love        | 10                          | .602             |
| 2                               | Brand trust       | 4                           | .811             |
| 3                               | Brand loyalty     | 4                           | .745             |
| 4                               | Brand forgiveness | 7                           | .371             |
| 5                               | Positive-WOM      | 4                           | .748             |
| 6                               | Brand advocacy    | 3                           | .834             |
| 7                               | Brand defence     | 9                           | .924             |

The Cronbach's alpha value for brand forgiveness scale was considerably low and the Cronbach's alpha value for brand love was also slightly lower than the accepted/recommended value of 0.7

(Hair *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, the reliability analysis was repeated after the exploratory factors results, which revealed that 2 scale items for brand love and four brand forgiveness items did not load on a single factor. The final decision of deleting the scale items was made based on the factors analysis results for the individual items. The Cronbach's alpha value of the revised brand forgiveness scale after items deleted was .730 with three scale items. However, the brand love scale was reduced to eight items after deleting two items after EFA analysis of the main surveys, the reliability for brand love for the two main surveys was .898 and .858 for cosmetics and consumer-electronics respectively, as presented in table 5.4, which remained consistent with Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) reliability value of .91 for brand love.

The findings of the exploratory factor analysis for the pre-test analysis is discussed next.

#### **4.3.3 Exploratory Factors Analysis (EFA):**

Based on Churchill's (1979) scale development procedure, the study involved scale purification using exploratory factors analysis (EFA) prior to the final survey. This section presents the exploratory factors analysis results for the pilot study.

The objectives of the exploratory factors analysis were:

1. *To identify the underlying constructs capturing a set of items.*
2. *To assess the uni-dimensionality of the underlying constructs*
3. *To assess the validity of the measure.*

The initial EFA was conducted using SPSS (version 20) with a sample size of 128 respondents, which was considered adequate based on Hair *et al.*'s (2006) recommendation of pre-test survey sample size of 100 and larger as preferable. The measurement instrument initially consisted of 41 items, as presented in table 4.11, depicting initial scale items and representative factor extractions, which later reduced to 35 items in the final surveys. The analysis involved principle component analysis, varimax rotation with eigenvalues greater than 1. The cut-off values for factor loadings greater than 0.5 were considered as acceptable.

The measuring scales for most of the constructs depicted accepted reliability values and factor loadings. However, scale items for three constructs, brand defence, brand love, and brand forgiveness did not load on a single factor. The Cronbach's Alpha scores for two constructs, brand love and brand forgiveness were also lower than the accepted value of 0.7. Cronbach's alpha score for the initial brand forgiveness score was extremely low as 0.371, and four of the scale items did not load on a single component with significantly low loadings as -.565, .026, -.662, -.760 (see table 4.10). Therefore, four items of brand forgiveness were deleted from the original scales based on the rotated component matrix results; the revised scale for brand forgiveness is presented in table 4.12. The reliability and factor loadings result for other scale items were satisfactory; therefore, all other scale items were kept the same for the final survey. Regarding brand love and brand defence scales, the EFA results in table 4.11 show that two items for brand love and one of the brand defence scale items did not load on a single factor.

| Table 4.11                                                                        |                                                                                                            |             |             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| EFA – Factor Loadings <sup>a</sup> Pre-test Pilot Survey (7 Constructs, 41 Items) |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| No.                                                                               | Items                                                                                                      | Component 1 | Component 2 |
| <b>Brand love</b>                                                                 |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 1                                                                                 | Wonderful mobile phone brand                                                                               | .725        | .112        |
| 2                                                                                 | This brand makes me feel good                                                                              | .813        | .189        |
| 3                                                                                 | This brand is totally awesome                                                                              | .772        | .269        |
| 4                                                                                 | I have neutral feelings about this brand                                                                   | -.519       | .774        |
| 5                                                                                 | This brand makes me very happy                                                                             | .785        | .021        |
| 6                                                                                 | I love this mobile phone brand                                                                             | .619        | .032        |
| 7                                                                                 | I have no particular feelings about this brand                                                             | -.534       | .769        |
| 8                                                                                 | This brand is a pure delight                                                                               | .739        | .090        |
| 9                                                                                 | I am passionate about this brand                                                                           | .798        | .059        |
| 10                                                                                | I am very attached to this brand.                                                                          | .679        | .324        |
| <b>Brand Trust</b>                                                                |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 11                                                                                | I know my brand, refuse to believe the negative information                                                | .892        |             |
| 12                                                                                | I trust my brand, refuse to believe the negative information                                               | .886        |             |
| 13                                                                                | I believe the information, but I will not blame my brand                                                   | .645        |             |
| 14                                                                                | My brand always fulfils the promises that it makes to its customers                                        | .771        |             |
| <b>Brand Loyalty</b>                                                              |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 15                                                                                | I will prefer my present brand provider to others in future                                                | .810        |             |
| 16                                                                                | I will not switch from this brand to try another brand                                                     | .843        |             |
| 17                                                                                | I feel a strong sense of identification towards this brand                                                 | .839        |             |
| 18                                                                                | I like my brand                                                                                            | .495        |             |
| <b>Brand Forgiveness</b>                                                          |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 19                                                                                | I forgive my favourite brand                                                                               | .732        | .356        |
| 20                                                                                | I feel angry toward this brand                                                                             | -.565       | .599        |
| 21                                                                                | Even though the negative information hurts me, I do not feel ill-will toward my favourite brand            | .643        | .435        |
| 22                                                                                | I dislike the brand out of negative information                                                            | .029        | .752        |
| 23                                                                                | I feel warmly toward this mobile phone brand                                                               | .674        | .301        |
| 24                                                                                | I hope this brand gets what's coming to it for what the brand did to me.                                   | -.662       | .273        |
| 25                                                                                | If I saw this brand again, I would try to avoid using the brand.                                           | -.760       | .323        |
| <b>Positive-WOM</b>                                                               |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 26                                                                                | I will tell more people about the experience of the mobile phone brand than any other mobile phone brand.  | .760        |             |
| 27                                                                                | I will seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about the experience of my favourite mobile phone brand.  | .797        |             |
| 28                                                                                | When I tell others about my experience of the mobile phone brand, I tend to talk about it in great detail. | .833        |             |
| 29                                                                                | I will say positive things about the mobile brand                                                          | .613        |             |
| <b>Brand Advocacy</b>                                                             |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 30                                                                                | I will share my experience about the mobile brand.                                                         | .873        |             |
| 31                                                                                | I will recommend my mobile brand.                                                                          | .875        |             |
| 32                                                                                | I will ask people to try the mobile brand themselves                                                       | .853        |             |
| <b>Brand Defence</b>                                                              |                                                                                                            |             |             |
| 33                                                                                | I will take their criticism as personally threatening and will refuse to believe.                          | .838        | -.249       |
| 34                                                                                | I will take their criticism as personally threatening and will argue for my brand                          | .855        | -.315       |
| 35                                                                                | I will try to protect my brand against criticism                                                           | .839        | -.116       |
| 36                                                                                | I will refer to the strong points of my mobile phone brand                                                 | .604        | .697        |
| 37                                                                                | I will convince them on the strong points of my mobile brand.                                              | .712        | .534        |
| 38                                                                                | I will protect my brand against any criticism                                                              | .810        | -.156       |
| 39                                                                                | I will not let people criticise my mobile brand                                                            | .825        | -.311       |
| 40                                                                                | I will make people realise that my mobile phone has better features.                                       | .766        | .199        |
| 41                                                                                | I will defend my brand                                                                                     | .844        | .006        |

The factor loadings value for the item BD4 was slightly higher (.694) for the second component than the component-1 (.604), showing that both the values are positive and demonstrate very little difference, which suggested that the item was observable. Therefore, the item was not deleted at

the pre-test stage and kept for reviewing later in the final surveys' phase, which turned out to be significant demonstrating high factor loadings, loaded on the single factor, and high Cronbach's reliability value for brand defence construct.

The detailed findings of the main surveys are presented in chapter 5. Hence, retaining item BD4 in the scale to measure brand defence scale in this study was confirmed. Moreover, the two brand love items were also retained to review later in the main surveys' stage. However, the items did not load on a single item within the final surveys either and depicted lower factor loadings, thus deleted after the EFA analysis of the final surveys before the CFA, which resulted in 8 items for brand love.

| <b>Table 4.12</b>                                       |                                                                                                 |                                    |                         |
|---------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Revised Scales – Factor Loadings and Reliability</b> |                                                                                                 |                                    |                         |
| <b>Item Codes</b>                                       | <b>Items</b>                                                                                    | <b>Factor Loadings<sup>*</sup></b> | <b>Cronbach's Alpha</b> |
| BF1                                                     | <b>Brand Forgiveness</b><br>I forgive my favourite brand                                        | .845                               | .730                    |
| BF3                                                     | Even though the negative information hurts me, I do not feel ill-will toward my favourite brand | .786                               |                         |
| BF5                                                     | I feel warmly toward this mobile phone brand                                                    | .789                               |                         |

*Note: All the factor loadings are significant with p- values less than 0.001 and/or 0.01.*

The next section of the chapter presents a summary and conclusion of the chapter.

#### **4.4 Conclusion:**

This chapter presented the findings of the development and purification of the research instrument and brand defence scale, which consisted of two stages. The first stage dealt with generating scale items for brand defence and refining the research instrument design using pre-survey pilot interviews, while the second stage dealt with purifying the scales using Cronbach's alpha reliability and EFA analysis of the pre-test pilot survey. The final scale demonstrated a very good face and content validity, as well as a very high internal consistency (reliability) for each construct used in this study.

The next chapter presents and discuss the detailed findings of the main quantitative surveys conducted in this study exploring the two main product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics.

## Chapter 5

### Research Phase II; Findings of the Quantitative Surveys - Scale Validation and Research Hypotheses

#### 5.1 Aims of the Chapter:

This chapter presents the results of the main quantitative study, it presents the research model reliability through confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) and research hypotheses tested using structural equations modelling (SEM) and Sobel's test for mediation. The research model showing the research hypotheses is presented in figure 5.1.

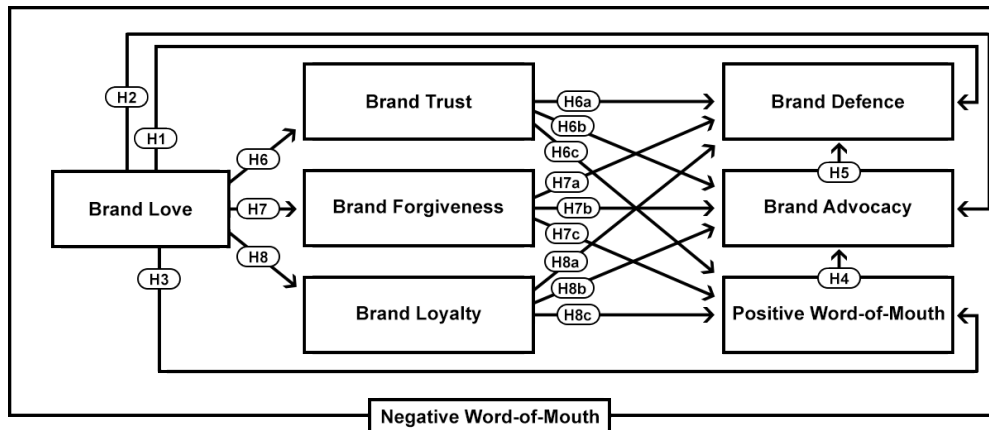


Figure 5.1 Research Model with Research Hypotheses

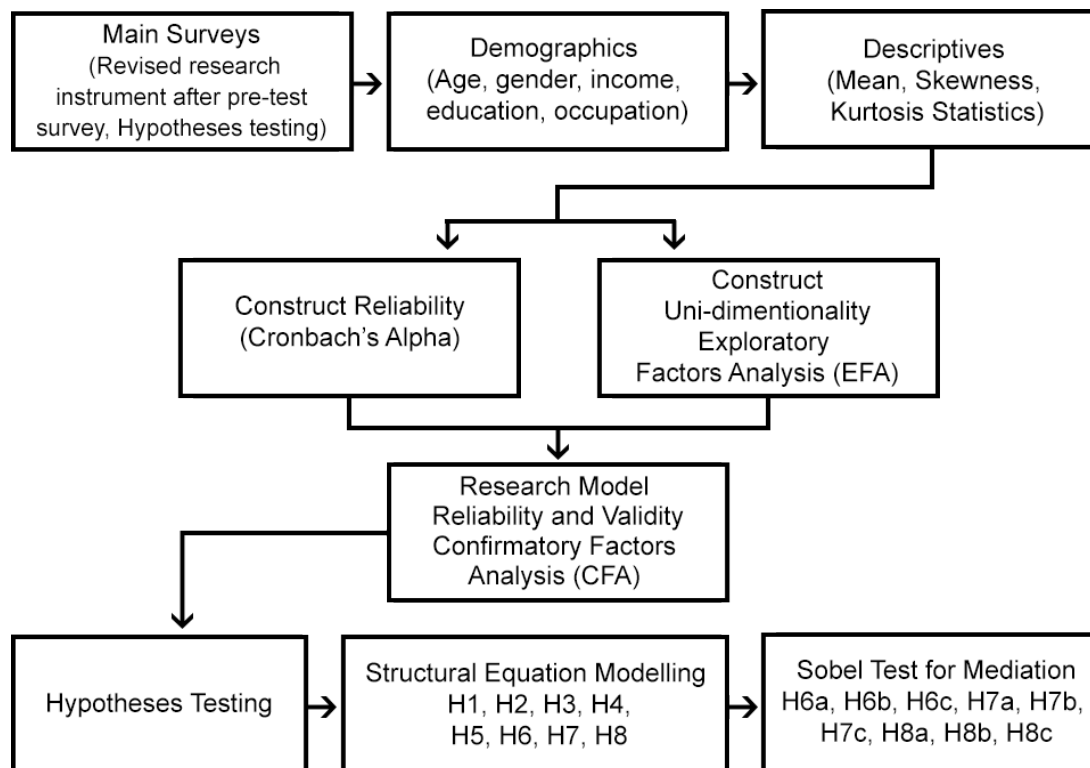


Figure 5.2 Overview of the Analysis Process Used for the Main Surveys



The final quantitative phase of the study consisted of two online surveys to cross validate the results over two product categories. The two categories selected for the two surveys were consumer-electronics and cosmetics. The original questionnaire consisted of 41 scale items to measure the seven constructs were reduced to 35 items after constructs' reliability and uni-dimensionality analysis, as discussed in chapter 4. Moreover, the pre-test questionnaire was also adjusted slightly based on the two distinct product categories; consumer-electronics and cosmetics. Figure 5.2 and table 5.1 presents the overview of the final surveys, table 5.1 also presents the objectives of the specific data-collection strategy and the corresponding research objectives of this study to demonstrate how this phase of the research contributed to fulfil the main objectives of this study. Table 5.1 also presents the data analysis techniques, and the sample sizes for each survey.

This chapter; therefore, presents the complete statistical analysis and the hypotheses test results of the two main surveys with the relevant numerical presentation, as well as a written description and explanation of the hypotheses results. It will allow the non-statistician readers to understand the hypotheses results and provide a fuller account of the research findings.

| <b>Table 5.1</b>                  |                                         |                        |                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Overview Research Phase II</b> |                                         |                        |                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>No.</b>                        | <b>Data Collection Methods</b>          | <b>Sample Size (N)</b> | <b>Data Analysis Methods</b>   | <b>Methodological Objective</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>Relevance with the Study Objectives</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| 1.                                | Online Quantitative Survey<br>Cosmetics | 469                    | Reliability Analysis           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To test the reliability and validity of the research constructs.</li> <li>- To test the reliability and the validity of the measurement model.</li> <li>- To test the research hypotheses.</li> <li>- To demonstrate the generalisability of the research findings through quantifiable means across two product categories.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards and against their loved brands.</li> <li>- To create and empirically validate a measurement scale for brand defence;</li> <li>- To evaluate the mediating impact of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the relationship between brand love and consumers' WOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence.</li> <li>- To provide conclusions and recommendations on future WOM research particularly the role of brand defence in relation to consumer-brand relationships, and brand love.</li> </ul> |
| 2.                                | Consumer-electronics                    | 418                    | Exploratory Factors Analysis   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                   |                                         |                        | Confirmatory Factors Analysis  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                   |                                         |                        | Structural Equations Modelling |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|                                   |                                         |                        | Sobel Test for Mediation       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |

The next section presents the survey demographics, followed by the reliability and EFA results for the two surveys.

## 5.2 Survey Demographics and Descriptive Statistics:

The two surveys were conducted for the final study using different product categories; consumer-electronics, and cosmetics. The participants were recruited using social networks, friends and family and professional colleagues were accessed through snowball sampling. The total of 700 emails were sent to direct and indirect contacts containing links for both surveys; cosmetics and

consumer-electronics, requesting all the potential participants to respond to both the product categories. The main objective was to collect responses from the same set of participants' towards the two different product categories to facilitate comparison on how consumers' WOM attributions may differ for the two different product categories.

In this regard, out of 700 requests for completing the two surveys, the number of responses received for the cosmetics survey was 540, and consumer-electronics survey was 463, with a response rate of 77% for cosmetics and 66% for consumer-electronics. This high response rate was only made possible with snowball sampling (Black, 1999). However, the total number of valid surveys considered for the final analysis was 469 for cosmetics and 418 for consumer-electronics (based on the missing data and outliers' analysis). This provided a large sample size for generalisability, while reducing the limitations associated with snowball sampling (Salganik and Heckathorn, 2004). The demographic characteristics of the two surveys are presented in table 5.2.

| <b>Table 5.2</b>                              |                                |                            |                         |                                       |                         |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Respondent Demographic Characteristics</b> |                                |                            |                         |                                       |                         |
| <b>Demographics</b>                           | <b>Category</b>                | <b>Cosmetics<br/>N=469</b> |                         | <b>Consumer-electronics<br/>N=418</b> |                         |
|                                               |                                | <b>Frequency</b>           | <b>Percentage<br/>%</b> | <b>Frequency</b>                      | <b>Percentage<br/>%</b> |
| <b>Age</b>                                    | 18-25 years                    | 54                         | 11.5                    | 30                                    | 7.2                     |
|                                               | 26-30 years                    | 147                        | 31.3                    | 201                                   | 48.1                    |
|                                               | 31-35 years                    | 169                        | 36                      | 126                                   | 30.1                    |
|                                               | 36-40 years                    | 85                         | 18.1                    | 49                                    | 11.7                    |
|                                               | 41-45 years                    | 11                         | 2.3                     | 6                                     | 1.4                     |
|                                               | 46-50 years                    | 1                          | .2                      | 4                                     | 1.0                     |
|                                               | Over 50 years                  | 2                          | .4                      | 2                                     | .4                      |
| <b>Gender</b>                                 | Male                           | 223                        | 47.5                    | 214                                   | 51.2                    |
|                                               | Female                         | 246                        | 52.5                    | 204                                   | 48.8                    |
| <b>Household<br/>Income</b>                   | £20,000 or less                | 69                         | 14.7                    | 60                                    | 14.4                    |
|                                               | £21,000-£30,000                | 271                        | 57.8                    | 177                                   | 42.3                    |
|                                               | £31,000-£40,000                | 105                        | 22.4                    | 163                                   | 39                      |
|                                               | £41,000 or above               | 19                         | 4.1                     | 14                                    | 3.3                     |
| <b>Education</b>                              | Up to Higher School            | 45                         | 9.6                     | 20                                    | 4.8                     |
|                                               | Under Graduates                | 341                        | 72.7                    | 338                                   | 80.9                    |
|                                               | Post Graduates                 | 75                         | 16                      | 58                                    | 13.9                    |
|                                               | Others                         | 8                          | 1.7                     | 2                                     | .5                      |
| <b>Occupation</b>                             | Student                        | 123                        | 26.2                    | 77                                    | 16.7                    |
|                                               | Employed in Public<br>Sector   | 117                        | 24.9                    | 109                                   | 26.1                    |
|                                               | Employed in Private-<br>Sector | 168                        | 35.8                    | 161                                   | 38.5                    |
|                                               | Self-employed                  | 61                         | 13                      | 49                                    | 11.7                    |
|                                               | Others                         |                            |                         | 22                                    | 5.3                     |
| <b>Years Product<br/>Used</b>                 | Less than 1 year               | 164                        | 35                      | 3                                     | .7                      |
|                                               | 1-2 years                      | 204                        | 43.5                    | 80                                    | 19.1                    |
|                                               | 2-3 years                      | 90                         | 19.2                    | 183                                   | 43.8                    |
|                                               | More than 3 years              | 11                         | 2.3                     | 152                                   | 36.4                    |

The demographic profiling clearly shows there was vice versa response rate concerning gender for the two surveys. Thus, there was 52.5% female responses for cosmetics brands and 48.8% for consumer-electronics, and 47.5% male responses were received for cosmetics and 51.2% responses for consumer-electronics. The population of the United kingdom in 2016 by gender has been reported 49.32% males and 50.68% females population in the UK (Office for National Statistics UK, 2018). The figures show that both the surveys have received a balanced ratio for both male and female responses, thus not deviating much from the UK population. This suggests

the sample is representative of the population, particularly in the cosmetics survey. Moreover, the lower number of female responses to consumer-electronics' survey than cosmetics show women's higher inclination and interest towards cosmetics.

Concerning age, the responses were received from all age groups but most responses for both the surveys were received from the age ranges 26-30 and 31-35 years. This is also consistent with the stats of UK Internet users identified by a survey on internet usage in the United Kingdom (UK) from 2012 to 2016, by age group. During the survey period, it was found that 97 percent in the group of respondents between 25 to 34 years of age used the internet (Ofcom, 2016). However, a general trend was also identified that those in older age groups were less likely to use the internet than those in younger age groups, which is also apparent within the demographics of the two surveys, therefore it is representative of the population.

| Table 5.3                                                                      |      |      |        |      |      |     |                |       |                                                                                        |        |                                                                                        |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|--------|------|------|-----|----------------|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|
| Descriptive Statistics – Cosmetics (Cs) N=540 Consumer-Electronics (CEs) N=463 |      |      |        |      |      |     |                |       |                                                                                        |        |                                                                                        |       |
| Items                                                                          | Mean |      | Median |      | Mode |     | Std. Deviation |       | Skewness Std. Error of Skewness (.114 for cosmetics and .121 for consumer-electronics) |        | Kurtosis Std. Error of Kurtosis (.228 for cosmetics and .241 for consumer-electronics) |       |
|                                                                                | Cs   | CEs  | Cs     | CEs  | Cs   | CEs | Cs             | CEs   | Cs                                                                                     | CEs    | Cs                                                                                     | CEs   |
| BL1                                                                            | 5.61 | 5.82 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | .998           | .964  | -.904                                                                                  | -1.745 | 2.965                                                                                  | 6.091 |
| BL2                                                                            | 5.57 | 5.81 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | .989           | .912  | -1.230                                                                                 | -1.755 | 4.442                                                                                  | 7.070 |
| BL3                                                                            | 5.52 | 5.85 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.017          | .974  | -1.073                                                                                 | -1.744 | 3.072                                                                                  | 6.043 |
| BL5                                                                            | 5.41 | 5.84 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | .956           | .928  | -1.221                                                                                 | -1.701 | 4.460                                                                                  | 6.653 |
| BL6                                                                            | 5.53 | 5.85 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | .962           | .994  | -1.274                                                                                 | -1.741 | 4.165                                                                                  | 5.570 |
| BL8                                                                            | 5.45 | 5.86 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.001          | 1.008 | -1.380                                                                                 | -1.695 | 4.260                                                                                  | 5.266 |
| BL9                                                                            | 5.50 | 5.84 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.013          | .928  | -1.260                                                                                 | -1.701 | 3.625                                                                                  | 6.653 |
| BL10                                                                           | 5.54 | 5.90 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.069          | .930  | -1.084                                                                                 | -1.598 | 2.679                                                                                  | 5.328 |
| BT1                                                                            | 5.35 | 5.98 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.046          | .878  | -1.212                                                                                 | -1.890 | 3.839                                                                                  | 6.994 |
| BT2                                                                            | 5.34 | 5.86 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.023          | .852  | -1.653                                                                                 | -2.171 | 5.523                                                                                  | 8.154 |
| BT3                                                                            | 5.29 | 5.77 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.186          | 1.041 | -1.346                                                                                 | -2.101 | 3.036                                                                                  | 6.719 |
| BT4                                                                            | 5.51 | 6.01 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.007          | .908  | -1.310                                                                                 | -1.788 | 4.090                                                                                  | 6.106 |
| BLY1                                                                           | 5.42 | 5.97 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.006          | .937  | -1.350                                                                                 | -1.786 | 4.002                                                                                  | 5.898 |
| BLY2                                                                           | 5.33 | 5.96 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.017          | .964  | -1.335                                                                                 | -1.910 | 3.603                                                                                  | 6.705 |
| BLY3                                                                           | 5.42 | 5.98 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.008          | .936  | -1.174                                                                                 | -2.042 | 2.861                                                                                  | 7.137 |
| BLY4                                                                           | 5.51 | 5.96 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.005          | .922  | -1.317                                                                                 | -1.836 | 3.862                                                                                  | 6.388 |
| BF1                                                                            | 5.33 | 5.93 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.047          | .980  | -1.274                                                                                 | -1.888 | 3.276                                                                                  | 6.317 |
| BF2                                                                            | 5.38 | 5.98 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.049          | 1.005 | -1.341                                                                                 | -2.054 | 3.704                                                                                  | 6.679 |
| BF3                                                                            | 5.34 | 5.98 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.041          | .958  | -1.393                                                                                 | -2.015 | 3.815                                                                                  | 7.143 |
| WM1                                                                            | 5.35 | 5.97 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.015          | .911  | -1.375                                                                                 | -1.716 | 3.775                                                                                  | 5.406 |
| WM2                                                                            | 5.31 | 5.87 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.076          | 1.003 | -1.316                                                                                 | -1.747 | 3.502                                                                                  | 4.666 |
| WM3                                                                            | 5.32 | 5.92 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.114          | .942  | -1.353                                                                                 | -1.621 | 2.773                                                                                  | 4.630 |
| WM4                                                                            | 5.42 | 5.88 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.004          | .948  | -1.021                                                                                 | -1.952 | 2.260                                                                                  | 6.540 |
| BA1                                                                            | 5.45 | 5.97 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.012          | .968  | -.873                                                                                  | -2.080 | 1.771                                                                                  | 7.575 |
| BA2                                                                            | 5.46 | 5.97 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.036          | .946  | -1.235                                                                                 | -1.816 | 3.485                                                                                  | 6.141 |
| BA3                                                                            | 5.43 | 6.05 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.070          | .947  | -1.239                                                                                 | -1.836 | 2.836                                                                                  | 5.929 |
| BD1                                                                            | 5.20 | 5.77 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.175          | 1.283 | -1.442                                                                                 | -1.954 | 3.225                                                                                  | 3.043 |
| BD2                                                                            | 5.20 | 5.73 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.128          | 1.244 | -1.365                                                                                 | -1.705 | 2.980                                                                                  | 3.825 |
| BD3                                                                            | 5.32 | 5.87 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.115          | .965  | -1.489                                                                                 | -2.298 | 3.349                                                                                  | 8.241 |
| BD4                                                                            | 5.41 | 5.97 | 6.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.050          | .944  | -1.425                                                                                 | -1.990 | 3.528                                                                                  | 6.708 |
| BD5                                                                            | 5.39 | 5.96 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.042          | .978  | -1.410                                                                                 | -1.917 | 3.494                                                                                  | 6.226 |
| BD6                                                                            | 5.28 | 5.96 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 5    | 6   | 1.092          | 1.034 | -1.443                                                                                 | -1.957 | 3.504                                                                                  | 5.831 |
| BD7                                                                            | 5.35 | 5.90 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.140          | 1.036 | -1.480                                                                                 | -2.057 | 3.501                                                                                  | 6.423 |
| BD8                                                                            | 5.30 | 5.97 | 5.00   | 6.00 | 6    | 6   | 1.082          | .981  | -1.422                                                                                 | -1.834 | 3.538                                                                                  | 6.117 |
| BD9                                                                            | 5.46 | 6.24 | 6.00   | 7.00 | 6    | 7   | 1.122          | 1.086 | -1.427                                                                                 | -2.350 | 3.262                                                                                  | 7.072 |

The data was analysed for the general traits and data normality and the descriptive statistics for the two surveys as presented in table 5.3. Unlike pre-test surveys, data normality was assessed using the absolute values of skewness and kurtosis without considering the z-values, as recommended

for sample sizes greater than 300 (Kim, 2013; West *et al.*, 1996). As the standard errors in large sample sizes gets significant, the z-tests under null hypothesis of normal distribution tend to be easily rejected with distribution, which may not differ from normal distribution (Kim, 2013). Therefore, the absolute skewness value smaller than 2 or an absolute kurtosis smaller than 7 are considered for the datasets to be approximately normally distributed in this study. In this regard, 5 items for consumer-electronics survey showed slight abnormality, which shows a tendency of outliers and missing data, however, these were later addressed, which resulted in n=418 for consumer-electronics for the final analysis, n=469 for cosmetics. Moreover, most Likert scale data face such normality issue because of its ordinal nature (Creswel, 2008; Jamieson, 2004). Based on cosmetics' surveys' normal distribution, this abnormality was observed as product-category specific, which is also apparent from high mean and median values. Furthermore, it was also observed within the qualitative findings that participants were highly intended to support their loved consumer-electronics, as compared to their loved cosmetics brands.

The next section presents the reliability and uni-dimensionality of the measuring constructs used in this study.

### **5.3 Reliability and Uni-dimensionality of the Measuring Constructs:**

The final surveys consisted of brand love (8 items); brand trust (4 items); brand forgiveness (3 items); brand loyalty (4 items); positive-WOM (4 items), brand advocacy (3 items), and brand defence (9 items) to measure the research model, involving a seven-point Likert scale. This study used exploratory factors analysis (EFA) to test the constructs' uni-dimensionality and Cronbach's Alpha for constructs' reliability. The EFA was used prior to the CFA to verify the number of underlying latent variables and the pattern of observed variable and factor relationships (Brown, 2015; Champlain, 2015; Lewis, 2017).

Uni-dimensionality check is necessary when the measurement variables are connected to their latent constructs in a reflective way (Tenenhaus *et al.*, 2005); therefore, principal component analysis with varimax rotation with eigenvalues greater than 1 was used. Factor loadings greater than 0.5 were retained for all the factor analysis results. Results of the factor analysis revealed that most of the constructs were uni-dimensional because the items measuring the constructs had loaded on the respective constructs except brand love and brand defence. Brand love scale item revealed loading on two components for both the surveys and brand defence for consumer-electronics. However, based on the higher factor loadings on the first component, the items were retained at this stage to check later at CFA stage for more informed decision.

Concerning the scale reliability, the Cronbach's Alpha values for all the constructs were higher than the minimum recommended value of 0.7 for considering a construct to be reliable. Results of the exploratory factors analysis and Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis for both the main surveys cosmetics and consumer-electronics are presented in table 5.4.

| Table 5.4                                          |            |                              |             |                  |                              |             |                  |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|------------------------------|-------------|------------------|
| Factor Loadings and Cronbach's Alpha Final Surveys |            |                              |             |                  |                              |             |                  |
| Construct                                          | Scale Item | Cosmetics                    |             |                  | Consumer-Electronics         |             |                  |
|                                                    |            | Factor Loadings <sup>a</sup> |             | Cronbach's Alpha | Factor Loadings <sup>a</sup> |             | Cronbach's Alpha |
|                                                    |            | Componen t1                  | Componen t2 |                  | Componen t1                  | Component 2 |                  |
| Brand love                                         | BL1        | .748                         | -.528       | .898             | .664                         | -.621       | .858             |
|                                                    | BL2        | .784                         | -.483       |                  | .752                         | -.401       |                  |
|                                                    | BL3        | .756                         | -.340       |                  | .747                         | -.098       |                  |
|                                                    | BL5        | .731                         | .272        |                  | .661                         | .518        |                  |
|                                                    | BL6        | .777                         | .184        |                  | .708                         | .431        |                  |
|                                                    | BL8        | .725                         | .364        |                  | .676                         | .468        |                  |
|                                                    | BL9        | .788                         | .287        |                  | .779                         | .154        |                  |
|                                                    | BL10       | .801                         | .247        |                  | .707                         | -.420       |                  |
| Brand trust                                        | BT1        | .814                         |             | .830             | .792                         |             | .796             |
|                                                    | BT2        | .878                         |             |                  | .848                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | BT3        | .810                         |             |                  | .784                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | BT4        | .760                         |             |                  | .743                         |             |                  |
| Brand loyalty                                      | LY1        | .835                         |             | .868             | .793                         |             | .856             |
|                                                    | LY2        | .886                         |             |                  | .884                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | LY3        | .864                         |             |                  | .869                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | LY4        | .800                         |             |                  | .797                         |             |                  |
| Brand forgiveness                                  | BF1        | .730                         |             | .820             | .815                         |             | .749             |
|                                                    | BF2        | .800                         |             |                  | .899                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | BF3        | .678                         |             |                  | .733                         |             |                  |
| WOM                                                | WM1        | .835                         |             | .867             | .713                         |             | .814             |
|                                                    | WM2        | .886                         |             |                  | .853                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | WM3        | .864                         |             |                  | .852                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | WM4        | .800                         |             |                  | .783                         |             |                  |
| Brand advocacy                                     | BA1        | .862                         |             | .860             | .887                         |             | .868             |
|                                                    | BA2        | .912                         |             |                  | .923                         |             |                  |
|                                                    | BA3        | .877                         |             |                  | .859                         |             |                  |
| Brand defence                                      | BD1        | .787                         |             | .936             | .677                         | .569        | .900             |
|                                                    | BD2        | .770                         |             |                  | .702                         | .575        |                  |
|                                                    | BD3        | .815                         |             |                  | .756                         | .198        |                  |
|                                                    | BD5        | .831                         |             |                  | .760                         | .037        |                  |
|                                                    | BD6        | .834                         |             |                  | .782                         | -.316       |                  |
|                                                    | BD7        | .819                         |             |                  | .781                         | -.418       |                  |
|                                                    | BD8        | .776                         |             |                  | .800                         | -.393       |                  |
|                                                    | BD9        | .857                         |             |                  | .760                         | -.255       |                  |

Note: All the factor loadings are significant with *p*- values less than 0.001 and/or 0.01.

The next section presents the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) results.

#### 5.4 Confirmatory Factors Analysis:

CFA was used to assess the construct validity and feasibility of the measurement model before incorporating the model into a full SEM analysis (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Lewis, 2017), based on its flexibility in refining, and calibrating a valid measuring construct (Champlain, 2015; Lewis, 2017). Moreover, it is considered as an important tool to assess the internal, or latent structure of an instrument, or questionnaire within the complex process of scale development (Brown, 2015).

##### 5.4.1 Confirmatory Factors Analysis – Brand Defence:

A separate CFA for brand defence was conducted based on the recommendations of Churchill's (1979) step-by-step procedure for scale development to check the reliability and validity of the measurement model concerning the new scale. AMOS 22.0 software was used for the statistical

analysis. The same reliability and validity measures were used as of the full measurement model, except for the discriminant validity involving comparison of the inter-construct correlations, as only one construct was analysed in this case. The measurement model as shown in table 5.5, indicated a reasonable fit of the measurement model with both datasets; cosmetics and consumer-electronics with RMSEA less than .08 and all model fit indices above 0.95 as recommended (Byrne, 2001).

| <b>Table 5.5</b>                             |                            |             |            |            |            |            |            |            |              |
|----------------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|--------------|
| <b>Model Fit<sup>1</sup> – Brand Defence</b> |                            |             |            |            |            |            |            |            |              |
| <b>Model</b>                                 | <b><math>\chi^2</math></b> | <b>d.f.</b> | <b>CFI</b> | <b>IFI</b> | <b>TLI</b> | <b>NFI</b> | <b>RFI</b> | <b>GFI</b> | <b>RMSEA</b> |
| Cosmetics                                    | 28.645                     | 8           | .988       | .988       | .978       | .984       | .970       | .980       | .074         |
| Consumer-electronics                         | 63.356                     | 8           | .961       | .961       | .926       | .955       | .916       | .950       | .059         |

Concerning indicator reliability, as shown in table 5.6 the squared multiple correlations (SMC) values of all the indicators were equal/above 0.50, which indicated brand defence as a reliable scale. Moreover, the composite reliability values of brand defence for both the surveys were greater than 0.9, which further strengthened the reliability and convergent validity of the construct (see table 5.7). Moreover, the construct validity of brand defence was also examined by calculating the average variance extracted. Table 5.7 shows that all the measurement variables had significant loadings onto the respective latent constructs for both cosmetics and consumer-electronics surveys.

| <b>Table 5.6</b>                                   |                        |                                                  |                              |                                                  |                              |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>Brand Defence Measurement Model Reliability</b> |                        |                                                  |                              |                                                  |                              |
| <b>Constructs</b>                                  | <b>Scale Item Code</b> | <b>Cosmetics</b>                                 |                              | <b>Consumer-electronics</b>                      |                              |
|                                                    |                        | <b>Squared Multiple Correlations<sup>a</sup></b> | <b>Composite Reliability</b> | <b>Squared Multiple Correlations<sup>a</sup></b> | <b>Composite Reliability</b> |
| <b>Brand Defence</b>                               | BD3                    | .577                                             | .910                         | .327                                             | .872                         |
|                                                    | BD4                    | .614                                             |                              | .400                                             |                              |
|                                                    | BD5                    | .680                                             |                              | .685                                             |                              |
|                                                    | BD6                    | .663                                             |                              | .746                                             |                              |
|                                                    | BD7                    | .537                                             |                              | .688                                             |                              |
|                                                    | BD9                    | .710                                             |                              | .389                                             |                              |

The loadings ranged between 0.732 and 0.843 for cosmetics and loadings for consumer-electronics survey ranged between 0.571 and 0.864. These loadings demonstrated that the standardised factor loadings were high and significant; hence it reflected the convergent validity of the customer metrics used in the study. Moreover, the average variance extracted (AVE) for brand defence construct was 0.61 for cosmetics and 0.58 for consumer-electronics, which were above the recommended value of 0.50. It showed that the shared variance accounted for by brand defence was 61% and 58% of the total variance for cosmetics and consumer-electronics respectively. The above conditions reflect that the measuring construct for brand defence developed and refined in this study possessed convergent validity.

| Table 5.7                                                |                 |                                    |                                  |                                    |                                  |
|----------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Convergent Validity Brand Defence Final Survey-Cosmetics |                 |                                    |                                  |                                    |                                  |
| Constructs                                               | Scale Item Code | Cosmetics                          |                                  | Consumer-electronics               |                                  |
|                                                          |                 | Standardised loadings <sup>*</sup> | Average variance extracted (AVE) | Standardised loadings <sup>*</sup> | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
| Brand Defence                                            | BD3             | .760                               | 0.63                             | .571                               | 0.54                             |
|                                                          | BD4             | .784                               |                                  | .632                               |                                  |
|                                                          | BD5             | .824                               |                                  | .828                               |                                  |
|                                                          | BD6             | .814                               |                                  | .864                               |                                  |
|                                                          | BD7             | .732                               |                                  | .829                               |                                  |
|                                                          | BD9             | .843                               |                                  | .623                               |                                  |

The next section presents the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) of the measurement model for the two surveys.

#### 5.4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test and improve the reliability and validity of the measurement model. AMOS 22.0 software was used for the purpose. The CFA involved modifying the measuring constructs based on the modification indices to meet the model fit requirements to measure the research model. The maximum likelihood method was used, and the goodness-of-fit of the model was evaluated using the comparative fit index (CFI), degrees of freedom goodness of fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness of fit index (AGFI), Tucker Lewis index (TLI), incremental fit index (IFI), normed fit index (NFI), relative fit index (RFI) and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA). Values greater than 0.90 for CFI, GFI, AGFI, TLI, IFI, NFI, and RFI and values of 0.08 or lower for RMSEA was considered a good model fit (Hu and Bentler, 1999). The measurement model was revised by means of deleting the scale items with low standardised loadings with loadings  $>.6$  and higher modification indices values  $>15$  as recommended (Awang, 2014). The items were deleted one by one until all the model fit indices, and individual loadings expressed an acceptable fit. The absolute fit index of minimum discrepancy chi-square statistics turned significant, which could be ignored in case of sample sizes for the study greater than 200 (Hair *et al.*, 1996; Joreskog and Sorbom, 1996); however, the chi-square/df  $>3.0$  suggested a good parsimonious fit.

Within the different statistical analyses, CFA is a widely regarded method for refining a measuring model (Champlain, 2015; Lewis, 2017), which provides the flexibility and means of improving a measurement model by deleting redundant items. Moreover, it is recommended for a scale development procedure concerning marketing and consumer research to include a larger pool of items for scale development even with slightly different shades of meaning as the original list will be refined to produce a final measure (Churchill, 1979). It is also a practice in branding research, for example Schivinski *et al.* (2016) developed a pool of 35 items, which were reduced to 31 items in the EFA phase by deleting 4 items based on cross loadings issues, which further reduced to 17

observable items in the CFA analysis based on lower loadings and modification indices in order to achieve good model fit indices. Similarly, Brun *et al.* (2014) started with a 27-item measuring model, which eventually resulted in 21 items after EFA and CFA. Therefore, based on the recommended procedures, the final measurement model consisted of 25 items comprising of all the measuring construct; brand love (4 items), brand trust (3 items), brand loyalty (3 items), brand forgiveness (3 items), WOM (3 items), brand advocacy (3 items), and brand defence (6 items). It is recommended to consider at least one criterion for absolute fit, incremental fit, and parsimonious fit for considering the measurement model adequate (Hair *et al.*, 1995, Hair *et al.*, 2010; Holmes-Smith, 2006). The final measurement model represented good absolute fit (GFI>.90), incremental fit (CFI, AGFI, TLI, NFI >.90), and parsimonious fit (chi-square/d.f.>3).

The findings of the CFA with the final measuring constructs are presented next.

#### 5.4.3 Model Fit:

The measurement model indicated an acceptable model fit to the data for both the surveys as shown in table 5.8.

| Table 5.8                                       |          |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |
|-------------------------------------------------|----------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Model Fit <sup>2</sup> of the Measurement Model |          |      |      |      |      |      |      |      |       |
| Measurement Model                               | $\chi^2$ | d.f. | CFI  | IFI  | TLI  | NFI  | RFI  | GFI  | RMSEA |
| Cosmetics                                       | 448.661  | 240  | 0.97 | 0.97 | 0.97 | 0.95 | 0.93 | 0.93 | 0.043 |
| Consumer-electronics                            | 545.591  | 240  | 0.94 | 0.95 | 0.94 | 0.91 | 0.90 | 0.91 | 0.055 |

According to Byrne (2001) the value of the fit indices as shown in table 5.8 were acceptable and indicated a reasonable fit of the measurement model with the data. Therefore, the CFA model confirmed the factor structure of the measurement instrument involving the different constructs used in the research model.

The reliability and validity of the measurement model is presented next.

#### 5.4.4 Measurement Model Reliability:

The reliability of the measurement model was assessed using both indicator and composite reliability, as presented in table 5.9. It is generally acknowledged that composite reliability is a better measure of scale reliability than Cronbach's alpha coefficient (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988). The indicator reliability was examined by calculating the squared multiple correlations (SMC). The SMC values of all the indicators were ranged from 0.43-0.4 for cosmetics and 0.32-0.77 for consumer-electronics, demonstrating at least 32% of common variance explained for cosmetics and 32% for consumer-electronics. The composite reliability (CR) values of all the constructs were greater than 0.9, which is higher than 0.7 acceptable value of CR (Fornell-Larcker, 1981). Therefore, both cosmetics and consumer-electronics surveys were considered possessing reliable measurement models.



| Table 5.9                                                    |             |                                      |                            |                                      |                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Indicator and Composite Reliability of the Measurement Model |             |                                      |                            |                                      |                            |
| Constructs                                                   | Scale Items | Cosmetics                            |                            | Consumer-electronics                 |                            |
|                                                              |             | Squared Multiple Correlations* (SMC) | Composite Reliability (CR) | Squared Multiple Correlations* (SMC) | Composite Reliability (CR) |
| Brand love                                                   | BL2         | .48                                  | 0.94                       | .32                                  | 0.94                       |
|                                                              | BL3         | .43                                  |                            | .38                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BL6         | .52                                  |                            | .46                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BL9         | .58                                  |                            | .51                                  |                            |
| Brand trust                                                  | BT2         | .66                                  | 0.94                       | .44                                  | 0.95                       |
|                                                              | BT3         | .59                                  |                            | .54                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BT4         | .44                                  |                            | .55                                  |                            |
| Brand loyalty                                                | LY2         | .68                                  | 0.97                       | .62                                  | 0.97                       |
|                                                              | LY3         | .69                                  |                            | .77                                  |                            |
|                                                              | LY4         | .55                                  |                            | .56                                  |                            |
| Brand forgiveness                                            | BF1         | .64                                  | 0.97                       | .60                                  | 0.95                       |
|                                                              | BF2         | .67                                  |                            | .65                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BF3         | .60                                  |                            | .45                                  |                            |
| Positive-WOM                                                 | WM2         | .58                                  | 0.97                       | .77                                  | 0.96                       |
|                                                              | WM3         | .64                                  |                            | .50                                  |                            |
|                                                              | WM4         | .69                                  |                            | .53                                  |                            |
| Brand advocacy                                               | BA1         | .62                                  | 0.97                       | .81                                  | 0.98                       |
|                                                              | BA2         | .74                                  |                            | .72                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BA3         | .71                                  |                            | .66                                  |                            |
| Brand defence                                                | BD3         | .59                                  | 0.98                       | .47                                  | 0.96                       |
|                                                              | BD4         | .60                                  |                            | .47                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BD5         | .67                                  |                            | .55                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BD6         | .62                                  |                            | .53                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BD7         | .49                                  |                            | .62                                  |                            |
|                                                              | BD9         | .72                                  |                            | .59                                  |                            |

The next section presents the measurement model validity.

#### 5.4.3 Measurement Model Validity:

Convergent and discriminant validity of the final surveys were examined by calculating the average variance extracted (AVE) for each of the seven constructs. The composite reliability values of 0.7 and above also demonstrate the convergent validity of a measurement model (Fornell-Larcker, 1981). The values presented in table 5.6 show that all the measurement variables had significant loadings onto the respective latent constructs for both the cosmetics and consumer-electronics surveys. The standardised loadings ranged between 0.657-0.847, and 0.616-0.902 for cosmetics and consumer-electronics surveys respectively, which shows that the standardised factor loadings were high and significant. The AVE values equal or above 0.5 reflected the convergent validity of the customer metrics used in the study, with the shared variance accounted for by all the constructs is 50% or more of the total variance. The discriminant validity was established by a comparison of the AVE values with average shared variance (ASV) and maximum shared variance (MSV) values as presented in table 5.10 and 5.11.

| Table 5.10                                                    |             |                                    |                                  |                               |                                    |                                  |                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Convergent and Discriminant Validity of the Measurement Model |             |                                    |                                  |                               |                                    |                                  |                               |
| Constructs                                                    | Scale Items | Cosmetics                          |                                  |                               | Consumer-electronics               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               |             | Standardised loadings <sup>a</sup> | Average variance extracted (AVE) | Average shared variance (ASV) | Standardised loadings <sup>a</sup> | Average variance extracted (AVE) | Average shared variance (ASV) |
| Brand love                                                    | BL2         | .690                               | .50                              | .46                           | .663                               | .50                              | .28                           |
|                                                               | BL3         | .657                               |                                  |                               | .616                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BL6         | .720                               |                                  |                               | .676                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BL9         | .763                               |                                  |                               | .708                               |                                  |                               |
| Brand trust                                                   | BT2         | .802                               | .56                              | .61                           | .665                               | .50                              | .42                           |
|                                                               | BT3         | .772                               |                                  |                               | .735                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BT4         | .665                               |                                  |                               | .744                               |                                  |                               |
| Brand loyalty                                                 | LY2         | .823                               | .64                              | .49                           | .789                               | .65                              | .40                           |
|                                                               | LY3         | .832                               |                                  |                               | .878                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | LY4         | .745                               |                                  |                               | .747                               |                                  |                               |
| Brand forgiveness                                             | BF1         | .802                               | .64                              | .54                           | .777                               | .57                              | .43                           |
|                                                               | BF2         | .817                               |                                  |                               | .807                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BF3         | .776                               |                                  |                               | .672                               |                                  |                               |
| Positive-WOM                                                  | WM2         | .760                               | .64                              | .60                           | .708                               | .63                              | .40                           |
|                                                               | WM3         | .802                               |                                  |                               | .727                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | WM4         | .836                               |                                  |                               | .882                               |                                  |                               |
| Brand advocacy                                                | BA1         | .789                               | .69                              | .62                           | .902                               | .73                              | .41                           |
|                                                               | BA2         | .861                               |                                  |                               | .846                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BA3         | .844                               |                                  |                               | .816                               |                                  |                               |
| Brand defence                                                 | BD3         | .765                               | .62                              | .60                           | .688                               | .54                              | .50                           |
|                                                               | BD4         | .777                               |                                  |                               | .682                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BD5         | .821                               |                                  |                               | .742                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BD6         | .788                               |                                  |                               | .730                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BD7         | .706                               |                                  |                               | .790                               |                                  |                               |
|                                                               | BD9         | .847                               |                                  |                               | .766                               |                                  |                               |

The MSVs values for cosmetics surveys suggested high correlations between the three brand-favourable WOM outcomes (defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM), based on the theoretical background as these constructs are developed from a single parent construct; word-of-mouth. However, the ASV values for all the three constructs were lower than AVE values for cosmetics survey, which suggested that the constructs are discriminant valid for further analysis. The brand trust depicted discriminant validity issue for cosmetics survey, but good discriminant validity for consumer-electronics. However, all the model fit indices supported the good fitting value for this measuring model within both datasets. Therefore, based on its uni-dimensionality, content and indicator reliability, convergent validity, and satisfactory discriminant validity of brand trust in case of consumer-electronics, the construct was considered appropriate to test for the SEM analysis, which is consistent with Morgan and Hunt (1994). Moreover, another requirement for discriminant validity to meet is that correlation between exogenous constructs should not exceed 0.85. Correlations above 0.85 indicates serious multicollinearity problem within the two exogenous constructs (Awang, 2014). In this measurement model, none of the correlations between the exogenous variables exceeded 0.85, and the maximum correlations value were .784 for cosmetics and .704 for consumer-electronics data.

With regards to consumer-electronics surveys, all the constructs expressed good convergent and discriminant validity including, brand trust, positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. Moreover, all the constructs had good convergent validity, composite, and indicator reliability for both the surveys, which allows the model to measure them as individual constructs.

| Table 5.11                                     |                       |                                            |                       |                                            |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| Discriminant Validity of the Measurement Model |                       |                                            |                       |                                            |
|                                                | Cosmetics             |                                            | Consumer-electronics  |                                            |
|                                                | Correlation estimates | Squared Inter-Construct Correlations (MSV) | Correlation estimates | Squared Inter-Construct Correlations (MSV) |
| BL<-->BLY                                      | .629                  | .40                                        | .571                  | .32                                        |
| BL<-->BF                                       | .560                  | .31                                        | .521                  | .27                                        |
| BL<-->BT                                       | .749                  | .56                                        | .558                  | .31                                        |
| BL<-->WOM                                      | .694                  | .48                                        | .509                  | .26                                        |
| BL<-->BA                                       | .715                  | .51                                        | .484                  | .23                                        |
| BL<-->BD                                       | .683                  | .47                                        | .540                  | .29                                        |
| BF<-->BLY                                      | .743                  | .55                                        | .691                  | .48                                        |
| BT<-->BLY                                      | .784                  | .61                                        | .631                  | .40                                        |
| BLY<-->WOM                                     | .794                  | .62                                        | .555                  | .31                                        |
| BLY<-->BD                                      | .794                  | .62                                        | .702                  | .49                                        |
| BA<-->BLY                                      | .744                  | .63                                        | .611                  | .37                                        |
| BT<-->BF                                       | .734                  | .55                                        | .704                  | .49                                        |
| BF<-->WOM                                      | .762                  | .58                                        | .597                  | .36                                        |
| BF<-->BD                                       | .804                  | .58                                        | .774                  | .59                                        |
| BA<-->BF                                       | .684                  | .65                                        | .620                  | .38                                        |
| BT<-->WOM                                      | .805                  | .64                                        | .578                  | .33                                        |
| BT<-->BD                                       | .809                  | .65                                        | .665                  | .44                                        |
| BA<-->BT                                       | .787                  | .62                                        | .494                  | .24                                        |
| BD<-->WOM                                      | .805                  | .64                                        | .733                  | .54                                        |
| BA<-->WOM                                      | .809                  | .65                                        | .794                  | .62                                        |
| BA<-->BD                                       | .809                  | .65                                        | .804                  | .64                                        |

The next section presents the results of the research hypotheses.

## 5.6 Hypotheses Testing:

In this study, the hypotheses testing was carried out using structural equation modelling (SEM) and Sobel's test. The first eight hypotheses involving direct relationships were tested using SEM; however, the mediation hypotheses were tested using Sobel's test. Figure 5.1 of the research model presents the paths, and the research hypotheses tested in this study.

### 5.6.1 Structural Equation Modelling Results:

The research model was tested using SEM. The SEM analysis was conducted using AMOS 22.0 to test the research hypotheses. The goodness of model fit indices for the two surveys are presented in table 5.12 and r-square values are presented in table 5.13 for both cosmetics and consumer-electronics surveys.

| Table 5.12                                             |          |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Model Fit <sup>3</sup> indices of the Structural Model |          |      |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |
| Model                                                  | $\chi^2$ | d.f. | CFI   | IFI   | TLI   | NFI   | RFI   | GFI   | RMSEA |
| Cosmetics                                              | 604.771  | 243  | 0.954 | 0.954 | 0.943 | 0.926 | 0.908 | 0.901 | 0.056 |
| Consumer-electronics                                   | 537.229  | 239  | 0.950 | 0.950 | 0.937 | 0.914 | 0.901 | 0.910 | 0.055 |

The values of the model fit indices suggested a good fit between the data and the model as reflected in table 5.12, with all indices  $>.90$  and RMSEA  $>.05$ . Moreover, r-squares for the endogenous variables for both the constructs are also satisfactory based on the recommended values suggested by different scholars. Such as, Cohen (1988) suggested r-square values  $\geq 0.26$  as substantial,  $\geq 0.13$  as moderate and  $\geq 0.02$  as weak, and Chin (1998) recommended r-square values  $\geq 0.67$  as substantial,  $0.33$  as moderate, and  $0.19$  as weak. However, this thesis used Hair *et al.* (2011, 2013) recommended r-square values for interpreting the research in marketing; they respectively described  $\geq 0.75$ ,  $\geq 0.50$ , and  $\geq 0.25$  as substantial, moderate, and weak. As presented in table 5.14 the r-squares value for brand defence for both the datasets are substantial with  $.94$  for cosmetics and  $.82$  for consumer electronics. The r-square value for positive-WOM is slightly lower but still it does not fall in the weak zone as suggested by Hair *et al.* (2011, 2013).

| Table 5.13                                        |           |                      |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Structural Equation Modelling Results – R-Squares |           |                      |
|                                                   | Cosmetics | Consumer-Electronics |
| Brand Trust                                       | .80       | .72                  |
| Brand Loyalty                                     | .79       | .63                  |
| Brand Forgiveness                                 | .71       | .66                  |
| Positive-WOM                                      | .75       | .45                  |
| Brand Advocacy                                    | .94       | .82                  |
| Brand Defence                                     | .92       | .88                  |

Results of SEM results for path significance and basic hypotheses testing are shown in table 5.13. The path coefficients of the SEM along with their p-values provide direct evidence of the significant/insignificant paths (see table 5.14). The path significance values (p-values) as shown in tables 5.14, the direct paths from brand love to brand advocacy and brand defence and the hypotheses concerning the three relationship outcomes brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty were significant. However, the positive impact of brand love on positive-WOM within the negative-WOM incident has been rejected, whereas, the hypotheses testing the hierarchical relationship of positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence were also significant at  $.001$ , hence the hierarchical relationship between positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence were empirically confirmed. The results; therefore, show that seven of the eight direct hypotheses (H1, H2, H4, H5, H6, H7, and H8) were accepted for both the datasets. This shows that brand love has a positive influence on the superior WOM constructs; brand advocacy and brand defence, and all the consumer-brand relationship outcomes proposed in this study. With regards to the mediation paths, the results revealed differences between the two surveys.

The results shown in table 5.14 show that the path coefficients for the paths BT→PWOM and BT→BA were not significant for cosmetics. However, all three paths testing the impact of brand trust on brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM were significant for consumer-electronics. It shows that brand trust did not have any influence on positive-WOM and brand advocacy in case of cosmetics, but had a significant positive impact on brand defence in response to negative-WOM. Based on the paths estimates the mediation effect of brand trust on positive-WOM and brand advocacy for cosmetics could not be tested. Therefore, the two hypotheses H6a, H6b were rejected and did not require running the Sobel's test for mediation as the second paths

for the two hypotheses were not significant. Concerning consumer-electronics all the three paths were significant for brand trust; therefore, it involved using Sobel's test to confirm the mediation affect as presented in table 5.14.

| Table 5.14                                                              |           |          |                           |                      |          |                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------|--------------------------|
| Structural Equation Modelling Results – Path Estimates and Significance |           |          |                           |                      |          |                          |
| Paths Analysed                                                          | Cosmetics |          |                           | Consumer-Electronics |          |                          |
|                                                                         | Estimate  | p-values | Comments                  | Estimate             | p-values | Comments                 |
| BL→BD                                                                   | .820      | .018*    | H1 (Accepted)             | .841                 | .001     | H1 (Accepted)            |
| BL→BA                                                                   | .958      | ***      | H2 (Accepted)             | .826                 | ***      | H2 (Accepted)            |
| BL→PWOM                                                                 | .328      | .298     | H3 (Rejected)             | .077                 | .802     | H3 (Rejected)            |
| PWOM→BA                                                                 | .754      | ***      | H4 (Accepted)             | .701                 | ***      | H4 (Accepted)            |
| BA→BD                                                                   | .857      | ***      | H5 (Accepted)             | .665                 | ***      | H5 (Accepted)            |
| BL→BT                                                                   | .897      | ***      | H6 (Accepted)             | .851                 | ***      | H6 (Accepted)            |
| BL→BF                                                                   | .842      | ***      | H7 (Accepted)             | .815                 | ***      | H7 (Accepted)            |
| BL→BLY                                                                  | .891      | ***      | H8 (Accepted)             | .793                 | ***      | H8 (Accepted)            |
| BT→BD                                                                   | .331      | .011*    | Path Significant at .05   | .586                 | ***      | Path Significant at .001 |
| BT→BA                                                                   | .247      | .055     | Path not Significant      | .601                 | ***      | Path Significant at .001 |
| BT→PWOM                                                                 | .263      | .092     | Path not Significant      | .339                 | .040*    | Path Significant at 0.05 |
| BF→BD                                                                   | .458      | ***      | Path Significant at 0.001 | .449                 | ***      | Path Significant at .001 |
| BF→BA                                                                   | .284      | ***      | Path Significant at 0.001 | .043                 | .651     | Path not significant     |
| BF→PWOM                                                                 | .176      | .088     | Path not Significant      | .303                 | .020*    | Path Significant at 0.05 |
| BLY→BD                                                                  | .252      | .041*    | Path Significant at 0.05  | .268                 | .001**   | Path Significant at 0.01 |
| BLY→BA                                                                  | .281      | .004**   | Path Significant at 0.01  | .007                 | .936     | Path not significant     |
| BLY→PWOM                                                                | .155      | .281     | Path not Significant      | .193                 | .097     | Path not significant     |

Concerning the mediating role of brand forgiveness, again the primary hypothesis (H7) was accepted for the influence of brand love on brand forgiveness for both the surveys. However, the effect of forgiveness on the three brand-favourable WOM outcomes revealed to be different for the two product categories. Two paths each for the two surveys were significant, however, BF→PWOM for cosmetics and BF→BA for consumer-electronics were not significant, resulting in the rejection of hypotheses H7c for cosmetics and H7b for consumer-electronics before the mediation test. However, paths testing the impact of brand forgiveness on brand defence concerning cosmetics and consumer-electronics were significant and tested for mediation as presented in table 5.14. In case of brand loyalty, two paths for cosmetics and one path for consumer-electronics were significant, however, BLY→PWOM for cosmetics and BLY→BA for consumer-electronics were not significant, which rejected hypotheses H6c for cosmetics and H6b, and H6c for consumer-electronics even before the mediation test. However, paths testing the impact of brand loyalty on brand defence concerning both cosmetics and consumer-electronics were significant and tested for mediation. Therefore, based on the structural model paths, Sobel Test was used for H6a, H7a, H7b, H8a, and H8b for cosmetics and H6a, H6b, H6c, H7a, H7c, and H8a for consumer-electronics. The Sobel's Test results for mediation are presented in table 5.15 for both the surveys.

