



Examining the Mediating Effect of Customer-Brand Engagement on the Relationship between Brand Involvement and Brand Loyalty

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Abstract

Using a symbolic interactionism theory, this paper develops a model, which integrates brand involvement (BI) and customer-brand engagement (CBE) into a broader conceptualization of loyalty formation, and tests its predictive power in explaining brand loyalty. A self-administered, cross-sectional survey was employed to collect the required data from 524 consumers from: the capital city Amman, and two major cities: Irbid, in the north, and Zarqa, in the middle. To start with, the use of symbolic interactionism theory suggests that brand involvement (BI) and customer-brand engagement (CBE), which draws on relationship marketing theory and service dominant logic perspective, can be integrated to delineate the consumer's psychological path to brand loyalty. Second, the study confirms the mediating effect of CBE on the relationship between brand involvement and brand loyalty. This research adds to the growing body of knowledge on brand loyalty through using a symbolic interactionism theory to examine the interrelationships between three focal constructs namely; brand involvement, CBE, and brand loyalty

Keywords: Brand Involvement, Customer-Brand Engagement, Brand Loyalty

Introduction

Drawing on service-dominant logic and relationship marketing (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric and Ilic, 2011; Brodie, Glynn and Little, 2006), prior researchers proposed a new concept called 'customer brand-engagement' (CBE). Proponents of this concept theorize that a level of customer involvement with respect to a focal brand is a prerequisite condition to the emergence of specific CBE levels (Hollebeek, 2011). They also theorize that CBE encapsulating cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally stimulating brand-related activity, would serve collectively together, as key mechanisms to creating higher levels of brand loyalty. Accordingly, this perspective assumes that the path to brand loyalty via 'CBE' is the interactivity, which is based on two-way interactions between the brand and the customer. This perspective, thus, strongly stresses that there must exist focal, two-way interactions between customers and brands (Brodie et al., 2011 Hollebeek, 2011; Bowden, 2009) as a necessary condition for the emergence of relevant engagement (Patterson *et al.*, 2006).

The Research Problem

As noted by Loureiro (2013) and Hollebeek (2011) and others (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Bowden, 2009; Little and Little, 2006), the potentially predictive power of brand involvement and CBE is largely restricted to conceptual relationships to date, and there are also limited insights into their interrelationships with other constructs including brand loyalty (Loureiro, 2013; Cho, 2012). Hence, from an empirical perspective, the literature lacks evidence on whether brand involvement and CBE would have predictive power on brand loyalty. This leads to propose the following questions:

1. To what extent does brand involvement affect CBE?
2. To what extent does CBE affect brand loyalty?
3. To what extent does brand involvement affect brand loyalty?
4. How does CBE mediate the relationship between brand involvement and brand loyalty?

Research objectives

This paper has two key objectives:

1. To examine the relationships between involvement, CBE and brand loyalty through the use of a symbolic interactionism theory.
2. To test the mediating effect of CBE on the relationship between brand involvement and brand loyalty.

Research Importance

Despite the potential effect of brand involvement and CBE on brand loyalty, no attempt was made, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, to show how these two concepts, which have become cornerstones in modern marketing, could be integrated to explain the consumer's psychological path in developing and generating higher levels of brand loyalty. Examining the interrelationships between these three constructs would add significantly to our understanding in regards to the mechanisms that would contribute to the enhancement of brand loyalty.

