

# MASTER THESIS

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## ALL YOU NEED IS

# *brand love*

The relationship of brand love and its consequences  
for compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

ABSTRACT .....	5
1. INTRODUCTION .....	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW .....	8
2.1 <i>Brand love</i> .....	8
2.2 <i>Brand love and its consequences</i> .....	8
2.2.1 Brand loyalty .....	9
2.2.2 Positive word-of-mouth .....	10
2.2.3 Negative word-of-mouth.....	11
2.2.4 Resistance to negative information.....	11
2.3 <i>Compulsive buyers</i> .....	12
2.3.1 Compulsive buyers and brand loyalty .....	13
2.3.2 Compulsive buyers and positive WOM.....	13
2.3.3 Compulsive buyers and negative WOM.....	14
2.3.4 Compulsive buyers and resistance to negative information .....	15
3. METHODOLOGY .....	16
3.1 <i>Measurement</i> .....	16
3.2 <i>Data collection</i> .....	19
3.3 <i>Sample</i> .....	19
3.4 <i>Reliability analysis</i> .....	20
4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....	21
4.1 <i>Assumptions for regression analyses</i> .....	21
4.2 <i>Compulsive buying behavior measurement</i> .....	21
4.3 <i>Randomization of the treatment</i> .....	22
4.3.1 Gender.....	22
4.3.2 Age.....	22
4.3.3 Annual income.....	22
4.3.4 Current employment status .....	23
4.3.5 Relationship status .....	23
4.3.6 Frequency of buying <i>brand x</i> .....	23
4.4 <i>Brand love</i> .....	23
4.5 <i>Brand loyalty</i> .....	24
4.6 <i>Positive word-of-mouth</i> .....	24
4.7 <i>Negative word-of-mouth</i> .....	25
4.8 <i>Resistance to negative information</i> .....	26
4.9 <i>Conclusion</i> .....	28
5. DISCUSSION .....	29
5.1 <i>Limitations and suggestions for further research</i> .....	30
5.2 <i>Implications</i> .....	33



REFERENCE LIST .....	35
APPENDIX .....	42
<i>Appendix 1. The survey (English version)</i> .....	42
1A. Introduction .....	42
1B. Compulsive buying .....	42
1C. Last purchased brand .....	43
1D. Brand love .....	43
1E. Consequences of brand love .....	45
1F. Control questions .....	47
1H. Participation in the lottery .....	49
1I. End of the survey .....	49
<i>Appendix 2. Overview of measurement scales consequences of brand love</i> .....	50



## ABSTRACT

This study examines to which degree compulsive buying behavior affects the relationship between brand love and its consequences, such as brand loyalty, positive/negative word of mouth and resistance to negative information. So far, little research has been done regarding this topic. A survey was conducted and resulted in a sample of 800 respondents, which was divided over compulsive buyers (244) and non-compulsive buyers (265). The findings suggest that there is a relationship between brand love and all its consequences. However, the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty and positive WOM was significantly higher. When moderating for compulsive buying behavior, almost no significant differences were found. Nevertheless, there are indications that there might be differences between the groups, possibly once equal groups are assumed. Therefore, further research on compulsive buying behavior and brand love is suggested in order for organizations to help compulsive buyers as their CSR.

**Keywords:** compulsive buying behavior, brand love, brand loyalty, positive/negative word of mouth, resistance to negative information



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays brands are one of the most important intangible assets of an organization. Therefore, from an economic perspective, brand management is essential for organizations (Keller & Lehmann, 2006; Fisher, Völckner & Sattler, 2010; Park, Eisingerich, Pol & Park, 2013). A brand can create awareness and associations that are stored in the mindset of the consumers, which will not only benefit brand loyalty, but also higher sales and eventually a higher market share (Keller, 1998). Moreover, positive evaluations of consumers in combination with the perceived quality of the brand can result in love for a brand (Batra, Ahuvia and Bagozzi, 2012). Hence, brand love may not only result in higher repurchase intentions of consumers, but also in brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth and higher resistance to negative information about the brand (Batra et al., 2012).

However, consumers do differ in what they appreciate about brands and how they develop certain feelings, associations, attitudes and behavior towards brands (Keller, 1993). These differences also occur in different market segments. One particular interesting and sizeable consumer group is compulsive buyers (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). Previous findings indicate that compulsive buyers differ from non-compulsive buyers in their shopping behavior regarding brands (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015; Flight & Sacramento, 2015). Compulsive buying is an excessive form of buying behavior, which can be seen as: "chronic, repetitive purchasing that occurs as a response to negative events or feelings" (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989, p.149). In the United States, over 18 million people are suffering from compulsive buying behavior, of which the majority is female (Workman & Paper, 2010; Kilbourne & LaForge, 2010; Lee & Workman, 2015).

So far, little research has been carried out regarding compulsive buying and brands. Based on a small sample, Horváth and Van Birgelen (2015) indicate that there are differences in perceiving brands on levels like brand trust and brand switching behavior between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers. Also, brand attachment might be related to compulsive buying behavior (Flight & Sacramento, 2015). Overall, compulsive buyers found it more difficult to name their favorite brand, showed a higher tendency on variety seeking and brand experimentation and a higher willingness to switch among brands, even when they were satisfied with a brand (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). These results could indicate that compulsive buyers might respond in a different way to brand love than non-compulsives do. However, no research has been carried out on brand love and its consequences regarding conceivable differences between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers. The aim of



this research is to investigate whether there are differences between compulsive and non-compulsive buyers regarding consequences of brand love. Hence, the research question is as follows,

*RQ: Does compulsive buyer behavior affect the relationship between brand love and its consequences and if so, how do they differ from non-compulsive buyers?*

Since the market segment of compulsive buyers is still growing nowadays (Neuner, Raab & Reisch, 2005; Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney & Monroe, 2008) and companies have become more aware of the power that brands can have in consumer decision-making processes (Flight & Sacramento, 2015), this study is both managerially and academically relevant. Compulsive buying is deviant behavior and might not necessarily build on consumer relationships with brands (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). In order to gain a better understanding of this behavior, it is useful to know to what degree compulsives feel love towards brands and how they might differ in the consequences of brand love from non-compulsives. So far, only little research has been carried out regarding brand love and compulsive buyers and therefore, the results of this study will add to the existing literature by filling in the knowledge gap of brand love and its consequences.

Gaining more knowledge about the consequences of brand love and compulsive buyers could also make organizations more socially aware. Although compulsive buying behavior is a disorder and can have effects similar to gambling, kleptomania and eating disorders on people (Trautmann-Attman & Johnson, 2009), it seems to be more socially accepted and even supported by advertisements. Advertisements can delude consumers by letting them believe that excessive buying behavior is normal behavior and practiced among other consumers as well (Flight & Sacramento, 2015). Through referring to “retail therapy” in advertising, compulsive buying is being portrayed as a beneficial activity which enhances one’s life (Kyrios, Frost & Stektee, 2004). Instead of setting up marketing activities to attract those compulsive buyers, organizations should rather set up activities to discourage and help this market segment as part of their corporate social responsibility. So far, there has been no clear evidence-based treatments for compulsive buying behavior and thus, more research is needed (Black, 2007). Next to organizations, the findings may be useful for public policy officials, as it could be an important topic for the government as well. Since compulsive buying is a disorder, the government might want to fund, or even set up more research programs.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To investigate the research question, first the concept of brand love and its consequences will be elaborated upon. Secondly, some background about compulsive buying behavior will be discussed, resulting in the hypothesis of consequences of brand love and compulsive buying behavior. Finally, an overview of all hypotheses will be summarized in the conceptual model.

### 2.1 Brand love

Previous research regarding branding and the love for brands has been done largely. Brands are important in order to distinguish one organization products or services from its competitors (Keller, Apéria & Georgson, 2012). Positive evaluations/emotions and attachment of consumers about a brand can result in the love for a brand (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Ahuvia, 2005b). Therefore, brand love can be seen as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006, p.81). Although previous research has mainly associated brand love with interpersonal love (Aggarwal, 2004; Richins, 1994; Sternberg, 1986), there are indications that brand love differs from interpersonal love. The altruistic aspect for both ends of the relationship is important in interpersonal love, but not reciprocal regarding brand love (Batra et al., 2012; Fournier, 1998a). Also, brands do not experience emotions as people do and thus, could not return love in a way a person can (Batra et al., 2012).

From an organizational perspective, having consumers that love the brand is of importance since it may have long-term positive consequences (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Thomson, MacInnis & Park, 2005; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009; Fullerton, 2005). The feeling of love does not automatically apply to all consumers and therefore, there is reason to believe that brand love arises through earlier experiences, associations and evaluations with the brand. Antecedents of brand love might be the ability to identify with the brand (Albert, Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009), trust in a brand (Albert & Merunka, 2013) or sense of community (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009). In addition, the level of quality appears as important in the creation of love towards a brand (Batra et al., 2012).

