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WHY "HAPPILY EVER AFTER" DID NOT LAST FOREVER: QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF DETERMINANTS CAUSING TERMINATION OF BRAND LOVE.

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MASTER'S THESIS

WHY "HAPPILY EVER AFTER" DID NOT LAST FOREVER: QUALITATIVE INVESTIGATION OF DETERMINANTS CAUSING THE TERMINATION OF BRAND LOVE.

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Abstract

Love should not be taken for granted, as "happily ever after" is not promised. The study presents a qualitative investigation of determinants that cause the termination of brand love. Insights and conclusions are derived from in-depth interviews with consumers who have experienced brand love, and have for some reason decided to terminate the relationship with their beloved brand. The aim of the paper is to contribute to current knowledge on brand love termination by exploring reasons and underlying motives for the dissolution of the relationship. Five relevant constructs were derived based on open coding analysis, and are interpreted as determinants causing termination of brand love. Additionally, research finds a connection between variables creating and facilitating brand love, and the ones that destroy it. Overall, the research advances the understanding of brand-consumer relationships, offering managerial recommendations, while providing a framework and direction for future research.

Key words: brand love termination, brand love, qualitative investigation, determinants, brand transgressions, trust, negative experiences, product quality, social influences, brand obsolescence, brand-consumer relationships.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Realizing the importance of the concept of brand love, this master thesis recognizes the importance of another relevant construct, one that is opposite from brand love – brand love termination. It explores the process of dissolution of love consumers feel toward a brand, by defining determinants leading to termination of love. It does so by using findings gathered from qualitative research in the form of interviews, while also being led by the developed theoretical framework. The themes that will be covered in this master thesis are explained next.

1.1 Background and Problem Context

For consumers, a brand represents an unconditional promise that they will be satisfied[1]. Building relationships with the customers, and maintaining them, is of great importance to any brand. These relationships offer great financial benefits to brands, in terms of generating profit from their community of loyal customers. For consumers to become loyal, there are many antecedents and factors. One of them is brand love.

Brand love is a strong, helpful, and important construct, especially now when relationship marketing becomes more important by the day and brand love is a great part of it. It has been greatly explored during the last two decades, offering many useful insights into consumer behavior. Today, stakes are higher and consumers want more. The market is changing and companies mustadapt to consumers that want everything better and bigger, all the time, from experience with the brand to trust, love, and later loyalty. To survive and succeed, the brand must provide all that and even more, as competition is never higher and consumers are never more demanding.The future is now and new opportunities must be researched and taken advantage of. It is simple –adapt and surpass or just fail.

Taking what has been said into consideration, and acknowledging the importance of the brand love construct and the steps to its creation, one can also assume the importance of exploring the steps that lead to the diminishment of brand love. If antecedents of brand love are well explored and defined, allowing the research community and managers to know how the emotional relationship between brand and consumer is created, the question of how to maintain that relationship and what not to do to make the consumer terminate the relationship, should also be asked.

Brand love termination refers to the end of a consumer's emotional connection to a brand they previously loved. This can occur for various reasons that still need defining. The termination of brand love can have significant impacts on consumer behavior and brand reputation, making it an important topic for marketing and consumer

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[1] The power of Unconditional Service Guarantees. Harvard Business Review. (2014, August 1). https://hbr.org/1988/07/the-power-of-unconditional-service-guarantees

behavior research. With this kind of impact, interest in brand love termination as a construct is growing. This allows for a creation of a new research problem that yet needs the analysis it deserves. Many loved brands today, stop being loved and the reasons are still not precisely defined, nor adequately explored. It is time to explore the dark side of customer relationships and see what causes the 'happily ever after' to end.

1.2 Research Objective

Love does not necessarily last forever. Consumer-brand relationships have their lifecycle and have been known to end, but the purpose of this research is to identify reasons why brand love diminishes and becomes terminated. Reasons for ending the relationship with the brand can be customer-related or brand-related. Still, all of those need more specification, especially in the scope of a construct such as brand love, which holds great importance for managers and practice. This research will identify the actions that act as determinants and reasons for brand love termination.

Brand love, as well as interpersonal love, is a complex construct with multiple layers and there is no predefined set of steps that tells the managers when and what will happen. Research is necessary on this topic to set the determinants that can lead to brand love termination so that managers can do all that is in their power to prevent the said situation. In the end, love is what keeps us going. Hence, the question arises – what does a loved brand have to do to cause the love to stop?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study has great significance for the overall research and available information on the topic of the brand love cycle and the relationships formed and maintained between the brand and the consumer, enabling the brand to have great financial benefits from forming meaningful connections with its target market. Consequently, the study aims to provide useful insights and introduce brand love termination as a relevant construct that should be further researched and addressed by brands in the process of creating their branding strategies.

Contributions of this research are that it will identify actions that are presumed to be negative, causing brand love termination, while helping managers to avoid them and maintain their community of brand lovers. As previously said, research will tackle the question that has been neglected in previous literature and recognize brand love termination as a single concept, detaching it from the concept of brand hate, and further improving the research on brand love trajectories and relationship cycle. Alongside this, this research will provide a deeper understanding of the emotional and subjective aspects of brand love termination and contribute to the development of more empathetic and effective marketing strategies.

With this being said, the significance of the study is therefore seen in the many contributions it will provide. Raging from contributions to the theoretical understanding of aforementioned concepts, further defining the concept of brand love termination while qualitatively exploring the determinants causing the break-up, adding a fresh point of view to current theoretical frameworks of consumer-brand relationships and consumer behavior; to offering implications useful for the practical organization and branding, enabling brands who take into consideration and implement the elements responsible for the dissolution of emotional consumer-brand relationships, to create sustainable strategies to maintain these meaningful relationships for a long period.

Besides theoretical contributions and practical insights, the significance of the study is also seen in its contribution to better understanding consumer behavior and their decision-making process in the context of brand love termination, by underlying psychological and behavioral variables involved in this process. Alongside, this paper, after identifying the research gap in previous research with more detail, will aim to fill that gap with qualitatively identified, previously under-studied, determinants causing the dissolution of a loving relationship between brand and consumer. Lastly, the study aims to capitalize on the usage of qualitative research methods for a deeper understanding of underlying opinions and perceptions dictating consumer behavior.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis and study identified as a qualitative investigation of determinants causing termination of brand love, is organized into a comprehensive and logical framework. The first part of this paper aims to introduce the topic of brand love termination, explain the context of this phenomenon, and give certain justification for this research, explaining briefly its significance and background. After identifying research objectives, and explaining the aim of the study which is to qualitatively investigate said problem, the significance of the study itself is explained by identifying potential contributions of this research.

The thesis structure is further developed with a chapter covering a literature review, developed firstly through defining the conceptual framework that will guide the investigation of determinants causing brand love termination, including all relevant models and concepts. This part will cover the explanation of the crown concept of brand love to give background knowledge on the main pre-condition for brand love termination, that is for brand love to exist in the first place. Continuing with covering current studies and theories of brand love termination, a research gap is identified, as well as the main research question.

The proceeding, part of this thesis will be dedicated to explaining in detail the research methodology used and data collection process, by covering research design, data sources, sampling techniques, providing data analysis, results, and their interpretation, while addressing the ethical considerations of this research.

Lastly, the main part of this thesis is developed by addressing leading findings, through the prism of main themes and demographical overview, while later on, interpreting those findings in the context of previous theoretical overview and conclusions derived from the qualitative study, giving a detailed explanation of the observations, singling out theoretical and managerial contributions. This thesis will not neglect to also add the contributions to the brand love research while acclaiming limitations and providing recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

To begin this research, a theoretical framework will be developed to define the field and context within which determinants of brand love termination will be explored. To identify the determinants causing brand love termination, it is necessary to understand the underlying concept of brand love, as it is the necessary pre-condition for the dissolution of the relationship. Therefore, the first step is to explain brand love, as it is necessary to understand and comprehend how love is created, more specifically, actions and patterns leading to love creation so that the connection between brand love antecedents and reasons for termination of brand love could be found and explained. Hence, to understand how this construct dissolves, firstly the process of its creation needs to be covered and explained. The literature review will define brand love, antecedents of brand love, and related constructs.

Later on, the part dedicated to the literature review should focus on current studies and insights available on the topic of brand love termination. Determinants identified by previous research should be specified so that later on, insights from qualitative studies addressed in this research, can be compared and conclusions could be drawn. For further investigation of this phenomenon, leading to a more developed and detailed research design, a gap in the current literature needs to be identified, and an adequate research question for this study must be chosen and specified.

2.1 Brand Love

Doing business in an ever-changing society and market, being surrounded by people who continue to change their behavior and purchase patterns, implies being able to adapt and constantly give more and more. Authors of important papers on the topic of brand love agree that achieving liking and satisfaction with the brand is no longer enough to have a desired competitive and comparative advantage. Therefore, the love that consumers will potentially feel due to the brand's efforts is what will set the brand apart from all others. There lies the importance of exploring the construct of brand love.

In 2004, Kevin Roberts, CEO of the global advertising agency Saatchi&Saatchi, introduced a new marketing concept called Lovemarks. The author recognized that markets and human nature are changing and that brands need to rise to the love mark status. It goes beyond brands, demanding love and respect to be at high levels. The concept focuses on creating brands that are truly loved for them to survive in today's market[2]. One can thus conclude that brands that are not loved, have a hard time surviving in today's environment. This conclusion gives an insight into the need to explore factors causing brand love termination so that they can be avoided.

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[2] Saatchi and Saatchi. (n.d.). Lovemarks. [online] Available at: https://saatchi.co.uk/en-gb/purpose/lovemarks/ Accessed January 25th, 2023

Brand love is defined as an attitude that consumers hold toward a particular brand which includes their ability to think, feel, and behave concerning that brand (Rubin, 1973). Consumers experience brand love as a higher–order construct that includes multiple cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, that they later organize into a mental prototype (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012). It is a complex structure with many dimensions. Another definition states that brand love is a marketing construct that helps explain and predict variation in desirable post-consumption behaviors among satisfied consumers (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Authors define brand love as an emotional attachment and identification that consumers feel toward a brand or trade name. Brands are known to provide emotional benefits and symbolic meanings to their consumers. This statement is the basis for building the theory of creating positive emotions and a loving relationship between consumers and brands. The relationship that brands aim to create is long-term, enduring, and deep and should be a two–way street. That is actually how a loving and meaningful interpersonal relationship is defined.

There are different literature frameworks and perspectives for studying brand love. Therefore, scholars use different approaches in their studies and research to explain their views on the concept of brand love. The most applied framework is one of the interpersonal love theories. It is used by Albert, Merunka, Valette – Florence (2008); Albert and Valette – Florence (2010); Thomson et al. (2005); Whang, Allen, Zhang, Sahoury, Khan, and Frances Luce (2004). To conclude, prior work has primarily been based on explaining brand love through the literature on interpersonal love and/or attachment. Lastly, the grounded theory approach highlights the importance of phenomenological experience in the relationship between the brand and the consumer. Batra et al. (2012), creators of another groundbreaking and relevant paper in brand love literature, based their study on this approach.

The theory that many more were based upon is the Triangular theory of love created by Sternberg in 1986. It is applied extensively in consumer research. The theory originated from psychology and is based on a well-known interpersonal relationship theory basis. Sternberg explains that brand love has three primary dimensions:

- Intimacy – a feeling of warmth, closeness, and connectivity in a relationship, tied to happiness overall;
- Passion – physical and passionate attraction and psychological arousal; linked to romance, self-esteem, and self-actualization;
- Decision/commitment – cognitive perception of love where the decision is a short-term orientation while commitment is defined as long–term orientation. Also, commitment is perceived as the moral and normative obligation to maintain a certain relationship. This interpretation from Sternberg is not in line with how consumers define the commitment/decision component of brand love (Batra and Ahuvia, 2012).

Later, Shimp and Madden (1988) adapted Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of interpersonal love and formed their "consumer-object relationship" model. Three dimensions of brand love that they adapted to the consumption context were now yearning, liking, and decision/commitment. Similarities have been recognized between the positive emotional feelings consumers feel toward other people, their loved ones and objects that are material goods. The answer to the question of why consumers love a certain brand is found in the explanation of the interpersonal love phenomena. Consequently, a very hard question is imposed of why we, as humans, fall in love with someone. As it might be hard to resolve that dilemma, it is even harder to find one widely accepted theory on consumer – brand love relationship. Questions of how you treat people you love, how your loved ones treat you, and most importantly why people choose to love someone, need to be asked and answered first in the interpersonal love context and later in brand love and consumer context. In 1998, Fournier was the first one to include, in his theory, brand love as one of the core components of consumer-brand relationships.

The first relevant research in the new millennia was the one by Ahuvia in 2005. Brand love prototype aspects were detected. Dimensions established are passionate feelings, attachment, positive emotions, positive brand evaluation, and open declaration of love. This prototype was used later as groundwork for the brand love mental prototype created by Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi in 2012. Their brand love prototype was built upon the interpersonal theory that was modified to consumer context. In 2006, Ahuvia partnered with Carroll on another important research and theory development. The authors determined two key elements of brand love:

- *Emotional attachment* – strong and specific bond aside with psychological proximity of a consumer with the brand;
- *Passion* – consumer's desire for a brand that creates high arousal emotions (Batra et al. 2012), separation anxiety (Albert and Valette – Florence, 2010), and a general sense of pleasure as an outcome of brand ownership (Albert, Merunka, and Valette – Florence, 2009). Passion is often viewed as a critical component of emotional attachment.

Love relationship according to Fournier (1998) is long-term and involves numerous behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences. Batra and Ahuvia's (2012) respondents described love in the same way as Fournier defined it. Emotions that those respondents associated with brands were mostly happiness or anxiety because of the possibility of losing the brand, similar to what people feel when talking about other people they feel love towards. Consequently, emotion is viewed as an affective state while love refers to the consumer brand relationship.

