

Understanding lovemark brands

Dimensions and effect on Brand loyalty in high-technology products

Lovemark
brands

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Marcas lovemark

Dimensiones y efecto en la Lealtad a la marca en productos tecnológicos

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study is to develop and empirically test a lovemark measure that can be used to identify how brands of wireless-enabled computing devices are classified based on customers' respect and love toward them.

Design/methodology/approach – On evidence drawn from 1,016 consumers of wireless-enabled computing devices (e.g. netbooks and tablets) in Greece, partial least squares method is used to test the validity of the proposed hierarchical model.

Findings – Results show that a lovemark measure can be conceptualized as a third-order reflective construct having respect and love as its second-order dimensions. In turn, respect reflects on brand performance, trust and reputation, and love reflects on brand commitment, intimacy and passion. The proposed measure presents a very good external validity as it can explain big portions of variance in consumer responses including repurchase intentions, positive WOM and willingness to pay a price premium. Finally, the proposed measure is used to classify eight well-known devices as products, fads, brands and lovemarks and identify the love styles associated with brand relationships.

Originality/value – This paper provides empirical evidence for measuring and identifying lovemarks using a hierarchical model, which can be further used to develop a more effective strategy



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for managing the functional and emotional aspects of brands to strengthen consumer-brand relationships.

Keywords Branding, Brand love, Brand loyalty, Lovemarks, Brand respect, High-technology products

Paper type Research paper

Resumen

Propósito – El objetivo de este estudio es el desarrollo metodológico y validación empírica de una escala para clasificar las marcas de productos tecnológicos en base a las dos dimensiones que caracterizan a las marcas Lovemark: el respeto y amor.

Diseño/metodología/enfoque – Con una base de datos recogidos de una muestra de 1.106 consumidores de productos tecnológicos (e.g., tablets y portátiles pequeños) en Grecia, se usa PLS para testar la validez del modelo jerárquico propuesto.

Resultados – Los resultados ponen de manifiesto que el concepto Lovemark puede ser conceptualizado como un constructo reflectivo de tres dimensiones siendo el respeto y el amor hacia la marca las dimensiones de segundo orden. A su vez, el respeto hacia la marca refleja el desempeño, la confianza y reputación de la marca mientras que el amor queda reflejado en conceptos tales como el compromiso, la intimidad y la pasión. La medida propuesta presenta una aceptable validez externa pues es capaz de explicar mayor porcentaje de la varianza de las intenciones de compra, la comunicación boca-oreja positiva y la disposición a pagar un mayor precio por la marca. Finalmente, se demuestra la utilidad de la medida propuesta para clasificar ocho marcas conocidas según los niveles de amor y respeto que los consumidores manifiestan hacia las mismas así como identificar los estilos de amor asociados a la relación que los consumidores mantienen con estas marcas.

Originalidad/valor – Este trabajo ofrece evidencias empíricas para medir e identificar las Lovemark usando un modelo jerárquico que puede ser utilizado posteriormente para desarrollar una estrategia más efectiva en la gestión de los aspectos funcionales y emocionales de las marcas como medio para fortalecer las relaciones marca-consumidor.

Palabras claves – Lovemark, Respeto hacia la marca, Amor a la marca, Lealtad, Productos tecnológicos

Tipo de artículo – Trabalho de investigação

1. Introduction

Wireless-enabled computing devices are high-technology products that provide broadband wireless data access and support open software standards (Ha and Park, 2013). These products are now ever more pervasive in consumers' everyday life, as they provide them with continuous and ubiquitous connectivity to easily retrieve information from the network and to interact with it. Netbooks and tablets are typical products in this category.

The competition in the market of wireless-enabled computing devices has increased rapidly, as companies are competing hard against each other (Liu, 2007). This situation has certain consequences including the following: the consumer decision-making process for such products is made very complex (Sahadev and Jayachandran, 2004); customers are highly involved with wireless-enabled computing devices' features to lower perceived risk (Ha and Park, 2013) and exhibit high levels of brand switching (Lam and Shankar, 2014; Stremersch *et al.*, 2010).

The development of strong brands that develop long-term relationships with customers is used by firms to decrease brand switching. American Marketing Association (AMA) considers brand as a source of product identity and differentiation (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The significance of brand-based differentiation and its role in the development of strong consumer-brand relationships and in companies' prosperity is well-recognized by business practice (Keller, 2009; Keller, 2013; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015). The consistent fulfillment of the brand promise made to consumers is of paramount importance and can be used for the establishment and maintenance of strong consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1988; Dall'Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001) that will

differentiate brands in the market. Aaker (2002) and Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) considers the functional and emotional value delivered by the brand as the mean for a brand to establish and maintain strong consumer-brand relationships and drive brand loyalty.

Differentiating products based on brand's emotional benefits (e.g. relationships) is getting more and more significant in today's market (Fournier, 1998; Roberts, 2004; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Rossiter and Bellman, 2012). Emotions play a significant role in consumers' buying decision-making process, as consumption is based more on feelings and emotions than on superior product features and price worthiness (Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Cho *et al.*, 2015). Emotions and reason are intertwined in purchasing situations. In buying decisions, however, emotions prevail when they are in conflict with reason or when consumers use pseudo-logic to support their emotional choices (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Moreover, the basic difference between emotion and reason is that the former leads to actions, whereas the latter determines the conclusions (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). This is supported by the fact that satisfaction alone is not enough to sustain a strong customer-brand relationship as many satisfied customers switch to competitor brands. On the other hand, various studies suggest that emotional and passionate love with a brand is a prerequisite for the development and maintenance of strong consumer-brand relationships that lead to brand loyalty and better brand deliverables (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2013; Cho *et al.*, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Nyffenegger *et al.*, 2015; Shuv-Ami, 2017).

However, not all brands can develop strong and long-term consumer-brand relationships. According to Roberts (2004) lovemarks are brands, events and experiences that people passionately love. Certain brands are able to become lovemark brands. The lovemarks theory is developed by Roberts (2004) and suggests that "lovemark brands" score high on two lovemark dimensions "love" and "respect" that strengthen consumer-brand relationships and, in turn, positively affect brand loyalty. This relationship is termed a lovemark experience (Cho *et al.*, 2015). Given that a lovemark is both an object (brand) and a relationship experience (Cho *et al.*, 2015), the term lovemark, in this study represents the lovemark experience that a consumer enjoys by being in a relationship of love and respect with a brand, whereas the lovemark object will be explicitly termed lovemark brand.