Research Hypotheses

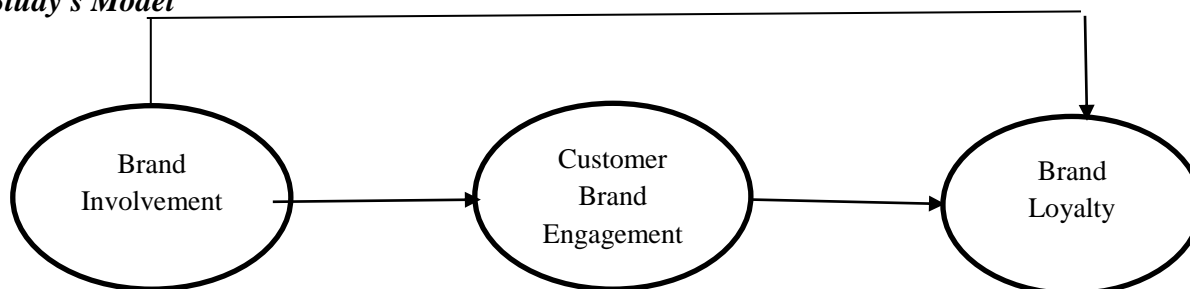
H1: Brand involvement has a significant and positive effect on customer-brand engagement.

H2: Customer-brand engagement has a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty.

H3: brand involvement has a significant and positive effect on brand loyalty.

H4: CBE mediates the relationship between brand involvement and brand loyalty.

Study's Model



Literature Review: Definition of the Constructs

Brand involvement (BI) is primarily a cognitive construct (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Mollen and Wilson, 2010), and is generally related to self-relevance (Higie and Feick 1989). BI represents consumers' cognitive responses, including: memory, focused attention, processing, search, engrossment and interest (Laaksonen 1994), and it concerns policies of attracting and maintaining customer interest in a specific brand (Andersen, 2004: 291). A key distinction between BI and CBE is that the former requires primarily the exercise of cognition to satisfy instrumental value, *i.e.* satisfaction of goal-directed behavior through information delivery (Fiore, Kim and Lee, 2005), whereas, the latter extends beyond mere involvement, as it includes an interactive relationship with the brand, and requires the satisfaction of the individual's instrumental value as well as perceived experiential value (*i.e.* emotional satisfaction, the satisfaction of the senses, and mental play, or amusement) (Fiore, Kim and Lee, 2005). In other words, involvement is a result of a conscious judgment about how the brand satisfies the customer's instrumental values, and is related to one's self-image, whereas, CBE has to do with how consumers utilize themselves in their interaction with the brand, where they actively use emotions and behaviors along with their thought processes. Thus, CBE requires the active use of emotions and behaviors along with consumer thought processes.

Customer Brand Engagement is defined as 'the level of an individual customer's motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions (Hollebeek, 2011: 790). Moreover, CBE, which is a set of psychological (Bowden, 2009), motivational (Hollebeek, 2011) and contextual processes (Ilic, 2008), addresses specific interactions between a focal customer and a particular brand (Hollebeek, 2011), and motivates the consumer towards a specific brand, based on his/her needs and values (Sprott *et al.*, 2009). It requires consumer connection (Abdul-Ghani *et al.*, 2010), emerges from two-way interactions between customer/brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2011), develops over time (Owen *et al.*, 2001), exists at different intensities (Bryson and Hand, 2007), and occurs within a range of pre-specified levels (Hollebeek, 2011).

Literature Review: Symbolic Interactionism Theory

The basis of the symbolic interactionism theory was explained by Blumer (1969:2), who stated that:

“human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them; that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows; and that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person in dealing with things he/she encounters (Blumer, 1969: 2)”.

Basically, the theory indicates that people act and react to symbols based on the current assigned meaning. This is because the meanings attached to symbols are socially created and not natural, and dynamic, not stagnant (OpenStax College, 2012). The world, societies and individuals are continuously changing, and meaning itself is not an exception. Csikszentmihali and Rochberg-Halton (1981) explained that meaning is created through the interaction between people, object and context, and thus, it is not inherent, and differs across persons and across contexts for the same person (Kleme an Keman, 1991). A domain or an object can have various and diverse meanings when it is used in social interaction, and hence, individuals’ attitudes and ideas of the meanings associated with a particular object change continuously during the occurrence of interaction between other individuals (Levy, 1986).

