
Determinants of Brand Love of e-retailers Towards Purchase Intention and the Moderating Role of e-WOM

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Abstract

This study explores brand experience, brand trust, and affective commitment as determinants of brand love of e-retailers. The study also investigates the impact of brand love on consumers' purchase intention and the moderating role of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) on the relationship between brand love and purchase intention. The study was conducted in the dynamic Saudi Arabian consumer market. Data was collected through an online survey, resulting in a sample size of 329 respondents. Statistical analysis, including validity and reliability assessments, was conducted using SPSS and Smart PLS software. The findings highlighted the significant relationships between each of brand experience, brand trust, affective commitment as independent variables, and brand love. The findings also revealed a positive relationship between brand love and purchase intention. However, electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) did not moderate the relationship between brand love and purchase intention. This study provides valuable insights for businesses in developing effective marketing strategies in the digital market.

Keywords: Brand experience, Brand trust, Affective commitment, Brand love, electronic word of mouth, Purchase intention, electronic retailers, Saudi market.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary marketing landscape, understanding the particulars of consumer-brand relationships and their impact on purchase intention is vital for businesses aiming to thrive in competitive markets. Consumers' interactions, perceptions, and feelings towards a brand across various touchpoints are fundamental determinants of brand experience, trust, affective commitment, and love. These emotional connections, in turn, significantly influence consumers' intentions to purchase products or services of the brand.

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the dynamic and rapidly growing Saudi consumer market, investigating the connections between brand experience, brand trust, affective commitment (independent variables), brand love (a mediator), and purchase intention (dependent variable) is crucial for businesses seeking to be competitive.

With its expanding digital landscape and digitally adaptive population, Saudi Arabia presents a productive ground for studying consumer behavior in the digital arena. As consumers increasingly engage with products through various digital platforms, purchase intentions become profoundly entangled with electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), which involves sharing opinions, recommendations, and experiences about brands through online channels.

With the proliferation of social media and online review platforms, consumers rely heavily on e-WOM to gather information, seek recommendations, and make purchase decisions. Therefore, understanding how e-WOM moderates the relationship between consumers' brand love of e-retailers and purchase intention becomes essential for businesses seeking existence and development in the Saudi Arabian market.

Thus, the main objectives of this study are to explore the determinants of brand love of e-retailers (brand experience, brand trust, and brand affective commitment), the relationship between brand love of e-retailers and purchase intention, and the moderating role of (e-WOM) on the relationship between brand love of e-retailers and brand's purchase intention. This research extends the extant research regarding the determinants of purchase intention in the digital market in Saudi Arabia, which needs more studies to understand consumer behavior. Besides, the findings of this study are expected to be significant for businesses since consumer behavior insight is crucial in developing effective marketing strategies that enhance consumers' digital purchase intention.

The dynamics of consumer-brand relationships play a pivotal role in shaping purchase intentions and driving business success. Understanding the nuances of brand-consumer interactions is imperative, particularly in the apparel industry, where attractiveness, trends, and personal preferences heavily influence consumer decisions. Consumers in the apparel industry often form deep emotional connections with digital platforms as brands (brands of e-retailers), driven by factors such as brand experience, trust, and affective commitment. These emotional bonds are integral to brand love, representing the peak of consumer-brand relationships. In the context of consumers' online purchases, brand love of e-retailers is translated into loyal and eager customers willing to purchase products and advocate for e-retailers within their social circles.

Moreover, in today's digital age, the apparel industry increasingly relies on e-WOM as a powerful influencer of consumer behavior. Platforms like social media and online review websites are hubs for consumers to share their opinions, experiences, and recommendations regarding apparel brands. Understanding how e-WOM moderates the relationship between brand love of e-retailers and purchase intention is essential for businesses aiming to harness the power of digital communication channels to drive sales and foster brand loyalty.

By delving into these dynamics within the apparel industry and digital transactions, this study aims to provide valuable insights for businesses seeking to enhance their competitive edge in the apparel digital market in Saudi Arabia. Through a comprehensive analysis of the determinants of brand love of e-retailers, the relationship between brand love of e-retailers and purchase intention, and the moderating effect of e-WOM, this research will offer actionable

recommendations for developing effective marketing strategies tailored to the unique characteristics of the apparel's digital transactions. Ultimately, by understanding and leveraging consumer behavior drivers, the apparel industry and e-retail businesses can position themselves for sustainable growth and success in the dynamic Saudi marketplace.