When brand love has been achieved, it is not the end. A strategy for supporting and maintaining that love needs to be developed and implemented. An interesting concept of relationship stages has been presented by Fetscherin, Barker, and Peacock (2015). They distinguished between the five stages of brand love: new, dating, love,

boredom, and divorce (Barker, Peacock, and Fetscherin, 2015). Brand divorce most resembles brand love termination that this thesis aims to explore.

2.1.1 Antecedents of Brand Love and Related Constructs

Reasons for and importance of exploring firstly antecedents of brand love, with the goal of better-comprehending factors causing brand love termination, have been explained throughout this paper multiple times. To summarize, it is important to first understand what creates brand love and to recognize and deepen the knowledge of what destroys it. Factors that will be explained further lead to brand love creation, as has been agreed upon by many authors. Still, it is important to emphasize the fact that different factors overlap with each other and influence the creation of an emotional bond between consumer and brand, as this is a multi-dimensional complex construct. For this research, the most relevant factors and concepts have been singled out and will be explained.

Trust

Brand trust is one of the most important antecedents of brand love since it gives consumers reliability and confidence in the brand and the relationship, as well as a sense of security, that is especially relevant in situations of uncertainty. Brand trust is explained as the willingness of an average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Albert and Merunka (2013) proved that brand love is influenced by reliability that the brand will fulfill its obligations, as a cognitive dimension, and honesty, as an affective dimension, meaning that customers do not want to be let down by the brand they trust and love. Once trust is created, brands must continue to meet their obligations with every direct and indirect experience thereby reinforcing the trust consumer have toward the brand. Trust makes a relationship between consumer and brand highly valued and creates a desire to maintain it through relational exchanges and attitudinal commitment (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Antecedents of brand trust, as identified by Huang (2017), are functional benefits, actual uses, and satisfaction. Trust is also under the influence of quality, after-sales service, and employee effectiveness in addressing consumers' needs (Albert and Merunka, 2013). Authors like Albert and Merunka (2013) argue that the consumer first needs to trust the brand to develop feelings and love it. Others state that if one loves a brand, it implies that trust will be developed. Still, the importance of trust for the creation and maintenance of love is evident.

Brand Satisfaction and Experience

Brand love is developed as a result of positive brand experiences and satisfaction (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roberts et al., 2018). Satisfaction with all brand interactions fosters love and emotional attachment. The

importance of quality, at all levels and forms of brand interactions, is stated by many authors mentioned beforehand. Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) recognize high quality as the antecedent of brand love. Brand experience serves as a combination of love-based and experience-based dimensions explaining relationship quality – love/passion, intimacy, interdependence, self-connection, commitment, and brand partner quality (Batra et al., 2012). Positive experiences and satisfaction also create trust, which is one of the most important dimensions of brand love, as previously stated.

Brand Image

The brand image describes the general opinion and impression that customers have of a certain brand. It depicts the mental image or associations that people have about a brand as a result of their encounters, interactions, and exposure to the marketing initiatives, goods, services, and communications of the brand. Thanks to brand image, brand message influence is stronger on consumers who love a brand and creates a stronger positive word of mouth as an outcome (Anggraeni and Rachmanita, 2015). Also, brand image is realized to have a direct positive impact on brand love and consequently, an indirect one on WOM formation. It is because one needs to feel stronger emotions to recommend something rather than just having a positive perception of the brand. When brand image and consumers' lifestyles are overlapping, greater consumer identification with the brand is established, leading to greater brand love (Alnawas and Altarifi, 2015).

Brand Identification and Authenticity

Brand love is the influence of consumers' ability to identify with a brand's values, beliefs, or image (Albert et al., 2008; Escalas & Bettman, 2015). A sensation of self-extension and emotional connection are produced by strong brand identification. According to Rodrigues, Reis, and Cantista (2015), brand identification implies that consumer identity is created by loving the brand. Brand identity also satisfies consumers' symbolic needs rather than functional ones, meaning that brand identification is based on emotions and cognition, where a brand represents something personal and unique, thus leading to brand love. Identification with the brand means that the brand for consumers symbolizes what they are, contributes to their image creation, and helps develop a sense of belonging (Loureiro, Ruediger, and Demetris, 2012).

Brand identification is thus based on the alignment of customers and the brand's values and ideals that need to be perceived as genuine and authentic. Authenticity is of great importance as it shapes the brand image, perceptions, and creation of trust, making it easier for customers to identify with the brand. For generating brand love, authenticity has a crucial role as consumers tend to be more emotionally attached to a brand if they perceive it as honest, true to their values, and transparent (Albert et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2018). Consumers tend to show

love toward a brand if it exhibits great authentic features, meaning that they are honest (Babić-Hodović et al., 2022).

Product category and intensity of brand love

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) developed a model that predicts how loved hedonic products and self-expressive brands can be, and have concluded that brands are loved more if they play a significant role in consumer identity shaping, reflecting a customer's inner self and enhancing the social self. When it comes to the influence of category on brand love, Ahuvia (2005) states that product category is important as hedonic product category brands have more chance of being loved, as it is a product category that has more symbolic meaning. Therefore, Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) concluded that brands vary in their potential to be loved because of product or service category. Besides category, authors found that a brand's ability to be loved depends on its opportunity for interaction and active engagement. Tsiotsou and Goldsmith (2011) proved the difference between goods and services in predicting brand love. On the other hand, Loureiro, Ruediger, and Demetris (2012) in their research, proved strong brand love existence in the utilitarian product category that is the car industry, possessing high involvement characteristics. This is a stance that conflicts with the attitude that brand love is universal and that product or service category has no impact on brand love creation. For example, Fetscherin (2014) has a stand that category is not relevant in determining brand love. In 2012, Rossiter defined brand love as a state that is experienced only by a minority of customers. According to Rossiter, the state of love occurs mostly in the case of products and services that are highly involved and experiential. The intensity of loyalty consumers feel toward a brand, which is also connected to brand love, influences the process of relationship dissolution in terms of the length of time necessary to make that decision (Fajer and Schouten, 1995).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Brand Love Termination

After doing the overview of existing literature and conclusions on how love is created, the next part of this paper is dedicated to reviewing existing theories on the topic of termination of brand love, meaning understanding how love is ruined. Termination of a consumer-brand relationship has often been described as brand divorce. Brand divorce refers to a consumer's separation from a brand. Still, numerous papers include brand divorce in their framework, but none of them focus on this relationship as a loving one.

As we ask ourselves what are the reasons to fall in love with someone or something, we should also ask ourselves what are the factors that lead to that love ending. Same as with brand love, we need to ask ourselves questions about breaking up emotional bonds in the interpersonal context and adapting it to the consumer brand context.

In 1982, Duck described four types of processes of interpersonal breakup that were later adapted to the consumer-brand context by Fajer and Schouten (1995):

1. Break-down – disruption in the relationship caused by a break of conduct such as unmet expectations for brand performance or changed needs
2. Decline – reduction of affection toward a brand
3. Disengagement – communication with other consumers (social reinforcement) that leads to the ending of a relationship as well as finding other alternatives
4. Dissolution – termination of a relationship

Researchers exploring brand love through the prism of interpersonal love (Albert and Merunka, 2008; Albert and Valette – Florence,2010; Thomson et al., 2005; Shimp and Madden, 1988), base their assumptions about consumer-brand relationships on determinants and concepts present in interpersonal relationships. Thus, if the basic assumption is that the consumer-brand relationship resembles a human one, and is formed similarly, an assumption about brand love termination can also be made. This means that the break-up between consumer and brand will resemble a break-up between two people, being underlined by similar motives and caused by similar actions.

Breaking up with a brand in which consumer is greatly invested, emotionally and financially, is a long process characterized by many activities and caused by many actions by the brand, or it could be a short one if it entails a strong emotional reaction to the brand's actions (Fajer and Schouten, 1995). Brand love termination, as it comes out of an emotional relationship, becomes defined as emotional detachment. Emotional detachment is a technique by which the neurotic system resolves the internal conflict by maintaining emotional distance towards others (Horney, 1993), and it usually precedes the final dissolution of interpersonal relationships. Current literature recognizes the end of a love relationship, brand hate, and brand detachment, lacking in further explanation of emotional detachment other than that it is a long process (Coulter and Ligas, 2000).

Investigating what may occur if customers have a bad experience with their favorite brand is intriguing. These customers are devoted to and passionate about the brand, and they share the same values that the company promotes. It is recognized that any of the possible determinants of love termination can cause disruptions in a loving consumer-brand relationship. Still, there is a limited understanding of how love moderates the relationship between negative experiences and the feeling of betrayal in the case of customers who have a loving relationship with a brand. If the consumers have a pre-existing relationship with the brand and if the love is strong enough, they will be more sensitive to repeated negative experiences with their preferred brand, meaning that they will

likely make an emotional decision of terminating the relationship (Jabeen et al., 2022). It can be explained by the fact that customers do not like to be let down by the ones they love, so their emotions are aggravated.

Fetscherin and Samperdo (2019) argue that consumers that feel love toward a brand, tend to forgive it for their transgressions, especially if consumers' emotions are high and the relationship is strong, both of which are factors relevant for brand forgiveness. Still, authors emphasize that this is a complex reaction and that in cases of value and image-related transgressions, brands are less likely to be forgiven. Building upon this, Kennedy and Guzman (2021) conclude that the effect of transgression will be minimized if the brand is loved, meaning that the loving nature of the consumer-brand relationship overpowers the negative effect of brand transgression and makes the consumer overlook the mistake and forgive. Earlier research also shows that stronger relationships tend to serve as a buffer that evokes greater tolerance and forgiveness on behalf of consumers to counter the negativity (Grégoire and Fisher, 2008). Nonetheless, while these consumers' threshold may be higher to forgive a few instances of brand failure, prolonged disappointment, and particularly a violation of the fairness norm, may result in detrimental consequences for brands (Gregoire and Fisher, 2008). As Odekerken-Schröder, et al. (2010) pointed out, their respondents terminated the relationship after multiple disappointments and forgiveness. The approach that is widely used for the analysis of how consumers react to negative experiences with their beloved brand is called love makes you forgive (Lee et al., 2021; Yang and Mattila, 2012). Even though love may help to forgive, the question arises – how long are consumers willing to forgive the mistakes and disappointments caused by the brand they love?

2.3 Factors Influencing Brand Love Termination

When trying to identify determinants causing brand love termination, it is necessary to explore the various factors identified in previous research that may contribute to the termination of brand love.

Disruptive brand behaviors, product-related difficulties, unpleasant brand experiences, changes in a brand's image or reputation, fluctuations in consumer preferences, and changes in personal growth or identity are all potential factors that can cause a consumer-brand relationship to break down. These factors have been identified in the existing literature and will be explained in more detail further on.

Based on the processes of a consumer-brand breakup, Fajer and Schouten (1995) provide four different causes for dissolution:

a) Pre-existing doom: no common features necessary for identification and compatibility between brand and consumer.
b) Mechanical failure: Low brand performance and low customer satisfaction

c) Process loss: Not adapting to changing consumer needs or engaging with customers may cause brand shifting.

d) Sudden death: Unexpected and surprising information about the brand, negative in nature, and usually some kind of corporate scandal

Brand transgressions

Brand transgressions are recognized as brand actions that violate social norms or are seen as moral misconduct (Romani *et al*., 2015). In this case, consumers see themselves as victims and brands as wrongdoers. Even though brand transgressions have mostly been researched within the framework of brand hate, the connection could also be found with brand love termination. Romani *et al*. (2015) state that these actions are harmful to the brand's image and create negative emotions among customers. As a brand's wrongdoings destroy the positive brand image upon which brand love was established, we can assume that it will affect brand love as well.

After exposing customers to negative experiences such as deceptive advertising, ethical transgressions, dissatisfaction, and poor quality in products and services, the once beloved brand creates negative emotions for customers, such as a sense of betrayal, resulting in avoidance of the brand in question (Jabeen et al., 2022). The main question asked was if and how brands suffer because of their service failure. It was concluded that those negative experiences in question have a lasting impact on customers, with a possibility of translating into avoidance of the brand (Odoom et al. (2019), Zarantonello et al. (2016)). It is characterized as a passive coping response (Hegner et al., 2017). More on, brand betrayal is recognized as a consequence of a brand's actions that are not consistent with their promises, values, or set expectations, resulting in the violation of the trust of their customers, which is an important aspect of brand love creation and maintenance (Roberts et al., 2018). Consumers then tend to feel deluded, disappointed, badly treated and let down by their beloved brand. If betrayal is present in this form, it damages the relationship with the brand and can lead to dissolution, manifesting in brand avoidance. This can be explained by brand betrayal's reference to relationship norms (Palusuk et al., 2019).

Besides violating norms and expectations, exhibiting dishonesty in any form, from behavior to representation and marketing efforts, will lead to decreased love (Babić-Hodović et al., 2022). These negative emotions are a consequence of accumulated bad experiences with the brand (Jabeen et al., 2022). Brands are also at risk of losing the customers that love them if brand actions are not in line with customers' self-brand image (Fournier, 1998) or have negative symbolic associations attached to them (Lee et al., 2009).

Customer-related reasons

There are many individual reasons for the dissolution of any relationship. In 2010, Odekerken-Schröder, et al.provided research that was useful for understanding reasons related to a dissolution of a brand-consumer relationship. Even though they mostly focus on consumers' responses to the termination of a relationship, they still provided useful insight into reasons for dissolution. Based on previous work of other authors, they have summarized said determinants and divided them into two categories, later organized into a model explaining relationship dissolution and post-termination responses. One of those categories is customer-related reasons for termination, meaning determinants that have nothing to do with the brand nor their actions, performance, etc. Customer-related reasons imply financial reasons, changing needs, and variety-seeking. These are all individual reasons, of subjective nature. Even though changing needs and variety-seeking are both individual and subjective determinants, they imply another, objective problem. If consumers feel like they need to search for another brand because their needs have changed or the brand just doesn't offer enough options, that means that the brand is probably not adapting to the market, or new trends and is probably not doing substantial market research to comply with the changing needs of the market.