Although, research lately tries to conceptualize lovemark and its dimensions, there is no accepted scale that can be used in any related study. Research on the lovemarks theory has been light and limited so far (Cho *et al.*, 2015; Pavel, 2013; Pawle and Cooper, 2006; Shuv-Ami, 2017; Shuv-Ami *et al.*, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017). The purpose of this study is to develop a hierarchical model for a lovemark measure in the context of high-technology products and then to empirically investigate its theoretical and nomological validity by showing its association with three loyalty manifestations, namely repurchase intentions, positive WOM behavior and willingness to pay a price premium. The proposed measure is also used to identify lovemarks and differentiate them from other types of brands. The study is conducted on evidence from Greece.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review relevant literature and focus on the theoretical background. Then, we conceptualize the proposed model for measuring the lovemark concept and describe the process followed to ensure the theoretical and nomological validity of the proposed measure; third, we explain the research methodology; fourth, we present and discuss results and finally, we conclude with theoretical and managerial implications, limitations and suggestions for further research.

2. Conceptual background and proposed model

2.1 Brands and lovemark theory

A brand is a name, term, sign, symbol or design or combination of them which is intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from

those of competitors (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Furthermore, de Chernatony and Dall’Olmo (1997, p. 47) propose that a brand is the link between firms’ marketing activities and consumers’ perceptions of functional and emotional elements in their experience with the product/service and the way it is presented. Also, the brand can act as a relationship builder with customers (Dall’Olmo Riley and de Chernatony, 2000; Veloutsou, 2015; Veloutsou and Guzmán, 2017).

The development of consumer-brand relationships is based on the emotional connection of customers with brands and is used for differentiation purposes (Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015). Marketers nowadays face difficulties in differentiating their products solely based on their functional benefits (Pawle and Cooper, 2006), as products’ functional attributes (i.e. performance, quality and value) are getting similar with those of competing products because of technological advancements. Therefore, the role of emotional benefits is getting more and more significant in developing brand-based differentiation strategies (Fournier, 1998; Roberts, 2004; Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Albert *et al.*, 2008; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015).

However, not all brands create long lasting relationships with customers. People tend to love some brands more than others. Certain brands become what we call lovemark brands. The lovemarks theory, introduced by Roberts (2004), CEO of Saatchi and Saatchi, suggests that two components of a “lovemark”, “love” and “respect”, are the main drivers of brand loyalty beyond reason. Respect represents the functional aspects of a brand and it basically reflects the brand’s performance, reputation and trust (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). Love, on the other side, represents the emotional attributes of a brand which are used by consumers to develop emotional relationships with it. Roberts (2004) suggests that brands can be classified based on these two relationship-related dimensions: love and respect and proposes a lovemark grid illustrated in Figure 1. Based on this grid we can distinguish four types of brands: lovemark brands, quality brands, brands that are fads and brands that are just products. “Lovemark brands” are highly desired brands that enjoy the love and respect of their customers. Brands with low love and high respect are “quality brands” but not highly desired brands. Brands with high love and low respect are “fads” that will eventually disappear. Brands with low love and low respect are merely available “products”.

The development of the lovemarks theory is strongly related to the evolution of branding theory and to the importance given to the development of consumer-brand relationships. Brands evolve into “lovemark brands” that are about building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers (Pawle and Cooper, 2006). It takes three key ingredients for a product to qualify as a lovemark brand: mystery, rendered through

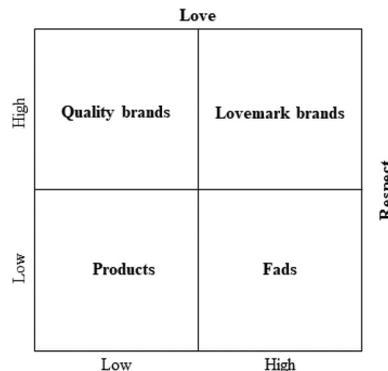


Figure 1.
Lovemark grid

impressive stories, ancient times, myths, dreams and a lot of inspiration, then the creation of a complete experience through the union of the five senses (sensuality), as well as a close relationship with the consumer (intimacy) provided by commitment and empathy (Roberts, 2004). The theory of “lovemarks” may explain why consumers feel loyal and attached to one brand and not to another. As Roberts described it, the loyalty for “lovemarks” is “loyalty beyond reason” (2005, p. 66) when citing a loyal Apple user – “*After 14 years I am still in love. To be honest I don’t know why I feel that way...*” (Roberts, 2004, p.200). Roberts (2004) defines lovemarks as “*brands, events and experiences that people passionately love*” Also, Pawle and Cooper, 2006 (p. 39) describe lovemark brands very vividly by saying that:

Lovemarks deliver beyond expectations of great performance. Lovemarks reach the heart and gut, as well as the mind, creating intimate, emotional connections. Take a brand away and people will find a replacement. Take a Lovemark away and people will mourn its absence. Lovemarks are a relationship, not a mere transaction. You do not just buy Lovemarks, you embrace them with passion.

2.2 Brand love

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as “*the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name*”. In contrast, Keh *et al.* (2007) define brand love as “*the intimate, passionate, and committed relationship between a customer and a brand, characterized by its reciprocal, purposive, multiplex, and dynamic properties*”. Moreover, Rossiter (2012) defines brand love as “*achieved only when ‘Deep Affection’ and ‘Separation Anxiety’ are jointly felt in relation to the potential love object*”.

The concept of “brand love” has attracted much attention in recent years in the marketing literature (Sarkar, 2011; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Rossiter, 2012; Rossiter and Bellman, 2012; Maxian *et al.*, 2013; Patwardhan and Balasubramanian, 2013; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Fetscherin, 2014; Cho *et al.*, 2015; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2017). This stream of research has mainly focused on the conceptualization of “brand love” but has used different types and inconsistent measurement in relation to “brand love”.

The brand love concept is rooted in the assumption that theories of interpersonal love can be applied to the consumer-brand relationship context. Love can refer both to a social relationship and to an emotional state. When people, for instance, speak of lovers, then the love relationship between two individuals is emphasized. In social psychology, there are several theories (Freud, 1922; Lee, 1977; Maslow, 1962; Reik, 1944) that focus, among others, on the concept of love between individuals. One of the theories most often cited in literature that explicitly deals with love is Sternberg’s (1986, 1987, 1988, 1997) triangular theory of love. Sternberg’s (1986) triangular theory of love indicates that interpersonal love has three highly correlated dimensions, intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Intimacy, the “warm” component, refers to “feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness” (Sternberg, 1986). Passion, the “hot” component, reflects “the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, and sexual consummation” (Sternberg, 1988). Decision/commitment, the “cold” component, represents the decision to love someone else in the short run and the commitment to maintain that love in the long run (Sternberg, 1986). Using various combinations of these three components, Sternberg (1988) creates a love typology which covers eight different types of interpersonal love: nonlove, liking, infatuated love, empty love, romantic love, companionate love, fatuous love and consummate love.