### 2.2 Brand love and its consequences

Brand love has significant consequences for the brand. For example, brand loyalty and willingness to invest in a brand are consequences of brand love with regard to emotional brand attachment (Thomson et al., 2005; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009).



Furthermore, the willingness to forgive brands after failures (Bauer, Heinrich, & Albrecht, 2009), and having a high degree of brand commitment could be positive consequences (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Fullerton, 2005). Next, Batra et al. (2012) distinguished three consequences of the brand love prototype, which are brand loyalty, word of mouth and resistance to negative information. This study will develop the idea of Batra et al. (2012) further with these three consequences. However, since the impact of word of mouth has changed and increased for brands (Hoffman & Daugherty, 2013), the construct of WOM will not only focus on the positive consequence. There is reason to believe that brand love will also decrease negative WOM (Richins, 1983; Sweeney, Soutar & Mazzarol, 2005), which will be elaborated upon further in this section (2.2.3).

### **2.2.1 Brand loyalty**

Brand loyalty itself does not only result in repeat purchases and the consumers' willingness to pay a higher price for the brand, but also in greater market share (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Ehrenberg, Barnard, & Scriven, 1997). Loyalty can be divided into behavioral loyalty and attitudinal loyalty. While behavioral loyalty is often measured as the actual consumer behavior like repeat purchases, the attitudinal loyalty is measured in the evaluation process of an individual regarding a purchase (Bandyopadhyay & Martell, 2007). Behavioral loyalty specifically can result in a higher market share and attitudinal loyalty may lead to the possibility to have a higher relative price (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Although the distinction between behavioral and attitudinal loyalty is often made by researchers (Ehrenberg, Goodhardt & Barwise, 1990; Kahn, Kalwani & Morrison, 1986; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001; Baldinger & Rubinson, 1996), the two schools both influence each other (Bandyopadhyay & Martell, 2007). In this study, brand loyalty refers to repeat purchases and to deep embedded feelings towards a brand, which usually arise after certain experiences with the brand (Fournier, 1998a; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

An important factor that has often been associated with brand loyalty is the consideration set. The consideration set (also referred to as evoked set) consists of a small number of brands that are retrieved from the memory and is different for every individual (Kardes, Kalyanaram, Chandrashekar & Dornoff, 1993). A consumer's preferred brand is more likely to be chosen in a consistent way over time from the consideration set (Huang & Yu, 1999). Loyal consumers are more likely to have the same-brand consideration set and therefore might chose a family brand over a competitive brand (Oliver, 1997; He, Chen, Tam & Lee, 2016). Moreover, consumers are found to be less price-sensitive if they reached the



loyalty stage (Jensen & Drozdenko, 2008). The trust in a brand also has an effect on brand loyalty (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). Brand loyalty tries to indicate the strength of the connection between consumer and brand and even may predict the relationship over time (Fournier, 1998a). In doing so, brand loyalty can be seen as a consequence of loving a brand (Batra et al., 2012). In order to build upon this finding of Batra et al. (2012), the following hypothesis is posited:

*H1: Brand love increases brand loyalty*

### **2.2.2 Positive word-of-mouth**

Nowadays it is fairly easy for consumers to spread either positive or negative WOM to many consumers at the same time and therefore, the echoverse of brand buzz has become much more complex (Hewett, Rand, Rust & Van Heerde, 2016). In general, consumers who have strong positive or negative feelings towards a brand are more likely to share their opinion with others (Anderson, 1998). Although WOM has not been a new concept in the marketing, the concept has been changed rapidly over the past decades with the presence of internet and social media (Hoffman & Daugherty, 2013). Consumers tend to talk more online about differentiated brands, premium brands and to enhance their self-esteem. In the offline WOM, new brands are more important as well as complex brands (Lovett, Peres & Shachar, 2013).

Social comparison is an important concept in determining the willingness to share opinions with others. Positive WOM is often used for people to self-enhance and to bond socially with one-another (Alexandrov, Lilly & Babakus, 2013). Also, consumers that feel love towards a brand tend to engage more with positive WOM (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009), especially when it comes to self-expressive brands (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Since individuals love to talk about their passions and would like to identify their selves with their passions, the construction of their own identity is an important aspect for engaging in WOM (Holt, 1997). This may imply that a higher level of brand love, will positively affect positive WOM among consumers and hence,

*H2: Brand love increases positive WOM*



### **2.2.3 Negative word-of-mouth**

Next to positive WOM, consumers tend to share their negative experiences with brands as well. Statements are often made about the bigger impact of negative information on individuals (Fiske, 1980; Klein, 1996). Negative WOM does have an impact on the evaluation of brands, and even possibly the evaluation of other consumers about that brand. Consumers' attitudes will become more negative towards a brand if the number of negative reviews increases. Also, the quality of the negative reviews plays an important role in attitude forming (Lee, Park & Han, 2008).

Social comparison can also be applied to negative WOM. However, in contrast to positive WOM, negative WOM has found to be more used for self-affirmation and with the idea of helping others with their negative experience or opinion (Alexandrov et al., 2013). Furthermore, negative WOM is often an expression of dissatisfaction (Richins, 1983; Sweeney et al., 2005; Mattila & Ro, 2008; Anderson, 1998). In general, negative WOM is associated with emotional aspects of the consumer. Due to this, consumers might share their negative WOM with others sooner after the purchase than with positive WOM (Sweeney et al., 2005). In addition, some emotions are more likely to result in negative WOM, such as (feelings of) anger, disappointment and regret (Mattila & Ro, 2008; Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003). In line with these negative feelings, negative WOM arose when an organization failed to solve a problem with a product or service and thus, created negative associations with this organization (Sundaram, Mitra & Webster, 1998). Organizations that facilitate the opportunity for consumers to complain about products or services, have a higher chance of winning back the consumers. Since consumers value being taken seriously by companies, this rather results in repeat purchases than an organization's ignorance of negative WOM (Richins, 1983).

In conclusion, although Batra et al. (2012) have mainly focused on positive WOM as an outcome of brand love, there is reason to believe that more love towards a brand can result in less negative WOM. However, negative WOM has not been tested as a consequence of brand love in previous research. Hence, the following hypothesis is stated:

*H3: Brand love decreases negative WOM*

### **2.2.4 Resistance to negative information**

Resistance to negative information indicates how likely it will be that a consumer questions bad news of a beloved brand, when he or she hears negative information about the brand (Batra et al., 2012). When it comes to resistance, there is always an entity that is refused by someone



(Fournier, 1998b), in this case negative information. A distinction can be made between passive and active actions, where passive is simply about the avoidance of the entity and active could manifest in boycotts and protests (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010; Pentina & Amos, 2011). Regardless, other previous studies define resistance as a continuum between passive and active actions (Fournier, 1998b; Cambefort & Roux, 2019).

Repeatedly, negative information often has a bigger impact on consumers than positive information (Fiske, 1980; Klein, 1996). Examples of negative information about the brand can be negative (competitive) advertising, negative WOM and negative reviews. When the degree of brand attachment is high, it is more likely someone will defend that brand when hearing negative information about it (Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich & Iacobucci, 2010). Moreover, the higher the consumers' level of commitment to a brand, the more likely it will be that they reject the negative information (Ahluwalia, Burnkrant & Unnava, 2000; Sternthal, Dholakia and Leavitt, 1978). In addition, the acceptance of a brand by consumers is an important determinant in considering brand love. In case of high brand acceptance, consumers might be more willing to forgive a brand in case of illegal or dishonest behavior (Wallace, Buil & De Chernatony, 2014; Cambefort & Roux, 2019). In line with this, people that feel affection towards a brand are also more likely to resist negative information (Batra et al., 2012; Wallace et al., 2014). Thus, to build upon this finding the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H4: Brand love increases resistance to negative information*

### **2.3 Compulsive buyers**

So far, psychological research has often classified compulsive buying behavior as an impulse-control disorder, which differs from the obsessive-compulsive disorder. In general, ICD is mainly defined by the tempts of impulsive behavior, while OCD states the anxiety part of obsession and compulsive behavior (Ridgway, Kukar-Kinney & Monroe, 2008). However, Ridgway et al. (2008) found that there is an overlap between those disorders with regard to compulsive buyers and therefore, compulsive buying behavior should be considered with both disorders. Following this, previous research has mainly been focusing and measuring the impulse-control disorder and this may indicate that there are more compulsives than officially mentioned in previous studies (Ridgway et al., 2008; Neuner et al., 2005; Faber & O'Guinn, 1992).