Brand performance

Reasons that are connected to a brand's overall performance and serve as determinants of brand-consumer relationship dissolution are organized into a category conveniently named brand/company-related reasons for termination (Odekerken-Schröder, et al., 2010). Authors identify, agreeing with previous research and conclusions by other authors, that these are service delivery problems and core product failures. Both are deeply rooted in the quality of service or product, which is defined as an antecedent of brand love. The authors also recognized the importance that codes of conduct imposed on the customers and the decision to maintain the relationship with the brand. If those code of conducts in terms of quality or experience are violated, it could be a reason for them to terminate the relationship. Respondents in this research stated that they had multiple disappointments with brand experience, alongside multiple product failures and poor performance, that they had not experienced previously. As quality and experience are both important antecedents of brand love, it is understandable that once these two dimensions are violated, consumers could decide to terminate the relationship. Still, it is not likely that the consumer will break a loving relationship with the brand based solely on lower quality than expected, as other psychological factors also contribute to the decision to terminate the relationship (Mai and Conti, 2007). According to Aakar et al. (2004), the reason for customers' dissatisfaction and dissolution of a relationship could be underperformance in any of the marketing mix elements.

2.4 Research Gap and Research Question

There have been several studies on the creation and upkeep of brand love relationships, but there is still a general lack of knowledge on the processes and determinants leading to the termination of those loving relationships. Previous research proves that negative experiences with the brand, after being repeated multiple times, can trigger brand hate (Zarantonello et al. (2016), Bryson et al. (2013), Hegner et al. (2017)). Still, the impact of the negative experience of brand love has not yet been proven. Adding to that, sampling in most previous research has been done based solely on the condition that consumers had previous experience with the brand, and not necessarily that they loved the brand.

Brand love creation and termination are evolving topics because they are deeply rooted in consumer behavior and consumers' preferences, social influences, emerging trends, and other psychological and sociological factors, all influencing consumer behavior and hence their stances toward brand relationships. These topics should constantly be revised and adapted based on changes in the market.

There exists no current knowledge on whether there is a direct connection between the factors creating and facilitating brand love and the ones that destroy it. Assuming one of the brand love antecedents is desolated, brand love will be too. Still, current research fails to fully answer the question of how brand love as a single concept will be terminated and whether the actions that collapse brand love antecedents are the same actions that terminate the construct of brand love. It should be researched whether termination of love is caused by opposite and negative versions of brand love antecedents, such as negative brand personality, negative brand image, etc. Based on this gap identified, this paper proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the determinants causing brand love termination, meaning consumer motivation to terminate a relationship?

RQ2: Is there a realistic connection between brand love antecedents and the effect on brand love termination if the brand fails to respect those antecedents?

Another matter of question that is identified as a research gap is at what point does one decide that love will stop, what is the limit up to which the consumer forgives the brand and what does the brand have to do, to make consumers stop loving it? Poor performance is undeniable as stated by Batra et al. (2012) but it is not researched how long will it be tolerated for the sake of love. Consequently, determinants of brand love termination and their intensity and frequency in terms of lasting, strength, and repetition, need defining. With this being said, it is also concluded that current research, therefore, neglects the power and complexity of brand forgiveness. Kennedy and

Guzmán (2021) found that brand transgressions are overpowered and minimized in consumers' minds when the brand in question is loved. This supports the reasoning for deeper exploring of the brand actions leading to love termination, as those negative actions may not have a great impact on a loved brand if they only occur once. Thus, research is needed on determining the frequency of occurrence of said actions for love to end.

> *RQ3: Which brand actions are consumers ready to overlook and forgive for the sake of love, and for how long?*

As the authors (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Ahuvia, 2005; Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010; Tsiotsou and Goldsmith, 2011; Loureiro, et al., 2012) have pointed out, the brand category has an impact on brand love, in terms of intensity and brand's overall ability to be loved. There is a lack of knowledge on whether this is correct for brand love termination as well.

> *RQ4: Does the brand category play any significant role in the dissolution process of a loving consumer-brand relationship?*

Following previous research questions, the impact of brand love intensity on the termination of a relationship still needs exploring. Fajer and Schouten (1995) pointed out that the intensity of loyalty consumers feel toward a brand influences the process of relationship dissolution. Brand love, even though related to loyalty, is not the same concept, therefor this conclusion also needs to be proven in the case of brand love.

> *RQ5: Does the intensity of love consumer feels toward a brand, represent a factor in the process of brand love termination?*

As the understanding of the construct of brand love termination is limited, so are the useful recommendations on desirable brand reactions when a disruption in a relationship happens, that could help consumers forgive the brand and brand to keep their customers. This research aims to fill these identified gaps by doing a deep dive into the subject, providing fresh insights and understanding.

2.5 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model for this planned qualitative research serves as a visual representation of all the key concepts, their relationships, and research questions, identified based on research gaps found within the theoretical framework. This study identifies brand actions leading customers to end a relationship with a brand they once loved. It also provides insights into the underlying psychological reasoning and consumers' motives to end the relationship with the mentioned brand.

The conceptual model of this study visually represents the causal relationship between the negative actions of the brand and brand love termination, while taking into consideration brand love existence as a prerequisite for brand love termination. It is created based on the theoretical framework and research questions that are guiding the research. The model also includes brand love antecedents and states that the nature of antecedents' relationship with determinants of brand love termination, needs to be explored. This means that the conceptual model presents another aim of the research, which is to find the connection between factors that facilitate the creation of brand love and those that cause brand love to dissolve.
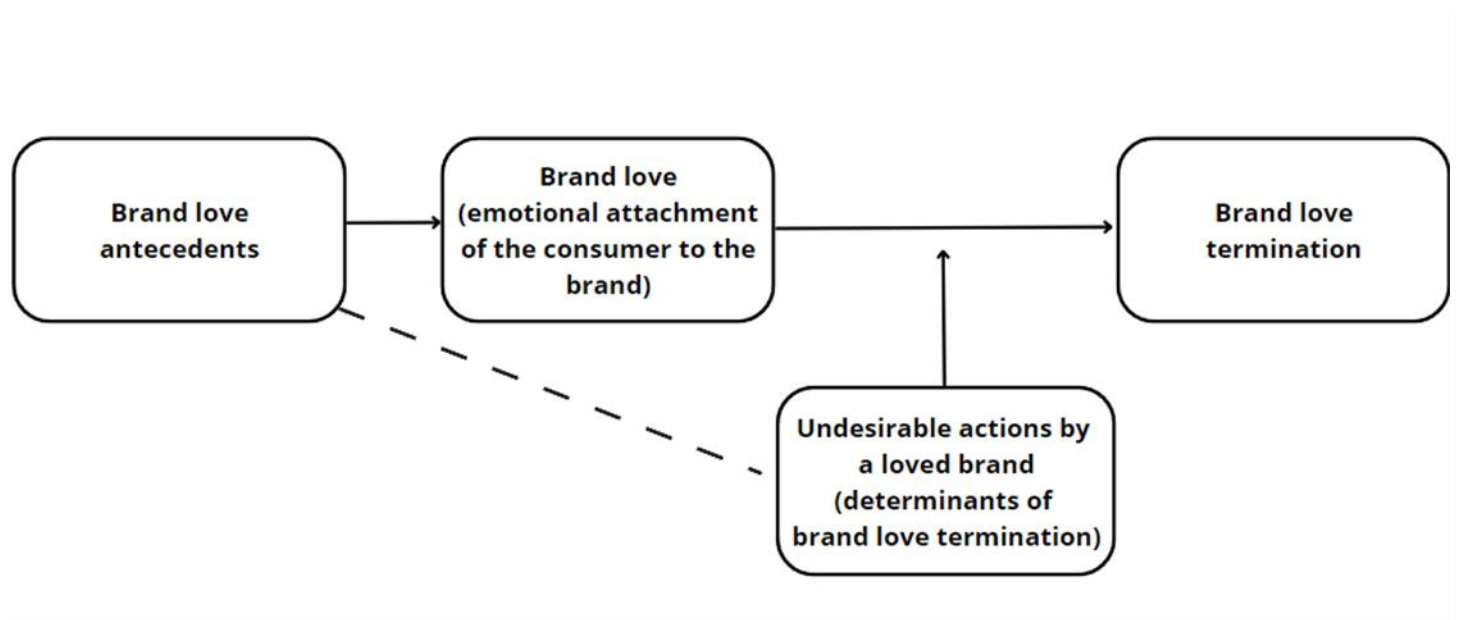

Figure 1 Graphical representation of the conceptual model used for the research on determinants causing brand love termination

3. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research holds its main objective in identifying reasons why brand love diminishes and becomes terminated. As it will be further explained in more detail, this research will identify the actions that act as determinants for brand love termination. To define these determinants, a deep dive into consumers' motives and reasoning is needed. For understanding overlapping trajectories of the consumer decision-making process in the case of a higher-order construct, that holds many dimensions, such as brand love, the best choice for research design is qualitative research. This research design enables capturing of rich, detailed, and in-depth insights. Brand love, as a starting point of this research, is a complex phenomenon and involves many subjective perceptions and experiences, as well as social and environmental factors. The decision to terminate any relationship, especially an emotional one, involves many thoughts, emotions, and different motivations. Qualitative research enables researchers to explore the aforementioned variables more deeply and gather a comprehensive understanding of the problem.

As consumers may not be so consciously aware of all motives that led them to the decision to break with a brand they once loved, a set of carefully chosen general questions need to be prepared to guide them while being open to creating new ones during the process of the interview itself. It is important to take into consideration the fact that maybe their decision was not intellectualized and they may not be able to instantly answer the question of why they terminated the relationship. The research questions of this paper need deep and thorough analysis and understanding of participants' viewpoints so that adequate insights can be extracted. All being said, to answer the research questions of this paper, it is best to opt for a qualitative research design, more specifically open-ended, semi-structured interviews.

Since the interview is semi-structured and open-ended, it enables following new topics and themes that emerge during the conversation with the interviewee. It is possible to ask new sub-questions, outside the ones dictated by the current literature or the gap identified. By probing, all underlying motives and meanings, feelings and perceptions, can be revealed. Interviewees are also able to open up and explain in detail their opinions and standpoints, as one on one interviews provide a safe and personal environment, suitable for a topic such as this one, which demands that kind of approach to get a better insight into consumer's mind. Obtaining and analyzing non-numerical data, found through qualitative interviews, is necessary to properly understand consumers' motivation to terminate a relationship for which they had some kind of feelings. The emphasis is on exploring the range of participant viewpoints and exposing subjective judgments. By qualitatively analyzing the causes that lead to brand love termination, this research fills a gap and provides relevant information on interactions between companies and consumers.

3.2 Data Collection and Data Sources

As explained in the previous paragraph, the type of interview that was used as a part of the qualitative research design was an open-ended, semi-structured interview. It enables an in-depth and rich insight into consumers' motives for termination of a loving relationship with their preferred brand, their perceptions, and opinions on this topic. Interviewees were asked to think about a brand they once loved and have since stopped loving. They had the full freedom to talk about any brand, of any product or service category, just as long as they fulfilled the sampling condition which is the existence of love toward that brand. Follow-up questions that were asked during the interview process and that were guiding the conversation are created in regards to identified research gaps, and related research questions. To get a deeper understanding of these topics, questions are organized so that the first part of the interview covers positive emotions about the brand, recalling good aspects of their relationship, establishing a timeline, and then later focusing on reasons and motivation for termination, accompanied by questions that aim to unwind all the emotions, cognitions and behaviors involved in the process of termination. The technique called probing needs to be used during the interview process to help emerging new topics and help consumers open up and explain their opinions in as much detail as possible. Based on that, additional sub-questions accompany the general ones. Those were adapted to each participant individually. Questions used for the open-ended, semi-structured interviews conducted are presented below:

1. *Can you tell me about a brand you loved? To which product category it belongs, how long have you loved the brand, was the emotional connection strong?*
2. *Can you tell me about when you stopped loving that brand?*
3. *How did you first become aware that your feelings toward the brand had changed?*
4. *What specific actions or events led to your decision to terminate your relationship with the brand?*
5. *After how long did you terminate the relationship? After only one action or event, or did you give the brand multiple chances?*
6. *How did you feel when you realized that your feelings toward the brand changed?*
7. *Did you try to rekindle your relationship with the brand after terminating it? If so, what happened?*
8. *Did you tell others about your decision to terminate your relationship with the brand? If so, how did they react?*
9. *What role did the brand's marketing or advertising play in your decision to terminate your relationship with them?*
10. *How do you think the brand could have prevented you from terminating your relationship with them?*
11. *Have you terminated your relationship with any other brands in the past? If so, were there any common themes or reasons for these terminations?*

3.2.1 Objective

This research aimed to qualitatively investigate the reasons for and factors leading to brand love termination. As this is not a usual conversation topic between consumers, qualitative investigation and research design best fits this topic, because it enables the detection of underlying reasons and motives for ending the emotional relationship consumers have with a specific brand. The nature of those reasons is completely individual and subjective for every single person, based on their perceptions, experiences, and insights. Hence, the primary goal of this research is to have a deep dive into perspectives and opinions consumers hold toward a certain brand or brands they have once loved, and then decided to stop loving, meaning they ended the emotional relationship that they had and were nurturing for a certain period. The purpose of the paper is to first identify actions and events leading to the "break-up" with the brand, followed by understanding and explaining those events, thereby contributing general knowledge on this topic. It will be done through clustering emotions, and understanding narratives and viewpoints of people who have decided to break up an emotional bond they had with a certain brand, gathered from the qualitative interviews. Lastly, the research aims to give a greater knowledge of the complex nature of interactions between brands and consumers, as well as the reasons why the promise of "happily ever after" did not last indefinitely.