A fuller written explanation of the hypotheses test results is also included in section 5.7, and table 5.16 for the non-statistician readers.

The results of the Sobel Test are discussed next.

### 5.6.2 Results of Sobel's Test:

The Sobel's test for mediation was run using the significant paths' values identified through SEM. The Sobel's test can only run for significant paths, therefore, the paths that were insignificant were not included in the test and the hypotheses for those paths were already rejected based on the structural modelling results as shown in table 5.14. For example, as shown in figure 5.2, the hypothesis H6b involved two paths brand love to brand trust and brand trust to brand advocacy, therefore, to run Sobel's test both the paths needed to be significant. The initial paths BL→BT were significant for both the surveys, however the secondary paths for the two hypotheses H6b and H6c, BT→PWOM and BT→BA were not significant for cosmetics. However, all three paths concerning H6a, H6b, and H6c were significant for consumer-electronics. Therefore, the Sobel's test was only conducted for H6a for cosmetics, but for all three hypotheses H6a, H6b, and H6c for consumer-electronics, where H6c got rejected for any mediation effects of brand trust on the relationship of brand love and positive-WOM in case of negative-WOM incident.

| Table 5.15         |            |                       |          |                    |                       |          |                    |
|--------------------|------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|-----------------------|----------|--------------------|
| Sobel Test Results |            |                       |          |                    |                       |          |                    |
| Mediation Path     | Hypotheses | Cosmetics             |          |                    | Consumer-Electronics  |          |                    |
|                    |            | Sobel Test Statistics | P-Values | Hypothesis Results | Sobel Test Statistics | P-Values | Hypothesis Results |
| BL→BT→BD           | H6a        | 2.250                 | 0.024*   | Accepted           | 2.648                 | 0.008**  | Accepted           |
| BL→BT→BA           | H6b        |                       |          | Rejected           | 2.272                 | 0.023*   | Accepted           |
| BL→BT→PWOM         | H6c        |                       |          | Rejected           | 1.432                 | 0.161    | Rejected           |
| BL→BF→BD           | H7a        | 3.647                 | ***      | Accepted           | 2.789                 | 0.005*   | Accepted           |
| BL→BF→BA           | H7b        | 2.786                 | 0.005*   | Accepted           |                       |          | Rejected           |
| BL→BF→PWOM         | H7c        |                       |          | Rejected           | 1.984                 | 0.047*   | Accepted           |
| BL→BLY→BD          | H8a        | 1.944                 | 0.041 *  | Accepted           | 2.494                 | 0.012*   | Accepted           |
| BL→BLY→BA          | H8b        | 2.141                 | 0.032*   | Accepted           |                       |          | Rejected           |
| BL→BLY→PWOM        | H8c        |                       |          | Rejected           |                       |          | Rejected           |

Regarding brand forgiveness, H7a and H7b were tested for cosmetics and H7a and H7c were tested for consumer-electronics for mediation, which turned out to be significant. Hence, partial mediation was accepted for all four hypotheses, suggesting brand forgiveness partially mediates the relationship of brand love with brand defence and brand advocacy for cosmetics, and brand defence and positive-WOM for consumer-electronics. However, hypotheses H7c and H7b were rejected for cosmetics and consumer-electronics respectively. Concerning brand loyalty, H8a and H8b for partial mediation were accepted for cosmetics and H8a was accepted for consumer-electronics, as shown in table 5.15.

Overall, there found to be extreme differentiation between the mediation results for the two product categories. Moreover, even with the significant values for the Sobel's test of mediation, the results did not suggest complete mediation, as the direct effects were found to be strongly significant than that of mediating tests, which indicate partial mediation. As, to consider full mediation, the direct path should be non-significant (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Therefore, it was concluded in this

doctoral study that all the hypotheses accepted for mediation demonstrated a partially mediated relationship; whereas, the direct relationship of brand love with the two superior brand-favourable WOM outcomes; brand defence and brand advocacy were strongly significant for both the product categories.

The findings therefore, suggest that the influential role of brand love on the brand-favourable WOM behaviour is irrelevant of the product categories in the case of any negative incident. Consumers faced with negative-WOM about the loved brand go beyond just positive-WOM, but attribute brand advocacy and brand defence to support their loved brand. However, the other relationship factors: brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty implied differences towards the two different product categories, which is also apparent in the post-survey interviews as discussed in chapter 6.

The next section provides a written explanation of the research hypotheses results for explicit understanding for the non-technical audience of the study.

### **5.7 Findings of the Research Hypotheses:**

The quantitative analysis of the survey findings and hypotheses results revealed very interesting findings for this research. The quantitative findings strongly supported the importance, existence, and prevalence of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards the loved brands as hypothesised in this study, including brand advocacy, and brand defence. The research hypotheses involving the direct positive impact of brand love on brand defence (H1), brand advocacy (H2), brand trust (H6), brand forgiveness (H7), and brand loyalty (H8) were accepted for both the product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics. Moreover, both the hierarchical hypotheses H4, and H5 were also accepted for both surveys. Please note that all the research hypotheses were tested under the negative-WOM incident. Therefore, acceptance and rejection of any research hypotheses should be observed in the same context, which implies that the negative incident should always be considered in interpreting any research hypotheses results for this thesis. Thus, the rejection of H3 for both the datasets imply that consumers tend to offer superior WOM in case of a negative-WOM incident, and go beyond just positive-WOM.

The results for the two product categories differed in terms of the mediating role of other consumer-brand relationships constructs used in the study, such as brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty. The hypotheses result for the two surveys are summarised and depicted in table 5.16. The results show a differentiation between cosmetics and consumer-electronics with regards to the mediating role of brand trust in generating the three WOM behaviour, namely positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. In this regard, mediating role of brand trust on the relationship of brand love and brand defence (H6a) was accepted for partial mediation for both the product categories. Furthermore, hypotheses H6b and H6c were rejected for cosmetics and H6c was rejected for consumer-electronics, suggesting no effects of mediation of brand trust on brand advocacy and positive-WOM for cosmetics. However, with regards to consumer-electronics, hypotheses H6a and H6b were accepted, suggesting partial mediation of brand trust for the impact

of brand love on brand defence and brand advocacy, but H6c was rejected, suggesting no mediation found for positive-WOM. Therefore, the mediation hypotheses results involving the mediating role of brand trust on the relationship of brand love with brand advocacy and positive-WOM for cosmetics depicted no mediation. However, the brand trust mediation effects concerning brand defence was significant for both the datasets in case of negative-WOM, showing presence of partial mediation. It was also consistent with the post-survey laddering interview findings, as presented in chapter 6. A fuller discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings is presented in chapter 7, providing insights and reasoning to the hypotheses results in line with the qualitative findings, and the existing literature.

Concerning the mediating effect of brand forgiveness, hypothesis H7a testing the mediating effect of brand loyalty on brand defence were accepted for both the surveys. However, H5c for cosmetics and H5b for consumer-electronics were rejected. The results for hypotheses H5b and H5c for the two surveys suggested no mediation effect of brand forgiveness on the relationship of brand love and positive-WOM for cosmetics, and brand love and brand advocacy for consumer-electronics. The results showed that if a consumer loves a brand and forgives a brand in case of believed negative-WOM, the consumer supports the brand through brand defence and advocacy in case of cosmetics, whereas in case of consumer-electronics they offer brand defence and positive-WOM. Moreover, the accepted hypotheses did not demonstrate a fuller mediation, which suggested that consumers defend their loved brands after forgiving their loved brands, however the direct impact of brand love remains significant in generating brand-favourable defence and advocacy against negative-WOM incident.

Regarding the mediating role of brand loyalty, H8a, H8b were supported in case of cosmetics brand, however only H8a was supported in case of consumer-electronics brands. The findings suggested that the two surveys suggested no mediation effect of brand loyalty on the relationship of brand love with positive-WOM for cosmetics, and positive-WOM and brand advocacy for consumer-electronics.

The hypotheses findings show that in case of negative-WOM, all the relationship constructs positively impact consumers' brand defence behaviour. All the direct and mediating hypotheses concerning brand defence are accepted for both the surveys. Moreover, the least attributed brand favourable WOM has revealed to be positive-WOM against negative-WOM for both the surveys, and readiness of brand defence remains the foremost as hypothesised and conceptualised in this thesis.

The differences in the research hypotheses results suggested that consumers respond differently to the different product categories in terms of their relationship attributions. However, in case of negative WOM, the positive impact of brand love revealed to be strong and consistent towards the two product categories, in case of all the independent variables explored in this study except positive-WOM, which further supports the hierarchical importance of the three brand-favourable



WOM, and the importance of brand defence in response to any negative WOM about the loved brand.

| Table 5.16                                                    |                                                                                               |                    |                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| Hypotheses Results Cosmetics and Consumer-electronics Surveys |                                                                                               |                    |                      |
| Research Hypotheses                                           |                                                                                               | Cosmetics          | Consumer-electronics |
| H1                                                            | Brand love has a positive impact on brand defence                                             | Accepted           | Accepted             |
| H2                                                            | Brand love has a positive impact on brand advocacy                                            | Accepted           | Accepted             |
| H3                                                            | Brand love has a positive impact on positive-WOM                                              | Rejected           | Rejected             |
| H4                                                            | <i>Positive-WOM has a positive impact on brand advocacy.</i>                                  | <b>Accepted</b>    | <b>Accepted</b>      |
| H5                                                            | <i>Brand advocacy has a positive impact on brand defence.</i>                                 | <b>Accepted</b>    | <b>Accepted</b>      |
| H6                                                            | <b>Brand love has a positive impact on brand trust</b>                                        | <b>Accepted</b>    | <b>Accepted</b>      |
| H6a                                                           | Brand trust positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand defence.        | Partially-Accepted | Partially-Accepted   |
| H6b                                                           | Brand trust positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand advocacy.       | Rejected           | Partially-Accepted   |
| H6c                                                           | Brand trust positively mediates the relationship between brand love and positive-WOM.         | Rejected           | Rejected             |
| H7                                                            | <b>Brand love has a positive impact on brand forgiveness.</b>                                 | <b>Accepted</b>    | <b>Accepted</b>      |
| H7a                                                           | Brand forgiveness positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand defence.  | Partially-Accepted | Partially-Accepted   |
| H7b                                                           | Brand forgiveness positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand advocacy. | Partially-Accepted | Rejected             |
| H7c                                                           | Brand forgiveness positively mediates the relationship between brand love and positive-WOM.   | Rejected           | Partially-Accepted   |
| H8                                                            | <b>Brand love has a positive impact on brand loyalty.</b>                                     | <b>Accepted</b>    | <b>Accepted</b>      |
| H8a                                                           | Brand loyalty positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand defence.      | Partially-Accepted | Partially-Accepted   |
| H8b                                                           | Brand loyalty positively mediates the relationship between brand love and brand advocacy.     | Partially-Accepted | Rejected             |
| H8c                                                           | Brand loyalty positively mediates the relationship between brand love and positive-WOM        | Rejected           | Rejected             |

The conclusion of the chapter is presented next.

## 5.8 Conclusion:

This chapter presented the findings of the research Phase-II. It involved the main quantitative study involving hypotheses testing using two datasets acquired through two online surveys, investigating two different product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics. The results for both the surveys were similar in case of the direct positive influence of brand love on both the consumer-brand relationship (trust, forgiveness, loyalty), and the brand-favourable WOM (defence, advocacy) constructs. The hypotheses test results confirmed the existence and prevalence of the three intensities of WOM attributions, positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved brands, as conceptualised and tested for the hierarchical paths. However, the responses differed in terms of the role of the three relationship mediators with regards to the different product categories. Moreover, none of the mediation hypotheses resulted in full mediation, only partial mediation was observed, because the direct influence of brand love on brand defence and advocacy was strong and fully significant for both the surveys.

The quantitative findings have provided a general overview of the constructs in terms of consumers' responses to the two product categories; cosmetics, and consumer-electronics. However, the quantitative results do not provide any insights to the consumer behaviour in specific that how, why,

and to what extent the consumers are likely to provide such WOM attributions, and when and why they are reluctant to do so. Therefore, to validate the quantitative findings by providing qualitative insights to the research, a set of follow up post-survey face-to-face laddering interviews were conducted. The findings for the research Phase III involving post-survey laddering interviews are presented in the next chapter.

## Chapter 6

### Findings Research Phase III; Post-Survey Laddering Interviews

#### 6.1 Aims of the Chapter:

This chapter presents the findings of the research phase-III of this study involving post-survey laddering interviews to validate the quantitative findings. Though, this study was orientated towards a positivist approach, the importance, and benefits of using mixed methods was also appreciated (Harrison and Reilly, 2011; Johnson *et al.*, 2007). The purpose of these interviews was to inform understanding of the survey data, particularly where it was more complex to provide an explanation to the findings. Therefore, post-survey face-to-face laddering interviews were conducted to help validate the quantitative findings. Table 6.1 presents an overview of the research in phase III, with the objectives of the data-collection strategy, the corresponding research objectives, the data analysis techniques, and the sample size.

| Table 6.1                   |                                                                  |                 |                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Overview Research Phase III |                                                                  |                 |                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| N o.                        | Data Collection Methods                                          | Sample Size (N) | Data Analysis Methods                                          | Methodological Objective/ Rationale                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Relevance with the Study Objectives                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| 1.                          | Qualitative<br><br>Post-survey Face-to-Face Laddering Interviews | 10              | Thematic-Content Analysis<br><br>Consumers Value Maps Analysis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To augment understanding of brand love, and its attributions.</li> <li>- To develop an understanding of consumers' value structures that motivate consumers to attribute brand-favourable behaviour towards their loved brands.</li> <li>- To explore, how consumers respond to negative-WOM about their loved brands.</li> <li>- To compliment the quantitative findings with qualitative insights to the research phenomena.</li> <li>- To seek commonalities and contrasts between the quantitative and qualitative findings across two product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics.</li> <li>- To validate the quantitative findings.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM attributions towards and against their loved brands.</li> <li>- To conceptualise the levels and types of consumers' WOM behaviour as a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM attributions.</li> <li>- To evaluate the mediating impact of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the relationship between brand love and consumers' WOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence.</li> <li>- To provide conclusions and recommendations on future WOM research particularly the role of 'brand defence' in relation to consumer-brand relationships, and brand love.</li> </ul> |

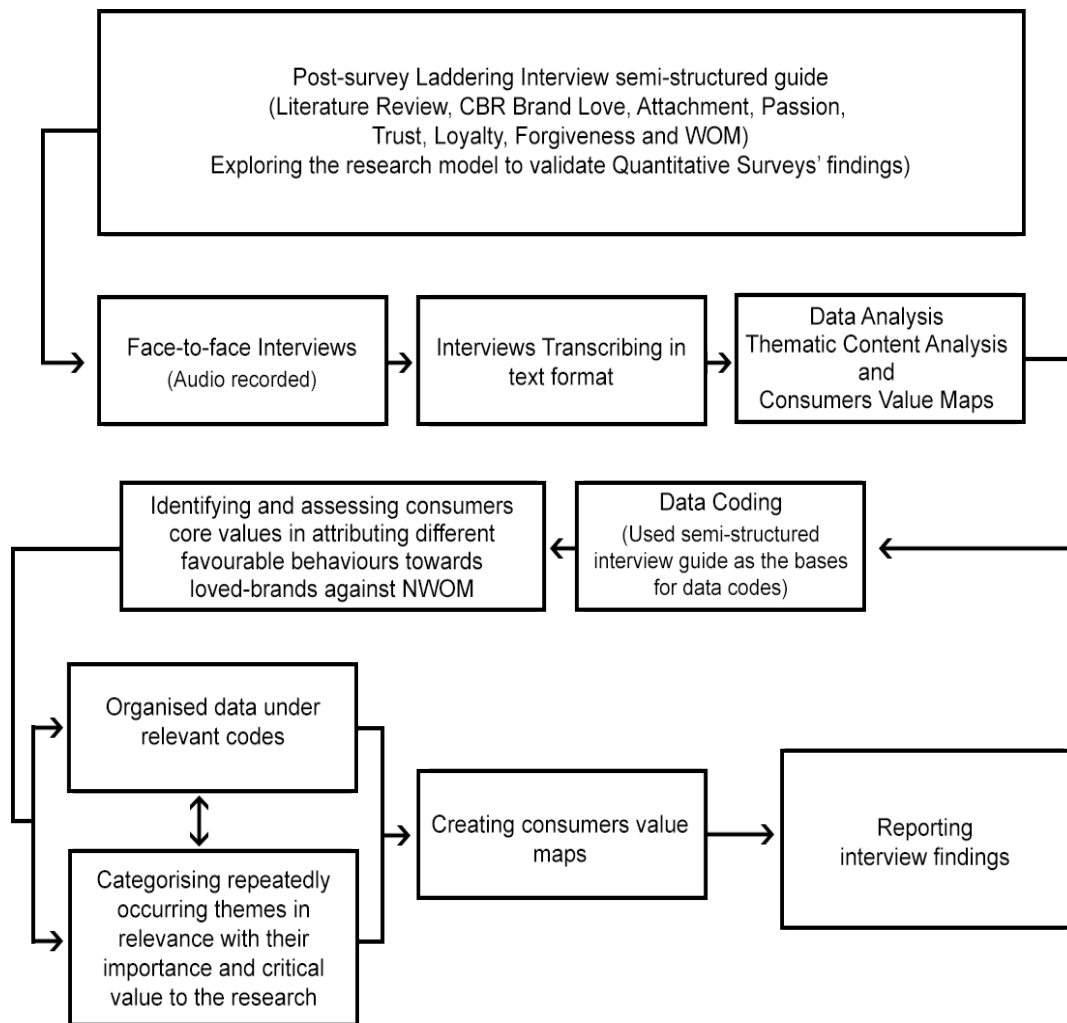


**Figure 6.1 Overview Post-Survey Laddering Interviews**

The semi-structured interview guide was developed based on the laddering interview techniques suggested by Reynolds and Phillips (2015). Like quantitative surveys, the interviews also explored the participants' inclinations about attributing brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards their loved brands in response to any negative-WOM. Following the quantitative surveys, the exploration was carried out across two product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics. The interviews also explored the insights, reasons, and intensity of the participants' willingness and/or reluctance in offering the proposed brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM. The interviews also explored the role of the three consumer-brand relationship constructs; brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty in influencing participants' brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards their loved brands to appreciate and validate the survey findings in this context. The interview guide carefully included items to cover all aspects and constructs that are relevant to this research as presented in table 3.9 in chapter 3. Figure 6.1 presents a complete overview of the laddering interview process as followed in this study.

The next section presents the demographics profile of the interviews' participants.

## 6.2 Sample and Demographics:

Ten participants were recruited for the interviews using judgement sampling techniques, with an equal number of male and female participants (5 each). Table 6.2 presents the fuller details of the participants' profile, and specifics of the interviews concerning sampling, time, and duration of the interviews. Unlike pre-survey interviews, the purpose of accessing both male and female participants was to avoid any gender bias concerning WOM behaviour, or relationship attributions towards loved or favourite brands. Moreover, it could provide opportunity to observe any gender specific differences in their relationship with brands and their consequent WOM behaviour. However, the interview findings did not reveal any gender specific differences concerning brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards loved brands; therefore, no gender differences were reported in this study.

| Table 6.2                                                     |              |        |     |                  |                |                    |                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-----|------------------|----------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Post-survey Laddering Interviews Participants' Sample Profile |              |        |     |                  |                |                    |                                                              |
| No.                                                           | Interviewees | Gender | Age | Interview Length | Interview date | Sampling Technique | Population Criteria                                          |
| 1                                                             | PST-Int-1    | Female | 28  | 53 mins          | 08-10-2015     | Judgement Sampling | British consumers of the chosen categories aged 18 and over. |
| 2                                                             | PST-Int-2    | Female | 32  | 51 mins          | 13-10-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 3                                                             | PST-Int-3    | Male   | 31  | 110 mins         | 26-11-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 4                                                             | PST-Int-4    | Female | 39  | 41 mins          | 30-11-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 5                                                             | PST-Int-5    | Male   | 44  | 63 mins          | 07-12-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 6                                                             | PST-Int-6    | Female | 37  | 38 mins          | 09-12-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 7                                                             | PST-Int-7    | Male   | 41  | 56 mins          | 17-12-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 8                                                             | PST-Int-8    | Female | 22  | 45 mins          | 19-12-2015     |                    |                                                              |
| 9                                                             | PST-Int-9    | Male   | 24  | 43 mins          | 06-01-2016     |                    |                                                              |
| 10                                                            | PST-Int-10   | Male   | 27  | 59 mins          | 13-01-2015     |                    |                                                              |

Note: Seconds are rounded to the closest minute.

The next section presents the findings of the post-survey laddering interviews.

## 6.3 Findings of the Post-Survey Laddering Interviews:

Like online surveys, the post-survey interviews also explored the participants' responses based on their relationship with the brand and the negative critical incident. The interviewees were asked about their relatedness with the brand, the reasons for building such relationship, and the intensity of their relatedness and/or their feelings for the brand, and their willingness or readiness for attributing positive behaviour towards that brand.

All the interviewees were asked about at least one most favourite cosmetic, and at least one consumer-electronics brand to collect data for both the product categories. All ten participants claimed to love at least one brand in both the categories, which supported the selection of cosmetics and consumer-electronics for the exploration of the impact of brand love. Moreover, responses collected on both product categories assisted in validating and complementing the quantitative findings through qualitative insights.

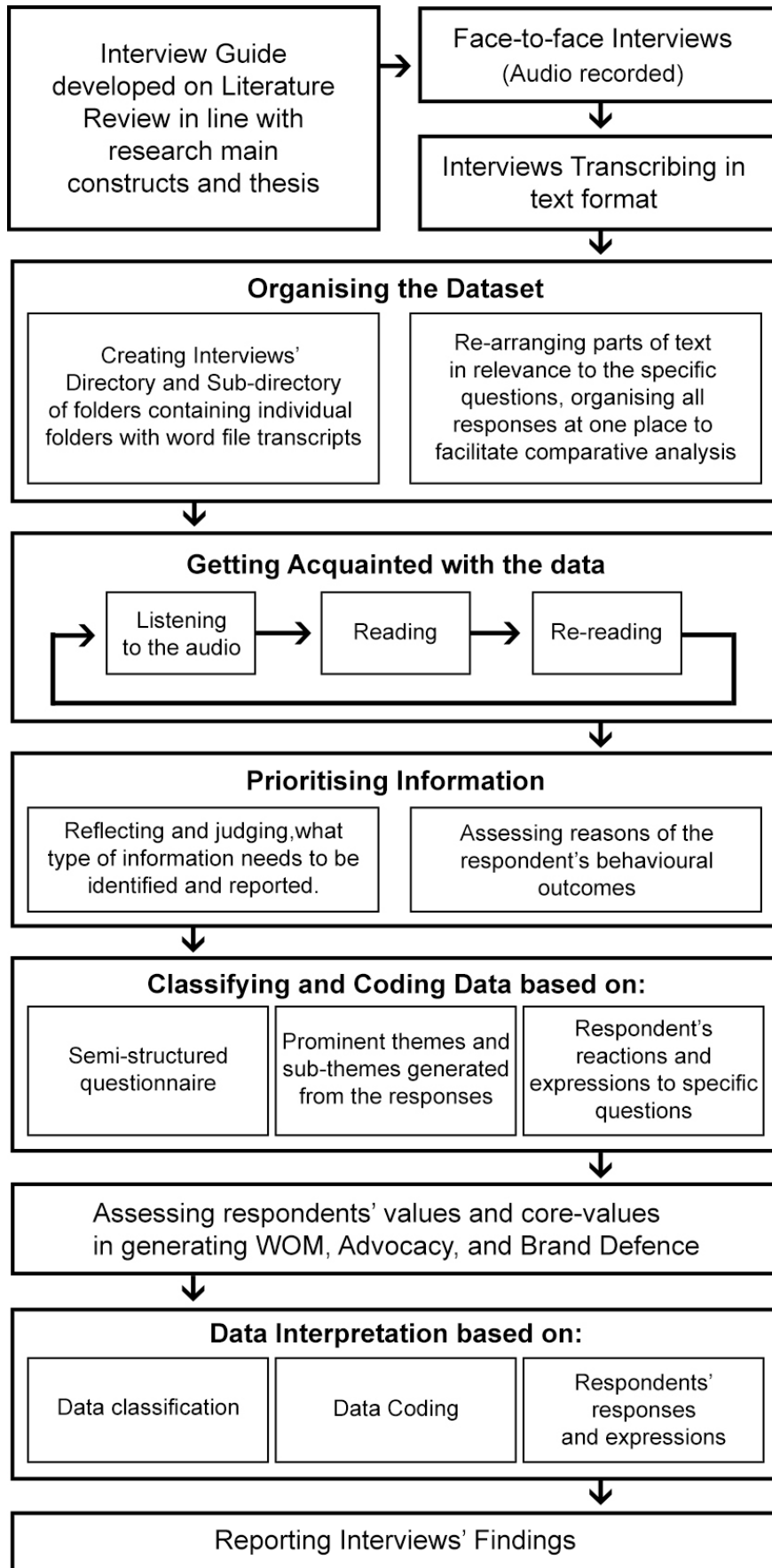


**Figure 6.2 Post-Survey Laddering Interviews Data Analysis Procedure – Thematic-Content Analysis and Consumers’ Value-maps**

The interview findings were analysed systematically using thematic-content analysis to generate the consumers' hierarchical value-maps as suggested by the laddering method (Ilicic and Webster, 2015; Reynolds and Phillips, 2009) (see figures 6.1, and 6.2).

| <b>Table 6.3</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                             |                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Data Extracts with Applied Codes – Working Example</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                             |                                                                                          |
| <b>Data Extracts – PST-Int1</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | <b>Coded for</b>                                                                            | <b>Sub-codes</b>                                                                         |
| I like because of the usability, because it uses everyday technology in the market but gives you an awesome product that's very easy to use. You don't need to learn how to use an Apple product.                                                                                                                                              | - Product Attributes<br>- Personal Preferences                                              | Technology<br>Easy-to-use                                                                |
| Like every social activity, every educational, every academic activity, everything is through my Apple product, so it would have to be Apple.                                                                                                                                                                                                  | - Product Attributes<br>- Personal Preferences<br>- Social Influences                       | Variety of use<br>Dependability                                                          |
| Its again like a memory thing, so my first official phone was an Apple so I am just so comfortable with using an Apple, I love the phone quality, I love the video quality, it has always been there for me.                                                                                                                                   | - Personal Preferences<br>- Social Influences                                               | Product features<br>Product quality<br>Memory<br>Comfort<br>Dependability<br>Reliability |
| When the original ... came out it was a very different phone, it changed the way we use phones today.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | - Product Attributes<br>- Brand Attributes                                                  | Technology<br>Innovation<br>Trend-setter                                                 |
| It always looks good like walking into a conference or something holding a MacBook... I would want it is because it looks good while holding, so it's like you are holding like a fashion thing basically. Apple is like fashion technology basically, so you are holding the latest fashion gizmo in your hand.                               | - Product Attributes<br>- Brand Attributes<br>- Personal Preferences<br>- Social Influences | Technology<br>Fashion<br>Image<br>Impression<br>Status                                   |
| When originally, I got it, it was one of the few in the market so that was really good, it felt good to have that.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | - Personal Preferences<br>- Social Preferences                                              | Status<br>Self-esteem                                                                    |
| We all know the drawbacks, we all know that it's not value for money, but we all are biased to it because it does crash lesser than other products and If there is a problem with it you can just go to the genius bar to the Apple store and get it fixed.                                                                                    | - Product Attributes<br>- Brand Attributes<br>- Personal Preferences                        | Customer service<br>Accessibility<br>Familiarity                                         |
| When the first time I got the ..., which is my first official phone. My dad got it for me because I had done so well in my GCSEs so it's a good memory that has been attached with it, so obviously, the bias of Apple always comes because of the memories attached with it rather than just the product itself.                              | - Social Influences<br>- Social Influences                                                  | Kinship (association of the brand with some close person)<br>Memory                      |
| But, still Apple is all around you, everywhere you go you see Apple products, my friends own Apple products, my family owns Apple products, and you see it around you so you do keep thinking about it.                                                                                                                                        | - Social Influences                                                                         | Kinship                                                                                  |
| Yes, because it's the same thing as when you hold a Gucci bag you feel good, you hold an Apple product you actually feel good                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | - Social Influences<br>- Social Influences                                                  | Status<br>Self-esteem<br>Feel good<br>Fashionable                                        |
| I have been using Apple products now since the age of 15 and I am now 23 so that is quite a long time... If I have to go and use someone else's phone I find it so difficult now because it's so much easier to use an ... now and so much more fun... it will be very difficult for me to move on to a Samsung or something. I would hate it. | - Personal Preferences                                                                      | Long-term relationship<br>Distress on separation                                         |

The purpose of using thematic-content analysis was to translate the interviewees' meanings and themes into observable data to avoid overlooking any important themes or explanations that might be helpful to develop the participants' hierarchical value-maps.

Figure 6.2 presents the analysis procedure of the post-survey laddering interviews in detail, and table 6.3 presents a worked example of the analytical process involved in this study for data coding. Table 6.3 presents the worked example of the data coding process using extracts from the responses of post-survey interview with interviewee 1, to show how the data were treated using open and axial coding. The open coding facilitated naming and categorising the main codes, and the axial coding helped to generate the sub-codes. All the ten interview transcripts were read, immersed in by the researcher, and included in the data-coding process in generating main themes for the analysis.

Moreover, to facilitate transparency, interview guides are provided in chapter 3 in tables 3.5 and 3.9, and one complete transcript for post-survey and pre-survey interviews each are provided in appendices. Moreover, summarised transcripts of post-survey interviews are also included in appendices in tabular form to present individual responses regarding basic inclination factors, the corresponding relationship constructs, and WOM outcomes for both the product categories to allow utmost transparency. The process of coding data involved organising data into meaningful groups (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Tuckett, 2005), and it is part of the analysis (Mile and Huberman, 1994). Therefore, the data was coded and sub-coded to identify meaningful themes to build the research argument. The data-coding process was started with open coding to find any possible themes present in the data, followed by an axial coding to explore relationships and overlaps between codes, and finally selective coding was focused at research model to extract inferences and build arguments as suggested by Al-Saifi *et al.* (2016). Table 6.4 presents the main coding criteria for the hierarchical value-maps developed in this study.

The findings of the thematic-content analysis revealed the nature, existence, and intensity of consumers' relatedness, love, or attachment towards the favourite brands. The relationship constructs explored in this research involved brand love, brand loyalty, brand trust, and brand forgiveness. The interview responses were organised and reported to portray and reflect on the following factors:

1. *The interviewees' direct responses about their perceived relationships with the brands;*
2. *The relationship constructs observed in the research model, their existing conceptualisations, relationship identifiers, motivators, and scale items identified through existing literature and/or preliminary face-to-face interviews;*
3. *The different types and intensities of the WOM behaviour conceptualised, measured, and explored in this study; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, towards the loved brands in general and in response to any negative-WOM incident.*

The thematic-content analysis identified themes were organised in three main categories to retain alignment with the value-map construction. Firstly, the general themes depicted through the interview responses indicating interviewees' motives or reasons of using or loving a product/brand, these themes involved product or brand basic attributes or personal preferences. Secondly, the relationship-specific consequences or comments that depicted the interviewees' consequent WOM behaviour against negative-WOM about their loved brands. Thirdly, the interviewees' core values



that instigate their brand-oriented WOM behaviour in response to negative-WOM. The findings also suggested that even with the same attributes, the behavioural consequences change if the consumers' values change by any means.

| <b>Table 6.4</b>                                                |                                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Interviewees' Value-Mapping Categories and Major Factors</b> |                                         |                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>Hierarchical Value-Map Categories</b>                        | <b>Main Corresponding Factors</b>       | <b>Relevant Codes</b>                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Definition of Codes</b>                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Values</b>                                                   | Relationship Values                     | Brand love<br>Attachment<br>Brand trust                                                                                                                                  | Respondents relationship with the brand                                                                                                                                  |
|                                                                 | Self-Esteem Values                      | Sense of responsibility, fairness, and justice<br>Personal status                                                                                                        | Personal esteem values in terms of personal image, principals, sense of justice/fairness, sense of responsibility towards society, friends or family, consumer awareness |
|                                                                 | Health and Safety                       | Harmful ingredients/effects                                                                                                                                              | Resistance to harmful effects                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Consequences</b>                                             | Behavioural Consequences                | Brand defence<br>Brand advocacy<br>positive-WOM                                                                                                                          | Consequent WOM behaviour based on interviewees' main values and basic personal, social, and/or product attributes in response to negative incident                       |
|                                                                 | Psychological/relationship Consequences | Brand loyalty<br>Brand forgiveness                                                                                                                                       | Willingness to forgive and/or sustain long-term relationship based on the interviewees' main values and basic personal, social, and/or product attributes                |
| <b>Attributes</b>                                               | Social                                  | Kinship<br>Memories<br>Status<br>Social connectivity<br>Relationship length                                                                                              | Social influences, or associations attributing to consumer-brand relationships' main values and consequences.                                                            |
|                                                                 | Personal                                | Self-Identity<br>Dependability<br>Personal looks and image<br>Familiarity<br>Suitability<br>Used-to                                                                      | Personal preferences attributing to consumer-brand relationships' main values and consequences.                                                                          |
|                                                                 | Product                                 | Quality<br>Brand value (brand name, market position)<br>High-tech<br>Modern<br>Fashionable<br>Availability<br>Product range<br>Helpfulness<br>User-friendly<br>Usability | Product attributes contributing to consumer-brand relationships' main values and consequences.                                                                           |

Furthermore, the most favourite or most loved cosmetics and consumer-electronics brands reported in the post survey interviews are also presented in table 6.5. As shown in table 6.5, the list of loved brands illustrate that nine out of ten interviewees claimed loving their most favourite consumer-electronics brand more than the cosmetics brand. The findings suggested a higher involvement of interviewees with their loved consumer-electronics brands, as compared to their cosmetics brands. This difference of involvement was further expressed throughout the interviews and was also apparent from their WOM behavioural intentions towards their loved consumer/electronics or cosmetics brands in response to any negative incidents, particularly if perceived negative-WOM being true. These differences mostly emanated from the nature of the product, along with the usability and dependability on the product, which is discussed in detail later

in this chapter.

| Table 6.5                                        |                             |                         |                                           |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------|
| Loved Brands Cited in the Post-Survey Interviews |                             |                         |                                           |
| Interviewees                                     | More Loved Product Category | Cosmetics               | Consumer-electronics                      |
| PST-Int-1                                        | Consumer-Electronics        | Lakme'                  | Apple (iPhone, laptop)                    |
| PST-Int-2                                        |                             | Rimmel (eye liner)      | Apple (iPhone)                            |
| PST-Int-3                                        |                             | Garnier (hair gel)      | Apple (iPhone)                            |
| PST-Int-4                                        |                             | Mac (lipsticks)         | Samsung Alpha (mobile phone)              |
| PST-Int-5                                        | Cosmetics                   | Nivea (cold cream)      | Apple (iPhone), Philips (electric shaver) |
| PST-Int-6                                        | Consumer-electronics        | Maybelline              | Samsung (mobile phone)                    |
| PST-Int-7                                        |                             | Gillette, and Old Spice | Sony (TV), Apple (iPhone)                 |
| PST-Int-8                                        |                             | L'Oréal                 | Samsung (mobile phone)                    |
| PST-Int-9                                        |                             | Garnier                 | Sony (TV, cameras, mobile phone)          |
| PST-Int-10                                       |                             | Gucci (perfumes)        | Samsung (mobile phones)                   |

As mentioned earlier thematic-content analysis was aimed at developing interviewees' hierarchical value-maps, and the main purpose of using the hierarchical value-mapping analysis was to develop an overall understanding of consumer value structures in generating brand-favourable WOM, particularly brand defence. The value-maps are presented in the form of honeycomb diagrams depicting relevant factors predicting consumers' values, attributes, and, subsequent behavioural and psychosocial consequences.

The next section presents the findings of the post-survey interviews in form of hierarchical value-maps.

### 6.3.1 Consumers' Hierarchical Value-Maps:

Based on the thematic-content analysis and laddering techniques, the consumers' hierarchical value-maps were developed for both loved cosmetics and consumer-electronics brands. The main objectives for developing hierarchical value-maps and the corresponding methodological objectives are presented in table 6.1. In order to develop the value-maps for the proposed brand-favourable WOM behaviour, the findings were organised in three major categories:

1. *Attributes (perceived benefits of the product or brand), involving product attributes, personal preferences, and social influences,*
2. *Relationship or behavioural consequences (loyalty, forgiveness, and consequent.WOM behaviour positive-WOM, brand advocacy, or brand defence), and*
3. *Core-values (consumer-brand relationships i.e. brand love, brand trust, brand loyalty, response to negative incident),*

The interviews were designed and analysed based on the recommendations of laddering interviewing methods (Reynolds and Phillips 2009, 2008) developed on the means-end theory (Guttman, 1982). Therefore, the data codes were developed and sorted using the thematic-content analysis into the three main categories; values, consequences, and attributes, which were further divided into the corresponding factors that shape interviewees' hierarchical value-maps. Table 6.4 presents the factors and relevant codes involved in the three main categories for developing value-maps for the interviewees' basic responses to the proposed negative incident for both the product categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics.

The main corresponding themes were identified, and codes were sorted based on the responses recorded and analysed through the thematic analysis of the post-survey laddering interviews. The definitions for the corresponding factors are included and presented in table 6.4.

Interviewees' values were identified within three main factors; the values associated to the consumer-brand relationships, such as love, and level of trust, secondly, self-esteem values that involved interviewees' sense of responsibility, fairness, and justice, towards either the brand or the friends and family, and thirdly health and safety concerns. The interviews' findings revealed that health and safety concerns can go beyond any brand-relationships or associations in case of any information or believed negative-WOM that is deemed harmful, as discussed in sections 6.1.2.2 and 6.1.2.3. Concerning the consequences, the thematic-content analysis identified both behavioural and psychosocial consequences. The two psychosocial consequences identified were: brand loyalty and brand forgiveness, and the behavioural consequences involved positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence.

Moreover, the thematic-content analysis also identified the interviewees' general product and/or brand oriented attributes, preferences, and/or influences, which the participants referred to in their interviews as means of their consumption and behavioural inclinations. These product attributes make consumers indulge in a relationship with a brand leading to brand-favourable behaviour. Therefore, the attributes for the two product categories identified in the post-survey findings are presented individually in tables 6.6 and 6.7. As depicted in tables 6.6 and 6.7, all the questions relating to why and how consumers relate themselves to the brands, and which factors act as the main attributes that connect consumers with brands fell into three main categories, namely product/brand/service attributes, personal preferences, and social influences.

The product/brand/service attributes included the quality and usability of the product itself, the branding attributes, or service quality, as depicted in table 6.6 and 6.7. These attributes include everything that appeals to the consumer including; looks, feel, impression, usability, reliability, etc. of the product or the brand. The branding, marketing, and/or service attributes are perceived collectively by the consumer. Personal preferences included consumers' personal experience with the brand, such as if the personal expectations of the brand were met in addition to the basic product features or attributes. In addition, if the products of the brand meet the esteem or comfort needs, or add to the current or desired self-identity, the brand becomes a habitual necessity for a consumer. In this case, a consumer feels that he/she is unable to do without the brand, it increases consumers' dependence on the brand. Moreover, the image and impression of the brand were also reported as main attributes; however, these attributes overlap in the case of both personal and social influences.

Regarding the social influences, the findings of both the pre-survey and post-survey follow-up interviews revealed the strong role of social influences in promoting or motivating positive consumer brand relationships.

It was also apparent from the pre-survey interviews' findings that love, affection, attachment, and/or emotional bonding with brands also stemmed from social influences that included kinship (some close person using the brand), desired social status, social impression, desired self-identity, as well as the facilitation in carrying out one's social life.

| <b>Table 6.6</b>                                                      |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Main Consumer Responses Reported on the Three Major Attributes</b> |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Cosmetics</b>                                                      |                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Interviewees</b>                                                   | <b>Product Attributes</b>                                                                          | <b>Personal Preferences</b>                                                                                                                                      | <b>Social Influences</b>                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-1</b>                                                      | Quality<br>Reliability                                                                             | I am not allergic to<br>I have grown up with...<br>Feel good<br>Looks good<br>I feel feminine<br>Sense of womanliness<br>Long-term relationship<br>Use regularly | my mum has used it<br>I have seen my grandma using...<br>I have always seen... around my family and around my relatives and it has a link to India ... |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b>                                                      | Gives me the best results<br>Lasts longer<br>Reliability<br>It works well<br>Good product<br>Price | It's proven...the best brand for me and my particular skin type<br>Look pretty<br>Associate my pretty eyes with this brand<br>Use daily                          | Positive remarks<br>Compliments<br>Desired image                                                                                                       |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>                                                      | Quality<br>Fulfils the purpose                                                                     | Used to<br>Long-term relationship<br>Use daily<br>Look good<br>Represents himself                                                                                | Adds to image                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>                                                      | Quality<br>Affordable<br>Lasts longer<br>Meets expectations<br>Good finish                         | Feel comfortable<br>Used to<br>Long-term relationship<br>Fond of makeup<br>Look good                                                                             | Look good                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>                                                      | Quality                                                                                            | Long-term relationship<br>Use daily<br>Enjoy using<br>Dependability<br>Used to                                                                                   | Desired image                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>                                                      | Quality<br>Best mascara in the market                                                              | Satisfaction<br>Do not want to keep changing the brands                                                                                                          | Kinship                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>                                                      | Market leader<br>Quality                                                                           | Long-term relationship<br>Feel happy to use<br>Familiarity with the brand                                                                                        | Kinship                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>                                                      | Price<br>Quality<br>Wide range of products                                                         | Used to it<br>Long-term relationship<br>Regular use                                                                                                              | Look good                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>                                                      | Quality<br>Lasts longer<br>Good finish                                                             | Long-term relationship<br>Use daily<br>Used to                                                                                                                   | Kinship                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>                                                     | Quality<br>Brand name<br>Unique<br>Classy                                                          | Long-term relationship<br>Use daily<br>Used to                                                                                                                   | Look good                                                                                                                                              |

The findings revealed three main social factors that prevail in forming and maintaining brand relations:

1. *The relatedness of closely related person with the brand i.e. Kinship;*
2. *Social impression, status, or esteem needs that I am using the best brand, or my brand is better, trendier, or high-tech, the sense of superiority, or being noticed;*
3. *The facilitation from the loved brand or product of the brand in carrying out the consumers' social life, such as, keeping in contact with friends and family, remain connected, keeping in touch, social media, emails, texting, calls, etc., as all these factors have become an important part of consumers' lives these days.*

| Table 6.7                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Main Participants' Comments Reported on the Three Major Attributes<br>Consumer-electronics |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                       |
| Interviewees                                                                               | Product Attributes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Personal Preferences                                                                                                                                                                                             | Social Influences                                                                                                                                                     |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                  | Usability<br>Technology<br>Awesome product<br>Quality<br>User friendly<br>Camera<br>Ahead of its time<br>It changed the way we use phones today<br>Wonderful brand<br>This is the first time someone has taken a technological company and made it into a fashion icon<br>Fashion technology | First phone<br>Feel good<br>Pleasant memory<br>Comfortable with using<br>Always been there for me<br>It looks good<br>Part of my life every day.<br>Personal experience<br>Long-term relationship<br>Regular use | All social life and interactive life depend on the product.<br>My dad got it for me<br>Fashion icon<br>Social Status<br>Experiences of the product with other people. |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                  | Reliable<br>User friendly<br>Advance<br>Most up-to-date<br>Helpful<br>Modern<br>Durable<br>Wonderful brand<br>Customer service                                                                                                                                                               | Used to it<br>Huge impact in life,<br>Feel proud of it.<br>I use my phone throughout the day, I sleep with it, I wake up with it, it's always there...                                                           | Brother used/use it<br>Medium to contact people I know.<br>Keep in contact with the people I love...<br>Desired image                                                 |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                  | Reliable<br>Dependable<br>Modern<br>Quality<br>High-tech<br>Top of the range<br>Aftersales service                                                                                                                                                                                           | Used to<br>Long-term relationship<br>Dependability                                                                                                                                                               | Desired image<br>Means of contact and connect with others<br>Kinship (everyone in the family uses the brand)                                                          |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                  | Reliable<br>Camera<br>Variety of Apps<br>Helpful<br>User-interface<br>Modern<br>High-tech<br>Sleek                                                                                                                                                                                           | Used to<br>Long-term relationship<br>Dependability<br>Helps in household and work routines<br>Feel confident                                                                                                     | Compliments                                                                                                                                                           |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                  | Reliable<br>User-friendly<br>Best brand<br>Best design                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Long-term relationship<br>Use daily<br>Enjoy using<br>Helpful<br>Dependability                                                                                                                                   | Means of contact with clients, friends, and family.<br>Desired image                                                                                                  |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                  | Reliable<br>Software<br>Quality                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Long-term relationship<br>Satisfaction                                                                                                                                                                           | Kinship                                                                                                                                                               |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                  | Quality<br>Reliable<br>Wide range of products                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Long-term relationship<br>Feel happy<br>Familiarity with the brand<br>Childhood memories                                                                                                                         | Kinship                                                                                                                                                               |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                  | Innovative<br>Good product                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Long-term relationship<br>Satisfaction<br>Used to<br>Use daily                                                                                                                                                   | Self-identity                                                                                                                                                         |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                  | Quality<br>Reliable<br>User-friendly<br>Creative<br>Stylish<br>Wide range of products                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Long-term relationship<br>Used to<br>Use daily                                                                                                                                                                   | Kinship<br>Self-identity                                                                                                                                              |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                 | Vibrant<br>Innovative<br>Brand development and growth<br>Futuristic (investment in virtual reality)<br>Consistent<br>Value for money                                                                                                                                                         | Used to<br>Use regularly<br>Dependability                                                                                                                                                                        | Impression<br>Compliments                                                                                                                                             |

The hierarchical value-maps were developed individually for all the ten participants for both the product categories. Based on the findings, three hierarchical value-maps scenarios were identified for loved cosmetics, and two hierarchical value-maps scenarios for loved consumer-electronics brands. The hierarchical value-maps scenarios were identified based on the response ladders depicted in the interviewees' responses to the proposed negative incidents or negative-WOM. Figure 6.3 and 6.4 presents the basic response ladders or mean-end chains (MECs) identified through the thematic findings of the post-survey interviews, depicting participants' main values, consequences, and attribute for the two product categories.

The ladders presented in figure 6.3 and 6.4 provide the example for the participants' means-end value chains analysis. Ladders or MECs are used interchangeably for the value chains identified through laddering interviews (Reynold and Phillips, 2015). Three MECs in figure 6.3 and two MECs in 6.4 present the basic ladder structures for interviewees loved cosmetics and consumer-electronics respectively. The three MECs for cosmetics and two MECs for consumer-electronics show the different value structures identified from the thematic-content analysis. These value-structures were based on the different scenarios developed on the synthetic negative-WOM incident proposed in the interviews. The MECs developed on thematic-content analysis suggested three main scenarios for cosmetics and two for consumer-electronics.

The first MECs in both the figures 6.3 and 6.4 depict healthy brand love relationship concerning both the product categories. The MECs show that a healthy consumer-brand love relationship in the absence of any negative incident does not reveal any observable differences concerning the two product categories. This suggests that brand love posits similar attributes irrespective of the product categories in general. The second MECs in both figures 6.3 and 6.4 suggested the participants' inclination to forgive the brands, but only if the negative-WOM was not deemed harmful. However, the third and final MEC in figure 6.3 shows that interviewees were not willing to forgive the loved brands if the negative-WOM was believed as true and harmful in any way. It showed that the health and safety concerns even went beyond the relationship values associated to the loved brands.

Moreover, these MECs were developed based on the unanimous responses from the post-survey interviewees. This difference of behaviour suggested the difference in the consumer values in processing and responding to certain information towards the different kind of products based on the differing intensity of the sensitivity involved in case of the two different product categories. The consumer values, consequences, and attributes concerning the two product categories form the hierarchical value-maps figures.

The response ladders were compared for any similarities or differences, and finally three value structures for loved cosmetics and two basic value structures for loved consumer-electronics brands were identified. The value structures identified through the interview findings are presented in figures 6.5, 6.6, 6.7, 6.8, and 6.9.

The participants' hierarchical value-maps show that how the core values developed on the basic attributes impact the psychosocial and behavioural consequences attached to consumers' brand perceptions and brand-relevant decision making (Ilicic and Webster, 2015; Reynolds and Phillips, 2009).

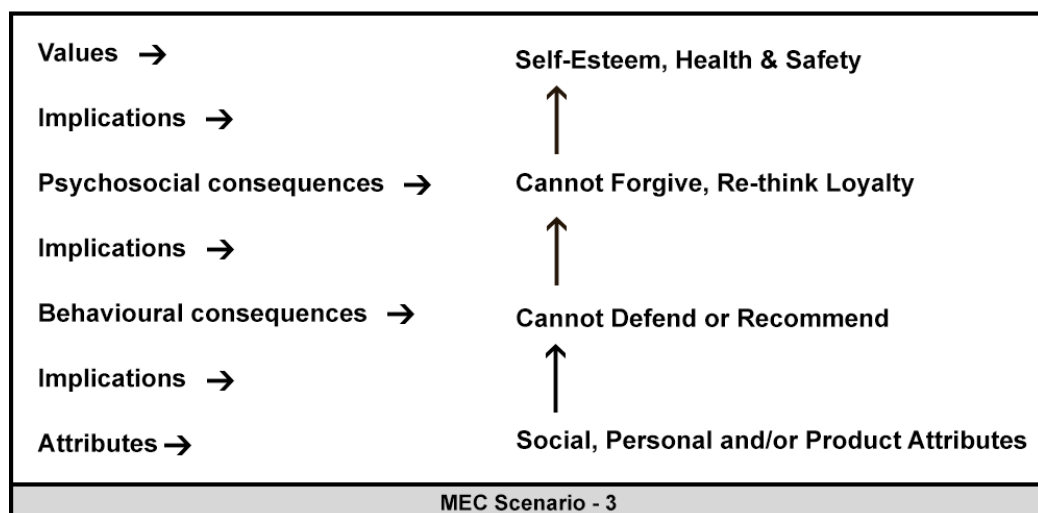
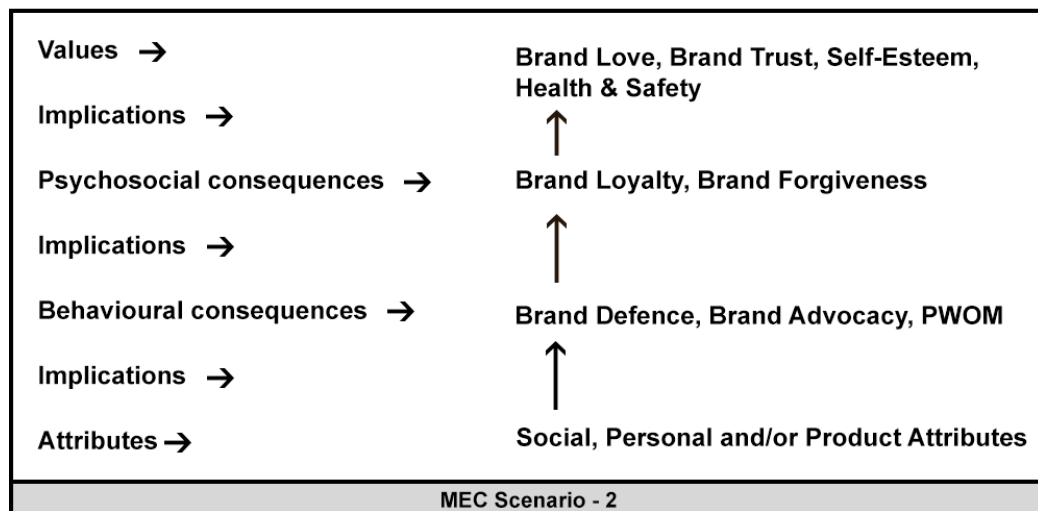
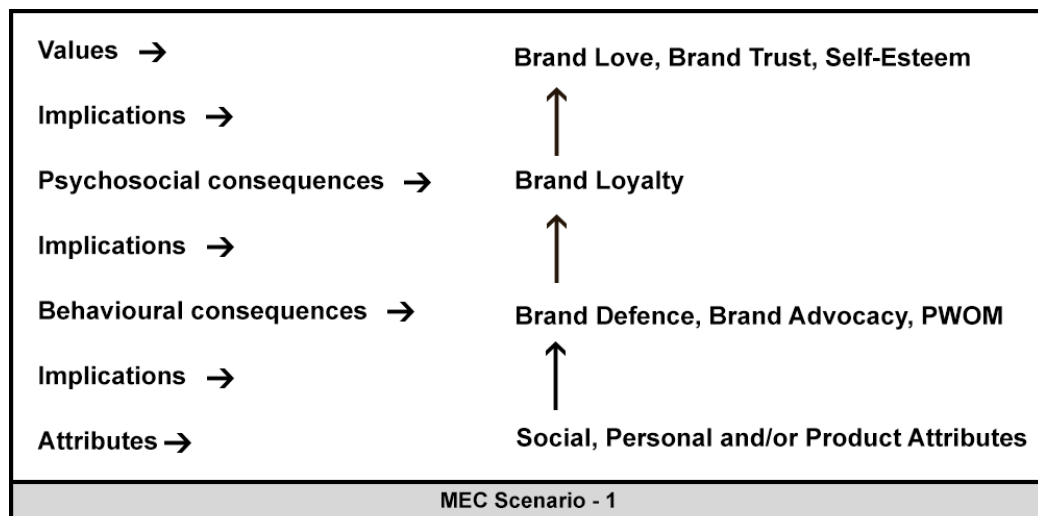


Figure 6.3 Mean-End-Chains Example – *Cosmetics*

The value-maps are developed using honeycomb structures based on the ability of honeycomb space efficient conjecture (Hale, 2001). Moreover, the honeycomb structures were also used in presenting the social media functionality in understanding online consumer behaviour, content management, and making best use of the social media through unveiling the implications for brands (Kietzmann *et al.*, 2011; Patrut and Patrut, 2013). In the hierarchical value-maps figures, the joint walls show the relevant factors, and the darkened nests suggest the main factors. For example, the main values, attributes, and consequences depicted through the consumer response ladders are presented in the darker cells, and the different factors depicting those main values, attributes, and consequences are presented in lighter cells.

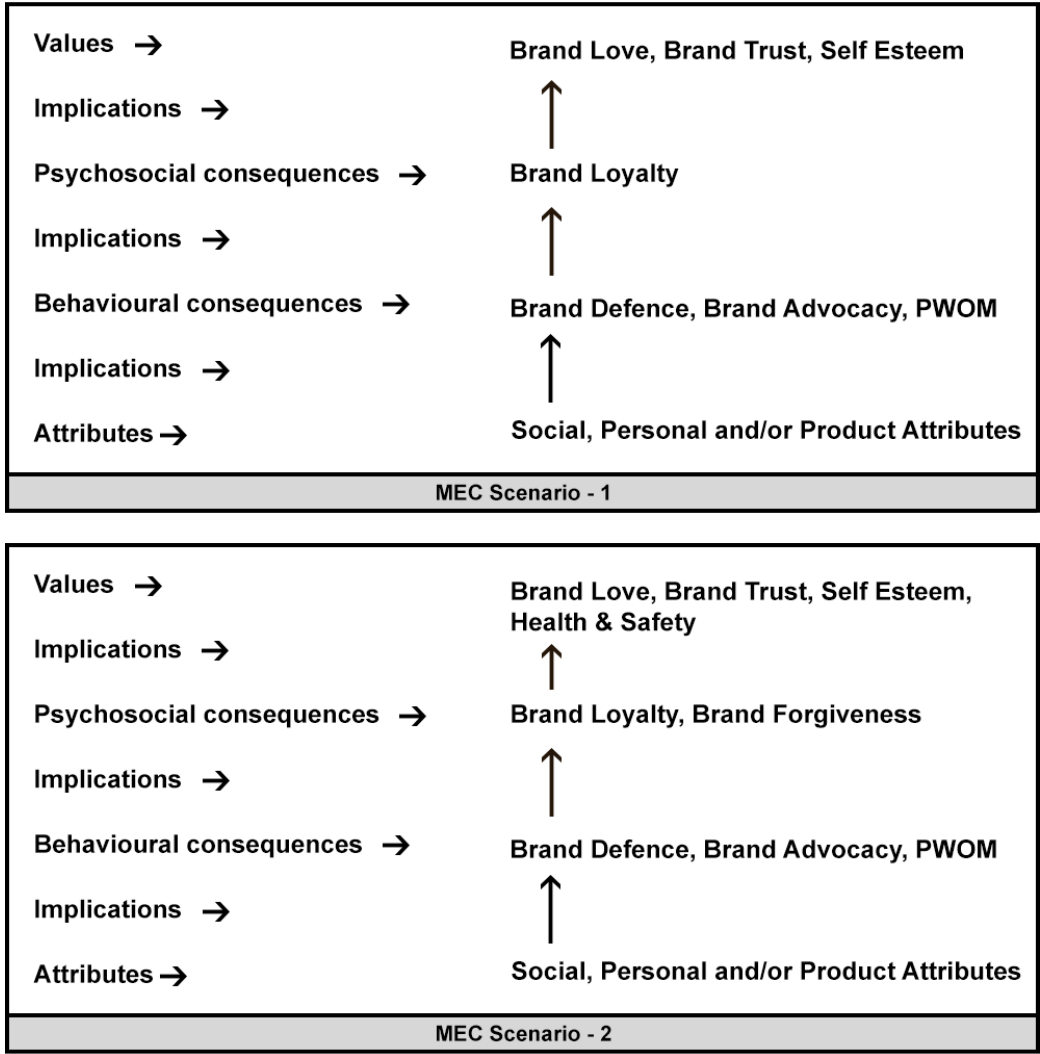


**Figure 6.4 Mean-End-Chains Example – Consumer-Electronics**

The hierarchical value-maps scenarios identified through the interview findings suggested that the basic attributes remained the same for all the scenarios in case of both the product categories, as depicted in MECs, as well (see figure 6.3 and 6.4). However, the observed scenarios for cosmetics brands involved three circumstantial consequences driven by the different core values, while two main scenarios were identified for consumer-electronics.