Compulsive buying behavior is a disorder that is often nurtured during the years. Although the normative influence of both parents and peers had a significant effect on compulsive buying behavior, peers seemed to be more influential towards (shaping) compulsive buying behavior (Roberts, Manolis & Tanner, 2008). Furthermore, an important motive for compulsives to buy products or services is to take away negative feelings (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), which could be due to stress (Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2009). In general, the degree of depression, anxiety and stress is higher for people suffering from compulsive buying (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Sneath et al., 2009). Also, the self-esteem of compulsive buyers is more likely to be low (Ridgway et al., 2008; Faber, O'Guinn & Krych, 1987) and materialistic consumers are more likely to be compulsive buyers (Dittmar, 2005a; Ridgway et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2008). Being materialistic does not only have a negative effect on someone's well-being (Kasser & Kanner, 2004), it also has a negative effect on showing love towards a brand (Roy, Eshghi & Sarkar, 2012). Overall, this could imply that compulsive buyers tend to show less love towards a brand than non-compulsives.

### **2.3.1 Compulsive buyers and brand loyalty**

With regard to the customer journey, the actual shopping process is the most important part for compulsive buyers, rather than achieving the goal of possessing the product or service (Dittmar, 2005a; Sneath, Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2009). This is also supported in the finding that compulsive buyers are more likely to have unopened shopping bags in their closet (Schlosser, Black, Repertinger & Freet, 1994). Moreover, there is reason to believe that compulsive buyers find it harder to name their favorite brand than non-compulsive buyers (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). In line with this, compulsives tend to have weaker attitudes towards a brand (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). In conclusion, previous research may imply that compulsive buyers tend to be less loyal towards a brand. Therefore, it is proposed that the effect of brand love on brand loyalty will be lower when moderated for compulsive buyers:

*H5: The effect of brand love on brand loyalty is lower for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers*

### **2.3.2 Compulsive buyers and positive WOM**

Self-expressive brands tend to score higher for engaging in positive WOM (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace et al., 2014). Therefore, the identity of the consumers is an important aspect for



engaging in WOM (Holt, 1997). Compulsive buyers are more sensitive for brands that show prestige towards others than non-compulsive buyers (Kukar-Kinney, Ridgway & Monroe, 2012). In general, positive WOM is used by people to self-enhance and have social bonding (Alexandrov et al., 2013). The purchase of a product can take away a consumer's negative feelings, since this may reflect on their ideal-self (Alex & Joseph, 2012). This holds especially for compulsive buyers (Dittmar, 2005b). When a consumer feels more self-expressive towards a brand, their social self and inner self will be enhanced and therefore, this may have a positive effect on brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace et al., 2014). Indeed, an explorative study found that compulsive buyers engage more with positive WOM than non-compulsive buyers (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). Previous research found that consumers showing love towards a brand engage more with positive WOM (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009), but so far, no research has investigated whether this will increase when moderating for compulsive buyers. Thus, the following hypothesis is assumed:

*H6: The effect of brand love on positive WOM is higher for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers*

### **2.3.3 Compulsive buyers and negative WOM**

As mentioned before, negative WOM is associated with emotional aspects of the consumer (Sweeney et al., 2005). Horváth and Van Birgelen (2015) found that compulsive buyers rather focus on the emotional and social benefits of a brand than non-compulsive buyers. A possible explanation might be that compulsive buyers have less confidence in their selves (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). In addition, compulsive buyers often show excessive shopping behavior because they want to reduce feelings such as tension, anxiety or discomfort (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). However, the reduction of feelings is often only short-term (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Emotions as anger, disappointment and regret are more likely to result in negative WOM (Mattila & Ro, 2008; Bougie, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2003). Since negative WOM can often be an expression of dissatisfaction (Richins, 1983; Sweeney et al., 2005; Mattila & Ro, 2008; Anderson, 1998), it may be more likely that compulsive buyers would engage with negative WOM.

Furthermore, negative WOM has found to be more used for self-affirmation (Alexandrov et al., 2013). Having a low self-esteem has also been associated with compulsive buying behavior (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). In addition to this, negative WOM has been used for ego protection and the rebuilding of a damaged self-image (Alexandrov et al., 2013). As the ideal-self is an important aspect for compulsive buyers (Dittmar, 2005b), this might play a role



as well in the engagement of negative WOM. In conclusion, there is reason to believe that consumers with love for a brand engage less in negative WOM. However, with moderating for compulsive buyers, the engagement in negative WOM might be higher. Hence,

*H7: The effect of brand love on negative WOM is higher for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers*

#### **2.3.4 Compulsive buyers and resistance to negative information**

Brand acceptance is a factor that determines how likely it is that a consumer will resist to negative information in case of brand love (Wallace et al., 2014; Cambefort & Roux, 2019). Consumers may be more willing to forgive a brand in case of high acceptance, and in this way resist to negative information. Also, brand acceptance is related to the experimentation of new products of a brand. Someone showing love towards a brand, is more likely to try other (new) products of that same brand as well (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2007). In this sense, brand experimentation within the brand might be higher. However, it does not entirely reflect on the experimentation among other brands. Overall, compulsive buyers may have a higher tendency on variety seeking and brand experimentation (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015).

Moreover, there might be differences in types of brands. Self-expressive brands can result in more positive WOM, but consumers will be less likely to forgive a brand in case of illegal or dishonest behavior (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Wallace et al., 2014). A possible explanation for this is that the brand has failed to reflect the inner self-identity. In contrary, when the social self has been well reflected, it is more likely that the consumer resists to negative information about that brand (Wallace et al., 2014). Social benefits are kept in mind by compulsive buyers when buying a product (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). Also, with regard to their own self, people in general tend to resist negative information about themselves (Ahearne, Bhattacharya & Gruen, 2005). Identity and judgements of others are very important for compulsive buyers (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989), and thus there is reason to believe that compulsive buyers would resist more negative information about themselves. To build upon this, compulsives value other people's opinions (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989) and in that sense also what other people think about the brands that they buy. In case of bad publicity about a brand, there is reason to believe that compulsive buyers are less likely to resist the negative information. So, the effect of brand love on its consequence resistance to negative information will be lower when moderating for compulsive buyers. Hence,



*H8: The effect of brand love on resistance to negative information is lower for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers*

Figure 1 shows all the proposed hypotheses. Brand love can be seen as the independent variable, whose influence is going to be tested on the dependent variables brand loyalty, positive WOM, negative WOM and resistance to negative information. Moreover, a possible moderation effect of compulsive buyers will be tested.

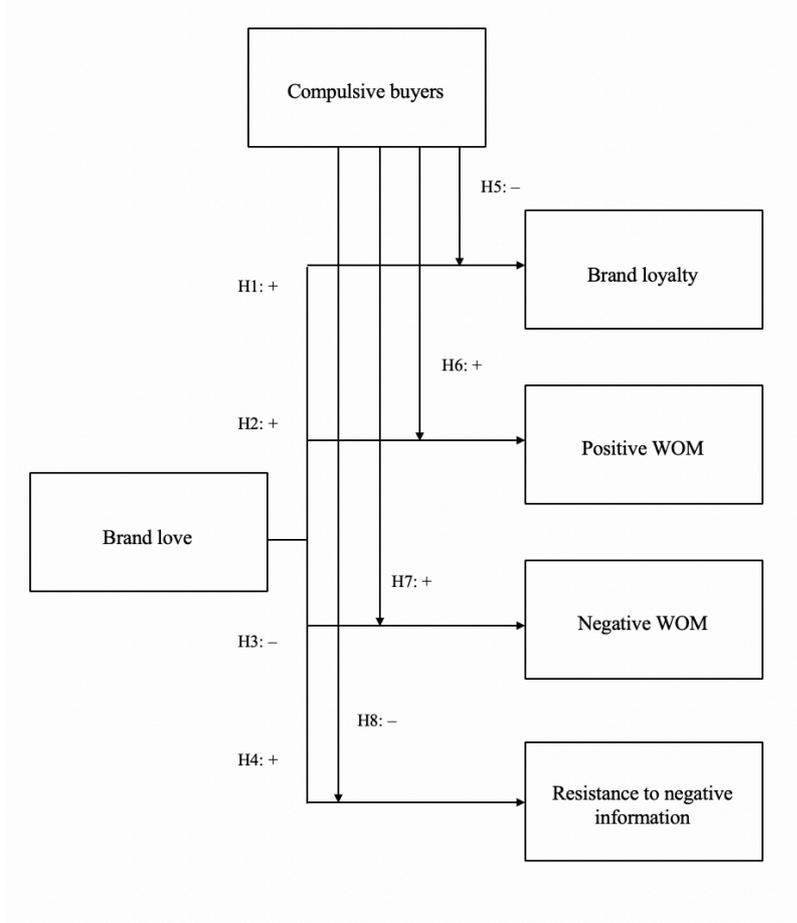


Figure 1. Conceptual model for brand love and its consequences on compulsive and non-compulsive buyers

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Measurement

For the purposes of this study, a quantitative approach was used. All the data was collected through an online survey in Qualtrics. In total, the survey consisted of 26 questions and was distributed in both the English and Dutch language. The survey was distributed for three research purposes. A copy of the English survey can be found in Appendix 1.