2. Literature review and research model

2.1 The relationship between brand experience and brand love

The literature on the relationship between brand experience and brand love highlights the evolving significance of brands in consumer lives. Brands are no longer perceived solely as providers of practical benefits but are increasingly valued for the enriching experiences they offer consumers. This shift in perspective has led marketing professionals to recognize the crucial role of understanding consumer perceptions of brands in developing effective marketing strategies. There is a growing acknowledgment that brands delivering superior experiences to customers tend to thrive in the marketplace, prompting marketers to explore the various dimensions of brand experience and their impact on other brand elements (Bapat & Thanigan, 2016).

Brakus et al. (2009) define brand experience as the internal response of consumers, encompassing sensations, feelings, cognitions, and behaviors triggered by brand stimuli such as identity, packaging, communication, and environment. The digital brand experience, which includes both cognitive and affective aspects, has garnered attention from researchers, with several authors emphasizing the importance of considering both perspectives (Bhat & Reddy, 1998; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Bridges & Florsheim, 2008; Caruana & Ewing, 2010; Hausman & Siekpe, 2009).

Extant studies found that brand experience significantly influences brand love, with sensory, emotional, social, and intellectual dimensions playing crucial roles (Safeer, 2020; Zhang, 2019; Madeline & Sihombing, 2019; Choi, 2023). This influence is mediated by brand authenticity and trust, particularly in luxury brands, where a favorable brand image further enhances the relationship between brand experience and brand love (Safeer, 2020; Madeline & Sihombing, 2019; Choi, 2023). Ferreira et al. (2019) also suggested that brand experience, particularly its sensory and affective dimensions, is pivotal in shaping brand love among consumers.

Eklund (2022) suggested that brand love and brand image mediate the association between brand experience and brand loyalty, highlighting that brand experience evolves continuously over time due to ongoing exposure to brand-related stimuli, such as driving a vehicle. Also, a study by Madeline and Sihombing (2019) filled the gap by examining how brand experience affects brand loyalty through brand love and trust, revealing positive relationships between these variables.

Based on the previous research and the context of the digital platforms' brands in this study, it can be assumed that when consumers have a good experience with an e-retailer, they will fall in love with that e-retailer's brand. Thus, H1 describes the relationship between brand experience and brand love of e-retailers, which could be hypnotized as:

H1: Consumers' brand experience with e-retailers has a statistically positive impact on their brand love towards these e-retailers.

2.2 The relationship between brand trust and brand love

Brand trust, a concept defined by Delgado-Ballester et al. (2003) as the consumer's sense of security in brand interactions based on perceptions of reliability and responsibility, has been found to significantly influence brand love and, consequently, brand loyalty (Madeline & Sihombing, 2019; Huang, 2017). This relationship is further strengthened by a brand's self-expression, particularly in hedonic product types and through positive word of mouth, as evidenced by studies conducted by Kiuru (2014). The significance of trust in fostering brand loyalty is exemplified in the context of name-brand coffee shops, where brand love and respect mediate the relationship between trust and brand loyalty (Song et al., 2019). This highlights the pivotal role of trust in cultivating brand love and long-term customer commitment.

Previous research conducted by Bainbridge (1997), Kamp (1999), Smith (2001), and Scott (2000) underscores the importance of trust as a fundamental attribute for any brand. Their work emphasizes that trust is a paramount factor in brand success. Furthermore, Morgan-Thomas and Veloutsou (2013) contributed to the literature by demonstrating the positive impact of trust and perceived usefulness on the online brand experience. Their findings emphasized the role of trust in shaping consumers' perceptions of brands in the digital realm.

The existing body of research supports the idea that brand loyalty is nurtured through establishing brand trust and facilitating valuable exchange associations (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). This notion is reinforced by Lau & Lee (1999), who proposed that the brand symbolizes the manufacturing organization, enhancing consumer interaction.

Based on the previous research and the context of the digital platforms' brands in this study, it can be assumed that when consumers trust the retailer's brand, they will fall in love with the brand. Thus, H2 describes the relationship between brand trust and brand love of e-retailers, which could be hypothesized as:

H2: Consumers' brand trust in e-retailers has a statistically positive impact on their brand love towards these e-retailers.