The three main scenarios identified for cosmetics involved:

1. *refuse to believe any negative-WOM*
2. *forgiving the brand for believed, revealed, or verified offences, and*
3. *refuse to forgive the brand for believed, revealed, or verified negative-WOM.*

The three scenarios are presented in figures 6.5, 6.7, and 6.9 respectively. The two scenarios identified in case of loved consumer-electronics brands as presented in figures 6.6 and 6.8 were:

1. *refuse to believe any negative-WOM,*
2. *forgiving the brand for believed, revealed, or verified offences,*

The third scenario identified about the loved cosmetics brands was not observed about the loved consumer-electronics brands. Although, the first two scenarios were common for the two product categories. Therefore, the observations for the two common scenarios for cosmetics and consumer-electronics brands are presented together to facilitate comparison.

#### **6.3.1.1 Scenario-1; Refused to Believe Negative-WOM:**

The first scenario depicted the events where participants did not believe the negative information. This disbelief was supported by different reasons, which mainly included: 1. brand trust based on personal experience with the brand, and/or 2. the nature of the information being trivial and/or 3. the negative-WOM did not make sense and/or unbelievable, or 4. the negative-WOM was revealed to be false (see figure 6.6 and 6.8). As discussed above, the trust and personal experience with the brands were observed as more prevalent in consumer-electronics, as participants were more sensitive to any negative information about their loved cosmetics brands. However, the value-structures for the two products in normal circumstances were similar, for instance, in the absence of the negative information or if the nature of the negative-WOM was not extreme negativity, or if the brand had promised to rectify the mistake.

In scenario-1, the interviewees' core values that played a role in shaping brand-favourable behavioural or psychosocial consequences were mainly observed as:

1. *Relationship values (love, trust, attachment).*
2. *Self-Esteem values (my brand is the best, I feel proud of my brand)*

Such consumers' values were developed through their long-term dependability on the brand based on brand reliability. Such dependability was supported by their basic attributes driven by product features, followed by the interviewees' personal and social preferences/influences. Therefore, the hierarchical value-maps figures 6.5 and 6.6 for both cosmetics and consumer-electronics respectively, show analogous value structures driving the same behavioural and psychosocial consequences.

The hierarchical value-maps depicted in figures 6.5 and 6.6 show that when the interviewees felt confident about their loved cosmetics or consumer-electronics brands, their love and trust for the brand boosted their self-esteem values such as love, trust, and/or pride in the brand, which made them feel responsible towards the brand. The responses regarding relationship and esteem values overlap with regards to trust, confidence, and pride for the brand. The values of 'my brand is the best', delight, awesome, wonderful, feelings of pride, confidence, and happiness overlap in terms of both relationship and esteem values. The participants' responses about their relationship values, particularly brand love and their consequent WOM behaviour are depicted by the following quotes:

*"I mean the fact that I defend it and the fact I don't like to move away from it, I mean yes I guess I do have a certain level of affection with it, and what it does, it does it well. I do kind of feel proud of it. So, I suppose in a way there is a degree of affection and I think naturally you do that for someone you care about so potentially now that I think about it I do have a degree of affection towards it... definitely very attached... I feel that I love this brand... try to see what the actual truth is and whether or not if there is something wrong with it... try to prove or disprove the evidence that has been presented to me... then I would probably try to defend the negative information... so I would find my ways for defending the brand" (Interviewee-2 May11, 2016).*

The quote presented above not only depicts brand love but also depicts the interviewees' esteem values associated with the brand, and the consequent brand defence behaviour, after verifying the negative-WOM. Some of the interviewees claimed to disbelieve the information instantly without having to search for the truth, which reflects that consumers do blindly trust the loved brands based on their personal experience with the brand. However, the refusal to believe any negative-WOM was only observed in the responses towards the loved consumer-electronics brands, as interviewees were revealed to be more sensitive for their cosmetics. One of the comments towards refusing to believe any negative-WOM about the loved brands is as follows:

*"Well I would, I would reiterate the positive aspects again and again, I would continue doing that, I would stand up for anything negative because I know that I have been using it for so long and (the brand) has always delivered what it promises. I would stand up and since in the past it has not misled its customers, on one occasion even if it did, it doesn't matter because it will always try to fulfil its promises to the customers" (Interviewee-4 November 30, 2015).*

However, most of the interviewees were willing to explore if the negative-WOM could be true or not; however, they use their common sense and personal instincts in screening negative-WOM about their loved brands. One participant responded in the following manner:

*...it does have its share of negativities and high price being the obvious one of them so yeah, I would believe it, so I am not like a blind consumer. I trust the products, but at the same time if I got a negative review, I would trust that as well because as a high functioning company, it always has drawbacks there is no high functioning company that can function without such negativities. But yes, the products I do trust... And it's hard to believe if you love the brand, but these are true things which each and every brand has..." (Interviewee-1 May11, 2016)*

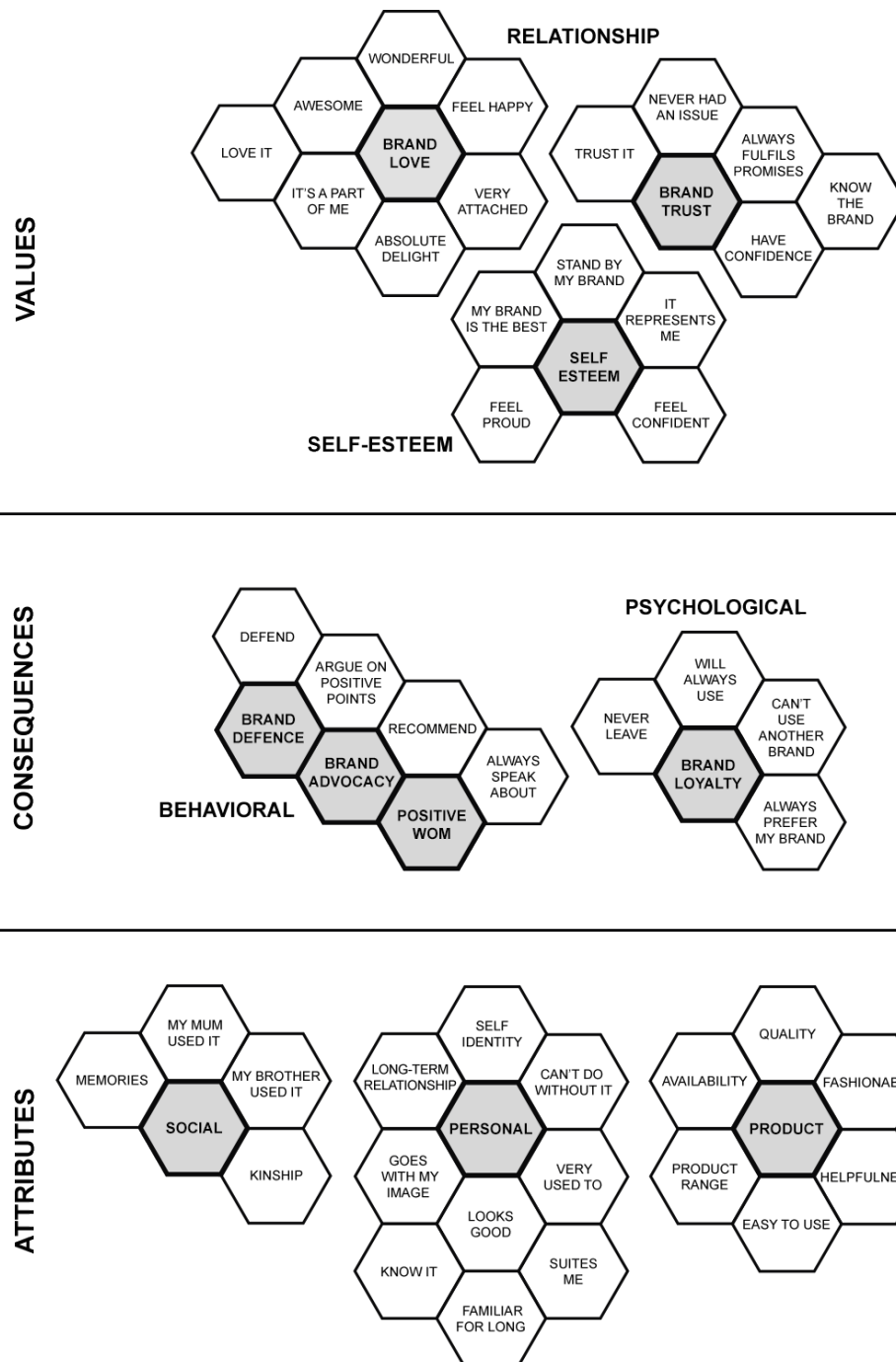


**Figure 6.5 Interviewees' Hierarchical Value-map – S1-Cosmetics: Refused to Believe Negative-WOM**

The major self-esteem value identified from the interview comments was, '*the sense of responsibility*' towards the loved brand that promoted the positive-WOM behaviour towards the brands, particularly brand defence in response to any negative-WOM, when interviewees did not believe the negative-WOM. The sense of responsibility and rightfulness was also revealed to play an important role where the interviewees expressed their intention of refusal to forgive the loved brand due to any negative-WOM, which revealed to be harmful to anyone's health, skin, or society. It is depicted in figure 6.9 and discussed respectively.

The following interview quote reflects the values associated with esteem values associated to the interviewees' behavioural and psychosocial consequences:

“...I always defend it like, people think I am just defending it because it’s fashionable, No! I defend it because I have had a very good experience with (the brand) ..., so I always defend (the brand) ... I am quite fond of it like it’s one of the top brands for me” (Interviewee-1 May11, 2016).

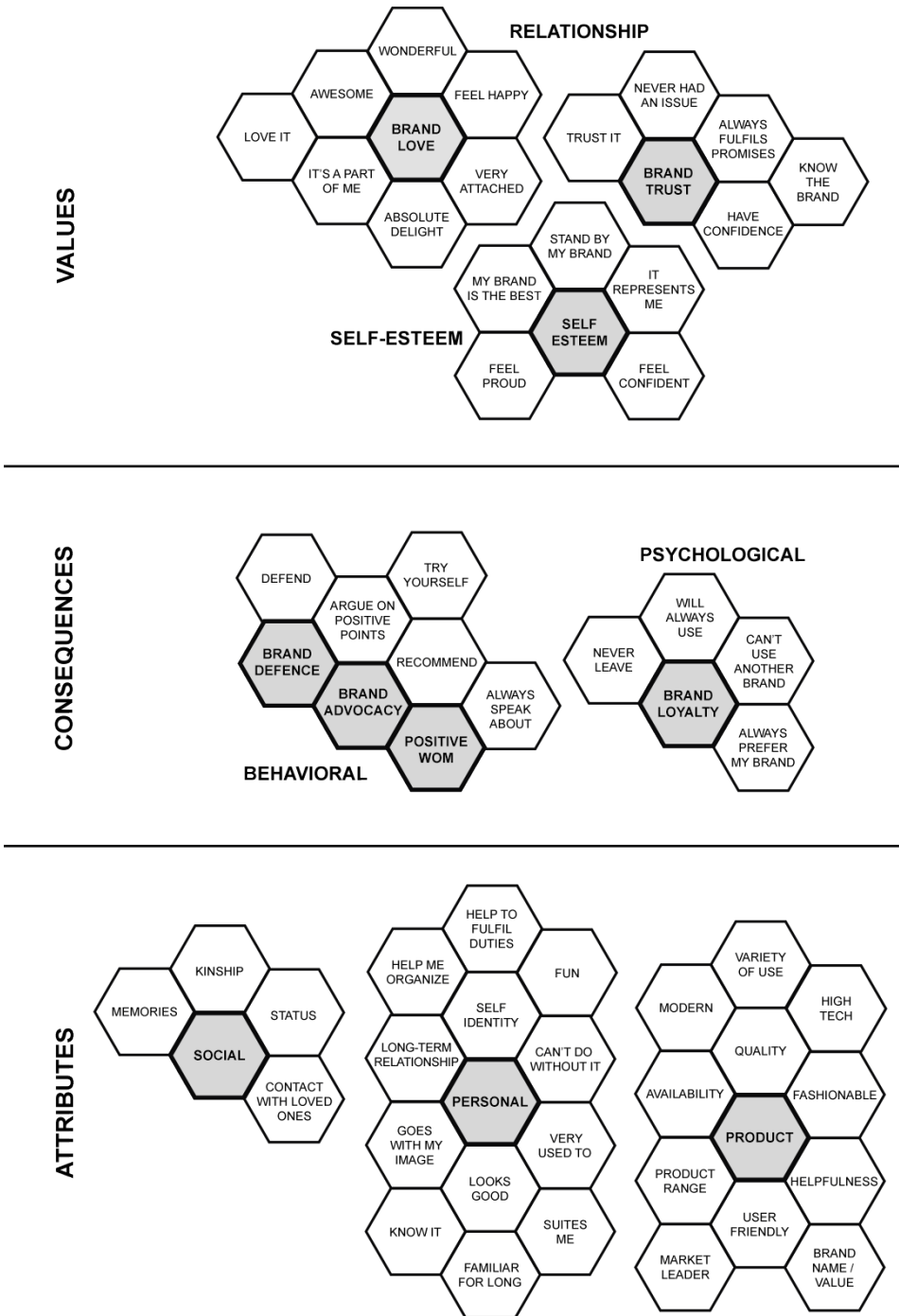


**Figure 6.6 Interviewees' Hierarchical Value-map – S1–Consumer-Electronics: Refused to Believe Negative-WOM**

The findings suggested that the sense of responsibility towards a loved brand also emanates from brand trust based on the consumers' personal experience with the brand. Consumers' values based on brand trust are that the brand has never failed him/her, which yields stronger brand-favoured

behavioural and psychosocial consequences. The psychosocial consequences in this case reinforced loyalty, to remain with the brand. The analysis suggested that if the brand revealed to be correct against the negative-WOM about that brand, makes said brand more credible for its lovers. The consumers feel more obliged to the brand and they would take the responsibility to stand by the brand, and it fosters not only their loyalty to the brand, but this enhances brand credibility, and promotes brand defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM.

The findings fully supported the existence and prevalence of the different intensities of brand-favourable WOM behaviour and the existence of strong brand defence behaviour in response to any false or disbelieved negative-WOM. In case of Scenario-1 brand defence and brand advocacy were revealed to be more prevalent as compared to merely positive-WOM. It implied that the qualitative findings also supported the claim of the study that consumers attribute brand-favourable WOM behaviour including brand advocacy and brand defence towards their loved brands. Moreover, the findings revealed that the nature of positive-WOM used to be stronger in case of loved brands and the type of most positive-WOM generated towards the loved brands in response to a negative incident, which was believed to be untrue was brand defence.

The next section presents the value-maps developed for Scenario-2.

#### **6.3.1.2 Scenario-2; Forgive the Brand for Believed Negative-WOM:**

The scenario-2 identified the interviewees' willingness to forgive the loved brand. In this study, brand forgiveness has been considered as the consumers' 'inclination to forgive a brand' for any believed or verified offences. This scenario was identified in case of both the product-categories, cosmetics, and consumer-electronics. The findings revealed that brand forgiveness only prevailed when the negative information, mistakes, or offence was believed to be true, but when it was not deemed harmful for the consumers' own wellbeing, health, skin, society, or environment. This finding implied that the consumers' inclination to forgive a loved brand is conditional based on the nature of the negative information, as the respondents were not inclined to ignore any negative-WOM or forgive their loved brand if the negative information was revealed to be harmful in any way.

The interviewees' sense of responsibility and sense of justice towards the brand (Colliander and Wien, 2013) and sense of responsibility towards right/wrong, and towards oneself, friends, family, and/or society played a strong role in shaping their psychosocial and behavioural consequences in case of a negative incident. These consequences could be either brand-favoured or anti-brand based on the nature, intensity, and truthfulness of the negative information. The findings revealed that the interviewees were willing to forgive their loved brands and were ready to defend the brands, if the nature of the negative-WOM was not harmful. The following quotes suggest the participants' willingness to forgive their loved brands based on their sense of responsibility towards their loved brands:

*"Everyone makes mistakes... anyone that I love... I probably would forgive if there is something not right with a friend, or if they have made a mistake or something, no one is perfect. As a doctor,*

*I know I have probably made few mistakes on the ward and I would be very upset if someone would take me for it or take me out of the job for it. Similarly, I think it as fairness... I will try to forgive it as much as I could... I would present my argument for the brand... because not many people admit to their mistakes so the fact that it has admitted to it and maybe out of the fact that it would try to improve on it, whatever the mistake was! I would continue giving positive word-of-mouth... I could probably advocate positively for the brand because I think I would take it as a personal responsibility to promote it given that I have had such a good affiliation with it for the past few years... I will probably go a bit about the top to just defend it like... posting things on social media speaking to people on WhatsApp that shows some going above and beyond... so yeah I would go about what is required to defend the brand.” (Interviewee-2 May11, 2016)*

Moreover, brand trust was revealed as another value identified to drive interviewees' willingness to forgive their loved brands. The interviewees were ready to trust their loved brands based on their long-term relationship and positive experience with the brand, that if the brand has promised that it will rectify the issue and will not repeat the mistake, they were willing to forgive their loved brand. The findings also show that the confidence in a brand that it has never wronged the participants within a long-term relationship also fostered the their trust in the loved brand's promise.

Based on the preceding discussion, the hierarchical value-maps for the two product categories for scenario-2 are presented in figures 6.7 and 6.8 respectively. The hierarchical value-maps for the two product-categories, cosmetics, and consumer-electronics show that if negative-WOM was deemed irrelevant to the product quality, or use of the product, and/or not deemed harmful to skin or health, the interviewees were ready to forgive the brands. This forgiveness was driven by the participants' sense of justice and responsibility towards their loved brands. Therefore, the behavioural and psychosocial consequences were revealed to be driven by three main values:

1. *Relationship values (love, trust, attachment).*
2. *Self-Esteem values (my brand is the best, I stand by my brand, I have a responsibility towards the brand, it is not justified to punish the brand for something that's rectifiable, the brand made a promise not to repeat the mistake, the negative-WOM was not harmful).*
3. *Health and safety.*

These values remained the same for scenario-3; however, the corresponding reasons changed for scenario-3. As the three main values that include relationship values, esteem values and health and safety values are presented in divisions, presenting the main corresponding factors and sub-factors in explaining the different elements that prevail in the different circumstances. These factors were used to shape or form consumers' consequent behaviour based on that specific incident.

Therefore, the findings revealed that in case of scenario-2 the respondents' main values depicted were the elements that promoted the brand-favourable consequences even in the case of believed negative-WOM, where negative-WOM was not deemed as harmful. In scenario-2, the main factor that played a vital role in forming consumers' value structures was revealed as brand trust that 'the brand has never made a mistake' and 'it always fulfils the promises', and/or believing in the brand for not repeating the mistake. Therefore, it was concluded that brand love strengthened by brand trust based on consumers' experience and relationship length promotes both psychosocial and behavioural consequences in the favour of the loved brand. The findings suggested brand loyalty,

and forgiveness as the psychosocial consequences in consumers' value structures and brand defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM as behavioural consequences.

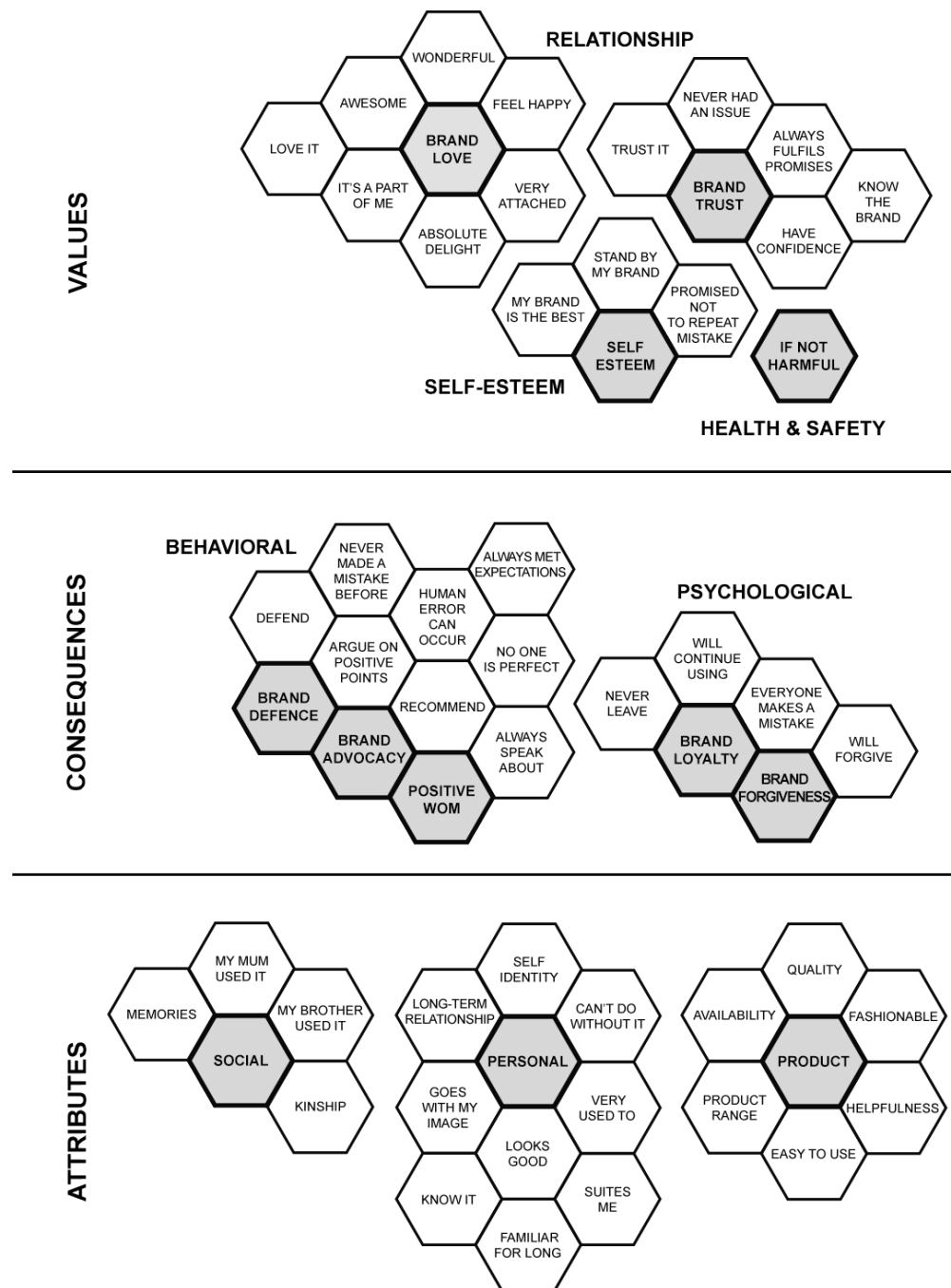


**Figure 6.7 Interviewees' Hierarchical Value-map – S2–Cosmetics: Forgive the Brand for Believed or Verified Negative-WOM**

In case of scenario-2 the positive psychosocial (brand loyalty, brand forgiveness) and behavioural consequences (positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence) were prevalent irrespective of the product category. In scenario-2 brand defence and positive-WOM revealed to be more frequent than that of brand advocacy; however, there were no differences reported for the respondents' loyalty intentions, if they had forgiven the brand.

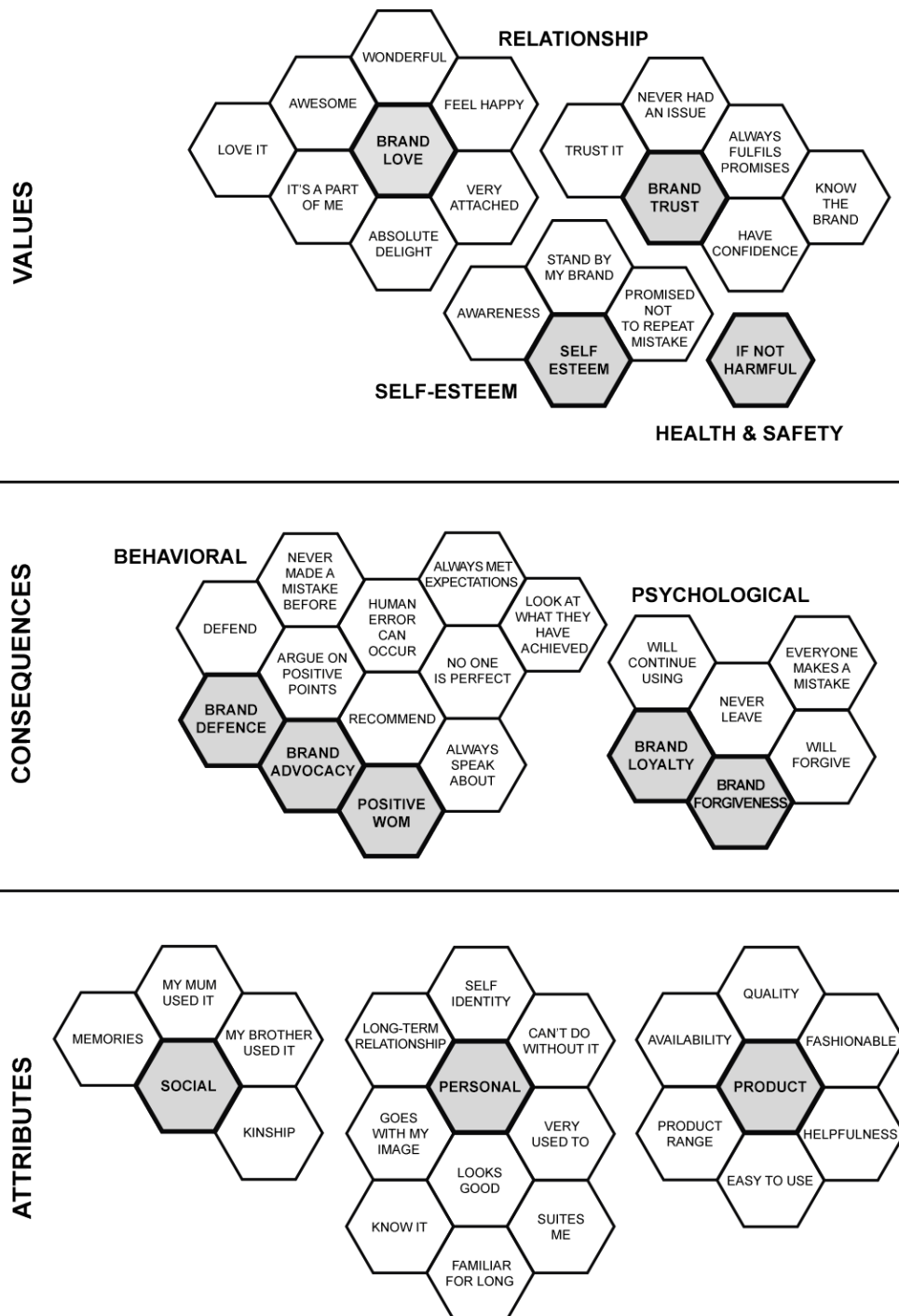


**Figure 6.8 Interviewees' Hierarchical Value-map – S2-Consumer-Electronics: Forgive the Brand for Believed or Verified Negative-WOM**

In case of loved cosmetics brands, the interviewees' value structure and the behavioural consequences were revealed to change if the negative-WOM about the brand was believed/verified and deemed as harmful. The interviewees revealed as more sensitive to any negative-WOM about their loved cosmetics brands and feel reluctant to support their cosmetics brands in case of any true or believed negative-WOM that revealed to be harmful for their skin/health. The Scenario-3 is discussed next.



### 6.3.1.3 Scenario-3: Refused to Forgive the Brand for Believed or Verified Negative-WOM

In scenario-2, the value-maps for both the product-categories cosmetics and consumer-electronics depicted the factors that used to promote the brand-favourable consequences even in case of believed negative-WOM, where negative-WOM was not deemed as harmful. However, the interview findings also suggested that in case of negative-WOM being harmful in any way, the respondents were not willing to forgive their loved brands. This scenario was only observed in the responses towards the loved cosmetics brands.

Scenario-3 suggested a value structure where interviewees were reluctant to forgive their loved brands, their responses revealed a state where the interviewees refused to forgive the brand for the believed, revealed, or verified offence based on the nature of the mistake/offence. The findings of the post-survey interviews provided a unanimous response against supporting the loved brand if the negative-WOM was proved as true, and harmful in nature for one's skin and/or health, such as, the product involves any harmful ingredients for skin, environment, nature, or health. The following quotes from the post-survey interviews show the reluctance and refusal to forgive their loved brands:

*"Well, in that case, you would of course blame the brand because for example the blame is severe in terms of using the actual cologne itself has given a bad reaction to peoples' skin or they have been testing on animals or any sort of human emotions to it then yes you would be inclining towards blaming the brand. I would standby it if they have like sort of increased the prices, or something like that then I would understand that, but if it's sort of severe reaction to chemicals or something then I would definitely blame the brand. If it's something to do with your health I would blame the brand, otherwise I would stand by it in other words. Obviously, you know when it comes to health it's a serious matter and a company has a responsibility to look after its customers when they are releasing or showcasing these products." (Interviewee-10 May11, 2016)*

As depicted from the quotes above and figure 6.9, there were two main values that effected the psychosocial and behavioural consequences in case of harmful information about the loved cosmetics brands:

1. *Self-Esteem values (I am not a blind consumer, cannot trust anymore if the product is harmful)*
2. *Health and safety (harmful to skin, health, involve animal testing, might cause cancer).*

However, the basic attributes concerning the product, personal preferences, or social factors remain the same, but the negative-WOM revealing harmful effects of the brand's products change the consumers' core values that drive their consequent brand perceptions and behaviour. In this case, the respondents clearly refused to forgive the loved brands, and to provide any brand-favourable WOM behaviour, as well as they were not ready to use the brand anymore.

Therefore, Scenario-3 suggested that the nature of the believed or verified negative-WOM that the product/brand could be harmful to one's health and skin undermines the role of all the basic personal, social, or product attributes, which had been playing their role in consumer-brand relationship building and sustenance. In addition, this finding also revealed to undermine the consumer-brand relationships' values such as brand love, attachment, or trust that provided a basis

for all the brand-favourable psychosocial and behavioural consequences, such as brand loyalty, forgiveness, and the proposed brand-favourable WOM behaviour, including advocacy and brand defence.

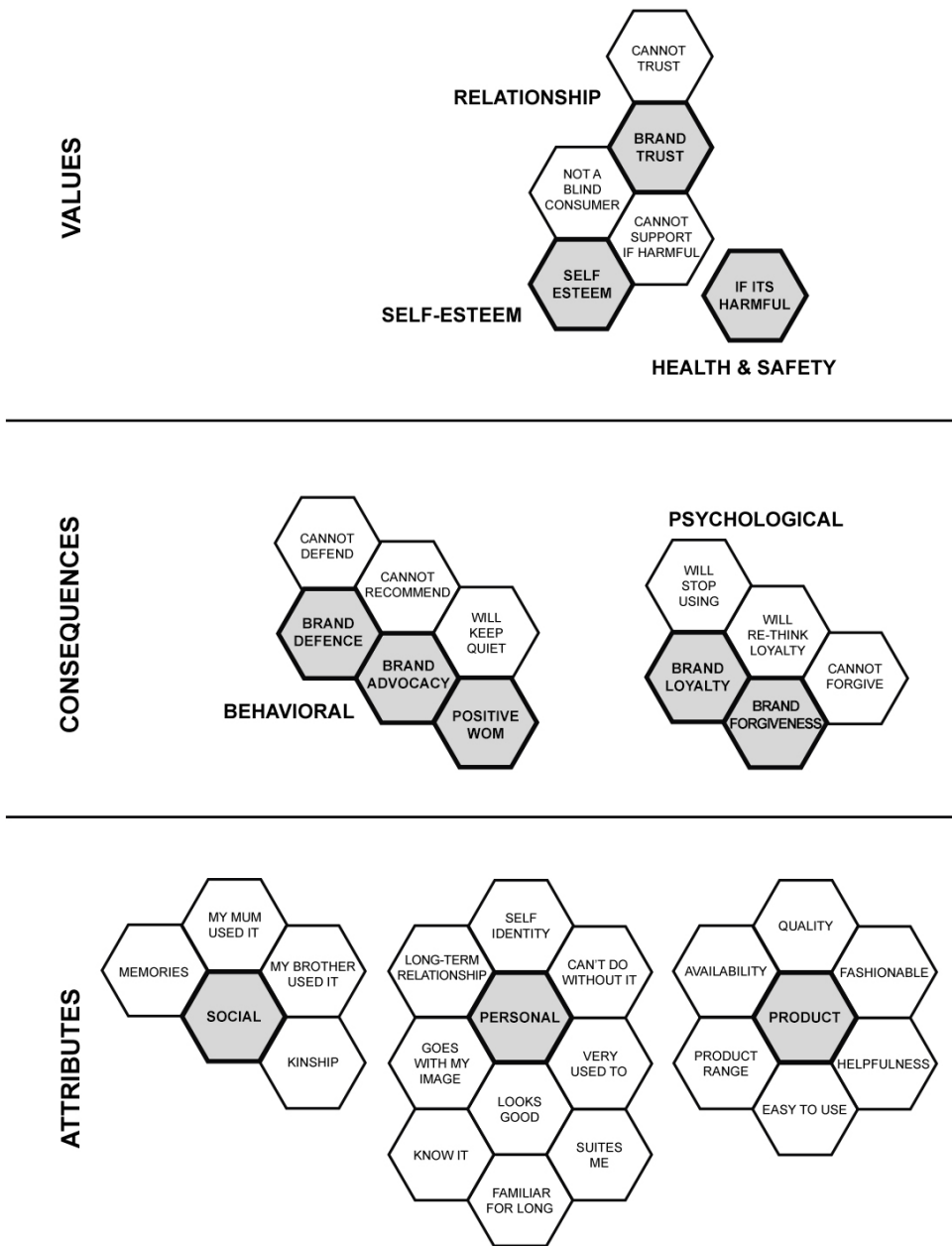


**Figure 6.9 Interviewees' Hierarchical Value-map – S3–Cosmetics: Refused to Forgive the Brand for Believed or Verified Negative-WOM**

The reluctance in providing the brand-favourable WOM towards the products/brands that were deemed harmful is also consistent with a pre-survey interviewee's (interviewee-1) response towards her loved carbonated drink brand, Pepsi Max. The pre-survey interviewee-1 was reluctant to provide any brand-favourable WOM or recommend Pepsi Max to her friends or family, because she herself was not convinced of the benefits of the brand, but she was concerned about the perceived and/or known harms of fizzy drinks. However, she claimed to love the brand warmly, but her self-conscience and her sense of responsibility towards her friends' health and safety did not allow her to support the brand through positive-WOM, brand advocacy, or brand defence.

However, she was ready to defend the brand for any explicitly false allegations. The similarity of interviewees' responses towards any harmful effects of such consumer products/brands that involve direct consumption like drinking, or application to human skin suggested that the nature of products play an important role in consumers' value structures and their consequent behaviour towards those products/brands.

On the other hand, the responses towards the loved consumer-electronics brands suggested that interviewees even aware of the drawbacks of their loved brands were not as concerned as they were for their cosmetics. There were few issues that interviewees mentioned about their loved consumer-electronics; however, they did not consider those issues as worth noting, reacting to, or that might need forgiveness, such as battery life, charging higher prices, or any technical issues. They were not even concerned about any minor issues, or minor product design, or specification failures, or mistakes by their loved consumer-electronics based on the other benefits they were getting in terms of usability, dependability, comfort, fun, and/or social status, etc., by using that brand. Therefore, the findings revealed that consumers are more sensitive towards the products that are used on their skin or being consumed in their diet, as they are more related to their personal wellbeing and health and lesser associated to their social impression and status.

The conclusion of this chapter is presented next.

#### **6.4 Conclusion:**

This chapter of the study presented and discussed the findings of the research phase-III, the post-survey laddering interviews. The interview findings were analysed using thematic-content analysis and consumers' value-mapping techniques. The findings involved identifying both general, as well as relationship specific themes to observe the proposed brand-favourable WOM behaviour. The general themes identified from the interview responses revealed the participants' inclinations in forming consumer-brand relationships based on product and personal attributes, and then relationship themes suggested the influence of close consumer-brand relationships that influence the consequent WOM behaviour, especially brand defence against negative WOM.

The general themes identified in terms of personal and social preferences overlap in terms of the interviewees' reasons in indulging in a relationship. However, the product attributes found to be one of the most basic reasons of using a product or indulging in a relationship with the brand. The findings suggested that consumers' preferences fall into various consumers' expectations with the products, which then promote consumer-brand relationships on the fulfilment of those expectations.

Regarding the relationship constructs and their consequent WOM behaviour observed in this study, the hierarchical value-maps provided an insight to how these relationships are developed and sustained that lead to brand-favourable behaviour, particularly brand defence against negative-WOM about the loved brand. However, the findings revealed that in case of a negative incident, the brand-favourable behaviour towards the loved brands vary based on two factors, the nature of the product, as well as the nature and intensity of the negative incident. And, the findings suggest that

in case of believed negative-WOM, brand forgiveness becomes conditional based on the nature and intensity of the believed offence. However, in case if a consumer forgives a loved brand, he or she behaves as normal and offer similar brand-favourable attributes including loyalty with the brand, recommending the brand (brand advocacy), and defending the brand against negative-WOM.

The laddering interviews suggested both brand love and brand trust as important values, which drive the different brand-favourable behavioural and psychosocial consequences. The two relationship constructs brand loyalty and brand forgiveness were observed as the psychosocial consequences of consumers' core values that included relationship values, self-esteem values, and health and safety values. The three brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM were observed as behavioural consequences driven by consumers' values, developed on consumers' personal and product/brand attributes. The findings suggested that the consumers were more sensitive to health and safety values in case of loved cosmetics brands as compared to consumer-electronics brands.

Overall, the post-survey findings were consistent with the findings of the research Phase-I and Phase-II involving pre-survey interviews, pre-test survey and the main surveys. The laddering interviews findings supported the different intensities of the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour in response to negative-WOM about a loved brand as proposed in this study. Moreover, brand defence revealed to be the most frequent brand-favourable WOM in response to any negative-WOM about the loved brands, unless the negative-WOM was deemed extremely harmful, which is only anticipated for the cosmetics brands in this thesis. The next chapter presents the discussion and analysis of the findings of the three research phases of this study in line with this research's aim and objectives.

#### 7.1 Aims of the Chapter:

In this study, the research involved three phases of primary data collection as presented and discussed in the previous chapters. This chapter presents the analysis of all three phases of the research, which involved the collection of both primary and secondary data to fulfil the aims and objectives of the study. Figure 7.1 illustrates how the three phases of the research and the existing literature were analysed and compared.

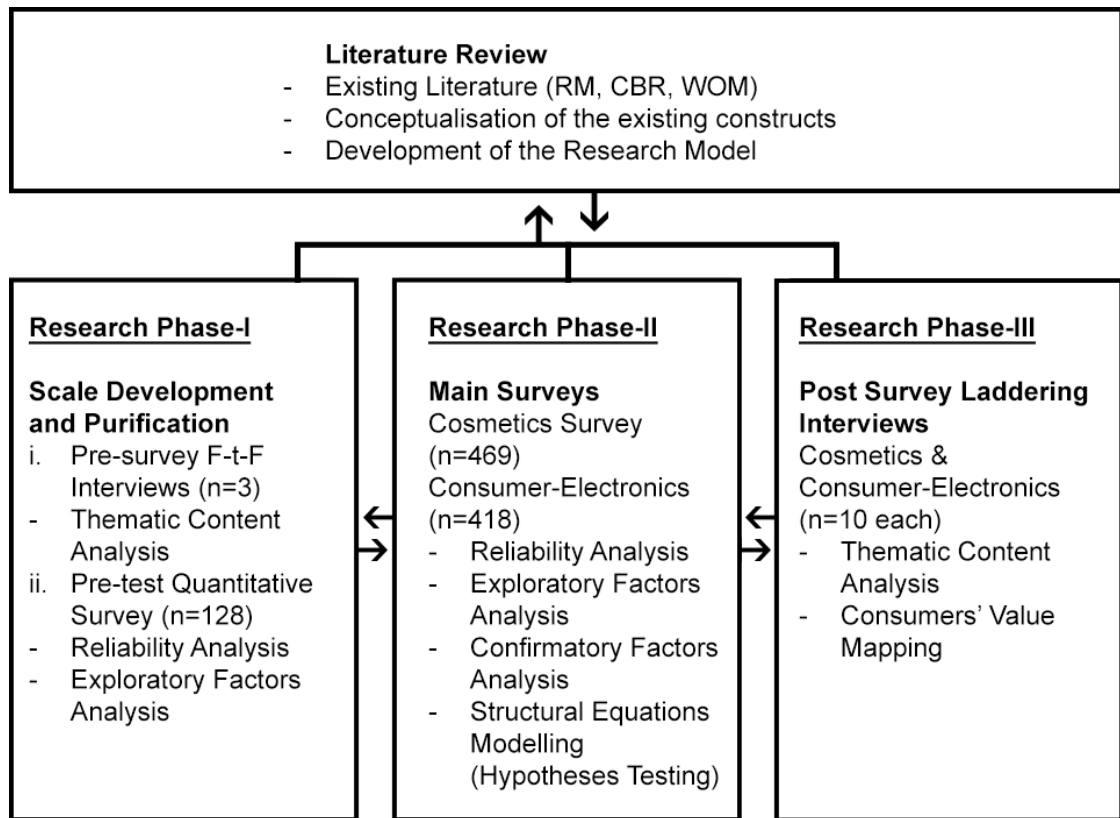


**Figure 7.1 Overview Analysis and Discussion**

Furthermore, figure 7.2 presents the research model showing this study's research hypotheses to provide the reader with a visual presentation of the hypothetical structure of the research, as how the research constructs have been explored.

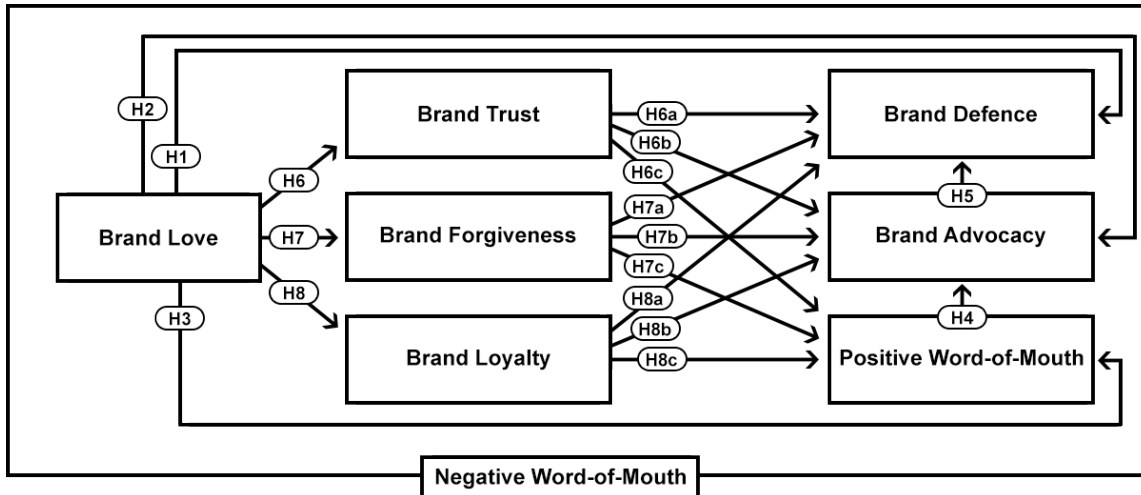


**Figure. 7.2 Research Model with Research Hypotheses**

This study involved exploring the attributions of brand love concerning consumers brand defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM behaviour against any negative-WOM about the loved brands, and the mediating role of trust, loyalty, and forgiveness on the relationship of brand love and the three WOM behaviour across two product-categories. The analysis across two product-categories allowed observations concerning two different types of product, providing a wider scope to research through cross-product validation. The analysis also involved comparing and appraising primary research with the existing literature to verify, validate, and where necessary, contradict any existing research to enhance and extend the existing knowledge.

The research analysis is discussed as follows.

## 7.2 Discussion:

In this study, brand love was explored as the main relationship construct, which was hypothesised to promote a number of brand-favourable behaviour based on the existing literature, such as increased loyalty (Ahuvia, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin 2014; Kamat and Parulekar, 2007; Park *et al.*, 2013; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2015), trust (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Belaid and Behi, 2011), inclination to forgive (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), and positive-WOM behaviour (Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Rossiter, 2012). The exploration involved mixed methods research, involving three phases of research including both quantitative and qualitative findings, as reported in the three previous chapters individually. All the three phases of the research played their respective role in achieving the research aim and corresponding objectives, which is analysed in this section and discussed as follows.

The aim of this doctoral research was,

*“to critically explore brand love and brand defence in consumer-brand relationships by considering the question: can consumers go beyond positive word-of-mouth, and/or brand advocacy to defend their loved-brands against criticism?”*

This study involved devising a set of research objectives to systematically aid in achieving the research aim and to get the breakdown analysis of what and how this study could achieve through the three phases of the research. As reported in the chapters 4, 5, and 6, the findings of all the three research phases supported the conceptual model proposed in this study, particularly the role of brand love in generating superior brand-favourable WOM outcomes for brands against negative-WOM, particularly brand defence. The analysis and implications of the overall findings of the three phases of the research are discussed in detail throughout this chapter.

In this study, the influence of brand love was supported by both quantitative and qualitative research in generating brand-favourable behaviour (brand defence, brand advocacy, positive-WOM) and attitudes (brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness). This is congruent with the growing literature of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Karjaluo *et al.*, 2016; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), which strongly supports the positive outcomes of brand love, particularly concerning consumers' WOM behaviour. Therefore, in this study, the willingness to go beyond '*positive word-of-mouth, and brand advocacy*' in defending the loved brand against negative-WOM was fully supported in both the product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics. The intensity of brand love and the consequent superior WOM behaviour, brand defence, were found to be strong and prevalent against any negative-WOM, and even stronger against any negative WOM that is deemed as a false allegation on the loved brand. However, the intensity of the subsequent consumers' intentional outcomes of brand love differed in terms of both relationship attributions and WOM behaviour towards two different product-categories (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014); cosmetics, and consumer-electronics, in case of believed or verified negative-WOM.

The implications arising from the findings are multiple, enduring, and extending the existing literature; the main aspects of the research which are discussed in this chapter are as follows:

- The conceptualisation of brand defence as a superior form of brand-favourable WOM, which extends beyond brand advocacy and positive-WOM against any negative-WOM about the loved brands, extending the existing research in consumer-brand relationships and WOM, in congruence with the indications in the existing literature.*
- The recognition that both person-to-person and online positive-WOM are more influential and effective on consumers' perceptions and decision-making as compared to advertising and synthetic WOM (marketers' generated messages disguised as eWOM) as congruent with the existing literature.*
- The realisation of the critical nature of negative-WOM concerning brand perceptions and attitudes as suggested in the literature, and extending the understanding of the implications of negative-WOM on consumers' decision-making, in case of both believed and/or disbelieved negative-WOM, and the differentiation in the negative-WOM impact across two product-categories.*
- The recognition of the importance of positive-WOM in counter-fighting negative-WOM, particularly compared to the marketers' generated comments, in complimenting and extending current research by introducing brand defence.*

- Exploring the importance of brand love in promoting brand-favourable behaviour as suggested in the existing literature, but in the presence of negative-WOM towards a loved brand to extend the exiting knowledge.
- To extend an understanding of the attributions of brand love, the conceptualisation of brand love as general love factor in analogy to inter-personal love, which is proposed to posit similar positive attributions towards the loved brands irrespective of the antecedents of the relationship.
- The exploratory analysis of the antecedents of brand love as suggested in the existing literature, to extend the existing knowledge through qualitative inferences to what extent the existing factors are applicable to the participants' perceptions of brand love.
- Identifying, understanding, and explaining the consumers' brand love attributions across two product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics in extending the existing knowledge that how consumers attribute to their loved brands across two different product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics, particularly in case of negative-WOM.
- Identifying and analysing consumers' core values in driving consumers brand-favourable behaviour, particularly brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, using hierarchical value-maps for the first time in the consumer-brand relationships and WOM research in extending and complementing the two research streams.
- Identifying and analysing general product, and personal attributes in building and/or shaping consumers' core values, which result in consumers' brand-favourable behaviour.
- Identifying the impact of brand love on the three relationship constructs; brand forgiveness, brand trust, and brand loyalty in case of negative-WOM.
- The role of brand forgiveness, brand trust, and brand loyalty, in mediating the relationship between brand love and WOM.

This research has critical implications to the existing research and practice as an increasing body of literature on the power of WOM and/or eWOM in influencing consumer behaviour suggested the critical importance of WOM in the brand management context (Choi *et al.*, 2017; deMatos and Rossi 2008; Furner *et al.*, 2016; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Hong *et al.*, 2016; Jalilvand *et al.*, 2017; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Romaniuk and Hartnett, 2017; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010; Wallace *et al.*, 2014; Yi and Ahn, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2017). The destructive nature of negative-WOM was also appreciated (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016; East *et al.*, 2008; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Hong *et al.*, 2016; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). Moreover, the increased and wider range, reach, and speed of the user-generated content through the Internet and social media as eWOM (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Graham and Havelina 2007; Weisfeld-Spolter *et al.*, 2014), posed additional concern for brands to control, or address negative-WOM, which provided serious motivations for this study.

The importance of positive-WOM has also encouraged brands to invest significant resources in synthetic eWOM (brand-generated messages disguised as true WOM) in efforts to influence consumer behaviour (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). Such synthetic WOM can assist in encouraging further WOM for the brand through e-marketing (Jeong and Koo 2015). However, such synthetic WOM has been revealed to have little impact, based on the lack of neutrality and natural response (Colliander and Dahle'n, 2011; Colliander and Wien, 2013; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015; Wang *et al.*, 2011), and this may damage customer trust and commitment in the long-run (Magnini, 2011).



However, the eWOM provided by real consumers has been observed as natural, trustworthy, and influential (Jeong and Koo, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, it was deemed as recommended to address negative-WOM through positive-WOM (Jeong and Koo, 2015), and in this effort, the secondary and primary research conducted in this study provided strong supportive evidence that consumers attribute different intensities of WOM, particularly brand defence against any negative-WOM about their loved brands.

The key efforts and achievements of this doctoral research are discussed in sections for coherence. The next section discusses brand defence, a new branding construct, conceived and developed as a superior positive-WOM attribution that extends beyond brand advocacy towards the loved brands against negative-WOM.

### **7.2.1 Brand Defence; a Superior WOM Behaviour Empowered by Brand Love:**

The study explored consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards loved brands in response to any negative-WOM about their loved brands, and involved categorising WOM in a hierarchy (Gutman, 1982; Wansink, 2003) of three levels of WOM based on the intensity and nature of WOM and the consumer-brand relationship. In this regard, this study conceptualised, theoretically developed (Colliander and Wien, 2013; Park *et al.*, 2006; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012), and tested (Churchill, 1979) a new branding construct, brand defence as a superior brand-favourable WOM behaviour.

The consumers' positive-WOM and recommending behaviour (brand advocacy) had received ample attention in research (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014; Wallace *et al.*, 2014). However, the consumers' defending behaviour towards their loved brands has not been previously empirically identified. Although, Park *et al.* (2006) referred to consumers' defence of brands that they feel attached to, but this was not formally conceptualised or tested empirically. This study involved conceptualising and developing brand defence as a superior WOM behaviour in response to any negative information about the loved brands, which is congruent with the observations of Park *et al.* (2006) and Lisjack *et al.* (2012), and the recently observed concept of customer rebuttals (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015), and defence of companies on online forums (Colliander and Wien, 2013).

Ulrich and Brunner (2015) explored customer rebuttals as a form of positive eWOM against negative customer reviews and found, '*a positive customer review counteracts a negative consumer review more effectively than a positive brand response*' (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015, p.66). Similarly, Colliander and Wien (2013), also studied defence of companies within online forums based on consumers' sense of justice towards brands, and their readiness to respond to the non-rational negative comments about companies. However, brand defence has never been proposed as a superior form of positive-WOM and/or eWOM.

In this study, brand defence has been revealed to provide counter-argument in response to any negative information about the loved brand. The analysis revealed brand defence as an emotional

driven WOM that aggravates against any negative-WOM. It is also congruent with Park *et al.* (2010; 2006) that consumers take brand criticisms as personally threatening and defend them as self-defence. Brand defence is found to be most analogous to the idea of brand rebuttals (Ulrich and Brunner, 2015), as it involves fighting for the loved brand against criticism. However, the concept is not limited to online reviews but prevalent to overall consumers' brand-favourable behaviour in both online and offline communications.

Ulrich and Brunner (2015) also found these rebuttals as more effective in counteracting the negativity of negative reviews rather than positive brand communications and suggested that the strength of the brand moderates this relationship. However, this study provided clear means of mobilising and enhancing brand defence behaviour by fostering strong consumer-brand relationships. The analysis revealed strong positive influence of brand love on consumers' brand defence inclinations, as well as the existence and prevalence of brand defence against any negative-WOM about the loved brand, particularly when negative-WOM is being believed as a false allegation. Both quantitative and qualitative analysis revealed that consumers intend to defend their loved brands against negative-WOM even in cases where they do not provide positive-WOM or recommend the brand; but they intend to go beyond just positive-WOM and brand advocacy by defending their loved brands. Therefore, the scope and implications of brand defence are wider being prevalent in offline, as well as online brand management, especially when offline person-to-person negative-WOM has been identified as more impactful than negative eWOM (Bachleda and Berrada-Fathi, 2016).

The recognition of stronger brand-favourable WOM behaviour to counter fight negative-WOM is a crucial discovery for both research and practice, particularly when destructive impact of negative-WOM is widely accepted (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Hong *et al.*, 2016; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Xue and Zhou, 2010; Yang and Mai, 2010). Moreover, the recent research in eWOM has established the power of positive-WOM in eliminating and/or subsidising the impact of negative-WOM (Jeong and Koo, 2015), whereas, the synthetic WOM or any other form of marketing communications have been recognised as less effective (Hong and Park, 2012; Lee and Youn, 2009; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Wallace *et al.*, 2014; Jeong and Koo, 2015), particularly compared to the marketers' generated comments (Hong and Park, 2012; Lee and Youn, 2009; Sen and Lerman, 2007).

Furthermore, conceptualising, categorising, and measuring brand-favourable WOM in a form of a hierarchy, by distinguishing the importance and strength of specific WOM behaviour offer academicians and managers better understanding of consumers' WOM attributions. Hierarchical categorisation of human behaviour for improved understanding has been recognised and recommended for a long time in the existing literature of social psychology (Maslow, 1956), consumer-brand relationships (Park *et al.*, 2006), and consumer behaviour research (Gutman, 1982; Phillips and Reynold, 2009; Reynolds and Phillips, 2009, 2015). Therefore, this study conceptualised and explored consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards loved brands

in a hierarchy, suggesting brand defence as the most superior brand-favourable WOM attribution towards a loved brand against negative-WOM, followed by brand advocacy, and positive-WOM.

The analysis concerning the critical nature of negative-WOM is discussed next.

### **7.2.2 The Critical Nature of WOM Communications; Negative-WOM vs Positive-WOM:**

The importance of brand defence is recognised based on its importance concerning counter fighting negative-WOM, which has been revealed as detrimental for brands concerning brand perceptions and consumption decisions. The existing literature provides strong background to the effectiveness of WOM communications on consumers' perceptions and decision-making in case of both negative-WOM (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Hong *et al.*, 2016; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee *et al.*, 2008; Xue and Zhou, 2010; Yang and Mai, 2010) and positive-WOM (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014, 2008; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). This study involved exploring WOM and identified brand defence as a superior WOM behaviour, which is only prevalent against negative-WOM, based on this recognised criticality of positive and negative-WOM concerning brand perceptions and consumers' decision making in the existing literature.

In this study, the overall exploration did not involve exploring the effectiveness of overall brand-favourable WOM behaviour, but the existence and prevalence of brand defence, in response to any negative-WOM about loved brands. However, the analysis did not reveal the exact effectiveness of brand-favourable WOM against negative-WOM, but revealed the critically detrimental nature of negative-WOM on consumer behaviour and brand relevant decision-making, and the potential value of brand defence in counteracting such negativity. The analysis revealed it is the nature, seriousness, and the believability of negative-WOM, which directs its impact, which is congruent with the existing research that suggest a lesser impact of irrational negative-WOM (East *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014).

The analysis across two product-categories demonstrated that the truthfulness and/or believability and the nature of negative-WOM is critical in determining consumers' reactions to that negative-WOM, and the nature of use of the product also impact consumers' sensitivity to negative-WOM. The analysis revealed that interviews' participants were more sensitive to any negative-WOM about loved cosmetics than loved consumer-electronics brands, and to such an extent that if negative-WOM would reveal as harmful in any way to skin or health they could even quit the brand. However, they were ready to support the brand for any lame accusations, and even forgiving loved brands for any minor mistakes and/or transgressions, but not for any negativity which is harmful to them. It is also consistent with Park *et al.* (2009) that consumers avoid defending brands against serious transgressions, which is unlike interpersonal love where people are likely to forgive their partners' serious transgressions as well (Allemand *et al.*, 2007). However, the analysis did not support the claims of Heinrich *et al.* (2012) of consumers putting a blind eye to their loved brands mistakes, as almost, all the interview participants wanted to verify the truthfulness of any negative-WOM received

about their loved brands, particularly regarding cosmetics. However, this dimension was unobservable through quantitative analysis.

On the other hand, it was revealed that consumers are now becoming more cautious about brand conduct and they are keen to enquire about any negative-WOM concerning the truthfulness and the nature of the negativity, and then make informed decisions. The analysis shows that consumers not only provide brand-favourable WOM attributions towards their loved brands in case of disapproved negative-WOM, but also defend their loved brands for believed and/or verified negative-WOM. The participants were revealed to forgive and defend brands even for believed negative-WOM only if it is not deemed harmful to their skin or health in anyway, or the brand has promised not to repeat the mistake.

Sweeney *et al.* (2014) found the impact of positive-WOM being more influential than negative-WOM, and it is also recognised that positive-WOM is more effective than brand communications in venting the effects of negative-WOM (Hong and Park, 2012; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee and Youn, 2009; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Wallace *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, this study identified brand defence as the superior WOM behaviour in counteracting negative-WOM, supported by both quantitative and qualitative findings. However, this study did not explore the effectiveness of brand defence in venting the destructive impact of negative-WOM, but the provision of brand defence towards the loved brands against negative-WOM attack.

The section below presents the role of brand love in influencing and mobilising brand-favourable WOM behaviour against negative-WOM.

