

## ABSTRACT

The traditional view that brands relate to consumers in terms rationally, emotionally, and symbolically needs to be revisited because the consumer brand experience is embedded in the context of the virtual brand communities. As a consequence this research explores the brand love impact of identification to the brand and others mediated by engagement. The Social Identity Theory is used to explain how the identification to the brand and the other members of the community serves as antecedents to brand love. The Consumer Culture Theory is used to explain the mediation effect of engagement. The Self-Expansion Theory is used to explain the brand love construct.

The first major theoretical contribution of this study is the confirmation of the nomological network for brand love having identification antecedents mediated by engagement in the context of virtual brand communities. The second contribution is the exploration of the relationship between consumer brand identification and the psychological sense of community. The third contribution of the study is the exploration of the impact on traditional marketing communications on brand love. The fourth contribution is the study of the mediation effect of engagement explained by the Consumer Culture Theory. And, the final theoretical contribution is the study of the impact of engagement in the context of sports. The study utilizes the case of the English Premier League fan clubs in Thailand. In terms of managerial contribution this study provides a guideline for managing virtual brand communities.

The questionnaire was developed with three additional steps were added to ensure content validity. The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) reveals five dimensions of brand love as opposed to the previous theory. This is an additional contribution of this research. The hypothesis testing showed support for the nomological net for the construct brand love with identification antecedents mediated by engagement. The findings show that it is the value of the brand that brings the people together while engagement strengthens brand love. Traditional marketing communications tools are still effective in brand building. For the managerial contribution this would mean providing more co-creation activities and products for consumers to engage and express their brand love.