The theory also depicts that individuals’ role taking in terms of viewing their selves from the perspective of the other and a society, are necessary for the development of the self (Mead, 1934). Individuals first see themselves and come to experience a self when they see their selves from other’s perspective and the generalized standard of culture, i.e. people in general see their selves based on the reflection they get from other people (Cooley, 1909). From this perspective, human behavior needs to be understood and explained not by personality traits of people, but in the context of social forces and situational experiences of daily life (Goffman, 1961). Moreover, if individuals regard an object or a domain as central to their self-concept, they may identify with the object/domain (Osborne and Walker, 2006). The more essential and important the domain is to self-concept, the more meaningful it is. If an object or a domain is meaningful and the person receives negative feedback from interacting with that object/domain, self-esteem may be negatively affected. On the other hand, if the object/domain is not central to self-concept (i.e., not meaningful) then feedback obtained from that environment will not affect self-esteem (ibid).

The theory further posits that needs for verification of identities are the driving force of interaction, and the flow of interaction revolves around the extent to which individuals’ identities are mutually verified (Turner, 2013). And, once they are verified, individuals feel positive emotions and would begin to make commitments to the larger social structures in which interactions occur. Moreover, self serves ‘as a kind of gyroscope for keeping behaviors stable and coherent and that people are motivated to verify their sense of self in the eyes of themselves and others (Turner, 2013: 331). In this sense, there are four fundamental identities of a self: (a) *core identity* (i.e., the cognitions and feelings that individuals have about themselves that are generally salient in almost all situations); (b) *social identities* (i.e., the cognitions and feelings that people have of themselves as members of social groups), (c) *group identities* (i.e., cognitions and feelings about self that arise from identification with corporate units revealing divisions of labor, communities, and organizations); and (d) *role identities* (i.e., the roles that individuals play in any social context). Thus, according to symbolic interactionism, individuals put their identities on the line during interaction; and based on the extent to which people succeed, or fail, in verifying, or getting others to verify identities, the emotions that are aroused will shape the subsequent flow of the interaction and eventually the structure of a person’s identity system (Turner, 2013; Stryker, 1982; Bruker, 1980).

The core principles of the theory discussed in this section have been used to develop the research hypotheses.

Study's Model

Brand Involvement → CBE

From a symbolic interactionism perspective, the particular identity that consumers decide to signal through using a particular brand needs to be verified by themselves (i.e., either consistent with their actual self-concept or their ideal self-concept) and the others (i.e., consistent with the groups that consumers want to affiliate themselves with and/or others signal their acceptance of identities). For example, if a brand such as the Body Shop focuses on ethical and environmental issues, the customers may incorporate these ideas into their knowledge structure. Accordingly, when the meanings assigned to a particular brand are interpreted by the consumers to be in line with their identities or the identity of the important others, the possibility of consumers to identify with the brand will increase.

Thus, the need for verifying consumers’ core identity, and/or social identities, and/or group identities, and/or role identities represents the driving force behind consumer involvement and engagement with the focal brand. The more important and the more likely a brand is relevant to any of the four identities, the more consumers will interact with the focal brand to have their identities verified either by themselves or by others. Additionally, the more

essential and important the brand is to self-concept, the more meaningful it is. If a brand is meaningful and the consumer receives positive responses from interacting with that brand, self-esteem may be positively affected, and thus, the consumer may identify with that brand.

