

BRAND LOVE IN THE DIGITAL ERA: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW ON CONSUMER-BRAND RELATIONSHIPS IN ONLINE PLATFORMS

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ABSTRACT

This study systematically reviews the development of brand love in the digital era by examining how online platforms reshape consumer-brand relationships. The review adopts a systematic literature review approach guided by PRISMA 2020 and synthesizes studies retrieved from major academic databases, particularly Scopus and Web of Science. The analysis focuses on the evolution of brand love research, its theoretical foundations, digital antecedents, relational mechanisms, behavioral outcomes, and emerging research gaps. The findings show that digital marketing, social media engagement, online brand communities, interactivity, user-generated content, and value co-creation have become important contexts for the formation and expression of brand love. Digital platforms extend brand love beyond a dyadic consumer-brand relationship by incorporating consumer-consumer, consumer-community, and technology-mediated interactions. The review also indicates that brand love is associated with outcomes such as loyalty, electronic word of mouth, online advocacy, community participation, brand defense, and co-creation. However, the literature remains fragmented across digital marketing, consumer engagement, online community, and emotional branding streams. Emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, virtual influencers, chatbots, and algorithmic personalization, also create new opportunities and challenges for understanding emotionally driven consumer-brand relationships. This study contributes by integrating these fragmented streams into a coherent perspective of brand love in digital environments and by identifying theoretical, contextual, and methodological directions for future research. The review offers useful implications for scholars and practitioners seeking to strengthen meaningful and enduring consumer-brand relationships in increasingly interactive online settings. In particular, future research should examine cross-platform differences, cultural variations, longitudinal relationship development, and authenticity in AI-mediated brand interactions.

Keywords: Brand love; consumer-brand relationship; digital marketing; online platforms; social media; online brand communities; systematic literature review; consumer engagement

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has substantially changed the ways in which consumers encounter, interact with, and develop relationships with brands. Consumer-brand interactions are no longer limited to physical consumption experiences, traditional advertising, or direct encounters with firms. Social media, online brand communities, digital content platforms, and interactive online environments now enable consumers to communicate continuously with brands and with other consumers, generate and share brand-related content, participate in online communities, and publicly express their brand preferences. Consequently, consumer-brand relationships have evolved from predominantly firm-controlled and transactional interactions into increasingly interactive, participatory, and socially embedded relationships.

The conceptual foundation for understanding these relationships can be traced to Fournier (1998), who argued that consumers can establish meaningful relationships with brands in ways that resemble interpersonal relationships. Rather than functioning merely as identifiable products or services, brands may become relationship partners that acquire emotional, symbolic, and identity-related significance in consumers' lives. This relational perspective has subsequently encouraged researchers to investigate various forms of consumer-brand relationships, including brand attachment, brand identification, brand trust, brand friendship, brand addiction, brand hate, and particularly brand love (Alvarez et al., 2023).

Brand love has emerged as one of the most important concepts for explaining intense positive consumer-brand relationships. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) initially defined brand love as the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer develops toward a particular brand. Their findings demonstrated that brand love is associated with desirable outcomes such as stronger brand loyalty and positive word of mouth. Batra et al. (2012) further expanded the concept by demonstrating that brand love represents a complex relationship involving self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship orientation, favorable attitudes, attitude certainty, and anticipated separation distress. Thus, brand love represents considerably more than satisfaction or simple brand preference; it reflects a deeper emotional and relational connection between consumers and brands.

Although brand love was initially conceptualized primarily around consumer experiences with products and brands, the digital environment has introduced new conditions under which such emotional relationships are created and maintained. Digital platforms allow consumers to interact with brands more frequently and directly, thereby increasing opportunities for emotional connection, participation, identification, and relationship development. Digital interactivity is particularly important because consumers can react to brand content, participate in conversations, communicate with firms, share experiences, and become active contributors to brand-related meaning. Recent meta-analytic evidence demonstrates that digital brand interactivity can influence cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses, including brand experience, engagement, trust, emotional attachment, loyalty, and purchase-related behavior (Fan et al., 2025).

Social media marketing represents one increasingly important source of brand love. Through entertaining, informative, interactive, customized, and socially relevant content, brands can develop relationships with consumers beyond conventional promotional communication. Nurhadi et al. (2025), for example, found that social media marketing

activities contributed to brand love among young consumers, with brand awareness and brand image serving as important mechanisms in this process. Such findings suggest that contemporary brand love may emerge not only from direct product experiences but also from digitally mediated communication and repeated online exposure.

Online brand communities further transform the nature of brand love by introducing social relationships among consumers into the consumer-brand relationship. Lee and Hsieh (2022) showed that engagement within social media-based brand communities can contribute to stronger brand love. Similarly, research on social media brand communities indicates that digital communities provide environments in which consumers interact, exchange information, develop social identification, and strengthen their relationships with brands (Santos et al., 2022). More recent studies have extended this perspective by demonstrating that emotional bonds among community members can strengthen attachment to communities and ultimately contribute to stronger brand relationships (Sanz-Blas, 2026).