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) develop a scale for measuring brand love in general. However, their scale deals with love itself and does not reflect the three different aspects of Sternberg’s complex idea of love. Also, Albert *et al.* (2008) identify 11 major dimensions of brand love, namely duration of the relationship, self-congruity, dreams, memories, pleasure, attraction, uniqueness, beauty, trust and declaration of affect. Hegner *et al.* (2017) use the theory of

planned behavior to understand brand love. [Batra et al. \(2012\)](#) proposes a new measurement of brand love that was harshly criticized by [Rossiter \(2012\)](#). [Batra et al. \(2012\)](#) distinguish between “love emotion” and “love relationship” and suggest that brand love as a “love emotion” is temporary and episodic whereas a “love relationship” can last for years. Finally, [Heinrich et al. \(2012\)](#), drawing on the interpersonal theory of love and [Keh's et al. \(2007\)](#) theoretical perspective of brand love, conceptualize and empirically validate a construct of consumers' brand love, reflecting consumers' passion, intimacy and commitment toward a brand, and test its association with forgiveness and price tolerance. The same conceptualization to model the emotional brand properties in the service context was used by [Nyffenegger et al. \(2015\)](#) and includes consumers' feelings and connections to the brand, as well by [Bügel et al. \(2011\)](#) to investigate the role of brand's affective aspects in relationship maintenance in different sectors and in different customer life-cycle stages.

Overall, although various researchers look at the concept of brand love, there is no consensus on its measurement. Based on the findings of [Aaker \(2002\)](#), [Fournier \(1998\)](#), [Keh et al. \(2007\)](#) and [Delgado-Ballester et al., 2017](#) that brands are considered to be relationship partners and that people assign human-like properties to brands and interact with them and the suggestions of [Aaker \(2002\)](#), [Hwang and Kandampully \(2012\)](#) and [Veloutsou \(2015\)](#), originating in social psychology, that consumer-brand relationships are similar to interpersonal relationships because they involve reciprocal exchanges (i.e. informational and emotional) between partners through a series of repeated actions, this study adopts the theoretical framework provided by [Heinrich et al. \(2012\)](#) and conceptualizes brand love using three highly correlated dimensions, intimacy, passion and commitment.

2.3 Brand respect

In addition to earning consumers' love, products require respect to become lovemarks. [Roberts \(2004\)](#) states that:

Without respect there is no foundation for any long-term relationship. Without the sharp delineation of the axis format it was very easy for our ideas about love to float off into feeling with no practical edge (p. 146).

Brand respect expresses consumers' positive perception toward a brand, based on their evaluation of brand performance ([Roberts, 2004](#)). [Roberts \(2004\)](#) states that brand respect is a combination of three elements: brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation. A brand creates respect by providing good performance, which, in turn, creates a sense of trust and builds a positive reputation ([Roberts, 2004](#)). Moreover, brand communication, the creation of unforgettable positive experiences with a brand or of personally relevant messages, may lead to brand respect. These messages, delivered through storytelling and the use of cultural myths and iconic characters, may build respect through an emphasis on the brand's performance, trust and reputation. [Hsu and Cai \(2009\)](#) suggest that cognitive aspects of brand image can enhance brand trust by reducing risk and enhancing performance expectations, which in turn may increase consumers' trust toward the brand. Brand respect is modeled as a second-order construct having brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation as its main dimensions. All these three concepts require a cognitive evaluation and reflect consumers' perceptions about the cognitive aspects of a brand.

Brand performance is defined as a customer's evaluation of a product's cumulative excellence ([Grewal et al., 1988](#)). It refers to a consumer's intangible perception of the whole quality or superiority of a product or service ([Lee et al., 2011](#)). [Sweeney and Soutar \(2001\)](#) consider perceived brand quality and expected brand performance as determinants of the functional value delivered to consumers through product consumption. Information about

brand features and other extrinsic cues (i.e. country-of-origin, brand name and price) may affect brand performance perception. Also, a brand which is associated with quality, can create a positive image in consumers' mind and can motivate consumers to start a relationship with this particular brand (Lee *et al.*, 2011).

Brand trust has attracted the attention of both practitioners and researchers because it is critically important for establishing and developing consumer-brand relationships, and for building brand loyalty and equity (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003; Li *et al.*, 2008; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Veloutsou, 2015; Hegner and Jevons, 2016). There are several perspectives for brand trust conceptualization, leading to different definitions and associated operationalizations of the concept (Albert *et al.*, 2013). Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001, p. 82) define brand trust as "consumers' willingness to rely on the ability of the brand to perform its stated function". Based on such a conceptualization, they develop a uni-dimensional measurement scale that assesses trust through reliability and honesty. Delgado-Ballester *et al.* (2003, p. 37) provide a two-dimensional measurement scale for brand trust relying on the definition that brand trust is "the confident expectations of the brand's reliability and intentions in situations entailing risk to the consumer". Finally, Li *et al.* (2008) argue that brand trust exists when consumers place their confidence in the performance competence and/or benevolent intentions of a brand and conceptualize brand trust as a higher-order construct formatively measured by the previous two trust sub-components. Li *et al.* (2014, p. 773) argue that these three perspectives are closely related to each other as "reliability and honesty" are closely aligned to "reliability and intentions", which, in turn, correspond to "competence and benevolence". Lately, Hegner and Jevons (2016) add predictability as a third brand trust dimension, to express brand's consistency in its behavior. In the field of consumer-brand management, trust is generally considered to be a key determinant of relationship development (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Delgado-Ballester *et al.*, 2003; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Veloutsou, 2015). Many previous studies suggest that customers are reluctant to commit themselves to a relationship unless they have confidence that the brand has the competence to do the job and is able to constantly meet their expectations in the future, and will avoid any behavior that will be harmful for them in the future (Li *et al.*, 2008). In this study, trust is seen as the belief in the reliability, truth, ability and sincerity of the brand (Veloutsou, 2015).