The survey started with a brief introduction to inform respondents about the survey. Here, the research ethics were the core message, which was to reassure participants that the information is treated with confidence, with anonymity and used for research purposes only. Respondents also had the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time. The participants were informed about the duration of the survey, which was set at 7 minutes after 18 pre-tests. Since the survey is distributed for three master theses, all names of the researchers including pictures are displayed at the end of the introduction. After the introduction, the scale by Ridgway et al. (2008) followed. This six-item scale measured the classification whether a respondent is showing compulsive buyer behavior or not. The scale made a distinction between obsessive-compulsive buying and impulsive buying behavior. Since the consequences of being a compulsive buyer are separated from the measure itself in this scale, which has not been done by other scales before, this may lead to a larger percentage of participants that are categorized as compulsive buyers (Ridgway et al., 2008). This scale can be found in appendix 1B.

Moreover, the respondents were asked to fill out the brand name of their last purchased clothing brand. The named brand is used as a reference point throughout the survey and referred to as *brand x*. In the Qualtrics survey, a code is used to refer to the brand name that has been filled out by the respondent. With the help of this, the respondent automatically saw the brand name which makes filling out the survey easier. While it might be easier for a consumer to remember what their last purchased brand is, it did not automatically indicate that the consumer had love for this brand. It showed that the consumer is familiar with this brand and however, decided on buying due to one or several reasons. In addition, clothing was found to be one of the most frequently bought items by compulsive buyers (Faber, O'Guinn & Krych, 1987; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Trautmann-Attman & Johnson, 2009). Therefore, this product category was chosen, as it might increase the number of compulsive buyers.

In order to measure brand love as the dependent variable for its consequences, the scale of Bagozzi, Batra and Ahuvia (2017) was used. The scale consisted of 13 items on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored with 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. Also, this scale measured seven dimensions of brand love itself, such as passion-driven behaviors and positive emotional connection. The overall measurement of brand love was used to test as independent variable with the dependent variables. A detailed version of these scales is presented in appendix 1D.

In total, the consequences of brand love are measured with 13 items, divided over two questions in Qualtrics. The respondents were asked to indicate to what degree the statements apply to them on a 7-point Likert scale, anchored with 1=strongly disagree to 7=strongly agree. The scales can be found in appendix 1E. All constructs (brand loyalty, positive WOM, negative



WOM, resistance to negative information) had three measurement scales in order to test the relationship with brand love. Table 1 provides an overview of all construct measurements, the total number of items and the scale origin and appendix 2 shows an overview of all measurements of consequences of brand love, including the detailed scale origin.

Table 1. Overview of the measurement of the constructs

Latent construct	Scale origin	Number of items	Adjusted?
1. Compulsive buyers	Ridgway et al. (2008)	6 items	None
2. Brand love	Bagozzi et al. (2017)	12 items	None
3. General WOM	Own	1 item	None
4. Brand loyalty	Zeithaml et al. (1996); Own	3 items	None
5. Positive WOM	Zeithaml, Berry & Parasuraman et al. (1996)	3 items	One scale
6. Negative WOM	Zeithaml et al. (1996)	3 items	Two scales
7. Resistance to negative information	Eisingerich, Rubera, Seifert & Bhardwaj (2011); Lau & Lee (1999)	3 items	None

The survey ended with three control questions in order to test how truthful the respondent was towards *brand x* and the accuracy of the categorization of being compulsive or non-compulsive. The first question measured to what degree *brand x* the favorite brand of the respondent was. The second question measured if the respondents have more favorite brands and the last question was about how often *brand x* is purchased by the respondent. Lastly, six demographic related questions are added, such as gender, age and wage.

All the scales are developed in English, but were distributed in the Dutch language as well. In order to make sure that the Dutch version of the survey is reflecting on the English version and minimalizing the bias due to mistranslation (Brislin, 1986), the survey was back-translated by two native (C2) speakers of both the English and Dutch language according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. After the back-translation, 18 pre-tests were filled out by both Dutch and English speakers to check the duration of the survey, minimize misconceptions and fine-tune the survey. After collecting the data, the survey was analyzed using SPSS. In SPSS, several AN(C)OVA's and multiple regressions were used to measure the relationship between brand love and its consequences.



### **3.2 Data collection**

The aim of this study is to compare compulsive buyers with non-compulsive buyers to see whether there are any differences regarding the consequences of brand love. Following this aim, it was of importance to gain a significant number of compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers to be able to make comparisons. There is reason to believe that compulsive buyers may be hard to find since it is estimated that only 5.8% of the population shows compulsive buying behavior (Workman & Paper, 2010; Koran, Faber, Aboujaoude, Large & Serpe, 2006) and they might feel embarrassed about their shopping behavior (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Therefore, extra effort was taken to increase the number of compulsive respondents, for example going to places where it is expected to find more compulsive buyers.

However, the respondents were collected via convenience sampling. First of all, a link was sent to close friends and family of the researcher. In addition, the (online) personal network of the researcher is used, such as Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn. Both personal messages were sent as well as an attractive post was posted on those platforms. Also, the link was posted in specifically chosen shopping groups. Thirdly, respondents indicating that they really love shopping were asked whether they know other people that are willing to fill out the survey. A last method that was used, as mentioned before, is going to places where the probabilities are higher to find compulsives. This was near shops in the city center. In order to extrinsically motivate respondents to fill out the survey, an incentive is used. After gathering all respondents, a coupon of Bol.com is raffled among respondents who left their e-mail in the survey. Respondents had the opportunity to decide themselves if they want to participate in the lottery due to ethical reasons.

### **3.3 Sample**

In total, the sample consisted of 798 respondents without any missing data. All respondents with missing data were removed and thus, only the respondents who filled in the entire survey were analyzed. Almost every respondent had the Dutch nationality (96.4%) and the vast majority of the respondents identified themselves as female (80.5%). The age of the respondents was measured in categories and was therefore diverse. However, the age categories that scored the highest were between the age of 18 and 24 (46.4%) and between 25 and 29 (16%). Moreover, most of the respondents were currently student (41.4%) followed by employed part-time (26.7%) and employed full-time (19.6%). The majority of the respondents had a completed diploma of University of Applied Sciences, University or PhD and were therefore, high



educated (61.2%). Respondents were free to fill out their last purchased brand. To demonstrate, brands that were mentioned most often were: ZARA (65), ONLY (58), H&M (46), Costes (37), Levi's (23), Tommy Hilfiger (23), Nike (20) and Adidas (19).

### 3.4 Reliability analysis

A principal component analysis for the compulsive buying measurement with a direct oblimin rotation (assuming there is a correlation between the factors) showed that all items perfectly load on only one component based on the Eigenvalue > 1 criterium. The reliability of the scale with all six items was good ( $\alpha = .84$ ). After deleting one item "my closet has unopened shopping bags in it" the Cronbach's Alpha was higher ( $\alpha = .86$ ). However, the significance did not increase dramatically (Field, 2013), and therefore it was chosen to measure compulsive buying behavior with all six items.

In order to measure the brand love construct, all 12 items of Batra et al. (2012) were used. The items are a combination of several aspects, for example, self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors and positive emotional connection. Due to this, a principal component analysis for brand love showed an Eigenvalue of 5.255, which is fairly high. However, despite this high Eigenvalue, brand love was kept as one construct, since the aim of this study is not so much to focus on the subcategories of brand love but rather on brand love as a whole. In addition, the reliability of the scale with all 12 items was good ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

With regard to the consequences of brand love, a principal component analysis for all 12 items measuring the four consequences of brand love indicated three components based on the criterium of an Eigenvalue > 1. However, only one component had a significant number of items and a Cronbach's Alpha that was good ( $\alpha = .84$ ). Given the criterium of the cumulative percentage of the Eigenvalue above 60%, the analysis indicated four components. This resulted in only three components with a good reliability of the scale: brand loyalty ( $\alpha = .81$ ), positive WOM ( $\alpha = .82$ ) and negative WOM ( $\alpha = .76$ ). However, resistance to negative information had a problematic low reliability ( $\alpha < .30$ ). This could be due to, apparently, the too diverse themes covered in the items and thus, a lack of consistency. Therefore, this construct was subsequently analyzed separately in the analysis.