Consequently, brand love in the digital era may no longer be adequately conceptualized as a purely dyadic relationship between an individual consumer and a brand. Online platforms create a more complex relational ecosystem involving consumer-brand, consumer-consumer, consumer-community, and consumer-content interactions. Consumers can become followers, community members, content creators, reviewers, advocates, and co-creators rather than remaining passive recipients of brand communication. Brand love can therefore both result from digital engagement and motivate further participation in digital brand activities. This change also expands the possible consequences of brand love. Traditional brand-love studies have predominantly associated the construct with loyalty, positive word of mouth, and resistance to negative information (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In online environments, however, emotionally attached consumers may engage in electronic word of mouth, online advocacy, community participation, content sharing, user-generated content, brand defense, and value co-creation. For example, Mujahid and Khandai (2025) demonstrated the relevance of brand love for facilitating co-creation within online brand communities. Thus, digital environments may transform brand love from an individual emotional response into a relational resource that motivates active participation in the broader brand ecosystem.

Despite growing interest in these phenomena, the knowledge base remains fragmented. Previous systematic reviews have provided important foundations. Gumparthi and Patra (2020) reviewed 76 studies on brand love and mapped major themes, theoretical perspectives, methodologies, antecedents, and consequences. Alvarez et al. (2023) subsequently positioned brand love within a broader systematic classification of consumer-brand relationships. Meanwhile, Santos et al. (2022) synthesized research on consumer engagement in social media brand communities. Although these reviews substantially advance the literature, they were designed to address either brand love broadly, consumer-brand relationship types broadly, or digital consumer engagement, rather than systematically integrating brand love specifically within the changing architecture of online platforms.

At the same time, recent empirical research is increasingly distributed across separate domains such as social media marketing, digital brand interactivity, online brand communities, brand engagement, community attachment, electronic word of mouth, and co-creation (Fan et al., 2025; Mujahid & Khandai, 2025; Nurhadi et al., 2025; Sanz-Blas, 2026). This fragmentation makes it difficult to determine how digital-platform characteristics collectively reshape the antecedents, mechanisms, and outcomes of brand love. It also limits understanding of whether existing conceptualizations of brand love developed largely before

the maturation of contemporary interactive platforms are sufficient for explaining today's digitally mediated consumer-brand relationships.

Accordingly, this study conducts a systematic literature review entitled "Brand Love in the Digital Era: A Systematic Literature Review on Consumer-Brand Relationships in Online Platforms." The review aims to synthesize and organize existing knowledge at the intersection of brand love, consumer-brand relationships, and digital platforms. Specifically, it maps the intellectual development of the field, identifies dominant theoretical foundations and methodological approaches, synthesizes the digital antecedents and relational mechanisms associated with brand love, examines its consequences for online consumer behavior, and identifies underexplored areas for future research. By doing so, this study shifts the discussion from the question of whether consumers can love brands toward a more contemporary question: how digital platforms create, strengthen, express, and potentially transform brand love in contemporary consumer-brand relationships.

Although brand love has accumulated a substantial body of knowledge, four interrelated gaps remain evident. First, there is a contextual gap. Existing systematic reviews have generally treated brand love across product categories and consumption settings without making digital platforms the primary unit of synthesis (Gumparthi & Patra, 2020). At the same time, reviews focusing on social media and online brand communities have emphasized consumer engagement rather than brand love as their central relational construct (Santos et al., 2022). Consequently, knowledge located specifically at the intersection of brand love and online platforms remains dispersed.

Second, there is a conceptual fragmentation gap. Studies use multiple digital antecedents, including social media marketing, interactivity, online engagement, community identification, digital brand experience, social interactions, and co-creation. These factors are usually examined separately, creating limited understanding of how they can be organized into an integrated explanation of digital brand love.

Third, there is a relational gap. Classical consumer-brand relationship research largely conceptualizes the relationship between an individual consumer and a brand (Fournier, 1998). Digital platforms introduce consumer-consumer and consumer-community relationships that may shape consumers' emotional connections with brands. Recent evidence concerning member-to-member emotional bonds and online community attachment demonstrates the increasing importance of these networked relationships (Sanz-Blas, 2026). Nevertheless, these relational mechanisms have not yet been systematically integrated into the broader brand-love literature.

Fourth, there is a theoretical and methodological fragmentation gap. Research employs diverse theoretical perspectives, including consumer-brand relationship theory, attachment theory, self-congruity theory, social identity theory, social capital theory, Stimulus-Organism-Response theory, and associative network memory theory. Studies also differ substantially in industries, countries, populations, platforms, measures, and analytical approaches. An integrative review is therefore needed to clarify which theories and methodologies dominate the literature and which areas remain theoretically and methodologically underdeveloped. The novelty of this study lies in reframing brand love through the lens of digital-platform-based consumer-brand relationships. Rather than conducting another general review of brand love, the study systematically examines how interactive online environments alter the processes through which brand love is formed, experienced, expressed, and translated into consumer behavior.

