What Brands Do Consumers Love? - A Study of Fashion Brands and Food Brands

Exposé

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European Master in Business Studies

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What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

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List of Abbreviations
BRQ – Brand Relationship Quality
WOM – Word Of Mouth

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Abstract

Title: What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

Keywords: love, brand love, categories of brands, differences, food brands, fashion brands

Background: The concept of brand love claims that consumers feel a feeling of ‘love’ towards brands and this feeling can be considered similar to the feeling of love we feel towards people. Even though the definition of ‘love’ remains debatable, the general notion of romance is considered when we talk about brand love. Brand love is comparatively a new field of study and one can see that not many studies have been carried out in this area. This, therefore, makes the scope of study in this field quite vast. The studies that have been carried out are mostly in the direction of proving whether brand love exists or not and some also show differences in this concept when applied to different cultures. This study, thus, can be seen as a step forward.

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to carry this concept of brand love a step further and see if there are any differences in it if we look at different categories of brands. Studying all categories of brands is not feasible for one study and comparison among all would be next to impossible, therefore for this study, two categories of brands will be compared; fashion brands and food brands. The reason for choosing these two categories is further explained in the description.

Method: Mixed methodology is applied to collect data. Online questionnaires will be sent out which will generate more qualitative data in the form of text. As this study does not take into account cultural impacts, the whole world population from the age of 15 to 75 is considered as our sample.
1. Introduction

There is no one agreed definition of ‘love’ and many schools of thought present different definitions. As Whang, Florida and Allen put it in their article ‘Falling in love with a product: the structure of a romantic consumer-product relationship’ - “Love is an outcome of bi-directional interaction between two partners, yet its highly dynamic interactivity makes it challenging for researchers to study.” As love is seen to be interpersonal, it raises a question whether love towards products and brands can be romantic even if it’s not towards another human being?

Branden (1980) define love as "The origin of our desire to love lies in our profound need to value, to find things in the world which we can care about, can feel excited and inspired by. It is our values that tie us to the world and that motivate us to go on living. Every action is taken for the purpose of gaining or protecting something we believe will benefit our life or enhance our experience" (p.67).

From this definition we can see that the concept of romantic love is not only restricted towards other human beings. (Whang, Florida & Allen, 2004) Therefore when brand love is discussed, it refers to the romantic feelings people may feel towards products/brands. Different viewpoints exist and many definitions have been given of this concept, which is further described in the theoretical background section.

In the article 'When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions', Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) carried out an exploratory research to find out whether love in a romantic way exists between consumers and brands. They based their study on social psychology’s definition of love, which applies the relationship paradigm. An internet study was carried out which didn't include the words ‘love’ or ‘liking’ and the attitude of consumers towards the brands they mentioned were studied. The conclusion of this research was proving that this kind of love do exists between consumers and brands. Albert (2009) carried out another study ‘The feeling of love toward a brand: concept and measurement’ which was focused towards understanding the concept in more detail and development of new scale to measure brand love.

This study is inspired from their work of 2008. It can be seen as an extension, being based on their findings. As they proved romantic feelings towards brands exist, this study will try to find out what are those brands that consumers feel these feelings towards. Can they be towards brands of any category? Are there any specific categories?
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In order for this research to be more useful and applicable, I narrowed down the research to two categories of brands and decided to compare fashion brands and food brands. Fashion has many definitions, some of them are:

1) “Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles” (Svendsen, 2010)
2) “...represents something special and striking, while at the same time he feels inwardly supported by persons who are striving for the same thing…. It is peculiarly characteristic of fashion that it renders possible a social obedience, which at the same time is a form of individual differentiation” (Simmel, 2001)
3) “signifies union with those in the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, and, uno actu, the exclusion of all other groups” (Simmel, 2001)

Food on the other hand is a simple and basic need, which we satisfy using various and different brands.