Brand reputation expresses the overall perception of outsiders on the salient characteristics of brands (Fombrun and Rindova, 2000; Veloutsou, 2015). The development of a brand with a high reputation requires a positive brand evaluation by various audiences apart from keeping customers satisfied. Reputation serves as a determinant of brand quality, as it is used by consumers to form their expectations about the product carrying the brand name (Milewicz and Herbig, 1994; Cretu and Brodie, 2007). Brand reputation development is a continuous process and is determined by consumers' brand experience and brand communication effectiveness (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Brand reputation as an outcome of brand image plays a significant role in the establishment of consumer-brand relationships (Stuart-Menteth *et al.*, 2006; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Veloutsou, 2015). Reputable brands are more successful brands, as they are able to attract and retain more customers by lowering the perceived risk that consumers face during the consumer decision making process (Milewicz and Herbig, 1994; Herbig and Milewicz, 1995; Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009; Veloutsou, 2015). Furthermore, consumers tend to be more committed to relationships and are more likely to interact with brands for which they have a positive attitude (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Moreover, numerous studies show that high brand reputation provides the brand with a favorable first impression and is interpreted in a positive manner while this is not the case for low reputation brands (Dahlén *et al.*, 2009).

Taken together brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation form a brand relationship component reflecting consumers' high confidence in and a positive evaluation of the brand's performance.

2.4 *The model*

The proposed model suggests that a lovemark brand strengthens the relationship, consisting of brand love and respect, between consumers and a brand. Thus, the emotional aspects of a brand, that lead to the development of brand love, and the functional aspects of the brand, that lead to brand respect are the root causes of lovemark experience that will drive the consumer-brand relationship development process. These two constructs reflect the proposed lovemark measure which, in turn, will determine the nature of consumer-brand relationships. Thus, the proposed lovemark measure is modeled as a third-order reflective hierarchical model in which indicators are manifestations of the construct (Jarvis *et al.*, 2003; Petter *et al.*, 2007). The conceptualization and operationalization of the lovemark as a higher order construct enhances its theoretical parsimony and reduces the proposed model's complexity (MacKenzie *et al.*, 2005).

Apart from the theoretical justification of the lovemark measurement provided in the previous section, it is necessary to show the nomological validity of the proposed measure. Given that lovemark theory considers the achievement of "brand loyalty beyond reason" as the ultimate objective of emotional branding, the lovemark measure's validity is tested against brand loyalty which is considered to be an important consequence of brand relationship development (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Albert and Merunka, 2013; Albert *et al.*, 2013; Fetscherin *et al.*, 2014; Veloutsou, 2015; Zarantonello *et al.*, 2016; Shuv-Ami, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017; Bairrada *et al.*, 2018). As Roberts (2015, p. 13) postulates, the most important issues for marketers wanting to increase brand loyalty have less to do with functional elements and more to do with emotional fulfillment. Moreover, he argues that emotions for a brand is a predictor of loyalty to it, but a loyalty beyond reason, because "reason leads to conclusions but emotions lead to action". When consumers make buying decisions, they ask themselves "how does this brand improve my life?" and "how do I feel about this brand?" Emotion that is calculating and casual has limited value. However, when emotion makes people feel something deeper, they are more likely to engage in a relationship with their preferred brand (Rossiter and Bellman, 2012).

Brand loyalty is defined as the extent of faithfulness of consumers to a particular brand, irrespective of the marketing activities of competitive brands (Oliver, 1999). Brand loyalty is included in the conceptualization of brand equity (Aaker, 2002; Keller, 2013), which is used in brand success assessment. It is also used by practitioners and brand consultants as the most-frequently cited consumer-based criterion of brand success (Kotler and Keller, 2012).

Previous research suggests that there are two types of brand loyalty: attitudinal and behavioral (Chiu *et al.*, 2013). The current study focuses on attitudinal loyalty because customers who seem behaviorally loyal can also be spuriously loyal as they may make repeat purchases because of certain situational constraints. Attitudinal loyalty manifests itself with a variety of indicators among which are repurchase intentions; consumer willingness to recommend a service provider to other consumers and willingness to pay a price premium (Vázquez-Casielles *et al.*, 2009; Bairrada *et al.*, 2018). Repurchase intentions is defined as consumers' motivation for repeating the behavior of buying the brand (Hellier *et al.*, 2003). Positive word-of-mouth concerns the extent to which consumers spread positive recommendations about a brand to others (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006; Albert *et al.*, 2013). Finally, willingness to pay a price premium is the amount of money consumers are willing to pay for their preferred brand over what they would pay for a comparable brand (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2004). These three loyalty manifestations were selected to test the external validity of

the lovemark measure because they are strongly related to brand success measures such as share of purchase and revenue growth. A consumer willing to pay a price premium and to speak positively for a brand is also more likely to buy it repeatedly (compared to other brands), and this leads to a higher share of wallet and more revenues per customer. (Bowman and Narayandas, 2004; Nyffenegger *et al.*, 2015).

Given that the consumption of a lovemark brand is expected to be an extremely gratifying experience that results in brand loyalty beyond reason (Roberts, 2004), and in accordance with the findings of recent studies (Shuv-Ami, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017), the lovemark relationship is expected to encourage consumers to remain loyal to their brand, to accept higher prices than those of competing brands and to talk favorably to others about their beloved brand.

Figure 2 depicts the proposed model reflecting the proposed relationships among the first-, second- and third-order constructs.

3. Research methodology

A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted to test the lovemark measure for wireless-enabled computing devices (i.e. netbooks and tablets) in Greece. This section provides a description of the research instrument design, sampling procedure, data collection technique and data analysis method.

3.1 Measures and questionnaire development

To collect empirical data to assess the lovemark measure’s properties and test the validity of the proposed model, a self-administered questionnaire is developed based on related literature and the opinions of users and experts. Likert scales (1-7), with anchors ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” are used for all items to ensure statistical variability among survey responses for all items measured. The items of the questionnaire are adopted from existing and well-tested scales offered by the extant literature. In

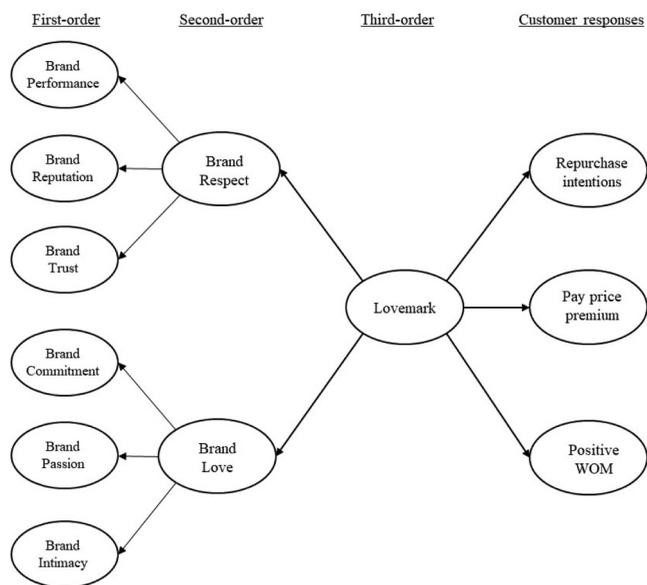


Figure 2. Research model

particular, brand performance, reflecting the utilitarian benefits of a brand, is measured with the scale proposed by [Sweeney and Soutar \(2001\)](#). The scale used to measure brand trust is retrieved from the study of [Veloutsou \(2015\)](#) and that of brand reputation from the study of [Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou \(2013\)](#). The scales used to operationalize brand commitment, brand passion and brand intimacy, are adopted from the studies of [Heinrich et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Cho et al. \(2015\)](#). Finally, repurchase intentions is measured with the scale drawn from the study of [Verhoef et al. \(2002\)](#) and WOM behavior and willingness to pay a price premium are measured with the scales retrieved from the studies of [Carroll and Ahuvia \(2006\)](#) and [Albert and Merunka \(2013\)](#).