The review integrates previously fragmented streams of research—including social media marketing, online brand communities, digital interactivity, consumer engagement, electronic

word of mouth, community attachment, and co-creation – around brand love as the central relational construct.

A second contribution is the proposed movement from a traditional dyadic consumer-brand perspective toward a networked digital relationship perspective. Under this perspective, brand love may emerge not only from direct consumer-brand interaction but also from relationships with other consumers, online communities, brand-generated content, and participatory digital experiences.

The systematic review addresses the following research questions:

1. RQ1: How has research on brand love in online platforms evolved in terms of publication trends, theoretical foundations, research contexts, and methodological approaches?
2. RQ2: What digital-platform characteristics and antecedents contribute to the development of brand love?
3. RQ3: What psychological and relational mechanisms explain how online consumer-brand interactions develop into brand love?
4. RQ4: What behavioral and relational outcomes are associated with brand love in digital environments?
5. RQ5: What theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps remain in the literature, and what future research directions can advance understanding of brand love in online platforms?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer-Brand Relationships

The study of consumer-brand relationships originates from the recognition that consumers do not interact with brands merely as functional market offerings but may develop meaningful psychological and emotional relationships with them. Fournier (1998) provided a foundational contribution by demonstrating that brands can function as relationship partners and that consumer-brand relationships may vary considerably in their strength, meaning, and emotional characteristics. Her work introduced the concept of brand relationship quality and established an important theoretical basis for examining emotional bonds between consumers and brands.

The consumer-brand relationship perspective represents a transition from transactional marketing toward relational marketing. Rather than focusing exclusively on purchase behavior, price, and functional product characteristics, relationship-oriented marketing emphasizes attachment, identification, commitment, engagement, trust, intimacy, and other psychological connections between consumers and brands. This perspective is particularly relevant because consumers may integrate brands into their identities, lifestyles, memories, communities, and social relationships.

Subsequent research has expanded consumer-brand relationship theory by identifying multiple relationship forms. Alvarez et al. (2023), in a systematic review of consumer-brand relationship types, identified brand love, brand hate, communal relationships, friendships, and brand addiction as relationship forms that have received repeated empirical attention. Their review confirms that brand love has become one of the most extensively developed concepts within the broader consumer-brand relationship literature.

The increasing importance of brand love is particularly relevant in contemporary digital environments. Unlike traditional brand relationships, which were primarily developed

through product consumption, conventional advertising, or direct service encounters, digital platforms allow relationships to develop continuously through interactions, content consumption, community participation, electronic word of mouth, influencer communication, and consumer-generated content. Consequently, digital technologies have changed the processes through which consumer–brand relationships are initiated, maintained, expressed, and strengthened.

Conceptual Development of Brand Love

Brand love represents an intense positive emotional relationship between a consumer and a particular brand. Early research conceptualized brand love as a passionate emotional attachment experienced by satisfied consumers. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) demonstrated that brand love extends beyond satisfaction and is associated with important relational outcomes, particularly brand loyalty and positive word of mouth. They further found that consumers may develop stronger love toward brands that provide hedonic and self-expressive benefits. The concept was subsequently developed by Albert et al. (2008), who investigated how consumers understand love toward brands. Their research identified multiple dimensions characterizing this relationship, including passion, duration, self-congruity, dreams, memories, pleasure, attraction, uniqueness, and trust. These findings demonstrated that brand love should not be regarded as a simple positive evaluation but rather as a multidimensional relational phenomenon involving emotional, symbolic, cognitive, and experiential elements. A major theoretical development was provided by Batra et al. (2012). Based initially on qualitative investigations of consumers' lived experiences, the authors conceptualized brand love as a higher-order construct consisting of seven core elements: self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors, positive emotional connection, a long-term relationship orientation, positive overall attitude valence, attitude certainty and confidence, and anticipated separation distress. Their findings further indicated that brand love can contribute to loyalty, positive word of mouth, and resistance to negative information concerning the brand.

These conceptualizations indicate that brand love differs from related concepts such as brand satisfaction, brand attachment, brand trust, and brand loyalty. Satisfaction principally represents an evaluation of consumption experiences, whereas love involves a deeper and more enduring emotional relationship. Similarly, attachment reflects emotional bonding, while brand love may incorporate attachment together with passion, identity integration, positive affect, and willingness to maintain the relationship.

Rauschnabel and Ahuvia (2014) further demonstrated that anthropomorphism can strengthen brand love because consumers may perceive brands as possessing human-like characteristics. Their findings emphasize mechanisms including self-extension and self-congruence, suggesting that consumers are more likely to establish intense emotional relationships with brands that become psychologically integrated into their identities.