2.3 The relationship between affective commitment and brand love

The literature elucidates the intricate relationship between brand commitment and brand love, emphasizing affective commitment as a pivotal component of brand loyalty, mainly influenced by brand attachment and trust, notably in non-hedonic product contexts (Loureiro et al., 2012). Allen and Meyer (1990) defined commitment as comprising both affective and continuance components, with affective commitment grounded in emotional bonds with the organization and continuance commitment shaped by factors such as side bets and switching costs (Ziaullah et al., 2015).

Affective commitment, as delineated by Meyer and Allen (1991), diverges from a calculative or obligation-driven nature, instead embodying the member's inclination to remain attached to the

social entity due to the positive emotions, sense of belonging, and satisfaction it engenders (Byrne & McCarthy, 2005). In essence, the attitudinal aspect of affective commitment can be viewed as gauging the likelihood that members wish to maintain their association with and support the cooperative organizations. The sources of affective commitment, identified from the cooperative literature, are categorized into three main themes: identification with the cooperative, cooperative-based self-esteem, and psychological ownership of the cooperative (Jussila & Tuominen, 2012).

Turri et al. (2013) highlighted the role of social media platforms in fostering affective commitment, particularly in personal branding for music artists. They showcase the significance of social media in nurturing strong emotional connections between consumers and brands. Maisam and Mahsa (2016) underscored how value congruity, brand love, and brand image foster consumer commitment, subsequently driving positive word-of-mouth.

Affective commitment mediates brand experience and loyalty across diverse product categories (Iglesias et al., 2011). Fullerton (2009) found that both affective and continuance commitments fully mediate the relationship between brand satisfaction and both repurchase intentions and advocacy intentions. Bachman and Wilkins (2014) further explored brand commitment and its impact on purchasing intentions and word-of-mouth promotion, revealing the differential effects of self-congruity, customers' identification with the brand, and commitment on purchasing intentions and word-of-mouth marketing.

Based on the earlier research and the background of the digital platforms' brands in this study, it can be expected that when consumers commit to the retailer's brand, they will fall in love with the brand. Thus, H3 describes the relationship between affective commitment and brand love of e-retailers, which could be hypothesized as:

H3: Consumers' affective Commitment to e-retailers has a statistically positive impact on their brand love towards these e-retailers.

2.4 The relationship between brand love and purchase intention

Efforts to define, measure, and evaluate the connections of love with other factors are perceived as interconnected components of a unified undertaking. At the outset of this endeavor lies the assumption that love constitutes an individual's attitude toward a specific person, encompassing inclinations to think, feel, and act in distinct manners toward that individual (Rubin, 1970). Brand love is defined by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) as "the degree of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name."

Companies must focus on understanding online consumers' needs, habits, lifestyles, and traits to satisfy them in a highly competitive and dynamic global environment. Yasin and Shamim (2013) revealed that purchase intentions play a significant role in predicting brand love and word-of-mouth, and brand love significantly impacts word-of-mouth. Furthermore, brand love partially mediates the connection between purchase intentions and word-of-mouth. This is particularly true in the online environment, where a positive customer experience, including hedonic, aesthetic, and functional elements, directly influences purchase intention (Maitlo et al., 2017).

Research highlights potential negative consequences for consumers stemming from cultivating strong emotions, necessitating businesses' cautious implementation of brand love strategies, which demands a thorough grasp of the concept. Furthermore, brand love and likeability are separate concepts with varying impacts on repurchase intentions, particularly within product categories distinguished by their search, experience, and credence qualities. This prompts the development of a framework to analyze the interplay between brand likeability and brand love and their respective influences on consumer repurchase intention (Suetrong et al., 2018).

In experiential marketing, customer experience stands out as a fundamental concept. It serves as a basis for predicting customer purchase intentions, where a promising positive connection occurs between emotional experience and purchase intention, with social experience as a mediator (Nasermoadeli et al., 2013). Exploring brand love's influence on purchase intention reveals that brand trust factors directly impact customers' purchase intentions and exert an indirect effect through the mediating variable of brand love (Singh et al., 2021).

Based on the previous research and the framework of the digital platforms' brands in this study, it can be assumed that purchase intention will increase when consumers fall in love with the retailer's brand. Thus, H4 describes the relationship between brand love of e-retailers and purchase intention from these e-retailers, which could be hypnotized as:

H4: Consumers' brand love of e-retailers has a statistically positive impact on their purchase intention from these e-retailers.