## 4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

After reliability and factor analysis, the hypotheses were tested by carrying out several ANOVAs and linear regressions. This section will first discuss assumptions for carrying out regressions (4.1). Secondly, the measurement of compulsive buying behavior (4.2) and the randomization of the treatment (4.3) will be discussed. In paragraph 4.4 the measurement of brand love is shown. Furthermore, every consequence of brand love (brand loyalty, 4.5; positive WOM, 4.6; negative WOM, 4.7; resistance to negative information 4.8) will be discussed separately. The structure of these paragraphs is as follows, first there is a discussion of the main effect and second, the discussion of the findings for the moderation effect. Eventually, a conclusion is made based on the findings.

### 4.1 Assumptions for regression analyses

In the regression analyses, brand love was the independent variable and the consequences were separately measured as dependent variables. Since all the tolerance values were above the value of .20, the assumption about no multicollinearity was met. Also, a plot showed that there is homoscedasticity for all variables. Lastly, the assumptions of normal distribution and linearity were met. In order to facilitate the interpretation of the results, brand love was centered.

### 4.2 Compulsive buying behavior measurement

To investigate for significant differences between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers, the six-item scale of Ridgway et al. (2008) was initially used for classification. Accordingly, all respondents who scored on average higher than four on the 7-point scale of all six items combined were classified as compulsives. In other words, all respondents that achieved a total value between 25 and 42 (Ridgway et al., 2008). This led to 209 compulsives (26.2%) and 589 non-compulsives (73.8%). However, the 33% rule was applied to the sample in order to compare two more extreme with approximately the same  $N$ . Following this, the sample was divided into three groups, where respondents on average scoring between 1 and 2.50 ( $M = 1.93$ ,  $SD = .45$ ,  $N = 265$ ) were classified as non-compulsive buyers and respondents who scored between 3.84 and 7 were classified as the compulsives ( $M = 4.68$ ,  $SD = .57$ ,  $N = 244$ ). The scores of respondents between 2.51 and 3.83 were average and excluded from the analysis. A total of 509 respondents were used in the analysis controlling for compulsive buying behavior, and was entered in the regression as dummy variable.



### 4.3 Randomization of the treatment

Firstly, several ANOVAs were run to test significant differences between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers regarding demographics and brand love. Ideally, the two groups (compulsives vs. non-compulsives) should not differ on some unintended variables. However, the two groups differed significantly on several demographics.

#### 4.3.1 Gender

Firstly, a one-way ANOVA showed that there is a significant effect of being compulsive buyer or non-compulsive buyer and gender ( $F(1, 507) = 36.86, p < .001$ ). There were more females being compulsive buyers ( $M = 1.92, SD = .27$ ) than non-compulsive buyers ( $M = 1.72, SD = .45$ ). In total, 92.3% of the compulsive buyers were female. Also, before applying the 33% rule, the sample consisted of more females than males.

#### 4.3.2 Age

With regard to differences between compulsives and non-compulsives regarding age a correlation test was run. The test showed a significant difference between the groups ( $r_s(509) = -.36, p < .001$ ). Crosstabs showed that regarding non-compulsive buyers the age categories that scored the highest were 18-24 (32.5%), followed by 55-64 (21.9%) and 45-54 (18.5%). However, the majority of the compulsives were between the age of 18 and 24 (52.9%), followed by 25-29 (22.1%) and 30-34 (7%). This could imply that compulsives tend to have a younger age than non-compulsives.

#### 4.3.3 Annual income

A correlation test between annual income and compulsive buying behavior showed that there are differences between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers ( $r_s(509) = -.21, p < .001$ ). The annual income of compulsive buyers that scored highest was below €10.000 (25.4%), while for non-compulsive buyers it was over €50.000 (23.0%). This could indicate that, while compulsive buyers have less to spend, they tend to buy more. However, it is important to note that respondents had the opportunity to click on “I prefer not to say”. In total, 125 respondents filled this in and therefore, this result should be approached with caution.



#### 4.3.4 Current employment status

Also, the correlation test between current employment status and compulsive buying behavior showed a significant effect ( $r_s(509) = -.20, p < .001$ ). Regarding compulsive buyers, students were the largest group (47.5%), followed by part-time employed (29.5%) and full-time employed (15.2%). For non-compulsive buyers, the largest group was also students (29.4%). However, the differences between students, part-time employed (25.7%) and full-time employed (23.4%) were more equally divided over the categories.

#### 4.3.5 Relationship status

Lastly, a correlation test was run between relationship status and compulsive buying behavior and showed a significant difference between the groups ( $r_s(509) = -.28, p < .001$ ). Most of the non-compulsive buyers were married or had a registered partnership (43.8%), while most of the compulsive buyers were single (58.2%). In conclusion, all these differences between the groups of compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers might influence moderating for compulsive buyers.

#### 4.3.6 Frequency of buying *brand x*

A correlation test between frequency of buying *brand x* and compulsive buying behavior showed a significant effect ( $r_s(800) = 6.53, p < .001$ ). Overall, *brand x* was bought multiple times a year (57.9%), followed by once a month (18.3%) and once a year (13.4%). However, the compulsive buyers differed from the non-compulsives if it comes down to the frequency of buying *brand x*. Compulsives bought *brand x* multiple times a year (50.2%), followed by once a month (30.1%). For the non-compulsives, this was less spread amongst multiple times a year (60.6%) and once a month (14.0%).

### 4.4. Brand love

Brand love was measured by the last purchased clothing brand of the respondent. Following this, every level of brand love was represented in the sample ( $M = 3.04, SD = .98$ ). In order to test if compulsive buyers score different on brand love itself, an ANOVA was carried out. This test showed that there are significant differences between compulsive buying behavior and brand love ( $F(1, 507) = 60.09, p < .001$ ). Compulsive buyers tend to develop a higher degree of brand love ( $M = 3.39, SD = 0.97$ ) than non-compulsive buyers ( $M = 2.71, SD = 0.91$ ) on a 7-point scale.



## 4.5 Brand loyalty

As stated in hypothesis 1, it is expected that brand love increases brand loyalty. Table 2 confirms that indeed, brand love significantly increases brand loyalty. A correlation test between brand love and brand loyalty showed a positive significant effect ( $r(789) = .53, p < .001$ ). The regression coefficient indicated that there is a moderate positive relationship. Therefore, hypothesis 1 supported.

To test for differences between compulsives and non-compulsives regarding brand loyalty itself, an ANOVA was run. A one-way ANOVA showed that there are significant differences between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers on brand loyalty itself ( $F(1, 507) = 15.61, p < .001$ ). Compulsive buyers tend to score higher on brand loyalty ( $M = 4.23, SD = 1.44$ ) than non-compulsives ( $M = 3.74, SD = 1.38$ ). Moreover, the regression analysis between brand love and brand loyalty was found to be significant. A linear regression showed that brand love can explain for 25% for brand loyalty when moderating for compulsive buying behavior ( $F(3, 505) = 57.30, p < .001$ ). Despite the fact that, no significant interaction effects were found between brand love and compulsive buying behavior below an Alpha threshold of  $<.05$ , the effect was moderately significant ( $p = .076$ ). Accordingly, the effect of brand love on brand loyalty is higher for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers. However, this interaction effect was fairly low ( $\beta = .08$ ). The findings are presented in table 3.

In conclusion, there is an implication that there might be some differences between compulsive and non-compulsive buyers. Following this, the results partly support contrary to what was hypothesized. Thus, this indicates that the effect of brand love on brand loyalty is higher for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers.

## 4.6 Positive word-of-mouth

It is expected that brand love also increases positive WOM. Running a correlation test between brand love and positive WOM showed a positive significant effect ( $r(798) = .56, p < .001$ ). Here, the regression coefficient also indicated a moderate positive relationship. Following this, it can be concluded that hypothesis 2 is supported. The results can be found in table 2.

In addition, significant differences between compulsives and non-compulsives were found regarding positive WOM ( $F(1, 507) = 50.64, p < .001$ ). Compulsive buyers also score higher on positive WOM ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.35$ ), than non-compulsive buyers ( $M = 3.53, SD = 1.35$ ). The effect of brand love on positive WOM was also shown to be significant. A linear regression showed that brand love can explain for 32.6% for positive WOM when moderating



for compulsive buying behavior ( $F(3, 505) = 82.99, p < .001$ ). The interaction term between compulsive buying behavior and brand love was not found to be significant ( $p = .478$ ), which is also shown in table 3.

Although compulsive buyers tend to score higher on positive WOM itself, no significant effect was found for the relationship between brand love and positive WOM, and therefore hypothesis 6 (the effect of brand love on positive WOM is higher for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers) was not supported.