Moreover, cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally stimulating brand-related activity, which allows consumers to interact with the brand at different intensities, will provide consumers with an opportunity to see the extent to which that such activity helps them in verifying their identities by themselves and by others, thus increasing the possibility of identifying with the brand. Furthermore, if consumers' interpretations of the meanings of a brand, when interacting with it, are that it strongly fulfills a consumer's sense of self identity and credibly symbolizes such self-identifying values (Peñeloza; 1994), and that it has the ability to signaling one's self-identity to others, they will be more likely to identify with the brand. Following the logic of the argument, the following is hypothesized:

H1: Brand involvement is positively associated with customer-brand engagement

CBE → Brand Loyalty

By drawing on symbolic interactionism, it could be argued that if consumers' identities are constantly confirmed in interaction with brands, they will: increasingly come to trust these brands; develop commitments to these brands; reveal emotional attachments to these brands; and become more oriented to the brands in which their identities are confirmed (Turner, 2013; Stryker, 1982; Bruker, 1980). When these reactions to identity verification play out, the salience of a brand to the consumer is more likely to increase. Continuous self-verification would eventually lead to commitments to those brands in which encounters have stimulated the positive feelings and emotions that come with self-verification. As such, the more brands help identities to be verified, the greater the commitments will be to those brands. This is because brands helped consumers to orchestrate their behaviors in an attempt to verify any of the four previously mentioned identities in a situation. Thus, if others signal their acceptance of a consumer's identity or identities, the consumer will experience "positive emotions from *satisfaction* at the lower-intensity end from *joy* and *pride* at the higher-intensity end of the positive emotions" (Turner, 2013: 351). On the other hand, if a brand does not provide a consumer with identity verification, he/she may experience negative emotions such as anger, fear, embarrassment and other negative feelings. Accordingly, it is reasonable to propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Customer-brand engagement is positively associated with brand loyalty.

BI → Brand Loyalty

A number of researchers have identified a strong empirical link between BI and brand loyalty (Quester and Lim, 2003; Iwasaki and Havitz, 1998; Prak, 1996). Involvement is argued to be the antecedent for an overwhelming range of consequences (Kapferer and Laurent, 1985). Involvement with a brand is likely to depend on whether and how the focal brand relates to the consumer's life more generally (Bloch and Richins 1983). The more important a brand is to a consumer's ego, the stronger the psychological attachment a consumer will exhibit to that particular brand (Quester and Lim, 2003; Traylor 1981). Research shows that consumers' interpretations of cultural ideologies communicated by a brand play a role in activating involvement, and subsequently in invoking brand commitment (Fournier 1998; Mick and Buhl 1992; Thompson 1997).

In their recent article, Batra *et al.* (2012: 9) showed a high correlation between "passion-driven behaviors (willingness to invest resources, passionate desire to use, and things done in the past [involvement])", and "positive emotional connection (a sense of 'intuitive fit' with the brand in which it feels 'just right'. Haugtvedt, Petty and Cacioppo (1992) also demonstrated that high involved consumers who developed positive attitudes towards brands, had less erosion in their opinions on brands they favor, as well as more resilience towards negative brand news. Thus, it could be argued that brands' perceived action, which can trigger "attitudinal, cognitive, and/or behavioral responses on the part of the consumer" (Aaker and Fournier, 1995: 393), and brands that have required more elaborative effort during their selection will tend to be perceived as closer to consumers and their selves, and will therefore, lead consumers to develop deep emotional attachment and a positive perception about brand performance. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H3: brand involvement is positively associated with brand loyalty

Loyal customers may engage in and develop emotional attachment to a particular brand, not to gain status or express their identity through the focal brand, but simply to meet functional needs (*i.e.*, a pragmatic desire for the better deals and special treatments that come with elite relationship status), or to extract greater exchange value from the brand (Fournier, 2008), or to gain new social connections (O'Guinn and Muniz, 2008), or to get emotional support, advice and companionship (Rosenbaum *et al.* 2007), or to mutate and adapt the brand's meanings to fit their life tasks and concerns (Fournier, Solomon, and Englis, 2008), or for quality assurance reasons (Ouwensloot, Odekerken-Schröder, 2008). These reasons indicate that brand loyalty could be developed via cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally stimulating brand-related activities, rather than the enhancement of personal identity and/or social identity that the brand offers.