### **7.2.3 The Power of Brand Love in Mobilising Brand-Favourable WOM Against Negative-WOM:**

The quantitative and qualitative analysis remained congruent with the existing literature on brand love (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012), which has identified the several positive outcomes for loved brands; particularly concerning brand-favourable WOM behaviour even in response to negative-WOM. However, the existing literature has only identified positive-WOM as the efficacy of brand love in the positive brand scenarios (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015), and none of the studies have identified the role of brand love in promoting brand-favourable WOM behaviour against negative-WOM. Therefore, the existing research in consumer-brand relationships was limited in exploring consumers' receptivity and response to negative information about loved brands.

The WOM research also lack in explaining the means of promoting positive-WOM against negative-WOM, even after realising the importance and effectiveness of positive-WOM in counter fighting negative-WOM (Hong and Park, 2012; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee and Youn, 2009; Sen and Lerman, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015).

Sweeney *et al.* (2014) found positive-WOM and interpersonal factors more impactful than the influence of negative-WOM and suggested that different circumstances may enhance, or detract the influence of positive and negative-WOM. Therefore, the existing literature recognise that maximising the verbal strength of positive-WOM messages and generating positive brand equity perceptions can serve as a buffer to negative-WOM (Sweeney *et al.*, 2014). Similarly, this doctoral study offers brand defence as a superior WOM behaviour that involve fighting and arguing in the favour of the loved brand against negative-WOM; therefore, a certain negative-WOM can be directly addressed and answered by brand lovers. Sweeney *et al.* (2014) recommended addressing customer education and socialisation to enhance the influence of positive-WOM. Jeong and Koo (2015) suggested to induce positive-WOM messages as they positively affect consumers attitude towards brands and minimise the impact of negative-WOM. In this regard, this doctoral study helps extend our understanding of the impact of brand love in inducing and generating three types of brand-favourable WOM behaviour by conceptualising brand defence as a weapon against negative-WOM). Moreover, indicated the means of promoting brand defence through fostering close consumer-brand relationship, especially brand love.

The analysis suggested that negative-WOM about loved brand results in stronger brand defence behaviour, which makes lower intensity positive-WOM and advocacy irrelevant, and only defence mechanisms prevail. The content and nature of a WOM message suggests if it is merely positive-WOM, advocacy (Sweeney *et al.*, 2010) and or brand defence. However, in case of believed or verified negative-WOM, the consumers brand defence attributions depend on the nature and seriousness of negative-WOM. Brand defence has been reported as the most consistent intended WOM behaviour against both rejected and believed negative-WOM, even in the scenario where consumers are not intended to recommend a brand but defend it against negative-WOM. The concept of customer rebuttals by Ulrich and Brunner (2015), suggest customers' rebuttals being more effective than brand rebuttals in their power of fighting negative reviews, which is consistent with the perceived potential and role of brand defence in both online and offline situations.

The conceptualisation of brand love and its antecedents are discussed next.

#### **7.2.4 The Conceptualisation of Brand Love and its Antecedents:**

The conceptualisation of brand love is still in its infancy and a common conceptualisation of brand love does not exist (Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Huber *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, this study involved evaluating the existing research on the conceptualisation of brand love (Fournier, 1998; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin and Dato-On 2012; Fetscherin, 2014) and developed a conceptualisation of the construct based on the existing consumer-brand relationships literature (Fournier, 1998; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015) and the interpersonal love research (Graham, 2011), as presented and discussed in Chapter 2. Therefore, this research augmented the understanding on the conceptualisation of brand love, and revealed it as an influential consumer-brand relationships' construct that yield all the relational and behavioural outcomes as suggested

in the research model, which is consistent with the existing literature (Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Rossiter, 2012; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). However, this research rejects the arguments of observing consumers' love for brands in the context of uni-dimensional one-sided relationship based on para-social interactions (Fetscherin and Dato-On 2012; Fetscherin, 2014), an explanation follows.

The concept of unidimensional relationship in para-social interactions ignored the brands' efforts, which brands put in promoting brand offerings in attracting and retaining customers (Fiske *et al.*, 2012; Fournier, 2009; Kervyn *et al.*, 2012). Such brand offers make consumer-brand relationships bidirectional as suggested by the BIAF model (brands as intentional agents) (Fiske *et al.*, 2012; Kervyn *et al.*, 2012). Concerning the concept of unreciprocated love (Aaron *et al.*, 1998), it involves two main discrepancies. Firstly, it undermines the efforts of brands in promoting and keeping the consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 2009). Secondly, the past research suggested several negative outcomes of unreciprocated love that include serious distress (Smith and Hockland, 1988), disrupted lives (Tennov, 1979), lowered self-esteem (Baumeister *et al.*, 1993) and suicide inclinations (Westefeld and Furr, 1989). On the other hand, contrary to the consequences of unreciprocated love, brand love is believed to promote several positive outcomes for both consumers and brands (Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Rossiter, 2012; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015).

This study observed brand love in the context of interpersonal love and suggested brand love as a bi-directional relationship, where not only consumers, but brands also attribute towards the relationship. The brand love relationship process conceptualised in this study suggested that brand love bonds are initiated by the brand offerings, or the brand name and image, and afterwards they are fulfilled through mutual attributions. It is also consistent with the brand as intentional agents framework (BIAF), which advocated that there are people behind every brand, who respond and correspond to consumers' expectations (Fiske *et al.*, 2012), which help fulfil consumer-brand relationships. Therefore, this study has conceptualised brand love as 'general love factor', based on the meta-analysis study of interpersonal love by Graham (2011), as discussed in chapter 2. It is argued in this study that like inter-personal love, consumers in brand love also involve attributing similar positive behaviour and attitudes towards their loved brands, irrespective of the reasons, motives, or antecedents of their love for brands.

The qualitative research conducted in this study supported the conceptualisation of brand love as a bi-directional general love factor. On the contrary, it is also observed in this study, as well as from the existing literature that all the interpersonal factors do not fully apply to brand love (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Sarkar, 2014) and differ slightly based on the core nature and intensity of the relationship, as discussed in the next paragraph. However, the consumers' attributing to brands as relationship-partners and anthropomorphising provide strong basis for viewing brand love in interpersonal relationships constructs (Alvarez and Fournier, 2016; Epley and Waytz, 2009; Fournier, 1998;

Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Kwak *et al.*, 2015). On the other hand, the concept of para-social love does not apply to the consumer-brand relationships, which involve reciprocity and not a one-way fantasising of a celebrity as suggested by para-social love (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Moreover, recent research advocated that anthropomorphising involves social interaction within a consumption experience, which gives consumers' the feeling of reciprocity (Aggarwal and McGill, 2012; Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016).

As mentioned above, the analysis of the exiting factors of brand love revealed that few humanly factors of love do not fully apply to brand love context, as love is considered as a value beyond materialism. Therefore, some expressions of interpersonal love cannot fully apply to brand love, which is congruent with Ahuvia (2012) and Sarkar (2014). However, this difference in consumers love for brands with human-to-human love undermines the claim of Epley *et al.* (2007), who considered the essence of anthropomorphising as, "*the real or imagined behaviour of nonhuman agents with humanlike characteristics, motivations, intentions, and emotions*" (p. 864). Moreover, this study conceptualised brand love in interpersonal context and found strong support both theoretically (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Wallace *et al.*, 2014), as well as empirically. The qualitative analysis revealed a few differences in terms of expression, intensity, and the comprehensive nature of human-to-human love as compared to the love towards brands or material things.

As evidenced from the literature, one of the main differences between interpersonal love and brand love has been reported as selflessness, as the content of selflessness in interpersonal love is deemed missing in brand love (Sarkar, 2014), and secondly the intensity and nature of relatedness (Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin, 2014), which is far more intense in interpersonal love than Brand love. Another argument about the multiplicity of love with different brands even concerning one product-category also differ with love for a singular partner in interpersonal love (Sarkar, 2014), but this multiplicity is also present in interpersonal love relationships, like love for parents, partners, or spouse (Graham, 2011). Moreover, it is observed that low levels of brand love can be perceived for many brands, which should not be viewed as brand love (Huber *et al.*, 2015), as high levels of brand love is limited to a small subset of brands (Ahuvia *et al.*, 2014). However, the analysis provided contrary evidence, as participants even claimed deep love for a few ordinary utilitarian cosmetics brands, based on their long-term relationship and dependence on the brand.

The brand love scale items used for quantitative surveys were also included to the qualitative exploration to acquire qualitative insights to the applicability of these items to consumers' perceptions and their feeling of love for brands. The interviews findings were observed to support the brand love scale items used in the main surveys, with a couple of participants comparing the use of 'pure delight' as an expression for their love for brands as compared to their love for humans. However, all other participants completely supported this factor along with the other factors, including wonderful, totally awesome, pure delight, makes a consumer feel good, and very happy (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012), and declaration of attachment and love for the brand

(Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006, 2010, 2013; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the existing literature also suggested several apprehensions about the conceptualisation of brand love in the interpersonal relationship context (Batra *et al.*, 2012).

The existing research observing brand love in line with the interpersonal theories of love acknowledged that brand love does posit certain dissimilarities to interpersonal love and that is why the interpersonal theories of love are not capable of explaining the construct fully (Ahuvia 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, it is also realised that the conceptualisation of brand love is not fully developed (Albert and Merunka, 2013), and still needs a widely-accepted definition (Huang, 2017). Therefore, this study developed a conceptualisation of brand love involving the existing literature, which is later supported by the qualitative research conducted in this study. The conceptualisation of brand love as a general love factor (Graham, 2011) with a reciprocal relationship attributed by both brand and consumer extended the understanding of consumers' love towards brands, which further enhance the understanding of consumers' subsequent brand-favourable attributions.

On the other hand, qualitative analysis revealed interesting insights explaining consumers' feelings of love for brands. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed little differences for the two product-categories concerning their expression and indication of love, but the levels of relatedness and intensity towards the two product categories differed. It is also consistent with Fetscherin *et al.* (2014), who found no differences towards the existence and directionality of brand love towards the four categories (soft drink, mobile phone, shoes, cars). However, Fetscherin *et al.* (2014) found differences in terms of the intensity of consumers' relationships and their effect on the explanation power of the brand outcome; WOM and purchase intentions. Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) also found greater intensity of love towards hedonic products than utilitarian goods. Similarly, the analysis revealed stronger brand love intensity towards consumer-electronics, particularly based on the variety of use, social-connectivity, and hedonism associated to consumer-electronics brands.

The consumers love towards cosmetics brands was revealed as more intrinsic, personal, or intimate. However, the love for consumer-electronics was based on more extrinsic factors that seemed to be socially influenced, such as social status, public image, self-identity, keeping up-to-date, social viability, and connectedness. Batra *et al.* (2012, p.28) considered these extrinsic factors as the 'intrinsic rewards' for consumers. This difference in brand love towards the two product-categories also reflects the similarity of brand love to interpersonal love relationships. The nature of love, desirability, sentiments, and inclinations vary towards the different humanly relations as well; such as love for parents, children, and or spouse (Graham, 2011), where the lover posits several similar positive attributions and behaviour towards the loved ones (Graham, 2011), such as care, sacrifice, forgiveness, etc. However, the extent of these attributions can vary towards the different relationships based on the intensity and nature of that relationship. This research also reflected some differences concerning the relationship attributions towards the two product-categories based on the participants' relatedness with the two distinct product brands, as discussed in section 7.2.4 in this chapter, which is congruent with Fetscherin *et al.* (2014).



The analysis provided clear contradictions to the existing literature of brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2008; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace *et al.*, 2014) concerning some factors determining brand love, such as '*frequently thinking about the brand*', '*gives meaning to your life in any way*', and feeling of '*affection*' towards a brand. The analysis revealed that these expressions are considered more human than a consumer would want to use for expressing their feeling for a product or brand. It is also consistent with the debates in the literature (Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Sarkar, 2014), which commends viewing brand love in the interpersonal relationship context, but simultaneously caution about considering the differences in the core nature of the relationship.

About '*frequently thinking about the brand*', the reasons and the way of frequently thinking about the brand mentioned in both the pre-survey and post-survey interviews did not reflect any similarity with the interpersonal love relationships (Sternberg, 1986), as suggested in the brand love literature (Albert and Valette-Florence, 2010; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), where a lover frequently thinks about a loved one. The previous research had associated the feeling with the products or brands of hedonic value (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006); therefore, it might be due to the difference in nature of the two product-categories explored in this study. The analysis revealed that consumer-electronics do involve fulfilling consumers' hedonic values in some way, however, the cosmetics brands revealed as more personal and intrinsic to participants' use and suitability. This difference of nature in the two product-categories also revealed some differences concerning participants' brand love attribution towards them. Fetscherin *et al.* (2014) also found that the intensity of relationships and emotional attachment consumers develop with brands differ based on the difference in the product-category.

Moreover, it is also observed that consumers sometimes associate with brands with surrealistic values (dream-like qualities) and relate with the brands based on those associations and dream about several unrealistic things (Sarkar, 2014). Moreover, when consumers relate with brands based on their personal idealisation, memories, and dreams (Albert *et al.*, 2013, 2008; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Hegner *et al.*, 2017), they can associate unrealistic expectations from their relationship with the brands. However, this research did not support the factor, '*frequently thinking about the brand*', within its core meaning and potential in brand love context as it does in interpersonal love in case of both the product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics.

Concerning the phrase, '*giving meaning to life*', in the participants' perspective offer a much broader spectrum than consumers' consumption goals or associations with brands. However, it is observed in a study with American consumers that some consumers try finding meaning through their consumption (Tian and Belk, 2006). On the other hand, most of the past research, meaning in life has often been defined as a sense of one's life having a purpose of attainment of cherished goals (Ryff and Singer, 1998) personal accomplishments (Frank, 1984), and or fulfilling purpose, value, efficacy, and self-worth (Baumiester, 1991). Moreover, Allport (1961) implied that meaning to oneself or one's existence can also be achieved through associating oneself to a larger framework

of meaning, like religion or a philosophy of life. King *et al.* (2006) advocated that positive affect has a stronger impact on 'meaning to life' than goal appraisals, and some associate with spirituality (Klerk, 2005). Only one of the participants of post-survey interviews took, '*giving meaning to life*' in the literal sense, as commended in the past literature, and defined having his love for a consumer-electronics brand as a source of inspiration to improvise and grow in life, and expressed this factor as follows:

*"In terms of example, how to improve yourself, and I think this is what we want to do in life, how to progress, develop and see where I was sort of or my flaws are and take the initiative to achieve it and that's what (the loved brand) does and this is what I am trying to do now"* (PST-Int-10, November 30, 2015, Consumer-Electronics).

Moreover, '*affection*' has also been extensively explored and observed within consumer-brand relationships literature (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Hemsley-Brown and Alnawas, 2016; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Park *et al.*, 2006, 2010, 2013; Pedeliento *et al.*, 2015; Proksch *et al.*, 2015). However, the analysis of the post-survey interviews '*affection*' offered mixed responses and revealed that some participants were not willing to use this expression for a non-humanly relationship. These comments were also associated with the consumers' concern for having a selfless interpersonal love relationship as compared to their relationship with brands. However, a few interviewees did agree in feeling '*affection*' towards their loved brands, and explained it as part of their attachment and love for the brand.

Arising from the analysis of the post-survey interviews, the most important factors in developing and fostering brand love were categorised into three main categories, namely brand, product, and/or service attributes, personal preferences, and social influences as presented in table 6.7 in chapter 6. However, the reasons reported for initiating the use of the brand were different in some cases, but the reasons behind developing and continuing the relationship were mostly associated with the brand specific attributes and social influences that become the consumers' personal preferences.

Consistent with the criticality of experience with a brand, the analysis also identified 'relationship length' as a critical predictor of brand love, brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness, as well as the consequent brand-favourable WOM behaviour including brand defence. Long-term relationship or intension to keep a long-term relationship with a brand had been highly supported in the literature as well (Huber *et al.*, 2015). The interviews revealed that the long-term relationship with brands are experience driven and thus drive several consumer's behaviour, perceptions, beliefs, and relations, given the consumers' experience with the brand has been positive. It is also congruent with the existing research in consumer-brand relationships (Ahuvia, 1993, 2005; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Brock and Zhou, 2012; Gummerson, 1998; Huber *et al.*, 2015). Not only the long-term relationships foster brand love, but it is also essential for brands to maintain passionate consumer-brand relationships, i.e. brand love is also essential to sustain a long-term relationship (Huber *et al.*, 2015). It is argued that intense feelings are a prerequisite for any long-term interpersonal and/or consumer-brand relationship (Shimp and Madden, 1988).

The analysis demonstrated that positive experience with a brand promotes reliability, dependence, habitual use, confidence, trust, loyalty, and finally love and attachment with the brand, and therefore, consumers also feel distress on the separation of the product/brand. The distress on separation when a loved brand is missing, or the product of the brand discontinues has been observed in the literature (Pedeliento *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, the relationship length was reported as one of the most important factors in building and promoting brand relations, and their consequent behaviour, and such distress of separation was also driven by the participants' dependence on the brand through the long-term use of the product/brand.

In cosmetics brands, the qualitative analysis revealed such dependence based on personal use of the product, suitability to the skin type, and desired personal results, which restricts the consumers in trying or using any other brand. The analysis suggested that consumers consider cosmetics brands as more personally associated, and the personal experience and consequent results of a product strengthen consumers' personal dependence on the brand. It is consistent with the extant literature in recognising the importance of brand experience in inducing and effecting several positive brand relationships and behaviour, such as, brand love (Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Huang, 2017; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016; Veloutsou, and Guzmán, 2017), brand trust (Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Huang, 2017), WOM, and eWOM (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, the differentiation of relationship towards cosmetics and consumer-electronics brands is based on the utilitarian and hedonic values associated to a product-category (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Sarkar, 2014). However, in case of consumer-electronics, the analysis depicted both utilitarian, as well as hedonic values playing a role in driving such dependence, particularly concerning mobile phones. The participants claimed to depend on their mobile phones increasingly based on the variety of use of the device that used to aid them in fulfilling their day-to-day responsibilities, as well as serving as means of entertainment and socialising. The ability of smart phones in helping people in organising, keeping updated, up-to-date, and punctual, along with the social interactivity have made these devices and brands indispensable. Therefore, this sheer dependence on a brand plays a strong role in developing and sustaining close brand relations and promotes consumers' brand-favoured behaviour, including both positive relationship and WOM attributions, including loyalty, trust, forgiveness, and proposed WOM behaviour.

The consumers have become more aware and conscious for their brand choices based on the information overload (Furner *et al.*, 2016; Park and Lee, 2009), particularly online through social media, reviews websites, as well as brand advertising, and marketing communications (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012). Due to the increased effectiveness of eWOM (Christodoulides *et al.*, 2012; Furner *et al.*, 2016; Park and Lee, 2009; Wang *et al.*, 2014) through increased trust on online sources, particularly independent review sites (Wang *et al.*, 2014); the competitiveness in online marketplace has enormously increased. Therefore, it has become essential for brands to keep up with consumers' expectations.

The analysis of the interviews' responses about loved consumer-electronics brands mentioned by the survey participants revealed that people mostly love brands that are leading and competing in the market. Consumers are willing to have the brands that are deemed as the best (market leaders) or one of the best to serve their self-esteem (Malär *et al.*, 2011), and self-enhancement (Aguirre-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2012) motives. It is also consistent with the impact of brand reputation (Garg *et al.*, 2015), and brand image (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Loureiro *et al.*, 2012; Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012).

However, the analysis of the cosmetics brands revealed a wider mix of different brands, few responses mentioned the high-end cosmetics brands, but mostly considered normal brands that are easily available on local high streets and retail supermarkets at affordable prices. This is also consistent with Batra *et al.* (2012), who found price sensitivity towards utility brands. Moreover, Karjaluoto *et al.* (2016) has also advocated a strong impact of consumers' price judgements and affordability on consumers' loyalty and positive-WOM. However, in this study, the responses towards consumer-electronics remained otherwise. The reasons for participants' price sensitivity to cosmetics brands was revealed as the regular use of cosmetics, which involve quicker repurchasing, as compared to consumer-electronics. Furthermore, this commonality of response towards the cosmetics brands might be because of the limitation of the participants' sample, as it was a purposive sampling method used in this study, which can result in recruits coming from similar traits, such as, social status and income groups (Reynolds and Phillips, 2009).

Concerning personal preferences, these involve personal experience, such as, suitability of the product, dependence on the product or brand, familiarity with the brand, long-term relationship with the brand, regularity of use, and personal likability, of the brand. On the other hand, social influences involved how consumers want to carry and portray their social-self (Aguirre-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012). The analysis further suggested a few overlaps of the different corresponding factors on the three main categories (product attributes, personal preferences, and social influences) governing consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love. Such as reliability and dependence of the brand were observed within both brand strengths, as well as personal preferences. Similarly, the social influences were observed to be driven by personal preferences concerning social-self, and desirability of keeping and maintaining social relationships.

Developed on the analysis, it is argued that the product attributes engage a customer in a relationship by developing a degree of dependence on the brand, which promotes consumers' relationships with the brand. And, thereafter, the dependence on a product or brand based on personal experience develops emotional attachment, love, affection, trust, and loyalty with the brand. It is also consistent with the existing literature that considers brand experience as an essential antecedent of brand love (Joji and Ashwin, 2012; Huang, 2017; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016), and brand trust (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Esch *et al.*, 2006; Huang, 2017; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016; Li *et al.*, 2008), brand loyalty (Barkus *et al.*, 2009), and both WOM and eWOM (Karjaluoto *et al.*,

2016). As analysed, the product attributes are considered as the quality and usability of the product itself, the branding attributes, and/or service quality. These attributes include everything that a brand offer and appeals to the consumers including; product usability, features, reliability, looks, feel, impression, etc. Therefore, it is concluded that the branding, marketing, and/or service attributes are perceived collectively by the consumer as means of complementing their brand experience, and enhancing their pro-brand attitude leading to consumer-brand relationships.

Concerning consumers' personal preferences, they have been revealed to extend beyond just the usability of the brand, as consumers start feeling a sense of connection, reliability, and dependence that leads to the feeling of relatedness with the brand. They feel the brand as part of themselves, and start feeling good, happy, or proud on the good performance of the brand, which is congruent to several existing research (e.g. Batra *et al.*, 2012; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2010). However, that sense of achievement belongs to the brand, but the consumers take the pride of using that brand or associating themselves with that brand (Park *et al.*, 2010). These personal preferences play a big part in inducing or promoting close consumer-brand relationships, as well as consumers' esteem values. This is also consistent with the existing research that suggest consumers start seeing loved brands as their extended-self, which result in consumers taking brand praise and brand insults as personal, which leads to both brand relevant self-esteem, as well as brand defence as means of self-defence (Lisjack *et al.*, 2012). Park *et al.* (2006) also suggested that consumers do take brand criticisms as personally threatening owing to their attachment with the brand, which leads to an automated defence behaviour against brand criticism, which in turn supports the concept of brand defence that has been explored and developed in this study.

The qualitative analysis remained pertinent with the role of brand-self integration in forming and sustaining close consumer-brand relationships, as it is extensively covered in the existing literature (Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Hwang and Kandampully, 2012; Unal and Aydin, 2013; Wallace *et al.*, 2014). The analysis found a division concerning the factors explained in the exiting literature that demonstrate brand-self integration. Batra *et al.* (2012) identified some factors explaining consumers' brand-self integration, such as, consumers' feel the brand as part of their self, the brand adds to their current or desired self-identity, gives meaning to consumers lives, or consumers start thinking frequently about the brand as one does in interpersonal love. The analysis did not offer full support to '*gives meaning to lives*', and '*consumers start thinking frequently about the brand*', as discussed above. It was revealed that participants mostly agreed that the brands do add to their self-identity desires and they feel the brand as a part of their self, based on their continuous use and dependence on the brand over a long time. Such dependence on brands lead consumers to identify with brands and then result in brand-favourable behaviour, particularly brand defence. It is also consistent with Lisjak *et al.* (2012) that consumers identify with brands, and as a result defend the brands they identify with.

Concerning the social influences, the analysis revealed a strong role of social influences in promoting or motivating positive consumer-brand relationships. It is identified that love, affection, attachment, and or emotional bonding with brands also stems from social influences that include kinship (some close person using the brand), desired social status, social impression, desired self-identity, as well as the facilitation in carrying social life. The impact of social influences on consumers' brand perceptions and consumer-brand relationships depicted in this study is congruent with the existing literature, which depicted consumers' public self-motives influencing their brand-decisions to fulfil their social acceptance or self-enhancement goals (Aguirre-Rodriguez *et al.*, 2012).

The analysis identified three main social factors that prevail in forming and maintaining brand relations, firstly kinship, secondly consumers' social impression, status, or esteem needs of using the better, trendier, or the best perceived brand in the market. And, thirdly, if the loved brand or product of the brand is facilitating consumers' social life, such as, keeping in contact with friends and family, keeping connected, using social media, emails, texting, calls, etc. These factors revealed to be prevalent in almost all interviewees' comments. However, few interviewees considered kinship more important as means of their initiation of the relatedness with a brand, and a few valued their social status, image, and desired self-identity more in fostering their relationship with the brand. However, the factor of social connectivity and facilitation in developing and maintaining social relationships were more prevalent in the responses towards consumer-electronics. The existing literature already considers the importance of social influences in governing brand-oriented attitudes including desired and/or present self-identity (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008), social status (Moore *et al.*, 2010), brand identification (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 20016) influence of kinship i.e. friends' or familys' brand perceptions, likeability and experience (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Iyer *et al.*, 2016), and brand pride (Park *et al.*, 2006, 2010; Taute *et al.*, 2017).

These three factors, kinship, social self-image, and facilitation in socialising were analysed to have significant influence on liking, loving, and/or using a product. The need for social connectivity and connectedness has grown as much that all the participants including both pre-survey, as well as post-survey interviewees declared their mobile phone brands as their most or one of the most favourite or loved brand. This lovability of the mobile phone brands was based on the ability of their smartphones of keeping them connected with their loved ones, their friends and family. This factor has not been identified in the literature concerning consumers' brand love with mobile phone brands; however, mobile phones have been explored as a product-category in brand love literature (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014). It is might be the limited qualitative research in brand love and consumer-brand relationships (Sarkar 2014), as quantitative findings do not reveal much about the motives and insights associated to consumer perceptions or attitudes, but only the inferences that are directly measured. However, the importance of connectivity and consumers' enthusiasm to keep connected, and socialising has gained much importance in the literature of brand engagement (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Vivek *et al.*, 2012), and consumers' involvement in the social networking and eWOM (Baldus *et al.*, 2015; Wallace *et al.*, 2014).

The analysis also revealed kinship as one of the critical factors in promoting Consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love. Like a close family member or friend using a product or brand brings familiarity, acceptability, and trust for the brand that induces liking, and even love for the brand. It is consistent with consumer-brand relationships research on brand love (Fournier, 1998; Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2010) and product adoption for the impact of family ties on consumers' consumption and brand equity (Bravo *et al.*, 2007), and consumer-brand relatedness and love (Iyer *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, the recent research advocating the importance and impact of kinship on brand love has particularly confirmed a strong impact of mother and child relationship on mutual brand love development (Iyer *et al.*, 2016). The influence of kinship was supported for both the product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics. It was depicted through most of the responses that someone closely related to the consumers, such as a family member, using a product/brand leaves great impact on consumers, and induces a familiarity with the brand that develops a willingness of trying/using the brand by themselves as well. The familiarity with a brand itself has been considered as a strong factor in driving consumers brand adoption and pro-brand sentiments that could lead to consumer-brand relationships and other brand-favourable consequence (Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Huber *et al.*, 2015). Moreover, this willingness to use the brand was also apparent in the case of the brands that participants had been observing in their household since childhood. Such willingness was also associated with the familiarity with a brand (Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2010) enhanced by the influence of family consumption on brand relations (Iyer *et al.*, 2016). The analysis revealed that such familiarity with a brand plays an important part in promoting self-brand-relations.

Concerning personal impression and desired social image, the analysis demonstrated that everyone wants to give a certain impression of themselves, some wanted to look good, some wanted to portray themselves as high-tech, some wanted to look trendy and fashionable, some wanted to appear decent, intelligent etc. Therefore, in this effort they felt that certain products or brands helped portray their desired image in the society, which is congruent with the strong role of social phenomena and consumers' desirability of acquiring and sustaining a specific self-identity (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia 2006, Grisaffe and Nguyen, 2010; Ismail and Spinelli 2012; Unal and Aydin, 2013), through relating with brands who facilitate in any way in adding to consumers' desired impression. It also supports the consumers' needs of self-enhancement and self-esteem (Albert *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, consumers' '*willingness to invest resources*' for the loved brand was another important factor verified by the study's findings as it was suggested in the existing literature (Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006), it includes spending time and money for the brand, such as, willingness to pay a premium price to buy the products of the brand.

Understanding the antecedents of consumers' brand love provided a basis to understand and conceptualise the outcomes of brand love in influencing consumers' pro-brand attitudes and behaviour, which helped achieve the basic research objectives expected from this study. This discussion aimed to develop an understanding of the antecedents of brand love to fully appreciate

the consumers' readiness for attributing brand-favourable behaviour to fulfil the research objectives of understanding the relationship outcomes of brand love, and consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour as conceptualised in this study.

The next section discusses the analysis of the three relationship constructs brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness explored in this study.

### **7.2.5 Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Forgiveness:**

In this study, three consumer-brand relationships construct; brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness were explored to observe the influence of brand love on the three relationship outcomes, and quantitatively measure the mediating role of these constructs on the relationship between brand love and brand-favourable WOM against negative-WOM, as detailed in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Brand trust is discussed next.

#### **7.2.5.1 Brand Trust:**

Both quantitative and qualitative analysis supported an important role of brand trust, and confirmed the positive impact of brand love on brand trust, as well as the positive impact of brand trust on the three proposed WOM behaviour. The significance of brand trust revealed from the analysis is congruent with the existing literature, which has been observing a positive influence of brand love on brand trust and commitment and found positive-WOM as one of the attributions of brand love (Albert and Merunka, 2013). However, the extant literature did not provide any insights to the role of brand trust in case of negative-WOM, which this study provided through both quantitative and qualitative data across two product-categories. The existing literature suggest several brand-favourable benefits of brand trust (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Arnott, 2007; Sekhon *et al.*, 2013), but like brand love, brand trust has not been explored in a negative-WOM scenario. The analysis revealed very interesting implications for extending the understanding of brand trust in advancing theory and practice.

The analysis found that the implications of brand trust differed based on the nature of the product-category. Moreover, the analysis revealed brand trust as a rational construct and not blind as depicted in the existing literature (e.g. Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). The intensity and nature of brand trust associated to brand-favourable attributions revealed to be strongly related to the nature of the product-category, particularly in the presence of negative-WOM about the brand. The trust revealed to be more blind towards loved consumer-electronics brands and less accommodating for cosmetics brands.

The impact of brand love on brand trust was found to be positive and strong as a norm of positive attribution of brand love; however, it did not remain as affirmative in case of negative-WOM, which has reflected in both qualitative findings concerning cosmetics, which suggest that level of brand



trust varies depending on the nature of a product category. The positive influence of brand love on brand trust was supported by both quantitative hypotheses results and laddering interviews, for both the product-categories. The quantitative analysis supported partial mediation of brand trust on the relationship of brand love and brand defence for both product categories, however no mediation for positive-WOM for both the surveys. Moreover, partial mediation was found for brand advocacy for consumer-electronics only. The quantitative analysis did not provide any insights to such differentiation; however, valuable inferences were extracted from hierarchical value-map analysis of the laddering interviews.

The hierarchical value-map analysis found a strong impact of brand trust on the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour, as a parallel construct to brand love, and depicted the relationship direction of brand trust and brand love otherwise as was initially suggested in the research model (see figure 7.2). The value-map analysis suggested a strong positive impact of brand trust on brand love driven by consumers' personal positive experience with the brand and topped-up by long-term relationship with the brand, and limited evidence supported the impact of brand love on brand trust. It is also consistent with the existing research (Holmes, 2000; Huang, 2017; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016; Mikulincer *et al.*, 2001), which argues brand trust as a pre-requisite of brand love built on personal brand experience. Karjaluoto *et al.* (2016) provide strong support for the positive impact of brand trust on brand love, and further suggested the positive influence of brand love on both offline and online WOM as suggested in this study. Moreover, consistent with Huang (2017), the value-map analysis also revealed positive impact of brand trust and brand love on brand loyalty.

Concerning the mediating role of brand trust on the relationship of brand love and the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, both quantitative and qualitative supported the stronger direct impact of brand love on brand advocacy, and particularly brand defence against negative-WOM. Moreover, the qualitative analysis also supported strong direct impact of brand trust on the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour for both the product-categories, but conditional based on the nature and intensity of negative-WOM, which was only reported for cosmetics brands, based on the concerns of health and safety and personal well-being. However, the quantitative analysis only revealed a positive impact of brand trust on the three WOM behaviour for consumer-electronics and positive impact of brand trust on brand defence for cosmetics. Moreover, partial mediation of brand trust on the relationship between brand love and brand defence was also significant for both the surveys.

Brand forgiveness is discussed next.

#### **7.2.5.2 Brand Forgiveness:**

In this study, brand forgiveness was conceptualised as the consumers' willingness to forgive a loved brand for any believed negative-WOM. Both qualitative and quantitative analysis confirmed brand forgiveness as one of the brand-favourable relationship outcomes of brand love. It is congruent with the recent research in consumer-brand relationships (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Hegner

*et al.*, 2017; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), and consistent with the interpersonal relationships' literature (Allemand *et al.*, 2007; Finkel *et al.*, 2002; Kearns and Fincham 2005; McCullough *et al.*, 1998). However, the impact of brand forgiveness on consumers' brand-favourable WOM attributions towards the loved brands was divided towards two different product-categories, and it was revealed to be primarily dependent on the nature of the negative-WOM, i.e. the nature and seriousness of the brand transgressions or failures. If negative-WOM involve brand transgressions, it could be costly to the brand (Donovan *et al.*, 2012), which leads to attenuated loyalty (Tax *et al.*, 1998), and increased brand avoidance (Gregoire *et al.*, 2009), however, forgiveness can neutralise such transgressions (Donovan *et al.*, 2012).

The qualitative analysis revealed that increased health and safety concerns associated to cosmetics brands make consumers more cautious in forgiving them for any brand failures, and showed reluctance to forgive brands for any transgressions that involve any harmful effects to skin or health. It implies that both nature of negative-WOM, as well as the product-category of a loved brand impact on consumers' brand forgiveness decisions. However, in case of brand mistakes or failures, promise by loved brands for rectifying the issue also influence consumers' inclination to forgive the brand based on their positive experience with the brand in the past. Therefore, brand experience is considered as a critical driver of pro-brand attitudes, behaviour, and relationships, such as, brand trust, brand loyalty, as well as brand forgiveness, and brand love. This is congruent with brand management research that found experience as an antecedent to several positive brand relationships and behaviour, such as, brand love (Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Huang, 2017; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016), brand loyalty (Barkus *et al.*, 2009; Miquel-Romero *et al.*, 2014), positive-WOM (Gremler *et al.*, 2001; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016), and eWOM (Karjaluoto *et al.*, 2016).

The analysis suggested that consumers do not feel like forgiving brands for any transgressions or failures that are deemed harmful in any way, and they refused to forgive the brand in such instances. It is also consistent with Park *et al.* (2009), which highlights the reduced willingness of consumers to defend a brand based on brand transgressions. This is unlike interpersonal relationships, where people are even willing to forgive their partners on serious transgressions (Allemand *et al.*, 2007). It is congruent with the existing literature of consumer-brand relationships, which has been developed based on interpersonal relationships, but advocates certain differences in the core nature and intensity of the consumers' relationships towards brands (Ahuvia, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012).

Concerning the research model as presented in figure 7.2, brand forgiveness did not mediate the relationship of brand love with positive-WOM for cosmetics and brand brand advocacy for consumer-electronics. However, the positive impact of brand forgiveness on brand defence remained consistent with both quantitative and qualitative data, and brand forgiveness partially mediated brand defence for both cosmetics and consumer-electronics. The qualitative analysis also identified positive impact of brand forgiveness on all three brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards the loved brands in both the product-categories, but the inclination of forgiveness

was completely dependent on the nature of the believed negative-WOM. The recent research in consumer-brand relationships has confirmed the positive impact of brand love on brand forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Garg *et al.*, 2015; Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), but none of the studies have explored the construct using qualitative research to provide insights to the extent of forgiveness offered to the loved brands. Moreover, the inclination of consumers' forgiveness towards the different levels, and nature of brand failures, and/or transgressions is also scant. The existing literature suggest limited research to explore consumers' post-forgiveness behaviour towards brands (Donovan *et al.*, 2012).

#### **7.2.5.3 Brand Loyalty:**

The qualitative and quantitative analysis collectively demonstrated a strong positive impact of brand love on brand loyalty for both the product-categories as congruent with an extensive research in the area (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Huang, 2017; Thomson *et al.*, 2005). The analysis also revealed to support the second preposition of the research model, which proposed positive impact of brand loyalty on the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour. It is congruent with the extant research that found positive influence of brand love on brand loyalty followed by the positive influence of both brand love and brand loyalty on WOM (Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014).

On the other hand, as brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty also becomes conditional based on the nature and intensity of the believed negativity of negative-WOM about the loved brands, as if the negativity involves transgressions, it can lead to attenuated loyalty (Tax *et al.*, 1998), and increased brand avoidance (Gregoire *et al.*, 2009). However, consumer-brand relationships can neutralise such transgressions through forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012), and brand defence (Park *et al.*, 2006; 2013).

Concerning the research model assumptions, the mediating role of brand loyalty in the relationship of brand love and the three WOM behaviour were also positive and partially supported brand defence for both cosmetics and consumer-electronics surveys, and only partially supported the relationship of brand love and brand advocacy for cosmetics, and no significance concerning the impact on positive-WOM and brand advocacy for consumer-electronics. It implies that brand loyalty leads to brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards the loved brands, particularly brand defence against negative-WOM.

#### **7.2.6 The WOM Behavioural and Relationship Outcomes of Brand Love Across Two Product-Categories; Cosmetics and Consumer-Electronics:**

The analysis revealed no differences concerning consumers' explanation and declaration of brand love for the two product-categories followed by the positive influence of brand love on the three relationship constructs, and consumers' intentions of providing three WOM behaviour against disbelieved or minor negative-WOM. However, the analysis propounded some differences in the participants' intensity of the relatedness with the brand and the subsequent relationship attributions

based on the difference in the nature and usability of the product-category, and especially the nature and seriousness of believed negative-WOM. This is consistent with Fetscherin *et al.* (2014), who examined four different product-categories to explore brand love and found no difference in the core nature of the relationship, but the differences in the relationship intensity and the consequent attributions based on the product-category.

It is argued in the literature that consumer-brand relationships are not product-category specific, but certain product-categories are conducive to more intense relationships than others (Christy *et al.*, 1996; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Kressmann *et al.*, 2006), which has been observed for cosmetics and consumer-electronics. Although, there is existing research which advocates of no product-category effect on brand relationship quality. However, in this study, the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative findings depicted difference in the participants' intensity of love, as well as their readiness and extent of brand love attributions for the two product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics.

Overall the analysis revealed, consumer-brand relationships in relation to cosmetics brands to be more personal and intimate, and usability driven as compared to consumer-electronics, where relationships were observed to be more society driven, on top of the usability, as congruent with the differentiation in utilitarian and hedonic product-categories (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Choi *et al.*, 2017; Huber *et al.*, 2017). However, the relationships towards consumer-electronics, particularly mobile phone brands included several factors beyond just desired identity and hedonism (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Huber *et al.*, 2017), but strong consideration of their utilitarian values (Huber *et al.*, 2017).

Therefore, based on the associated perceived risks and the sensitivity of the use of cosmetics products, the findings for cosmetics brands differed in terms of trusting, forgiving, recommending, and /or defending the loved brand. However, highlighted in the literature that such perceived risks do not impact the relationship strengths (Korai, 2017), but this research suggested otherwise. This differentiation might be observed based on the limitation of consumer-brand relationships of exploring cosmetics brands (Korai, 2017) using only quantitative survey data, and exploring brand perceptions within circumstances not including a negative scenario. Moreover, the consumer-brand relationships research is limited to positivist approach (Mousa, 2015; Fetscherin and Heinrich, 2014) where very little qualitative exploration is involved (Garg *et al.*, 2015; Sarkar, 2014). Therefore, this study used mixed methods research involving qualitative exploration, as it is recommended to use qualitative approach to identify the antecedents and outcomes of brand love, or mixed methods should be used to strengthen results (Garg *et al.*, 2015). It is also apparent in the recent research in brand love, which is involving qualitative methods to interpret consumer-brand relationships (Garg *et al.*, 2015; Sarkar, 2014). However, most older research on brand love involved strictly positivist stance (Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Fetscherin and Dato-On, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012).

In case of a consumer-electronics, the analysis revealed that consumers would refuse to believe any negative-WOM about their loved brand, based on their trust on the brand; however, it was

contrary in case of cosmetics. It is observed that such differentiation of attitude has not been identified in the literature towards the two product-categories concerning refusal to believe negative-WOM (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), or forgiving a loved brand for any failures or transgression (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). However, it is identified in the existing literature that consumers do develop different intensities of relationships with brands based on the nature of the product-category (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014).

Concerning consumer-electronics, the interviewees were less concerned about any negative-WOM, even if they believed it, unless it was to do with the usability of their product. However, in case of cosmetics brand, this differentiation of responses was also apparent from the quantitative analysis, which demonstrated lowered forgiveness and defence intensions for cosmetics, as compared to consumer-electronics as presented in chapter 5. This finding is contrary to the existing claims of the consumer-brand relationships research that suggested consumers turning a blind eye towards their loved brands (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). However, the analysis revealed that consumers are willing to investigate the negative information themselves before responding to any negative-WOM or continuing to use the product, unless the negative-WOM sounds baseless, or does not make sense. And this behaviour was apparent for both the product-categories, however, exceptions were offered to loved consumer-electronics brands based on the difference of the nature of products, which involve lesser perceived risk as compared to cosmetics brands.

The overall analysis confirmed the direct positive impact of brand love on trust, loyalty, and forgiveness, as well as defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM for both the product-categories, which is consistent with the bulk of existing literature, which advocates several positive outcomes of brand love (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Garg *et al.*, 2015; Huang, 2017; Huber *et al.*, 2017; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). In case of disbelieved or less harmful negative-WOM, all the above-mentioned positive attributions of brand love were found to prevail. However, in case of negative-WOM which is believed to be harmful in any way, all the brand love attributes revealed to decline including forgiveness, trust, loyalty and the brand-favourable WOM behaviour (brand defence, advocacy and positive-WOM) proposed in this study. And, this behaviour revealed to be stricter towards loved cosmetics. The analysis also provided clear evidence that consumers are inclined to forgive their loved brands, only if the mistake or failure was not harmful to personal well-being or health. Moreover, the analysis suggested that cosmetics brands are more intrinsically relied upon, in contrast to consumer-electronics brand. Cosmetics revealed to be considered as more personal based on the personal usage, skin suitability, and preference. However, the consumer-electronics were revealed as more facilitating concerning extrinsic tasks, such as, help in organising, working, more sociable, serve as means of social status, etc. Consumers tend to identify more openly with their consumer-electronics brands; and therefore, they tend to defend their loved consumer-electronics more explicitly. This is consistent with the findings of Lisjak *et al.* (2012) that consumers tend to defend the brands they identify with, and this is driven by their esteem values.

This social support and brand defence was more prevalent towards the loved consumer-electronics than loved cosmetics brands. However, the relationship driven positive behaviour and brand defence in case of moderate negativity was apparent in the research findings, concerning both cosmetics and consumer-electronics. It is consistent with Einwiller *et al.* (2006), who suggested that individuals who identify with brands only defend the brands against moderately negative-WOM, but do not defend the brand in case of extremely negative information. Therefore, it is inferred that consumers' brand forgiveness and positive-WOM behaviour including brand advocacy and brand defence, as well as their loyalty with the loved cosmetics brands are conditional based on the nature of negative-WOM. Moreover, the analysis revealed that consumers' willingness to offer their support to their loved brands amplifies in case of false allegations or rumours, or any comments that might be non-existent or does not make sense.

In case of believed negative-WOM about the loved cosmetics brand, which might be harmful in nature, the consumers refuse to forgive their loved brands based on their relationship values. In this case, none of the relationship values including love and trust play their role, but the values of health and safety takes over in directing consumer behaviour. This is also consistent with the latest market information as, international market research suggests a global awareness and consciousness for good quality cosmetics products, particularly skincare goods (Euromonitor, Accessed 16, June 2016). The Confederation of British Industry (CBI) trade statistics report of August 2015 suggested that consumers' demand for natural ingredients for cosmetics in Europe is increasing, and that there has been a spill over effect on their imports (CBI, 2015). This information, as well as the post-survey interviews identify that the consumers' awareness and concern regarding their well-being and health concerning the ingredients and long-term effects of their cosmetics brands has increased. This leads to consumers being more susceptible to any negative-WOM about their loved cosmetics brands.

The criticality of negative-WOM concerning the nature of negative-WOM is discussed next.

#### **7.2.7 The Criticality and Implications of the Nature of Negative-WOM:**

In this study, negative-WOM was considered as a critical incident to explore the strength of consumers' brand love attributions towards the loved brands, particularly consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour including brand defence. The analysis revealed that intensity, believability, and authenticity of negative-WOM plays a critical role in influencing consumers' attitudinal and behavioural attributions towards their loved brands.

Even though the analysis confirmed the positive impact of brand love on consumers' relationship and WOM behavioural attributions, including forgiveness and defence of love brands, the seriously negative information, which is deemed genuine is not forgiven or defended by consumers.

The consumer-brand relationships literature also supports this, and states that individuals who identify with brands will only defend the brands against moderately negative-WOM, and do not defend the brand in case of extremely negative information (Einwiller *et al.*, 2006). However, this is

contrary to interpersonal relationships, which provided the foundation for consumer-brand relationships, where people tend to forgive their partners for even serious transgressions (Allemand *et al.*, 2007) based on their relationship strength (Kearns and Fincham, 2005).

Although it is observed that consumers react negatively toward corporate irresponsibility, and consider it as ethical transgression, which leads to the feeling of contempt, anger, and disgust, which can further lead to negative-WOM and even protest behaviour (Grappi *et al.*, 2013). However, in case of brand love consumers are observed even ignoring (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012) or forgiving brand transgressions (Donovan *et al.*, 2012), and defending the brands for any wrong doings or merely rumours (Park *et al.*, 2006; 2010). Although the overall analysis conducted in this study reaffirmed the positive influence of brand love on consumers' brand-favourable attitudes and behaviour, particularly brand defence and brand forgiveness in response to negative-WOM, but the nature and intensity of negative-WOM remained critical.

The next section presents the conclusion of this chapter.

### **7.3 Conclusion:**

This chapter presented the discussion of the research analysis of the three phases of the research conducted in this study involving mixed methods approach. Overall, the research analysis supported the influence of brand love on the proposed WOM behaviour, particularly brand defence in response to negative-WOM. However, the mediating role of brand trust, loyalty, and forgiveness were not fully supported, although both qualitative and quantitative analysis supported the positive impact of brand love on the three relationship outcomes.

The qualitative analysis provided useful insights concerning the nature, antecedents and expressions of brand love as identified in the existing research. The analysis suggested some differentiation in the declaration of brand love to what has been suggested in the existing literature and found that few expressions of interpersonal love did not fully apply to consumer-brand love context. Moreover, the selflessness and intensity of interpersonal relationships are not fully applicable to brand love, which is in line with the existing literature. However, the analysis supported the initial conceptualisation of brand love as a bi-directional construct, where the relationship is attributed from both directions, where mutual expectations prevail and met to keep up the relationship.

The analysis revealed that brand defence, brand advocacy, and consumers' positive-WOM behaviour are influential, however, the brand-favourable WOM that prevails against negative-WOM is brand defence, given that the negative information was mild, negligible, not true, or was forgiven.

Moreover, the negative-WOM, which was unlikely to be forgiven is the one, which could be harmful to health or safety in any way. The participants were even willing to forgive any proven or believed negative-WOM about their loved brands, where the brand promises to rectify the mistake. It is also

consistent with the applied social psychology literature where transgressions are deemed to be fully forgiven based on an apology accompanying a promise of not repeating the mistake (Hui *et al.*, 2011).

Moreover, the attributions of brand love were revealed to be the same for two distinct product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics, in case of disbelieved negative-WOM, but different in case of believed negative-WOM, particularly when the negative-WOM was believed to be harmful in any way. The brand love attributions had been observed to differ based on the type of the product, intensity of the consumer-brand relationships, and the validity and nature of negative-WOM about the loved brand.

The next chapter presents the conclusion and contributions of the study.



## Chapter 8

### Conclusion and Contributions

#### 8.1 Aims of the Chapter:

This final chapter summarises the research, identifies the key contributions to theory and outlines the implications for marketing management. In addition, limitations of the research and future research directions are suggested. Furthermore, reflection is offered on the process of research and the researcher's own development during this process.

#### 8.2 Conclusion:

*The aim of this study was to critically explore brand love and brand defence in consumer-brand relationships by considering the question: 'can consumers go beyond positive word-of-mouth, and/or brand advocacy to defend their loved-brands against criticism?'*

The aim of the study was achieved by conceptualising, developing, measuring, and exploring brand defence as a superior brand-favourable WOM behaviour against negative-WOM about loved brands. The consumers' WOM behaviour has not been categorised before based on their nature and level of attribution against negative-WOM about loved brands, based on the intensity of the consumer-brand relationship. This study not only explored consumers' brand-favourable WOM attributions towards loved brands in negative-WOM scenario for the first time, but also identified a superior WOM behaviour, 'brand defence' in response to any negative information about the loved brand. Brand defence involves consumers' arguing and fighting for the brand against any negative-WOM about their loved brand, to defend their loved brand against any criticisms or allegations. Brand defence is found to prevail in case of both believed and disbelieved negative-WOM; however, the attribution differs based on the nature of negative-WOM and the sensitivity of the product-category.

The above quoted aim of this study was only achievable by devising and achieving specific research objectives; therefore, each objective is concluded individually for completeness.

**Objective-1:** *To critically analyse the literature, conceptualising and characterising WOM and eWOM, the impact of WOM/eWOM, and to evaluate the importance of consumer-brand relationships particularly 'brand love' in promoting positive-WOM.*

To achieve objective-1, the literature was developed and analysed using timeline synthesis of relationship marketing, consumer-brand relationships, brand love, and WOM research to develop an understanding of the overall development of the research streams, how they are inter-related, relevant, and valuable for this study, followed by extensive mixed methods primary research. The existing literature provided strong indications for developing and evaluating the research model (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Lisjack *et al.*, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006, 2010; Hegner *et al.*, 2017; Huang, 2017) depicting the brand-favourable attitudinal (trust, loyalty, and forgiveness) and behavioural outcomes (brand defence, advocacy and positive-WOM) of brand love. The primary research provided further insights into the consumers' relationship with brands, particularly brand love, and the consequent

behavioural outcomes. The analysis reaffirmed the initial conceptualisation of brand love developed on the interpersonal research realm as presented in chapter 2 and discussed in the previous chapter complemented by the primary findings.

Concerning the positive attributions of brand love for brands, this study proposed strong positive influence of brand love on brand-favourable WOM based on the extensive literature published in the support. However, this study suggested the exploring of the different intensities of WOM offered to loved brands against negative-WOM about loved brands, and proposed brand defence as a superior WOM behaviour that extends beyond general positive-WOM and brand advocacy.

**Objective-2:** *To examine the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM and/or eWOM attributions towards their loved brands.*

To develop an understanding of WOM and its impact on consumer behaviour, the second objective of this study involved examining the intensity and nature of consumers' WOM and/or eWOM attributions towards their loved brands. The exploration involved evaluating both positive and negative impact of WOM/eWOM, in understanding the role of WOM in influencing consumer behaviour, and how worthy is it to manage WOM/eWOM for marketers. The exploration of the existing literature, as well as the primary research provided strong evidence of the influential nature of both positive and negative-WOM/eWOM on consumers' brand perceptions, attitudes, and consumption decisions. The existing literature also recommended positive-WOM as the best means of counteracting negative-WOM, to manage and decrease the impact of negative-WOM (Hong and Park, 2012; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Lee and Youn, 2009; Sen and Lerman, 2007).

The continued growth in the literature on WOM/eWOM (Choi *et al.*, 2017; deMatos and Rossi 2008; Furner *et al.*, 2016; Hong *et al.*, 2016; Jalilvand *et al.*, 2017; Jeong and Koo, 2015; Liu *et al.*, 2017; Romaniuk and Hartnett, 2017; Sweeney *et al.*, 2010; Wallace *et al.*, 2014; Yi and Ahn, 2017; Yu *et al.*, 2017) and extensive recognition of positive-WOM as a brand-favourable attribution of brand love in consumer-brand relationships (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Drennan *et al.*, 2015; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Garg *et al.*, 2015; Huang, 2017; Huber *et al.*, 2017; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Wallace *et al.*, 2014) provided a strong basis to develop the conceptual model for this study.

**Objective-3:** *To develop a conceptual model of consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour including positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved-brands in a negative-WOM scenario.*

The third objective of the research involved developing the conceptualisation of brand defence and a conceptual model of consumers' WOM/eWOM behaviour including positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence towards the loved-brands in a negative-WOM scenario. In this regard, the conceptualisation of brand defence was developed on the Fairness Theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001), and Social Capital perspective of Equity Theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002). Moreover, the research model suggested observing and testing brand-favourable

WOM in a form of a novel hierarchy, to test the hierarchical relationships between, positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence in appreciating the role of brand defence. The conceptual model also involved appraising the role of brand trust, brand loyalty, and brand forgiveness in mediating the relationship between brand love and the three WOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. As discussed above, the conceptual model was developed based on rigorous exploration of the existing literature as presented in chapter 2, which was later evaluated using mixed methods research.

**Objective-4:** *To conceptualise the levels and types of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour as a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM and/or eWOM attributions.*

The fourth objective of the study was to conceptualise the levels and types of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour as a hierarchy based on the intensity of WOM and/or eWOM attributions to extend the understanding of WOM. The study categorised brand-favourable WOM in three distinct categories brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, developed on the indications in the existing WOM (Wallace *et al.*, 2012), and consumer-brand relationships (Park *et al.*, 2006, 2010) literature. The hierarchy was conceptualised and explored based on the assumptions of the hierarchy of effects theory (Ray *et al.*, 1973; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Tsotsou, 2013; Yoo *et al.*, 2004), and developed on means-end theory (Gutman, 1982) using laddering interviews (Phillips and Reynolds, 2009; Reynolds and Phillips, 2015; Wansink, 2003). Both quantitative and qualitative analysis identified the hierarchical significance of the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour; brand defence, brand advocacy, positive-WOM. The quantitative analysis demonstrated brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM as distinct constructs yet demonstrating required relevance, and confirmed the hierarchical relationship between positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence through significant path estimates in SEM analysis as reported in chapter 5.

**Objective-5:** *(a) To create and empirically validate a measurement scale for brand defence; (b) To evaluate the direct impact of brand love on consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. (c) To evaluate the mediating impact of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the relationship between brand love and consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence.*

The fifth objective of this study involved multiple objectives to address the main aim of the study, these were achieved systematically, using empirical data through pre-survey interviews, pre-test survey, main quantitative surveys, and post-survey laddering interviews.

Firstly, it required creating and empirically validating a measurement scale for brand defence. The study developed the scale using themes extracted through existing literature and pre-survey qualitative interviews, refined, and tested through pre-test survey and finally validated through confirmatory factors analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM).

Secondly, it involved evaluating the direct impact of brand love on consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. The positive direct influence of

brand love on the three brand-favourable WOM behaviour was confirmed by the quantitative research and reinforced by the qualitative research as well. The influence of brand love on the proposed brand-favourable WOM behaviour was explored across two product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics, to seek information on any differences of consumer emotions and/or behaviour based on the differential nature of the two categories. Using the same products for both the quantitative and qualitative research provided a means of direct comparison and cross-validation of two types of the data, confirming the strong positive influence of brand love on brand-favourable WOM; brand defence in response to negative-WOM.

The third part of the study's objective-5 proposed evaluating the mediating impact of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the relationship between brand love and consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence. Regarding the mediating role of brand trust, brand loyalty and brand forgiveness on the relationship of brand love and consumers' WOM and/or eWOM behaviour; the analysis revealed partial mediation in a few cases and no mediation in some as depicted in the hypotheses test results presented in chapter 5. Both the quantitative and qualitative analysis supported strong positive influence of brand love on brand defence, brand advocacy and the three relationship constructs; brand trust, brand forgiveness, and brand loyalty. The positive impact and partial mediation of the three relationship constructs was significant for brand trust for both the surveys. Moreover, the qualitative analysis revealed brand trust as a parallel driving force as brand love in influencing the WOM behaviour, as well as forgiveness and loyalty, against negative-WOM, rather than an outcome of brand love.

**Objective-6:** *To contribute to theory, methodology, and brand management concerning the role of consumer-brand relationships particularly brand love on the future WOM and eWOM research and practice, particularly concerning the role of brand defence.*

The sixth and final objective of the study required contributing to theory, methodology, and brand management concerning the role of consumer-brand relationships particularly brand love on the future WOM and eWOM research and practice, particularly concerning the role of brand defence. In this regard, this study has made contributions to knowledge and practice, including appraising, testing, and extending existing theory, and providing serious managerial implications concerning promoting WOM through brand love in managing the damages of negative-WOM.

The next section presents the contributions of this doctoral study.

### **8.3 Research Contributions:**

To achieve the research aim, this study involved three phases of empirical research, involving both primary and secondary data collection, using rigorous mixed methods research to extend knowledge through both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the research. This study, therefore, contributed to theory, methodology, and practical brand management concerning the role of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love on WOM and eWOM, especially concerning promoting brand defence against negative-WOM. This study confirmed the powerful

role of brand love in influencing brand-favourable behaviour, especially brand defence behaviour against any negative information about loved brands.

The theoretical contributions of the study are discussed next.

### **8.3.1 Theoretical Contributions:**

This doctoral research explored the importance of close-consumer-brand relationships in promoting WOM, and the significance of WOM in counteracting negative-WOM; hence augmented two research streams: 1. word-of-mouth, and 2. Consumers-brand relationships (Consumer-brand relationships), especially brand love.

This doctoral research therefore contributes to both theory and practice. The main theoretical contributions of this study are twofold:

1. The first major contribution of this doctoral study is embedded in the conceptualisation, development, and empirical measurement of 'brand defence' a novel construct to branding, developed on the Fairness Theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001), and Social Capital perspective of Equity Theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002). According to the fairness theory of Folger and Cropanzano (1998, 2001), there are three necessary processes (would, could, should) that must occur before a situation that can be interpreted as unjust. In this regard, brand defence was conceived within the 'could' component of the fairness theory (Folger and Cropanzano, 1998, 2001). As, the 'could' component suggests assessing if the brand responsible for the situation could have acted in a different way. Therefore, the '*could*' component of the fairness theory was found having the potential to provide support to the consumers' brand defence behaviour. Moreover, brand defence was also conceptualised in the social capital perspective of the equity theory (Adler, 2001; Adler and Kwon, 2002) that suggest physical and social capitals as equally important in case of both goods and service exchange processes (Wang and Fesenmaier, 2003). Social capital is referred as goodwill and trust that are considered as valuable resources (Adler, 2001). Such social capital lies in the social-interactions between social-relations and this can be mobilised for facilitating action. Therefore, concerning the importance and prevalence of relationship constructs, this theory was deemed more appropriate to develop an understanding of consumers' defence of brands (see section 2.10.1.3. in chapter two for fuller conceptualisation of brand defence). Moreover, consumer-brand relationships and WOM research also had indications of similar behaviour (Lisjack *et al.*, 2012; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). Therefore, this study conceptualised brand defence as an evolutionary form of WOM that supersedes positive-WOM and brand advocacy, in supporting the loved brand against negative-WOM. Brand defence, therefore, has been observed as a superior brand-favourable WOM behaviour that involves defending the loved brand and standing-by the brand, through counter arguments in favour of the brand, in attempting to counteract the negative-WOM about the loved brand. Within the proposed hierarchy of WOM, brand defence has been suggested as the top vertex, which involves consumers' defending their loved brands against negative-WOM. It is a novel contribution that provides insight into the

extent and nature of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour. In addition, the research illustrates the extent of consumers' brand-favourable attributions even in the case of the presence of negative information about the loved brand. Brand defence not only provides further recognition of the importance of WOM but also of the importance of consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love in governing such brand-favourable WOM behaviour, which is prevalent against negative-WOM.