2.5 The moderating role of electronic word of mouth

Word-of-mouth was defined by Westbrook (1987) as "an informal communication of the consumers with other consumers about the usage, performance, characteristics or ownership of the particular goods or services."

Within the context of purchase intention, Lin et al. (2013) and Cheung et al. (2009) concluded a positive relationship between electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) and purchase intention, moderated by product involvement and brand image. Yunus (2016) supported these findings, illustrating that e-WOM positively affects brand image and purchase intention, with brand image partially mediating this relationship. Additionally, Yasin and Shsmim (2013) emphasized the significant impact of brand experience, trust, and affective commitment on purchase intention, highlighting brand love as a mediator between purchase intention and word-of-mouth.

Marketers must recognize the influence of virtual communities on information quality, as e-WOM communication within these communities substantially impacts consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions toward products (Huang et al., 2012). Moreover, Huyen and Costello's (2017) study investigated how e-WOM affects individuals' behavior of online store reviews and attitudes, with brand trust mediating the e-WOM-purchase intention relationship. This study highlights the significant influence of review quantity and quality on purchase intention and guides practitioners in optimizing user-oriented review formats for effective online consumer feedback management.

Moreover, Heryana and Yasa (2020) found significant links between e-WOM, brand attitude, and

repurchase intention, with brand attitude mediating the relationship between electronic word of mouth and repurchase intention for the local clothing brand, which suggests the need for explicit management plans regarding e-WOM and the importance of digital advertising knowledge for achieving business goals.

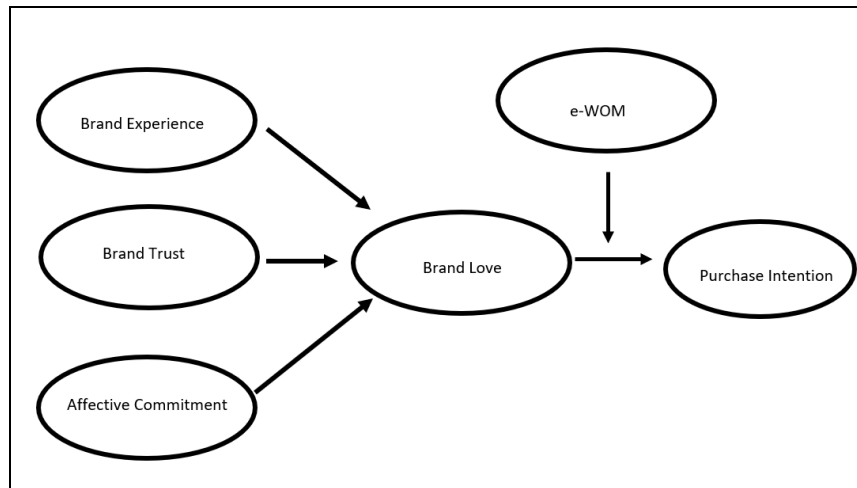
These studies underscore the significant roles of e-WOM, brand image, and brand love in shaping purchase intention, thus highlighting the intricate interplay between these factors in consumer decision-making. Therefore, H5 describes the moderating role of electronic word of mouth, which could be hypnotized as:

H5: E-WOM moderates the relationship between consumers' brand love of e-retailers and their purchase intention from these e-retailers.

2.6 Conceptual model:

Figure 1. below displays the study's constructs and their hypothesized relationships:

Figure 1. The Study Framework



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Measures

The research questionnaire begins with a filter question asking the responders to specify one of the electronic platforms from which they have previously purchased clothes to be the platform they keep in mind when answering the questions in the questionnaire. A focus group listed eight electronic platforms: Shein, Ounass, Voga Closet, Namshi, Assos, Farfetch, Net-a-Porter, and Amazon. The option of "Others" is also provided in the questionnaire in case a brand is not included in the list. Then, the respondent is asked to answer the questions for the constructs related to the chosen electronic platforms.