The survey is administered in Greek. To ensure conceptual equivalence, all scales are translated through back-translation by professionals. The adequateness and appropriateness of the research instrument items were validated through conducting two focus-groups of experienced customers and providers, respectively. A pilot test of the questionnaire was also done with a convenience sample of 40 respondents, allowing for consideration of the length of the questionnaire, clarity of instructions, the lay-out and flow of questions.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This study is undertaken in the Attica region, where about 50 per cent of the total Greek population lives. Given the difficulty to find a comprehensive sample, a convenient sampling method is used to reach research participants. The survey participants were visitors of big walk-in shopping malls in three different areas of Attica. The location of these places was carefully selected to reach much of the heterogeneous population, avoid location-based bias and ensure a wide spread of potential respondents. Thirty university students were involved in the data collection. Before sending volunteering students to collect data, they were trained to administer the questionnaires and were provided with a detailed instruction sheet to ensure consistency in questionnaire sampling and administration. The sample was targeted via the use of a modified mall intercept approach ([Rice and Hancock, 2005](#)) and interviewer-administered personal interviews. Visitors of shopping mall were approached and asked if they would be willing to participate in the survey developed for the study. In particular, the lounge area was used as the location for intercepting potential survey participants. Contacts were made according to a pre-specified time schedule at different times of the day and days of the week in order for day- and time-related bias to be eliminated.

The questionnaire was distributed to 1,050 consumers during the last three months of 2017. Of the 1,050 completed questionnaires, 34 questionnaires were eliminated because of incomplete data, leaving 1,016 questionnaires for data analysis. Using the [Armstrong and Overton \(1997\)](#) procedure, nonresponse bias was evaluated by comparing early respondents with late respondents for all constructs considered in this study. No significant differences were recorded at the 0.05 level of significance.

3.3 Data analysis method

The method of partial least squares (PLS) path methodology ([Hair et al., 2011](#)), an implementation of structural equation modeling (SEM) with Smart PLS 2.0 M3 ([Ringle et al., 2005](#)), is used to assess the proposed hierarchical model for the lovemark measure. The study applies PLS path modeling with a path-weighting scheme for the inside approximation ([Wetzels et al., 2009](#)). To obtain the standard errors of the estimates, this study applies non-parametric bootstrapping ([Wetzels et al., 2009](#)) as implemented in SmartPLS with 5,000 replications. The repeated indicators approach, as described in the study of [Wetzels et al. \(2009\)](#), is adopted to estimate the higher-order latent variables. In this

approach, the higher-order latent variables are set up through the repeated use of the manifest variables of the lower-order latent variables (Wetzels *et al.*, 2009).

4. Findings

4.1 Sample profile

As seen in Table I, among the 1,016 survey participants, 50.2 per cent were female. In terms of age 21.4 per cent were less than 24 years old; 28.9 per cent were in the 25-34 age group; 29.8 per cent were in the 35-44 age group and 19.9 per cent were more than 45 years old. In terms of educational background, 54.4 per cent of the respondents have college degree or higher. Also, 37.6 per cent of the respondents have a monthly income of less than €1,000; 25.2 per cent earn between €1,000 and €1,500; 14.8 per cent earn between €1,500 and €2,000 and 22.4 per cent have a monthly income of €2,000 or more. HP (20.9 per cent), Apple (15.1 per cent), Toshiba (15.1 per cent), Lenovo (14.6 per cent), Dell (12.4 per cent), Samsung (10.5 per cent), LG (5.8 per cent) and Asus (5.7 per cent) are the brands that were identified within the sample. Finally, 47.1 per cent of the respondents are related with the brand for less than 3 years, 27.5 per cent for 3-5 years and 25.8 per cent for more than 5 years.

4.2 Measurement model assessment (first-order constructs)

The test of the measurement model involves the estimation of reliability; convergent validity and discriminant validity of the first-order constructs included into the proposed lovemark

Characteristic	Description	N	(%)
Gender	Male	415	49.8
	Female	601	50.2
Age	18-24	217	21.4
	25-34	294	28.9
	35-44	303	29.8
	45 and above	202	19.9
Education level	Higher secondary school	319	31.4
	Prof school graduate	150	14.8
	College graduate	165	16.2
	Postgraduates	238	23.4
Monthly income	0-999 €	382	37.6
	1.000-1.499 €	256	25.2
	1.500-1.999 €	150	14.8
	2.000+ €	228	22.4
Brand name	Apple	153	15.1
	Asus	58	5.7
	Dell	126	12.4
	HP	212	20.9
	Lenovo	148	14.6
	LG	59	5.8
	Samsung	107	10.5
	Toshiba	153	15.1
Brand relationship age	< 1	78	7.7
	1-2	183	18
	2-3	217	21.4
	3-5	276	27.2
	5-10	207	20.4
	10+	55	5.4

Table I.
Customer profile
(N = 1,016)

measure (Hair *et al.*, 2011). The reliability of all constructs is examined using the Composite Reliability (CR) measure. Hair *et al.* (2011) suggest that a value of 0.70 provides adequate evidence for internal consistency. As shown in Table II, CR values of all measures included in the study are equal to or exceed 0.903 suggesting that all measures are good indicators of their respective components. The average variance extracted (AVE), indicating the amount of variance captured by the construct in relation to the variance because of measurement error, is used to assess convergent validity. As depicted in Table II, AVE values for all constructs are equal to or exceed 0.654, higher than the recommended cut-off value of 0.50 (Hair *et al.*, 2011) suggesting satisfactory convergent validity.