However, the literature has not always conceptualized brand love consistently. Gumparthi and Patra's (2020) systematic review of 76 brand-love studies identified considerable diversity in theoretical perspectives, measurement approaches, antecedents, and consequences. Similarly, Rahman et al. (2021), after reviewing studies examining causal relationships surrounding brand love, identified more than 150 differently named variables associated with its antecedents, components, and consequences. Such conceptual fragmentation illustrates both the richness of the brand-love literature and the continuing need for integrative research.

Brand Love in the Digital Era

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed how consumers interact with brands. Social media, online communities, e-commerce platforms, social commerce, mobile applications, and other interactive technologies allow consumers to maintain continuous contact with brands beyond traditional purchasing situations.

This transformation is important for brand love because emotional relationships require interaction, experience, identification, and repeated relational encounters. Digital environments provide multiple opportunities for these processes. Consumers can follow brands, comment on brand content, communicate directly with organizations, share experiences with other consumers, participate in online communities, produce brand-related content, and publicly demonstrate attachment to favorite brands.

Saikia and Bhattacharjee's review of digital consumer engagement emphasizes that social networking technologies have made communication and relationship formation between consumers and brands increasingly interactive. Likewise, Santos et al. (2022), reviewing 134 studies on social media brand communities, show that social media communities have become major environments for consumer engagement and relational development. Their review also demonstrates the importance of social identification and uses-and-gratifications perspectives in explaining digital consumer engagement.

Digital platforms therefore transform brand love from an essentially consumer-to-brand relationship into a networked phenomenon involving interactions among consumers, brands, communities, influencers, and digital content. This is an important conceptual shift. Brand love in digital environments may be stimulated not only by product experience but also by interactions that occur around the brand.

Social Media Marketing and Brand Love

Social media marketing has emerged as an important mechanism through which organizations create and sustain emotional consumer-brand relationships. Social media enables brands to communicate frequently, deliver entertaining and informative content, personalize messages, and invite consumers to participate in two-way interactions.

Recent empirical evidence demonstrates this relationship. Research involving young consumers interacting with Indonesian domestic brands found that social media marketing activities significantly strengthened brand love, with brand awareness and brand image helping explain the relationship. The study illustrates how digital communication can convert brand exposure into stronger emotional connections, particularly among digitally active young consumers.

Social media advertising characteristics may also contribute to emotional brand relationships. Hanaysha and Alhyasat (2025), for example, investigated advertising characteristics including interactivity, entertainment, informativeness, and perceived relevance in relation to perceived **value** and brand love. Such research demonstrates that the quality of digital interaction rather than simply the presence of brands on social media may shape emotional responses.

This development indicates that brand love is increasingly embedded in digitally mediated experiences. Consumers do not simply evaluate what a brand sells; they evaluate how the brand communicates, entertains, responds, interacts, and represents itself within their digital environment.

Online Brand Communities and Brand Love

Online brand communities constitute another major environment through which brand love develops. These communities bring together consumers who share interests, experiences, knowledge, and emotional connections concerning particular brands.

Lee and Hsieh (2022) demonstrated that engagement in social-media-based brand communities contributes to brand love. Their research showed that brand identification and social capital facilitate community engagement, which subsequently strengthens consumers' emotional relationships with brands and promotes brand-related information sharing.

More recent research indicates that relationships among community members themselves may be central to this process. Sanz-Blas and colleagues' study of online brand-community participants found that emotional bonds among members contribute to community attachment and brand-community love, thereby strengthening customer-brand relationships. This extends conventional thinking about brand love by showing that affection toward a brand can also be socially constructed through interactions among brand-community members.

Accordingly, online communities suggest that digital brand love is not exclusively dyadic. Traditional consumer-brand relationship models primarily emphasize the relationship between one consumer and one brand. Digital communities create a more complex structure involving consumer-brand, consumer-consumer, and consumer-community relationships. This social dimension represents one of the most important developments in contemporary brand-love research.

Digital Consumer Engagement and Brand Love

Consumer engagement is closely related to the development and consequences of brand love. Digital engagement may include consuming brand content, liking or reacting to content, commenting, sharing information, posting reviews, creating user-generated content, participating in communities, recommending brands, and interacting directly with brands.

The relationship can potentially operate in both directions. Digital engagement may facilitate brand love through repeated positive interactions, while consumers who already love a brand may subsequently engage more strongly with it online.

Research on younger consumers has shown that online brand engagement and consumer-brand identification can function as antecedents of brand love. Brand love subsequently contributes to consumers' willingness to participate in value co-creation and to pay premium prices for favored brands.

Recent research continues to support this reciprocal relationship. Studies of online brand communities have examined brand love as an important mechanism linking community participation with consumer co-creation, while other studies suggest that brand love can motivate consumer citizenship and active participation in social media environments.