The constructs examined in this study were measured using established scales drawn from prior research and tailored to fit the specific context of the investigation. Brand experience was assessed utilizing scales developed by Ha (2004) and Shankar et al. (2003). Brand trust was

evaluated through measures adapted from Newell and Ronald (2001) and Sinclair and Irani (2005). The affective commitment was measured using scales from Ahluwalia and Rohini (2000), Ahluwalia et al. (2000), Ahluwalia et al. (2001), and Beatty et al. (1988). Online purchase intention was assessed using scales developed by Pavlou (2003), while e-WOM behavior was measured based on scales by Arnett et al. (2003). Lastly, brand love was evaluated through scales adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006). All the constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Lastly, at the end of the questionnaire, the respondent is prompted to respond to some demographic variables.

3.2 Sampling method

The study sampling units were selected from Saudi residents who had previously purchased clothing from one of the electronic retail store platforms (e-retailers). A snowball sampling technique was utilized as a non-probability method where participants continued to refer the questionnaire to others similar to themselves (Parker et al., 2019). Responses to the questionnaire were collected using online survey forms through Survey Monkey. After giving their responses, the respondents were encouraged to forward the link to the questionnaire to other electronic platform users. No hired sample subjects were used; all the participants responded voluntarily. A total of 477 responses were collected and filtered; 52 out of them did not use online platforms to buy apparel, and 148 did not complete the questionnaire. 329 responses were left to analyze.

3.3 Statistical analysis

This study used SPSS and Smart PLS software to complete the statistical analysis of the collected data. The statistical analysis proceeded first with reporting sample characteristics and descriptive statistics using SPSS statistical software. The validity and reliability of the constructs were thoroughly investigated. Reliability was evaluated by calculating Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for each construct. Constructs with a Cronbach alpha exceeding .7 are deemed acceptable, aligning with the suggested threshold by DeVillis (2016) and Kline (2023). Composite Reliability (CR) and Convergent validity are gauged by ensuring that Composite Reliability and the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) surpass .6 and .5, respectively, in line with Fornell and Larcker's (1981) recommendations. Discriminant validity, as proposed by John and Benet-Martinez (2000), is confirmed when the square root of the AVE exceeds the correlations with other constructs.

4. Findings

4.1 Sample Characteristics

The study sample comprises 329 respondents, all using online platforms to buy apparel. Table 1 reports the complete sample characteristics of this study, starting with the percentage of different online platform brands recorded in the study sample. The online platform brands in this sample comprise Shein (39.2%), Ounass (22.5%), Voga Closet (5.8%), Namshi (4.3%), Assos (7.6%), Farfetch (7%), Net-a-Porter (1.5%), Amazon (6.1%), and others (6.1%). Most respondents were online platform brand buyers formed by Shein and Ounass.

Females comprised most of the sample (89.1%) compared to males (10.9%). Table 1 reports that more than 50% of the respondents constituted from two age groups, 20-29 (25.5%) and 40-49 (25.2%). The age group under 20 only constituted 8.2% of the sample, while the 60 and more

age group comprised 4.6%. As for the education level, most of the respondents were college graduates (61.7), while only 16.4% were high school graduates, and 18.6 were master’s and PhD degree holders.

It can be seen from Table 1 that most respondents identified with the social group of Saudi nationals (96.0%). In comparison, a minority of the respondents comprised the social group identifying with non-Saudi nationals (4.0%). The monthly income of the respondents is in Saudi Arabian Riyals, in which the maximum of the respondents fall in the income range was less than S.R. 10,000 (40.4%), followed by S.R. 10,000-19,999 (35.3%), while the income level of S.R. 40,000-49,999 represented the least of the sample (1.8%).

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender				
Male	36	10.9	10.9	10.9
Female	293	89.1	89.1	100.0
Age				
less than 20	27	8.2	8.2	8.2
20-29	84	25.5	25.5	33.7
30-39	62	18.8	18.8	52.6
40-49	83	25.2	25.2	77.8
50-59	58	17.6	17.6	95.4
More than 60	15	4.6	4.6	100.0
Nationality				
Saudi	316	96.0	96.0	96.0
Non Saudi	13	4.0	4.0	100.0
Education				
High school	54	16.4	16.4	16.4
College	203	61.7	61.7	78.1
Graduate				
Master’s degree	50	15.2	15.2	93.3
Doctoral Degree	12	3.6	3.6	97.0
Diploma	10	3.0	3.0	100.0
Income				
less than 10000	133	40.4	40.4	40.4
10000 - 19999	116	35.3	35.3	75.7
20000 - 29999	42	12.8	12.8	88.4
30000 - 39999	17	5.2	5.2	93.6
40000 - 49999	6	1.8	1.8	95.4
50000 or more	15	4.6	4.6	100.0
Brand				