The reason for choosing these two categories is when buying both these categories of brands reflects something about the person. As we can see from the various definitions of fashion, it is seen as something that differentiates one from the rest or in other words something which creates one’s identity. As Noesjirwan and Crawford (1982) put it “clothing is primarily a means of communicating, not personal identity, but social identity” concluding that “clothing is symbolic of that [social] identity and the values espoused by the group. The same values serve as a yardstick for judging the clothing worn by others and the social identity symbolized by it.” Therefore it is a category of brand consumers show interest and concern towards. This is proved by the premium prices customers are willing to pay and the commitment they show towards the brand (Schlobohm, Zulauf, Wagner, 2014)

Food brands on the other hand reflect the same principle. As food is something that is consumed and has an effect on our body, it is also a category of brands consumers pay attention towards. What we eat also shows something about ourselves, be it our preference in tastes, attitude towards fair trade products, attitude towards waste disposal or just a preference towards organic food. Although the issues mentioned above are not a part of our study, they just show that while choosing food, consumers do pay some attention towards it.

Of course, for both fashion brands and food brands, the condition is the level of involvement of consumers. Love towards brands can only exist if consumers are involved in the purchase they are making. If they just buy on impulse or what seems most convenient, the concept
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does not come into play. Therefore, level of involvement would be an important filter while carrying out this research.

This study hence covers how to deal with the problem question, i.e. do consumers really love fashion brands and food brands. Following is the literature review of previous works about brand love, what factors play a part and the definitions. Unfortunately no study about brand love in the two categories is found, so we generally talk about what theorists say about brand love. Finally, a research study is done to prove the hypothesis.

2. Problem Statement and Research Question

2.1 Problem Statement

As previously mentioned, this study is based on the work of Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence (2008) 'When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions'

Based on it, this study will take a step towards finding out what brands do consumers love. It is not aiming to study different brands on the market but rather categories of brands. In order to make it more specific and comparable, we only compare two categories of brands.

2.2 Research Question

The research question therefore is:

“How do consumers feel towards fashion brands and food brands?”

More specifically:

a) “How do consumers feel towards fashion brands?”
b) “How do consumers feel towards food brands?”
3. Theoretical background

This area of research is relatively new and not many studies have been carried out on it (Ahuvia, 2005; Fournier, 1998). There are some definitions of brand love given by theorists which can be used to understand this phenomenon. When we talk about such romantic feelings towards brands, we tend to talk about the interpersonal theories of love. Sternberg (1986) presented the Triangular theory of love, with the three points of the triangle being: intimacy, passion and decision/commitment. Using these three dimensions, he created eight different types of love by the absence (-)/presence (+) of the three dimensions. (See Figure 1 below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intimacy</th>
<th>Passion</th>
<th>Decision/commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nonlove</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liking/friendship</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infatuated love</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empty love</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic love</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Companionate love</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fatuous love</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consummate love</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. Sternberg’s dimensions of love

Shimp and Madden (1988) based their work on this theory and came up with three dimensions as well, which are liking, yearning and decision/commitment. They said that the presence of all three of these dimensions leads to brand loyalty, which is the same as Sternberg’s consummate love. While these two theories talk about the presence or absence of the three dimensions, there are some theorists like Heinrich, Bauer and Muhl (2006) who say that in order for brand love to exist; all three dimensions must be present. Some argue that brand love and brand loyalty are the same concepts while some argue them to be different. This is based on the argument that it becomes brand loyalty if the dimension of decision/commitment is present. Whang, Allen, Sahoury and Zhang (2004) support this view and say that consumers might experience passionate love and emotional love for a brand which might turn into romantic love over time.
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We also find some theorists talking about ‘consumer-object’ relationship. For example Fournier (1998) talks about the Brand Relationship Quality construct (BRQ), in which she argues that passion and love are the core elements of any consumer-brand relationship and people tend to develop intimate relationships with the brands similar to interpersonal ones. She talks about seven facets in this relationship. (See Figure. 2 below)

![Figure 2. BRQ and its seven facets](image)

These two paradigms (interpersonal theory and consumer-object relationship) show different viewpoints of various theorists but both of them are criticised which is why it is difficult to say which one of these will be agreed upon by later theorists and researchers.