3.2.2 Sampling Techniques

Selecting participants was based on a few factors. Primarily, it was necessary to select participants that have loved a certain brand and then stopped. That means they were emotionally attached and for some reason, they are not anymore. So mere brand experience was not enough. This was identified as a research gap based on previous studies that did not have a condition for choosing consumers who have necessarily experienced love toward a brand they are being questioned about. To have a comprehensive insight into the concept of brand love termination, this sampling condition was necessary. Participants were identified through acquaintances and word of mouth, as many were interested in the topic and wanted to discuss it.

The selection of participants in this sample was also based on their age and marital status. Firstly, the age group to which participants belong is 20 to 30 years old. Second, chosen participants are all single, meaning they are not a part of the marital community. Both of these reasons serve as a type of control variable because during this age and with this marital status, their purchase priorities and habits are similar and are most likely to be focused only on themselves. This allows them to focus more on symbolic consumption as well as value-driven purchases that align with their personal beliefs and values (Chan et al., 2020), valuing experiences provided by the brand (Goodman et al., 2019) and caring about brand authenticity (Larceneux et al., 2017), all of which is connected to

brand love and enables them to easily connect to brands, establishing an emotional relationship. With all being said, this age group has likely been, or still is, emotionally connected to some brand.

Previous research did not point out any other socio-demographic factors that are relevant for brand love or brand love termination investigation, hence they did not impose a criterion for the process of sampling. Still, some of them were included to further deepen the knowledge of brand love termination by exploring whether there are any differences in results based on some of these variables.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis itself is based on the grounded theory, meaning that the theory will be developed and the research question answered based on the data collected. After conducting interviews and later listening to recordings, relevant data was extracted and then the analysis was conducted. As it will be presented onward, textual input was analyzed through an open coding method, typical for qualitative data analysis. The open coding method is done by searching for relevant codes in the interviews. First, meaningful sentences, words, and phrases were identified and labeled with a given code that best conveys the essence and best signals important meaning for the topic. After identifying codes, their frequency of repetition across all interviews was calculated. To get a more comprehensive insight into the codes, they are accompanied by relevant quotes from the interviews, explaining deeper each code extracted more and thereby proving the importance of that specific code for this research topic. All codes were first written and then the frequency was calculated. Great attention was dedicated to making the codes as effective as possible in being relevant to the topic and conveying complex consumers' viewpoints, emotions, and opinions. The goal is to label the themes that emerged during the interviews. Afterward, codes were organized into constructs based on their similarity and identified patterns and connections between them. These constructs are then interpreted as relevant for brand love termination and thus provide a rich and nuanced understanding of the brand's love termination phenomenon.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

To secure full protection of data gathered in the research process, as well as the participants themselves. the whole research process and data analysis were conducted with great ethical considerations. Before the interview, all interviewees were sent a consent form that they signed, thereby giving their written consent to take part in the research process. In that document, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, who is conducting it, that their participation is voluntary and they are free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences, as well as not being obliged to answer if they do not feel comfortable. Additionally, participants have been familiarized with the fact that the responses will be used for the sole purpose of writing a Master Thesis and that the recordings of the interview will be used only for the

analysis by the research team. All signed and agreed to all parts of the consent form. At the beginning of the conversation, participants gave oral consent for the recording of the interview. Afterward, they were sent a Google Form to fill out with their socio-demographic data. Once again, participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their rights. They were also given the option to leave just their initials or first name if they were not comfortable with disclosing their full name in the Google Form. Hereby, absolute confidentially and protection of data were secured for the parties involved.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Results and Analysis

A total of 22 interviews gave a useful insight into consumers' reasoning and behavior patterns present when deciding to terminate a relationship with a brand they loved. Overall, the results supported existing literature while adding relevant conclusions and insights that could also be used later for further research and a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. An in-depth interpretation will be provided later on in the text.

Firstly, it is important to state that interviews also had to prove that love existed. Even though the existence of love was self-reported before the interview by each participant, as it was the sampling condition, the first question of the interview had the aim of confirming that. Participants were asked to talk about a brand they loved, more specifically why they fell in love, followed by evoking positive emotions and memories regarding the brand. What was noticed is that terminology used to describe the relationship with the brand fits the interpersonal norms of forming a relationship. This is in line with another research by Aggarwal (2004) who concluded the same pattern. All participants used the term "love" multiple times and stated that the loved brands were a part of their everyday life, something familiar and used to, while many described it as a habit and something that they couldn't imagine their life without.

"Essence (brand) was always in my bag, it was the first thing I look for in the cosmetics store and first thing I grab whenever I sit to do my makeup." – Ajla S.

"I couldn't imagine my day without going into the Netflix app or website to check what is new, it was like an addiction at one point - that is how imbedded it was in my life." – Tarik H.

Previous research stated that customers who love a brand behave similarly as they would in a loving relationship with a person. Still, it is important to notice that there exists a difference. Respondents in this research stated that when their beloved brand stopped providing them with certain benefits, and when they thought that some other brand could do for them what their beloved one could not, they decided to terminate the relationship, and their love diminished. Similarly, Batra and Ahuvia (2012) stated this occurrence is the main difference between brand love and interpersonal love. More specifically, the authors explained that consumers wonder what a brand can do for them, not the other way around. In the context of brand love termination, this is supported by the research conducted for this paper, meaning that when consumers believed that the brand cannot do anything else for them, the love was ended. Still, even though Batra and Ahuvia (2012) state that there is no altruistic concern and entailed

reciprocity in brand love, our research provides evidence that consumers do feel empathy towards a brand, stating that they feel sorry for the brand but they simply cannot continue the relationship.

"I feel so sorry for Volkswagen. They were an amazing brand, and it just seems as if they lost their way and their values, their identity." – Amer B.

In the context of reciprocity of love, the brand shows love by providing benefits. As stated, when those benefits are perceived as no longer provided, love ends. Interviewees stated multiple times that in those times, they felt as if the brand does not care about them.

"With all the lying from them (VW), I felt like they just didn't respect us or cared about us." – Faris H.

"If they (Apple) cared, they would have made more effort to fix things, or at least apologize. It just seems that they only care about the profit and not their loyal customers." – Tarik K.

Moving to the topic of providing evidence that brand love, as defined in previous research, truly existed for interviewees and building upon those theories, it is important to follow dimensions defining love existence and confirming the sampling criterion. It was noticed that interviewees felt connected to the brand, being committed to the point of only using that specific brand (Sternberg, 1986); feeling positive emotions, and giving open declarations of love (Ahuvia, 2005); while associating happiness with their beloved brand (Batra and Ahuvia, 2012). All detected emotions and behaviors are supported by previous research on brand love dimensions and conclusions that consumers exhibit love toward brands in a similar way as they do toward people.

4.1.1 Coding and Detecting Main Constructs

After providing evidence that love did exist, an analysis of the results is conducted through the coding process. Relevant codes were extracted and then organized into constructs. Constructs represent determinants of brand love termination, answering the first research question. Their relevancy is based on the calculated frequency of every code. Frequency implies the number of interviews where the corresponding code was mentioned as a reason for brand love termination. Codes hence represent certain actions and reasons for brand termination, and their organization into constructs provides a more comprehensive understanding of determinants leading to brand love termination. Codes are accompanied and supported by relevant quotes, extracted from the interviews. Also, it is important to emphasize that codes represent only actions leading to relationship termination, while the emotions that resulted from these actions, and that also influence consumers' decisions to terminate the relationship, are explained during the interpretation of findings. Codes, corresponding frequencies, and quotes,

organized into five constructs representing brand love termination determinants, are presented in the following table.

Codes	Relevant quotes	Construct
Inconsistency of brand values (7) Identity loss (7) Unreliable (4) Lack of inclusivity (6) Environmental irresponsibility (2) Dishonesty (8) Profit-oriented (11) Lack of care about customers (10) Bad company culture (1) Fail to meet expectations (8) Negative symbolic meaning (2) Scandal (4) Lack of apology (3) Repetition of mistakes (5)	*„I just did not identify with them (Mutti) anymore. That was not the brand I am used to."- Claudia J.* *„We didn't have Tart in my country, so all the advertising I saw made it even more special and made me love the brand so much. But it set so high expectations over time that I was a bit disappointed when I realized it isn't what it seems like. They were hyping up this story but never fulfilling it."- Ena P.* *„Even though I loved Nutella since I have been a little kid, the moment when I was able to realize how they are harming the environment, it was hard but I decided it was the end." – Alen I.* *„Apple came as something new and interesting, something so unique, and then became this profit-oriented company that just cared about money. It was hard for me to believe that they could engage in planned obsolescence, but then things just started piling up and that was it for me." – Tarik K.* *„I loved Victoria's Secret since I was a teenager, but then when the industry became more inclusive, they just ignored it and it seemed like they were making one mistake after another." – Lamiija T.*	BRAND TRANSGRESSION (78)

	„First I heard that the owner of Crvena Jabuka has extreme political opinions, and that was the trigger. But then I learned more about how they treat their employees and how they do their business, and I never went back." – Harun K. *„My favorite car brand ever, VW, lost me after numerous lies they said about this scandal they had. They just made it seem like they didn't care about their customers, and that wasn't how they first presented themselves. I was disappointed." – Faris H.*	
Lower quality (14) Unjustified price (10) Changed design (6) Quantity over quality (4) Low product performance (2) Lack of effort in product creation (8)	*„Because of all the constant changes in Netflix, I couldn't rely on it being the same next time I open it. It made me so anxious and annoyed." - Tarik H.* *„VW changed their design completely to the point it became a brand different from one I fell in love with. „ – Amer B.* *„For the quality I was getting (Ariel), the price was just unjustified." – Eldina A.* *„Zara started producing so much at one point, products all looked the same at such high prices and low-quality materials." – Sofia D.*	DIMINISHED PRODUCT QUALITY (44)
Irrelevancy (12) Failed to adapt to new trends (12) Changed needs (10) Variety seeking (5)	*„Before, whenever I held a MAC lipstick in my hands, I felt so special, it was a part of my identity, but now it is just boring and so usual. I don't feel special like before just because I have it."- Selma O.*	OBSOLESCENCE (44)

No point of differentiation (4)	*„Whole cosmetics industry is changing, and Nivea just stays lazy and the same."- Tana K.* *„I wanted to continue using Garnier because I loved it, it was the first brand I ever knew, but they just didn't have enough different products for my different needs." – Aleksandra P.* *„The only reason I stopped loving Nesquick is that it was so kids-related, and I didn't have anything in common with them after I grew up." – Ajdin M.*	
Unstable offer (5) Confusing offer (4) Unavailability (4) Complicated user experience (5) Failed experiences (6)	*„I felt that they (Victoria's Secret) wanted to do so much at the same time and they experimented all the time, so I became confused with what they represent and what they were trying to sell." – Anna M.* *„Whenever I wanted to buy something from Essence in the store, I could rarely find it because they were always changing their offer. There was no stability and I became tired of never finding what I want!"- Ajla S.* *„Last 10 times I went to McDonald's, there were so many people, I had to wait so long and they always forgot something I ordered." – Ena M.* *„Netflix made their user experience a living nightmare! They constantly sent me notifications, even when I turn them off and changed their website design multiple times, so I always had to learn how to use them. So complicated!" – Giulio O.*	NEGATIVE EXPERIENCE (24)

Shameful association (2)	*„After Balenciaga had that scandal, even though I haven't stopped loving them immediately, I was so ashamed to pull out my wallet that had their logo." – Emanuel R.*	SOCIAL PRESSURE
Pressure (4)	*„I loved the feeling Coca-Cola brought me and I loved the brand, but after people started talking about their mistakes ad unhealthy ingredients, I started questioning that love" – Amar O.*	
Negative WOM (5)		(18)
Social influences (7)	*„Smart was a car brand I loved, but after hearing from many people who have it, how unsafe it is and how it breaks down all the time, my love just vanished." – Hana R.*	

Figure 2 Relevant codes organized into constructs

4.1.2 Demographic Overview of the Study Participants

A total of 22 interviews were conducted. Participants mentioned and explained their relationship with a total of 24 brands. The sample consisted of 12 female and 10 male respondents, between 20 and 30 years old. The majority of them (14) come currently reside in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while the rest (eight of them) currently live in Italy. The vast majority of respondents (16) are employed, and the remaining six are current students that are not working. All respondents are single, and not a part of the marital community.

No relevant differences were found between responses given by participants from different places of residence, or employment. However, the difference was noticed between men and women, in regards to the category of a brand they once loved. Male respondents decided to talk about car brands, as well as service brands. Female participants, on the other hand, mostly mentioned different cosmetic brands. They stated that the reason for brand termination was primarily brand obsolescence, followed by brand transgression. It can be explained by the growing interest in sustainable products, containing natural ingredients, leaving many brands unable or unwilling to adapt. For men, brand transgressions were the primary reason for brand love termination, accompanied by diminished product quality and negative experiences.

4.2. Interpretation of Findings

Constructs identified through coding analysis, are interconnected as most of the interviewees did not state only one reason for love termination but rather concluded that it is a combination of many factors. The purpose of this study and analysis was to identify all actions and connect them in meaningful constructs based on knowledge gathered from the literature review and insights gathered during the interviews. The most relevant construct, according to summarized frequencies of all codes relevant for that construct, is brand transgressions. This is a very broad construct that has been previously identified as a reason for brand love termination, causing negative emotions and disrupting the brand's image (Romani et al., 2015). Many negative actions fall into the construct of brand transgressions, such as violation of expectations set by previous experiences and advertising, dishonesty in brand communications resulting in perceived inauthenticity, sudden change and inconsistency in brand values causing perceived loss of brand identity and making the brand unrecognizable and unreliable, scandals and wrongdoings causing negative symbolic meaning of a brand, environmental irresponsibility, bad treatment of employees and political ideals of top management that fall under undesirable company culture, lack of product variety and diversity, making the brand less inclusive as it should be, solely profit-oriented activities giving away an impression that the brand does not care about their customers. It is important to notice that constant repetition of mistakes without an adequate apology or effort to change something, results in brand transgressions that lead to break up with the brand.