2. The second major theoretical contribution lies in the conceptualisation of the novel hierarchy of three brand-favourable WOM behaviour; positive-WOM, brand advocacy, and brand defence against negative-WOM developed the means-end theory (Gutman, 1982), and the assumptions of the hierarchy of effects theory (Ray *et al.*, 1973; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Tsotsou, 2013; Yoo *et al.*, 2004). Conceptualising and categorising brand-favourable WOM in a hierarchy to develop increased understanding of the consumers' WOM attribution offer significant inroads to WOM research as suggested by the means-end theory (Wasnik, 2003). This involved conceptualising three levels of consumers' brand-favourable WOM behaviour observed in a hierarchy, based on the intensity of WOM and/or eWOM attributions towards loved brands in case of negative-WOM about the loved brands. Categorising WOM in specific levels provided distinct identification and role clarification of certain WOM behaviour that can be individually managed and mobilised in addressing specific brand goals. The hierarchy suggested positive-WOM as the third, brand advocacy as the second, and brand defence as the top vertex of the brand-favourable WOM behaviour towards the loved brands, recognising brand defence as a superior WOM against any criticisms about loved brands. Brand defence does not just involve positive comments about the brands but arguing and/or fighting for the loved brands against any negative-WOM. Moreover, recognising the role of all three brand-favourable WOM behaviour including brand defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM can help identify their specific benefits to brands.
3. The third theoretical contribution concerns consumer-brand relationships research, as the research involved exploring the importance of consumer-brand relationships particularly 'brand love' in promoting brand-favourable WOM behaviour, especially brand defence in response to any negative information about the loved brands. This study is the first study to explore brand love within a negative incident and to suggest using brand love to mobilise brand-favourable WOM behaviour to counteract anti-brand WOM. Therefore, this research is novel in using brand love, as well as consumer-brand relationships research to explore WOM as the central construct and include negative-WOM as a critical incident to investigate the brand-favourable behaviour expected from strong consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love.
4. The fourth theoretical contribution of this thesis that emerged during development of this doctoral study within the literature exploration and which was deliberate and/or expected from the study. involved conceptualising the nature of brand love by evaluating existing research on consumer-brand relationships, brand love, para-social love, and interpersonal bi-directional and unreciprocated love. This study involved conceptualizing brand love as a two-sided 'general love-factor' drawing on interdisciplinary literature of interpersonal love

and psychology for the first time. The conceptualisation is based on a meta-analysis study of inter-personal love (Graham, 2011), suggesting brand love as a general love factor, which suggest similar positive attributions of brand love, irrespective of the dimensions and antecedents of brand love. Although, this study also provided insights into the antecedents of WOM and recognised the role of brand experience, long-term relationship with the brand, variety of use, and the extent of dependence on the brand as critical antecedents of brand love. However, the analysis suggested that irrespective of the antecedents that have caused brand love, the consumers offer similar positive behaviours towards the brands, the intensity may vary based on the intensity of the relationship.

The methodological contributions to knowledge are presented next.

### **8.3.2 Methodological Contributions:**

The four methodological contributions of the study are presented as follows.

1. The first methodological contribution of this study is developing and implementing a measuring-scale for a new branding construct, brand defence. The scale was developed based on the method devised by Churchill (1979). The process involved identifying construct explanation and context, with items and themes from existing literature, followed by themes generation from qualitative interviewing, and tested through pre-test quantitative surveys, and finally validated through main surveys using larger sample size. This study provided detailed description and procedure of scale development in chapter 4, and presented a validated scale for brand defence to be used and replicated in future research.
2. The second methodological contribution is testing the hierarchical relationships of the WOM hierarchy conceptualised based on theoretical assumptions of the hierarchy of effects theory (Ray *et al.*, 1973; Smith *et al.*, 2008; Tsotsou, 2013; Yoo *et al.*, 2004), and means-end theory (Gutman, 1982). The SEM hypothetical paths analyses demonstrated significant hierarchical paths for both the paths defining the hierarchical relationship between positive-WOM, brand advocacy and brand defence, confirming brand defence as the superior WOM behaviour against negative-WOM.
3. The third methodological contribution for consumer-brand relationships research is exploring and measuring brand forgiveness. There has been limited research in consumer-brand relationships and Brand Management literature that explored consumers' inclination to forgive their favourite and loved brands. Only one study previously explored the role of forgiveness in the consumer-brand relationships context (Donovan *et al.*, 2012), and Heinrich *et al.* (2012) claimed that consumers' turns a blind eye to brand mistakes. However, this study found consumers' inclination to forgive a brand as conditional based on the nature and intensity of believed negative-WOM, even towards loved brands. Even having identified forgiveness as a positive behavioural outcome of brand love, no measuring scale had been offered for the construct in marketing or branding literature to replicate. Therefore, an interpersonal scale of forgiveness (Brown *et al.*, 2005) was adapted for this research and refined through the quantitative procedures recommended by the

literature including reliability, and exploratory factors analysis. This study entailed detailed description and procedure of scale refinement and presents the final scale items to be used and replicated in future research to measure brand forgiveness.

4. The fourth methodological contribution comprises the post-survey laddering interviews to develop consumer hierarchical value-maps to develop an understanding of consumers' value structures in driving their behavioural (brand defence, advocacy, and positive-WOM) and psychosocial consequences (brand forgiveness and loyalty). This approach is a popular approach in consumer behaviour research; however, this is the first study to use value-map analysis in consumer-brand relationships and WOM research. This thesis involved conducting laddering interviews of ten participants about their perceptions, reasons, and values concerning their brand-relationships, especially brand love in Phase-III, to explore insights to consumers' values in attributing the three levels of WOM towards the loved brands. The hierarchical value-maps provided an insight that how consumer-brand relationships develop, sustain, and grow and lead to a brand-favourable behaviour particularly brand defence against negative-WOM about the loved brand. This approach provided the explanation of consumers' attitudinal and behavioural outcomes of brand love that were not explicit through quantitative surveys.

The next section presents the study's implications to Brand Management and practice.

### **8.3.3 Implications to Brand Management and Practice:**

Subsequent to the theoretical and methodological contributions, valuable managerial contributions also emerge from this research study. The confirmation of the hypothesised relationships and qualitative insights offer useful implications for managers to recognise the strategic importance of brand love in stimulating brand-favourable WOM. The recognition of a superior form of WOM, 'brand defence' driven by brand love against negative-WOM suggests a fruitful direction for managers on how the destructive impact of negative-WOM can be mitigated or reversed by fostering close consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love. This imply managers to apply multi-focal strategies to promote and strengthen love for their brands to encourage brand-defenders in counteracting negative-WOM.

This thesis provides new insights to WOM behaviour research and practice and from the managerial point of view, the results indicate critical implications for managers. The managers can work toward developing and sustaining consumer-brand relationships that would promote brand defence; to combat the negative publicity prevalent offline and in the social media landscape in order to sustain brand reputation. In other words, fostering brand defence can go a long way to avert the destructive impact of negative publicity that erupts on social media platforms, and is highly unlikely to be controlled. This is similar to deploying an army of brand defenders for countering adverse brand publicity. Given the importance of brand defenders in sustaining brand reputation it makes sense to assess company's readiness to combat negative publicity. This can be done by creating a net-defender score similar to the net-promoter score proposed by Frederick Reichheld (2003).



Such a score would measure the percentage of company's customer base that is willing to enthusiastically defend their loved brands. Managers can monitor the net-defender score for their brands overtime to determine their preparedness to face brand adversity, which can erupt on social media platforms with increasing frequency. Moreover, in post-crisis analyses, calculating their brand defence score, managers will be able to measure that to what extent consumers have defended their brand. The median score of brand defence calculated over a specified period can also indicate the level of consumers' defence of a brand. Therefore, brand managers will be able to anticipate to what extent any anti-brand WOM, rumours, criticisms about the brand could be defended and counteracted by their consumers. It will also provide managers with the flexibility in brand decisions, concerning any brand extensions or changes to existing products.

Moreover, the qualitative findings have revealed that in case of negative-WOM believed to be true and harmful, the participants reported to be reluctant in offering brand defence. And literature also suggest that there are certain circumstances when negative information motivates consumers in rejecting a brand rather than defending it (Lisjak et al., 2012). Therefore, developing and monitoring brand defence score will help managers understanding consumers' propensity to defend the brand and the nature of negativity they are ready to defend. This continuous assessment of brand defence score will provide managers the insight to the consumers brand defence capacity. It will also reveal the consumers' threshold to the negativity, revealing the tipping point for consumers when the act of defending may turn into the act of rejecting. Therefore, the calculated observation of brand defence will offer managers a certain control over informed strategic decision-making.

The potential importance of brand defence provides strong implications for brand managers to strengthen consumer-brand relations by improving and maintaining positive customer experiences through sustained quality and good customer service. The qualitative analysis has revealed customer experience with the brand as one of the most important predictors of brand trust and brand love. Moreover, brand trust developed through personal experience with the brand promotes long-term use of the brand, which strengthens consumer-brand relationships, particularly brand love and the consequent brand-favourable behaviour, including brand defence. Therefore, the importance of enhancing consumers' brand experience is worth noting for managers in fostering brand trust, and thus brand love, which in turn leads to several brand-favourable behaviour including positive-WOM, advocacy, and brand defence.

The next section presents the limitations of this research.

#### **8.4 Research Limitations:**

Research into the benefits of brand love is an emerging domain, and this is the first study exploring WOM as a focal construct particularly the provisions of brand-favourable WOM against negative-WOM, which implies that several issues remain to be addressed. The potential conceptual and methodological limitations are identified in an effort to minimise them both theoretically and methodologically. The methodological triangulation through mixed methods research was acquired

to address the limitations related to the generalisation of the research findings and the explanatory value of the results, as suggested by Denzin (2010). However, not all limitations could be dealt with. These are discussed as follows to reflect on any limitations of the research approach adopted and executed in this study.

The first limitation of this research is associated with the sampling size for pre-test interviews, which were limited to three females based on Fournier (1998) methodology to generate brand defence scale items. However, the existing research suggests that the behavioural attitudes in males and females differ (Graham, 2011; Albert *et al.*, 2009), and enquiring only female participants could limit the scope of understanding a behavioural construct that emanates from relationship closeness. This limitation was addressed later in the research process with ten interviews in the research phase-III, with an equal number of females and male participants, five each. However, the findings did not report any WOM behavioural differences based on gender.

Secondly, there is another sampling limitation in this study, as this research is conducted among the UK residents belonging to diverse cultural groups. However, Albert *et al.* (2008) suggested viewing brand love outcomes within different cultural settings, as feeling of love is culturally embedded. Therefore, it is assumed that the research might offer different findings if conducted across different cultures and geographic areas.

Thirdly, the study explored the existence and prevalence of the three WOM behaviour, brand defence, brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, because of positive influences of brand love and other close consumer-brand relationships against negative-WOM. However, the research did not involve testing the impact and effectiveness of the proposed WOM behaviour. Therefore, it is believed that exploring the effectiveness in counteracting the negative effects of negative-WOM will ascertain the actual value of brand defence.

The fourth limitation of this study is using thematic content analysis, and inter-coder reliability was not applied employing an independent coder, this can affect the findings due to researcher bias. However, in order to minimise the impact of this limitation, the interviews were fully transcribed and coded with a systematic thematic and content analysis, involving checking and rechecking data for themes in multiple intervals. Moreover, working examples of the coding process and themes generation are added to the thesis.

Moreover, the surveys were conducted online, and survey data was relied on self-reporting which can lead to mis-interpretation of the survey questions, and/or respondents can misreport and/or lie for self-enhancement reasons. In order to address and minimise the impact of this limitation the survey was tested for ease of comprehension, and got it approved by the director of studies, second and third supervisors, and got the university's ethics committee. Moreover, the online surveys were unanimous and any form of identity of the participants could not be revealed, so the purpose of self-enhancement was not supported.

Furthermore, the convenience sampling methods (snowball sampling for surveys, and judgement sampling method for interviews) has its own limitations that effect the generalizability of the findings. However, the effect of this limitation was tried to address by the large sample sizes, representative of the population, as perfectly random sampling was not possible within the scope and resources of the doctoral research.

Another limitation of this research is that the negative-WOM used in this study was a proposed synthetic incident, and the actual consumer-behaviour can differ in a real-life situation. It is proposed to explore consumers' brand defence towards loved brands in response to any negative-WOM behaviour after actual brand failure or negative-WOM crisis to acquire consumers' actual brand defence behaviour.

### **8.5 Prospects for Future Research:**

The following future research directions have been identified.

Firstly, this doctoral research provided empirical evidence of the efficiency of brand love in promoting brand defence. However, the actual effectiveness of brand defence in preventing and mitigating the damage of negative-WOM is yet to be measured. Therefore, the future research should involve measuring the effectiveness of brand defence against negative-WOM in both offline and online scenarios, so as to calculate the extent brand defence is able to counteract negative-WOM.

Secondly, the findings suggested differing results for the two product-categories, suggesting that consumers' WOM behaviour may vary towards the different nature of products and this may be a fruitful avenue for future research to replicate this study across different product-categories in investigating the intensity of brand love and the consequent willingness of consumers in attributing brand defence and their intensity of defence.

Thirdly, the research should examine the different intensities of brand defence and the critical relationship factors that impact on the different levels of brand defence. This would assist managers to particularly target areas to foster consumers' relatedness with brands in achieving stronger brand defence behaviour.

A fourth avenue of future research concerns brand trust, as this study suggested brand trust as one of the strongest consumer-brand relationships' construct, which can influence consumers' WOM behaviour including brand defence, as well as foster brand love. Therefore, examining the specific impact of brand trust on brand defence across different product-categories will help managers to identify product-categories that are more brand trust driven. Moreover, the qualitative findings have revealed that consumers' trust develops through positive experience with the products, which managers can control by enhancing product/service experience.

Furthermore, this thesis involved the enquiry of tangible product categories, however, replicating the scale in case of services (Long-Tolbert and Gammoh, 2012), can provide fruitful avenue for future research, as services marketing is an ever-emerging domain and prone to negative publicity. Managers in services, especially hospitality sector need tools like brand defence in keeping up with the consumers comments and ratings, where most business is generated online through comparison websites, such as Expedia. This can yield theoretical contributions and augmentation to theory and valuable information for managers concerning brand defence and brand love.

As consumers' brand defence behaviour might depend on the personality traits, as well as cultural background of consumers (Albert *et al.*, 2008). Thereby, future research is examining the impact of personality traits and cultural background on consumers' propensity to defend their loved brand and engaging in co-creation activities (Mulyanegara *et al.* 2009; Albert *et al.*, 2008) can yield fruitful findings for both theory and practice.

The qualitative findings have suggested that in case of serious negative-WOM which is deemed true, participants were reluctant in offering brand defence. And literature also suggest that there are certain circumstances when negative information motivates consumers in rejecting a brand rather than defending it. Therefore, future research may examine the intensity of negative information to understand the tipping point when the act of defending turn into the act of rejecting (Lisjak *et al.*, 2012).

Moreover, future research in testing the model with random sampling strategy can provide more strength to our findings. And, finally this study utilised a cross-sectional design which needs to be replicated using a longitudinal research design. Therefore, replicating research in a longitudinal research can yield more realistic accounts for brand defence over time, which are not possible in one-time cross-sectional data.

The next section presents the researcher's reflections and personal development plans driven by this doctoral research.

## **8.6 Reflections and Personal Development:**

I found the doctoral research process transformed me as a person and has taught me several lessons. My research involved conceptualising, observing, and measuring a new branding construct brand defence, which is new to branding research, but not new to our day-to-day observations and experience (Park *et al.*, 2006, 2010; Ulrich and Brunner, 2015). Therefore, my endeavour to develop knowledge involved foregrounding a known behaviour as a new construct in Brand Management research; brand defence, which has not been explored, conceptualised, developed, and validated before. Therefore, my endeavour involved identifying a gap in the theory, which was a prevalent fact, but being a novel idea to existing theory it needed extra effort to provide theoretical support, which is inevitable to an academic research.

The effort of incorporating theory to support conceptualising a new construct, and the means and procedures to develop the construct and the overall research model was one of the toughest aspects of my academic research.

In this regard, the existence of WOM behaviour are existent since the existence of communication, as it refers to person-to-person, oral communication between a receiver and a sender (Lee and Youn, 2009), where our communications involve both negative and positive comments (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Sweeney *et al.*, 2014). All this information is embedded in our daily routine and its habitual, we ourselves make comments about people, products, services, politics, religion, and so and so. We also use to exchange comments and information about any products or services, specially we speak high about some products or brands that we are fond of. It is common in our everyday conversations that we appreciate brands or products based on our personal perceptions, experiences, and likings, and we also do speak ill about goods and services, again based on personal experiences and relationships. Therefore, we as humans speak out our emotions about people, as well as consumption goods, and now with the widespread of internet and social media, the trajectory of our communication has amplified. My research involved appreciating, evaluating, and categorising those daily occurring communications to theory in the lieu of explicit contributions to theory and practice. Overall it involved exploring consumers' love for brands and their emotion-driven consequences to negative-WOM as brand defence.

As discussed above, our communications are part of our personal experiences, which are cyclic, but has not been conceptualised and tested in formal research. These experiential cycles repeat regarding different people, products, brands; however, we do not assign them any theories, we do not name these actions, or find any academic references to support these actions. However, these are facts, but here I want to confess that such social facts are critically difficult to '*bring to the world*', making them observed as facts, exploring these facts systematically, and expressing those known truths logically and independent of personal biases. The main thing that the doctoral research taught me is the importance of presenting the researcher's known truths and realisations about a research phenomenon through the researched evidence, while keeping the researchers' own opinions and perceptions minimal by looking at the data as a novice. I have learnt that research involves unleashing the knowledge structures that are hidden and provide both support and contradictions to the initially hypothesised models and relationships.

I am pleased that I could finally succeed in bringing my observed truths to theory as evidenced facts. However, my journey on this research was full of up and downs, like many other researchers, may be a little more or may be less, but these were part of bringing all this in place. My story begins here:

My personal experience suggested that I never made a buying decision without going through customers' reviews (eWOM) and it always helped me made any product judgements and decisions. It was also observed through conventional knowledge that every business tries to capture their online presence (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010). And both offline and online businesses are being fuelled

with reviews these days, whether it's consumer goods, books, gadgets, any software, or movies, these are reviews that back consumers' behaviour. The consumers' practices of online experience sharing and comments on the different social networking sites especially YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter have changed the paradigm of consumer knowledge and behaviour.

As I started my formal research, my director of studies (DOS) asked me to explore the history of Marketing and Consumer Behaviour literature first. I started to wander in the sea of literature, going through the transactional-marketing, and the shift of Marketing focus from product to consumer. This exploration led me to the importance of relationships in Marketing and how they could impact consumer behaviour. Therefore, my topic refined through the exploration of Marketing, followed by relationship marketing, and finally landing into consumer-brand relationships in exploring WOM. When I explored consumer-brand relationships, its proximity with consumer behaviour research, and its ability to influence several brand-favourable consumers' behaviour including WOM, made consumer-brand relationships very relevant to my research. Still my research area was wide and I needed to refine and narrow it to explore a specific gap to get a specific focus of my research. Initially, I found a gap every day, and realised every next day that its already filled, so needed to start again.

Therefore, in this gap hunt, I developed tabular syntheses of WOM, relationship marketing, and consumer-brand relationships literature to identify any potential niche. I found brand love as one of the most growing domains in consumer-brand relationships, and WOM being one of the most observed outcome of brand love. This effort did not last for a long time to discover that brand love literature was limited in exploring its effectiveness in any negative incident. Initially, I was even unable to find any single study that explored any consumer-brand relationships or brand love attributions concerning any negative events, for example any brand criticisms, failures, mistakes, or transgressions. However, I found one indication in a brand attachment paper, which suggested that consumers in close attachment with brands take brand criticisms personally threatening, and therefore they try to defend their favourite brands against such criticisms (Park *et al.*, 2006). This idea was based on interpersonal attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979), and it was understandable and interesting. Moreover, I did not come across this before; however, I was struggling to find any consumer-brand relationships research that involved exploring the strength of relationships in case of any negative incident. The idea of exploring clicked into me but, by that time, the only support I could found in the literature was Park *et al.*'s (2006) paper, which itself was a conceptual paper and did not involve any empirical testing of the behaviour, which made consumers' defending behaviour more valuable to me.

In this quest, I also started looking at myself, and around my own friends and family and realised that we do deal differently towards any negative information about our loved brands, and such discussions sometimes become heated. I personally observed and recalled how people defend their favourite brands, and I realised that each one of us used to defend our favourite products/brands, such as, mobile phones, internet providers, lotion, clothing brands, etc.

It made me realise that here exists a very strong type of WOM that arises against any criticisms about the favourite or loved brands. I called it brand defence, as it involved defending the loved brand in all observed instances.

Brand advocacy was also observed in the positive brand scenarios, and it was recognised that only satisfied and happy consumers tend to recommend their favourite brands. However, brand advocates were also observed to defend their brands in some instances (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Cross and Smith, 1995). Therefore, it suggested observing brand defence as a superior construct to brand advocacy in case of negative-WOM about the loved brand. It further led to the conceptualisation of brand-favourable WOM behaviour in form of a hierarchy with brand defence as the top vertex, followed by brand advocacy, and positive-WOM, aided by the theoretical grounding. I was advised to write a few conference papers for international academic conferences in the field of Marketing and Brand Management to get expert external opinion and feedback on the research direction. It turned out to be a great idea.

I wrote four papers for four leading conferences of the field; EMAC 2013 (Istanbul, Turkey), Academy of Marketing 2013 (Cardiff, UK), and Consumer-Brand Relationships 2013 (Boston, USA), and Consumer-Brand Relationship Colloquium 2013 (Winter Park Florida, USA). All the four papers got accepted, and I received very positive feedback and most importantly from Susan Fournier. Her feedback was very important, her comments provided confidence to my research, she advised as,

*"My first recommendation is that the title be changed to reflect the real contribution of the manuscript – "Beyond brand advocacy: WOM as brand defence". That is the really interesting part of what you have written. This is something that has not really been considered in previous literature and bears a closer look. I like your suggestion that this is a behaviour that goes beyond brand advocacy. Perhaps your contribution lies in a hierarchy of defensive WOM behaviour".*

The other reviews also provided similar feedback concerning brand defence and viewing the different intensities of WOM. However, I faced a lot of criticism concerning the presentation of my ideas and contributions to research and I have been trying hard since then, to improve my communication of ideas to '*illuminate the contributions of research*' (Anonymous, Conference-Paper Reviewer, 2013). It was also suggested by the reviewers and conference attendees that I use quantitative methods to prove my initial conceptualisation. Moreover, one of my papers presented at Consumer-Brand Relationship Colloquium 2013 (Winter Park Florida, USA), was later published as a book chapter in '*Consumer-Brand Relationships*', a co-edited book by Marc Fetscherin and Tobias Heilmann, in 2015.

I got my methodology approved, took ethics approvals from Coventry University, collected the data, and started analysis. I thought I was finally getting along well with my PHD research, however owing to supervisory team leaving the university I was required to change universities; and thereafter, I joined Oxford Brookes University.

My supervisors at Oxford Brookes suggested me in the very first meeting to conduct follow-up interviews to validate and elaborate the quantitative findings, and I found this suggestion very valuable and helpful. We decided to interview a few people to take their insights on the same product-categories; cosmetics and consumer-electronics, which I had explored through main quantitative surveys. The idea was to compare findings and to qualitatively validate the quantitative results.

On exploring the means and methods for selecting an appropriate interview method and sample size, we decided to conduct ten laddering interviews to develop consumers' hierarchical value-maps (Reynolds and Phillips, 2015, 2009). The purpose was to develop an understanding of the consumers' value structures in providing brand defence and other brand-favourable behaviour proposed in this study. It is also a novel contribution of this study, as there has been no study, which has used laddering interviews or value-map analysis for understanding and explaining consumer behaviour in consumer-brand relationships and WOM/eWOM. However, it is a very popular method in consumer behaviour research (Reynolds and Phillips, 2015).

Conducting ten interviews were not easy as it sounded, it was difficult to get people on board, taking their precious time, and making them ready to speak about their brand relationships and consequent behaviour. And, afterwards the analysis of the interview findings was even tougher, and the communication and presentation of those findings found to be the toughest. However, I worked hard and tried to do maximum justice to the data through systematic means of analysis, with constant support and guidance from my supervisors. The exploration, management, and reporting of the qualitative data provided new insights for my research and learning for myself. The findings provided means and meanings behind consumers' WOM behaviour, provided explanations to their consumer-brand relationships attributions, and their intensity, nature, and different reasons for building and maintaining consumer-brand relationships.

It provided a new learning experience at every step; each interview provided a new insight to the drivers of consumer behaviour and perceptions. Each interview was found to be individually rich in informing consumer behaviour, as compared to the collective inferences developed on quantitative data. This made me realise that the qualitative interviewing provided such meanings and explanation to my research that were not possible through the quantitative surveys alone.

Although I had spent years immersed in the field of marketing and online advertising during my jobs, when I started to do and appraise my PhD research, I felt myself to be a novice. And, I felt to develop and learn with every step I took forward in my PhD research. My research and myself has totally emerged into a transformed research and a new me as a researcher and a person. I learnt as a researcher that how to explore the truths that are already known, how to screen and filter information, what is eye to detail, how to interpret and implement ideas, how to take critics positively, and how to cherish any little compliments. I reckon my PhD research experience as the toughest endeavour of my life, as well as the most memorable experience.



My personal development plans and publications I am planning to target are discussed next.

#### **8.6.1 Personal Development Plans and Possible Publications:**

My post-doctoral research plans involve pursuing a joint career combining academic and brand consultancy. I want to initiate with materialising the possible prospects of publications based on this doctoral research, which are discussed as follows:

- ***Unleashing the values driving consumers' defence of loved brands***

A prospective publication is the consumers' value-maps findings analysed and reported as part of this study, as this is the first research in consumer-brand relationships and/or WOM to employ laddering interviews and hierarchical value-maps in appreciating consumer behaviour. *The European Journal of Marketing* could be targeted as it has already published a qualitative study on online defence of companies by Colliander and Wien (2013).

- ***Love does not warrant forgiveness for loved brands, so is loyalty  
The post negative-WOM consumer behaviour towards loved brands***

The paper can offer the findings on the conditional forgiveness and loyalty intentions of consumers based on seriously negative nature of believed negative-WOM as revealed for cosmetics brands in this study. I will endeavour to target *The Journal of Product and Brand Management*, as it is an influential journal publishing consumer-brand relationship research.

- ***Measuring brand defence; a superior brand-favourable WOM in mitigating negative-WOM***

Another preposition of a possible publication is the scale-development and validation of brand defence and its practical implications to brands, involving examples of some big brands facing extensive criticisms, such as Apple on its launch of iPhone 7 and the iPhone 8, and iPhone X, but still defended by their lovers. I intend to target *Journal of Business Research* for this publication.

- ***Brand trust; a driver of brand love and brand defence***

The research paper can discuss the role of brand trust developed on consumers' brand experience, and long-term relationship with a brand leads to strong consumer-brand love and yield stronger defence behaviour based on personal confidence on the brand developed through personal use. For this paper, I would potentially target *Marketing Letters*.

In summary, this doctoral study has created and validated, through empirical research, an original new construct of brand defence, which can be used by both academics and managers, and as such provides value to both communities. Therefore, in doing so, this doctoral study has successfully

addressed the aim of the research by positively answering the question “*can consumers go beyond positive word-of-mouth, and/or brand advocacy to defend their loved-brands against criticism?*”

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## Appendices

### Survey Questionnaire

I am conducting a consumer-brand relationship research in the UK. It involved a set of three surveys, first survey was carried out among mobile phone users for pre-test analysis, and now two other surveys will conclude the research with confirmatory findings, exploring consumers' relatedness with consumer electronics brands and cosmetics brands.

**This survey is one of the final surveys. The survey will enquire your anticipated response, when your favourite cosmetic brand is faced with criticism, how would you behave. Cosmetics may include any products to be used at any parts of the human body with a view exclusively or mainly to cleaning them, perfuming them, changing their appearance, correcting body odours, protecting them, or keeping them in good condition. Cosmetics may include makeup products, beauty products, perfumes, or deodorants, etc.**

(Please note that the above paragraph in bold was replaced with the paragraph in bold below in the survey enquiring consumer-electronics, and the term 'cosmetics' was also replaced with 'consumer-electronics' throughout the survey, the rest of the survey remained the same for both the product categories.)

**This survey is one of the final surveys. The survey will enquire your anticipated response, when your favourite consumer electronic brand is faced with criticism, how would you behave. Consumer electronics are any electronic device that is designed for everyday use that may include cameras, laptops, iPods, iPad, MP3 players, television, refrigerator, etc.**

You can refer to any cosmetics brand or particular product that you think is your most favourite, or special. Please indicate your response on the items provided below. The information provided by you will be completely confidential and will be kept anonymous and will be used solely for academic purpose.

Please read the enclosed participants information sheet and return the completed survey only if you understand and agree to participate in this study without any obligation. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary. Therefore, your act of completing the survey would represent your consent to participate in the survey. However, you will have full rights to withdraw from the survey at any point of time, without giving a reason for doing so.

Please note this survey is required to be filled by any British residents aged 18 and over.

Mansoor Javed [Doctoral Candidate; Coventry University, Coventry, UK]

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#### **Part A: About your Favourite (*Cosmetics/Consumer-Electronics*) Product/Brand**

1. If you are aware of any cosmetics brands, can you name a few you are aware of?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Please name your most favourite cosmetics brand: \_\_\_\_\_

3. How long have you been using your most favourite product you mentioned above?

- (i) Less than 1 year  
(ii) 1-2 years  
(iii) 2-3 years  
(iv) More than 3 years

|                          |
|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |

Keeping in mind your most favourite (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand please indicate your level of agreement on the following items on a scale of 1-7 (“1 mean strongly disagree” and “7 means strongly agree”).

---

3a. This is a wonderful brand.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3b. This brand makes me feel good.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3c. This brand is totally awesome.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3d. I have neutral feelings about this brand.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3e. This brand makes me very happy.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3f. I love this (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3g. I have no particular feelings about this brand.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3h. This brand is a pure delight.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3i. I am passionate about this brand.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

3j. I am very attached to this brand.

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|

## Part B

Based on your experience of using (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand, and your association/affection/love towards your (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand, please indicate your level of agreement on the following items on a scale of 1-7 (“1 mean strongly disagree” and “7 means strongly agree”) based on the proposed incident or scenario. If you are using more than one (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand, consider the most favourite brand you use.

---

### Proposed Incident/Scenario:

*I would like you to imagine that up to this point your (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand has delivered the performance that you expected since you purchased it. It has confirmed your expectations and sometimes exceeded your expectations. You are pleased to pay for the brand and invest your time and money for the item. Now it has acquired a special place in your day-to-day life, you perceive it as an essential part of your life. It adds to your personality, you depend on*

*your (cosmetics/consumer-electronics) for a number of occasions in your day to day routine, at work, or business events and you feel distress on its absence. You really feel affection or passionate desire to use your (cosmetics/consumer-electronics) and feel attachment or love towards your (cosmetics/consumer-electronics) brand out of your experience with the brand, any close person using the brand or recommended the brand, or a long-term relationship with the brand.*

If you think this situation applies in any way to your relationship with your (cosmetics/consumer-electronics) brand, please read the conditional incident below:

*Now I would like you to assume that your favourite (cosmetics/consumer-electronics) brand is faced with criticism of negative rumours, or negative information in the market or you have come across this criticism through your friends, family, colleagues, or social media, how would you respond to this criticism (rumours or negative information)?*

Please indicate by highlighting "in yellow" your level of agreement on the following statements on a scale of 1-7:

(1 mean strongly disagree" and "7 means strongly agree)

4a. I know my brand and I will refuse to believe the negative information.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4b. I trust my brand and I will refuse to believe the negative information.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4c. I believe the information, but I will not blame my brand, nothing is perfect.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4d. My brand always fulfils the promises that it makes to its customers.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4e. I will prefer my present brand provider to others in future.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4f. I will not switch from this brand to try another brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4g. I feel a strong sense of identification towards this brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4h. I like my brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4i. I forgive my favourite brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4j. Even though the negative information about my favourite brand hurt me, I do not feel ill-will toward my favourite brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4k. I feel warmly toward this (cosmetics/consumer-electronics) brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4l. I will tell more people about the experience of the *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand than any other *((cosmetics/consumer-electronics) cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4m. I will seldom miss an opportunity to tell others about the experience of my favourite *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4n. When I tell others about my experience of the *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand, I tend to talk about it in great detail.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4o. I will say positive things about the *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4p. I will share my experience about the *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4q. I will recommend my *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4r. I will ask people to try the *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand on their own.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4s. I will take their criticism as personally threatening and will refuse to believe.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4t. I will take their criticism as personally threatening and will argue for my brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4u. I will try to protect my brand against criticism.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4v. I will refer to the strong points of my *(cosmetics/consumer-electronics)* brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4w. I will convince them on the strong points of my brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4x. I will protect my brand against any criticism.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7

4y. I will not let people criticise my brand.

1      2      3      4      5      6      7



4z. I will make people realise that my (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) item has better features. I will make them realise of the positives of my (*cosmetics/consumer-electronics*) brand.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4aa. I will defend my brand.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

### Part C: About You

Please put check the appropriate box:

#### Q5. Age

- |       |                   |                          |
|-------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| i.    | 18 – 25 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii.   | 26 – 30 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii.  | 31 – 35 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv.   | 36 - 40 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| v.    | 41 - 45 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| vi.   | 46 – 50 years     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| vii.  | 51 – 55           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| viii. | 56 – 60           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ix.   | 61 +              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| x.    | Prefer not to say | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Q6. Gender: M ☐ Female ☐

Q7. Please specify your ethnic group: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Q8. Annual Household Income.

- |      |                    |                          |
|------|--------------------|--------------------------|
| i.   | Less than £20,000  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii.  | £21,000 to £30,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii. | £31,000 to £40,000 | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv.  | More than £41,000  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### Q9. Level of Education:

- |      |                     |                          |
|------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| i.   | Up to Higher School |                          |
| ii.  | Under Graduates     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii. | Post Graduates      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv.  | Others              | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### Q10. Your occupation

- |      |                                |                          |
|------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| i.   | Student                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii.  | Employed in the public sector  |                          |
| iii. | Employed in the private sector |                          |
| iv.  | Self employed                  |                          |
| v.   | Others                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*Thanks a lot for your time and support in completing this questionnaire. All information you provided will be treated in strict confidence and as an individual you will not be identified.*

**Do you really like some particular brands?**

*I have a few that I do like a lot and they are used very frequently on a regular basis actually, I am part of the weight watchers' scheme, so I go every week and I use mainly most of food products are weight watchers, so naturally I have an inclination towards that. Other than that, there are few brands I do like. There is iPhone that I have been using for a couple of years now and currently it's a 3g, but I am looking to get iPhone 4s and I drink Pepsi max every and I have a love for that as well. I use Mac make up and Dorothy Perkins cloths and next as well, I can talk about that if you like too.*

**Why do you like these particular brands?**

*I think it's the quality, firstly weight watchers actually, if I talk about weight watchers, I like it because it's reliable, because I know about the scheme and I go to the meetings and they promote it a lot and they have point system on it, and that is what I use to lose weight or maintain weight and I like it because I know that what it says on the box is what it actually has in the product and I like reliability in a brand. Also, it's a well-known, everyone knows it and a lot of people live by it and they love it so it helps that there is a community out there that supports weight watchers as well, so the reason why I like weight watchers is because it's reliable, it's quite popular and it's given me results. I have lost weight on the scheme and I actually use weight watcher's products as well as their meetings of course. Those are the main reasons why I like weight watchers. iPhone I like because I think word of mouth again because I know everyone loves it, everyone compliments it and talks about it and my first encounter was through my brothers because they were using the product themselves and I wanted to have a look at it myself and I used it and I found that it was quite useable, easy to use and again it's got a lot of applications on it that I can use for my medical studies, there are games that are medical related, there are text books I can download on my phone so it has very wide application on it. I can use what's app, I can communicate with my friends on there and video talking and music for people. I think it's got the fact that it's got so many features on it that I can use, I can take pictures, I can take videos it's kind of become, I mean in my hand bag the only thing I would have is my phone because it's reliable and I have used Nokia in the past, again it doesn't have that much variety in its application and to be honest I think partly why I use the iPhone over the other phones in market is again because a lot of my family uses it, my friends use it and I have learned to kind of think that this is best basically because other people are using it. I suppose I haven't done a lot of research into but what when I did use it I did like it. So, I have not really decided to use any other smart phone.*

*With regards to Pepsi max, I just liked the flavour of it, there is nothing else about it. It's zero points, there is no fat to it and it tastes really good and it's sweet and the diet Coke I think it's good but it's just not sweet enough. Pepsi max I know that I don't have to feel guilty, I am not taking in too many calories, it tastes good and it's not expensive or anything like that so I'm happy with Pepsi max with that.*

*With Mac products, I am quite into my make-up and things. And mac products I find that it gives me a good quality finish and it's not very expensive. I am a student myself so it's difficult for me to kind of get expensive products. This one is cheap according to a student, also it gives me what I am looking for, good coverage, good products.*

*Again, Dorothy Perkins and next because it's my kind of style that is there, in particular, Dorothy Perkins has a lot of student discount and being a student I kind of look for discount all the time. The quality there is really good, they always have sales and that's why I like next as well, they always have the seasonal sales, half price more than half price off so quality in the clothing as well as good pricing and I kind of started to love it because of that. there are other stores that I go to but I don't have the same attachment with it, also because I have been brought up in that shop as well, my mum would go there when I was younger so it's kind of the familiarity that I like as well with it. Those are the reason I like those brands.*

**Okay, do you feel that some or any brand have special place in your life?**

**Special place I would say, in terms of love?**

*Yes. Yeah, I would definitely say I would have a love for weight watchers actually, it probably sounds very sad but I do have love and a special place for it in my life because it has become a ritual for me now, every weekend go to weight watchers, buying their products at weight watchers meetings and every time we go super market we have to buy weight watcher biscuit's and it has*

become a part of life and it has a special place in my life because it has given me the kind of happiness that I look for. A girl my age, we think about our looks a lot, I want to lose weight, I want to look pretty, and weight watchers has given me that confidence to lose weight so to me I associate Weight Watchers with happiness and with beauty. That's why it has a special place in my life, I think.

iPhone definitely, I would say has special place in my heart, because it obviously helps me connect with the other people that I live. I am engaged at the moment, I can contact my fiancé, I can contact my parents using my phone and it's a very quick and easy way, you can use FaceTime, it's allowed me to do that. it has a special place in my heart as well because I can take it in my bag, I know that I can look at my handbag to see if anyone has messaged me so again that has really helped me, and it has a special place in my life.

Other products I mean yeah, I love them a lot, but I wouldn't specifically go out of my way and say actually it plays a huge part in my life but yeah.

**Okay, you mentioned a few other names apart from iPhone and Weight watchers, how do you rate or place these brands in a hierarchy from top to bottom with the most favourite at the top?**

Weight Watchers, then Pepsi Max, I like my food, then iPhone, then Mac and then Dorothy Perkins and then Next.

**Okay, Now I would ask you about these brands individually, so let's start with the weight watchers keeping in mind. Do you have a passionate desire to use this brand, weight watcher?**

What do you mean by passionate desire?

**I mean, do you have urge to use this brand?**

Yes, I would have to say I do. There are so many other products like weight watchers, weight loss products out there, I can easily just go and turn to like go ahead but I particularly feel inclined to search for weight watcher's products wherever I go, that's because again like I said, it's got the value of points it and I know I don't have to worry about calculating points on other products and I know it's given me the results so I definitely do have an inclination to use it.

**Can you tell any certain experience of you feeling regarding this? Any incident anything you remember?**

About what sorry?

**About your experience that you have about passionate desire?**

Yes, I feel like I can actually, let me think... Whenever we have parties, I have my cousin Nadia, and my sister in law, whenever we get together or anything, she is asking me what do you want to eat? what do you want to have today? She always asks me I know you like weight loss products and things what do you want? I always say I want weight watchers' bread, I want weight watcher's yogurts and things like that. I don't ever think about anything else. I would go shopping, recently I went shopping and my mum said to get any biscuit that you want, and I am just like I am going to go for the weight watcher's products and I don't really look at anything else. It's not just a particular incident, I know it's just always a thing in my life. To be honest it's become such a huge part in my life that we don't have to think about it now, even my sister in law knows now that they are only going to eat weight watchers, anyone that knows me knows that I love it so it's kind of, it's not something that I can consciously count different things because it's always there.

**Okay, do you feel yourself willing to invest your resources for weight watchers, like your time, money, paying a premium price, postage etc.?**

Well, as I said I go to the Weight Watchers meetings and I have not really ever, I mean recently I have stopped sitting down for a long period of times in meetings and that's because I have to pay parking fee just outside the hall and I think it's £2.50 an hour and the weight watchers meeting it's self is about an hour, so I have not been happy just to pay £2.50 for that, I mean usually I do like to invest a lot of time and effort in weight watcher schemes but I haven't done that because I go every week, I don't have time to give the extra charges to weight watchers on purpose. Plus, now I am now a gold member, I have reached my target weight before, they don't charge me anymore for that. So, I like the idea that I am not paying anything for this service, you know I am a very, not cheap but I like to feel like I have, what I have done is efficient, and going to weight watchers and

then spending £2.50 every weekend, it doesn't seem efficient for me so I am not happy to just pay that money for it. Whenever I go to the meetings I am happy to spend money on their products, their crisps, their chocolates, their biscuit's, I am happy to invest my money in that but even then, I like to know if there is a sale on, so there is usually a sale for 3 of these boxed of chocolates you can get for £5, and I usually pay that for it. In terms of shopping outside, obviously, there is a limit with everything, I am not just going to go and buy weight watcher products and just by tons of that, there is always a limit but I am happy to invest in that because know it helps me with my lifestyle and it helps me with my weight and things but even then, I like, for me I'm happier that there is a sale on reduction in price so that's kind of my view.

**So, do you feel such feelings of love and attachment to weight watchers out of any past experience?**

Past experience, yes because I actually joined weight watchers when I was about 18 and now I am 23, and I did notice that, back in the day when you are young and you just want to lose weight, it gave me that happiness because it's a scheme that helps you lose weight and ever since I had lost that weight, I became attached to it, I think with me or with anyone when you start noticing positives in yourself, and you feel good about yourself, you tend to fall in love with that particular thing. Even with my fiancé, I obviously love him but because I feel good about myself, I I feel myself getting better I love him more! That's similarly with weight watchers, I knew that I am feeling better, I am more positive, I became in the past I became loved and attached with it, and that love hasn't change over time. To be honest I stopped going to weight watchers a couple of years ago, just because I felt bored of it, I had my studies in the way, and once I started putting on weight I didn't really want to face it, but there came a point where I thought I want to go back to it and that's quite interesting the fact that I wanted to go back to something, it shows me that I did have that attachment with weight watchers, I knew that I could rely on it to get me back to healthy again. I wanted to feel good about myself and It is a definitely past relationship and it's kind of, and obviously, I wasn't really young, I mean 18-17 to now 23 so it's a historical relationship that I have kind of experienced and I have fallen in love with and I have stayed with and I am still happy with it.

**Is that love because of any involvement of any close person do you think?**

My mother is very closed to the brand, she was the one that introduced me to weight watchers, she was the one that actually wanted to lose weight, I kind of followed her and I thought okay mum I will follow you and I will be with you, and she was happy for me to join with her, and again that's quite interesting actually that you say that obviously I find that whenever my mum loves someone or something I automatically love that thing because obviously that thing is making my mum happy. I would love that thing, so I fell in love with weight watchers at the same time as my mum kind of fell in love with it, that's the way I see because I attach weight watchers with my mother, maybe that's probably why I also like it because I know it's kept my mum happy, it's helped her lose weight and then probably there that attachment, so I think you are probably right when you say that.

**Okay, do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your desired self-identity?**

By identity in what way sorry?

**I mean, the way you perceive yourself? Does it add to your desired self-identity, basically part of your personality?**

Yes, I think it probably is, my university friends would turn around and tell me that Nadia is the healthiest out of us all, she likes to work out, she likes to keep her weight maintained and things and I think it adds to my personality. When I was living with my friends in university recently, I do outlooks in medicine, and we did a rotation and GI and abdominal problems and I was living with my friends and we use to eat together and I would always have weight loss product and weight watcher things and people have started to associate me with that, she likes to eat healthy, she is the only person who is good with the academics, she is good with her weight, the way she appears so it definitely adds to that image because I want to be the person that people look at and say Wow, she has managed to maintain a family life, her weight and she I good with her education, she is good with her family, she is good with her religion so it definitely adds to my image or desired image that I want.

**So, you think that this weight watcher is a part of yourself?**

I think it definitely does.

**And, do you think, this weigh watcher gives meaning to your life in anyway?**

*I mean wouldn't go as far as to say that it gives meaning to my life, but I think it forms a basic foundation to my life, because obviously meaning to my life is a bigger thing for me, my family, my religion, but in terms of giving a basic foundation to who I am.*

**Do you frequently think about this brand?**

*I think it forms a major part of my life, and I am always, obviously, you eat everyday so it is something that's always on my mind because I am having to either go and buy something related to watch watchers or actually going to eat something that's weight watchers related so yeah it is definitely on my mind and it is in my head, in my mouth.*

**Do you feel this brand as an intuitive fit for you like some personal instinct of feel or emotion connection with this brand?**

*Emotional connection yes, definitely there is personal feeling and emotional connection. Again, as I said it's there to give me that positive feeling about myself and that knowledge that what I am doing to my body is good, it gives me that happiness to continue with and I start to appreciate it and I have a that emotional involvement with that because I know that it's so good for me and I know that my mother loves it. Therefore, I have to automatically love it as well. I have known it for 5-6 years now so definitely there is that emotional kind of connection with it.*

**And do you feel affection with this brand?**

*Yeah, I would definitely, say that I feel affection with this brand, anyone that asks me about it, I am very happy to say you know it's a great brand that has helped me lose weight with the scenario and the products that I have taken has helped me maintain my weight and stuff so definitely yes.*

**And do you have long term relationship with this brand?**

*Yes, it's been going for 7 years now.*

**Do you intend to develop and sustain a long-term relationship with this brand?**

*I can see myself continue using this brand and the products continue with the scheme, for several years because I know it's an evolving thing, I mean they have update the points system, they have updated the products and it's something that's always new and new sales and new kind of offers to bring in to your pals and colleagues to come and join in, there is always something going with weight watchers to help continue my weight and to help continue to do best for my body I think.*

**Okay, let's assume if weight watchers or any particular products you use discontinues, then what will happen, will you feel distress on the separation or will you be okay?**

*I think that's the going to be very difficult for me to handle, that situation because I mean there needs to be a replacement because I am very much solely depending upon weight watchers at the moment. And, if that suddenly stops and the scheme stops, I don't know what I would do, I have invested a lot of time and effort in it and it's become such a huge part of my life, I think it will be difficult for me to kind of accept that there is anything else in market. If I had to move on if would have to be something equivalent to weight watchers, something that always needs to be filled and if weight watchers aren't doing it, I would be very distressed. Actually, I would probably try to find another source of love if you want to say that.*

**So, do you think that you trust weight watchers.**

*Yes, absolutely I trust it.*

**With confidence?**

*Yes. Definite confidence and definite trust in this, like I said when I see results, that's when I automatically think that yeah there must be something right with it and therefore I think to have any kind of relation I guess you need to have trust and I think I have got this relationship with weight watchers and if I didn't trust it I wouldn't stick with it, so I have been able to trust it and stick with it because of the results that I have gotten from it and yeah so definitely there is a level of trust.*

**So, do you think that you love Weight watchers?**

*Yes, hands down.*

**Okay if you think that you love weight watchers, how will you behave or respond to any negative information about this brand?**

*Actually recently there was a programme on how weight watchers makes it's millions and it was talking about how weight watchers kinds of rips people off and kind of tells that it has low points in values and the reason it's got low points in value is because there is less amount of food in it and that any smart person should be able to figure out that having this kind of, they can eat a bit more but if they have low calories they can still have the same amount of points but I think weight watchers tries to trick people by just giving you smaller amounts of food rather than the actual quantity being low in fat, and personally at the moment in time I remember feeling quite angry with the person who was presenting the show, I was thinking why? Why are they saying that weight watchers isn't good for them, I mean everyone has to make money in some way right, and I think what weight watchers is doing yeah maybe, it might be deceiving people but actually I wanted to defend weight watchers by saying the amount of people they have helped to loose weight, it's like 100s or millions of people who are following these diets, I wasn't happy with the idea and I remember telling my mum that actually these people are just defaming weight watchers for no reason when actually the product is great and they are helping people lose weight. Everyone has different ways to make money and this is how they make money but it has its positives to it, so it wasn't happy and I think there was a degree of anger towards the show and I remember me and mum exchanging quite a lot of things about it, saying that this isn't right, they shouldn't do this, and actually, it became quite heated and emotional.*

**So, in certain situations, will you keep quite or ignore the information?**

*No, I wouldn't ignore the information or keep quiet, I think I would quite actively want to defend the brand itself, I would want to say that this brand may have this negative thing according to you, but there are other people that have different opinions and I personally believe this and I would probably try to sell the positive points of it and try to brush away the perceived negatives about it. Because obviously to me, the weight watchers is the greatest thing in the world and I would want other people to think that as well, so yeah.*

**So, in other words, you would provide positive word of mouth?**

*Positively yes, I would try to make it sound a bit more positive than what they are perceiving.*

**What type of positive word of mouth will you generate?**

*I will try to sell the benefits of weight watchers, I will try to say that weight watchers do this great product with low point values and they have a whole scheme and a whole system which helps you to lose weight and I am a story, I have managed to lose weight, my mum has managed to lose weight, it's great. I would try to show that the products are tasty, they are low in value and they probably help you feel good about it.*

**So, in other words you are disbelieving the negative information and then you will support a brand and advocate the brand against the negative information?**

*Yes, probably yes, I mean I don't disbelieve the negative information, I don't think the negatives are enough to overlook the positives. Everyone has negatives right, even if you look at people, they have negatives to them, I mean I am sure brands have negatives to them, as well. But, what makes a person good are if their positives are greater than their negatives, and I think weight watchers is one of those products whose positives are much greater than any of the negatives that it has.*

**Even if you believe the negative information, you will still defend the brand?**

*Yes.*

**Okay, now we will move to Pepsi Max.**

**Same questions, do you have passionate desire to use Pepsi Max?**

*Yes, I have a very sweet tooth, and I believe that the taste of Pepsi max is sweet for me, and also it has 0 calories to it. So, I don't have a strong desire to use it and I actually drink it every day. Because I trust that brand and I know its good quality stuff and I know it fulfils my sweet tooth desire without adding on any calories so yeah definitely a strong desire?*

**Can you tell any certain experience or feeling regarding this?**

*Experiences with Pepsi max, I mean I don't remember when I started liking it, it's been quite a while now, probably when I was about 16 or 17 years old again. First time I drank it, it was low zero Pepsi and then it became Pepsi max. I think that was quite a good thing. Actually, they changed the name, and they made me like it a bit a more because of the name of it because I thought you know*

*maximum flavour, maximum taste and I remember I actually just finished the PE class with my friends and I had it, and I remember thinking this is really good, this is far better than diet Pepsi or diet coke and I think part of the fact that the name was different also helped. Because diet Pepsi, diet coke sounds a bit dull to me, Pepsi MAX makes it sound like wow! This must be a really good product and sweet and sugary and ever since then I have had a strong desire to continue using it and it hasn't stopped. A lot of people do try and put me off it by saying it ruins your teeth, it's not good for you and you should probably try and give it up, and I just haven't been able to do it, it's kind of bit of an addiction.*

**So, do you feel yourself willing to invest resources for this brand?**

*Yes, in fact there was an incident, yesterday even where, my brother came back really tired and late from university and he didn't want to go anywhere and I forced him to go out to get Pepsi max, that's his resources and I usually really take care of my brother quite a lot and I made him do it but he didn't do it in the end. So, in fact I was going to go out that day and thought no let's not go that crazy. So, I waited till next morning, I woke up early morning and the first thing I did was to go out and buy Pepsi max which is quite bad and I remember when I was in Sainsbury, and I saw the price, it wasn't the right price and I thought it was too expensive so I said I am not going to buy from here so I came back home and I then went back out to the local store to find a cheaper version of that same bottle and again. I have two priorities, I need to know that I have spent the right amount of money on something, and I know it's the cheapest thing and it's the best thing obviously because I love Pepsi. That's another time and an investment that I have done for this product just because I love it and I think its great tasting and I kind of depend on it really.*

**Do you feel a feeling of love or attachment with Pepsi max out of any past experience?**

*Past experience wise I mean I wouldn't say a specific point of time in my life where I thought this is it, but it is something that I have solely realised that I have,, you know how like an addiction, it's just that I have always had it, ever since I had have had it with my friends, that time back in school, it's just every other week that I would have it, and I would have it every other day, now it's kind of built up where now I have got to have, it's not good enough for me. It helps me calm down my sweet tooth. But there is nothing specifically in my past.*

**Is it because of any involvement of any closed person with this brand?**

*No, this one it hasn't actually. There isn't any particular involvement.*

**Any memories of kinship?**

*No, I can't think of anything, actually no.*

**Any memories of childhood?**

*No because I think Pepsi max is more of a recent thing, as a child, apparently, my mum says I used to drink Pepsi a lot as a child as well but that was sugary Pepsi. I think I have grown older, I have become more weight conscious and I think Pepsi max is more of a teenage thing, so not really childhood. Yes, childhood Pepsi probably was but now it has evolved and changed into diet version of it. So, you could probably say it has been part of my taste buds as a young person.*

**Okay, do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your desired self-identity?**

*Again, yes it does, because it's a low-fat thing, and it helps me show that I am a healthy person, however I mean it kind of takes away from my identity that way as well, because a lot of my friends say that you know you are such a healthy person, you shouldn't even be having these drinks, so it kind of takes away from that a little bit. I mean it adds to it because it's healthy but it takes away from that image from my friends actually, because they think that (interviewee-1) is not a person who gets addicted to things, she is actually very good and she doesn't have any kind of, she wouldn't drink fizzy drinks so it takes away from that a little bit. But a lot of people would say it's healthy so it does kind of stick with that but I think because my friends actually, tell me to stop drinking it, I remember my best friends saying to me that it's lens coming up, I am giving up this for lens, are you giving up Pepsi max, and I always say to her I can't do it, I should be able to do it but I can't. I kind of am dependant on it right now. Yeah so it takes away actually a bit more than it gives.*

**So, it is part of yourself?**

*Yes.*

**Do you enjoy this feeling that Pepsi max is part of yourself?**

*I do enjoy it but there has been time where I think I shouldn't be having this Pepsi max, because I have it so much. I enjoy the fact that I love it so much and it gives me that pleasure but I also know that it's not really good for me because obviously, my brother says to me that it's got things can cause cancer in it, my mum says your teeth would get ruined, and my friends say that it's not good to be addicted to anything so I think I enjoy it because it makes me happy but I sometimes think again, maybe it's not good for kind of thing. You know.*

**Do you feel that this brand gives meaning to your life in anyway?**

*I suppose, meaning to my life, not really no, it kind of hinders my life in a way because I know I have to have it, I mean I love it so much that I have to have it, maybe it's not good for me. I think it reminds me of some of my friends' relationships where they are in love with someone, but they know they are not good for them, so they really should be with them. I think I love Pepsi max so much, I know I shouldn't really have it because it's not really that healthy or good for me. Because it's just empty, there is no nutritional benefit to it. So even though I love it so much I know I shouldn't have it.*

**Do you frequently think about Pepsi max?**

*Yes definitely, even no the way back from here, I was out, I was thinking oh I should have Pepsi max, so I couldn't drink anything at the restaurant and I was at the restaurant recently. So, I couldn't have it there, but I have some at home, so I might have it there.*

**Do you think Pepsi max as an intuitive fit for you like some personal instinct of feel or some emotional connection?**

*Yes, definitely has an emotional connection with me, because it's quite funny actually even after like when I have had a bad at work, I am really tired and things, I remember I was talking to my fiancé on the phone, and he said are you drinking now? Because you know how people are tired, so I told him I am sitting down and having my Pepsi max right now. So he said or shall I leave you now, so it's obviously something I like to turn to when I have just had a rough way, so I definitely depend on it and I desire it a lot and have a huge emotional connection and the emotion is that I am usually tired and drained and sleepy and I just want to finish the day and I have to study and I just have to stay awake, it's got the right amount of caffeine I need, it's got the sugar that I need, it's got the fizziness that I need so I am just like I need to for that kind of wake up. A lot of people liken it to alcohol for me when I am like no it's not, but yeah, it's definitely that kind of emotional thing where I know that I need it for to help me feel better actually in a way.*

**Do you feel affection for this brand?**

*I feel affection because it helps me through difficult times, because I know that after my exams I am just drained, and I know that I will feel better when I have this drink, it sounds really sad, but yeah definitely affection.*

**Do you have a long-term relationship with Pepsi max?**

*Not really long term actually, it's been more of a, the kind of dependency I have on it it's been about a year and a half or 2 years and that's where my work has become more difficult in terms of like lots of effort, I have to go to hospital and things. I used it in the last two years, so I wouldn't say hugely long term but last couple of years definitely.*

**Okay, do you intend to develop or sustain a long-term relationship with this brand?**

*You know what I am thinking quite a lot of about quitting it, it's not really helping me, but because I love the product, I know I am going to continue using it until there comes a point where something else replaces it, that's not bad for me. Because obviously, I know it's not good for me because of the amount of caffeine and sugar level, and it can cause cancer. So, I think that in the short-term I am probably going to continue it, but there will be a point where I would have to give it up just because it's not healthy for me, not because I don't like the product not because people say bad thing about it. It's just because I know it's probably not healthy for me.*

**Okay, assume if Pepsi max discontinues then what will happen, will you feel distress on this separation?**

*That's a good question I think because I think I would feel distress on a level of there is nothing else that can replace it, but actually there will be a part of that will be slightly happier, because I would know that I haven't had to do anything to stop taking it. It's something out of my control and I can probably give it up now because it's not there, however part of me will feel sad because that*



was the thing that kind of helped me kept me going during difficult periods in my exams and things but yeah there will be half/half response, I think.