So all in all, how do we define brand love? Carrol and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment that a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name”. On the other hand Rossiter (2012) defines brand loves as “achieved only when “Deep Affection” and “Separation Anxiety” are jointly felt in relation to the potential love object.” Keh, Pang, and Peng (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"
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After discussing the definitions of brand love and what various theorists say about it, we move on to see the literature on this topic, the hypotheses of this study and further how this research will be carried out.
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4. Review of literature
Before conducting the study, it is important to understand where the current status of academic research lies on brand love and related topics. In order to do that, the following journal articles and books are reviewed.

Articles/Journals:

4.1 Brand love

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
- Comparing results in France to those in America.                                                                                      |

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Brand Love</th>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Journal</th>
<th>DOI</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role of brand love in consumer-brand relationships</td>
<td>Albert, N., &amp; Merunka, D.</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td><em>Journal of Consumer Marketing</em>, 30(3), pp. 258–266.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Proposing and testing antecedents and consequences (brand identification, brand commitment and brand trust) of brand love.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love</td>
<td>Carroll, Barbara a. Ahuvia, Aaron C.</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td><em>Marketing Letters</em>, 17(2), 79–89. doi:10.1007/s11002-006-4219-2</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Brand love linked to brand loyalty and effect of positive WOM. - Concluded that love is more for products perceived as hedonic compared to utilitarian ones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two studies of consequences</td>
<td>Bergkvist, Lars</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td><em>Journal of Brand Management</em>, 17(7), 504–523</td>
<td></td>
<td>Assessing managerial relevance of brand love by testing two antecedents – brand identification and</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>and actionable antecedents of brand love</th>
<th>Bech-Larsen, Tino</th>
<th>518. doi:10.1057/bm.2010.6</th>
<th>sense of community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand love</strong></td>
<td>Effects of brand love, personality and image on word of mouth: The case of fashion brands among young consumers</td>
<td>Ismail, A. R.</td>
<td>2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand love</strong></td>
<td>Falling in love with a product: The structure of a romantic consumer-product relationship</td>
<td>Whang, Yun-oh Florida, Central Allen, Jeff</td>
<td>2004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand love</strong></td>
<td>Romancing with a brand: a conceptual</td>
<td>Sarkar, Abhigyan</td>
<td>2011</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>analysis of romantic consumer-brand relationship</th>
<th>6(1), 79–94.</th>
<th>formulation and implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brand love</strong></td>
<td>Brand love, brand image and loyalty in Australian elite sport</td>
<td>Landau, LD 2010 Zhurnal Eksperimental'noi i Teoreticheskoi Fiziki. Retrieved from <a href="http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&amp;btnG=Search&amp;q=intitle:No+Title#0">http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&amp;btnG=Search&amp;q=intitle:No+Title#0</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles

From reviewing the articles above, we discover how different authors define brand love and other concepts related to it like brand loyalty and brand image. Different propositions about how to measure brand love and factors that influence it are also made.
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4.2 Brand relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand relationship</td>
<td>Brand relationship quality and its value for personal contact</td>
<td>Smit, Edith Bronner, Fred Tolboom, Maarten</td>
<td>2007</td>
<td><em>Journal of Business Research, 60</em>(6), 627–633. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2006.06.012</td>
<td>Study to assess if quality of customer-brand relationship differs from brand to brand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

The articles above explain the different types of relationships that can exist between a product/brand and a customer as well as the factors that impact this relationship.

### 4.3 Brand engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles

From this article we develop an understanding about the literature present on the topic of brand engagement and what it has to offer towards this field.
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

### 4.4 Brand attachment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

From the articles above, we get an understanding about brand attachment and how it is a factor in a customer-brand relationship.