The digital environment therefore expands the behavioral consequences traditionally associated with brand love. Earlier research predominantly emphasized loyalty, repurchase behavior, and word of mouth. Digital platforms add behaviors such as content creation, online advocacy, community participation, value co-creation, electronic word of mouth, and public displays of brand attachment.

Interactivity as a Foundation of Digital Brand Relationships

One of the defining characteristics distinguishing digital platforms from traditional media is interactivity. Traditional marketing communication was primarily firm-generated

and unidirectional. Digital platforms permit consumers and brands to respond to one another dynamically.

A recent meta-analysis synthesizing 144 samples with 57,952 participants found that digital brand interactivity produces important cognitive, affective, and behavioral consumer responses. The analysis indicates that brand experience, engagement, attitudes, trust, and emotional attachment play important roles in translating interactivity into loyalty and purchase-related outcomes.

This perspective is particularly relevant to brand love because emotional consumer-brand relationships are likely to depend increasingly on perceptions that brands are responsive, authentic, accessible, and socially present.

Digital technologies may therefore change the role of brands from symbolic objects toward interactive relationship partners. This development reinforces Fournier's (1998) original conceptualization of brands as relationship partners while extending it into technologically mediated environments.

Antecedents of Brand Love in Online Platforms

Existing literature identifies a wide range of antecedents of brand love. Traditional research emphasizes brand experience, perceived quality, satisfaction, self-congruity, symbolic benefits, brand personality, brand trust, identification, and anthropomorphism.

Within digital environments, additional antecedents have become increasingly important. These include social media marketing activities, platform interactivity, online engagement, digital content, electronic word of mouth, influencer communication, community identification, social capital, user-generated content, and relationships among members of brand communities.

The coexistence of traditional and digital antecedents indicates that brand love in contemporary markets cannot be explained exclusively through product-centered theories. Brand love increasingly emerges through an ecosystem of experiences distributed across products, services, platforms, communities, and digital actors.

This observation provides an important basis for conducting an SLR specifically focused on the digital era.

Consequences of Brand Love in Digital Environments

Brand love produces significant consequences for consumer behavior. Foundational studies associate brand love with loyalty and positive word of mouth (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), while Batra et al. (2012) additionally highlight resistance to negative information.

In online environments, however, the consequences are broader. Brand love can contribute to online engagement, information sharing, brand advocacy, electronic word of mouth, value co-creation, community participation, willingness to pay premium prices, consumer citizenship behavior, and user-generated content.

These outcomes have important implications because digitally engaged consumers can become active participants in brand value creation. Consumers who love brands may voluntarily defend them, recommend them, create content, assist other customers, participate in online communities, and amplify brand messages.

Brand love therefore operates not simply as an attitudinal outcome but as a potential mechanism transforming emotionally attached consumers into active brand advocates and co-creators

Theoretical Perspectives in Brand Love Research

Brand-love research draws from multiple theoretical perspectives. Consumer-brand relationship theory provides the broadest foundation by explaining brands as relational partners. Attachment theory explains emotional bonds and separation distress, while self-congruity and self-expansion perspectives explain why consumers incorporate favored brands into their identities.

In digital research, additional theories have become prominent. Social identity theory explains identification with online brand communities, social capital theory explains relational resources developed among community members, and the Stimulus-Organism-Response framework has increasingly been applied to explain how digital marketing stimuli generate internal emotional states such as brand love and subsequently influence behavioral responses. This theoretical diversity is valuable but also contributes to fragmentation. Reviews of consumer engagement in social media environments similarly demonstrate considerable diversity in conceptualizations, theories, and methodological approaches.

A systematic literature review can therefore provide value by mapping which theoretical perspectives dominate brand-love studies conducted in digital contexts and identifying theories that remain underutilized.

Several previous reviews have contributed substantially to understanding brand love. Gumparthi and Patra (2020) systematically examined 76 brand-love articles and identified major themes, methodologies, variables, and theoretical perspectives. Rahman et al. (2021) synthesized the broader causal network of brand love and identified a highly fragmented set of antecedents and consequences. Alvarez et al. (2023) positioned brand love within the broader taxonomy of consumer-brand relationship types. More recently, Setiyati et al. (2025) reviewed factors affecting brand love and its implications for marketing strategy. However, these reviews do not primarily organize brand-love research around the transformation produced by digital platforms. At the same time, systematic reviews of digital consumer engagement, social-media brand communities, digital content, and customer engagement demonstrate rapidly expanding but partially fragmented digital relationship research. Consequently, a specific research gap exists at the intersection of these two streams.