#### **4.7 Negative word-of-mouth**

Hypothesis 3 suggested that brand love decreases negative WOM. However, a correlation test between brand love and negative WOM showed a positive significant effect ( $r(798) = .14, p < .001$ ). The relationship is positive; however, it is fairly weak. On average, if brand love increases, negative WOM also increases. Therefore, the opposite of the hypothesis relationship was found. The results are presented in table 2.

Moreover, for negative WOM the same result as positive WOM and brand loyalty occurred. First, significant differences between compulsive buying behavior and negative WOM were found to be significant ( $F(1, 507) = 21.59, p < .001$ ). Compulsive buyers score higher on negative WOM ( $M = 2.11, SD = 0.93$ ) than non-compulsive buyers do ( $M = 1.71, SD = 1.02$ ). Also, a regression analysis showed that there is a significant effect between brand love and negative WOM. However, an increase in brand love indicates an increase in negative WOM rather than a decrease. A linear regression showed that brand love can explain for 4.6% for negative WOM when moderating for compulsive buying behavior ( $F(3, 505) = 9.21, p < .001$ ). Nevertheless, table 3 shows that the interaction effect between brand love and compulsive buyers was not found to be significant ( $p = .412$ ).

In conclusion, the opposite of what was hypothesized was found regarding the relationship between brand love and negative WOM. Compulsives score higher on engagement in negative WOM, however, once moderating for compulsive buyers between brand love and negative WOM, no significant differences were found. Accordingly, no support was found for hypothesis 6 (the effect of brand love on negative WOM is higher for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers).



## 4.8 Resistance to negative information

As shown in the factor analysis, the items used to measure the latent construct “resistance to negative information” could not be reduced to one reliable scale. Nevertheless, it was still decided to test for resistance to negative information with all items separately for robustness check purposes. Therefore, three separate correlation tests were run to determine whether or not brand love increases resistance to negative information (H4). An overview can be found in table 2. The first scale is “negative information about *brand x* has no effect on me”, also referred to as resistance to negative information 1 in table 2. A correlation test showed no significant effect ( $r(798) = -.02, p = .264$ ). Therefore, no significant conclusions can be made about the degree to which brand love influences the effect of negative information. Secondly, resistance to negative information 2 was measured by “I readily change my view of *brand x* based on negative information about it”, and was a reversed item. A correlation test showed that there is a significant negative effect ( $r(798) = -.08, p = .018$ ). However, this significant effect was very weak. The negative direction of the correlation coefficient showed that when brand love increases, someone is less likely to change the view of that brand. Accordingly, it means that when brand love increases, resistance to negative information increases. Resistance to negative information 3 refers to “if someone makes a negative comment about *brand x*, I would defend it”. This scale was also found to have a positive significant correlation with brand love ( $r(798) = .31, p < .001$ ). Although this regression coefficient is stronger than for resistance to negative information 2, it was still a weak relationship. In other words, if brand love increases, the likelihood that someone is going to defend that beloved brand from negative comments increases as well. By means of that, this result also supports H4. In brief, relationships were found between both resistance to negative information 2 and 3 with brand love, and therefore support that brand love increases resistance to negative information. However, these results should be approached with caution, since they were mainly added for robustness check purposes only.

No significant differences in compulsive buying behavior were found regarding resistance to negative information 1 “negative information about *brand x* has no effect on me” ( $p = .196$ ), resistance to negative information 2 “I readily change my view of *brand x* based on negative information about it” ( $p = .112$ ) and resistance to negative information 3 “If someone makes a negative comment about *brand x*, I would defend it” ( $p = .793$ ).

To test if the effect of brand love on resistance to negative information is lower for compulsive buyers than non-compulsive buyers (H7), three regressions were carried out. Firstly, a linear regression showed that brand love can explain for 0.8% for resistance to



negative information 1 when moderating for compulsive buying behavior ( $F(3, 505) = 2.29, p = .039$ ). The interaction effect between compulsive buyers and brand love is significant ( $p = .022$ ). The unstandardized  $b$  showed a negative correlation between compulsive buyers and brand love and the  $\beta$  was moderate ( $\beta = .35$ ). In this sense, compulsive buyers tend to have a lower degree of resistance to negative information that has an effect on them than non-compulsive buyers. Thus, this would suggest that their resistance to negative information is likely to be lower for non-compulsives. In addition, another regression showed that brand love explains for 0.7% for resistance to negative information 2 when moderating for compulsive buying behavior ( $F(3, 505) = 2.26, p = .041$ ). The interaction term was significant but, the  $\beta$  was fairly low ( $\beta = .109, p = .049$ ). Compulsive buyers score higher on “I readily change my view of *brand x* based on negative information about it” ( $b = 0.24$ ). So, in other words they are less likely to resist to negative information. A third regression showed that brand love explains for 0.9% for resistance to negative information 3 when moderating for compulsive buying behavior ( $F(3, 505) = 16.96, p < .001$ ). However, the interaction term was not found to be significant ( $p = .49$ ). As shown in table 3, it can be concluded that two out of three items had significant interaction terms between compulsive buying and resistance to negative information. For both scales, compulsive buyers are less resistant to negative information than non-compulsives if they love a brand.

Table 2. Correlation tests for brand love and its consequences

Hypothesis	$r$	$p$ -Value <sup>a c</sup>	Conclusion
H1: BL > Brand loyalty	.53	$p < .001^{**}$	Supported
H2: BL > Positive WOM	.56	$p < .001^{**}$	Supported
H3: BL < Negative WOM	.14	$p < .001^{**}$	Opposite found
H4: BL > RtNI 1 <sup>+</sup>	-.02	$p = .264$	n.s. <sup>b</sup>
H4: BL > RtNI 2 <sup>+</sup>	-.08	$p = .018^{**}$	Supported
H4: BL > RtNI 3 <sup>+</sup>	.31	$p < .001^{**}$	Supported

<sup>a</sup>  $\alpha = .05$ ;  $** p < .05$ ,  $* p < .10$

<sup>b</sup> n.s. = not significant

<sup>c</sup> All  $\alpha$  were tested 1-sided

<sup>+</sup> All items of resistance to negative information have been tested separately



Table 3. Regression analysis for brand love and its consequences moderating for compulsive buying behavior with the interaction terms

Hypothesis	<i>b</i>	SE <i>b</i>	$\beta$	<i>p</i> -Value <sup>a c</sup>	R <sup>2</sup>	Conclusion
H6: BLxCB < Brand loyalty	0.169	0.118	.082	<i>p</i> = .076*	.504	m.s. <sup>b</sup>
H7: BLxCB > Positive WOM	0.006	0.111	.003	<i>p</i> = .478	.575	n.s. <sup>b</sup>
H8: BLxCB > Negative WOM	-0.020	0.092	-.014	<i>p</i> = .412	.228	n.s. <sup>b</sup>
H9: BLxCB < RtNI 1 <sup>+</sup>	-0.325	0.160	-.133	<i>p</i> = .022**	.116	Supported
H9: BLxCB < RtNI 2 <sup>+</sup>	0.237	0.143	.109	<i>p</i> = .049**	.115	Supported
H9: BLxCB < RtNI 3 <sup>+</sup>	-0.004	0.132	-.028	<i>p</i> = .489	.303	n.s. <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>  $\alpha$  = .05; \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*  $p < .10$

<sup>b</sup> n.s. = not significant; m.s. = moderately significant

<sup>c</sup> All  $\alpha$  were tested 1-sided

<sup>+</sup> All items of resistance to negative information have been tested separately

Once controlling for compulsive buyers in the regressions, the main effect of brand love remained significant for all consequences (brand loyalty ( $p < .001$ ); positive WOM ( $p < .001$ ); negative WOM ( $p = .033$ ); resistance to negative information 1 ( $p = .012$ ); resistance to negative information 2 ( $p = .022$ ); resistance to negative information ( $p < .001$ )). This might be an extra indication that the relationship between brand love and its consequences is fairly strong.

## 4.9 Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be concluded that brand love positively influences brand loyalty and positive WOM. Contrary to expectations, brand love also increases the likelihood that someone will engage in negative WOM. Although, almost no significant differences were found between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers regarding brand love and its consequences, there is an indication that there might be differences once homogeneity of groups are assumed. Only a weak effect for brand love on brand loyalty controlling for compulsives was found. Compulsive buyers have a higher degree of brand loyalty when showing love for a brand. However, this effect was fairly weak. Furthermore, this study implies that there might be a correlation between brand love and resistance to negative information, even between compulsive and non-compulsives. Overall, if brand love increases, resistance to negative information increases. With regard to compulsive buyers, they tend to have a lower degree of resistance to negative information once they love a brand. Although



these results should be approached with caution, this indicates that there might be some differences between the groups.