### 4.5 Fashion consumption

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Table 1. Literature review: Journals/Articles

Unfortunately not many articles were found that could benefit us in both the fields of fashion and brand love. The article above gives us general insights about fashion consumption and how it can be influenced.
What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

Books:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Children’s relationships with brands: “True love” or “one-night”</td>
<td>Mindy F. Ji</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Children develop relationship with wide range of brands and these</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stand?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>relationships are embedded in the social environment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Literature review: Books

Unfortunately, not many books on the related topic were found. The book mentioned in the table above is interesting as we find out that people develop relationships with certain brands from a young age but not much research is carried out on it.
5. Hypothesis

In order to answer the research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated:

In the results of 'When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions', Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) discovered 11 dimensions of love towards a brand. Consumers who loved the brands they talked about, fully agreed with these 11 dimensions. As this study is based on their findings, we will use these 11 dimensions and apply them to fashion brands and food brands. Therefore each hypotheses represents a dimension from their results:

**Passion**

It is the first dimension discussed in the findings of Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) and as they say, it is often associated to the feeling of love. As it is referred to ‘intense longing for union with another’ (Hatfield & Walster, 1978), it is significant to link this factor to the categories of brands in our study.

**H1a:** Consumers are passionate towards the fashion brand(s) they love

**H1b:** Consumers are passionate towards the food brand(s) they love

**Duration of the relationship: long**

Long term relationship is linked with satisfaction and intimacy with the partner (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008) i.e. one of the factors of love. Therefore the following hypotheses are made to address this factor.

**H2a:** Consumers have a long term relationship with the fashion brand(s) they love

**H2b:** Consumers have a long term relationship with the food brand(s) they love

**Self congruity: congruity between self image and product image**

In their work, Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) state that couples usually have some form of similarity, for example, in beliefs, attitudes, humour, physical attractiveness etc. This means that when love exists, there is usually some similarity between the two people. In the same way for love to exist between brands and customers, this similarity is
expected. This is seen in the sense of product image being similar to self image. To test this, the following hypotheses are made.

**H3a:** Fashion brand(s) consumers love is congruent with their self image

**H3b:** Food brand(s) consumers love is congruent with their self image

**Dreams**

Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) say when consumers are in love with a brand, they dream about it. This means that they think about it often and that particular brand favours their dreams. The following hypotheses will test this dimension.

**H4a:** The fashion brand(s) consumers love support their dreams

**H4b:** The food brand(s) consumers love support their dreams

**Memories: evoked by the brand**

In their work, Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) state that certain brand brings back some memories to the consumers. These memories can be of their childhood, something special that happened or just nostalgia, but these feelings suggest a special relationship with the brand. Therefore, in order to understand this, we develop the following hypotheses.

**H5a:** The fashion brand(s) consumers love evoke some memories

**H5b:** The food brand(s) consumers love evoke some memories

**Pleasure**

Love is linked to positive emotions, including pleasure (Fehr & Russel, 1991) and when it comes to love between a brand and a consumer, pleasure effects the duration of the relationship (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008) In the following hypotheses we test the dimension of pleasure.

**H6a:** The fashion brand(s) consumers love provide them with some pleasure
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**H6b: The food brand(s) consumers love provide them with some pleasure**

**Attraction:**

Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) describe attraction as a dimension of interpersonal love. This means consumers feel attracted towards the brand they love. To test this, the following hypotheses are made.

**H7a: Consumers feel attracted towards the fashion brand(s) they love**

**H7b: Consumers feel attracted towards the food brand(s) they love**

**Uniqueness:**

Lovers usually consider their partners unique (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008). Also many respondents say that the brand they prefer is unique, which leads to feelings of idealization often mentioned in interpersonal love theories (Murray and Holmes, 1993; Murray et al., 1996; Sternberg and Barnes, 1985) The following hypotheses are made to test this dimension.