There remains a need to systematically integrate research examining how brand love is created, experienced, expressed, and transformed across online platforms and how digital interactions reshape the traditional consumer-brand relationship.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to synthesize existing knowledge concerning brand love and consumer-brand relationships in digital and online platform environments. The SLR approach was selected because research on brand love in digital contexts is distributed across several related streams, including social media marketing, online brand communities, consumer engagement, digital interactivity, electronic word of mouth, and value co-creation. A systematic approach therefore enables these fragmented findings to be identified, evaluated, classified, and integrated in a transparent and replicable manner. Compared with traditional narrative reviews, an SLR applies an explicit research protocol for identifying, screening, selecting, and synthesizing relevant studies, thereby reducing potential selection bias and providing a more rigorous basis for identifying established knowledge, inconsistencies, and future research opportunities (Snyder, 2019;

Tranfield et al., 2003). The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020) guidelines developed by Page et al. (2021). PRISMA 2020 provides a structured framework for documenting the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion of studies. Although PRISMA was originally developed primarily for systematic reviews in health-related research, its principles of transparency, systematic screening, and reproducibility are increasingly applicable to management, marketing, and business research.

Review Protocol

The review process was conducted through a series of systematic stages beginning with the formulation of the research questions, followed by the identification of relevant literature, screening and application of eligibility criteria, extraction and coding of relevant information, and synthesis and interpretation of the selected studies. This procedure is consistent with established systematic review principles that emphasize transparent planning, comprehensive literature searching, structured study selection, and systematic evidence synthesis (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). The review was guided by five research questions focusing on the development of brand love research in online platforms, the digital-platform characteristics and antecedents associated with brand love, the psychological and relational mechanisms underlying the development of brand love, the behavioral and relational outcomes resulting from brand love in digital environments, and the theoretical, contextual, and methodological gaps that remain in the literature. These research questions provided the analytical direction for the study and ensured that the review moved beyond descriptive reporting toward a more integrated understanding of brand love in contemporary digital consumer-brand relationships.

Database Selection

Relevant publications were identified primarily through Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). These databases were selected because of their extensive multidisciplinary coverage of peer-reviewed academic literature in marketing, consumer behavior, business, management, information systems, and digital communication. The use of more than one major academic database helped increase the breadth of literature coverage and reduce the possibility of omitting relevant studies that might be indexed in only one database. The search covered publications available from the earliest indexed records in the selected databases until February 2026. No restrictive starting year was initially imposed because the review sought to capture both the foundational development of brand-love research and its subsequent evolution within digital and online platform environments. This broad temporal scope was considered important for tracing how the concept of brand love has progressed from traditional consumer-brand relationship research toward increasingly interactive, technology-mediated, and platform-based forms of engagement.

Search Strategy

The search strategy was developed by combining keywords related to brand love, consumer-brand relationships, and digital platforms. Boolean operators such as AND and OR, together with quotation marks and truncation symbols where appropriate, were used to broaden and refine the search results. The principal search terms included combinations such as "brand love" with "social media," "online platform," "digital platform," "online brand community," "social networking site," "digital engagement," "online engagement," "e-commerce," "social commerce," "digital interactivity," and "online consumer-brand

relationship." Additional searches combined "brand love" with related concepts such as "consumer engagement," "brand engagement," "online community," "electronic word of mouth," "eWOM," "co-creation," and "user-generated content." The searches were conducted within article titles, abstracts, and keywords whenever supported by the respective databases. This strategy was intentionally designed to be sufficiently broad to capture studies in which brand love appeared as an antecedent, outcome, mediator, moderator, or central relational construct within a digital context, while remaining sufficiently focused on the study's objective of understanding consumer-brand relationships in online platforms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 presents the keyword co-occurrence network generated using VOSviewer, illustrating the intellectual structure and thematic relationships among the keywords identified in the reviewed literature. In this visualization, the size of each node reflects the frequency of occurrence of a keyword, while the thickness of the connecting lines indicates the strength of co-occurrence between keywords. The distance between nodes represents their degree of relatedness, with more closely positioned terms indicating stronger conceptual association.

The network shows that "digital marketing" is the most prominent and centrally positioned keyword, indicating that it functions as the principal thematic hub connecting several research streams. Its central position and relatively large node size suggest that digital marketing is frequently discussed together with other concepts and plays an important role in integrating the broader literature.

Several thematic clusters can be identified from the visualization. The red cluster, centered on *digital marketing*, is associated with terms such as research, article, and artificial intelligence. This cluster reflects the emerging technological orientation of digital marketing research, particularly the growing integration of artificial intelligence into marketing studies. The linkage between *digital marketing* and *artificial intelligence* suggests that researchers are increasingly examining how advanced technologies influence contemporary marketing practices and consumer interactions.

The blue cluster is represented primarily by the terms marketing and strategy. The strong connection between these keywords indicates that digital marketing is not treated merely as an operational communication tool but increasingly as part of a broader strategic marketing orientation. The relationship between *marketing*, *strategy*, and *digital marketing* suggests that scholars are interested in how digital approaches are incorporated into organizational and brand strategies.