All actions identified under the brand transgression construct influence the perception of a brand in the public eye and create a negative brand image. Brand love is rooted in a positive brand image, and disruption of this factor, meaning the creation of a negative brand image, facilitates brand love termination. Results from the interviews support this statement as love seized to exist due to brand transgression changing consumers' perception of the brand. Current literature (Alnawas and Altarifi, 2015) supports the fact that when a brand's image and a consumer's lifestyle overlap, there is a higher chance of brand identification and brand love. Consequently, this research proves that, as the brand image is disrupted and no longer overlaps with consumers' lifestyles due to changed needs, search for variety, or parting with the brand's new ideals and values, the identification with the brand will seize to exist and so will the love.

Besides brand image being disrupted, other brand transgressions lead to consumers not being able to identify with the brand anymore, such as changes in brand values and beliefs, displaying dishonesty and inauthenticity, and having negative symbolic meanings associated with the brand due to other brand actions. Brand identification was identified as one of the most important antecedents to brand love, created on different pillars such as honesty,

authenticity, uniqueness, positive associations, and alignment of values and beliefs. This research again proves that when the pillars of brand identification and brand love are abolished, the loving relationship is also.

"My needs changed, and I expected them (Garnier) to follow the new market trends as well, and adapt, to provide more products for different types of hair or skin. But they did not, so I had to part ways."– Aleksandra P.

This quote demonstrates that changed needs make it impossible for consumers to identify with the brand they previously did. Brands are then expected to adapt to new trends and consumers, while maintaining their ideals and values, not losing their identity, but rather making their offer more diverse and inclusive. If they fail to do so, they are at risk of losing consumers that love them.

Changed consumers' needs are identified as an important part of another construct, identified as the determinant of brand love termination. That is brand obsolescence. According to the frequency of times this construct was mentioned throughout the interviews, it is the second most relevant one. Interviewees identified actions that made the brand obsolete and not lovable anymore. Among those actions, the most frequently mentioned ones were the brand's inability to adapt to changes in the market, changed consumer needs, and new trends that consumers were following, and hence demanded their preferred brand to follow. This then leads to a lack of variety in the brand's offer, identified as brand transgression. In the context of obsolete brands, consumers then tend to seek another brand that becomes more and more interesting to them, due to its diverse offer. Their once beloved brand as reported as not being special enough any more. Interviewees who stated that their needs changing and brands not following was the reason for the breakup, also stated that then, the beloved brand was just not interesting anymore and it became irrelevant in the new market that is characterized by new technologies and trends. Irrelevancy in the market caused the brand to become irrelevant in consumers' minds as well. By providing no point of differentiation or any symbolic benefit to their consumers, the brand is perceived as standardized and unoriginal. Intending to find the connection between antecedents of brand love and determinants of its termination, this paper recognizes that brand identification and brand love are enabled when the brand is perceived as unique and personal (Reis and Cantista, 2015), and concludes that love seizes to exist when this antecedent o brand love seizes to exist, supported by the interviewees' statements that the reason for termination was brand's unoriginality, irrelevancy due to lack of special benefits and points of differentiation.

"Nivea was the first brand I ever knew, and I loved them because I learned that they were a symbol of self-care. I enjoyed every time I used this little blue cream for my face. But when the industry started changing, using better ingredients, taking more care of the environment, and using new technologies, they just did nothing. They stayed the same. I think that made me so disappointed because I knew they could because everyone did it, they just did

not want to. In my eyes they became basic and irrelevant because I did not feel I was getting anything special from them, as I once did." – Tana K.

The study provides another relevant insight regarding brands that become loved when consumers are young, more specifically during their childhood or teenage years. It builds upon the current knowledge that the love consumer feel, can originate from particular events or memories from the past, even childhood (Palusuk, Koles, and Hasan, 2019). During interviews conducted, out of a total of 24 brands that were mentioned, 15 of them were brands that consumers loved since they were young. What is interesting and relevant is that all of these 15 brands, stopped being loved because, in consumers' minds, they became irrelevant and obsolete, stuck in time, unable and unwilling to adapt. These brands had the greatest potential to be loved forever, as these connections that were created during young age, obviously tend to be strong and lasting. Still, due to being ignorant of market changes, these brands lost very loyal and important consumers who had their childhood brand embedded in their DNA and had special emotional connections with the brand.

"My mom, my grandmother, my aunt, me – everyone used Ariel. It was just the way it is, no other brand was ever good enough until they were the only one in the market having the same product, while everyone else had these amazing technologically advanced detergents in all shapes and forms. It was new and fresh, and Ariel was the same old detergent my grandmother used 40 years ago." – Eldina A.

The causal relationship between obsolescence and brand transgressions emphasizes the insight this research provides, that there are many interrelated reasons for brand love termination, making it difficult to predict the patterns, but easier to get a full picture and understand the full complexity of all the individual actions that, when combined and intertwined, lead to dissolution of a relationship.

"I would never say that it was just one action, it just seems like one reason begets the other. Like a domino effect, one thing makes you think about another, and suddenly I was going left to KFC and not right, to McDonald's (once beloved brand)." – Ena M.

Another factor that influences brand perceptions, and consequently brand love, is performance. Brand performance implies the quality of the products or services and experiences. Constructs that were identified as two determinants of brand love termination are diminished product quality, having the same relevance as obsolescence based on calculated frequencies, and negative experiences. As these are both identified as brand love antecedents (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roberts et al., 2018; Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012), their diminishing being singled out as determinant of brand love termination, proves again the connection between factors creating brand love and those terminating it. Insights from the interviews also support the current literature

explaining that multiple violations of codes of conduct lead to the termination of brand love (Odekerken-Schröder, et al., 2010). This research provides a deeper understanding of actions that are perceived as violation of the code of conduct. In terms of diminishing product quality as a determinant of relationship termination, participants mentioned the lower quality of ingredients used than before, unjustified increases in price for the quality received, changed design that is not in line with previously set expectations or brand identity, constant use of unhealthy ingredients, the perception that the brand is prioritizing quantity over quality, resulting also in perception that there is lack of care about the customers which have been previously identified as brand transgression, lower product performance and failures in service delivery, as well as lack of effort in product creation which is also connected to brand not adapting their products to market demands and trends, recognized as brand obsolescence.

"Every time I go to the store (Zara) they have more and more clothes, every time with lower quality and higher prices than before." – Sofia D.

Participants identified actions that create negative experiences and result in their break-up with the brand. Those imply failed experiences, described as unexpected and unacceptable compared to previous experiences and expectations that have been set by the brand, unavailability of products causing frustration, complicated user experience, and constant changes in product or service offers that are being perceived as unstable and confusing. All actions create an unpleasant experience for the consumer, and interaction that should be much better in case of a loving relationship between a consumer and a brand.

"In their (Netflix) desire to adapt to every possible consumer need, they created a confusing user experience, always changing how the interface looks, constantly updating the platform, which resulted in me not being able to use the platform during that time, one-day making movies available, and then in a few days just removing them from the platform. It was just too much, never knowing what I will see when I open the app or website. At first, it was interesting, all the new updates and changes, but after a few times, it just became frustrating." – Giulio O.

Brands seem to make mistakes leading to brand love termination, which are direct opposites of one another. On one side, brands make the mistake of not changing, thus becoming irrelevant and obsolete. On the contrary, other interviewees stated that the determinant causing brand love termination is constant product change, signaling instability and unreliability. The relevance of these factors for brand love termination is embedded in the fact that consumers ask for comfort, stability, and security in brands they trust, especially during uncertain times (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roberts et al., 2018). When they do not perceive the brands as stable and reliable, trust is shattered and it affects the existence of brand love. Results from the interviews show that perceived instability comes from negative experiences with brand offers, while the perception of unreliability comes from expectations that are not met and the brand's dishonesty, again leading to a lack of trust. Brand actions resulting in a perception

of unreliability fall under the brand transgressions construct. Still, as previously amplified, constructs are interrelated and this example explains that undesirable performance, seen from negative experiences and diminished product quality, has a direct effect on the perception of brand actions as transgressions or the brand itself as obsolete.

Additionally, the results shed vital light on how the demise of brand love is directly influenced by the mistrust generated by brand actions. This provides the conclusive answer to the second research question, concluding that violation of pillars upon which brand love is created, one of them being trust (Albert and Merunka, 2013), results in brand love termination. Negative experiences create perceptions that the brand has changed its quality or values, becoming dishonest and inauthentic in the consumer's mind, thus leaving the consumer feeling betrayed and lied to.

Distrust is an underlying construct that is the consequence of brand love termination determinants. All brand experiences, in any form, directly confirm and reinforce brand trust (Batra et al., 2012). Consequently, research concludes that negative brand experiences and actions lead to consumers' loss of trust in the brand. All interviewees stated that they have lost trust in their beloved brand, once the brand engaged in one of the actions included in the constructs identified previously.

"I can maybe continue buying, but the emotional connection cannot be there again. They fooled me once, I cannot trust them again." – Alen I.

Alongside reporting a loss of trust, interviewees reported a sense of betrayal, disappointment, sadness, and feeling deluded, all caused by negative brand actions and dishonesty. This finding also supports previous research by Jabeen et al. (2022), stating that loss of trust and a sense of betrayal creates brand avoidance. Interviewees explained that they stopped buying the specific brand when they decided to terminate the relationship. Still, some of them stated that they are using the brand in question at the moment, even though they do not love it, only because it is a current necessity.

Lastly, an interesting conclusion was drawn from the interviews regarding the importance of an overlooked construct in brand love termination literature. This paper identifies it as social pressure. Interviewees identified shameful associations, pressure, negative word of mouth (WOM), and social influences as reasons for brand love termination. Identified reasons are not directly brand generated. They are rather a consequence of brand actions and how those actions are perceived in society.

All consumers, current and potential ones, are under the influence of negative user-generated feedback. Positive WOM is generated and facilitated by brand love. Thus, this research recognizes the relevance of negative WOM for brand love termination, as the determinants identified potentially generate negative WOM, thereby creating a new construct relevant for love termination, that is social pressure. For example, respondents stated that they felt the pressure to join the movement to boycott the brand that has made a certain transgression.

"In the global society of today, it is quite difficult to avoid being influenced by popular opinion. Although I firmly feel that I decided to end my brand relationship on my own, I must be honest and admit that learning what the general public thought of the brand (VW) and what they did caused me to reconsider." – Faris H.

Social influences had an impact on consumers' decisions in a way that using an obsolete brand, when it becomes publicly irrelevant and not trendy, also becomes shameful.

"Everyone in my neighborhood stopped using Mutti when this new brand came to the market. Even though I have already realized that the quality of Mutti has decreased, I still loved it and continued using it. But when everyone stopped, I felt the pressure that I also need to stop using Mutti, as it was no longer cool or trendy. I think this just sped up the process of me getting over this brand and the break-up." – Claudia J.

"This influencer in my country started promoting natural ingredients cosmetics, and overnight, everyone stopped using products that she said were bad. I felt great pressure from my friends to switch to another cosmetics brand, just because it was so cool and trendy at that moment, to use natural ingredients in everything." – Ena P.

Focusing on the process of brand love termination, research builds upon an insight that brand love is created through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions (Dessart et al., 2015). Based on the observations from the interviews, it is concluded that consumers decide to terminate the relationship through these dimensions as well. Some participants experienced love termination based on a cognitive dimension, meaning that even though they loved the brand very much, their rational decision was that the brand was no longer good for them and that the relationship needed to be terminated. Others experienced brand love termination through an emotional dimension, such as they were more emotionally hurt by the brand's actions. This conclusion is consistent with the brand love literature explaining that consumers fall in love with a brand based on different levels of involvement in every one of these dimensions. The research concludes that the same pattern can be applied to brand love termination.

The brand category did not play any significant role in the brand love termination process, aside from recognizing that consumers report especially strong, deep, and meaningful connections with the brand they have loved since a young age. Also, it is important to mention that consumers state that they experienced an easier break-up with

the beloved brand when there was another brand available to replace it. Participants also reported that the break-up was harder if the brand was a part of their everyday life, and embedded in their lifestyle. Self-reported brand love intensity was proven throughout the conversation and terminology used by every participant. Still, no significant influence of brand love intensity was detected in the process of brand love termination.

Even though intensity and category have no relevant influence on brand love termination, different types of determinants have an impact on the process of brand forgiveness. In the case of brand transgressions, consumers reported being very disappointed and betrayed. They stated that after the transgression happens, especially a sudden image disruption, they will rethink their relationship with the brand. In the case of minor brand transgressions, consumers reported overlooking it for the first few times, but then decided to terminate the relationship due to the brand's constant repetition of said mistakes. Fetscherin and Samperdo (2019) explained that consumers that feel strong love toward a brand, tend to forgive it for their transgressions. All respondents stated that they gave the beloved brand multiple chances, tolerating one mistake after another, until the point when the brand change was impossible to neglect. In the case of brands that have been loved by consumers since a young age, the forgiveness period was longer, as these consumers exhibit a stronger emotional dimension in love creation, and consequently, a stronger emotional dimension in brand love termination, as they felt more empathy toward a brand that is ingrained in their memories and lifestyle. Lastly, brands that were involved in some sort of a scandal, or extreme breach of trust, fell under the least forgiven category of brands. For consumers, this becomes a strong emotional decision of terminating the relationship, as they feel highly betrayed by the brand they trusted (Jabeen et al., 2022). Still, unlike childhood brands, these brands generate negative emotions and WOM among their consumers, causing an active response known as retaliation.

"I felt so betrayed and lied to by this pure and innocent brand (Crvena Jabuka). As it seems, that was all a facade." – Harun K.

Brands tend to be forgiven, in most cases longer than expected. This is supported by interpersonal theories explaining how empathic people tend to be toward other people they feel close to. Hence, love explains that forgiveness is present, but not promised.