**Do you trust Pepsi?**

*I trust it enough for me to continue drinking it. If I really thought that there was something completely wrong with it, bad for my teeth etc. I probably would have stopped a long time ago I have been using it for a couple of years and my mum says that your teeth are going to go bad, but my teeth have been fine. I see my dentists regularly and they are happy, so I trust it because I know that results have shown me that it's not affecting the way the other people have thought that it would affect me and in fact it has helped me feel better, but there is a part of me, right at the back of my mind that thinks that maybe I see bad things happening to me later on in life so I probably should stop now, so I trust it enough to know that at the moment it hasn't really affected me as bad as people say.*

**Do you think you love Pepsi max?**

*Yes, I think I love Pepsi max easily.*

**Okay if you think you love Pepsi max, how will you behave or respond about any negative information about Pepsi max?**

*It's interesting thing about Pepsi max is I am quite happy to accept when people say bad things about it. I wouldn't regularly defend it because I think I know that science tells me that it's not good for me. So, I would probably accept people's point of view but that wouldn't really stop me for liking it. There is a part of me for some reason I know that it's not good for me, but I would just continue doing it because I like it so much and I haven't seen the problem with it. You can even liken it for like smoker, you know how smoker smokes, they know that it's not good for them, because of the public and they will never ever turn around and say that actually, what you are saying is wrong, smoking is actually good for me, I think that I am like that. Because, they know smoking is not good, but it hasn't affected them negatively they will carry on doing it. So, I suppose that's how I think of Pepsi max, I would accept people's negative comments about it but I wouldn't stop the way that I continue my relationship with Pepsi max. I will just continue with it because It has been good with me so far. I probably wouldn't turn around and say you are wrong, I would probably just accept it and just continue doing what I am doing with it.*

**So, you will keep quiet? Or will straight away believe the negative information?**

*I will believe the negative information, but I will check, if they say something completely ridiculous then I would probably try to challenge them. If they suddenly say that it's going to cause you cancer in two days, I would definitely challenge that because that's ridiculous but if they start saying things that are a bit more believable, like it might not be good for your teeth because of the carbon dioxide or whatever in it. I would more readily believe that and I would keep quiet and maybe just say yes you are probably right. But if there is something completely ridiculous that I know is not true, then I would probably defend it.*

**There are chances that you can generate positive word of mouth about Pepsi?**

*I don't particularly go around promoting Pepsi max because again like I said I don't think it's the image that I want to give of myself because it's not really that healthy as a fizzy drink, I think. I wouldn't positively promote it but if someone asks their opinion on what drink should we have I would probably say yes let's go for Pepsi max because it has no fat but I wouldn't just suddenly say to random people. Weight watchers I would probably would say you know some responsibility and I would happy for me to promote it because it's good for you. Pepsi max because I know it's not that good for you, I would probably not promote it that positively all the time.*

**Now we will speak about iPhone. Do you have a passionate desire to use iPhone?**

*Yes, definitely, because it's because I have been using it for the past couple of years and I have had the opportunity to change my phone and I was quite passionate in saying that I actually. Yes. I want to have an iPhone again. My brother in law was saying to me that you should this phone or you should use that phone, Samsung or whatever but I said no I would honestly like an iPhone. They would actually tell me that it's not a good product, it's not very reliable, the connectivity of your phone is rubbish, you should stop using it because I have had such a good experience with it in the past, I want to continue with my iPhone so yeah definitely.*

**Can you tell me any certain experience regarding your iPhone?**

Yes, like I have quite frequent arguments with my to-be brother in law, that your phone is rubbish and even my fiancé, when I talk to him on the phone and my phone cuts off and he always says your phone is crap, it's rubbish, it's not good and then I feel extremely passionate about my iPhone and I think these guys don't know anything about iPhone, everyone's phone cuts off. This phone has done so much for me, it has so many applications for me, I would feel very passionate in my head and I would tell these people that my iPhone is better than your phone, you think your phone is really good, when in actuality my iPhone has got more applications helping through with my medical field, it has a great camera on my iPhone, even though the connectivity is not very good, it's actually most of the time really good. There are incidents, when I am on the phone and things but that's about it.

**Do you feel yourself willing to invest resources for iPhone like your time, money, paying a premium price or fuel, postage etc.**

Yes there was actually a particular incident again with my iPhone, I wanted to update my phone to the 4s and I recently remember like during my university time I made a trip to the Milton Keynes from Leicester because that's where I have my university, I took a break from my class and walked a good 20 minutes to get to the apple store to find out how to change from my old chip to my new chip because the new sim has to be smaller and I mean I took time out specifically for that and used my energy and effort for that and I didn't have to do anything in town but I just had to get my phone sorted, because there is no other iPhone store in Catering, so I did that for that and I was happy to invest that kind of time in it however right now my brother is updating my phone and I am not happy to invest that time for it, because think I am not technically minded at all. I am not happy to spend time phoning up the O2 people to change that. but the time that I am able to do like walking to the store and paying extra money. But I am not happy to spend the time with stuff I don't understand.

**So, do you feel such feeling of love or attachment to iPhone out of your past experience?**

Past experience, maybe, I think with my brothers because they are very pro iPhone and they love it so much and they are the ones that initially told me that I should probably go for the iPhone, because of that and that was a couple of years ago, three years ago I think it came out. It was a good phone since then, and even since I have had it, it's always been that. I mean I didn't have a very smart phone start, I had really old crappy Nokia at that moment in time. I was fairly young, I had this phone that was amazing, that my dad had, and my brothers have, and you know that was the kind of feeling like wow I am at their level now, I have this cool new phone that my brothers and dad have. I feel really high-tech now and that was when I was younger and ever since then I liked that feeling of being on the same level as my brothers and my dad and this is the kind of technology that they use and I am happy and it's continued because they have continued with the iPhone and I have continued with it. I am happy with it.

**Do you feel that iPhone represents or adds to your desired self-identity?**

I don't know because I don't really want people to look at me and think oh yeah, she likes to have expensive iPhones and things like that. that's not my kind of image, to be honest with you I am not the type of person that likes to wear branded things. I would hate to be the type of person where people look at me and say she just likes to wear expensive brands and she doesn't have a personality. You know how you see some people and they are superficial, I would hate to have that image where I am just like superficial, just likes to wear Prada to show the world, I want to wear things that I am happy with, I want to test the unbranded things just because I think it looks good on me and I feel comfortable in it. Similarly, with iPhone I think it kind of makes me look a bit like, she is a bit superficial, she likes to be with the crowd, so it doesn't add to my identity in that way, actually I think it takes away from that. I don't ever want to be the person that people look at and say that oh she has an iPhone, she doesn't think very deep and she likes to be on top, because you know iPhone was supposed to be quite good isn't it, so I don't want people to look at me and think she thinks that she wants to show off money or high branded phone. It takes away from that part of my personality actually, but I still like to use it because I still think it's a good quality phone. I am not going to stop using it just because it's taking away from my way wanted identity.

**So, do you think that iPhone is part of yourself?**

Yes, I think it is actually, my phone is a part of who I am, and that's because it obviously keeps me in touch with people that I love. So, I am able to keep in contact with them throughout. An iPhone that has other qualities to it too and it has definitely become a part of who I am and it has become part of my daily routine. Like I said it's always in my bag, it's always there. I have to stay away from

it during exams time obviously because you can't take it when you are taking an exam. And I am always thinking about my phone. I wonder who has messaged me now or I wonder what email I have got now, so definitely it's always there as part of my life, and you know, everything is part of it.

**Do you feel iPhone gives meaning to your life in anyway?**

Meaning to my life, yeah, I guess so, but then I think maybe any other phone can give meaning to my life in a way but specifically iPhone, I do like because everyone has iPhone, and there is iMessage on it, and like I said it keeps it cheap, messaging that's not expensive, you can do facetime on it. It allows me to keep in touch with people in a cheap way, like I say I like to save my money, so that it does give me meaning.

**Do you frequently think about iPhone?**

Yes, definitely, mainly now there is more, because my phone is a bit messed up at the moment and I have finally admitted that it's not doing very well because obviously it keeps cutting off and there are people who call me, I don't seem to get their call and it's getting now and now I am starting to think about it a lot more, especially now that I am changing it over and I am looking forward to getting a new iPhone, I mean there is possibility that my new phone is going to be as bad as like you know it went quite bad during the end. But I am still quite happy using it because like you said, I have had a quite a longish relationship with it and having seen my brothers and dad with it, it's kind of grown on me, and I want to keep that alive. Even though it might not be as good as other phones, but I'm still happy to continue with it.

**So, do you feel you have emotional attachment with iPhone?**

Yes, definitely now, it's going to be difficult for me to go back to any other phone now, just because I am so used to it now, it's been a huge part, I am definitely emotionally attached to my iPhone.

**Do you feel affection for the iPhone?**

Yes, I do feel affection for the iPhone, I do feel that I would like to look up any new applications that are going to be useful for me, that's what's particular about my iPhone, it's a smart phone isn't it so I like to keep up to date about new applications on my iPhone and I like to talk to my friends about my iPhone. So, definitely there is a level of affection because I want to keep on improving it.

**Do you have long term relationship about iPhone?**

Urm... long-term relationship in a sense that yeah, I have done in the last 2-3 years and I think that's a long term and ever since then I have stuck with it. Even though it's messed up, I am quite happy to continue.

**So, you are basically intending to develop or sustain a long relationship with iPhone?**

Yes, actually, I would feel happy to carry.

**So, if iPhone discontinues then what will happen? Will you feel distressed on this separation or will it be okay to switch to any other phone?**

Because I have become so used to it, and I have loved it now, I think it's going to be difficult for me to kind of move over to another brand. I will be dissatisfied and unhappy about it because I think it's so good but obviously if it's not there anymore, I am going to have to move on, it is going to cause some level of stress for me.

**Do you trust iPhone?**

Yes actually yes I do, because like I mentioned earlier, I went to the iPhone store and they were quite happy to help me out and I have known that because every time I have messed up or every time something has happened to my phone I can ring up the people that are relevant and they'll always help me, so I definitely trust it now, because I have had an experience in the past where I have fallen in the difficult times and they have helped me, so I definitely have a level of trust with them.

**Will you be confident about this brand?**

Yes, I definitely have confidence, I think it's going to continue growing, I mean there is iPhone 5 now, and I think it's going to carry so definitely.

**So, do you think that you love iPhone?**

Urm, yes

**If you think so, how will you behave or respond to any negative information about iPhone?**

*Well I have actually received quite a few bit of negative information, for about my iPhone, but every single time I have managed to defend it, I am always defending iPhone and I am saying that you know it's probably you know, when my fiancé always says to me that your phone is crap, I'll say to him that this is the phone that keeps me in contact with you all the time, so don't talk about it like that and I always have this argument like your phone is crap your phone is crap and I am like no it's not, it's probably my signal, it's probably the fact that I live in a random village where you can't really, it always cuts of my phone, so he is having a go at me and I am always telling him. He said you should stop using an iPhone, and I said I am not going to stop using an iPhone, I defended it like I would defend my own brother I think, it's that bad. Because obviously, I have seen my brother and my dad use it. I trust them; therefore, I trust iPhone, therefore I am going to continue using it. So yeah definitely defend it quite a lot.*

**So, you won't keep quiet and ignore the information?**

*Definitely not, quite passionate about it actually.*

**Will you believe the negative information in anyway?**

*I actually wouldn't believe the negative information about iPhone, I think these people are ridiculous, I would actually go to the extent of going online and finding reviews of iPhone and trying to dispute what they have said, just to make sure that iPhones look really good.*

**For example. If you believe that negative information by any chance, would you forgive the iPhone?**

*Yes, I would forgive iPhone, because obviously, I said I do love iPhone and if I loved a human being, I would have kind of level of forgiveness for them, so if my mum made a mistake I would be quite happy to just forgive her mistake and just forget it and move on, taking that everyone is allowed to make mistakes. In fact, I would probably like the fact that they agreed that actually, they is a mistake, and I think I like people who admit that they are wrong or something is wrong with them, and they are happy to improve themselves so you know definitely.*

**So, if you believe the negative information, and forgive the brand, then you will support the brand by positive word of mouth?**

*Yes, definitely*

**And if you believe the negative information and forgive the brand, then will you support the brand and advocate the brand against the negative information?**

*Yes, I would still do that, I would try to promote the fact that this is such a good brand, that it's actually admitted to the mistakes and it's probably wanting to change, so I would try to advocate the positive sides of it because I think what I am doing is right basically, that's the type of person I am, I want to defend whoever is right and I think when I am using iPhone I think I am right and I would like to defend that position that I hold and try to promote it with other people that actually yeah it's a good phone and it's probably going to help you with other aspects of your life, you know you can put your weight in there as well and monitor that and there are so many other applications with the iPhone that there are probably more better then bad. so definitely promote it.*

**Okay, let's move to Dorothy Perkins? Same question, do you have passionate desire to use this brand?**

*Yes I think even today, yesterday I went shopping because it's mother's day today, and there are lots of shops that we have there but I went instantly to Dorothy Perkins before I saw anything else, just because I know it's a reliable store and the products there are really good and I really like them, I think they are my style and you know good pricing, and it's got offers for students so I definitely have a passion to just go to find that store as supposed to going to any other store. I mean we have got next, we have other stores but I particularly like Dorothy Perkins, compared to others in shopping so I yes definitely I am passionate about it.*

**Okay, do you feel emotional attachment with Dorothy Perkins?**

*Urm, I would say, there is a degree of emotional attachment, I mean not so much as my other brands that I have talked about but there is a degree of you know, everywhere I go I would have to feel, like I have to see in Dorothy Perkins, and I because I have had so many clothes from like family members that are from Dorothy Perkins, I have started to associate to it from that kind of presence point of view, that kind of affection that other people have to give me clothes from Dorothy*

Perkins, so there is that kind of emotional connection because I think when I see cloths in Dorothy Perkins and I am like oh yeah my sister in law got me that, so there is that emotional attachment because you know it's the store that everyone turns to in my family and we all kind of shop there so there is a level of attachment for it because I associate it with the kind of love that my family gives me as presents from Dorothy Perkins so yeah.

**Do you feel yourself willing to invest resources for Dorothy Perkins?**

In terms of like time and money, effort and things definitely yes. I mean my store Dorothy Perkins is quite deep into town in Leicester but I am quite happy to walk extra, spend extra time, spending money there, I am happy to do that because I know the quality of the product is really good. So, I am happy to invest my money in it so yeah.

**Do you feel such feelings of love or attachment in this brand out of any past experience?**

Past experience... like I said there is nothing like extreme like oh yeah that was the moment that I became a Dorothy Perkins fan but again with all my brands actually, I have actually grown up with almost all of them. I think that's the kind of past relationship I have with it, just because I have been used to it as a child. Ever since I was young, to a teenager, shopping with my mum, we would always go to Dorothy Perkins first just because it's a good brand. So that kind of past relationship I have had to be exposed to at a younger age and I have continued to go there just because I am familiar with it and just because you know I have grown up with it, so yeah that's the type of relationship.

**Is it because of any involvement of any closed person as well?**

My friends actually, I have had lots of friends that do like shopping there and whenever I go shopping with my friends, in particular my best friend, I have got a close best friend and she enjoys shopping there and I think there is that kind of association with that as well because she goes there, I associate the kind of fun time that I have had with my friends there as well she likes the product there as well. So, you could say that my best friend and I have some sort of association with Dorothy Perkins. You could say.

**Do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your desired self-identity?**

I think it does actually Dorothy Perkins is one of those brands that's not flashy brands, I mean it's is probably like general, I don't like to look like someone who just follows everyone else because a lot of people like Dorothy Perkins but I like the fact that it adds to my personality where I don't want to be a brand person, I don't want to be the person who wears FCUK or Dior bags and Calvin Klein or whatever, I want to look like the kind of person who is a bit down to earth and it adds to that, it is a bit down to earth. There are lots of offers for students and I like that part of it. It helps me with my image of not looking too flashy in front of people. Brand conscious

**So, do you feel that Dorothy Perkins is part of yourself?**

Yes, I think in a way it is part of my self, because if you look at my wardrobe there is definitely a lot of my clothes are from Dorothy Perkins, because obviously, the right size, right fitting, right colour, right everything really, price wise as well.

**Do you feel that Dorothy Perkins gives meaning to your life in anyway?**

I mean I suppose it gives meaning to my life in a way because your clothes are who you are and the way you present yourself is through our clothes and it helps me, gives me a certain look, when I am wearing a professional attire in my hospital, it gives me that professional outlook and people see me as a professional because obviously they have got loads of office workers there and it gives me meaning in that respect that it helps me with my professional image of myself so yeah in that way I must say that it adds professional image that I want to portray to my officials.

**Do you frequently think about this brand?**

I mean I was thinking a lot about it yesterday, and today in fact because like I said it's Mother's Day and I wanted to get something for my mum and I was thinking about this, something, a dress that I have returned recently, and she had a voucher or something. So, I was wondering, whether or not, if I could get that voucher from her so I do think about ways I can make sure I am saved money while using Dorothy Perkins. Whenever I go shopping or something, I would like to make sure that I have my student card with me, so I can use that on Dorothy Perkins. So, it's like that kind of way when I think about it, I think oh yeah Dorothy Perkins or I'll need to find my shopping card or you know student discount card. And I have to shop quite a lot because obviously, we have got birthdays and things going on, so most definitely I think about it.

**Do you feel this brand as an intuitive fit for you like some personal instinct of feel of emotional connection with this brand?**

*Urm, I don't know actually, because there are so many other shops out there that I really like I mean I know that it has a place in my heart but I wouldn't say that it's got the deepest emotional connection at all. Because obviously, there are other shops that I like as well. So, there is a degree of kind of strong attraction to it because you know it gives me discounts and things but I wouldn't say it's got a huge deeply emotional connection.*

**Do you feel affection with this brand?**

*There is a sense of affection, but I wouldn't say it's as much as my other favourite brands, there is a sense of affection with it because I do love Dorothy Perkins and yeah so there is a level of affection but I wouldn't say it's the deepest affection ever.*

**Do you have long term relationship with this brand?**

*Long term yes, I suppose it has been, because Dorothy Perkins has evolved a lot and I recognise Dorothy Perkin as slightly different in the past because I think it was more, I remember when my mum used to go, I used to think of it as fashion sense isn't very good in Dorothy Perkins, it's a bit grumpy and I didn't really like it. I was exposed to it at a younger age and ever since than my mum would continue taking me there because she continued taking me there I developed an interest for it a bit more and I saw that it changed over the years and it was more trendier like a bit more suitable for people my age. So from then on I have started liking it and yes ever since a child I was exposed it and it got better and better and better so I found myself visiting it more frequently. So, there is that long term element to it.*

**Do you intend to develop or sustain a long-term relationship with Dorothy Perkins?**

*Yes, easily yes because it's just one of those stalls that provides you with everything and I mean yesterday I even wanted to buy a dress but I didn't buy it because I thought it's too expensive for now in my time in life so I am going to, I'm looking forward to visiting it a couple of months' time when it's probably on sale to go back to it, so I definitely want to have a long term.*

**Do you feel distress when this brand is missing?**

*what do you mean when it's missing?*

**I mean, if this brand or product of this brand discontinues?**

*Oh! yeah, I will feel very distressed about that actually but similarly I would have to feel, I mean I happy to be less distressed at that because I know that I could probably go shopping to other places so I mean yeah I would feel distressed and then I would feel okay because I know that there are other brands that I have been trying to go shopping for and I could make things work in that respect because I value clothes and things but I don't value it enough for me to think if that clothing brand is closed I am going to die because obviously there are other things that I can do so urm... yeah, there is a degree of the stress but I don't know.*

**So, do you trust Dorothy Perkins?**

*Yeah, I trust Dorothy Perkins, I have had lots of good experiences with it, the clothes are very good quality, they are never torn or ripped or anything and I have never had to really go back and anytime I have had to go back they have been happy to exchange things, so I trust it because past experience has told me that that any difficulty I am in, they are there to help me and it's good quality stuff.*

**Do you have confidence?**

*Yes, definitely confidence in the brand.*

**So, do you think that you love Dorothy Perkins?**

*Urm, I do love Dorothy Perkins yeah.*

**Okay if you think or feel love for this brand, how will you behave when someone is talking negative information about this brand?**

*About Dorothy Perkins, I would listen to the people, what is it that they have to say but I think I would also kind of promote it in a way, trying to say that it's got really good prices for students, it's got good quality products and a range of sizes and things and it's always available, the staff is*

*usually very good and Dorothy Perkins. I would kind of promote it in a way. I would listen to it, probably disagree with it and then try to promote good things about it.*

**So, you won't keep quiet and just ignore the information?**

*I wouldn't keep quiet and ignore the information no.*

**Okay, if you believe the negative information by any chance, but forgive the brand then will you support the brand through positive word of mouth?**

*Yes, I would definitely do that, if there was a mistake and they agreed to it, then I would just say, you know they have managed to improve upon their mistake that they have done and I have tried to influence this and I have tried to continue the like for this product that other people as well. Just because I think it's nice for people to improve where they think they have gone wrong. So yeah, I would try spread positive word.*

**So, if you believe the negative information, but forgive the brand then will you support the brand and advocate the brand against negative information?**

*Yeah.*

**What type of advocacy will you generate? Will you recommend the brand still?**

*I would still recommend the brand yeah, even though it might be some negatives in it, I would like to promote it because I personally believe the, it's really good and it might have some negatives but hey the positives are far more.*

**If there are any chances that you disbelieve the negative information about that brand and then you provide positive word of mouth?**

*There could be a possibility, that I would do that yeah. I think you have got to I mean I am the kind of person that likes to do a lot of research on it, I would have to physically see, I mean I would probably disbelieve it on the spot if someone says and I would try to defend it but then I would also try to look up what they have said and try to find out why did they say that and try and see and try and find further points to disapprove what they have said just because I know that I am probably not wrong.*

**Okay, let's move to the last brand which is next?**

**Same questions, do you have the passionate desire to use this brand?**

*Yes, because it's open till 8 o'clock, because my university finishes at 5 or 6 o'clock, it's always there because I know I can turn to Next for anything because it's got good quality products and I know that my mother loves Next and she is always buying things from there so I definitely have a strong passion for it and in fact anybody ask and you know especially within my family, any birthday present that they get would be from next. So yeah*

**Can you tell any certain experience of feeling regarding your passionate desire?**

*For next? A certain incident did you say? Urm.. yeah, I mean, today it was Mother's Day, I went with my brother, previous weekend my brother asked where we should go and I said specifically we should go to next because mum loves buying clothes from there and anyone I mean our whole family loves Next.*

*So, I said let's just go to next and buy my mum because we got her a suit, so we both went together and because they provided us with gift receipts and whatever else so it's a good and my mum loves shopping here so even if it's not something my mum likes she would be able to use the gift receipt to buy from her favourite store as well. So definitely that would be a single example of many times that we have had that we have done that and anytime we had to think about buying a present for someone, let's go to Next and everyone in my family loves it.*

**Do you feel yourself willing to invest resources for Next?**

*Yeah, I mean yeah, I would, sometimes I go out of my way to find Next, ummm..., but because I have never really had to do that, because Next is so local to where I live at the moment, I have never had to feel like oh I am having to use up all my resources to go there, that's partly why I like it because I feel like I am not having to put down that much effort. It's not very far from home here and it's open till late it's giving me more benefit then I am having to give it. That's why I love it so much, but if worse comes to worst and I am having to give resources for it, I think I will be happy to do that, and I would be happy to drive a bit longer to find it. Say for example, if I have a pair of shoes, I mean that's actually a good example. I had my graduation recently, and a pair of shoes I*

really wanted for my graduation, but they didn't have my size, I was very much happy to drive all the way to Wellingborough to go get another pair of shoes which is a good 45 mins drive here and back, to find a pair of shoes I wanted from Next, I wouldn't want to go anywhere else, so yeah, I am happy to give resources.

**Do you feel such feeling of love or attachment to this brand out of any past experience?**

Past experience, yes you can say that again, like with all my brands, I have been kind of brought up with it and I think there seems to be a very common theme that because I have been brought up with it and because my family has a degree of love for it I have been brought up with that kind of love as well, so I definitely have this past experience ever since a child and most of my stuff that I have got is from Next. So yeah.

**So, is it because of any involvement with closed person?**

Yeah, my mum actually, that's quite strange because most of the things that I like or brands that I like are because my mum loves it. I don't know why that it is, maybe because I love my mum so much, I trust her choice that I just automatically kind of love what she loves, brands being part of that and that's probably why I love Next a lot.

I mean if she loved something else, I would probably love that as well.

**Do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your desired self-identity?**

Yes, because I think I like to portray myself as like quite a classy girl, you know, sleek and good style, and Next is definitely that if you look at their products they have got very modern, very classical and good quality and not cheap looking so definitely that adds to my personality.

**Do you think that Next is part of yourself?**

Yes, you could say that because of most of my clothes, I mean I have used Next at quite big life events, I remember at my interview I wore next for my medical school, my graduation clothes were from next, um..., I have always turned to next for that kind of stuff and I think it has been a part of my life and even in the future when I go anywhere else for the big events like a job interview or something I would go to Next. So, I think Next is definitely a part of me and part of my life.

**Do you think Next gives meaning to your life in anyway?**

It gives meaning to my life in respect that like, I know that I can turn to it when it comes to the sales season. I mean it's giving me meaning, because I am able to use my money affectively there. But I wouldn't say that it's a huge part of my life. I mean it's got a good quality product for the right kind of price for me and sales. In that respect but I wouldn't say a lot.

**Do you frequently think about Next?**

I don't frequently because I don't shop that frequently but every time, I do shop I do frequently think about Next. If all else fails next will be reliable, I mean the reason why I don't go to it so frequently is because I think it's actually quite expensive sometimes, for me as a student I don't like to spend too much money on things but I love it because it's got great sales, I mean 50% off, 75% off once every 3-4 months is good enough for me.

**Ok now it is done thank you for your patience and time, and once more, please feel free to ask if you have any concerns or questions about the interview.**



**Do you really like some particular Consumer-Electronics and/or Cosmetics brands? Name them?**

*Yes, I do, so my favourite one in particular, in terms of electronics would be Samsung. I mean great love for Samsung, the products and the innovation and moving forward in terms of cosmetics I would say Gucci. Gucci is another one of those brands, obviously, Gucci is a lot of other markets a well, but in terms of their colognes and their perfumes, I am a huge fan of the brand.*

**Why do you like these particular brands?**

*In terms of Samsung, I have been following Samsung since I was a child over you know flip phones, and when they were moving on to the semi touch phones and into the fully-grown Samsung phones which are vibrant. If you look at Samsung from one point of view, they have innovated, they have developed, they have enormously increased their technology aspect, now they are the point where they are actually trying to develop into a Virtual reality equipment.*

*This is the sort of brand I admire because they are consistently trying to improve themselves, trying to differentiate from their competitors. If you look at the market right now we have tons and tons of companies trying to sell us the same product in a different shape or a different cover whereas Samsung are consistently trying to improve every product they release, hence my brand loyalty stands with Samsung.*

*Gucci is actually a funny one, again Gucci is another product I have been following from the start, from their belts to their pouches to their actual suits. Obviously once they introduced their colognes, I was really blown away by their actual fragrance, you know one would think that they are going after a different market, so they might not be as succesfull as they have been in the other, but they really blown me away with the quality of the product that they have released.*

**Do you feel that some or any brands have special place in your life?**

*Yes, I would say Samsung is one of those brands which play a Vital role in my day to day life, its actually an essential role it plays, mainly half of my life evolves around Samsung equipment and technology so definitely Samsung is one and so is Gucci.*

**Which brands do you think are special for you?**

*Samsung definitely is like I mentioned, and Gucci as well, but Gucci is a different market, so Samsung in terms of consumer electronics, products, technology and then obviously every person would have one preference when it comes to themselves, for example fragrances, creams, then I would say Gucci is the one.*

**You mentioned few names; do you feel the same for all these brands?**

*No, I think Samsung I feel more connected to.*

**If no? how do you rate or place these brands in a hierarchy from top to bottom with the most favourite at the top?**

*In terms of my brands I would say Samsung would definitely, be at the top, and then Gucci would be second.*

**Now I will ask you about these brands individually, so let's start with Samsung. Now keep Samsung in mind. Do you have a Passionate Desire to Use this brand?**

*Yes, definitely.*

**How can you explain this feeling?**

*So, in terms of feeling, actually, if I was to give you an example, if I don't use my phone which is Samsung or don't watch TV which is also Samsung, I would feel completely lost, that might be exaggeration for some people but it's actually true for me. Because you have been so used to using these, you have been around them for so long and seen them develop just like you have, you really kind of feel them as part of your daily life, if it's something is a part of your daily life then you would obviously have passion towards it.*

**Can you tell any certain experience regarding this feeling?**

*Yes, so I think Samsung when they actually, so they were the first company I remember to use the semi touch system, back in I would say 2007 or 8, that's when no one has actually thought about*

going after the touch market, this is where it really touched me where you had companies like Nokia and Alcatel, LG and they were all going after the big phones, but that's when Samsung came out with innovation and said look here is a phone which I think I can't remember was something like E900, here is the first touch pad phone which they released, that's when I felt really baffled and I felt really passionate that they are the only company which are actually investing in the future. And if we look at where they were to where they are now, it's a huge jump and all their hard work paid off.

**Do you feel yourself willing to Invest Resources for the brand? Like your time, money, how please explain. (Paying a premium price, fuel, postage, discussing the brand)**

Oh yes, regularly, I think I am the brand ambassador in my family for Samsung, that's one thing which I regularly push when someone asks for my advice in which product to go for, whether its Laptop, TVs, Mobile Phones, I kind of work as a brand ambassador internally. And obviously going after their premium yes of course, from Samsung I have bought a lot of additional premium products, their supports, their premium kits and obviously one thing I like about Samsung is that if you are loyal to them they will look after you with gifts so yeah definitely.

**Do you feel such feeling of love or attachment to this brand out of any past experience?**

Yes, so we do feel some sort of attachment with this brand, a sort of direct attachment as I said. If you have seen something evolving as you are growing and you have that product and you see that product to where it was to where it is now, you feel some sort of attachment to the brand and experience being that once we actually bought a Samsung TV, Samsung curve TV when they just came out and we were really baffled by the quality and were happy that it actually tested that sort of technology and it was really worth the money that you pay.

**Is it because of any involvement of any close person with the brand?**

Not particularly, it's not because of it's a close person with the brand, it's just the brand overall and the value for money that they offer.

**Is it because of any memories of kinship (relationship)?**

As I said we had people in the past using this brand, so my dad used Samsung and my brother also used Samsung products, it's sort of a generation using their products, so when you get your hand on it you feel that attachment, but it's not sort of a kinship or relationship but it's part of it.

**Is it because of any memories of the childhood, or because of any other reason (please explain)?**

Yes certainly, I think Samsung phones, so I use to crave for a Samsung phone which was a D500, again another phone with great memories from the past, with that being in school, they were the first one to introduce external speakers, and a lot of cool gadgets and applications in the phone which obviously, you know, once you get attracted to these gadgets and application you would just want to get hold of the phone, and still to the date I have old products which I still sometimes use.

**Do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your desired Self-Identity? like you want to become someone or like someone, or want to adopt some style, some particular image.**

It actually really represent, the brand itself really shows a certain example for us, how you would want to be, again quoting from previous discussions how Samsung has evolved and how it looked after itself and how to invest in yourself or how to be better and a step ahead and if I wanted to be somewhere in life, I would try to follow this example that how to improve yourself and how to go an extra mile and what sort of weaknesses you have or strengths you have and how to exploit that so yeah this is sort of a good example.

**Do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your Current Self-Identity?**

Yes, in some extent yes,

**How do you feel it?**

So, if you were to investigate further, now Samsung has gone way up the ladder, obviously I wouldn't say I am right up there but following on the footsteps of that company analogy, I am trying to build up myself, look at where I am now and what I need to achieve, what steps I need to take and how I need to achieve those goals is something that Samsung has done and it is something which I am currently doing right now, so does in a way represent myself identity at the moment.

**Do you feel this brand as a part of yourself? (If yes then ask 14.1)**

*Oh, yes definitely.*

**How do you feel it?**

*It actually really represents what I have, if I have a day where I don't use a Samsung equipment or watch something on a Samsung product, you do feel lost that what I need to do even though I have different other brands but Samsung is one brand which I always want to use.*

**Do you feel that this brand gives Meaning to your life in any way? (If yes then ask 15.1)**

*Yes, again.*

**Why do you feel it?**

*In terms of example, how to improve yourself, and I think this is what we want to do in life, how to progress, develop and see where I was sort of or my flaws are and take the initiative to achieve it and that's what Samsung does and this is what I am trying to do now.*

**Do you Frequently think about this brand in any way and if yes how often do you think about this brand and in relation to what?**

*In terms of entertainment, if you are looking for self-entertainment or home entertainment, you would always first think of Samsung products, whether it's sort of house entertainment, gathering, any sort of a house need, any need in your life that will be the brand you would think about.*

**Do you feel this brand as an Intuitive Fit for you? Like some personal instinct or feel of emotional connection with the brand?**

*Yes, again following from previous conversation, seeing that brand evolve during the years, you have some sort of loyalty with the brand, and as the brand evolves and gets better, your loyalty goes up. It's like a football team, if you support a football which is right at the start and have its early days and then they grow up and become a very good team, your emotional attachment would go with that, being at the start of the brand and seeing where the brand is right now, you do feel some sort of emotional attachment.*

**Do you feel Emotional Attachment with this brand?**

*Yes, I did mention that seeing the brand grow as a child and evolve into something which is magnificent, it has challenged one of the best other brands I would say so yes you would say that your brand is taking steps in the right direction.*

**Do you feel Affection with the brand?**

*Definitely.*

**How do you feel it?**

*I feel affection with the products, so the product line which they are developing or have already developed, you know you would be amazed by the technology which they have actually invested in those products and in terms of money they charge you for it, from laptops to mobile phones, to TVs to tablets they are everywhere and that really shows how you have affection for it, I have a lot of Samsung products, TVs, Cameras, phones, Fridge, laptops.*

**Do you think it is a wonderful brand?**

*Yes.*

**Why do you think so?**

*It's a beautiful brand to have, and obviously when you say a brand is wonderful, you would obviously want to hold on to that, and the only way you would think, it's beautiful or wonderful is when it adds meaning to your life and its good value for money so yeah.*

**Does it make you feel good in any way?**

*Definitely, you have Samsung phone and you go ahead, and you compare it with other phones, and you see the amount of features they have put in your phone compared to others, you get good remarks by that so of course you feel good about it.*

**Do you think that this brand is totally awesome?**

*Totally awesome, oh! yes indeed, so I would say one brand that would give a competition to Samsung would be Apple, when we look at Apple and we look at Samsung, we don't see a huge difference but what we do see a huge difference in technology but we do see a huge difference in*

price and that's where I think Samsung has won and the title of totally awesome is given because they are offering you a great technology at a much cheaper price.

**Does this brand make you very happy by any means?**

Yeah well, as I said if you in your daily life, you have not used this phone you would feel sad, so for example If I don't use this phone for let's say 5 mins, I would be eager, my hands would be tickling to go use the phone so that really correlates to you know you would check your phone, you want to play with your gadgets and that in return makes you happy.

**Do you think if this brand is a pure delight?**

Oh yeah, I mean I think this is just following on from being happy to delight, that is one step ahead and I would say yes definitely, by the same means I mean this is something that is your daily life necessity, that If you have your daily life necessity it will make you happy, that's like water, if you don't drink water you will feel really thirsty and you would then only want to drink water to make yourself happy and get rid of the thirst, it's the same as with these phones and gadgets.

**Do you feel that you are very attached to this brand?**

Oh yes, from the start, you know looking at how it had evolved over the time, so you do tend to build an emotional relationship with the brand as I mentioned you know you have a football team which obviously keeps on following, and once you do very well you feel emotional attachment with it, it's the same with the brand.

**Do you have Long-Term Relationship with the brand?**

Yes.

**For how long have you been using this brand?**

In terms of number of years that I have been using this brand is probably just over 13 years.

**Do you intend to develop or sustain Long-Term Relationship with the brand?**

Yes, I have sort of evolved the relationship, started from mobile phones to cameras then to TVs then to tablets, so every next we are taking, the gadgets we were buying we are going on a long-term relationship with Samsung.

**Do you feel distress when this brand is missing? Assume if... this brand or the product of this brand discontinues then what will happen? Will you feel distress on this separation... with the brand or product of that brand?**

Yes, so sort of echoing what I said, if I don't use my phone even though I have two phones, one is Apple and the other one is Samsung, but if I don't use my Samsung phone, you do feel some sort of distress.

**Are you passionate about this brand?**

Yes, very passionate.

**Do you feel that you love this brand?**

Definitely, again, just giving you an example of a football team again, you see something evolve from your childhood and you have been attached to it, you would definitely love the brand, you would only be a brand ambassador if you love the brand and that positivity will come out of it.

**If you think so or you feel love for this brand, do you think you know this brand?**

I do, when you say I know the brand I presume you mean in terms of its products, its technology, its values yes, definitely I am well aware of, and I tend to regularly follow up with that as well, so just keep up to date.

**If you believe that you know the brand, will you believe any negative information about the brand?**

No straight away, so if someone comes to me and says that Samsung has done this, I wouldn't just bat an eye and say yes, I will do some investigation of my own and until its proven, you won't be really pointing any fingers at them.

**That means you trust the brand; do you trust this brand?**

Yes, definitely, I think what they have achieved, and the amount of customers they have and the

technology they use you would definitely trust the brand.

**So, if you trust the brand, will you refuse to believe the negative information about this brand?**

*Well, it's because I trust the brand, I trust that they will not their customers down, they will not you know, try to con their customers, and that is obviously if I hear negative information about the brand, I won't just go ahead and believe it, there is some research that needs to be done and until its proven I won't trust anything.*

**If you believe the negative information, will you blame the brand, or will you stand by your brand?**

*Well, I think I will definitely stand by the brand, not everyone is perfect, it really depends what the brand has done. I can't imagine a consumer electronics brand to do something really harsh so I would certainly give my support to the brand.*

**Do you believe that this brand always fulfills the promises that it makes to its customers?**

*Yes, indeed.*

**Why do you think so?**

*I think, it actually succeeds them, in terms of products you get, it terms of quality you get, its spot on.*

**Will you prefer this brand to others in future?**

*Yes, I mean as I said, in terms of negativity, it depends what the brand has done but as I said I can't imagine a consumer brand doing something that bad, so I would definitely recommend this brand to others in the future.*

**If you think so or you feel love for this brand, how will you behave or respond to any negative information about this brand? Like if any friend of yours criticises your loved brand, how will you react? Like, how will you behave or respond if you hear anything negative about this brand?**

*I wouldn't react immediately, I will acknowledge it, learn about what the mistake is if there is any, and wait until there is a final verdict you can comment on that, but I wouldn't jump to a conclusion straight away.*

**Will you keep quiet and ignore the information? OR Will you believe the negative information and will start providing negative WOM yourself as well?**

*No I will keep quiet and ignore the information for time being.*

**Will you straightaway believe that negative information (Word-of-Mouth)?**

*No never, because obviously, you will be speaking with someone, like an apple user and he would obviously attack Samsung so he can make things up so you would never believe word of mouth.*

**If you hear and believe any negative information about the brand, can you forgive it? Why if yes or no?**

*Yes, as I said you know if I believe that they have done something and wrong and that mistake is being correct, I can't imagine the brand doing something majorly wrong, they might just have a defect in their phone or something and that's why I would forgive because everyone makes a mistake.*

**If you believe the negative information but forgive the brand, then will you support the brand through positive WOM?**

*Yes, you would always support the brand, this is where your brand loyalty comes in and how well you know the brand, and I would definitely believe the word of mouth for the positive aspect of the brand because obviously, I would know the truth.*

**If you believe the negative information but forgive the brand, then will you support the brand and advocate (recommending) the brand against that negative information?**

*Yes, I would, obviously, the reason being is if they have made a mistake, I am sure that they would rectify it, you know once the wrong has been rectified, I don't see why not.*

**If you believe the negative information but forgive the brand, then will you support the brand and defend the brand against that negative information?**

*Yes, I would, I would try to take a positivity among others, and rather than focusing on the negatives, I would try to focus on the positives.*

**How will you defend the brand?**

*That's obviously depending on who I am speaking to, then you give what the brand has done and you compare it with other brands and see what they have achieved and obviously if they have made a mistake everyone makes mistakes, that can be forgiven as a consumer electronic brand they might have a product that's not that successful or something isn't right but again there is no sort of a way to go against the brand or demotivate the brand.*

**Will you disbelieve the negative information about the brand, and will provide positive WOM?**

*Oh yeah, so if someone says Samsung has done this and its proven to be wrong I would also go back and defend the brand in terms of where they are and in terms of technology they have managed to achieve, in terms of customers they have managed to attract and are affecting.*

**If you disbelieve the negative information then will you support the brand and advocate the brand against that negative information?**

*Yeah, so, if I disbelieve the negative information, then kind of increases your moral and support for your brand, because people always make allegations against the companies or people who are doing well so that really give you a reason to promote the brand more.*

**If you disbelieve the negative information, then will you support the brand and defend the brand against that negative information?**

*I would definitely defend and advocate the brand, and if the information turns out to be wrong then your love and affection for the brand increases even more then you would want to go out and defend the brand and that could via your personal means, could be speaking to your friends about it who make allegations, supporting their campaigns, e petition support or anything.*

**Ok now let's get to the other brand. Do you have a Passionate Desire to Use this brand?**

*Yes, so the way I am passionate about this brand is that obviously, it's a good quality, as well as it has a good brand image which is really compelling, when it comes to choosing a brand because whenever you choose a brand these are the few things you will look at, its quality and its brand name*

**How can you explain this feeling?**

*Well, it's like any other excitement feeling, whenever you are getting ready or going somewhere you want to look best and obviously, it will make you feel good for yourself when you use this brand.*

**Can you tell any certain experience regarding this feeling?**

*Yes, I mean one of the experience which I have had if I were to compare these Gucci with other sort of brand is that its fragrance is very strong so if you have used this product on yourself or skin and it will remain for such a long-lasting time and in terms of getting its fragrance its truly brilliant, the brand or the perfume you are wearing gives you that internal good factor wearing that brand or using that particular cosmetic brand.*

**Do you feel yourself willing to Invest Resources for the brand?**

**Like your time, money, how? please explain. (Paying a premium price, fuel, postage, discussing the brand)**

*Yes, I mean when we talk about resources, these resources would obviously be money, so I would definitely invest money in buying Gucci products such as perfume, shampoo, body gel, as well as any other products from Gucci.*

**Do you feel such feeling of love or attachment to this brand out of any past experience?**

*Well, again, one of the good factors or experience I have had with this brand is when you are going out, you want to look your best or dress the best, look good whenever you are going to a special occasion and I think that's always the key and I have used Gucci in the past and I have sat next to my seniors in the interviews and obviously the discussion turned around in terms of what sort of a perfume I was using and it was obviously Gucci so they really noticed the use of my product and that lead into a very good conversation in the end.*

**Is it because of any involvement of any close person with the brand?**

*Not particularly, to be honest with you, its these sorts of brands, which to tend to pick up, you have used different brands as well but having used Gucci, a number of times now that sort of turns into your choice now so because you would tend to go with the best one.*

**Is it because of any memories of kinship?**

*Yes of course, so the way I was introduced to this brand was that my brother used to use this brand Gucci and I had his cologne and I used it once and I was baffled by its quality, its fragrance and its strength and that lead me to love this brand.*

**Is it because of any memories of the childhood, or because of any other reason, please explain.**

*Well, it's not a, obviously, I have used this brand quite a while ago, when my brother had this brand and I used it but I always have been fond of it, there is no particular memory and in terms of using it I have been using it in the past and once you get addicted to it you won't leave it.*

**Do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your desired Self-Identity? Like you want to become someone or like someone, or want to adopt some style, some particular image...**

*Yes, so if we look at Gucci, it's a very expensive brand, you are obviously they are obviously into different market. What I like about this brand is that it has kept its reputation, of course the product is expensive but as well being expensive they have maintained their quality and its about the flagship products and that really represents the brand, so if you are using a Gucci product that will represent your class as well, and people will notice it immediately so that does add to it.*

**Do you feel that this brand represents or adds to your Current Self-Identity?**

*This brand of course, I myself is a fond of this brand, by using this brand its really an identity I would say, it's my sort of identity because what it represents its uniqueness as well as a status. This is what you are trying to achieve because you are trying to be unique from others as well as have a status in society so yes in a way it does.*

**Do you feel this brand as a part of yourself?**

*Oh yes, every morning you wake up, that's the thing you put on, you go home that's the last thing you use so it becomes a daily part of your life, so no matter how good the other brands are but if you have been using this brand for a long time and daily you will not like other fragrance apart from the one from Gucci.*

**Do you feel that this brand gives Meaning to your life in any way?**

*In terms of it gives you positivity, it gives you a positive attitude, it gives you self-confidence, if you look good, If you smell good, you will have a positive attitude, and have a positive energy, you will sit among people and have a chat so it does add value.*

**Why do you feel it?**

*Because whenever you are among people, you want to look the sharpest, the best, the one who smells best and hence using this product gives you that edge among the other products and that's my explanation as to why this brand adds meaning to my life compared to other brands.*

**Do you Frequently think about this brand in any way and if yes how often do you think about this brand and in relation to what?**

*Well, everyday of course, you actually wake-up, you have to go get ready for work and that's the first thing you will use, whether its shower gel or cologne, so every day I would say.*

**Do you feel this brand as an Intuitive Fit for you? Like some personal instinct or feel of emotional connection with the brand?**

*Yes, this brand gives me a positive attitude, a self-confidence and as well as a feel-good factor so these are the most important things for a person itself so if a brand can provide you that by just simply using their cologne than of course you will have some sort of an emotional connection with the brand.*

**How do you feel it?**

*Well, in terms of intuitive fitness, first thing we need to look at is why do people wear colognes, obviously, the main reason is they want to smell nice amongst other factors like their appearance*

as well as having to have some sort of self-confidence, if you feel good, you know you will do good and that's why I believe it's an intuitive fit for myself because it gives me that edge and it gives me that feel good factor because it gives me that emotional connection with the brand.

**Do you feel Emotional Attachment with this brand?**

Yes, I mean I just explained in terms of once the brand makes you feel good then yes you would be emotionally attached with the brand.

**Do you feel Affection with the brand?**

When you say affection I guess you mean soft views so as I mentioned previously the brand itself has gone to the point where their design is right up in the world class brands as well the product enhancement has been great so of course they are developing day by day so that will automatically increase your affection with the brand day by day.

**Do you think it is a wonderful brand?**

Of course, this brand is wonderful because it's of good quality as well good maintenance of the brand.

**Does it makes you feel good in any way?**

Yes of course, the feel-good factor is the first thing, self-confidence is another.

**Do you think that this brand is totally awesome?**

Yes, so this is the only brand which I currently use in terms of cosmetic products and you know you tend to get used to this brand and you will have this brand forever.

**Does this brand make you very happy by any means?**

Yes, so this brand itself it gives you that little extra edge, you feel good about yourself, you feel good around people and it makes you happy.

**Do you think if this brand is a pure delight?**

Yes, definitely it is a pure delight, a pleasure to use it and it's a sign for class.

**Do you feel that you are very attached to this brand?**

I am attached to the brand, as I said in terms of it makes you feel good, positive attitude coming from you, so you feel good about yourself.

**Do you have Long-Term Relationship with the brand? For how long have you been using this brand?**

So, this brand I have been using this for more than 6 years now.

**Do you intend to develop or sustain Long-Term Relationship with the brand?**

Yes, I am obviously looking at different products of this brand, and how or try to develop it from there as well.

**Do you feel distress when this brand is missing? Assume if... this brand or the product of this brand discontinues then what will happen? Will you feel distress on this separation... with the brand or product of that brand?**

Yes, the question would be raised as to why, and of course you would feel sad about it, if something has discontinued that you love.

**Are you passionate about this brand?**

Yes, I really am, I would promote this brand to everyone I know like my closed relatives and friends with passion.

**Do you feel that you love this brand?**

Again yes, if you have passion for something, if you are excited about the brand then you would also love the brand as well.

**If you think so or you feel love for this brand, do you think you know this brand?**

Indeed, I know this brand, I know the sort of markets they are in, the products they offer, and I am aware of the history of this brand, so yeah totally.



**If you believe that you know the brand, will you believe any negative information about the brand?**

*In terms of negative information, I will look into myself and not just believe word of mouth.*

**That means you trust the brand; do you trust this brand?**

*Yes, I completely trust the brand, obviously when you say trust the brand that's what something you tend to develop from the years of using the product.*

**So, if you trust the brand, will you refuse to believe the negative information about this brand?**

*If the information itself, as I said I will investigate the information, and then I will come to a conclusion, initially I will refuse to believe the negative information about this brand unless I know it's true.*

**If you believe the negative information, will you blame the brand, or will you stand by your brand?**

*Well, in that case, you would of course blame the brand because for example the blame is severe in terms of using the actual cologne itself has given a bad reaction to people's skin or they have been testing on animals or any sort of human emotions to it then yes you would be inclining towards blaming the brand. I would standby it if they have like sort of increased the prices or something like that then I would understand that but if it's sort of severe reaction to chemicals or something then I would definitely blame the brand. If it's something to do with your health I would blame the brand, otherwise I would stand by it in other words. Obviously, you know when it comes to health it's a serious matter and a company has a responsibility to look after its customers when they are releasing or showcasing these products.*

**Do you believe that this brand always fulfils the promises that it makes to its customers?**

*So, far obviously, this brand has fulfilled its promises, delivering the quality, the class so yeah it does.*

**Why do you think so?**

*Anyone who wears Gucci products or uses Gucci products, he will feel good and he will feel the effects it has on someone, he will not just feel internally, he will also feel its affects as well that's why.*

**Will you prefer this brand to others in future?**

*Oh, yes indeed, I definitely would prefer this brand from others.*

**Why?**

*Again, it comes down to the passion for the brand, so if you are passionate about something you would like to pass it on and let other people use it as well so yeah.*

**If you think so or you feel love for this brand, how will you behave or respond to any negative information about this brand? Like if any friend of yours criticises your loved brand, how will you react? Like, how will you behave or respond if you hear anything negative about this brand?**

*So, if the negative information is true, and its severely related to the health then you would tend to agree with your brand but if they are talking about other things, or wrong information about the brand or something, which is not severe then I would stand by the brand and try to defend it.*

**Will you keep quiet and ignore the information? OR Will you believe the negative information and will start providing negative WOM yourself as well?**

*I would obviously ignore the information, if it's not too severe, but if it's to do with the health then it obviously becomes a serious matter and I would provide negative word of mouth.*

**Will you straightaway believe that negative information (Word of Mouth)?**

*No I would investigate first, wait until I have facts, and then I would make a final decision.*

**If you hear and believe any negative information about the brand, can you forgive it? Why if yes or no?**

*Well, that really depends what the brand has done, if it's a health issue then no you can't forgive the brand because that's something really severe, and if it's something to do with price increase or economic reason that you would tend to forgive it, so it all depends on what the brand has done.*

**If you believe the negative information but forgive the brand, then will you support the brand through positive WOM?**

*Well, then it becomes tricky, if it becomes a health concern then you won't be a brand ambassador but if I forgive the brand then of course if you have forgiven someone then you would try to bring the relationship back and you know provide positive word of mouth.*

**What type of Advocacy you will generate? Will you recommend the brand?**

*Well, mainly recommend to friends and family or assisting people who are looking to buy cosmetic products and showing them why this brand is better.*

**If you believe the negative information but forgive the brand, then will you support the brand and defend the brand against that negative information? (If yes then ask 31.18)**

*Yes, I would do that, so if I decided to believe and forgive the brand then I would definitely choose to defend the negative information too, in terms of how to defend I would mainly highlight the positives and the quality and its class so yeah that's how I would defend by looking at its positives instead of negatives.*

**Will you disbelieve the negative information about the brand, and will provide positive WOM?**

*Yes, I will still because I don't believe in the information about the brand, I would continue to provide positive word of mouth.*

**What type of WOM you will generate?**

*So, that would be again moving back to what the brand adds, the quality, the quantity, the class and obviously if I disbelieve the information then I would ignore the information as well.*

**If you disbelieve the negative information, then will you support the brand and advocate the brand against that negative information? (If yes then ask 31.22)**

*Yes, I would, if I don't even believe the information then my mind is clear, and I would revert back to what I was doing previously which was showcasing the brand amongst other people.*

**What type of advocacy you will generate? Like to what extent will you advocate your brand, and recommend the brand?**

*Yes, you would talk about these brands on social media, recommend it to your friends and family and these sorts of advocacy, which I will do.*

**If you disbelieve the negative information, then will you support the brand and defend the brand against that negative information? (If yes then ask 33.1)**

*Yes, I would support the brand and defend against the negative information, because obviously, I don't believe the information and accordingly to me its incorrect.*

**Ok now it is done thank you for your patience and time, and once more, please feel free to ask if you have any concerns or questions about the interview.**

## Summarised Transcripts Post-Survey Interviews

| Table A.1                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Summarised Transcripts Post-Survey Interviewees - Cosmetics                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| Responses to Relationship Specific Questions and Brand-Favourable WOM Behaviour            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| Passionate Desire to use the brand                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                  | I do, yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                  | I am passionate about this brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                  | Yes. Passionate to use it most importantly.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                  | So, I do have a passionate desire to use lipsticks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                  | Yes, passionate, most definitely, I use this cream on a daily basis, I have been using this for a long time.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                  | Yes, I do                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                  | Yes, I do... I think is designed around an emotional attachment towards brand and the emotions comes from the same feeling, connectivity, longevity of use and familiarity...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                  | Yes... Every time I go to purchase the cosmetics, I first check the L'Oréal content and the new product lines they have launched and everything because I like to keep up to date with the new products that L'Oréal is launching.                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                  | Yes, well I have been using it for years and years and it's reliable and it's easy to use.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                 | Yes... I am passionate about this brand... it's a good quality, as well as, it has a good brand image, which is really compelling when it comes to choosing a brand... it's quality and it's brand name.                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| Willingness to invest resources (Time, money, paying a premium price, fuel, postage, etc.) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                  | No, not so much... I love it but I would go to the shop and buy it, I wouldn't bother ordering, waiting for it come and all of that I wouldn't bother doing.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                  | I know it's reliable and it works well and it's proven to me that it's probably the best brand for me, and my particular skin type, so I would invest time and effort into this                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                  | Yes, definitely.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                  | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                  | Most definitely, I think I would be willing to invest my time, I can remember the time when I couldn't find the product in one of the stores, from then on, I had to go to a different store and I was more than happy to do that.                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                  | Yes, I would and yes, I have, I have purchased things online and sometimes the postage and delivery can be a little bit more but I tend to go the extra mile.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                  | Yes, I mean again it's the thing about getting what you want, and if Gillette is something that I want then I would go the extra mile, would pay the extra price and do what it takes to get those products so for example if they weren't available in a store near me, they are available further down, I would make that extra journey, that counts in terms of time and price and fuel and all those things. |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                  | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                  | Yes, it's a cosmetic brand so yeah, it's grooming my appearance, and If I had to invest my time to buy, I would and money, as well.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                 | Yes, I mean when we talk about resources, these resources would obviously be money, so I would definitely invest money in buying Gucci products such as perfume, shampoo, body gel, as well as any other products from Gucci.                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| Kinship and/or childhood associations or memories                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                  | Yes, it's that family thing that grandma uses it, mum uses it, and I use it now, so I am like grownup with...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                  | No.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                  | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                  | Yes, my mother uses them, my sister uses them, all my friends use them, so there is a bond with this brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                  | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                  | Yes, the brand it'self was recommended to me, it wasn't as if I went and tried different products so bearing that in mind, I have this attachment to it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                  | ...I saw male elders in my family using Gillette and preferring it, again I grew up in a place where options were severely limited compared to now days, it's not just the place I grew up in, it's to do with the era, It was the 80s... since those days, I have known Gillette to be the leader in the market for certain products.                                                                           |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                  | I think the first eye lines I ever used was by L'Oréal so that's why                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                  | Yes, my brother, used to have this gel, and I saw him using the brand... then I got close to this brand, through my brother.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                 | Yes of course, so the way I was introduced to this brand was that my brother used to use this brand Gucci and I had his cologne and I used it once and I was baffled by its quality, it's fragrance and its strength, and that lead me to love this brand.                                                                                                                                                       |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
| Self-Brand Integration                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                          |
|                                                                                            | Desired or Current Self-Identity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Feeling the brand as a part of yourself                      | Gives meaning to your life                                                                                                                                            | Frequently thinking about the brand                                      |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                  | Yes, like my grandma used it, my mum used it so if I use it I feel like now I am a grown up, you know doing the same thing they did so that kind of thing so it does add to my self-identity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Every day I am using this brand so naturally it's part of me | No, just because I use other make up products as well like this is not just the centre of my make-up regime, unlike Apple which is the centre of all my tech routine. | Yes, every day, every day I am using this brand... it's there every day. |

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| <b>PST-Int-2</b>  | ...There is an emotional connection now with my make up because it forms a part of my identity...                                                                                                                                                                    | I could say it has become a part of me...                                                                                                                                                            | I had used this product in major life events, like my graduation, my engagement... I have used it... happy moment with this particular eyeliner... so yeah in a strange way it probably has given me some sort of meaning to my life.                                                                                                                   | I don't think about it quite often if I'm honest... but often when I'm running out.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>  | Definitely, I think the way it makes your hair feel, and the look it brings out, it definitely adds to my desired identity.                                                                                                                                          | Yes, it is. Without it I would be a different person, I would even look different.                                                                                                                   | Meaning to my life? In what sense sorry? It brings meaning to my life because it represents my style, my looks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Yes, I think every day, in the morning, especially if it's about to run out, that I think about it the most.                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>  | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                  | In a way                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yeah like... I do think about the shades of lipsticks that would match my outfit so when I go out shopping, I do kind of check them at counter... I would say once or twice a week on an average I think about it.                                                       |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>  | Most definitely, it gives me confidence, it gives me pleasure, and it gives me a sense of peace.                                                                                                                                                                     | I would have to say to that as well, as I have said I use this brand on a daily basis, and this is something this brand is a part of my daily routine, it is a part of me, I wouldn't go without it. | Most definitely, meaning of life, it's what one does on a daily basis, wouldn't miss out for anything else, feels incomplete without and this product is something that would be part of my life.                                                                                                                                                       | Well there was a time when I had to remind myself to apply the cream, to make it a regular use, but now it is a second nature.                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>  | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Yes, it is a part of myself because it's something that I use on a daily basis and it's reliable and it's always there.                                                                              | I would say due to quality of the products it adds meaning and happiness in my life.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Yes, but only when I have to go and buy more product then I know what to get but otherwise I don't think about it on a daily basis.                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>  | Yes, I think it does add to it, secondly the brand is advertised in a way where the people shown using it are someone I find myself to be now and want myself to be in the future as well so I think their target market is a segment of the population which I fit. | Yes... Because I use it every day, it's a regular part of my life... so using this product since it's embedded into my daily routine, it's part of my life.                                          | Yes, I think it does, because of the quality it brings... the satisfaction... but it's a very limited role in my routine, be it a cologne or a deodorant or shaving cream or a shaving razor, they have all the things to do for me, but since they do it in such a good way, I think they add meaning to my life for those things that it involves in. | I don't know about frequently but again I think about it when it's necessary to think about it again, when I go to buy it, if I see it out or about in the world or an advertisement or in a shop window, so daily almost or maybe several times a day I think about it. |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>  | Yes, I mean when I use products by L'Oréal, I feel confident.                                                                                                                                                                                                        | To some extent, yes.                                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Not frequently when I need to use the product...                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>  | Yeah, it does represent my current self-identity.                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | I have been using it for many years now... going to school, going to college and then university. So, it's a brand that I use every day... it is a very important part of my life.                   | It certainly does have a meaning in my life.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Yes... talking to my friends and if they are talking about cosmetic brands, so yeah, I automatically think about this particular brand...                                                                                                                                |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b> | Yes... if you are using a Gucci product that will represent your                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Oh yes, every morning you wake up, that's the thing you                                                                                                                                              | In terms of it gives you positivity, it gives you a positive                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Well, every day of course, you actually wake up, you have to go                                                                                                                                                                                                          |