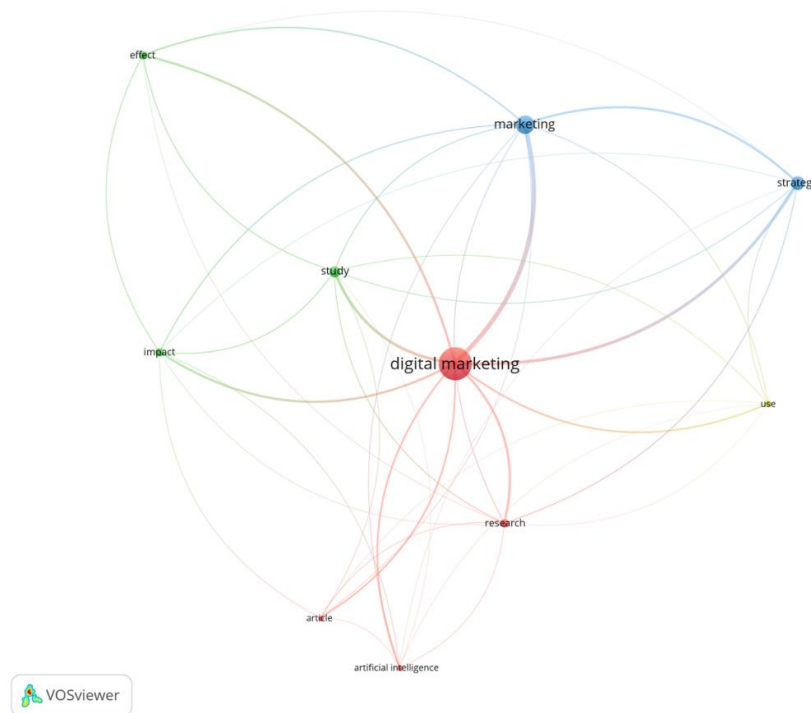
The green cluster contains the terms effect, study, and impact. These keywords indicate a strong empirical orientation within the literature, with many studies examining the effects and impacts of digital marketing practices. The presence of these terms suggests that a considerable proportion of the research focuses on evaluating the consequences of digital marketing activities on marketing-related or consumer-related outcomes.

A smaller thematic stream is represented by the keyword use, which is connected to *digital marketing*, *marketing*, and *strategy*. This may indicate interest in the practical application or utilization of digital marketing tools and platforms. Although this theme is less dominant than the others, its connections suggest that implementation-related issues remain part of the broader research landscape.

Overall, the network demonstrates that the literature is structured around three broad areas: digital marketing and emerging technology, marketing strategy, and empirical examination of marketing effects and impacts. The centrality of *digital marketing* suggests that it serves as the connecting theme among technological, strategic, and outcome-oriented research streams.

For the present review on brand love and consumer-brand relationships in online platforms, the visualization also reveals an important research gap. Terms directly related to brand love, consumer-brand relationships, emotional attachment, online brand communities, engagement, and loyalty do not appear as dominant nodes in this network. This suggests that although digital marketing has attracted substantial attention, its role in developing deeper emotional relationships between consumers and brands may remain comparatively fragmented or underexplored. Consequently, the study provides an opportunity to extend the literature beyond general digital marketing outcomes by specifically examining how online platforms contribute to the formation and consequences of brand love.

Figure 1. Network Visualization



DISCUSSION

Figure 1 shows that digital marketing is the most dominant and centrally positioned keyword in the network. This indicates that the reviewed literature is strongly concentrated on digital marketing as the main context for understanding contemporary consumer behavior and brand relationships. Its connections with *marketing*, *strategy*, *effect*, *impact*, *research*, and *artificial intelligence* suggest that digital marketing research is increasingly integrated with strategic, technological, and outcome-oriented perspectives.

This finding is consistent with previous studies showing that digital platforms have transformed the way consumers interact with brands. Fournier (1998) originally emphasized that brands can function as relationship partners, while later research demonstrated that emotional relationships with brands can develop into brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006;

Batra et al., 2012). In digital environments, this relationship becomes more dynamic because consumers can continuously interact with brands through social media, online communities, digital content, and other interactive platforms. Therefore, the central position of digital marketing in Figure 1 reflects the increasing importance of online interaction in shaping consumer-brand relationships.

The strong relationship between digital marketing, marketing, and strategy also indicates that digital marketing is increasingly treated as a strategic tool rather than merely a communication channel. This is supported by Nurhadi et al. (2025), who found that social media marketing activities can strengthen brand love among young consumers. Their study suggests that digital communication may contribute not only to brand awareness and image but also to deeper emotional connections. Similarly, Lee and Hsieh (2022) showed that engagement in social media-based brand communities can strengthen brand relationships and brand love. These findings indicate that digital marketing strategies can play an important role in developing long-term relational outcomes.