Further, by drawing on brand community literature (e.g., Cheung *et al.*, 2011), it could be argued that, the more a consumer is engaged with the focal brand in cognitive, emotional and behavioral manner, the more favorable thoughts (cognition), feelings (emotion) and willingness to spend time and energy (behavioral) will emerge. This will further enhance the emotional attachment to the focal brand and the positive perceptions about the brand performance, increasing by that, the likelihood for the consumers to involve in active participation in brand-supporting activity (e.g., brand loyalty).

Moreover, Johnson *et al.* (2006) pointed that “as the customers' experience with a particular offering grows over time, attitudes toward brands and relationships should become stronger, more top of mind or accessible, persistent, resistant to change, and likely to guide intentions and subsequent behavior”. Consistent with that, and by drawing on the work of (Cheung *et al.*, 2011), it is argued here that when consumers are willing to overcome obstacles in order to continue their relationship with the brand that they are loyal to, then it means that they are ready to make personal sacrifices; such as devoting more personal energy and spending more money for that brand. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

H4: CBE mediates the relationship between brand involvement and brand loyalty.

Research Methodology

Study's Population and Sampling Procedures

The study's population consists of most consumer categories located across Jordan. Due to time and financial constraints, a sample of (700) consumers was conveniently chosen from Amman, Zarqa and Irbid. The consumers were approached inside major malls in the three mentioned cities. Total number of (524) questionnaires were returned, thus resulting in a response rate of (75%).

Variable	Source	No. of Items
Brand Involvement	Zaichkowsky (1985)	11
Cognitive-Customer Brand Engagement	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2011)	4
Emotional-Customer Brand Engagement	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2011)	5
Behavioral-Customer Brand Engagement	Cheung <i>et al.</i> (2011)	5
Cognitive Loyalty	Harris and Goode -2004	3
Affective Loyalty	Harris and Goode -2004	3
Action Loyalty	Harris and Goode -2004	3

Table (1): Item Generation

Research Instrument

To assess the study's constructs, a number of previous studies were consulted in order to generate items that best measure each construct. The variables, sources of items, and number of items are reported in table (1) above.

The (53) items, which measure the study's constructs, were face validated by two academic professors. Very few comments were made and very few concerns were noted by those academics. A part from brand involvement, which was measured using a semantic scale, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement regarding the statements of the other five constructs based on a five-point Lickert scale (1= strongly disagree, and 5= strongly agree).

Given the nature of the variables included in the current study, consumer packaged goods and consumer non-durable goods were chosen as the study context, because they are heavily branded. After answering three open-ended questions, respondents were asked to recall a specific brand of non-durable goods or packaged goods (and its product category) with which they were satisfied. Respondents then filled the questionnaire with reference to the brand they had identified.

Data Analysis

Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

The demographic characteristics of the surveyed consumers are reported in table (2).

Demographic Characteristics	Percentage
Gender	
Male	74%
Female	26%
Age	
<25	11%
25-34	42%
35-44	30%
45-54	15%
≥55	2%
Education	
High school	14%
College degree	65%
Postgraduate degree	21%
Income	
<500	33%
500-1000	51%
1001-1500	10%
>1500	6%
Relationship with the focal brand	
< 1 year	11%
1-3 years	52%
>3 years	37%

Table (2): Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

Respondents also reported on (56) unique brands in (16) different *non-durable consumer* goods categories such as cereals and soft drinks. They also reported on (128) unique brands in (48) different *durable consumer goods* categories such as cars, laptops, mobile phones and sports gear.

Measurement Validation

It is important to note that some of the constructs measured in the current study are reflective, while others are formative. The reflective constructs are as follows: brand involvement; emotional-customer brand engagement; cognitive-customer brand engagement, behavioral-customer brand engagement; cognitive loyalty; affective loyalty and action loyalty. On the other hand, the formative constructs are: customer-brand engagement and brand loyalty. The first formative construct, *i.e.* customer-brand engagement consists of three first-order reflective indicators: emotional-customer brand engagement; cognitive-customer brand engagement and behavioral-customer brand engagement. Similarly, the second formative construct, *i.e.* brand loyalty consists of three first-order reflective indicators: cognitive loyalty; affective loyalty and action loyalty.