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|                        | class as well, and people will notice it immediately so that does add to it... what it represents is uniqueness as well as a status... so yes in a way it does. | put on, you go home that's the last thing you use, so it becomes a daily part of your life, so no matter how good the other brands are but if you have been using this brand for a long time and daily you will not like other fragrance... | attitude, it gives you self-confidence, if you look good, if you smell good, you will have a positive attitude, and have a positive energy, you will sit among people and have a chat, so it does add value. | get ready for work and that's the first thing you will use, whether it's shower gel or cologne...                    |                                                                                                         |
| Declaration of Love    |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                         |
| Brand Specific Stimuli |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                         |
|                        | Wonderful brand                                                                                                                                                 | Makes you feel good                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Totally awesome                                                                                                                                                                                              | Makes you very happy                                                                                                 | Pure delight                                                                                            |
| PST-Int-1              | Definitely                                                                                                                                                      | Good quality brand that's not too expensive so yes definitely.                                                                                                                                                                              | Not totally awesome but pretty amazing                                                                                                                                                                       | Yes, because the quality is good, the make-up comes out looking good, I feel good about it so yeah definitely        | Yes, pretty good, Value for money and it makes you look good...                                         |
| PST-Int-2              | Definitely so wonderful                                                                                                                                         | Anything that make other people give you compliment and anything that helps you boost your self-esteem... it makes me feel good                                                                                                             | It's easy to use and anyone can use it so it is awesome                                                                                                                                                      | It always makes me happy because it's so simple and I don't have to do much to make myself feel good about myself... | Pure Delight, it produces the physical desired effect and it makes me feel happy,                       |
| PST-Int-3              | Yes                                                                                                                                                             | when I am using it, it makes me feel good...                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                          | it makes feel comfortable, it makes me feel happy. What more could I want from this brand!                           | It definitely is a pure delight                                                                         |
| PST-Int-4              | Definitely                                                                                                                                                      | Yes, I feel really good, I feel confident, I know that they're not going to smudge easily, stay very long ... so I don't have to worry about re-applying them... definitely good quality and not extremely expensive...                     | Absolutely awesome                                                                                                                                                                                           | yes, it does when I apply MAC lipstick, it gives me a feeling of self-fulfilment and satisfaction yes.               | An absolute delight                                                                                     |
| PST-Int-5              | I personally think this is the most wonderful brand I know.                                                                                                     | Well yeah, it most definitely makes me feel good, as I have said once I have applied it. It is literally completing my daily routine, it satisfies my skin to how I want it to feel.                                                        | Most definitely                                                                                                                                                                                              | Yes of course                                                                                                        | Yes, I think most delightful for me personally, it is a delight every day, it has been, and it will be. |
| PST-Int-6              | Yes                                                                                                                                                             | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Yes                                                                                                                  | Yes                                                                                                     |
| PST-Int-7              | Yes... Because of the services and products, it offers and the quality of the products and the affordability, availability everything!                          | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Yes, it is totally awesome                                                                                                                                                                                   | Yes                                                                                                                  | It is a delight in a way, because of the happiness it gives me, the happiness comes out of the good     |

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|                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   | quality it gives to your life,                                                         |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                    | Yes...<br>Because they cater to a lot of different kind of customers, I mean... the fairest skin tone to the darkest, they have different products for different skin types, different skin tones...                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Yes, when I can find the perfect fit for me then it makes me feel good.              | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes                                                                                                                                               | Yes, products are yes                                                                  |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                    | Yes... reliable... last 24 hours                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Obviously, when I use it.                                                            | Yes, it's a reliable brand.                                                                                                                                         | When I use It, it does make me happy                                                                                                              | Yes                                                                                    |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                   | Of course                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Yes, of course, the feel-good factor is the first thing, self-confidence is another. | Yes... is the only brand, which I currently use in terms of cosmetic products and you know you tend to get used to this brand and you will have this brand forever. | Yes, so this brand it'self it gives you that little extra edge, you feel good about yourself, you feel good around people and it makes you happy. | Yes, definitely, it is a pure delight, a pleasure to use it and it's a sign for class. |
| Relationship Duration                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
|                                                                                              | Long-Term relationship                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                      | Intention to develop a long-term relationship                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                    | I have been using it for so long I have a personal attachment to it...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                    | I have, ten years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                    | Yes, for about 6-7 years now.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                      | Yes, I wouldn't change my hair gel regardless.                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                    | 14 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                      | Yes, I tend to stick around, If I like something and it works for me, it delivers what it promises then obviously, I stick by that brand.                           |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                    | Yes, I have been using this cream for over 11 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                    | Yes, 5 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                    | Yes... when I was exposed to the brand... about 17 years, and in terms of me purchasing the brand and using it for myself...10 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                    | Yes, 7-8 Years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                    | Yes, 10-11 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                   | Yes, over 6 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                      | Yes                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| Feeling of distress on separation (when the brand is missing or assuming if it discontinues) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                    | No, because I know that there are a lot of other options that I do have unlike which is the only tech brand I use, here I do have other options so no I don't.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                    | I would feel some degree of distress actually because I haven't found anything worthwhile using and to have lost something that I am so used to for the last ten years, it will be distressing almost like I have lost a part of myself... but I can see myself recovering because I am sure... I would find something to replace it... I would eventually get over it.                                                        |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                    | ...If I don't use it for a day, I miss that gel and it's just an uncomfortable feeling overall, so if it was gone completely, I would definitely feel distress.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                    | I would be upset about it I would be highly I would be highly disappointed                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                    | Yes, definitely, at this precise time I have 5 creams, which I have in different places and before I run out of one, I go and purchase one when its half way making sure that I have enough supply on a daily basis.                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                    | Yes, I would, it's this self-reliance, I would have to do my own research again, and try different things and I am not the sort of person that likes trying different things, I like sticking to one.                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                    | Yes... when something is there in your life, for quite a while, it becomes a part of your routine and part of your habit, and that thing is not there, then I will find myself in an unknown ground, unknown territory and I wouldn't know what to do in that case because this particular brand has always fulfilled that role, so now I would need to worry about replacing that brand. So yeah that would distress me yeah. |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                    | I would, as I have previously mentioned that they are a lot of products that I use that are by L'Oréal so if the brand just discontinues, I would be confused as to which other products I can substitute for L'Oréal and that's going to be a really hard thing to do.                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                    | Yes... when I had to use a different gel, it was really difficult for me... I had to reapply again and again to firmly hold the hair...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                   | Yes, the question would be raised as to why, and of course you would feel sad about it, if something has discontinued that you love.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| Positive Emotional Connection, Brand Attachment, Affection, Passion, Love                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                    | I love it... feel attached... So, like I said its kind of more than the brand, it's the experiences you have with the brand, that kind of trigger that happy memory.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                        |

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| <b>PST-Int-2</b>                                          | I do love the brand... very attached... feel affection...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>                                          | Emotionally as well as physically. Physically because it's a cosmetic product, I don't look the same if I don't use this product.... Love it                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>                                          | Great attachment to it, love it                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>                                          | I love it                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>                                          | Love the product                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>                                          | Feel attached... (Love the brand) Yes, as far as, any human can love a brand, yes I do.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>                                          | Love the brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>                                          | Have an emotional attachment... have affection... love it                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>                                         | Feel attached, excited, affection, love.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Brand Trust</b>                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-1</b>                                          | ...So, if you grow up with the brand, you kind of trust it more... Mostly but not every time so a lot of time... the reason I am less likely to believe negativity for Apple is because a lot of people say it out of jealousy, while Lakme is like a normal consumer-brand so it could be that negative things are true... I would want to find out myself before I believe anything positive or negative.                                                                                                                         |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b>                                          | ...I trust it and because I have seen how it has been for the past ten years, I would find it difficult to believe the negative information... I wouldn't immediately believe it, I would probably have to research it before I believe the negativity, I think it has to do with a lot with what the negative information is.                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>                                          | Yes, definitely, I trust this brand... Refuse to believe every negative information not as such. Majority of it yes, I would refuse to believe the majority of it, unless and until it's happened to me.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>                                          | Yes... Because in the past I've never been disappointed.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>                                          | I most definitely trust it... I wouldn't believe any negative criticism at first hand... I would stand by it because have many years of experience and I am completely satisfied with the brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>                                          | I do... (believe in negative-WOM) not straight away... I would stand by the brand. It's very reliable, it's long lasting, and that's the number 1 thing for women, you don't want to be re doing your make up again throughout the day so it's reliable.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>                                          | Yes... it has never given me a cause to complaint or any concerns, it's always like that saying it does what it says on the tin so I think it's done that pretty well so far.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>                                          | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>                                          | Yes... (negative-WOM) unless it's coming from a reliable source like news channel or the company it's self.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>                                         | Yes, I completely trust the brand, obviously when you say trust the brand that's what something you tend to develop from the years of using the product... If the information it's self, as I said I will investigate the information and then I will come to a conclusion, initially I will refuse to believe the negative information about this brand unless I know it's true.                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Brand Loyalty (Repurchase intentions)</b>              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-1</b>                                          | Depends what the negative information is, if the negative information is that they are doing animal testing or have been using bad chemicals, then no I wouldn't, I would simply stop because it's going to damage my skin so I will stop there, but if it's the negative information like they haven't paid their workers or something like that, something that directly doesn't affect me I might still continue with the brand but something like which could compromise on my health or skin I would definitely stop using it. |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b>                                          | Yes, definitely. I always choose this. In fact, I have got the three of the same Rimmel things because I love it so much and I don't want to ever be without it so I am looking to, when my other one runs out I will make sure I go and get another one, and I would only go for Rimmel...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>                                          | I wouldn't change my hair gel regardless.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>                                          | I highly doubt it if it's not extremely negative like completely out of the contact like it being completely harmful otherwise, I would stay quite even if there is minor negativity about the brand I would stick up for it but if it's something harmful then yes, I would rethink my brand loyalty                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>                                          | I will always use it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>                                          | Yes, it's just satisfying                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>                                          | Yes, I would, I still prefer it to other brands at present as well and will do in the future because I have used it for quite a while, I know the brand, I know what it does, I don't have any reason to look for any other.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>                                          | Yes, it has taken a long time for me to know which product is right for me, and it's not an easy thing to do so, I think I am going to stick with L'Oréal.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>                                          | Of course.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>                                         | Oh, yes indeed, I definitely would prefer this brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Brand Forgiveness (Inclination to forgive a brand)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-1</b>                                          | Yes, I do... (Depends on the negative-WOM if it is not harmful, and If the brand promise not to do again.)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b>                                          | Yes, obviously, it has given me so much in the past ten years... until I was really desperately heart broken and I felt like this brand has betrayed me...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>                                          | ... if they make a mistake, I would stand by them, but it depends on the type of mistake they make.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>                                          | I would stand by it I would definitely stand by it but if it's the negativity on a very extreme something that I find out exactly true then I might rethink but if it come around then I will promote the positivity of brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>                                          | Well, if it was just something that coming from a source that didn't have enough information or full facts of the products, I would certainly have to ignore those criticisms however if the sources in fact were valid, I would have to do further research before I would make a decision. I would have to                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |

|                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
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|                                                                                                                                        | consider the fact of a long-term relationship and all the positive experiences that I have had, before I can make any decisions... depends on as I have said where the information is coming from.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                              | Yes, because I have strong belonging to the brand, well it depends really what the person might say. If it lacks its main qualities and the image, or maybe the way it looks on me, if there is a fault in that that would bother me, otherwise I would forgive it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                              | Yes, I think I can forgive it, it just comes from the brand for so long, you just don't hear anything negative about a family member and then disown them, I mean it's a similar thing towards a brand that you have used for so long, I would hear it, I would be willing to forgive the brand, if it has caused some offence or injury to me even, I would expect them to correct what they have done wrong.                                                                                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                              | Yes, I think so. If they have come up with the solutions for that negative information, then yes and I would choose to forgive it because they might have made up for it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                                                              | Of course, I can't remember the last time that they did something bad... I will forgive them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                                                             | Well, that really depends what the brand has done, if it's a health issue then no you can't forgive the brand because that's something really severe, and if it's something to do with price increase or economic reason that you would tend to forgive it, so it all depends on what the brand has done.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>WOM Attributions towards Loved Brands in the negative-WOM scenario (Response to any negative information about the loved brand)</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Positive-Word-of-Mouth</b>                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                                                              | Yes, I already do, I tell a lot of people about Lakme.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                                                              | Possibly yes. (advocate and defend)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                                                              | Yes, I would and that's exactly what I did... 3 years ago when this issue happened, that people found out that this brand was misleading them... I supported it and I said that I have done my research, and this is what I have found out, it is not extremely unhealthy, your gel is using exactly the same products as Garnier, so why are you talking negatively about it.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                                                              | Yes, I would I would still continue standing up for it and I will still advocate the brand definitely...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                                                              | Most definitely, as I have said, the only experience I have had of this brand are positives, the only word-of-mouth would be the positive one.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                              | I would probably use positive word-of-mouth.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                              | I imagine I would react by highlighting the positive aspects of the brand that I have experienced personally so in a way I would be defending the brand I guess.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                              | Yes, have a logical debate.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                                                              | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                                                             | Well then it becomes tricky, if it becomes a health concern then you won't be a brand ambassador but if I forgive the brand then of course if you have forgiven someone then you would try to bring the relationship back and you provide positive word-of-mouth.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Brand Advocacy</b>                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                                                              | Recommending it, giving its positives, out weighing it's positives vs the negatives, price range, quality and the range of products so these type of things. (conditional)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                                                              | Do try to persuade them to buy it themselves, I would advocate it more than I would have done...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                                                              | I would advocate it as much as I can.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                                                              | Yes, definitely... advocate it and recommend it to anyone and everyone yes...if it's not something harmful, the negativity is something that would cause harm to myself or to others than yes there is no reason why I wouldn't support it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                                                              | I would most certainly still stand by the brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                              | All of it really, I would speak about my experiences about the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                              | Yes, I would, I would take the brands side in an argument, bring up it's good points, positive points and that counts as advocacy... recommend the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                              | I would tell my friends and family that what they were saying before is now wrong and L'Oréal has made up for it and now, they can go and keep using the brand again.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                                                              | Yes, through social media, through friends and family.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                                                             | Well, mainly recommend to friends and family or assisting people who are looking to buy cosmetic products and showing them why this brand is better. (conditional)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Brand Defence</b>                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                                                              | I would argue back and defend the positives of the brand. (conditional)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                                                              | I would be defensive, I try to get them to give their reasons to why they think it's negative, and I will try to possibly convince them that what the information they are reading might not be accurate, and would push them to reconsider that the claims they make at the first instance, but in the background, I would probably try to do my own research... my initially gut reaction would to kind of defend it. I would try to defend it as much as I can and try to almost make the other people believe that maybe the negative aspect is not 100% correct. |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                                                              | Yes... The difference is I wouldn't have defended this brand 3 years ago if I found out that the chemicals, they were using in the gel were very different to every other hair gel company and secondly that it was harming my hair.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                                                              | I would be confident in defending it because I've been using it for so long.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                                                              | Well it would only depend on what kind of negative information I would receive. If it is something to do with the ingredients of the products, I would get in touch with the manufacturers, I would have to get more facts, and I would do everything possible to defend this brand, as I have said the only experience that I have had is the best and the good one.                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                              | Yes... a bit of everything really, I would criticise other brands who have made the same mistake and embrace my brand. I would just talk about it, do my research on it, try to convince them and persuade them about it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                              | I would still defend the brand like brands do make mistakes, it's okay for them to make mistakes, as long as they take steps to remedy the situation.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                              | I would be a bit careful defending them again but yes, I think I would defend it but I will have to do my                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |



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|                                                                                                                                                                          | research before that.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>                                                                                                                                                         | Yes... I will defend the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>                                                                                                                                                        | Yes... I would do that, so if I decided to believe and forgive the brand then I would definitely choose to defend the negative information too, in terms of how to defend I would mainly highlight the positives and the quality and it's class, so yeah that's how I would defend by looking at it's positives instead of negatives. |
| <b>Note:</b> <i>PST-Int refers to post-survey interviewee and the corresponding number depicts the sequential number of the interviews, when he/she was interviewed.</i> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |

| Table A.2                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
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| Summarised Transcripts Post-Survey Interviewees – Consumer-Electronics Responses to Relationship Specific Questions and Brand-Favourable WOM Behaviour |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
| Passionate Desire to use the brand                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                                                                              | Yeah, because like from the time I used my first phone, it was always an apple. My first official laptop was a MAC                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                                                                              | Yes, definitely 100 percent... I am passionate to continue using iPhone...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                                                                              | passionate about the product... passionate about its features... definitely a lot of Passion.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                                                                              | I already have it, so the desire is not there anymore... but the desire to continue using it is there ... I feel quite helpless and sort of crippled when I don't have my phone                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                                                                              | Yes, apple iPhone I wouldn't use anything else                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                                              | Yes, I do. I have always used Samsung... whenever I think about buying something electronic... Samsung would be the first thing I would look at and see if they have the right product for me rather than looking at any other brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                                              | Yes, I do, I would use it again and again and again.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                                              | Yes, Well, I use Samsung... as my smart phone so it's a part of my life, I have a desire to use... because they are quite good.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                                                                              | I have been using it since childhood... it's in the household for so long... the counsel I used to play is Sony, the camera I use is Sony, the phone I use is Sony, the TV I watch is Sony. So, yeah, I have a passionate feeling about this brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                                                                             | Yes definitely... if I don't use my phone which is Samsung or don't watch TV which is also Samsung, I would feel completely lost... you have been so used to using these, you have been around them for so long and seen them develop just like you have, you really kind of feel them as part of your daily life, if it's something is a part... then you would obviously have passion towards it                                                                                                                          |                                         |                            |                                     |
| Willingness to invest resources (Time, money, paying a premium price, fuel, postage, etc.)                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                                                                              | Yes, I mean I know it's highly overpriced compared to others... When Apple originally came out, there was no other phone like it... Now there are so many competitors especially Samsung has gone very close... providing you even more stuff... there is the big draw back that apple products are ridiculously priced and they don't ever lower their prices... but at the same time I am biased towards them so I would probably invest in them.                                                                         |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                                                                              | ... I would spend extra time and effort and money...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                                                                              | Oh yes, most definitely. I mean everyone knows that iPhone is one of the best phones in the market at the moment... it's an expensive phone, it hasn't bothered me that I have to pay £10 or £15 per month extra to get an iPhone compared for example if I was to get a Samsung or HTC because I feel that it's worth it for me...                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                                                                              | Yes, if I have to yeah why not...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                                                                              | Well, at present I am actually, and have invested money in my phone and I will keep doing so.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                                              | Yes, I would, I would recommend it definitely, if anyone is even thinking about purchasing this brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                                              | Yes, I would... even if it is slightly more expensive than any other product or brand... I rather pay a little extra to get this so yes, I guess I would.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                                              | Yes, I do.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                                                                              | Yes, obviously... I can't imagine my life without it. So yeah, I will be willing to do that.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                                                                             | Oh yes, regularly, I think I am the brand ambassador in my family for Samsung.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                         |                            |                                     |
| Kinship and/or childhood associations or memories                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                                                                              | My dad got it for me because I had done so well in my GCSEs, so it's a good memory that has been attached with it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                                                                              | Yes, it does come from the fact that my oldest brother he started up using the iPhone... my older brother continuing to use that brand it kind of almost becomes necessary for me to continue using it...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                                                                              | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                                                                              | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                                                                              | Well yes, I would say yes that, one of my very close friends actually introduced the iPhone to me, I personally was more of a Sony guy when it came to phones but when the iPhone was launched, it was actually introduced to me and It was just love at first sight.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                                                                              | I would say childhood as well, because you see your parents buying these things, it's something that you see from a very young age in the house, different products in the house most of them Samsung, it does stay in your memory.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                                                                              | ... they do television and game consoles and so much more, so my first experience for Sony was back in my childhood days, when they came out with a gaming console, it was called the Sega Mega drive, and that was the first console it was gifted to me in my childhood by my father so my brothers and I used to play it all the time and that was the first contact I had with Sony and I have been using it since... my father, my brother, my family they all used the same brand and I have known it since childhood |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                                                                              | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                                                                              | Yes, my brother had a Sony camera... I used to take his camera to my school... yeah, it has an attachment because of that close person, because I think he was the first to introduce me to Sony, that it's a brand, because I used to watch cartoons on the TV, but I didn't know the brand but yeah as I grew older, my family like my brother as I said introduced me to this brand...                                                                                                                                   |                                         |                            |                                     |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                                                                             | Not particularly... we had people in the past using this brand, so my dad used Samsung and my brother also used Samsung products, it's sort of a generation using their products, so when you get your hand on it you feel that attachment, but it's not sort of a kinship or relationship but it's part of it... it's just the brand overall and the value for money that they offer.                                                                                                                                      |                                         |                            |                                     |
| Self-Brand Integration                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                         |                            |                                     |
|                                                                                                                                                        | Desired or Current Self-Identity                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Feeling the brand as a part of yourself | Gives meaning to your life | Frequently thinking about the brand |

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
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| <b>PST-Int-1</b> | Yes, well just because in today's world, Prada is like the fashion retail brand. Apple is like a fashion tech brand, so you feel good holding an apple product.                                                                                                                   | Yes, just because I wake up and the first thing, I do is check my phone, I go to the university and the first thing I do is open my laptop so even if it wasn't, it's just there as part of my life every day.          | Yeah, I mean I have a very travelling lifestyle...When I am travelling alone, the long travels are very boring until now... Having a MacBook... I can take it around with me everywhere.                                                                                                                                              | Yes, in general like you always anticipating what apple is going to come out with next... Apple is all around you, everywhere you go you see apple products, My friends own apple products, my family owns apple products, and you see it around you so you do keep thinking about it.                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b> | I do think potentially I could identify with it as a part of me...                                                                                                                                                                                                                | ... I'm a freak anything about the brand it's just part of myself...                                                                                                                                                    | Yes... I have very meaning of my life, keeping up-to-date with my family, being close to my friends, obviously, a lot of my life is my job so it allows me the ability to keep up-to-date with my friends and it allows me to access information for my job, so in a way it does fulfill a part of the purpose in my life in my head. | ...I won't say it plays a major part in my daily thoughts.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b> | I can relate to my iPhone... it represents myself                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes, most definitely. I think I would be incomplete without my iPhone.                                                                                                                                                  | Meaning in what sense... just for keeping up the relationships with friends and family.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | If I see another phone I would think about apple and how my phone is better than theirs straight away.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b> | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Yes, it fulfils my desire to take photographs, it helps stay organised, it keeps me up to date and in touch with my family and friends and yeah, all the important thing in my life sort of converged into this phone.                                                                                                                | I wouldn't say I think frequently about the brand but yes, I do because I have it with me most of the time, I do appreciate it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b> | Most definitely... as you need to portray yourself as someone who is able to deliver... I love the way it looks, it represents me, and how I want to be seen as a person, in touch with the technology with the best-looking phone, and the best design, the best software.       | Yes, as I have said, I would be completely lost without it, it is something that I carry all the time, I don't want to leave the house without it, it is a part of me the way that it carries everything that I need.   | Yes, in a way it would do, meaning, yes, when I am out and about even if I am at home, it is something that I can rely on...                                                                                                                                                                                                          | I think about it, when I need to communicate, when I need to use it and mostly it's by my side.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b> | No, I wouldn't say that.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Yes, it does.                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | No                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b> | Yes... there is a certain maturity about Sony, as far as technology goes, it does compete with the best I mean Sony TVs, electronics everything is top of the range... I am looking for a right word... along the lines of maturity, gentleness, subtlety, it's not too flashy... | Yes, I think I do, because, as long as I will have electronics, they will be Sony, I am not saying all of them will be but as much as I can get from Sony, will be Sony products so they will be a part of my life yes. | In terms of value or enriching my life, yes, they would, it would, because again it's the quality that the brand gives, so if you have a higher quality, quality of life is what everyone looks for so if they are increasing or adding to my quality to my life then yes, they do add meaning to it.                                 | I don't know whether it's frequently... mostly If I think about it it would be in comparison to the other products, it would be in terms of the other brands providing similar products as Sony... everywhere, when I do look at them and I see their price and look at the performance specs that they give, then I would think of my products |

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|------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                        |                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | that I have from Sony and I would compare them...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                     |
| PST-Int-8              | To some extent...I think it kind of sets me apart from other people because some people are using one particular brand, which just has one version of it... | Not really, kind of, it's not that extreme                                                                                                                                               | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | I don't think about the brand that frequently, maybe when they are announcing their new products then... but that's probably it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                     |
| PST-Int-9              | Yes, it does, Sony is a creative company... it is a stylish company... yes it does represent myself identity.                                               | Well, as I said, it has a connection and it's coming from the family so yeah it is a big part of my life.                                                                                | Yes, of course it does, without this brand I can't imagine my life.                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Yes I do think about this brand when I am talking to my friends and like my family members and If I wanted to refer them to a particular brand, I would think about Sony and funny thing is when my friend wanted to buy a brand so yeah I referred him to buy a Sony phone. So yeah, I frequently think about this brand, whenever someone needs an advice on electronic brand. |                                                                     |
| PST-Int-10             | Yes, to some extent.                                                                                                                                        | Oh yes, definitely.                                                                                                                                                                      | Yes... In terms of example, how to improve yourself, and I think this is what we want to do in life, how to progress, develop and see where I was sort of or my flaws are and take the initiative to achieve it and that's what Samsung does and this is what I am trying to do now. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                     |
| Declaration of Love    |                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                     |
| Brand Specific Stimuli |                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                     |
|                        | Wonderful brand                                                                                                                                             | Makes you feel good                                                                                                                                                                      | Totally awesome                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Makes you very happy                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Pure delight                                                        |
| PST-Int-1              | It's a wonderful brand is because this is the first time someone has taken a technological company and made it into a fashion icon.                         | Yes, because it's the same thing as when you hold a Gucci bag you feel good, you hold an apple product you actually feel good                                                            | not totally awesome but the way they have changed the technological market is phenomenal.                                                                                                                                                                                            | Yes, quite often. Just because it's easier to use, it crashes lesser, it looks good, there are a lot of things around it                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Yes, it's pretty good. It's pretty amazing feeling.                 |
| PST-Int-2              | Definitely                                                                                                                                                  | Definitely makes me feel good about myself... it does give me that boost of self-esteem at some point when I feel like it's done a good job and help to meet in some way through the day | It's totally awesome                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Yes, it makes my very happy...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | I wouldn't use those words to describe it to be honest no.          |
| PST-Int-3              | It's wonderful                                                                                                                                              | Yes, definitely. Mainly because I have been swapping phones quite a lot, since I                                                                                                         | By far a totally awesome brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Yes, especially talking about it...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Yes definitely... Delight to use, delight to talk about, delight to |

|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | have been using iPhone it makes me feel good because every time you touch it you know you are using a quality product.                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                               | advocate, delight to have...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b> | I like the fact that it looks classy, it's beige and golden... it goes with my personality...                                                                                                                             | Yes, it does, I feel very confident... feel secure... in control of everything... because I have got so much of my important things stored in it...                                                         | Absolutely awesome                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes... it does make me very happy because the interface is absolutely fantastic. The look and the outside appearance are very very sleek, modern and classic.                                                 | An absolute delight                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b> | the most wonderful brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | it makes me feel good and proud.                                                                                                                                                                            | Completely awesome, I have not seen a better design in the market, it delivers beautifully, it's smooth, it is sleek.                                                                                                             | Yes, it couldn't make me any happier, as I have the best product in the market; nothing else compares to it and it makes you feel the best.                                                                   | Definitely                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b> | Yes, it is.                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Yes, it does                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | It does                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b> | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Yes, it does make me feel good, I would say, because it provides such good service, as it fulfills its purpose fully, so that results in making me feel good about the purchase, or my faith in that brand. | Yes... I have known people who own other brands, and they do sometimes complain about... I always find myself being happy or thankful that I don't face similar problems with my brand, so I would say yes, it's totally awesome. | I it does make me feel happy, it doesn't give me a reason to be sad or angry or upset, so it makes me happy. I am thankful that I don't have to worry about the brand or the products I have from that brand. | I don't think I have thought of it in those terms, if pure delight relates to the brand being awesome and giving me happiness then yes, it's a pure delight and for the same reason of it being good to me, being good value for money, good performance, good service, similar things. |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b> | Because when they launch their new products and everything, they are quite unique and they sometimes offer some features that other brands don't, so they are kind of like ahead of the game as compared to other brands. | It makes me feel good when other people like the same brand. It kinds of gives me satisfaction that okay, it's not just me who likes that brand for this particular feature, it's other people as well.     | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | I have taken a lot of shots of my friends for their products so maybe just the memories that I have made through that brand make me feel happy.                                                               | Yes... it offers, different products for different people... it doesn't just offer phones, it offers washing machines, cameras, memory sticks, and I think that's really good thing about it... range of products for everyone.                                                         |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b> | Yes... it delivers what it says, like the camera, the phone, the TV, the results everything, like I am not                                                                                                                | Well when I use it I feel good, it's easy to use...                                                                                                                                                         | Yes... it delivers what it says, it's reliable                                                                                                                                                                                    | Yes... When I use this brand, it makes me happy, even by just seeing the name on like a camera, phone, it makes me feel                                                                                       | Yes... when I use the electronics of Sony, it makes me delightful, because of the quality, the results, the                                                                                                                                                                             |

|                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                              | saying it's perfect, but it is the most amazing and reliable right now in the world.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | happy that it's Sony.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | features, and everything                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                   | It's a beautiful brand to have, and obviously when you say a brand is wonderful, you would obviously want to hold on to that, and the only way you would think it's beautiful or wonderful is when it adds meaning to your life and it's good value for money so yeah.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Definitely, you have Samsung phone and you go ahead and you compare it with other phones, and you see the amount of features they have put in your phone compared to others, you get good remarks by that so of course you feel good about it. | Oh, yes indeed... one brand that would give a competition to Samsung would be Apple, when we look at Apple and we look at Samsung, we don't see a huge difference, but see a huge difference in technology... a huge difference in price and that's where I think Samsung has won... because they are offering you a great technology at a much cheaper price. | Yeah well, as I said if you in your daily life, you have not used this phone you would feel sad, so for example If I don't use this phone for let's say 5 mins, I would be eager, my hands would be tickling to go use the phone so that really correlates to you know you would check your phone, you want to play with your gadgets and that in return makes you happy. | Oh yeah... this is just following on from being happy to delight, that is one step ahead and I would say yes definitely, by the same means I mean this is something that is your daily life necessity... that's like water, if you don't drink water you will feel really thirsty, and you would then only want to drink water to make yourself happy and get rid of the thirst, it's the same... |
| Relationship Duration                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|                                                                                              | Long-Term relationship                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Intention to develop a long-term relationship                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                    | It's like a long-term thing, I have grown up with it...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes definitely                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                    | Definitely                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | ...I can foresee that it's going to be long term.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                    | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                    | I have had Samsung for 7 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                    | Yes, I have been using it since it's actually first launch iPhone 4, and that it was introduced it to me, well I have been using this brand for over 6 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Most definitely, I think am so attached to it now, that having a feel of any other product just doesn't satisfy me.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                    | Yes, 6-7 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                    | Yes, since childhood... about 16-17 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                    | Yes, 5-6 years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                    | Yes, 11-12 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-10                                                                                   | Yes, over 13 years.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Yes, I have sort of evolved the relationship, started from mobile phones to cameras then to TVs then to tablets, so every next we are taking, the gadgets... we are going on a long-term relationship with Samsung.                                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Feeling of distress on separation (when the brand is missing or assuming if it discontinues) |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-1                                                                                    | A lot, it will be very difficult for me to move on to a Samsung or something. I would hate it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-2                                                                                    | I will feel distress, and I think I will try to find the other brands that kind of reminds me of the iPhone that I feel can live up to my expectation of a good phone, so yeah, I will feel very distressed if it goes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-3                                                                                    | I would feel incomplete; I can't imagine my life without my iPhone...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-4                                                                                    | I believe I would be distressed if I lose my phone, Yes, I would definitely be upset                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-5                                                                                    | I don't see a reason why they would discontinue it... I would keep the last one that they make...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-6                                                                                    | Yes, I would have to build a good bond with a different brand and try something different and I don't really like trying new things.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-7                                                                                    | I have never been in this situation, so I can't talk from experience but If I assume that they discontinued production of their items then yes, I would be distressed because then I would have to look for an alternative...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-8                                                                                    | I think they have discontinued some products, but that's for the best, because I think they might have come out with another clever idea or another way to make that same product better, and I think that's fine, as long as, they keep making new things and keep the innovation alive, but I would be really sad if they discontinue completely... a good company shouldn't shut down.                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| PST-Int-9                                                                                    | That would-be disaster, because everything in my house if we talk about electronics are Sony, like the camera, the phone, the TV, the counsel, everything if this brand discontinues, it would be a disaster because then I have to research individually on every electronic brand-wise, who makes the best TV, who makes the best phone, who makes the best counsel, who makes the best camera. I don't think there is any other company than Sony that makes all these electronics reliable like the phone the camera, the TV. So, yeah I can't imagine my life without it. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

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| PST-Int-10                                                                       | Yes... even though I have two phones, one is Apple and the other one is Samsung, but if I don't use my Samsung phone, you do feel some sort of distress.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>Positive Emotional Connection, Brand Attachment, Affection, Passion, Love</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                        | I do have a certain level of affection... definitely very attached... I will feel very distressed if it goes...<br>I love this brand...<br>I do love it ...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| PST-Int-2                                                                        | I love this brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-3                                                                        | I definitely have emotional attachment with it, I feel affection for it... love it without a doubt...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| PST-Int-4                                                                        | Very much attached to this brand... definitely, love Samsung.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| PST-Int-5                                                                        | Yes, apple is a brand that designs only the best, and that it's self actually makes you affectionate about the product it's self... much attached, love it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| PST-Int-6                                                                        | I have been using for years so it does create that bond and love for the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-7                                                                        | Affection I think would come from a feeling of when you say affection, affection is a very human emotion, human beings or life, animated things feel affection towards each other, I think when you talk about affection for an inanimate object, it would have to be an attachment instead... love the brand. I think I do have an emotional attachment to it.                                          |
| PST-Int-8                                                                        | (Love the brand) Not everything about it, but aspects that concern me yes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| PST-Int-9                                                                        | Close attachment, I feel affection, love it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| PST-Int-10                                                                       | Attached, love the brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Brand Trust</b>                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                        | I trust the products, but at the same time if I got a negative review, I would trust that as well because as a high functioning company, it always has drawbacks. I know its strengths; I know the weaknesses I know the draw backs. I know the brand quite well. I trust the products.                                                                                                                  |
| PST-Int-2                                                                        | I trust the brand... I believe that yes, I've never had a problem with it                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PST-Int-3                                                                        | Yes, definitely... Yes, I believe everything it stands for, everything it states, the marketing they do, and the products that they make                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-4                                                                        | Definitely... what they Promise they deliver... I would stick by the fact that this phone is better than the rest of the mobiles out there.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| PST-Int-5                                                                        | Most definitely, Apple iPhone as I have mentioned is most user friendly that I have found, it is the most beautiful looking phone that I have seen in the market, so in fact for a mobile phone user, at this precise time, I wouldn't be able to get a better product.                                                                                                                                  |
| PST-Int-6                                                                        | Yes... Based on the experiences, it's rewarding, it's satisfactory, it's favourable for me so I would definitely stand by and try to convince the other person and try to persuade them.                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| PST-Int-7                                                                        | Yes, I do... Word-of-mouth is gossip, and I don't pay much attention to it anyway... I think I would look deeper into and see if it has any merit, otherwise no I don't think I would pay too much attention.                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| PST-Int-8                                                                        | Yes... I would refuse to believe (negative-WOM) it initially and then I would go online and search about it and then see what's right and what's wrong... (fulfils promises) Yes, always, maybe not always but like always.                                                                                                                                                                              |
| PST-Int-9                                                                        | Yes, it delivers what it says. (believe in negative-WOM) Well not straight away unless it's coming from a reliable source                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PST-Int-10                                                                       | Yes, definitely, I think what they have achieved and the amount of customers they have and the technology they use you would definitely trust the brand. that is obviously if I hear negative information about the brand, I won't just go ahead and believe it, there is some research that needs to be done and until it's proven I won't trust anything.                                              |
| <b>Brand Loyalty (Repurchase intentions)</b>                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                        | Oh, then I would use the product definitely, if it suit's my needs than regardless of the negative opinions I would use it. There are positive and negatives... it's kind of what suit's you that defines what's positive and negative for you.                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-2                                                                        | I am passionate to continue using iPhone... I can't even see myself without... I believe I have a sense of loyalty with...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| PST-Int-3                                                                        | I don't feel right for me to use another brand so I would always prefer using this brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| PST-Int-4                                                                        | I have been using it for seven years, there is an element of loyalty as well maybe but what majority of the main reason would be that I am very comfortable, and I am used to the features so much that I cannot see myself using any other brand.                                                                                                                                                       |
| PST-Int-5                                                                        | Apple would be on top of my list, I would only wait for the one coming out next, and the one after next and always wait for the newer models.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| PST-Int-6                                                                        | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| PST-Int-7                                                                        | Yes, because of my long-term attachment with it and familiarity of use.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| PST-Int-8                                                                        | I have been using Samsung for quite a lot of time I think, I have used quite a lot of their products and I have been very satisfied with that and that's why I am sticking to the same brand over and over again.                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| PST-Int-9                                                                        | Of course... Because I have been using it for years and years, and I trust it, and my experience tells me that it's the right brand to use...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| PST-Int-10                                                                       | Yes, in terms of negativity, it depends what the brand has done, but as I said I can't imagine a consumer brand doing something that bad, so I would recommend this brand to others in the future.                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Brand Forgiveness (Inclination to forgive a brand)</b>                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| PST-Int-1                                                                        | Yes, I can because like I said the positives are way ahead for me than the negatives.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| PST-Int-2                                                                        | Everyone makes mistakes... no one is perfect as a doctor I know I have probably made few mistakes on the ward and I would be very upset if someone would take me for it or take me out of the job for it. Similarly, I think it all fairness, I would not dislike the phone or the brand if there was something negative, or if they have made a mistake, I will try to forgive it as much as I could... |

|                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
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| <b>PST-Int-3</b>              | Yes Definitely, the reason why, I will give you an example of my friend, if my friend was in trouble, if my friend made a mistake, obviously, I would first of forgive them for the mistake they have made, if they haven't repeated it constantly...                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>              | Yes, I will stand by it because the good things in the brand over shadows the little minute negativity that it may have which is of no importance to me, because it fulfils all the other desires and needs that I have from the phone so when I'm getting there I don't care about anything else and 99% of the features are absolutely fantastic.                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>              | I think, one has to learn to forgive... I would have to look at is the track records which are mostly positive for certain brand and if the track records are only pointing it to be the best than one or two negatives mistakes can most definitely be forgiven.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>              | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>              | Yes, I'll forgive the brand because... if a brand does make a mistake or goes wrong somewhere, you don't disown it, especially in my case, because I have had such a long attachment with it, I'll be willing to forgive it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>              | I will forgive the brand... if they come up with another solution for that problem then yes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>              | Yes. As I said, everyone makes mistakes... Even if they do make mistakes, as I have said I have been using it for 11 to 12 years, I haven't heard any big mistakes of Sony. So yeah if they make any mistakes, I will forgive because it's a reliable brand.                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>             | Yes... if I believe that they have done something and wrong and that mistake is being correct, I can't imagine the brand doing something majorly wrong, they might just have a defect in their phone or something and that's why I would definitely forgive because everyone makes a mistake.                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Positive Word-to-Mouth</b> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Pst-Int-1</b>              | ...just because it is giving me a good experience, so I do, always.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>Pst-Int-2</b>              | I would take it as a personal responsibility to promote it, given that I have had such a good affiliation with it for the past few years...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Pst-Int-3</b>              | I would make sure I would speak my mind...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Pst-Int-4</b>              | Yes, definitely, because I have been using it for so long, I have some good things to say about it. I do talk about my phone when I have to, a few of my friends actually had bought this phone because they really liked the picture quality and they really like the interface so yeah, I have convinced quite a few people                                                                                                                     |
| <b>Pst-Int-5</b>              | Most definitely I would do that, the only reason for that is that let's say, there was certain issue with a handset with one of their new releases, it definitely doesn't mean that that would be the case with all their products or it definitely doesn't mean that that would be the case with all their future products. If you know which other manufacturer has delivered, so far, I don't think                                            |
| <b>Pst-Int-6</b>              | I would provide word-of-mouth, I would do some research and let them know exactly what I think, and I would stick by my brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Pst-Int-7</b>              | just highlighting or praising the positives of the brand is actually support for the brand                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Pst-Int-8</b>              | Yes, I would                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <b>Pst-Int-9</b>              | Yes.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Pst-Int-10</b>             | Yes, would always support the brand, this is where your brand loyalty comes in and how well you know the brand, and I would definitely spread the word-of-mouth for the positive aspect of the brand, because obviously, I would know the truth.                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Brand Advocacy</b>         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>PST-Int-1</b>              | I have been doing that for years, especially for the iPhone (in case of negative-WOM) I will still do it. I would recommend it, I would suggest the positives of the brand and the overall experience.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b>              | I would continue to recommend it to my friends and family even though there is negative information about it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>              | If anyone says something negative about the iPhone, it automatically brings out the desire for me to try and advocate that this is a good phone                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>              | Well, I will say...I have always said, I would stand up for the positive aspects of this brand, which have been really consistent by the way.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>              | Most definitely, one would only have to look at the past of the product and the current ratings of that product at this precise time, I can guarantee that there isn't a better product in the market... I would have to mention that it is user friendly, it is the nicest looking product in the market, it's wonderful to handle, it is something that makes you feel good.                                                                    |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>              | Yes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>              | Yes, I would, I mean these are blurred lines there, they actually overlap each other, I mean talking in favour of the brand is actually advocating brand too... recommend it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>              | I will do both recommend it to the friends and I will also compare the brand with other brands and see which one is doing better and what are pros and cons of each.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>              | Yes, I will provide the positive information of the brand to the people.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>             | Yes, I would, obviously, the reason being is if they have made a mistake, I am sure that they would rectify it, you know once the wrong has been rectified, I don't see why not.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Brand Defence</b>          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>PST-Int-1</b>              | I always defend it... I defend it because I have had a very good experience with the iPhone, so I always defend the iPhone.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>PST-Int-2</b>              | I mean the fact that I defend it and the fact I don't like to move away from it... I would probably try to defend the negative information... I would find my ways for defending the brand... I would go about what is required to defend the Brand                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>PST-Int-3</b>              | I would defend it for as long as I have to. I do that already...                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>PST-Int-4</b>              | Well I would, I would reiterate the positive aspects again and again, I would continue doing that, I would stand up for anything negative because I know that I have been using it for so long and Samsung has always delivered what it promises, I would stand up and since in the past it has not misled it's customers, on one occasion even if it did, it doesn't matter because it will always try to fulfil it's promises to the customers. |



|                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PST-Int-5</b>                                                                                                                                                  | I would defend the brand by the products... comparison at this moment to any other product... there is nothing out there that would meet the specification, so this it'self is my defence.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| <b>PST-Int-6</b>                                                                                                                                                  | I would talk about it's promising sides and it's rewarding side, how it is a good brand, I would still and convince the person that it's a good brand.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| <b>PST-Int-7</b>                                                                                                                                                  | By highlighting its positive merit's, I mean you can't fight gossip with gossip, I mean if someone has actual facts against the brand, then they can be defended or argued against in a similar way, if it's just negative word-of-mouth, you just return that with positive feedback. If there are actual negative facts then you defend the brand by saying that since they have been around for so long, you don't hear problems like these arise every day, it's once in a while thing... so I would definitely show faith in the brand... |
| <b>PST-Int-8</b>                                                                                                                                                  | I will collect all the arguments for and against that information and I will emphasise on the positive ones.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>PST-Int-9</b>                                                                                                                                                  | Yes, I will defend the brand. Obviously positive, even if company makes a mistake, as I said it's not a big deal and I will clear the misconceptions within my friends and other people by defending it.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>PST-Int-10</b>                                                                                                                                                 | Yes... I would try to focus on the positives ... I would definitely defend and advocate the brand, and if the information turns out to be wrong then your love and affection for the brand increases even more then you would want to go out and defend the brand and that could via your personal means, could be speaking to your friends about it who make allegations, supporting their campaigns, support or anything.                                                                                                                    |
| <b>Note:</b> PST-Int refers to post-survey interviewee and the corresponding number depicts the sequential number of the interviews, when he/she was interviewed. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

## Publications Associated to this Doctoral Study

### **Book Chapter:**

**Javed, M.**, Roy, S., and Mansoor, B. (2015) 'Will you defend your Loved Brand? Brand Defence superseding Advocacy', in Fetscherin, M., and Heilmann, T. (Eds.), *Consumer-Brand Relationships*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, UK, pp.31-54.

The contents of a book chapter has been removed from this version of the thesis due to copyright restrictions

## **Conference Papers and Presentations:**

Roy, S., **Javed, M.**, and Mansoor, B. (2014). "Brand Defence: When You Love It, You Defend It", paper presented at 9<sup>th</sup> Global Branding Conference, April 9-11, 2014 Hertfordshire, UK.

## **Brand Defence: When You Love It, You Defend It**

*Sanjit Kumar Roy, Mansoor Javed, Bano Mansoor*

### **Abstract**

The study is built on the extant literature on Word of Mouth (hereafter WOM) communications and the subsequent benefits of WOM communications for brands, as a result of close consumer brand relationships, such as Brand Love. The consumer brand love and its WOM attributions are explored in negative WOM scenario. It is proposed that there are different intensities of WOM behaviour, and in response to negative WOM, consumers posit defensive behaviour towards their loved brands. The study conceptualised Brand Defence as a higher order WOM behaviour that is beyond just simple WOM and Brand Advocacy behaviour. The aim of this study is to empirically examine the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence with the mediating role of Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Forgiveness in case of negative WOM. The study involves a quantitative approach to research and test the research hypotheses using Structural Equation Modelling causal relationships, and Sobel Test for mediating relationships. The research findings confirm the impact of Brand Trust, Forgiveness and Loyalty on the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence. The study suggests that Brand Love fosters consumer brand trust that refrains consumers to trust the negative information and leads to an automated defence behaviour towards their loved brands. The study suggests managers that brand love; with its higher order positive WOM outcomes, such as, Brand Defence can avert the destructive impact of negative WOM. The findings, overall, imply that developing strong relationships with consumers can help brands grow and sustain in the marketplace.

**Keywords:** Brand Defence, Brand Love, Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, Word of Mouth, Consumer Brand Relationship

### **Brand Defence: When You Love It, You Defend It Research Background and Aim**

The Word-of-Mouth (hereafter WOM) communications have long been recognised as an important decision-clincher (Arndt, 1967) and strongest form of marketing communications (Graham and Havelena, 2007). WOM has initially been viewed as merely the face-to-face communications, but as the world has become very small and interactive with the ease of communication and widespread technology, the scope of WOM became relentless. People tend to share their emotions, behaviour, experiences, perceptions, and views regarding their personal and professional lives. These communications also include the sharing of perceptions or views regarding any consumption experiences of goods or services (Arndt 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Graham and Havelena, 2007; Harrison-Walker, 2001). Such product and/or services-oriented communications have received academic and practitioners' attention alike (Rogers, 2003). Research has explored the benefits and drawbacks associated with such communications in a marketing context (deMatos and Rossi, 2008).

The antecedents and consequences of WOM communications have been extensively examined in literature. Limited research evidence exists, which examines the impact of negative WOM (East *et al.* 2008). However, the influential impact of negative information over positive information has been confirmed by several studies (Assael, 2004; East *et al.* 2008; Kroloff, 1988; Skowronski and Carlston, 1989). It is also observed that generally the negative information is fewer as compared to positive information (East *et al.* 2007; Naylor and Kleiser; 2000) and it makes negative information more valuable or diagnostic (Fiske, 1980). Also, the negative information is considered as useful evidence for unreliability of the brand, and it suggests negative information to be more effective on judgment (Anderson, 1965; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Fiske, 1980; Mittal *et al.* 1998; Mizerski, 1982).

In this regard, we conceptualise that WOM attributions towards brands exist at different intensities. We conceptualise that there exist a higher order WOM behaviour, which we label as 'Brand Defence'. We define Brand Defence as the highest order positive WOM behaviour that consumers offer to their loved brands. The conceptualisation of the study is based on the extant literature that

support several consumers' attributions towards loved brands. The existing literature suggests that the intensity of consumers' WOM attributions depends on the relationship between the consumers and the brands. It is evident in the literature that in close consumer brand relationships, particularly when consumers love their brands, positive WOM has been observed as one of the most common consumers' attributions towards loved brands (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Ng *et al.*, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2006). Even along with positive WOM, consumers are even observed refusing to believe any negative information about the brand in a few instances (Park *et al.*, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, this study based on Javed and Roy (2013), Javed (2013), and Javed and Mansoor (2013), proposes that Brand Defence is a higher order positive WOM attribution towards a loved brand. And, this study explores the role of Brand Trust, Brand Forgiveness and Brand Loyalty, in consumers' willingness to generate Brand Defence for the loved brands. Consumers Brand Defence behaviour is explored in case of any criticism or negative WOM against the loved brand.

### Purpose of Research

The aim of this study is to empirically examine the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence with the mediating role of Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Forgiveness in case of negative WOM. The Research Model for the study is presented in Figure i. It is an empirical study that is built on extant literature involving hypotheses formulation and testing the research hypotheses through quantitative means.

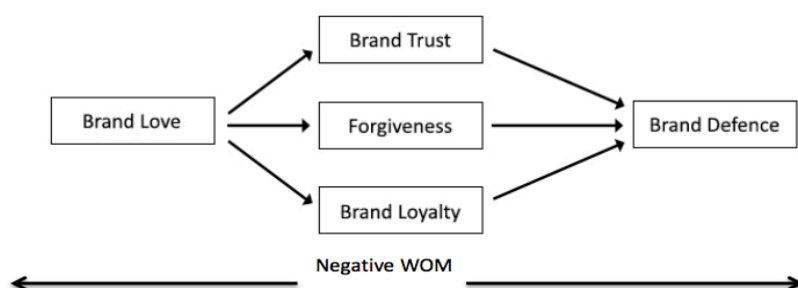


Figure i. Research Model

### Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are developed on the existing literature and tested using primary information collected through online surveys. The research hypotheses are tested using structural equation modelling.

The basic proposition in this study suggests the consumers defence behaviour against any negative information towards their loved brands. There is scant literature on negative WOM that suggest consumer response towards brands they love. Also, there are evidences found in literature suggesting that in some instances brand advocates even defend their loved brands for any wrong doings (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Park *et al.*, 2006) and consumers involved in close relationships with their brands can potentially support the brands to avert brand crisis (Liu *et al.*, 2009; Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis 2006). Moreover, according to Park *et al.* (2006), consumers often refuse to believe the negative information about the favourite brand in close consumer brand relationships. It shows consumers' trust over their loved brand that the brand cannot make such mistake. In instances, where consumers believe any mistakes or wrong doings of their loved brands, they somehow tend to forgive their loved brands (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). In this regard, researchers have based their enquiry on interpersonal constructs adapted to consumer brand relationships context and built their conceptualisations (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). It is observed that like interpersonal relationship, researchers observed the role of forgiveness in consumer-brand relationships to demonstrate, how consumers respond to the mistakes by their loved brands (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it suggests Brand Forgiveness can also play its role in consumers' Brand Defence behaviour, when consumers love their brands. The third construct suggested to explore the proposed relationship is Brand Loyalty. Brand Loyalty is considered as a consequence of Brand Love by a number of researchers (Ahuvia, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008, 2009; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Kamat and Parulekar, 2007). Brand loyalty is consumers repurchase intention and readiness to recommend the brand to other consumers (Fournier 1998; Tsai 2011). Therefore, in this study, the

mediating role of Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Forgiveness are hypothesised based on extant literature to explore the suggested research model. Therefore, the study proposes the following six research hypotheses:

*H1: Brand Love has a positive impact on Brand Trust.*

*H2: Brand Love has a positive impact on Brand Forgiveness.*

*H3: Brand Love has a positive impact on Brand Loyalty.*

*H1a: Brand trust mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence.*

*H2a: Brand Forgiveness mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence.*

*H3a: Brand Loyalty mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence.*

### **Research Approach and Methodology**

The study explores the WOM outcomes of brand love to avert negative WOM impact using a scenario-based approach (Donovan *et al.*, 2001) in which consumers are given a scenario, whereby their loved brand is faced with negative WOM or criticism as a result of any mistake or failure. The consumers' brand love is measured using the scale from Carrol and Ahuvia (2006); WOM (Sweeney *et al.* 2010), Brand Advocacy (Kemp *et al.* 2012; Kim *et al.* 2001), and Trust (Aydin and Ozer, 2005; Doney *et al.* 2007), and Brand Defence (Javed, and Mansoor 2013). The study is carried out among UK residents aged 18 and over, using an online survey at Bristol Online Surveys. A total of 500 respondents were invited to fill out a survey using the snowball sampling technique, where 344 valid responses were received. The consumers' Brand Defence attributions towards their loved brands are tested in case of their favourite cosmetics brand. The product category is selected based on a preliminary in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted based on Fournier (1998) and Sweeney and Chew (2000), with the same sample size of three adult females. The interviews helped selecting an appropriate product category for the study, as well as, helped forming a workable research model based on the extant literature. The consumers' responses are taken on a seven-point Likert Scale survey (where 1= Not at all; 7= Completely Agree). Prior to the final survey a pre-test study has also been carried out to test reliability and factor structure of the constructs, using Cronbach's Alpha and Exploratory Factor Analysis. The data analysis of the final study involved Confirmatory factor analysis for testing the convergent validity, discriminant validity, and model fit indices of the measurement model. The Hypotheses testing is carried out using the Structural Equation Modelling using AMOS 19. Sobel test is also carried out to test the mediating impact of Brand Trust, Brand Loyalty, and Brand Forgiveness on the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence behaviour.

### **Hypotheses Test Results**

The results of the Hypotheses tests revealed that all the six hypotheses are accepted for Cosmetics survey. See Table I for Structural Equation Models, and Table ii for Sobel Test for Hypotheses.

The study views a higher order positive WOM behavioural outcome in result of brand love, 'Brand Defence'. It is proposed as one of the strongest WOM outcomes in case of Brand Love, as suggested by Javed (2013) and Javed and Roy (2013). The whole study is carried out in a scenario of negative WOM towards the loved brands and explored that how consumers respond to that negative word of mouth. Moreover, the study confirms the impact of Brand Trust, Forgiveness and Loyalty on the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence. The study suggests that Brand Love fosters consumer brand trust that refrains consumers to trust the negative information and leads to an automated defence behaviour towards their loved brands. The findings also revealed that consumers are more reactive towards any negative information about their loved cosmetics out of sheer trust. The consumers in some cases, where they think brand has made a mistake, forgive their loved brands, like interpersonal relationships. The impact of Brand Loyalty is also confirmed by the research findings on consumers' Brand Defence behaviour towards loved brands.

### **Research Implications and Limitations**

The study suggests managers that brand love; with its higher order positive WOM outcomes, such as, Brand Defence, can avert the destructive impact of negative WOM. Therefore, managers by employing adequate strategies to foster consumer-brand love bonds can reverse the advice pattern in the market through own brand defenders and advocates. The research needs to be carried out with multiple product categories, and within different cultural datasets for cross validating results over product categories, and different demographics. The increasing importance of Consumer

Brand Relationship and consumers' attributions towards their loved brands support the importance of this study. Therefore, the findings imply that developing strong relationships with consumers can help brands grow and sustain in the market.

|                   |                     | Estimate | p-values | Comments                  |
|-------------------|---------------------|----------|----------|---------------------------|
| Brand Love        | → Brand Loyalty     | .681     | ***      | H3 (Accepted)             |
| Brand Love        | → Brand Trust       | .772     | ***      | H1 (Accepted)             |
| Brand Love        | → Brand Forgiveness | .567     | ***      | H2 (Accepted)             |
| Brand Forgiveness | → Brand Defence     | .261     | ***      | Path Significant at 0.001 |
| Brand Trust       | → Brand Defence     | .535     | ***      | Path Significant at 0.001 |
| Brand Loyalty     | → Brand Defence     | .158     | .007**   | Path Significant at 0.01  |

Note: \* implies path coefficients significant at 5% level of significance; \*\* implies path coefficients significant at 1% level of significance; \*\*\* implies path coefficients significant at 0.1% level of significance; NS implies 'Not significant'.

**Table i. Structural Equation Models**

| Mediation Path                           | Sobel Test Statistics | P-Values | Hypotheses     |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----------|----------------|
| Brand Love > Trust > Brand Defence       | 4.587                 | ***      | H1a (Accepted) |
| Brand Love > Forgiveness > Brand Defence | 3.377                 | ***      | H2a (Accepted) |
| Brand Love > Loyalty > Brand Defence     | 1.970                 | .024*    | H3a (Accepted) |

Note: \* implies path coefficients significant at 5% level of significance; \*\* implies path coefficients significant at 1% level of significance; \*\*\* implies path coefficients significant at 0.1% level of significance; NS implies 'Not significant'.

**Table ii. Sobel Test Results**

## Originality, Value and Contribution of Research

There is limited research, which examines WOM attributions towards the loved brands and scant research exist which explores the outcomes of brand love or future behavioural intentions of consumers in a negative scenario (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Javed and Roy, 2013). The study also contributes to the existing knowledge by establishing the mediating impact of brand trust, loyalty, and forgiveness on the relationship between brand love and WOM Attributions, which we term as 'Brand Defence'.

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### ***Defending your Loved Brand, does Brand Trust foster Brand Defence against Negative Word of Mouth?***

*Mansoor Javed, and Sanjit Kumar Roy*

#### **Extended Abstract**

#### **Research Background and Aim**

The Word of Mouth communications have long been recognised as an important decision-clincher (Arndt, 1967) and strongest form of Marketing Communications (Graham and Havelena, 2007). WOM has initially been viewed as merely the face-to-face communications, but as the world has become very small and interactive with the ease of communication and widespread technology (latest means of telecommunications and Internet), the scope of WOM became relentless. People tend to share their emotions, behaviour, experiences, perceptions, and views regarding their personal and professional lives. These communications also include the sharing of perceptions or views regarding any consumption experiences of goods or services (Arndt 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Graham and Havelena, 2007; Harrison-Walker, 2001). And, such products or services-oriented communications took a lot of attraction by marketers (Rogers, 2003), academicians, and theorists (Arndt, 1967; deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Graham and Havelena, 2007; Harrison-Walker, 2001) that explored the benefits and drawbacks associated with such communications in a marketing context.