Construct	Item	Loading	CR	AVE
Brand performance	The products of Brand X are of very good quality	0.879	0.932	0.775
	Brand X offers products of consistent quality	0.879		
	Brand X offers durable products	0.867		
Brand reputation	Brand X offers products that perform consistently	0.896	0.933	0.777
	X is a well-known brand	0.879		
	Brand X is one of the leading brands in the market	0.924		
	Brand X is reputable	0.884		
Brand trust	Brand X is easily recognizable	0.837	0.930	0.654
	I have complete faith in the integrity of brand X	0.832		
	Promises made by brand X are reliable	0.859		
	Brand's X communications do not make false claims	0.691		
	Brand X is credible	0.810		
	Brand X is sincere about its products	0.859		
	I feel safe when I buy brand X	0.841		
Brand commitment	Brand X is genuinely committed to my satisfaction	0.754	0.923	0.799
	I am committed to brand X	0.914		
	I have solid support for brand X	0.910		
Brand passion	BC3. I can rely on this brand	0.856	0.913	0.777
	I am passionate about brand X	0.872		
	X is a captivating brand	0.913		
Brand intimacy	I am enthusiastic about brand X	0.859	0.925	0.802
	Most of the time I feel very close to brand X	0.914		
	There is a close connection between me and brand X	0.936		
Repurchase intentions	There is a certain intimacy between me and brand X	0.834	0.903	0.756
	I will repurchase brand X in the future	0.854		
	I would love to use brand X continuously	0.865		
Willingness to pay price premium	Even though brand X is sold out, I won't purchase other brands	0.890	0.934	0.826
	I would be prepared to pay more to be able to buy brand X again	0.912		
	I would remain a customer of brand X even if it raised the prices of its laptops, as long as the price rise was reasonable	0.912		
	I would accept a reasonable price rise, because brand X provides match my expectations	0.902		
Positive WOM	X provides match my expectations	0.902	0.958	0.885
	I have recommended brand X to many people	0.944		
	I would recommend brand X to my friends	0.944		
	If my friends were planning to buy a laptop I would tell them to buy brand X	0.935		

Table II. First-order constructs measurement assessment (reliability, convergence validity)

Notes: CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Finally, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was used to assess the discriminant validity by comparing the square root of AVE extracted from each construct with the correlations among constructs. The findings provide strong evidence of discriminant validity among all first-order constructs. As seen in Table III, the square roots of AVE for all first-order constructs, provided in the diagonal of the table, are higher than their shared variances (Hair et al., 2011).

4.3 Measurement model assessment (higher-order constructs)

In Figure 3, we include the CR and AVE values of the measures in the higher-order constructs (i.e. brand respect, brand love and lovemark). These show that CR and AVE values for brand respect are equal to or exceed 0.927 and 0.810 respectively, those for brand love are equal to or exceed 0.938 and 0.834 respectively and those for lovemark are equal to or exceed 0.874 and 0.777 respectively. These figures show evidence of reliable second- and third-order measures (Wetzels et al., 2009). Moreover, all factor loadings concerning the two second-order constructs reflecting in the lovemark measure as well as the six first-order construct reflecting its two sub-dimensions are all statistically significant and their size are greater or equal to 0.855 which exceeds that the recommended cut-off value of 0.7 (Wetzels et al., 2009). Based on the above, the notion that the lovemark measure is a third-order construct is validated (Wetzels et al., 2009).

4.4 Assessing the nomological validity of the lovemark measure

To assess the nomological validity of our hierarchical construct model we embedded the lovemark measure in a nomological network with three consumer responses measuring brand loyalty manifestations such as repurchase intentions, willingness to pay a price premium and positive WOM behavior (Wetzels et al., 2009). As it is shown in Figure 3, the results support the role of lovemark as a significant antecedent of all three consumer responses. More specifically, there is a significant impact of lovemark on consumers' repurchase intentions ($\beta = 0.801$; $t = 42.679$); consumers' willingness to pay a price premium ($\beta = 0.737$; $t = 34.754$) and consumers' engagement into positive WOM behavior ($\beta = 0.752$; $t = 36.270$). The variance explained by the model in terms of R^2 is 0.651 for repurchase intentions; 0.562 for willingness to pay a price premium and 0.560 for positive WOM behavior. The relatively high values of R^2 indicate that sizeable portions of the variance in the dependent variables are explained by the proposed lovemark measure. These

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Brand performance	0.880								
2. Brand reputation	0.683	0.881							
3. Brand trust	0.802	0.652	0.809						
4. Brand commitment	0.555	0.475	0.626	0.894					
5. Brand passion	0.436	0.372	0.515	0.720	0.881				
6. Brand intimacy	0.373	0.294	0.410	0.686	0.840	0.896			
7. Repurchase intentions	0.552	0.471	0.619	0.718	0.709	0.708	0.870		
8. Pay price premium	0.449	0.405	0.512	0.676	0.684	0.706	0.770	0.941	
9. Positive WOM	0.592	0.509	0.615	0.638	0.634	0.596	0.731	0.696	0.909
Mean Value	5.249	5.473	5.060	4.404	3.472	3.058	4.043	3.481	4.447
Std Deviation	1.306	1.266	1.169	1.532	1.637	1.691	1.576	1.794	1.0610

Note: Fornell-Larcker criterion

Table III. First-order constructs measurement assessment (discriminant validity)

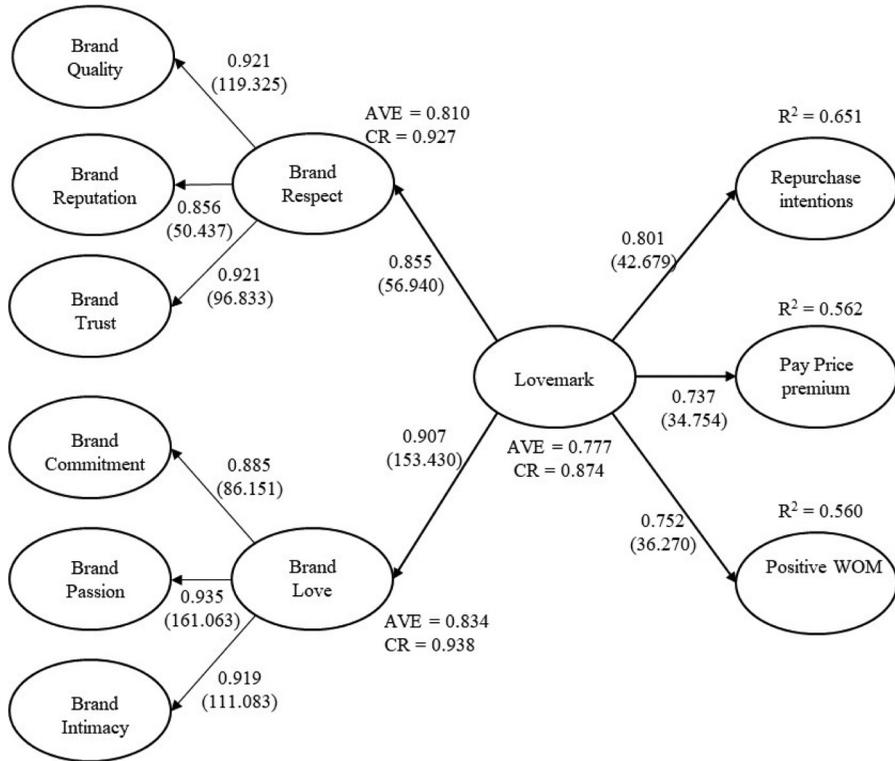


Figure 3.
Lovemark measure –
theoretical and
nomological validity

results confirm the functionality of the proposed modeling framework for lovemark measurement in the wireless-enabled computing devices context.