## 5. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between brand love and its consequences (brand loyalty, positive/negative WOM and resistance to negative information) and to which degree compulsive buyers differ from non-compulsive buyers regarding this relationship. Although the relationship between brand love and all its consequences was found to be significant, the strongest effects were found for brand loyalty and positive WOM. This is in line with previous studies, where brand loyalty refers to embedded feelings towards a brand after certain experiences (Fournier, 1998a; Albert & Merunka, 2013). Those (positive) experiences can increase brand love and therefore, also brand loyalty (Batra et al., 2012). Regarding positive WOM, people generally love to talk about their passions and even like to identify their selves with their passions (Holt, 1997). Following this, if a certain brand has become a person's passion, it is more likely that that person engages in positive WOM. Thus, the finding of engagement in positive WOM has been supported by previous studies (Batra et al., 2012; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2009).

Following previous studies, it was hypothesized that brand love decreases negative WOM. However, the findings of this study suggest that brand love rather increases negative WOM, although it was a fairly small effect. In general, negative WOM is associated with emotional aspects of a consumer. An emotion is often a result of an event or stimulus that has occurred (Roseman, 1984). The type of emotions (anger, disappointment, regret) might influence the reason why someone feels the need to spread the negativity (Mattila & Ro, 2008; Bougie, Pieters & Zeelenberg, 2003; Wetzler, Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2007). With regard to interpersonal relationships, intimate relationships go often together with strong emotions (Fitness & Fletcher, 1993), which suggests that you do more care if the other person lets you down. Since the consumer that shows brand love is also more engaged, has strong feelings and certain expectations, this might be a possible explanation for this finding as well. The consumer might get more emotions come to play when something unlikely happens, and therefore might want to engage in negative WOM to share these negative feelings with others. This might even result in some relief for them. Nevertheless, these are only speculations and an interesting suggestion for further research.



Furthermore, the results suggest that compulsive buyers develop a higher degree of brand love than non-compulsives. Also, if brand love increases, compulsive buyers tend to develop a higher degree of brand loyalty towards that brand. However, based on previous studies, it was suggested that compulsive buyers would show less love towards a brand and develop a lower degree of brand loyalty. In general, compulsive buyers tend to have a lower self-esteem (Ridgway et al., 2008; Faber, O'Guinn & Krych, 1987), are more materialistic (Dittmar, 2005a; Ridgway et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2008) and have a higher degree of depression, anxiety and stress (O'Guinn & Faber, 1989). Accordingly, a motive for compulsives to buy a product is to take away negative feelings, rather than choosing for a brand they love. Nevertheless, a possible explanation for this surprising result might be that a beloved brand can cover up for their low(er) self-esteem, and reflect on their ideal-self (Ridgway et al., 2008; Alex & Joseph, 2012). Furthermore, compulsive buyers are more sensitive for brands that show prestige towards others than non-compulsive buyers (Kukar-Kinney et al., 2012), and there is reason to believe that social benefits are more important than them (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). The use of clothing brands as reference category might be an explanation why compulsive buyers score higher, since clothes are a good way to make up for lower self-esteem and perfect to show off what kind of brands they wear. In fact, clothing was found to be one of the most frequently bought items by compulsives (Faber, O'Guinn & Krych, 1987; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Trautmann-Attman & Johnson, 2009).

## **5.1 Limitations and suggestions for further research**

The consequences were measured with three items each. However, resistance to negative information was measured with all items separately, and mainly included in the analysis for robustness check purposes. Although some findings indicate that there is a relationship between brand love and resistance to negative information and that compulsive buyers might develop a lower degree of resistance to negative information, further research is needed. As far as concerned, no existing scales have been introduced so far that perfectly fits this topic. Nevertheless, this study tried to combine scale origins from other studies (Eisingerich et al., 2011; Lau & Lee, 1999), but the Cronbach's Alpha was dramatically low. In order to be able to support the hypothesis and previous research, it is suggested to develop a scale with high reliability, which will lead to higher internal and construct validity (Boeije, 'T Hart & Hox, 2009; Babbie, 2016).



Another possible explanation for the low reliability of the resistance to negative information construct could be there were only three measurement items. The consequences of brand love were seen as latent variables. Initially, more items per consequence were added to the survey. The main reason for deleting some items was to be able to combine the survey for three research purposes. In this case, more respondents would be gathered and therefore, possibly increase the external validity (Boeijs et al., 2009). However, in order to measure those latent variables, more items might have been better. Also, aiming for a larger sample has led to a fairly long survey. The questions about the consequences of brand love were located nearly at the end of every survey. All respondents who did not complete the survey were left out of the analysis. However, the number of uncompleted surveys was quite high. The length of a survey might indeed have an effect on the number of respondents, and even questions located nearly the end are tend to be answered faster and more uniformly (Galesic & Bosnjak, 2009). This might have had little influence on the results and the sample, and subsequently this could decrease internal validity.

Although barely significant differences were found between compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers regarding brand love and its consequences, there is an indication that there still might be some differences between the groups. Following this, there is reason to believe that type II error occurred (Field, 2013). In other words, there might be some differences between the groups while in this study the hypotheses are not supported. Accordingly, ANOVAs regarding differences between the groups of compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers showed unequal groups, which means that the groups are not showing homogeneity. Besides the fact that this might have influenced the (non-significant) results, it also proves that the results are not generalizable to the population and therefore the external validity is lower. This also leads to a suggestion for further research, where ideally two equal groups of compulsive and non-compulsive buyers are analyzed.

Respondents were asked to fill in their last purchased clothing brand, which was referred to as “*brand x*”. However, filling in their last purchased brand does not automatically imply that the respondents have love towards that brand. In order to measure to which degree *brand x* was a brand they tend to have love towards, three control questions were added to the survey (appendix 1F). Once the regressions were run controlling for the “the degree to which *brand x* is the respondent’s favorite brand”, “if the respondent has more favorite clothing brands” and “the frequency the respondent buys *brand x*”, the variance in the model was more explained. For example, with regard to brand love and brand loyalty. Initially, brand love can explain for



27.7% for brand loyalty ( $F(1, 796) = 306.52, p < .001$ ). Once the control variables were added to the model, the variance explained was 59.7% ( $F(13, 797) = 91.96, p < .001$ ). In other words, the explanation of the variance in the model might indicate that *brand x* in general was not the respondent's favorite brand and therefore, could have influenced the results. An important motive for choosing the most recently bought clothing brand rather than a brand they show love for, is that it could bias the respondent while filling out the survey. This procedure resulted in more variance in the data regarding brand love, since not everyone automatically scored high on brand love. However, despite the considerations for choosing the last purchased brand, a suggestion for further research might be to research their actual favorite brand(s).

Regarding the supported findings that brand love correlates with its consequences, and that there might be differences regarding compulsive buyers, it would be interesting to look into different types of product categories. As has been noted, clothing was one of the most frequently bought items by compulsive buyers (Faber, O'Guinn & Krych, 1987; O'Guinn & Faber, 1989; Trautmann-Attman & Johnson, 2009). Following this, the surprising results that compulsive buyers score higher on brand love than non-compulsives and that they might develop a higher degree of brand loyalty when showing brand love, could be different with other product categories. It would be interesting to find out whether or not there might be differences in brand love between luxurious and convenience brands/products.

Originally, the idea was to also study brand switching as a consequence of brand love. There was reason to believe that an increase in brand love is associated with a decrease in switching among brands (Oliver, 1999). With regard to compulsives, an explorative study found that they tend to switch more easily among brands and are less willing to pay more for their favorite brand (Horváth & Van Birgelen, 2015). Nevertheless, brand switching was not a consequence mentioned by Batra et al. (2012). Due to time and space issues, it was decided to leave this consequence out of the study. However, there are indications that there is a relationship between brand love and brand switching and that there might be differences regarding compulsive and non-compulsive buyers. Therefore, this could be a suggestion for further research.



## 5.2 Implications

As far as concerned, this was the first study to investigate into the concept of brand love and its consequences regarding compulsive buyers and non-compulsive buyers. This study suggests that there is a relationship between brand love and its consequences, and speculate about differences regarding compulsive and non-compulsive buyers. This study contributes to the literature of compulsive buying behavior and brand love. So far, little research has been carried out regarding the combination of these topics. As suggested, the findings add up to the existing literature of the relationship of brand love and its consequences. However, there is still need for further research in order to understand, predict and help compulsive buyers.