To validate the reflective constructs, reliability test, factorial analysis, convergent validity, and multicollinearity (*i.e.* discriminant validity) were carried out. However, regarding the formative constructs; AMOS 19 was used to validate them as second-order constructs. To start with validating the reflective constructs, table (3) shows the reliabilities of the eight reflective constructs, which were assessed using Cronbach's alpha (Churchill, 1979), and were found to be much higher than the threshold (0.70) and revealed satisfactory levels, ranging from (0.776) to (0.921). These initial findings indicate that the eight scales are internally consistent and have acceptable reliability in their original form. After that, an exploratory factor analysis was performed to unearth and determine the questions or statements that appear to best measure each of the ten scales (Garson, 2008). The results which are reported in table (3) indicate that the items of each factor loaded significantly (≥ 0.50), ranging from (0.520) to (0.947) on their respective factors.

Factor Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	AVE	Multicollinearity
0.520-0.842	0.883	0.54	1.159
0.676-0.866	0.821	0.61	1.478
0.622-0.780	0.776	0.59	1.704
0.688-0.814	0.801	0.65	1.568
0.785-0.848	0.83	0.71	1.723
0.909-0.947	0.921	0.88	1.66
0.806-0.896	0.85	0.74	1.524

Table3: Reliability analysis, EFA, AVE and multicollinearity

However, multicollinearity was assessed using SPSS through evaluating the multicollinearity among all the variables. Multicollinearity can be detected by calculating the variance inflation factor (VIF) (Henseler *et al.* 2009). The table above, (table 3) shows that the highest value of VIF was (2.227), for emotional customer brand engagement. This is below the common cut-off point threshold of (5).

Regarding convergent validity, which measures the extent to which items on a scale are in theory linked (Harris *et al.*, 2010), it was assessed by observing the average variance extracted (AVE) index using Smart PLS2.0 (Wetzels *et al.*, 2009). Table3 shows that the AVE for all the eight scales exceeded the minimum threshold value of (0.5).

However, as far as ‘CBE’ and ‘Brand Loyalty’; are concerned, the study used "AMOS 19" to validate them as second-order constructs (Harris and Goode, 2004), (Table 3). The values of CMIN/DF were within the conventional range ($1.0 < \text{CMIN/DF} < 3.0$), and the values of other fit indices (e.g., CFI, IFI, TLI) were all ≥ 0.90 , indicating a satisfactory fit (table 4).

Construct	CMIN/DF	CFI	TLI	IFI	PCLOSE	RMSEA
CBE	2.474	0.964	0.94	0.95	0.402	0.065
Brand Loyalty	3.066	0.937	0.92	0.947	0.174	0.072

Table 4: Fit Measurements

Hypotheses Testing

The proposed framework of the current study was tested using a structural equation modelling SmartPLS 2.0. The results support H1 (Brand Involvement→CBE; $\beta=0.625$, $R^2=0.338$), H2 (CBE→brand loyalty; $\beta=0.440$, $R^2=0.375$); and H4 (Brand Involvement→brand loyalty; $\beta=0.314$, $R^2=0.375$). All relationships were significant at 0.001 (see table 5). The model also supported the mediating effect of CBE on the relationship between BI and brand loyalty. The results further indicate that CBE partially, rather than fully, mediates the relationship between BI and brand loyalty. This is because the path coefficient between BI and brand loyalty dropped from (0.625) to (0.388), but remained significant. The results reveal that the variances in the dependents variables that were explained by their predictors were either relatively moderate to high, supporting by that the integrated framework that the current study proposed (table 5).