The appearance of keywords such as effect and impact further suggests that much of the literature focuses on evaluating the consequences of digital marketing activities. This is consistent with earlier brand-love research, which links brand love with loyalty, positive word of mouth, and resistance to negative information (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In more recent digital contexts, these outcomes have expanded to include online advocacy, engagement, community participation, and co-creation. Mujahid and Khandai (2025), for example, found that brand love can encourage consumers to participate more actively in value co-creation within online brand communities.

Another important finding is the presence of artificial intelligence as an emerging theme. Although its node is relatively smaller, its connection with digital marketing indicates the growing role of technology in shaping consumer experiences. This development is relevant to brand-love research because advanced digital technologies can personalize consumer interactions and make brands appear more responsive and human-like. Rauschnabel and Ahuvia (2014) showed that anthropomorphism can strengthen brand love by encouraging consumers to perceive brands as more human and relatable. The increasing use of AI, chatbots, virtual assistants, and personalized digital communication may therefore create new mechanisms through which emotional brand relationships can develop. Overall, Figure 1 suggests that the current literature is primarily structured around digital marketing, strategic application, impact assessment, and emerging technology. However, concepts such as brand love, emotional attachment, and consumer-brand relationships are not highly dominant in the visible network. This supports the research gap identified by Gumparthi and Patra (2020) and Alvarez et al. (2023), who highlighted the fragmented nature of brand-love and consumer-brand relationship research. Therefore, the present study contributes by integrating digital marketing research with the literature on emotional consumer-brand relationships, particularly by examining how online platforms facilitate the development and expression of brand love.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

This systematic literature review concludes that brand love is becoming increasingly important in understanding consumer-brand relationships in the digital era. The development of social media, online brand communities, digital marketing, and interactive technologies has transformed consumer-brand relationships from predominantly transactional interactions into more continuous, participatory, and emotionally connected relationships. The review shows that digital marketing is a dominant theme in the literature and is closely associated with marketing strategy, consumer interaction, technological development, and impact assessment. Digital platforms provide consumers with opportunities to communicate with brands, participate in online communities, share experiences, create content, and engage in co-creation activities. These interactions can strengthen emotional connections and contribute to the development of brand love.

The findings also indicate that brand love in digital environments can generate broader behavioral outcomes than those traditionally associated with consumer-brand relationships. In addition to loyalty and positive word of mouth, brand love may encourage online advocacy, community participation, content sharing, brand defense, and value co-creation. This suggests that consumers who develop strong emotional relationships with brands can become active participants in the brand ecosystem.

At the same time, the literature remains relatively fragmented. Research has often examined digital marketing, consumer engagement, online communities, interactivity, and brand love as separate streams. Therefore, a more integrated understanding is needed to explain how digital experiences contribute to the formation, expression, and consequences of brand love. Another important development is the increasing role of artificial intelligence and technology-driven interaction. AI-based communication, personalization, virtual influencers, chatbots, and algorithmic recommendations are likely to create new forms of consumer-brand interaction. These developments may significantly influence how consumers perceive, interact with, and emotionally connect with brands.

Brand love in the digital era should be understood as a dynamic and multidimensional relationship shaped by digital interaction, consumer participation, online communities, technological experiences, and emotional connection. Digital platforms therefore provide an important environment in which brand love can be developed, strengthened, and expressed through various forms of consumer behavior.

Future research should examine brand love across different digital platforms because consumer experiences may vary between social media, e-commerce, social commerce, online communities, and mobile applications. Comparative studies across platforms may provide deeper insights into how particular digital characteristics contribute to emotional consumer-brand relationships. Future studies should also investigate emerging technologies, especially artificial intelligence, virtual influencers, chatbots, personalization systems, and immersive digital environments. These technologies may create new opportunities for emotional connection but may also raise concerns related to authenticity, privacy, and consumer trust. Methodologically, future research should employ more diverse approaches. Longitudinal studies would be useful for understanding how brand love develops over time, while qualitative research could provide richer insights into consumers' emotional experiences. Mixed-method studies may also help combine statistical relationships with deeper interpretations of consumer behavior.

Further research should also examine differences across countries, cultures, generations, industries, and consumer groups. Such comparisons may help explain why brand love develops differently across cultural and market contexts.

Finally, researchers should clearly distinguish brand love from related concepts such as brand attachment, consumer engagement, brand identification, brand trust, and loyalty. This distinction is important because frequent digital interaction does not always indicate a deep emotional relationship with a brand.

For practitioners, the findings suggest that firms should move beyond focusing only on digital reach, clicks, likes, and short-term engagement. Greater attention should be given to authentic communication, meaningful interaction, responsive online communities, personalized experiences, and opportunities for consumers to participate actively in brand-related activities. These practices can help strengthen long-term consumer-brand relationships in the digital environment.

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