With regard to managerial implications, the importance of brand love for organizations is indicated by the findings that brand love increases brand loyalty, positive WOM and resistance to negative information. Eventually, every organization wants to gain new consumers and turn these consumers into loyal consumers. Consumers sharing their positive experience with a particular brand, can lead to new consumers or loyal consumers for example, especially in an environment where social media and influencers take an important role these days (Booth & Matic, 2010). Therefore, an implication for organizations could be to set up marketing campaigns and to engage with influencers about how consumers really have love feelings for the brand, rather than just state or promote the brand they bought. The topic of the campaign could be love with the purpose to make consumers more aware of it.

Furthermore, since the market segment of compulsive buyers is still growing these days (Neuner et al., 2005; Ridgway et al., 2008), compulsive buying behavior was investigated. The results indicate that there might be differences, and therefore should alert organizations for the importance of this market segment. Overall, this study suggests that compulsive buyers develop a higher degree of brand love. Focusing just on the relationship between compulsive buyers and the consequences, it was found that compulsive buyers are more likely to engage in both positive and negative WOM, and also develop a higher degree of brand loyalty. Even though corporate social responsibility has become an important topic in organizations for both internal and external purposes (Brammer, Millington & Rayton, 2007), as far as concerned, compulsive buying behavior has not been acknowledged as a wide problem in organizations. How can this not been acknowledged, while research has found that it even can have similar effects as other serious disorders, such as gambling and eating disorders (Trautmann-Attman & Johnson, 2009)? Therefore, organizations may set up initiatives as part of their social responsibility. This could either be to donate money to clinicians or researches in order to support, or set up a program their selves. Next to organizations, setting up research programs or funding them might



also be applicable for the government. To give an example, as “retail therapy” is often referred to in advertising (Kyrios et al., 2004), companies should rather focus on other things that could help people as “therapy”. This does not automatically have to be something to do with the brand. It shows that the organization is not only in it to make lots of profit, but shows that the organizations really cares of their consumers and want them to be happy and healthy. In this sense, it can help both the organization and the consumer.



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# APPENDIX

## Appendix 1. The survey (English version)

### 1A. Introduction

Dear respondent,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this important survey about brands. This survey is part of our master theses from Radboud University Nijmegen. Below, you will find a few statements/questions, which we would like you to respond to. The survey is anonymous, and please note, the results are for research purposes only. The survey takes approximately 7 minutes.

By filling out this survey you have a chance of winning a Bol.com gift card worth €50,-. At the end of the survey you can enter your e-mail address to participate in the lottery.

Please, answer the statements/questions honestly to help improve the results of the research.

Cécile van de Beek

Eva Derksen

Estelle Roelofs

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### 1B. Compulsive buying

The following statements/questions are about your consuming behavior. Please, indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>						<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>



My closet has unopened shopping bags in it							
Others might consider me as a shopaholic							
Much of my life centers around buying things							
I buy things I don't need							
I buy things I did not plan to buy							
I consider myself an impulsive purchaser							

**1C. Last purchased brand**

Please, indicate, which brand in the product category clothing you bought most recently. If you do not remember exactly, try to indicate a brand which you bought relatively recently.

The BRAND I bought most recently in the PRODUCT CATEGORY CLOTHING:

---

**1D. Brand love**

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements about *brand x*

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>			<b>Moderate</b>			<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
I feel that wearing of <i>brand x</i> says something “true” and “deep” about who I am as a person							
<i>Brand x</i> is able to make me look like I want to look							



<i>Brand x</i> is able to do something that makes my life more meaningful							
I find myself thinking about <i>brand x</i>							
I am willing to spend a lot of money improving and fine-tuning a product from <i>brand x</i> after I buy it							
I feel the desire to wear <i>brand x</i> clothing							
I have interacted with <i>brand x</i> in the past							
I feel there is a natural “fit” between me and <i>brand x</i>							
I feel emotionally connected to <i>brand x</i>							
I feel that <i>brand x</i> is fun							
I believe that I will be wearing <i>brand x</i> for a long time							
Suppose <i>brand x</i> were to go out of existence, I would feel anxiety							

On the following scale, please express your overall feelings and evaluations towards *brand x*

Negative			Moderate			Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7



Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statement

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>			<b>Moderate</b>			<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
I like the experience of shopping clothes							

To what degree does the following statement apply to you?

	<b>Not at all</b>	<b>Slightly</b>	<b>Quite</b>	<b>Extremely</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
Do you feel deep affection like “love”, for <i>brand x</i> ?				

### 1E. Consequences of brand love

To what degree do the following statements apply to you?

	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b>
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
I often discuss aspects of different brands with others							
I regularly say positive things about <i>brand x</i> to other people							
I will recommend <i>brand x</i> to someone							



who seeks my advice							
I often encourage other people to buy products of <i>brand x</i>							
I regularly say negative things about <i>brand x</i> to other people							
I often complain to other customers if I experience a problem with <i>brand x</i>							
I often discourage other people to buy products of <i>brand x</i>							

To what degree do the following statements apply to you?

	<b>Strongly disagree</b> <b>1</b>	<b>Disagree</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Slightly disagree</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Moderate</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Slightly agree</b> <b>5</b>	<b>Agree</b> <b>6</b>	<b>Strongly agree</b> <b>7</b>
I regularly purchase <i>brand x</i>							
I see myself as loyal towards <i>brand x</i>							
I consider <i>brand x</i> as my first choice to buy clothes from							
Negative information about <i>brand x</i> has no effect on me							



I readily change my view of <i>brand x</i> based on negative information about it							
If someone makes a negative comment about <i>brand x</i> , I would defend it							

**1F. Control questions**

Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements about *brand x*

	<b>Strongly disagree</b> 1	2	3	<b>Moderate</b> 4	5	6	<b>Strongly agree</b> 7
<i>Brand x</i> is my favorite clothing brand							

Please, indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statement

	<b>Strongly disagree</b> 1	2	3	<b>Moderate</b> 4	5	6	<b>Strongly agree</b> 7
I have a lot of favorite clothing brands							

To what extent does the following statement apply to you?

On average, I buy a product from *brand x*...

- Once a day or more often
- Twice to six times a week
- Seven times a month or more often
- Once a month



- Multiple times a year
- Once a year
- Less than once a year

## 1G. Demographics

Hereafter some final questions will follow about your gender, age, nationality, etc.

Please indicate your gender

- Male
- Female
- Other

Please select the category that includes your age

- Under 18
- 18 – 24
- 25 – 29
- 30 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 or above

What is your nationality?

- Dutch
- Other: nationality in EU-country
- Other (please specify)

What is your current employment status?

- Student
- Employed full-time
- Employed part-time
- Self-employed
- Unemployed (currently searching for a job)



- Unemployed (currently not searching for a job)
- Retired

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? If currently enrolled, please indicate the highest degree received.

- Primary education
- High school degree or equivalent
- MBO
- University of Applied Sciences
- University
- PhD

What is your annual household income?

- Below €10.000
- €10.000 - €20.000
- €20.000 - €30.000
- €30.000 - €40.000
- €40.00 - €50.000
- Over €50.000
- I prefer not to say

What is your marital status?

- Single
- Cohabitant
- Married or registered partnership

## **1H. Participation in the lottery**

If you would like to have a chance of winning the Bol.com gift card worth €50,-, please enter your e-mail address here. For privacy reasons, your e-mail address will be deleted directly after the lottery.

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## **1I. End of the survey**



## Appendix 2. Overview of measurement scales consequences of brand love

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### General WOM

1. I often discuss aspects of different brands with others  
Own

### Positive WOM

To what degree do the following statements apply to you?

1. I regularly say positive things about *brand x* to other people  
Zeithaml et al. (1996)
2. I will recommend *brand x* to someone who seeks my advice  
Zeithaml et al. (1996) (adjusted)
3. I often encourage other people to buy products of *brand x*  
Zeithaml et al. (1996)

### Negative WOM

To what degree do the following statements apply to you?

1. I regularly say negative things about *brand x* to other people  
Zeithaml et al. (1996) (adjusted to negative)
2. I often complain to other customers if I experience a problem with brand x  
Zeithaml et al. (1996)
3. I often discourage other people to buy products of *brand x*  
Zeithaml et al. (1996) (adjusted to negative)

### Brand loyalty

To what degree do the following statements apply to you?

1. I regularly purchase *brand x*  
Own
2. I see myself as loyal towards *brand x*  
Own
3. I consider *brand x* as my first choice to buy clothes from  
Zeithaml et al. (1996)

### Resistance to negative information

To what degree do the following statements apply to you?

1. Negative information about *brand x* has no effect on me  
Eisingerich, Rubera, Seifert & Bhardwaj (2011)
  2. I readily change my view of *brand x* based on negative information about it  
Eisingerich, Rubera, Seifert & Bhardwaj (2011) (R)
  3. If someone makes a negative comment about *brand x*, I would defend it  
Lau & Lee (1999)
- 