Pathways	Path Coefficient	t-Statistics	R ²
Brand Involvement→CBE	0.625	0.001	0.34
CBE→Brand Loyalty	0.44	0.001	0.38
Brand Involvement→Brand Loyalty	0.314	0.001	0.38

Table 5: Hypotheses Testing

Discussion and Conclusions

This research adds to the growing body of knowledge on the concept of branding through examining the interrelationships between three focal constructs namely; brand involvement, customer brand engagement and brand loyalty, whose effect either had been examined in isolation, or had never been examined. It used a symbolic interactionism theory and developed a more comprehensive and integrated understanding of the nature of the relationship between these constructs. Therefore, this research makes a number of theoretical contributions to branding literature in general and loyalty in particular.

First and foremost, the extant literature on the concepts of BI and CBE discussed and theorized their effects on loyalty outcomes such as brand loyalty separately. However, no attempt was made, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, to show how these two concepts, which have become cornerstones in modern marketing, could be integrated to explain the consumer's psychological path in developing and generating higher levels of brand loyalty. Hence, through the use of symbolic interactionism theory, the current study showed that BI and CBE, which draw on relationship marketing theory and service dominant logic perspective, can be integrated to delineate the consumer's psychological path to brand loyalty. This may indicate that BI and CBE are not mutually exclusive and do not represent two paths to brand love, but rather, they are complementary to each other, and thus, they represent one path to achieving higher levels of brand loyalty. In other words, it is not an either/or situation to choose between them, but they may need to be seen as an integrated circuit that should not be broken.

Second, the framework that the current research developed and tested, indicate that higher levels of brand loyalty can be attained when the paths to that are developed via the brand's ability to provoke consumer interests with the brand (brand involvement) as well as its ability to stimulate the two-way interactions between the brand and the customer (*i.e.* CBE), which in turn, allows consumers to fulfill their self-definitional needs (inner and social self).

Third and last, in the path to developing brand love and brand loyalty, the study provides evidence on the nature of the interrelationships that CBE has with other constructs. As such, it responds to Hollebeek's (2011) call on the need to provide 'initial literature-based support' for the specific drivers of CBE and its interaction with other variables. For example, the findings indicate that there are some variations in the effect of BI on the individual dimensions of CBE. Such findings may initially confirm the view of Brodie *et al.* (2011) which suggests that CBE emerges at different levels of intensity over time and as polar low/high-intensity and short/ long-term affective attitudes directed toward brands.

Given that this research is the first, to the best of our knowledge, in examining the role of brand involvement, customer-brand engagement, in forming brand loyalty, future research can examine the following areas. First, this study was conducted in Middle Eastern culture; therefore, future research is encouraged to confirm the findings of the current study in other contexts (*e.g.*, Western culture). This in turn would lead to the provision of further evidence on the exact role of brand involvement and customer-brand engagement in generating higher levels of brand loyalty.

Managerial Implications

The insights that the findings of the current research offer to brand managers are threefold. First of all, the findings reveal that brand involvement and customer-brand engagement are meaningful consumers' psychological modes that are linked to a measurable strategic objective (*i.e.* brand love) and desirable post-consumption behavior (*i.e.* brand loyalty). As such, brand managers may find that improving and augmenting these aspects of their offerings increase consumers' intense emotional response and encourage desirable post-consumption behavior.

Second, brand managers need to go beyond brand awareness and focus on cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally stimulating brand-related activity, because a consumer may be well-aware of a certain brand but he/she does not have positive assessments of that brand. Brand managers also need to keep in mind that developing and maintaining love and loyalty towards the focal brand is a continuous process, which requires them to integrate their rational social exchange investment and investment on customer social interaction into their brand building.

Third, managers with budget constraints are strongly advised to focus specifically on designing and packaging techniques that embody what consumers believe in, create a great deal of personal meaning to consumers, allow consumers to have a strong sense of belonging to the brand, and make them feel that the brand is a part of them.

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