Both antecedents and consequences of WOM communications have been extensively explored to find out how to take utmost advantage of the positive communications, but there are a very few studies that explore how to vent the drawbacks of the negative WOM (East *et al.*, 2008). However, the influential impact of negative information over positive information has been confirmed by a number of studies (Assael, 2004; East *et al.*, 2008; Kroloff, 1988; Skowronski and Carlston, 1989). It is also observed that generally the negative information is fewer as compared to positive information (East *et al.* 2007; Naylor and Kleiser; 2000) and it makes negative information more valuable or diagnostic (Fiske, 1980). Also, the negative information is considered as useful evidence for unreliability of the brand and it suggests negative information to be more effective on judgment (Anderson, 1965; Chevalier and Mayzlin 2003; Fiske, 1980; Mittal *et al.*, 1998; Mizerski, 1982).

This study therefore, explores word of mouth in a newer perspective, which suggests that there are different intensities of consumers' WOM attributions towards any brand. The intensity of a consumer's WOM attributions depends on the relationship between the consumer and the brand. It is evident in the literature that in close consumer brand relationships, particularly in Brand Love, positive WOM has been observed as one of the most common consumers' attributions towards loved brands (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Ng, *et al.*, 2011; Park *et al.*, 2006). Even along with positive WOM, consumers are even observed refuting to negative brand information in a few instances (Park *et al.*, 2006; Batra *et al.* 2012). Therefore, this study based on Javed and Roy (2013) and Javed (2013a, 2013b) proposes that Brand Defence is a higher order positive WOM attribution that extends beyond just positive WOM and Brand Advocacy. And, this study explores the role of Brand Trust in consumers' willingness to generate Brand Defence for the loved brand. Consumers Brand Defence behaviour is explored in case of any criticism or negative WOM against the loved brand.

#### **Purpose of Research**

The basic aim of this study is to empirically test the role of Brand Trust in generating consumers' Brand Defence behaviour towards a loved brand in case of negative WOM.

#### **Research Approach and Methodology**

The study explores the WOM outcomes of brand love to avert negative WOM impact using a scenario-based approach (Donovan *et al.*, 2001) in which consumers are given a scenario, where their loved brand is faced with negative WOM or criticism for any mistake or failure. The consumer

brand love is assessed using the scale from Carrol and Ahuvia (2006). Also, the survey uses existing scales for WOM (Sweeney *et al.*, 2010), Brand Advocacy (Kemp *et al.*, 2012; Kim *et al.*, 2001), and Trust (Aydin and Ozer, 2005; Doney *et al.*, 2007), and Brand Defence (Javed and Mansoor 2013). The study is carried out among UK residents aged 18 and over, using an online survey at Bristol Online Surveys. A total of 500 respondents each were invited to fill out two surveys through snowball sampling technique, where 356, and 344 valid responses were received for consumer electronics and cosmetics surveys respectively. The online surveys enquiring about two different categories facilitated cross validation of results over two categories. The consumers' responses are taken on seven-point Likert Scale survey (1= Not at all; 7= Completely). Prior to the final survey a pretest study has also been carried out to test reliability and factor loadings of the measuring items, using Cronbach's Alpha and Exploratory Factor Analysis. The data analysis of the final study involved Confirmatory factor analysis for face validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and model fit values of the research instrument. The Hypotheses testing is carried out using the Structural Equation Modeling using AMOS 19. Sobel test is also carried out to test the mediating impact of Brand Trust in generating positive WOM, Brand Advocacy and Defence.

### Research Hypotheses

The research hypotheses are developed on the existing literature and tested using primary information collected through online surveys and tested using structural equation modelling. According to Park *et al.* (2006), consumers often refuse to believe the negative information about the favourite brand in close consumer brand relationships. Also, there are traces found in literature suggesting that in some instances brand advocates even defend their loved brands for any wrong doings (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Park *et al.*, 2006) and consumers involved in close relationships with their brands can potentially supports the brands to avert brand crisis (Liu *et al.*, 2009; Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis 2006). Therefore, based on the existing literature, the study proposes the research hypotheses as follows.

- *H1: Brand Love has an impact on Brand Trust.*
- *H2: Brand trust mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Defence.*
- *H3: Brand trust mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Brand Advocacy.*
- *H4: Brand trust mediates the relationship between Brand Love and Word of Mouth.*

### Hypotheses Test Results

The results of the Hypotheses tests revealed that all the four hypotheses are accepted for Cosmetics survey; however, H3 is rejected for Consumer Electronics.

### Research Findings

The study proposes to view WOM behavioural outcomes in a hierarchy to develop an improved understanding of the different levels and intensities of consumers' behavioural attributions towards a brand (Javed, 2013; Javed and Roy, 2013) as suggested by Park *et al.* (2006) and Park and McInnis (2006). Park *et al.* (2006) and Park and McInnis (2006) suggested viewing the overall consumer behaviour towards brands in a form of a hierarchy; however, this research paper involves exploring merely the consumers' WOM behaviour towards a brand in a hierarchy. Moreover, the study suggests that Brand Love fosters consumer brand trust that refrains consumers to trust the negative information and leads to an automated defence behaviour towards their loved brands. The findings also revealed that consumers are more reactive towards any negative information about their loved cosmetics out of sheer trust. However, they seem more defensive for their consumer electronics, particularly mobile phones even knowing any drawbacks; they tend to defend the brand even if they are not recommending that brand (Brand Advocacy).

### Research Implications, and Limitations

The study suggests managers that brand love, with its positive WOM outcomes, followed by advocacy and Brand Defence can avert the destructive impact of negative WOM. Therefore, managers by employing adequate strategies to foster consumer-brand love bonds can reverse the advice pattern in the market through own brand defenders and advocates. The research needs to be carried out with multiple product categories and within different cultural datasets for cross validating results over product categories and different demographics. The increasing importance of Consumer Brand Relationship and consumers' attributions towards their loved brands support the importance of this study. Therefore, the findings imply that developing strong relationships with consumers can help brands grow and sustain in the market.

### **Originality, Value and Contribution of Research**

There is limited research that study WOM outcomes as a focal point of investigation in Brand Love, and no Brand Love study except Donovan *et al.* (2012), Javed (2013) and Javed and Roy (2013) explores Brand Love outcomes or future behavioural intentions of consumers in a negative scenario. Another, contribution of this study is testing the mediating impact of brand trust on the relationship between brand love and Word of Mouth Attributions i.e. Positive WOM, Brand Advocacy, and Brand Defence.

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**Will you defend your Loved Brand? Brand Defence Superseding Advocacy**

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**Purpose:** The basic aim of this study is to holistically develop an understanding about the different types of consumers' future Word of Mouth behavioural intentions towards a loved brand in case of negative WOM about the loved brand and develop a scale for Brand Defence being the strongest Word of Mouth outcome of Brand Love.

**Design/Methodology/Approach:** Critical Incident Technique is used to develop brand defence scale; an online survey is conducted amongst 128 UK residents aged 18 and over in the United Kingdom.

**Findings:** The study develops a Brand Defence scale in the scenario of brand love. It suggests that Brand Love fosters consumer brand trust that refrains consumers to trust the negative information and leads to an automated defence behaviour towards their loved brands.

**Implications:** Brand love with its positive WOM outcomes followed by advocacy and Brand Defence can avert the destructive impact of negative WOM. Therefore, managers by employing adequate strategies to foster brand love can reverse the advice pattern in the market. The major limitation of the research is the sample size of 128 respondents with only one product category (mobile phone).

**Originality/Value:** This is the first study that develops a scale for Brand Defence. Moreover, no Brand Love study except Javed (2013) and Javed and Roy (2013) studied WOM as a focal point in Brand Love studies, and no Brand Love study except Donovan *et al.* (2012) explores Brand Love outcomes in a negative scenario.

**Brand Defence; A Hierarchy of Possible WOM Behaviour of Brand Love**  
*Mansoor Javed and Sanjit Kumar Roy*

**Abstract**

The study offers insights for managers to consider and understand the overwhelming benefits of close consumer-brand relationships, especially Brand Love that promotes and offer substantial WOM attributes that are vital for recent competition. The study involves investigation of possible WOM outcomes of Brand Love in good and bad times. In the quest of exploring the different possible WOM themes offered by consumers in the Brand Love scenario, Brand defence is proposed as the superlative degree of WOM behaviour towards brands. The study suggests acquiring a case study method involving phenomenological interviewing to acquire required insights and in-depth understanding of the scenario. The possible WOM outcomes of WOM will be viewed in a form of a hierarchy to understand the different intensities of consumer-brand relationships and their consequent WOM attributions. The secondary findings suggest a gap in the literature that WOM has never been explored in the context of brand defence that can serve as the strongest and top most outcomes of WOM behaviour in averting brand crisis. It is proposed that brand defence should be given the highest level in the hierarchy of possible WOM behaviour, followed by brand advocacy, positive WOM, no WOM and in the least order it should be negative WOM.

**Introduction:**

Word of Mouth (WOM) has gained extravagant significance regarding image promoter (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008), and decision clincher (Arndt, 1967), due to the perceived non-biased and non-commercial nature of WOM information. WOM is also believed to be stronger than any other form of Advertising (Arndt, 1967). It gained tremendous attention by researchers with the realisation of its effectiveness in regard to consumers believe and perceptions of WOM being true and unbiased information (Arndt, 1967; Harrison-Walker, 2001; deMatos and Rossi, 2008). Therefore, a number of antecedents (deMatos and Rossi, 2008; Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008), consequences or outcomes (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008), and triggers (Mazzarol, *et al.*, 2007) of WOM have been considered and discussed. However, within the last few years, with the consideration of the concepts of having close consumer brand relationships, such as brand love (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), brand attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and MacInnis, 2006), and passion (Bauer *et al.*, 2007) in the marketing context, WOM has emerged as one of the most common and prominent attribute. Also, according to the prevalent literature on consumer brand relationships, WOM has been observed as one of the most common attribute by most studies on close consumer brand relationships (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006), and it has also been observed as a relationship benefit (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Ng, *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, considering the strategic nature of WOM, and increasing realisation that WOM has revealed to be one of the most common consequences of close consumer-brand relationships, and particularly Brand Love. The study aims to explore the possible WOM outcomes of Brand Love in good and bad times. WOM has never been explored in this context as a focal point of research; therefore, this study can contribute in developing the further understanding of WOM themes generated by consumers in Brand Love scenario.

**Concept of WOM and its Strategic Position towards Brands:**

In short, Word of Mouth refers to "person-to-person communication", and its importance is similar to the importance of communication itself, especially in marketing contexts within recent competition. The tremendous growth of WOM literature in the last two three decades with increased debate on its viability and significance in comparison to other Marketing Communications show its importance (e.g. Arndt, 1967; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Buttle, 1998; Graham and Havelena, 2007; deMatos and Rossi, 2008). The realisation of being WOM a more powerful decisive factor than any other form of advertising (Arndt, 1967) changed the whole phenomenology of marketing and advertising research. Various definitions of WOM developed in the process of the literature development. However, there is no unanimously agreed definition of WOM in the literature so far, but the most accepted meaning of WOM is a non-commercial communication regarding a brand, product, or service. Arndt (1967) defined WOM as "an oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial,

regarding a brand, product, or service” (p. 66). Anderson (1998), Buttle (1998), Harrison-Walker (2001), and deMatos and Rossi (2008) shared the same conceptualisation of WOM as Arndt’s (1967). Richins (1984) refers WOM to interpersonal interactions about consumption experiences, whereas, Bayus (1985), and Still *et al.* (1984) considered WOM simply as giving or receiving any comments about a product or service. Some researchers considered WOM as recommending (Brown *et al.*, 2005; File *et al.*, 1992; Yang, 2009), evaluating (Anderson, 1998), and people’s enthusiasm for sharing products or services information (Heckman, 1999). It shows that most of the definitions of WOM, conceptualised WOM as a form of communication or interaction between individuals or groups regarding any goods or services. These interactions can be positive or negative, and there are researches that confirm both negative and positive role (valence or praise) of WOM for brands and products (Harrison-Walker, 2001; deMatos and Rossi, 2008). The positive role of WOM put significant influence on consumers’ adoption decisions for a new product (Rogers, 2003; Sheth, 1971), and the negative role influence consumers to switch from the existing product or brand (Bone, 1992). In this regard, Sweeney *et al.* (2010) suggests that the givers of positive WOM offer more rich messages as compared to the intense messages offered by negative WOM givers. The study also intends to explore the positive WOM attributions that are expected to be more content-specific, rich, or strong as compared to the intense nature of negative WOM. Moreover, positive WOM is observed to be more impactful and influential (Sweeney *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, Wang’s (2011) study also suggested that positive WOM events are more impactful as compared to negative WOM. The study also suggested that a consumer’s perceptions about service quality and purchase intentions are strongly driven by the most recent WOM activities. Therefore, Wang (2011) suggests companies to induce WOM by using creative and innovative promotional tools to make consumers talk about their services and provoke consumers’ purchase intentions to stimulate consumption levels. The whole literature of WOM is governed by its beneficial impact on products/ services offerings, and so are companies and brands. Moreover, the literature of Brand Love suggests having WOM being an outcome or consequence of most Brand Love studies. Therefore, it seems significant to study WOM as focal factor in the scenario of Brand Love.

#### **Strategic Importance of Brand Love in Generating WOM:**

The experience of love is central to most close relationships. Because love can mean differently to different love relationships, for example, love for friends, children, or a romantic partner; so, researchers have worked at developing different models of Love to allow differentiation, understanding and measurement of varying love experiences (Graham, 2011). It is also believed that Love is one of the essential components of a successful relationship (Simpson *et al.*, 1986). Therefore, with the realisation of the significance of consumer brand relationships, and their different facets (Fournier, 1998), researchers also started observing love in the consumer-brand relationship scenarios (Ahuvia, 1993, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fetscherin and Dato-on 2012; Fournier, 1998; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Wallace *et al.*, 2012), and found love as a strong relationship construct in consumer brand relationship contexts. In Brand love scenario consumers are revealed to attribute several positive behaviour towards brands including increased loyalty (Ahuvia, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2009; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Kamat and Parulekar, 2007), trust (Albert *et al.*, 2009), price premium (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), forgiveness (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), and the most common attribute of brand love is revealed to be positive WOM (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace, 2012). Not only Brand Love, but also several researches have confirmed to date that customers in close brand relationships tend to attribute higher WOM behaviour such as Brand Attachment (Park *et al.*, 2006) and Brand Passion (Bauer *et al.*, 2007). Therefore, the literature confirms the significance of Brand Love in regards to WOM attributions and their consequent benefits for brands.

#### **The Conceptual Framework; a Review of Literature**

The study intends to explore the consumers’ willingness to attribute WOM behaviour towards a brand, in cases of close consumer-brand relations and particularly when they carry a feeling of love for the brand. The literature suggests that consumers’ attributions towards brands vary with the levels of consumer’s relatedness and attachment with a brand, the closer the consumer-brand relationship, the higher, and more positive are the consumers’ attributions (Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis 2006). The literature also suggests that consumers, who carry a feeling of love for certain brands refuse to believe any negative information about the brand (Park *et al.*, 2006; Park and McInnis 2006). This is also consistent with Heinrich *et al.* (2012) observations that consumers put a blind eye on the mistakes of their loved brands. Further it is also observed that consumers involved in love with the brand, forgive the brand for any wrong doings (Donovan *et al.*, 2012). Not

just this, but most importantly it is also suggested that in any scenarios of good and bad conditions; consumers in love with the brand attribute positive WOM, Advocacy and/or defence towards its loved brand, and takes brand criticisms as personal, and fight back that criticism (e.g. Park *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, based on the consumers' attributions towards brands and the realisation of the strategic nature of WOM in directing consumers' decision-making (Arndt 1967). The most important nature of WOM proposed by this study is "Brand Defence". It is observed that consumers used to defend their loved brands for any mistakes or wrong doings (Donovan *et al.*, 2012) or any rumours or criticisms regardless that they are true or not. There are a few researches that suggest that consumers defend brands that they feel closed to (Bowlby, 1979; Park and MacInnis, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006). But this term has not been explored in the context of WOM research, as a strong strategic tool. It is proposed that consumers cannot defend, advocate, or recommend every brand they feel related to, but the level of WOM attributions varies with the intensity of love they feel for the brand. The study suggests five levels of WOM attributes that can be viewed in the form of a hierarchy that include, Brand Defence as the superlative degree of WOM attributions, followed by Brand Advocacy, then positive WOM, no WOM, and in the lowest place its negative WOM. The conceptual framework suggested that it is not necessary that brand advocates also defend the brand, but a person attributing Brand Defence always offer advocacy and positive WOM for the loved brand, and this preposition suggest Brand Defence to hold the highest pedestal in the Hierarchy of WOM behaviour (See figure 1).

### Why View WOM in a Form of a Hierarchy:

The rationale of viewing WOM attributes in a form of a hierarchy is to understand the intensity and willingness of consumers' attributions towards brands. Park *et al.* (2006) also suggested viewing consumer behaviour towards brands in a form of a hierarchy to understand the levels of consumer brand attachment and the consequent behaviour. Park *et al.* (2006) studied overall consumer behaviour towards a brand in attachment context, but this study is investigating only WOM, and trying to develop an understanding of the differing levels of WOM attributes and their significance towards brands. The findings of the study are expected to reveal that the closer the consumer brand relation, the higher level of consumer's attribution of WOM towards the brand. The preceding literature also suggested that consumers in close consumer-brand relations or carrying feeling of love for the brand, avoid listening to the negative information about the brand, or negates or refuse to believe the negative information about the brand (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it is unlikely that consumers in close relationships with a brand deliver negative WOM or avoid providing WOM. Based on the firefighting or protective nature of Brand Defence, it is recognised as the most superior and the strongest level of WOM and preserves the highest level in the WOM hierarchy; brand advocacy follows it, then positive WOM, then no WOM and then negative WOM (See figure 1). No WOM is suggested as a stage, where nothing is said or written about the brand; so, it can be assumed as no or negligible consumer-brand relationship level.

**Figure 1.** Hierarchy of Positive WOM Behaviour





**Concept of Brand Defence:**

Brand Defence refers to a state of positive WOM attribution; where consumers in close consumer-brand relationships or brand love, defend the brand for any criticisms of any failure or wrongdoings, irrespective of those criticisms being true or not. The term has never been used in this context before, but still a few researchers used to believe that consumers do defend brands that they feel close to (Bowlby, 1979; Park and MacInnis, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006). Park *et al.* (2006) suggests consumers with high attachment levels, even ready to risk their discretionary resources by “publicly displaying, defending, advocating, or promoting their support for a brand”, and ignore the associated risks of ridicule, discredit, and/or social rejection. They further suggest that consumers take such brands criticisms as personal, and development of self-connected relations with brands out of attachment leads to an automated Brand Defence behaviour. It is also believed that brand advocates also defend their brands in some instances (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Cross and Smith, 1995; Liu *et al.*, 2009). The findings of this study suggest the existence of this WOM attribution, and managers can fully make use of this attribution by enhancing and developing strong consumer brand relationships and making strategic moves that make consumers love their brands.

**How Brand Defence Supersedes Advocacy:**

Brand Advocacy can be viewed as a superior form of positive WOM as it is the content, language or manner of the WOM messages that informs if it is advocacy (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the statement, “Advocacy encompasses and extends beyond the traditional concept of WOM” (p.3) seems accurate for the basic understanding of Advocacy. According to Peck *et al.* (1999), “someone who actively recommends you to others, who does your marketing for you” (p.45) is a brand advocate. It is observed that brand advocates go an extra mile in consumer behaviour towards a brand that include actively promoting the brand and even defending the brand or firm against criticism. So far, advocacy has been identified as the foremost relationship benefit (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Cross and Smith, 1995; Liu *et al.*, 2009). Urban (2004) also considers advocacy as an ultimate goal for a firm to achieve a sustainable competitive position. But, this study suggests, “brand defence encompasses and extends beyond the concept of Advocacy”. It suggests that advocacy can involve defending a brand, but every brand advocate does not offer Brand Defence as WOM can incorporate recommending and advocacy behaviour, but all WOM messages can never yield advocacy, but all advocacy offers high levels of positive WOM. Similarly, extreme levels of positive WOM and advocacy govern Brand Defence, which makes it hold the top position in the hierarchy of WOM Behaviour.

**Research Methodology:**

The research method proposed for this research is the case study approach with a sample size of three adult females of different ages and overall characteristics (Fournier, 1998; Sweeney and Chew, 2000). Similar to Sweeney and Chew (2000), the sample will be recruited on preference and will not meet the requirements of random sampling. The participants will be selected primarily for the inductive interviewing. It is proposed to select three South Asian women with different overall demographics, characteristics, lifestyles, and professional backgrounds to get maximum varied themes regarding their WOM attributes in general and in the scenario of Brand Love. The in-depth interviewing of the respondents will be carried out to investigate that how consumers communicate about brands in general? And how they communicate about the brands that they love? Both the scenarios will be investigated in regard to both good and bad incidents. The purpose of the investigation is to explore the different levels, and nature of WOM, as the content, language, or manner of WOM depicts the nature and impact of WOM (Mazzarol *et al.*, 2007; Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). Also, the consumer WOM behaviour will be viewed in a form of a hierarchy for improved understanding of the different intensities of consumer behaviour towards brands (Park *et al.*, 2006). The aim for using phenomenological interviewing (Fournier, 1998; Sweeney and Chew, 2000) is to develop an in-depth understanding of consumer WOM behaviour towards their loved brands to acquire the behavioural insights that are not possible through positivist paradigm using quantitative methods (Schutz, 1967). The interview findings will be analysed using Thematic Content Analysis. Thematic Content Analysis (TCA) is adopted for this study to analyse interview findings. Thematic analysis involves the search for themes that emerge as being significant to report the phenomenon (Daly *et al.*, 1997). The procedure involves identifying themes through “careful reading and re-reading of the data” (Rice and Ezzy, 1999:258). Thematic Content Analysis is considered as an extensive form of content analysis that can be described as a descriptive presentation of qualitative information (Anderson, 2007). It is a research technique used to generate valid and replicable inferences through text and speech in the relevant useful context (Krippendorff, 2004).

### Practical Implications and Limitations:

The study offers insights for managers to consider and understand the overwhelming benefits of close consumer-brand relationships, especially Brand Love that promotes and offer substantial WOM attributes that are vital for recent competition. It has become critical for managers to make their agents working for them to fight criticisms (Park *et al.*, 2006) and do marketing for them (Peck *et al.*, 1999) with the widespread of social media and Internet communities. The key expected contribution of the study conveys the positive attributions of brand love in good and bad times and propose the concept of Brand Defence that go beyond the boundaries of traditional consumption concepts, but treat brand as a part of self and fight criticism as of personal criticism (Park *et al.*, 2006). The study suggests managers to create strategies that promote brand love and consequently positive WOM followed by advocacy and defence to get unconditional support from consumers in the face of any criticisms as researchers have identified the fact that customers rely most on WOM rather than traditional advertising (Arndt, 1967; deMattos and Rossi, 2008). In regard to the limitations of this study, there are a number of limitations that include the issues of generalisability and statistical rigor due to the qualitative nature of research (Schutz, 1967). Therefore, future researches can explore WOM attributions, particularly Brand Defence with a large and adverse sample with adequate statistical techniques to provide generalisability and validity.

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## **Brand as an Active Partner in Consumer-Brand Love Bonds; Brand Love Relationship Process**

*Mansoor Javed and Sanjit Kumar Roy*

### **Abstract**

Identifying and realising the significance of brand love, the paper proposes a conceptual model developed on the existing literature of consumer-brand relationship, brand love, interpersonal love, branding, and social psychology. The paper explores the role of 'brand' in a *brand love relationship process* and proposes brand as an initiator and active partner in the relationship process, where a consumer response is followed by the brand proposing a relationship, and the relationship develops, initiates, and sustains as a bidirectional relation. The second major exploration of the paper is the conceptualisation of brand love as 'a *general love factor*', where the consumers involved in brand love offer general loving gesture/attributes.

**Keywords:** *Brand Love, General Love Factor, Consumer-Brand Relationship, BIAF*

**Track:** *Relationship Marketing*

### **1. Introduction**

Brand love has gained sumptuous attraction in consumer-brand relationship literature within the last two decades (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Batra *et al.* 2012). The research field is still experiencing its infancy and most researchers are focusing more on the dimensions (Albert *et al.*, 2008), antecedents, and consequences of brand love (e.g. Carrol and Ahuvia 2006; Roy *et al.* 2012). However, the construct of brand love itself is under an argument that whether it is an analogous construct, as interpersonal love (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012) or a unidirectional construct of Para-social love domain (Horton and Wohl, 1956), or it is any other form of unreciprocated love (Aron *et al.*, 1998). The basic debate that could not find a unanimous agreement is the role of "brand" within a "consumer-brand" relationship scenario. This study builds up its argument on the previous literature including empirical work in the field to build the conceptualisation of brand love relationship process (BLRP). The study bases its foundations on Fournier's (1998) notion of "brands as relationship partners". Therefore, the basic proposition of this study includes that brands reciprocate in a consumer/brand love relationship (Fournier, 1998, 2009; Fournier and Alvarez, 2012; Kervyn *et al.*, 2012; MacInnis, 2012). The second proposition of this study includes that this is brand, who initiates a relationship with consumer or that invites or proposes a consumer to indulge in a relationship, through its unique product or services offerings (Albert *et al.*, 2008) advertising, positioning, credibility (Keller and Lehman, 2006), and/or value creation (Aaker, D. 1991). The third proposition of this model propose that irrespective of the antecedents, moderators, mediators, or dimensions, Brand Love becomes a general love construct in line with Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) and the meta-analysis findings of interpersonal love constructs by Graham (2011), and its components can only be explored in an interpersonal context. The forth assumption of this model proposes that after Brand Love (general love factor), consumers impart general loving gestures to the brand, and it leads generalised future behavioural intentions. And, the final proposition suggest that this consumer brand relationship always keep growing both sides, as if consumer render its love to a brand, the brand responds to its love through its own ways, and when brand shows its love for consumers the consumer responds in a humanly manner. The BLRP concludes that the brand-consumer love relationships are as complex as interpersonal love constructs. Therefore, to measure the outcomes of brand love, it is essential to consider love as a general love factor, similar to interpersonal love that incorporates all the different dimensions of human relationship facets, including intimacy, passion, warmth, excitement, anger, forgiveness etc.

### **2. Brand as a Relationship Initiator**

The study proposes brand as an initiator of any relationship between a brand and a consumer and build the case on the prevailing literature on branding, relationship marketing, and social psychology (e.g. Fournier, 1998, 2009; Keller, 2012; MacInnis, 2012, Kervyn *et al.*, 2012) insights to the consumer-brand relationships. Therefore, the argument starts with the concept of brand, and leads towards how a brand builds a relationship and sustains that.

## 2.1 Who is a Brand?

Brand is identity; American Marketing Association (2011) defines brand as "*name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers.*" In this paper, the brand is not just the distinct face or identity of any goods or services but someone, *who create value* (Aaker, D. 1991), *develop relationship* (Fournier, 1998), *show care and support* (Fournier, 2009) and *sustain relationships* (Fournier 2009; Kervyn *et al.*, 2011; Fournier and Alvarez, 2011). Therefore, the concept of 'brand' is governed by a whole thought process, it is not merely a non-responding entity, or object.

## 2.2 How Brand Proposes a Consumer-Brand Relationship?

None knows a brand, unless it is told by the brand itself, by its management/marketing brains. The term brand is governed by a whole process of creating an offering (product or services) followed by marketing communications that facilitates a brand to introduce itself to the consumers, make them purchase, develop their liking, attachment, trust and love. Brand positioning (Keller and Lehmann, 2006) with supporting advertising plays a key role of value creation and introduction of the brand to the consumers. It develops key brand associations in consumers' minds and creates differentiation to provide "competitive superiority" (Keller *et al.*, 2002), that makes the brand prominent or attractive to consumers. The positioning followed by brand intangibles (Levy, 1999), brand personality (Aaker, J. 1997), brand as relationship partner (Fournier, 1998), and the latest concept of brands as intentional agent framework (BIAF) propose the scope and vitality of the proposition that brand is capable of building and maintaining relationships (Kervyn *et al.*, 2012). This latest notion that brands act as intentional agents extends Fournier's (2009) perception that consumers can also develop relations with brands as they form relations with humans. The BIAF model gained instant attraction, criticism (Fournier and Alvarez, 2012; Keller, 2012), and inquisitiveness (MacInnis, 2012), for its viability, due to the perceived multifarious dimensionality of consumer-brand relationships; but none denied the acting role of brands. The researchers doubt that this two-factor (warmth and competence) matrix would not be able to incorporate the dimensions and complicities of consumer-brand bonds. Irrespective of the criticism and Fiske *et al.*'s (2012) response, the agreement on the two-way relationship provide support to the idea that brands play as an active partner and reciprocate in brand love bonds. Moreover, the basic BIAF hypothesis "*that brands are 'people' ...*" (p.207) lends a basis for conceptualising the relationship process proposed in this paper. Therefore, the literature supports the human side of brand and validates this proposition that "*a brand can develop a relation and can be the one who initiates a relationship*" through its people.

## 3. Consumer Realm of Brand Love

Researchers are taking extensive interest in the consumers' context of Brand Love, its dimensions, its antecedents, and outcomes, as mentioned above, there is no unanimous agreement found on the conceptualisation of brand love. Brand love is observed to drive a number of positive behavioural outcomes for loved brands, such as, *positive word of mouth*, increased *brand loyalty* (Roy *et al.*, 2012; Carrol and Ahuvia 2006), ignoring wrong-doings of the brand, *forgiveness* (Donovan *et al.* 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), *brand advocacy* (Urban, 2004) and *brand defence* (under construction), including each and everything that a lover can do for his/her loved one within a brand-consumer context. The intensities may vary based on individual demographics (Fournier, 2009). The realisation of such rewarding outcomes of consumer-brand relationships overall, gained a high attraction in research.

## 4. The Conceptualisation of Consumer's Love for a Brand

The feeling of love is central to most close relationships, as it can mean differently to different relations, such as, love for friends, children, or a romantic partner; so, researchers have worked at developing different models of love to allow differentiation, understanding and measurement of varying love experiences (Graham, 2011). Love is observed as one of the essential components of a successful relationship (Simpson *et al.*, 1986). Based on the relational paradigm and the notion that consumers may attribute human characteristics to brands (Fournier, 1998; Aaker, J.1997), the researchers started paying attention to the concept of love also in brand's context. Brand love can be explored in the three possible domains.

### 4.1 Brand Love under Para-Social Love Domain

Whang *et al.* (2004) argued that bi-directional love models are not applicable to brand love, as the consumers' love for brands could not be reciprocated by a brand; therefore, this consumer-brand relation becomes unidirectional. Fetscherin and Dato-on (2012) supported the view, and they conceptualised brand love under both domains interpersonal, as well as, Para-social (Horton and Wohl, 1956). The concept refers to a friendship or intimacy relationship by any audience for a media

figure. It is believed that such interactions or relations are unidirectional, and the loved person does not reciprocate to the lover, analogous to a fan celebrity relationship (Caughey, 1984). This conceptualisation of brand love entirely negates the concept of brand as relationship partners (Fournier, 1998), and a brand actively participates in consumer-brand relationship (Fournier, 2009).

#### **4.2 Brand Love under Unreciprocated Love**

On the other hand, the conceptualisation of unreciprocated love (Aron et al. 1998) also does not fit in the brand love context. All the brand love studies to date suggest the positive outcomes of brand love (e.g. Roy *et al.*, 2012; Batra *et al.*, 2012). The interpersonal relationship literature also evidence that close relationships are governed by positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (McNulty, 2010) and even in transgressions, they empathise their partners, where kind attributions, and forgiveness prevails (Kearns and Fincham, 2005). However, the unreciprocated love is governed by negative outcomes, such as, serious distress (Smith and Hockland, 1988), or disrupted lives (Tennov, 1979), lowered self-esteem (Baumiester *et al.* 1993) and suicide inclinations (Westefeld and Furr, 1989). However, the concept of Brand love is administered by positive behavioural outcomes (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012, Donovan et al. 2012; Heinrich et al. 2012). Looking at the Aron et al's (1998) motivational framework, unreciprocated love initiates with the desirability and probability of making a relationship that denotes to a bi-directional nature of the concept. In brand love, irrespective of unidirectional or bidirectional relationship, consumers love the brands knowingly that brands cannot reciprocate in the way they love the brand, and still they offer positive attributions to their loved brands and seek positive feelings in turn.

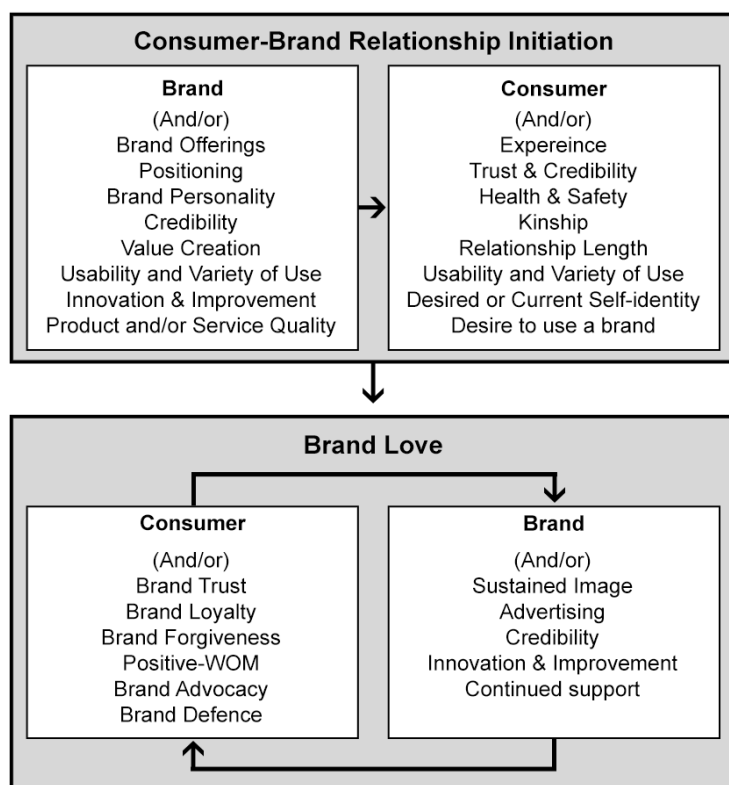
#### **4.3 Interpersonal Theory of Love; Brand Love as a General Love Factor**

Researchers believe that at least some form of love, presuming romantic love, have been present within all human groups in all eras of human history (Hatfield and Rapson 2002). With the growth in branding literature, researchers started assuming brand-consumer relationships attributing similar characteristics as of interpersonal relationships (Aaker, J. 1997; Fournier, 1998). And, love also started getting appreciation and inclusion in the Brand-Consumer relationship contexts in research (Aaker, J. 1997; Fournier, 1998). The Sternberg's (1987) Triangular Theory of Love attracted the lot in consumer-brand love relationship. Most literature on brand love initially is developed on this theory (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Fetscherin and Dato-on 2012), and offer avenues to dig further into interpersonal love relationships to provide further basis to understand and measure brand love and its consequential outcomes. Graham (2011) has recently conducted a meta-analysis of "Love" exploring the higher-order factors measured by the most popular measures of love. The results negated the common conceptualisations of love, suggesting that the existing love measures fell into three discrete higher-order factors, based on global self-report love measures, where most measures appeared to be tapped into a single general factor of love. It proposes that love outcomes can be viewed in general, whether it stemmed out of any relational soil but depict having similar impact overall. Graham (2011) compared it with intelligence research, where Individual components of intelligence, even having distinct standing are hypothesised, as a single general intelligence factor at a higher-order level, so is love can be viewed as a unified general love factor. And, based on these findings, the Consumers' love for brands can also be viewed as a general Brand Love factor that yield general set positive behaviour. Graham, (2011) suggests using experience sampling method (Graham, 2008) to avoid the high overlapping of self-report measures in love, and this may also be useful for brand love, as well, to better distinguish its proposed components, as it is developing as an analogous concept as interpersonal love.

#### **5. Corresponding Nature of the Relationship; Consumer-Brand Relationship Process**

The literature supports the fact that consumer-brand relationships are like interpersonal relationships (Fournier, 1998; Kervyn *et al.*, 2012), so it is proposed that brand love is a bidirectional construct. In addition, being its exaggerated complexity, it is important to understand its flow and process to further develop its comprehensive measure that does not ignore its dimensionality. The study proposes that a consumer-brand love relationship initiates by the brand, and consumer on receiving brand messages and offerings develops its side of brand love based on its cognitions, like self-congruity, trust, well-being, dreams (Albert *et al.*, 2008), and experience (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012) and then in turn consumer attributes outcomes of its side of love to the brand. The consumer's love for brand is observed as highly beneficial to brands and has been apparent in several relationship examples such as revival and survival of NIKE (Donovan *et al.*, 2012). It proposes that understanding the nature and process of brand love can provide basis for developing the components of brand love to measure them in a collective general brand love construct to appreciate the positive outcomes of brand love. The final proposition of the model suggests that this consumer's love for brand is reciprocated by the brand through sustained credibility, image,

innovation, advertising (Keller and Lehman, 2006), and/or support (Fournier, 2009). Therefore, the relationship sustains and grows bi-directionally, as of human-to-human reciprocity of love. The proposed relationship process is predicted in the Brand Love Relationship Process figure.



## 6. Discussion

The purpose of the study was to provide a preliminary basis for a research in *Brand Love Relationship Process*. Inclusion of different components of brand-consumer attributions towards each other to form and sustain relationships can provide bases to develop a working model for managers to understand and measure general brand love factor. Not only the literature, the day to day advertisements and brand taglines reinforce the idea and importance of forming consumer-brand relationships, we see stimulating taglines enhancing relationship arousals that play a role in building, maintaining or sustaining relationships. Some famous taglines of successful international brands are included to show that somehow all these taglines are aimed at stimulating some personal insight of their target customers, the taglines of Apple "Think Different", and British Airways' "Upgrade to British Airways" seems to capture the self-esteem, and ego aspect of consumers. Coke reinforces the part of self-arousals by "The Coke Side of Life", whereas Nike' "Just Do It" and Canon's "You Can" encourages one's ability, Nokia's "Connecting People" focuses the social side, whereas Tesco's "Every Little Helps" and DHL's "We Keep Your Promises" renders support. All of these are International brands, which address multi-cultural and multi-geographical consumers and belong to different industries but following a similar approach that invites consumers to develop relationships. Therefore, it is assumingly concluded that the consumer-brand relationships can never be unidirectional, irrespective of any industry or geographical area, an empirical testing is required to improve and validate the relationship process and to develop a viable measuring model that include all the basic consumer-brand love components to measure the general brand love factor. Building on Filho and Fetscherin's (2012) work that like product categories, as they do not affect brand love, so are the components or dimensions of love do not affect the overall general Brand Love outcomes.

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## **"Beyond Brand Advocacy: WOM as Brand Defence"**

Mansoor Javed

### **Work-in-Progress Paper**

#### **Abstract:**

The study explores the WOM behaviour and discusses a hierarchy of five possible WOM outcomes and reflective behaviour of "brand love". The WOM outcomes of Brand Love are explored in the case of brand failure, mistake, transgression, and negative WOM and proposed "Brand Defence" as the superlative degree of consumers' WOM behaviour. The five WOM outcomes suggested by this study include Brand Defence being the most positive and strong outcome, then Brand Advocacy, Positive WOM, then No WOM and in the least order, it is negative WOM.

#### **Extended Abstract**

##### **Conceptual Background**

Several researches have confirmed to date that customers in close brand relationships tend to attribute higher WOM behaviour (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002) and WOM has been reported as one of the most common attribute, consequence or outcome of most Brand Love studies (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012). Also, it is apparent from the existing literature of Brand Love that with a few exceptions (Donovan *et al.*, 2012), most Brand Love studies have explored the bright side of consumer-brand relationships, such as satisfaction and excitement (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), excitement and brand image (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012), loyalty, and experience (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012), and higher order brand love factors (Batra *et al.* 2012). The review of brand love literature reveals that consumers tend to attribute positive WOM and resist to negative information about the brand (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to extend the existing knowledge and recognition of brand love promoting WOM in the scenario of "*any failure, mistake, Transgression (or merely a negative WOM spread by a rumour) by the brand*". The study assumes that consumer-brand relationship cannot remain a normal relation, when it is intervened by love. In this study, Brand Forgiveness is observed as one of the moderating factors for post-love behaviour of consumers in the case of Brand failure, mistake, or transgression.

##### **Research Questions**

- How Consumers behave, when their loved brand makes a mistake, transgress, fail, and/or face Negative WOM?
- What are the WOM reflective behaviour or outcomes of Brand Love in case of failure, transgression, mistake and/or Negative WOM?

##### **Method**

The research methods proposed for this research are a mix of two methods; first the case study method similar to Fournier (1998) and Sweeney and Chew (2000), with the same sample size of three adult females. The second method proposed for this study is CIT forms (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008) for data triangulation (Denzin 1970), which will be developed on the bases of brand stories and themes generated by three case studies. The aim for using phenomenological interviewing (Fournier 1998; Sweeney and Chew 2000) and Critical Incident Technique forms to dig deep into the consumer behaviour regarding their loved brands to acquire such behavioural insights that are impossible through deductive approaches (Schutz 1967).

##### **Projected Findings**

The study is proposed to enhance the understanding of consumer WOM behaviour towards their loved brands in the scenarios of failure, transgression, mistake and/or Negative WOM. The first phase of findings is proposed to generate themes and will support the hierarchy of WOM behaviour that suggest "Brand Defence" being the most positive and strong outcome, then Brand Advocacy, Positive WOM, No WOM, and in the least order, it is negative WOM. The prospective findings from this study are expected to be three folds, first refusal to believe of any negative information about the brand in line with Park *et al.* (2006), second to forgive the brand for any wrong doings, and third, and the most important finding expected from the study is that in both the initial scenarios the

consumers attribute positive WOM, Advocacy and/or defence towards its loved brand. Moreover, it is also expected to be explored that in intense brand love relations, the consumer takes brand criticisms as personal criticism, and fights back that criticism as its own, to test the propositions of Park *et al.* (2006) and Park and McInnis (2006). The most noteworthy exploration of this study involves investigating that whether the consumers used to defend their loved brand for any wrong doings or any rumours, or criticisms regardless of believing them or not. It is also proposed that the intensities of the WOM vary with the levels of relatedness with the brand, the closer the consumer-brand relationship the higher, and more positive would be the WOM attributions. The author aims to report the WOM attributions in a form of a hierarchy as suggested by Park *et al.* (2006) for improved understanding of consumers' attributions towards a brand.

### Projected Contributions

The key contribution of the study conveys the positive attributions of brand love even in the case of negative scenarios, whether it is a brand mistake, failure, transgression, and/or negative WOM or merely a rumour spread by any competitor. It suggests managers to create strategies that enhance brand love and consequently positive WOM followed by advocacy and Brand Defence to get unconditional support from consumers in case of any downturns as researchers have identified the fact that customers rely most on WOM rather than traditional advertising (Arndt, 1967; deMattos and Rossi, 2008). The significance of WOM is highly appreciated in the latest studies, as well (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Wallace, 2012). This is the first study to-date that explores WOM outcomes of Brand Love in the unfavourable scenarios like failure, transgression, mistake, and/or Negative WOM and suggests a hierarchy of WOM behaviour. The CIT findings are expected to refine the findings further and provide improved insights and generalisability.

### Introduction

Several researches have confirmed to date that customers in close brand relationships tend to attribute higher WOM behaviour (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002), and WOM has been reported as one of the most common attributes, consequences or outcomes of most Brand Love studies (Albert *et al.*, 2009; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Bauer *et al.*, 2007; Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Park *et al.*, 2006). Moreover, it is apparent from the existing literature of Brand Love that with a few exceptions (e.g., Donovan *et al.*, 2012 studied forgiveness in brand transgressions), most Brand Love studies have explored the bright side of consumer-brand relationships. Such as, satisfaction and excitement of hedonic products (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006), consumers' love for fashion brands, exploring excitement and brand image and their consequent WOM outcomes (Ismail, and Spinelli, 2012), brand loyalty, and brand experience (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012), and higher order brand love factors (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, Bauer *et al.* (2007) studied brand passion that is considered as a dimension of brand love or a similar construct by most studies (Carrol and Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998; Whang *et al.*, 2004). This study also involved the exceptional side of brand that exhibit uniqueness, self-expressiveness, prestige of the brand, hedonic factor, and consumer's extraversion, and above all, Bauer *et al.* (2007) also considered positive WOM as one of the consequences of brand passion with a price premium and purchase intentions. Therefore, the review of brand love literature reveals that consumers tend to attribute positive WOM and resist to negative information about the brand (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to extend the existing knowledge and recognition of brand love promoting positive WOM in the scenario of "any failure, mistake, Transgression (or merely a negative WOM spread by a rumour) by the brand". The study view consumer WOM behavioural outcomes in a form of a hierarchy to identify and understand the differing levels of relationship intensities, as suggested by Park *et al.* (2006) to understand consumer behaviour towards brands in a form of a hierarchy. Park *et al.* (2006) and Park and McInnis (2006) viewed the overall consumer behaviour towards brands including, liking a brand, purchase intentions, repeat purchase behaviour, resistance to negative information about the brand or competitive brand offerings, actively promoting the brand through positive WOM, paying a price premium, and/or postponing purchases in case of unavailability. However, this study is all about exploring the WOM behaviour. Therefore, it discusses a hierarchy of five possible WOM outcomes and reflective behaviour of "brand love" (See Fig.1). The WOM outcomes of Brand Love are explored in the case of brand failure, mistake, transgression, and negative WOM and proposed "Brand Defence" (Javed and Roy, 2013b forthcoming) as the superlative degree of consumers' WOM behaviour. The five WOM outcomes suggested by this study include Brand Defence being the most positive and strong outcome, then Brand Advocacy, Positive WOM, then No WOM and in the least order, it is negative WOM.

### Conceptual Framework

The authors view brand love as a prismatic condition, and WOM as the refrangible rays of consumer behaviour out of transgression, failure or negative WOM scenario. The author relates the Consumer Brand Love behavioural attributes to Newton's (1672) concept of light that states white light as, "heterogeneous mixture of differently refrangible rays", each colour corresponding to a different re-frangibility, assuming that the white sunlight is composed of several rays, where each kind of ray refracts in a different direction, when passes through a prism, and it is associated with a distinct colour (Newton 1672). Similarly, in case of Brand Love if a loved brand fails or commits a mistake, the consumers' WOM outcomes can exhibit different re-frangibility, when passed through the prism of Brand Love. Moreover, Park *et al.* (2006) also suggest the different levels and intensities of consumer behaviour towards brands, as the rays do for light. The basic proposition of this study is that the consumer behaviour never remains the same or normal, when there comes a love factor, like interpersonal love relationships that suggest lovers defend and protect their loved ones or partners in any form of grievance (Graham, 2011). Also, lovers attribute higher levels of forgiveness towards their partners (Allemand *et al.*, 2007; Kearns and Fincham 2005). Therefore, analogous to most brand love studies (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012; Fournier, 1998; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012), this study also builds its argument on the analogous nature of brand love and interpersonal love and considers brand love as a general love factor (Graham 2011). The general love factor refers to the state, where a consumer attributes general positive attributes towards its loved brand, irrespective of the dimensions, or antecedents of Brand Love. The research model in figure 1 explains the conceptual structure. The major contribution this study is proposed to make includes, its being the first study exploring the different possible WOM outcomes in the case of brand mistake, or failure, in the Brand Love scenario. And, secondly the findings of the first phase of research validates the existing nature of Brand Defence (Javed and Roy, 2013b forthcoming) as the strongest or super most WOM behavioural outcome that cannot let the loved brand left alone facing the criticism, but front the brand, and defend it against any criticisms among friends, family, colleagues, and online social media.

### Conceptualisation of WOM (word-of-mouth)

Researchers could not agree on any single definition of WOM (de Matos and Rossi, 2008), but the most accepted meaning of WOM in general, is a non-commercial communication regarding a brand, product, or service. Arndt (1967) defined WOM as, "an oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, regarding a brand, product, or service" (p. 66). Buttle (1998) and Harrison-Walker (2001) also built on this definition of WOM. However, Anderson *et al.* (1998) considered WOM as an informal, non-commercial evaluation of goods and services. In this study, WOM is considered as anything positive or negative said or written about a brand, product, or service by a non-commercial communicator (most likely to be a consumer).

Regarding the differing levels of WOM observed in this study, Negative WOM refers to something negative said or written about a brand (Harrison-Walker, 2001). No WOM is a state considered in this study, where consumer does not speak or write about the brand. However, Positive WOM refers to the positive communications about the brand, whereas, Advocacy can be viewed as a superior form of positive WOM, as the content, language, or manner of WOM informs if it is advocacy (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008). According to Wallace *et al.* (2012), "Advocacy encompasses and extends beyond the traditional concept of WOM" (p.3). Moreover, a new term, 'Brand Defence' is suggested as the strongest form of 'WOM' as a behavioural outcome of strong consumer-brand relationships and brand love. The term to-date is not used in this context, but still a few researchers believe that consumers do defend their brands in close consumer brand relationships (Bowlby, 1979; Park and McInnis, 2006; Park *et al.*, 2006).

### Brand Love as General Love Factor

Love is a universal construct, and it is believed to be present within all human groups throughout the human history (Hatfield and Rapson, 2002). As the concept of brands and branding grew, researchers started assuming consumer feeling love for brands analogous to interpersonal love with few differences (Aaker, 1997; Fournier, 1998). The Sternberg's (1986) Triangular Theory of Love has been highly appreciated in brand love scenario with its three components: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment (Fetscherin and Dato-on, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). However, the recent meta-analysis of "Love" suggested that love can be viewed as a general love factor and so is its outcomes (Graham, 2011). Graham (2011) suggested that like general intelligence factor, love could also be viewed as a unified general love factor regardless of the different dimensions of love (Javed and Roy, 2013a, forthcoming). Therefore, this study considers love for brands as a

general Brand Love factor that makes consumers attribute a general set of positive behaviour towards the loved brand.

### **Brand Mistake, Failure, Transgression And/or Negative WOM**

*"Brands fail... Right now, somewhere in the world, someone in a very smart suit and an expensive haircut is in a boardroom selling an idea for a new brand and everyone in the room nodding their heads as happily as people boarded titanic"* (Haig 2011, xi). But, in today's market with exceeding competition these failures can be fatal for brands, and even a false rumour spread by a competitor can ruin a brand's image (Haig, 2011). Therefore, it is imperative for managers to learn that how they can circumvent the devastating effects and costs of such mistakes, failures, transgressions, and/or rumours. Therefore, this study suggests that consumers loving a brand do not believe in the negative information about the brand, and if they come across any mistake, failure, or transgression, they not only forgive the brand (Donovan *et al.* 2012) in most cases, but also intend to defend the brand for any criticisms. According to Heinrich *et al.* (2012, 146) *"consumers turn a blind eye to the beloved brand when the brand makes a mistake"*. It further reveals the significance of brand love in survival of a brand in grieved times.

### **Brand Forgiveness**

In regard to forgiveness in interpersonal relationship literature, the individuals in high-quality relationships suggest having higher inclination to forgive their partners (Allemand *et al.*, 2007; Finkel *et al.* 2002; Kearns and Fincham 2005; McCullough *et al.* 1998). Even in case of remembered offenses, individuals forgive their partners. However, such forgiveness is governed by higher levels of relationship satisfaction (Allemand *et al.*, 2007), relationship quality (Kearns and Fincham 2005), and closeness of relationship (McCullough *et al.*, 1998). It is observed that individuals in higher quality relationships tend to empathise more with their partner and attribute softer or more positive behaviour towards their partners' mistakes or transgressions that posit greater forgiveness ultimately (Kearns and Fincham 2005; McCullough *et al.*, 1998). Further to this positive attribution behaviour of individuals for their partners in high quality relations, satisfied couples are expected to exhibit more positive thoughts, feelings, and behaviour toward their partners (McNulty 2010). Therefore, like the interpersonal relationship, researchers also applied the concept of forgiveness to consumer-brand relationships, as well (Donovan *et al.*, 2012; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Donovan *et al.*'s (2012) study investigates brand forgiveness and future behavioural intentions in case of brand relationship closeness and found that brand forgiveness out of brand relationship closeness plays a key role in moderating future brand behaviour. Heinrich *et al.* (2012) also investigated forgiveness and price premium being the consequences of brand love and found supporting evidence for both outcomes. Therefore, in this study, brand forgiveness is observed as one of the moderating factors for post-love behaviour of consumers in the case of Brand failure, mistake, or transgression.

### **Research Methodology**

The research methods proposed for this research are a mix of two methods. The first phase of the study will involve a case study, phenomenological interviewing method similar to Fournier (1998) and Sweeney and Chew (2000), with the same sample size of three adult females. Like Sweeney and Chew (2000), the sample will not be selected based on basic sampling rules, but it will be a preferred sample with differing demographics, characteristics, lifestyles, and professional backgrounds. The purpose is to get maximum varied themes for consumers' love for brands, and how they react to brand discrepancies, such as mistake, failure, transgression, or negative WOM (even if it is a mere rumour). The reactions will be explored in relation to the consumers' WOM outcomes. Moreover, in line with Park *et al.* (2006), the consumer WOM behaviour will be viewed in a form of a hierarchy of prospective WOM behaviour for improved understanding of the different relationship intensities. The second method proposed for this study is CIT forms (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008) for data triangulation (Denzin, 1970), which will be developed on the bases of brand stories and themes generated through the three case studies. The aim for using phenomenological interviewing (Fournier, 1998; Sweeney and Chew, 2000) and Critical Incident Technique forms is to dig deep into the consumer behavioural intentions towards their loved brands to acquire such behavioural insights that are impossible through deductive approaches (Schutz, 1967).

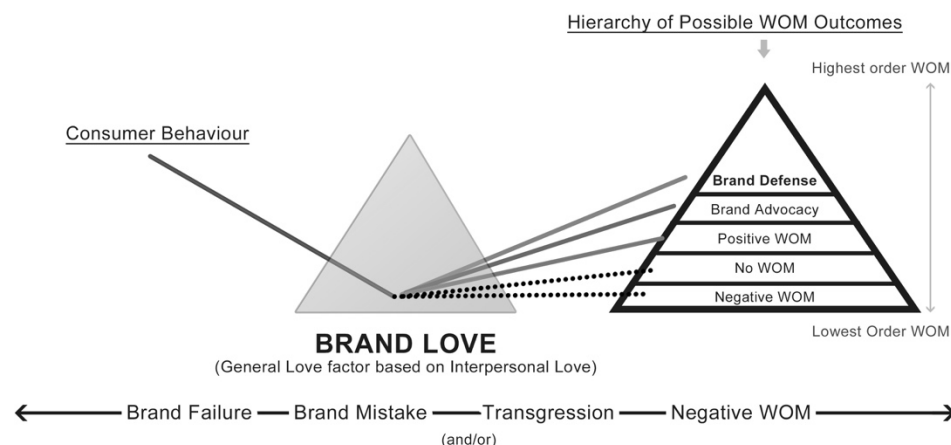
### **Wom Attributions of Brand Love; Identifying WOM Themes**

The first phase of the research will involve phenomenological interviewing (Fournier, 1998) of three Asian females with certainly different demographics (Fournier, 1998; Sweeney and Chew 2000) to allow different WOM themes and patterns to reveal in the brand love context. The participants will be interviewed in detail using a semi-structured questionnaire to allow flexibility yet to control over the interview (Dunn, 2000). The interviews will enquire interviewees about their favourite brands,

more and the most favourite brands and that the brands they think they are in love with. The interviewee will ask about the extent and intensity of their relationship that what can they do for their loved brands. The interviews will be directed in a way to explore two main things, first the respondents' feeling of love for a brand, and secondly their willingness or intent to attribute WOM for that brand in the scenarios, when a brand is faced with criticism for any mistake, failure, and/or transgression. The interview findings are expected to reveal important insights to consumers' willingness to attribute WOM, when they relate with brands, especially when they feel love for the brand. The prospective findings of this study are expected to be threefold. First, whether the consumer involved in brand love refuses to believe any negative information about the brand? Secondly, will the consumer forgive the brand for any wrong doings? And, thirdly, and the most importantly, the study involves investigating the consumers' intentions that will the consumer attribute positive WOM, Advocacy and/or defence towards its loved brand even in a negative scenario? Moreover, the consumers will also be explored for the intensity of their brand love relations. The interviewer will ask the consumer that will they take brand criticisms as personal criticism and fights back that criticism as their own, to explore Park *et al.* (2006) propositions. The study will explore the consumers defence behaviour towards their loved brand for any wrong doing or any rumors or criticisms towards their loved or most liked brand. The study proposes that the intensity of WOM behaviour varies with the intensity of love a consumer feels for a brand and intends to view the WOM behavioural intentions or attributions in a form of a hierarchy as suggested by Park *et al.* (2006) and Park and McInnis (2006). The rationale for viewing consumer behaviour in a form of a hierarchy is to understand the different levels of consumers' attributions towards a brand (Park *et al.* 2006; Park and McInnis, 2006). The conceptual research model is presented in Figure 1. In order to test and refine this research model, the study will also undertake a second phase of research consisting of CIT forms filled out by a larger sample of respondents, including a mix of male and female respondents (Sweeney *et al.*, 2008) with different ethnic, educational and professional backgrounds residing in the UK to avoid cultural, professional or gender bias in the information, and to provide further generalisability of the research findings.

### Projected Contributions, Practical Implications and Limitations

The key contribution expected from the study is to explore the positive attributions of brand love in the case of negative scenarios, whether it is a brand mistake, failure, transgression, and/or negative WOM or merely a rumour spread by any competitor. The study is aimed at exploring WOM themes, depicting the positive WOM, Brand Advocacy and Brand Defence behaviour to help managers create informed strategies that enhance brand love. As fostering Brand Love will further lead to consequent positive WOM behavioural outcomes followed by brand advocacy and brand defence to get unconditional support from consumers in case of any downturns as researchers have identified the fact that customers rely most on WOM rather than traditional advertising (Arndt, 1967; deMattos and Rossi, 2008). The significance of WOM is highly appreciated in the latest studies, as well (Batra *et al.*, 2012; Ismail and Spinelli, 2012; Wallace, 2012). Regarding the limitations of this study, there are a number of limitations associated to this study that include its qualitative approach that provides depth and detail (Schutz, 1967), but restrict generalisability and statistical rigor. Future researches should therefore test this research model using quantitative means to provide generalisability, as well as, investigate this study with different cultural samples as brand love factors are culturally grounded (Albert *et al.*, 2008), therefore can yield differing findings.



## Figure 1 Research Model of WOM Reflective Behaviour or Outcomes of Brand Love

**Notes:** The figure suggests that when Brand Love acting as a prism in the overall scenario of Brand Failure, Brand Mistake, Transgression, and/or Negative WOM, the consumer behaviour passing through the Brand Love prism can yield five possible WOM outcomes. The dotted lines show that there is less possibility for a consumer involved in Brand Love to attribute negative WOM or keep quiet, when loved brand is criticised for anything. The first phase of findings suggests that upper order WOM are more likely to be generated in Brand Love Scenarios, irrespective of brand making a mistake, transgress, fail, or faced with negative WOM.

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