Finally, by considering the significance of brand respect and love separately, we see that brand love has a greater association with all three consumer responses than brand respect, that is, repurchase intentions (0.779 vs. 0.623); positive WOM behavior (0.680 vs. 0.643) and willingness to pay a price premium (0.755 vs. 0.524).

4.5 Brand classification and Brand love styles determination

The lovemark measure can now be used for brand classification using the lovemark grid proposed by Roberts (2004). Figure 4 depicts the location of the eight brands in the Roberts' lovemark grid. As it is shown, Apple and Samsung are classified as lovemarks. The picture for Apple is very clear because it scores very high in both lovemark sub-dimensions, whereas Samsung scores very high in brand respect but just exceeds the average in brand love. All other brands are classified as quality brands, as they all exceed the mean value for brand respect but they score low in brand love as consumers feel a low level of love-like feelings for them.

Based on the aforementioned finding that the lovemark measure mostly reflect brand love, the method, proposed by Heinrich *et al.* (2012), is used to discover the love styles that consumers develop with the brands of their devices. The proposed measurement model reveals that brand intimacy, passion and commitment are sub-dimensions of brand love.

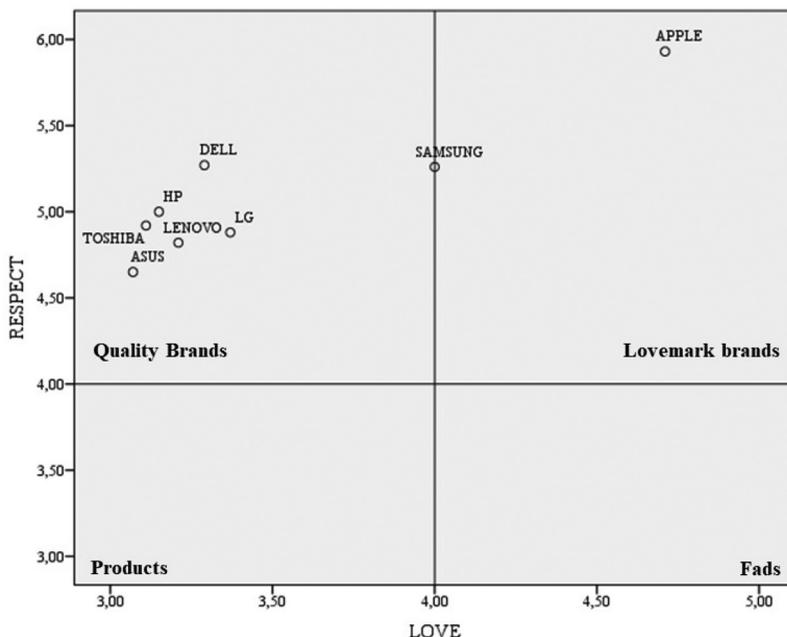


Figure 4.
Lovemark grid-brands classification

Depending on the presence or absence of these three components, eight different kinds of love emerge. The terminology proposed by Sternberg (1997) is used for labeling these brand love styles.

The results, provided in Table IV, indicate that all eight kinds of brand love are identified for the brands under investigation. Moreover, 44 per cent of respondents have some type of love for their preferred brands. A total of 16 per cent of respondents are in consummate love with their devices brands. As such, these consumers feel an intimate relationship with their beloved brand, have a strong yearning to purchase or repurchase the brand and are committed, at least in the short term, to support the particular brand (Shimp and Madden, 1988; Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Among the brands that enjoy high levels of consummate love are Apple (38 per cent) and Samsung (24 per cent). Fourteen per cent of respondents consist of persons that feel an empty love for the brands they own. In other words, these consumers show neither high intimacy nor passion for the brand, but they are committed to the brand. Samsung (20 per cent), Asus (19 per cent) and Lenovo (18 per cent) are among the brands with customers exhibiting an empty love style toward the brand. Furthermore, seven percent (7 per cent) of respondents is characterized by a high level of passion and commitment but the absence of intimacy. This love style is called fatuous in the sense that a commitment is made on the basis of passion without the stabilizing element of intimacy (Sternberg, 1986). Apple (19 per cent) and LG (8 per cent) have customers of this type.

The biggest proportion of respondents (56 per cent), however, is labeled as non-love, as they show neither high intimacy nor passion or commitment for the brand. But non-love does not mean that consumers dislike the brand, but it probably suggests that consumers do not have any love-like feeling for their brand. Nevertheless, the consumer–brand relationship can be strong enough as a result of the high levels of respect that these

Table IV.
Brand Love styles

Brand love style	# (%)	Brand love dimensions					Brand name					
		Intimacy	Passion	Commitment	Apple (%)	Asus (%)	Dell (%)	HP (%)	Lenovo (%)	LG (%)	Samsung (%)	Toshiba (%)
Non love	565 (56%)	-	-	-	20	59	65	67	63	61	42	66
Liking	9 (1%)	0	-	-	1	0	0	1	2	0	2	1
Infatuated love	35 (3%)	-	0	-	7	3	4	3	1	3	4	1
Empty love	142 (14%)	-	-	0	12	19	13	12	18	10	20	11
Romantic love	12 (1%)	0	0	-	1	0	2	1	1	0	2	1
Companionate love	16 (2%)	0	-	0	1	2	0	2	2	3	0	2
Fatuous love	72 (7%)	-	0	0	19	5	6	4	1	8	7	7
Consummate love	165 (16%)	0	0	0	38	12	11	9	11	14	24	10

consumers feel for the brand. Finally, the other four love styles of infatuated love (3 per cent), companionate love (2 per cent), romantic love (1 per cent) and liking (1 per cent) are identified, albeit at lower proportions, within our sample.