**H8a: Consumers see the fashion brand(s) they love as unique**

**H8b: Consumers see the food brand(s) they love as unique**

**Beauty:**

“Beauty is a determinant of love relationships” (Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008, Walster et al, 1966) Therefore when it comes to love, beauty is considered to be one of the most prominent factors. The following hypotheses are made to study this.

**H9a: Consumers see beauty in the fashion brand(s) they love**

**H9b: Consumers see beauty in the food brand(s) they love**
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Trust: No disappointment

“Consumers in love seem to declare they have never been disappointed and express their satisfaction with the brand” (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008) This shows that trust is also a dimension in the concept of brand love and the following hypotheses are made to study this.

H10a: Consumers fully trust the fashion brand(s) they love and have never felt disappointed

H10b: Consumers fully trust the food brand(s) they love and have never felt disappointed

Declaration of affect

This refers to the expression of love or sentiments towards another person/object/brand. Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) state that they did not name this dimension ‘declaration of love’ but rather ‘declaration of affect’ because consumers use many different words to express their feelings of love for example adore, appreciate, like etc. The following hypotheses are made to test this dimension.

H11a: Consumers declare their feeling of affect for the fashion brand(s) they love

H11b: Consumers declare their feeling of affect for the food brand(s) they love

The 11 hypotheses discussed above are made to prove whether brand love exists between consumers and fashion brand(s)/food brand(s). If these 11 hypotheses are tested to be true, we will successfully be able to say that brand love exists in the categories of fashion and food. The method to carry out this research is described in the next section.
6. Methodology

Method of research: Hybrid survey- exploratory study via an online questionnaire

As this study is inspired by the work of Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence (2008) 'When consumers love their brands: Exploring the concept and its dimensions', it will be using the same research approach as was used by them, but a little modified to suit the purpose of this study. In their study, interviews were first carried out to see what generally people felt towards this area of study, later questionnaires were spread. In this study, we will not carry out the interviews and only focus on the questionnaires, as this study is a step forward to the research and wants to investigate these feelings for two categories of brands.

Description/data analysis: The research consists of both qualitative and quantitative techniques: Quantitative: close-ended question, large number of respondents; Qualitative: exploratory study, projective techniques, text answers from respondents

The projective technique is used in this study because it is effective in encouraging people to bring forward their hidden opinions, attitudes or feelings about the object or situation. Such methods are useful when direct methods are unable to acquire the required information precisely or researchers need a better understanding of the phenomenon (Malhotra, 2004), (Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008). Therefore for our purpose of study, they seem best.

Setting: The questionnaire will be spread in early December 2014

Instruments: Software used for online survey - Sphinx

Sample and participants: This study does not take into account nationality as a factor so, the questionnaire will be spread as far and wide as possible using online platforms and personal contacts. The age group considered is 15-75 because people from a very young age show attitudes towards brands and this carries on till later in life. Also, as the medium of survey is online questionnaire, this age group seems most suitable to be able to access it and answer it. As the population size ideally is the total population of the world from the age 15 to 75, with an error margin of 5%, confidence level of 95% and response distribution of 50%, our sample is 385 respondents, calculated using the article 'sample size calculation' (Kadam & Bhalerao, 2010)
7. Overview of chapters

Abstract
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List of tables
List of abbreviations

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- Inspiration

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  4.2 Definitions of brand love
  4.3 Different models and previous works done

Chapter 5 Fashion brands and food brands
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  5.2 Connection with brand love and reasons for choosing

Chapter 6 Methodology
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  6.2 Execution
  6.3 Results
  6.4 Summary of results
  6.5 Concerns for validity

Chapter 7 Discussion and conclusion
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  7.2 Limitations of the study
  7.3 Suggestions for further researchers

Chapter 8 Bibliography

Chapter 9 Appendix
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## 8. Work plan

### Important deadlines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Tasks/Phases</th>
<th>Level</th>
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<tr>
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What brands do consumers love? - A study of fashion brands and food brands

9. Bibliography


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