5.   GENERAL DISCUSSION

A qualitative investigation of determinants causing brand love termination has provided many useful and interesting insights into this topic. There are many interrelated reasons for brand love termination, making it difficult to predict the patterns, but easier to get a full picture and understand the full complexity of all the individual actions that, when combined and intertwined, lead to the dissolution of a relationship.

Brand transgressions can have a serious effect on consumers' perception of a brand and damage its reputation. Brand identification and consequently brand love vanish when a brand's image is damaged and no longer reflects the values and lifestyle of its customers, as well as the brand proves dishonesty, and inauthenticity, and has negative symbolic meanings associated with the brand. Brand obsolescence—the outcome of the brand's incapacity to respond to market developments and satisfy customer demands—is recognized as a crucial factor in the termination of brand love. Impressions of unoriginality and lack of points of differentiation caused by the brand's limited product diversity also contribute to its perceived irrelevance. Consumers who have deep, long-lasting emotional relationships with brands can view them as irrelevant and stop loving them if they are unable or unwilling to adapt, and thus go out of style. This is most commonly recognized in the case of brands that have been loved by consumers from a very young age, childhood, or teenage years. Determinants of brand love terminations that are identified as performance-related elements include diminished product quality and negative experiences. Multiple violations of codes of conduct lead to the termination of brand love. Once the brand engages in any of the actions included in constructs identified previously, it leads to consumers' loss of trust in the brand and awakens a sense of betrayal and disappointment. Consequently, trust loss and feeling betrayed cause brand avoidance, which leads to final confirmation of the breakup with the brand. Lastly, the determinant not previously mentioned in brand love termination literature has been singled out as relevant. This paper identifies and explains how social pressure affects the end of brand love. Brand love can be lost due to shameful associations, pressure, negative word of mouth (WOM), and social influences. User-generated reviews have an impact on consumers, who may feel under pressure to break up with a beloved brand that has broken any code of conduct imposed. Identified reasons are not directly brand-generated, but are rather a consequence of brand actions and how those actions are perceived in society.

The process of breaking up a loving consumer-brand relationship is intricate, comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral elements. Customers may end the connection based on objective judgments of a brand's appropriateness or as a result of the emotional discomfort brought on by a brand's conduct. Hence, research concludes that consumers decide to terminate a loving relationship with a brand based on different levels of

involvement in every one of these dimensions. The same is in line with the conclusions of previous research on how brand love is created.

Answering the research question about the existence of a connection between factors creating and facilitating brand love, and those that are disrupting it, this paper concludes that there is an evident connection between these elements. More specifically, qualitative investigation confirmed that when the violation of pillars upon which brand love is created, results in brand love termination. Antecedents of brand love that, once disrupted, become determinants of brand love termination are brand image, brand identification, honesty, authenticity, uniqueness, positive associations, alignment of values and beliefs, product quality, positive experiences, positive WOM, and most importantly, trust. Trust has been identified as the overlooking construct, most relevant for the maintenance of the relationship, and affected by all the actions identified under the constructs that have been introduced as the ones leading to the termination of a relationship. In addition to these five constructs, disruption in any of the 7P elements of the marketing mix has been identified to have an impact on the brand love termination process. This is a confirmation of an initial assumption based on the fact that brand love is facilitated through 7P elements. To conclude, once the antecedents of brand love are violated, they become determinants of brand love termination.

Even though previous research on brand love state that brand category and intensity have an impact on brand love creation, this research found no significant role of brand category or intensity in the process of brand love termination. Still, it was concluded that the decision to terminate the relationship comes easier to consumers when there were available brand alternatives, while the decision was harder in the case of a brand that was an important part of their everyday life.

Consumers are likely to forgive their beloved brand and will overlook minor brand transgressions multiple times, especially in the case of childhood brands, while brands that have created extreme breaches of trust by engaging in greater brand transgressions, tend to be forgiven less. Still, any brand change or action that is not desirable, even though it will most likely be forgiven for the first time, makes the consumers more aware of any future mistake by the brand, makes them think and analyze the relationship, and that puts the brand in more danger as there are higher chances that the repeated mistake will result in a breakup. Thus, brands need to listen to any changes in the market and consumers' needs.

To summarize, this paper successfully answers all research questions that were set. Primarily, it identifies five determinants of brand love termination (brand transgressions, brand obsolescence, diminishing product quality, negative experiences, and social pressure), and provides evidence of a connection between elements facilitating brand love and elements leading to its termination, by explaining that violation and diminishment of these elements leads to the relationship dissolution. Even though brand category and love intensity have no significant

role in the love termination process, determinants of that process do, have an impact on brand forgiveness. This paper provides useful insights on the topic of brand love termination and emphasizes the importance of different factors for maintaining the relationship by explaining how they can deteriorate it.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

This research tackled the question of brand love termination and the determinants leading up to it, that were previously neglected. It also improves the research on brand love trajectories and relationship cycles. Alongside, the paper successfully provides a deeper understanding of identified constructs, adding to the existing literature and introducing the construct of social pressure as a relevant determinant of consumer-brand relationship dissolution. The research also took a deep dive into the emotional and subjective aspects of brand love termination, by directly analyzing consumer experiences and the emotions they felt during this process while emphasizing the importance of trust as a construct overlooking the relationship. By qualitatively exploring this phenomenon and the determinants causing the break-up, the paper adds a fresh point of view to the current theoretical frameworks of consumer-brand relationships and consumer behavior, filling the identified research gap. Even though determinants have been recognized in previous research, this paper expands the knowledge on the topic and provides a deeper understanding of underlying opinions and perceptions dictating consumer behavior. Most importantly, it introduces a new construction as a determinant of brand love termination.

It is important to emphasize, once again, that this paper confirms all the previous research on this topic, and also contributes to the current knowledge. In addition to identifying, explaining, and expanding the list of determinants, the theoretical contribution of this paper is also seen in the fact that it finds a direct connection between antecedents of brand love and determinants of brand love termination. More specifically, it provides a relevant insight that if the brand breaks the promise and fails to deliver on any of the antecedents it used to build the love between them and the consumers, that love will dissolve. Further on, the paper gives a contribution to the current literature by confirming Fajer and Schouten's (1995) causes for dissolution while adapting them to the current environment and making them more understandable through relevant practical examples and interviewees' testimonies, containing their underlying emotions and subjective judgments. Insights from the interviews also contribute to the overall theoretical framework of brand love by deepening the knowledge of the significance and strength of brand relationships that consumers form at a young age (Palusuk, Koles, and Hasan, 2019). Conclusions state that consumers forgive their beloved childhood brand more times than any other, as they are so keen on maintaining that very important emotional relationship with a brand rooted deeply in all of their memories.

5.2 Managerial Implications

This paper gives marketers useful insights and advice on brand love termination, and consumer behavior, and improves general consumer understanding. With the growing market and competition, the importance of maintaining strong and deep emotional connections with consumers is higher than ever. To stay relevant in a fast-changing environment that is saturated with information and different brands offering similar products, brands must be connected to their consumers on an emotional level, for a longer time. Thus, this paper helps managers by emphasizing the importance of knowing what can potentially disrupt those connections, so that they can avoid those actions. With the use of information provided in this paper, managers can anticipate problems, address them, limit the threats, and adapt the strategies so that brand love termination determinants can be eliminated, ultimately leading to improved relationships with consumers, while expanding the base of loyal consumers who love the brand.

Besides identifying factors that lead to brand love termination, this paper contributes practically by providing additional strategic recommendations that have been identified as relevant by consumers, concerning any disruption in the relationship between them and the brand. For example, consumers stated that too many changes in product offer lead to negative experiences, and signal instability and unreliability as brand transgression. On the other hand, brands that are not ever-changing, are perceived as irrelevant and obsolete. This imposes a challenge for managers in terms of identifying the right strategy. The findings from this research guide by explaining in detail the identified determinants. The paper also gives recommendations to find the balance between engaging in actions leading to perceived brand obsolescence or brand transgression, based on the product, market, and other relevant strategic factors. This implication highlights the importance of being aware of the environment, listening to consumers' needs and wants, and adapting the strategy accordingly, while not going to extremes, and avoiding actions identified as transgressions or obsolescence.

Managers are also advised to listen to the market, especially in the case of engaging in any activity that was identified as a determinant of brand love termination. As concluded previously, consumers will forgive their beloved brand, but brands need to be careful after the first mistake they make. Consumers will be more sensitive, evaluating every aspect of the relationship, and in the case of a greater brand transgression, they will expect an apology from the brand, showing that the brand is genuine and that it does care about the consumers. The paper also recognizes the relevance and strength of relationships consumers form with a brand at a young age. Thus, managers are advised to build up on these relationships, pay extreme attention to them as they bring great value to the brand that is lucky enough to be embedded in consumers' lifestyles and DNA from a young age, and possibly consult these consumers to realize how they should adapt their product and strategy. Hence, managers are advised

to pay attention to changes in the market, listen to their consumers, do adequate and in-depth market research, and honestly apologize if they make a mistake.

The research highlights the significance of adjusting to shifting customer demands and market trends while respecting original brand ideals and values. Lastly, the managerial contributions of this paper are evident through offering implications useful for practical organization and branding, enabling brands that take into consideration and implement the elements leading to the dissolution of emotional consumer-brand relationships, to create sustainable strategies to maintain these meaningful relationships for a long period.

5.3 Limitations

The qualitative research that was conducted had the condition of using participants that have experienced and terminated a love towards a brand, and their responses have proven the existence of love based on parameters identified in previous studies. Still, as brand love is a construct created based on subjective conceptualization, different understandings and meanings of love for consumers impose a limitation for this research, as well as any other on this topic, as it has the biases potential. It is also important to emphasize that this research was conducted by only one researcher, so the subjectivity and reliability of the findings, and their interpretation are identified as a limit to this research.

Another limitation of this study is the sample size. For this qualitative investigation, a total of 22 interviews has been conducted. To get an even deeper understanding of this construct, more participants should be involved. Limitation to this research is also imposed by the demographic characteristics of the sample. This study included participants of a specific age group, that were not in a marital relationship. Even though these demographic criteria were used to provide a better context for the research, they also impose a limitation on the study and generalizability of the findings. Participants belonged to two different geographical locations - a developed and developing country, and while the relevance of the level of development of a country where the consumer comes from is not proven in the context of brand love nor brand love termination, it should not be neglected as a possible limitation of this study. The sample size may also limit the understanding of brand love termination processes in different product categories or industries, making it impossible to fully generalize these conclusions. Thus, this paper builds upon existing theories, provides conclusions, and gives recommendations for managers and researchers.

5.4 Future Research

As consumer behavior, and market trends that it dictates, constantly evolves, the topic of brand love termination and its determinants evolves alongside. This allows plenty of future research on this topic. Because the market evolves, the results from this research will probably change, emphasizing the importance of constantly revisiting this topic over time to provide a deeper understanding and better recommendations for managers.

Revisiting the topic of brand love termination is important also because of the new generations of consumers and their purchasing power. Future research should focus on exploring which factors can be identified as determinants of brand love termination, mainly according to Generation Z. Consumers belonging to Generation Z care, for example, more than ever about the ethical behavior of brands, corporate social responsibility, ecological impact a company has and what they are doing to preserve the environment. What is possibly most important is their emotional cognition being highly developed and the emotional connection they feel toward objects and products such as mobile devices[3]. It is important to understand why the generation that is gaining more purchasing power by every day, decides to terminate a loving brand relationship and to avoid those actions.

Future research should also explore determinants leading to brand love termination in the context of different demographic factors such as age groups, geographical locations, and marital status. These results can be further compared, and a deeper understanding of the impact of these factors on the determinants can be gathered. Brand love termination in different industries, and according to different product or service categories should also be further researched, to give better managerial recommendations. Quantitative research for every factor identified as a determinant of a relationship dissolution should be conducted, so that their intensity and importance could be further assessed.

Lastly, this paper does not fail to acknowledge the relevance of the love consumers feel toward celebrities, that represent individual brands. Even though emotions experienced by consumers are strong, Perse and Rubin (1989) identified these relationships as parasocial. This type explains brand love as a one-sided form of relationship, where one side holds emotions toward the other party. Those emotions are unreciprocated. A unidirectional relationship further means that consumers establish a certain relationship while the other side (celebrities) is not in demand to reciprocate it. Applied to the brand love termination construct, it will be interesting to explore what factors cause this relationship to dissolve if the consumer does not expect anything in return from the brand. Individual celebrity brands are gaining more power, taking over the influence over the market trends and consumers, thus implying that this type of relationship should be further researched.

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SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the process of dissolution of love consumers feel toward a brand, by defining determinants leading to termination of love. It does so by using findings gathered from qualitative research in the form of interviews, while also being led by the developed theoretical framework.

1.1. Background and Problem Context

Brand love termination refers to the end of a consumer's emotional connection to a brand they previously loved, for reasons that still need defining. The termination of brand love can have a significant impact on consumer behavior and brand reputation, making it an important topic for marketing and consumer behavior research. It is time to explore the dark side of customer relationships and see what causes the 'happily ever after' to end.

1.2 Research Objective

Consumer-brand relationships have their lifecycle and have been known to end, and reasons for ending the relationship with the brand can be customer-related or brand-related. Still, all of those need more specification, and this research will identify the actions that act as determinants and reasons for brand love termination. Hence, the question arises – what does a loved brand have to do to cause the love to stop?