5. Discussion and implications

5.1 *Summary of findings*

The purpose of this study was to develop and empirically test a lovemark measure that can be used to identify how brands of high-tech consumer products are classified in consumers' mind with respect to functional and emotional brand aspects. In an effort to answer this question, this study provides an empirical illustration by developing a third-order reflective hierarchical model using data from netbook and tablet owners in Greece.

This study shows that the assessment of a lovemark measure as a third-order construct is fully functional and is reflected in its second-order dimensions, that is, love and respect. Then, brand respect is reflected by brand performance, brand trust and brand reputation and brand love, in turn, is reflected by brand commitment, brand passion and brand intimacy. The nomological validity of the proposed higher-order lovemark measure is also empirically confirmed by predicting its strong impact on three consumers' behavioral responses. The findings confirm the external validity of the lovemark modeling framework, as it explains sizeable portions of the variance in three customer responses, that is, consumers' repurchase intentions, willingness to pay a premium price to buy the brand and engagement in positive WOM behavior.

The findings of this study have a number of important implications for both researchers and practitioners. Because the proposed model has not been used so far, it could be used to provide the theoretical foundation for future research leading to a better understanding of the way consumers relate to brands in the context of high-tech products. On the other hand, the understanding of the key elements in the proposed model will help firms in the development and commercialization of wireless-enabled computing devices to achieve better results in terms of customer retention/acquisition and revenue enhancement.

5.2 *Theoretical implications*

Lovemark is the "wannabe" position in the mind of consumers for all brands and for brands of high technology products in particular (Roberts, 2004; Pawle and Cooper, 2006). However, there are limited research efforts investigating this new marketing concept in this product category with high utilitarian characteristics. This study contributes to the brand management literature for high technology products by proposing a new hierarchical modeling framework for measuring lovemark experience and identifying lovemark brands by capturing consumers' perception of two primary dimensions (i.e. respect and love) and six sub-dimensions (i.e. performance, trust, reputation, passion, intimacy and commitment). The results are in accordance with the lovemarks theory, proposed by Roberts (2004), that the lovemark measure reflects consumers' perception about brand respect and brand love for high-technology products as well as with the definition of de Chernatony and Dall'Olmo (1997) that a high-technology brand is a cluster of functional and emotional elements that are used by consumers to assess it. With regard to brand respect that represents the functional aspects of a brand, the findings are in accordance with the suggestions of Roberts (2004) that a brand creates respect through good performance, which creates a sense of trust and builds a positive reputation. These three brand relationship quality concepts participate in the consumer-brand relationship establishment phase where the cognitive brand elements matter more

(Sreejesh and Roy, 2015; Nyffenegger *et al.*, 2016). Regarding brand love, which represents the emotional/affective aspects of a high-technology brand, the findings are in accordance with those of Heinrich *et al.* (2012) and Nyffenegger *et al.* (2012) in which brand love is reflected by three primary factors, namely brand passion, brand intimacy and brand commitment. The absence or presence of these three factors can be used to capture facets of brand love as described in Sternberg's triangular interpersonal theory of love (Heinrich *et al.*, 2012). Based on the study of Sreejesh and Roy, (2015) these three affective-related concepts of brand relationships are responsible for the advancement of consumer-brand relationships, as brand intimacy and passion primarily contribute to relationships augmentation and brand commitment to brand relationship maintenance.

The study also presents a methodological contribution, as it validates the lovemark theory by establishing a third-order reflectively measured hierarchical construct. This is highly recommended as the use of multidimensional constructs increases the granularity and detail on different aspects of the lovemark concept (Petter *et al.*, 2007).

The results, in accordance with previous studies, also indicate that the proposed lovemark concept is highly related to three loyalty manifestations namely consumers' repurchase intentions, positive WOM behavior and willingness to pay a price premium (Shuv-Ami *et al.*, 2016; Shuv-Ami, 2017; Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017). Thus, when customers consider their wireless-enabled computing device as a lovemark brand, they will remain loyal even if the price of the device is higher than competitive brands and will spread positive recommendations to other customers. However, the brand love dimension has a greater impact on all three loyalty manifestations (Veloutsou and Aimpitaksa, 2017). This means that the relationship developed between customers and brands of wireless-enabled computing devices is more emotional than functional.

5.3 Practical implications

Based on the results of the empirical study, customers of wireless-enabled computing devices assess brands at an overall level, at a dimensional level and at a sub-dimensional level. For brand managers, this improves their understanding of how consumers of wireless-enabled computing devices evaluate functional and emotional brand aspects, which are then used for brand positioning in the lovemark grid as products, fads, quality brands or lovemark brands. In particular, brand managers that aim to develop a lovemark brand should focus on improving lovemark experience through brand respect and love and this can be achieved by improving their six sub-dimensions. For a brand to become a lovemark, it is not enough to deliver only functional benefits to customers in terms of high reputation, good performance and a sense of trust. Brand managers should address, in a coordinated manner, both the functional and emotional elements associated with a brand to have customers who are loyal beyond reason.

The results provide a useful brand-tracking tool for manufacturers of wireless-enabled computing devices that can be used during the brand development process to improve a particular brand element at different levels of abstraction. In particular, the proposed model helps brand managers determine the love styles that consumers feel for their brand and use this information to implement appropriate marketing strategies that will enhance consumer-brand relationships.

The results also confirm the strong association of the proposed lovemark measure with three loyalty manifestations. This suggests that brand managers should consider the development of lovemark brands as a strategic objective to: 1) ensure better retention rates, as it is highly possible that lovemark customers will replace their device within the same brand, 2) attract new customers via positive WOM behavior of existing customers that are

convinced about the superiority of the functional and emotional aspects of the brand and recommend it to others and to 3) avoid price reductions when facing high competition and price wars by focusing on the emotional value of the brand.

5.4 Limitations and future research proposals

Notwithstanding its contribution, this study is not without limitations, which in turn open new paths for further research. First, this is a cross-sectional study and therefore, it is not possible to consider temporal changes in the research constructs. A longitudinal study on the subject is necessary to clarify the effects of temporal changes. Second, the use of a non-probability sampling method, despite the big size of the sample used in this study, does not ensure the full generalization of results. The proposed model can be used for further research using a random sampling approach that will result in a more representative sample of the investigated population. Third, the model should be tested in product categories with lower perceived risks (i.e. Fast Moving Consumer Goods) or in hedonic products (i.e. cosmetics) to see if the results are different among product categories. Finally, because of globalization, it is important to test the model across various countries with different cultures, to identify differences or similarities because of culture.

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Further reading

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