1.3 Significance of the Study

The study fills the research gap identified and provides many contributions, ranging from contributions to the theoretical understanding of aforementioned concepts, further defining the concept of brand love termination while qualitatively exploring the determinants causing the break-up, adding a fresh point of view to current theoretical frameworks of consumer-brand relationships and consumer behavior by underlying psychological and behavioral variables involved in the decision process; to offering useful practical contributions, enabling brands to create sustainable strategies to maintain these meaningful relationships for a long period.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The paper introduces the topic of brand love termination, explains the context of this phenomenon, identifies research objectives, develops the conceptual framework that will guide the investigation of determinants causing termination, covers current studies and theories of brand love termination and brand love, identifies a research

gap and the main research question. Later on, the paper explains the research methodology, qualitative design, and data collection process, interprets the findings, and provides theoretical and managerial contributions, as well as limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework includes defining the field and context within which determinants of brand love termination will be explored. To understand how love dissolves, firstly the process of its creation needs to be covered and explained. The literature review will define brand love, antecedents of brand love, and related constructs. Later on, current studies and insights available on the topic of brand love termination and its determinants will be reviewed.

2.1 Brand Love

Brand love is defined as an attitude that consumers hold toward a particular brand which includes their ability to think, feel, and behave concerning that brand (Rubin, 1973). Consumers experience brand love as a higher–order construct that includes multiple cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, that they later organize into a mental prototype (Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012). Authors define brand love as an emotional attachment and identification that consumers feel toward a brand or trade name (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). Brands are known to provide emotional benefits and symbolic meanings to their consumers, and the relationship they form is long-term, enduring, and deep and should be a two–way street.

The most applied framework for studying brand love is one of the interpersonal love theories (Albert, Merunka, Valette – Florence, 2008; Albert and Valette – Florence, 2010; Thomson et al., 2005). The theory that many more were based upon is the Triangular theory of love created by Sternberg in 1986, based on three primary dimensions: intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment. Similarities have been recognized between the positive emotional feelings consumers feel toward other people, their loved ones and objects that are material goods. Questions of how you treat people you love, how your loved ones treat you, and most importantly why people choose to love someone, need to be asked and answered first in the interpersonal love context and later in brand love and consumer context.

The brand love prototype identifies dimensions of brand love: passionate feelings, attachment, positive emotions, positive brand evaluation, and open declaration of love (Ahuvia, 2005). In 2006, Ahuvia and Carroll determined two key elements of brand love: emotional attachment and passion. Love relationship according to Fournier (1998) is long-term and involves numerous behavioral, cognitive, and affective experiences. Batra and Ahuvia's

(2012) respondents described brand love as interpersonal one. Fetscherin, Barker, and Peacock (2015) distinguished between the five stages of brand love: new, dating, love, boredom, and divorce. Brand divorce most resembles brand love termination that this thesis aims to explore.

2.1.1. Antecedents of Brand Love and Related Constructs

It is important to first understand what creates brand love in order to recognize what destroys it. Different factors create brand love as they overlap with each other and influence the creation of an emotional bond between consumer and brand, as this is a multi-dimensional complex construct.

Trust

Brand trust is explained as the willingness of an average consumer to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Albert and Merunka (2013) proved that brand love is influenced by reliability that the brand will fulfill its obligations, as a cognitive dimension, and honesty, as an affective dimension, meaning that customers do not want to be let down by the brand they trust and love. Antecedents of brand trust are functional benefits, actual uses, experiences, and satisfaction (Huang, 2017).

Brand Satisfaction and Experience

Brand love is developed as a result of positive brand experiences and satisfaction (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roberts et al., 2018). Satisfaction with all brand interactions fosters love and emotional attachment. The importance of quality, at all levels and forms of brand interactions, is stated by many authors mentioned beforehand. Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012) recognize high quality as the antecedent of brand love.

Brand Image

The brand image describes the general opinion and impression that customers have of a certain brand. It depicts the mental image or associations that people have about a brand as a result of their encounters, interactions, and exposure to the marketing initiatives, goods, services, and communications of the brand. When brand image and consumers' lifestyles are overlapping, greater consumer identification with the brand is established, leading to greater brand love (Alnawas and Altarifi, 2015).

Brand Identification and Authenticity

Brand love is the influence of consumers' ability to identify with a brand's values, beliefs, or image (Albert et al., 2008; Escalas & Bettman, 2015). Brand identity also satisfies consumers' symbolic needs rather than functional ones, meaning that brand identification is based on emotions and cognition, where a brand represents something personal and unique, thus leading to brand love. Brand identification is thus based on the alignment of customers and the brand's values and ideals that need to be perceived as genuine and authentic. For generating brand love, authenticity has a crucial role as consumers tend to be more emotionally attached to a brand if they perceive it as honest, true to their values, and transparent (Albert et al., 2008; Roberts et al., 2018).

Product category and intensity of brand love

When it comes to the influence of category on brand love, Ahuvia (2005) states that product category is important as hedonic product category brands have more chance of being loved, as it is a product category that has more symbolic meaning. Therefore, Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) concluded that brands vary in their potential to be loved because of product or service category. Besides category, authors found that a brand's ability to be loved depends on its opportunity for interaction and active engagement (Rossiter, 2012). Fetscherin (2014) has a stand that category is not relevant in determining brand love. The intensity of loyalty consumers feel toward a brand, influences the process of relationship dissolution in terms of the length of time necessary to make that decision (Fajer and Schouten, 1995).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives on Brand Love Termination

Termination of a consumer-brand relationship has often been described as brand divorce. Brand divorce refers to a consumer's separation from a brand. Still, numerous papers include brand divorce in their framework, but none of them focus on this relationship as a loving one. In 1982, Duck described four types of processes of interpersonal breakup that were later adapted to the consumer-brand context by Fajer and Schouten (1995): break-down, decline, disengagement, and dissolution. Breaking up with a brand in which consumer is greatly invested, emotionally and financially, is a long process characterized by many activities and caused by many actions by the brand, or it could be a short one if it entails a strong emotional reaction to the brand's actions (Fajer and Schouten, 1995).

Investigating what may occur if customers have a bad experience with their favorite brand is intriguing. It is recognized that any of the possible determinants of love termination can cause disruptions in a loving consumer-brand relationship. Still, there is a limited understanding of how love moderates the relationship between negative

experiences and the feeling of betrayal in the case of customers who have a loving relationship with a brand. If the consumers have a pre-existing relationship with the brand and if the love is strong enough, they will be more sensitive to repeated negative experiences with their preferred brand, meaning that they will likely make an emotional decision of terminating the relationship (Jabeen et al., 2022).

Fetscherin and Samperdo (2019) argue that consumers that feel love toward a brand, tend to forgive it for their transgressions, especially if consumers' emotions are high and the relationship is strong. Still, authors emphasize that this is a complex reaction and that in cases of value and image-related transgressions, brands are less likely to be forgiven. Kennedy and Guzman (2021) conclude that the effect of transgression will be minimized if the brand is loved. Love evokes greater tolerance and forgiveness, but prolonged disappointment may result in detrimental consequences for brands (Gregoire and Fisher, 2008). As Odekerken-Schröder, et al. (2010) pointed out, their respondents terminated the relationship after multiple disappointments and forgiveness. Even though love may help to forgive, the question arises – how long are consumers willing to forgive the mistakes and disappointments caused by the brand they love?

2.3 Factors Influencing Brand Love Termination

Disruptive brand behaviors, product-related difficulties, unpleasant brand experiences, changes in a brand's image or reputation, fluctuations in consumer preferences, and changes in personal growth or identity are all potential factors that can cause a consumer-brand relationship to break down. Based on the processes of a consumer-brand breakup, Fajer and Schouten (1995) provide four different causes for dissolution: pre-existing doom, mechanical failure, process loss, and sudden death.

Brand transgressions

Brand transgressions are recognized as brand actions that violate social norms or are seen as moral misconduct, creating negative emotions for consumers, and are harmful to the brand's image (Romani *et al*., 2015). After exposing customers to negative experiences such as deceptive advertising, ethical transgressions, dissatisfaction, and poor quality in products and services, the once beloved brand creates negative emotions for customers, such as a sense of betrayal, resulting in avoidance of the brand in question (Jabeen et al., 2022; Zarantonello et al., 2016). More on, brand betrayal is recognized as a consequence of a brand's actions that are not consistent with their promises, values, or set expectations, resulting in the violation of the trust of their customers, which is an important aspect of brand love creation and maintenance (Roberts et al., 2018). Consumers then tend to feel deluded, disappointed, badly treated and let down by their beloved brand.

Besides violating norms and expectations, exhibiting dishonesty in any form, from behavior to representation and marketing efforts, will lead to decreased love (Babić-Hodović et al., 2022). These negative emotions are a consequence of accumulated bad experiences with the brand (Jabeen et al., 2022). Brands are also at risk of losing the customers that love them if brand actions are not in line with customers' self-brand image (Fournier, 1998) or have negative symbolic associations attached to them (Lee et al., 2009).

Customer-related reasons

Customer-related reasons imply financial reasons, changing needs, and variety-seeking, and have nothing to do with the brand nor its actions, and performance (Odekerken-Schröder, et al., 2010). If consumers feel like they need to search for another brand because their needs have changed or the brand just doesn't offer enough options, that means that the brand is probably not complying with the changing needs of the market.

Brand performance

Reasons that are connected to a brand's overall performance and serve as determinants of brand-consumer relationship dissolution are service delivery problems and core product failures (Odekerken-Schröder, et al., 2010). Both are deeply rooted in the quality of service or product, which is defined as an antecedent of brand love. If those code of conducts in terms of quality or experience are violated multiple times, it could be a reason for them to terminate the relationship. Still, it is not likely that the consumer will break a loving relationship with the brand based solely on lower quality than expected, as other psychological factors also contribute to the decision to terminate the relationship (Mai and Conti, 2007). According to Aakar et al. (2004), the reason for customers' dissatisfaction and dissolution of a relationship could be underperformance in any of the marketing mix elements.

2.4 Research Gap and Research Question

There have been several studies on the creation and upkeep of brand love relationships, but there is still a general lack of knowledge on the processes and determinants leading to the termination of those loving relationships. Adding to that, sampling in most previous research has been done based solely on the condition that consumers had previous experience with the brand, and not necessarily that they loved the brand.

There exists no current knowledge on whether there is a direct connection between the factors creating and facilitating brand love and the ones that destroy it. Current research fails to fully answer the question of how brand love as a single concept will be terminated and whether the actions that collapse brand love antecedents are the same actions that terminate the construct of brand love. It should be researched whether termination of love is

caused by opposite and negative versions of brand love antecedents, such as negative brand personality, negative brand image, etc. Based on this gap identified, this paper proposes the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the determinants causing brand love termination, meaning consumer motivation to terminate a relationship?

RQ2: Is there a realistic connection between brand love antecedents and the effect on brand love termination if the brand fails to respect those antecedents?

Determinants of brand love termination and their intensity and frequency in terms of lasting, strength, and repetition, need defining as we do not know when one decides that love will stop, and what is the limit to which the consumer forgives the brand. For example, poor performance is undeniable as stated by Batra et al. (2012) but it is not researched how long will it be tolerated for the sake of love.

RQ3: Which brand actions are consumers ready to overlook and forgive for the sake of love, and for how long?

The brand category has an impact on brand love, in terms of intensity and the brand's overall ability to be loved. There is a lack of knowledge on whether this is correct for brand love termination as well.

RQ4: Does the brand category play any significant role in the dissolution process of a loving consumer-brand relationship?

Fajer and Schouten (1995) pointed out that the intensity of loyalty consumers feel toward a brand influences the process of relationship dissolution. Brand love, even though related to loyalty, is not the same concept, so the impact of brand love intensity on the termination of a relationship still needs exploring.

RQ5: Does the intensity of love consumer feels toward a brand, represent a factor in the process of brand love termination?

As the understanding of the construct of brand love termination is limited, so are the useful recommendations on desirable brand reactions when a disruption in a relationship happens, that could help consumers forgive the brand.

2.5 Conceptual Model

The conceptual model of this study visually represents the causal relationship between the negative actions of the brand and brand love termination, while taking into consideration brand love existence as a prerequisite for brand love termination. The model also includes brand love antecedents and aims to find the connection between factors that facilitate the creation of brand love and those that cause brand love to dissolve.
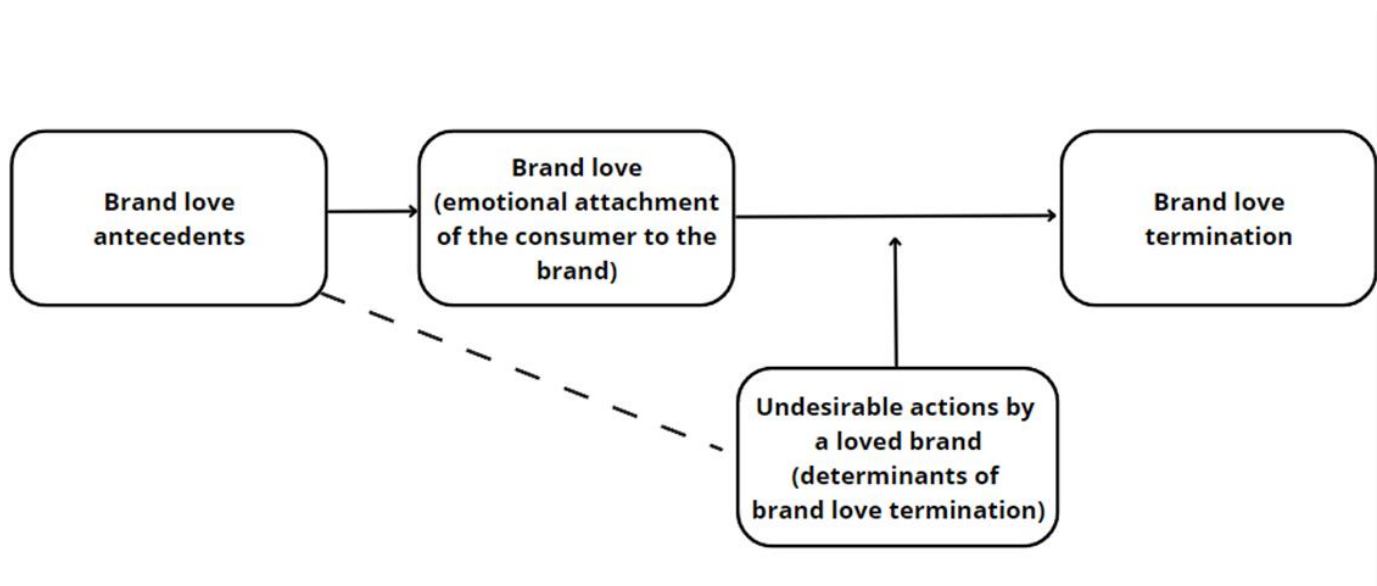

Figure 1 Graphical representation of the conceptual model used for the research on determinants causing brand love termination

3. DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research holds its main objective in identifying reasons why brand love diminishes and the actions that act as determinants of brand love termination. For understanding overlapping trajectories of the consumer decision-making process in the case of a higher-order construct, such as brand love, the best choice for research design is qualitative research.

3.2 Data Collection and Data Sources

Data is collected through open-ended, semi-structured interviews, accompanied by a probing technique of questioning for revealing all underlying motives and meanings, feelings, and perceptions. Questions covered the

main research gap, analyzing the positive emotional relationship with the brand, and focusing on reasons and motivation for termination.

3.2.1 Objective

This research aimed to qualitatively investigate the reasons for and factors leading to brand love termination. The purpose of the paper is to identify actions and events leading to the "break-up" with the brand, followed by understanding and explaining those events, giving relevant insights into the complex nature of interactions between brands and consumers, and filling the gap on the reasons why the promise of "happily ever after" did not last indefinitely.

3.2.2 Sampling Techniques

Selecting participants was based on a few factors. Participants loved a certain brand and then stopped, they were between 20 to 30 years old, and all were all single. Age and marital status serve as a type of control variable as people belonging to this group focus more on symbolic consumption, value-driven purchases that align with their personal beliefs and values (Chan et al., 2020), valuing experiences provided by the brand (Goodman et al., 2019) and caring about brand authenticity (Larceneux et al., 2017), all of which is connected to brand love and enables them to easily connect to brands, establishing an emotional relationship.

3.3 Data Analysis

The analysis itself is based on the grounded theory, meaning that the theory will be developed and the research question answered based on the data collected. Textual input was analyzed through an open coding method, searching for relevant codes in the interviews, calculating the frequency of repetition across all interviews for every code, providing relevant quotes, and organizing them into relevant constructs based on their similarity and identifying patterns and connections between them.

3.4 Ethical Considerations

To secure full protection of data gathered in the research process, as well as the participants themselves. the whole research process and data analysis were conducted with great ethical considerations. Participants have the written and oral consent to take part in the research process and were informed about the purpose of the research, and their individual rights and obligations. The data gathered was used for the sole purpose of writing a Master Thesis and the recordings of the interview were used only for the analysis by the research team.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Results and Analysis

A total of 22 interviews gave useful insight into consumers' reasoning and behavior patterns present when deciding to terminate a relationship with a brand they loved. Overall, the results supported existing literature while adding relevant conclusions and insights that could also be used later for further research and a deeper understanding of this phenomenon.

The experienced love was confirmed as participants used interpersonal terminology and norms when describing the relationship while following the dimensions that define love's existence. However, they terminated the relationship when the beloved brand stopped providing them with certain benefits and was perceived as not caring about the consumers, even though they still felt empathy towards the brand.

4.1.1 Coding and Detecting Main Constructs

After providing evidence that love did exist, an analysis of the results is conducted through the coding process. Relevant codes were extracted and then organized into constructs. Constructs represent determinants of brand love termination. Their relevancy is based on the calculated frequency of every code. Frequency implies the number of interviews where the corresponding code was mentioned as a reason for brand love termination. Codes hence represent certain reasons for brand termination, and their organization into constructs provides a more comprehensive understanding of determinants leading to brand love termination.

Identified constructs in the coding process and their corresponding frequencies, calculated as a sum of frequencies of codes within them are brand transgressions (78), brand obsolescence (44), diminishing product quality (44), negative experiences (24), and social pressure (18).

4.1.2 Demographic Overview of the Study Participants

A total of 22 interviews were conducted, mentioning a total of 24 brands. The sample consisted of 12 female and 10 male respondents, between 20 and 30 years old and single. Respondents live in Bosnia and Herzegovina (14) and Italy (8), are currently employed (16) or are students (6).

No relevant differences were found between responses given by participants from different places of residence, or employment. However, the difference was noticed between men and women, in regards to the category of a brand they once loved. Male respondents decided to talk about car brands, as well as service brands, and the

reason for termination was primarily brand transgressions, accompanied by diminished product quality and negative experiences. Female participants mostly mentioned different cosmetic brands and the love ended because of brand obsolescence, followed by brand transgression.

4.2. Interpretation of Findings

Constructs identified through coding analysis, are interconnected as most of the interviewees state that termination was a combination of many factors. The most relevant construct, according to summarized frequencies of all codes relevant for that construct, is brand transgressions. Many negative actions fall into the construct of brand transgressions, such as violation of expectations set by previous experiences and advertising, dishonesty in brand communications resulting in perceived inauthenticity, sudden change and inconsistency in brand values causing perceived loss of brand identity and making the brand unrecognizable and unreliable, scandals and wrongdoings causing negative symbolic meaning of a brand, environmental irresponsibility, bad treatment of employees and political ideals of top management that fall under undesirable company culture, lack of product variety and diversity, making the brand less inclusive as it should be, solely profit-oriented activities giving away an impression that the brand does not care about their customers. It is important to notice that constant repetition of mistakes without an adequate apology or effort to change something, results in brand transgressions that lead to break up with the brand. All actions identified under the brand transgression construct influence the perception of a brand in the public eye and create a negative brand image. Brand love is rooted in a positive brand image, and disruption of this factor, meaning the creation of a negative brand image that does not overlap with the consumer's lifestyle, facilitates brand love termination. The relationship is also terminated because consumers are unable to identify with the brand.

The second construct identified as a brand love termination determinant is brand obsolescence. The actions that made the brand obsolete and not lovable anymore are the brand's inability to adapt to changes in the market, changed consumer needs, and new trends that consumers were following, and hence demanded their preferred brand to follow. This then leads to a lack of variety in the brand's offer, identified as brand transgression. By providing no point of differentiation or any special benefit to their consumers, the brand is perceived as standardized and unoriginal. Brands are expected to adapt to changed consumers' needs and new trends, while maintaining their ideals and values, not losing their identity, but rather making their offer more diverse and inclusive. If they fail to do so, brands are perceived as not interesting anymore and irrelevant in the new market, putting the brands at risk of losing consumers that love them. The brands that became loved when consumers were young, more specifically during their childhood or teenage years, had great potential to have strong, long-lasting

relationships with consumers. Still, that love diminished because they were perceived as irrelevant and obsolete, stuck in time, unable and unwilling to adapt, as they are ignorant of market changes.

Another factor that influences brand perceptions, and consequently brand love, is performance. Brand performance implies the quality of the products or services and experiences. Constructs that were identified as two determinants of brand love termination are diminished product quality, having the same relevance as obsolescence based on calculated frequencies, and negative experiences.

In terms of diminishing product quality as a determinant of relationship termination, participants mentioned the lower quality of ingredients used than before, unjustified increases in price for the quality received, changed design that is not in line with previously set expectations or brand identity, constant use of unhealthy ingredients, the perception that the brand is prioritizing quantity over quality, resulting also in perception that there is lack of care about the customers which have been previously identified as brand transgression, lower product performance and failures in service delivery, as well as lack of effort in product creation which is also connected to brand not adapting their products to market demands and trends, recognized as brand obsolescence.

Participants identified actions that create negative experiences and result in their break-up with the brand. Those imply failed experiences, described as unexpected and unacceptable compared to previous experiences and expectations that have been set by the brand, unavailability of products causing frustration, complicated user experience, and constant changes in product or service offers that are being perceived as unstable and confusing.

Undesirable performance, seen from negative experiences and diminished product quality, has a direct effect on the perception of brand actions as transgressions or the brand itself as obsolete. Brands lose consumers' love if they do not change and thus become irrelevant and obsolete, or if they display constant product changes, signaling instability and unreliability. If a brand is perceived as unstable because of a negative experience with a product offer, or unreliable because of unmet expectations and brand dishonesty, trust is shattered and it affects the existence of brand love.

This provides the conclusive answer to the second research question, concluding that violation of pillars upon which brand love is created, one of them being trust, results in brand love termination. Distrust is an underlying construct that is the consequence of brand love termination determinants. All interviewees stated that they have lost trust in their beloved brand, once the brand engaged in one of the actions included in the constructs identified previously. Alongside reporting a loss of trust, interviewees reported a sense of betrayal, disappointment, sadness, and feeling deluded, all caused by negative brand actions and dishonesty, resulting in brand avoidance.

This paper identifies social pressure as an overlooked construct in brand love termination literature. Interviewees identified shameful associations, pressure, negative word of mouth (WOM), and social influences as reasons for brand love termination. Identified reasons are not directly brand generated. They are rather a consequence of brand actions and how those actions are perceived in society. Respondents stated that they felt the pressure to join the movement to boycott the brand that has made a certain transgression or have felt shame when using an obsolete brand when it becomes publicly irrelevant and not trendy.

Consumers decide to terminate the relationship through cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. This conclusion is consistent with the brand love literature explaining that consumers fall in love with a brand based on different levels of involvement in every one of these dimensions.

The brand category and love intensity did not play any significant role in the brand love termination process, aside from recognizing that consumers report especially strong, deep, and meaningful connections with the brand they have loved since a young age. Having an available alternative brand makes it easier to end the relationship, while a brand that is deeply integrated into one's daily routine and lifestyle makes the breakup harder.

The determinants have a different effects on the process of brand forgiveness. Brand transgressions, especially sudden image disruptions, cause consumers to feel betrayed and disappointed, which causes them to reevaluate the relationship. Minor transgressions could first be ignored, but multiple repetitions lead to termination. Customers that have a strong bond with a brand are more likely to overlook faults and put up with repeated errors until the mistakes pile up and cannot be neglected any longer. Brands that have been cherished from a young age have a longer forgiving period because of the emotions and the feelings attached to them. Conversely, companies associated with scandals or serious breaches of trust are least likely to be forgiven, and could even generate negative emotions and negative WOM in the form of retaliation.

5. GENERAL DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative study and analysis was to identify all actions and connect them in meaningful constructs based on knowledge gathered from the literature review and insights gathered during the interviews, making it easier to get a full picture and understand the full complexity of all the individual actions that, when combined and intertwined, leading to the dissolution of a relationship.

To summarize, this paper successfully answers all research questions that were set. Primarily, it identifies five determinants of brand love termination (brand transgressions, brand obsolescence, diminishing product quality, negative experiences, and social pressure), and provides evidence of a connection between elements facilitating

brand love and elements leading to its termination, by explaining that violation and diminishment of these elements leads to the relationship dissolution. Even though brand category and love intensity have no significant role in the love termination process, determinants of that process do, have an impact on brand forgiveness. This paper provides useful insights on the topic of brand love termination and emphasizes the importance of different factors for maintaining the relationship by explaining how they can deteriorate it.

5.1 Theoretical Contributions

The theoretical contribution of this paper is presented by adding on current knowledge and filling the research gaps on the topic of brand love terminations and their determinants. The research analyzes emotional and subjective aspects of brand love termination and emphasizes the importance of trust. Alongside, the paper successfully provides a deeper understanding of identified constructs, adding to the existing literature and introducing the construct of social pressure as a relevant determinant of consumer-brand relationship dissolution. In addition to identifying, explaining, and expanding the list of determinants, the paper finds a direct connection between antecedents of brand love and determinants of brand love termination. More specifically, it provides a relevant insight that if the brand breaks the promise and fails to deliver on any of the antecedents it used to build the love between them and the consumers, that love will dissolve. Further on, the paper gives a contribution to the current literature by confirming Fajer and Schouten's (1995) causes for dissolution while adapting them to the current environment and making them more understandable through relevant practical examples and interviewees' testimonies, containing their underlying emotions and subjective judgments.

5.2 Managerial Implications

This paper gives marketers useful insights and emphasizes the importance of knowing what can potentially disrupt emotional connections with their consumers so that they can avoid those actions. With the use of information provided in this paper, managers can anticipate problems, address them, limit the threats, and adapt the strategies so that brand love termination determinants can be eliminated, ultimately leading to improved and long-lasting relationships with consumers, while expanding the base of loyal consumers who love the brand. The paper also gives recommendations to find the balance between engaging in actions leading to perceived brand obsolescence or brand transgression, based on the product, market, and other relevant strategic factors. This implication highlights the importance of being aware of the environment, listening to consumers' needs and wants, and adapting the strategy accordingly, while not going to extremes, and avoiding actions identified as transgressions or obsolescence. Recommendations are given to managers based on the recognized importance of an honest apology and the significance of relationships consumers form at a young age.

5.3 Limitations

Limitations of this study are consumers' subjective conceptualization of brand love, different understandings and meanings of love for consumers, the subjectivity and reliability of the findings, and their interpretation as the research was conducted by only one researcher, and a relatively small sample size. Limited demographic characteristics of the sample that were used to provide a better context for the research, also impose a limitation on the study and generalizability of the findings.

5.4 Future Research

As consumer behavior, and market trends that it dictates, constantly evolves, the topic of brand love termination and its determinants evolves alongside. The topic should constantly be revisited to provide a deeper understanding and better recommendations for managers. Future research should focus on exploring which factors can be identified as determinants of brand love termination, mainly according to Generation Z, due to their strong concern for the ethical behavior of brands and emotional connections toward a device. Additionally, research should explore determinants of brand love termination in parasocial relationships, which are relationships consumers form with celebrities. Determinants can also be analyzed in the context of different demographic factors, as well as in different industries, and according to different product or service categories, accompanied by quantitative research for every factor identified as a determinant of relationship dissolution.