Shein	129	39.2	39.2	39.2
Ounass	74	22.5	22.5	61.7
Voga Closet	19	5.8	5.8	67.5
Namshi	14	4.3	4.3	71.7
Asos	25	7.6	7.6	79.3
Farfetch	23	7.0	7.0	86.3
Net-a-Porter	5	1.5	1.5	87.8
Amazon	20	6.1	6.1	93.9
Others	20	6.1	6.1	100.0

4.2 Reliability and Validity of the scales

The reliability of the study constructs was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and Cronbach's Alpha. Initially, the items with factor loadings below 0.60 were removed from the statistical analysis. The tests of reliability, validity, and the factor loadings of the retained items are depicted in Table 2. Except for AC and BE, all Alpha values and CRs surpassed the recommended threshold of 0.70. Those that do not are only accepted if they already have an accepted Average Variance Extracted (AVE), according to Hair et al. (2021). Notably, the AVE and CRs mostly exceeded or closely approached 0.50 and 0.70, respectively, affirming the reliability and convergent validity of the study scales.

Table 2: Construct Reliability and Validity

	Factor Loadings	α	Rh-A	RH-C	CR	AVE
Affective Commitment		0.264	0.264	80.916	0.577	0.512
AC2	0.823					
AC3	0.711					
Brand Experience		0.428	0.428	0.440	0.776	0.635
BE3	0.842					
BE4	0.749					
Brand Love		0.898	0.898	0.907	0.920	0.624
BL1	0.840					
BL2	0.841					
BL3	0.832					
BL5	0.835					
BL6	0.782					
BL8	0.734					
BL9	0.645					
Brand Trust		0.836	0.836	0.875	0.891	0.675
BT1	0.854					
BT2	0.884					
BT3	0.901					
BT4	0.617					

Purchase Intention		0.86	0.860	0.865	0.914	0.781
PI1	0.902					
PI2	0.897					
PI3	0.851					
e-Word of Mouth		0.833	0.833	1.937	0.829	0.558
e-WOM1	0.539					
e-WOM2	0.724					
e-WOM3	0.690					
e-WOM4	0.971					

Discriminant validity underwent evaluation via cross-loadings, as shown in Table 2, which displays the cross-factor loadings of all items. Notably, each factor loading surpasses its respective cross-loading, indicating discriminant validity.

Additionally, discriminant validity was examined following the criterion advocated by Fornell and Larcker (1981), stipulating that the square root of the average variance extracted by a construct should exceed the correlation between that construct and any other. The outcomes of this examination are presented in Table 3. Also, discriminant validity was confirmed through the Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations shown in Table 4 with all values less than 0.95, which is the HTMT threshold (Henseler et al., 2015).

Table 3. Fornell & Larcker Criterion

	AC	BE	BL	BT	PI	WOM
AC	0.715					
BE	0.241	0.797				
BL	0.522	0.408	0.790			
BT	0.313	0.306	0.586	0.822		
PI	0.391	0.312	0.668	0.512	0.884	
e-WOM	0.132	0.261	0.219	0.071	0.146	0.747

Table 4. Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

	AC	BE	BL	BT	PI	WOM
AC	0.506					
BE	0.794	0.653				
BL	0.532	0.492	0.648			
BT	0.660	0.505	0.753	0.598		
PI	0.204	0.376	0.225	0.153	0.099	
e-WOM	0.065	0.159	0.065	0.062	0.037	0.078

4.3 Measurement Model Fit

Table 5 shows additional indices for testing the measurement model fit. Values for the SRMR range from zero to 1.0, with well-fitting models obtaining values less than 0.05 (Byrne,1998;

Diamantopoulos & Siguaw, 2000). However, values as high as 0.08 are deemed acceptable (e.g., Hu and Bentler 1999). SRMR value is accounted for 0.075, which is acceptable. The NFI value cutoff is between 0 and 1. The closer the NFI is to 1, the better the fit. NFI values above 0.90 usually represent an acceptable fit. Table 5 shows that the NFI value is 0.76. These indices mean that the measurement model of this study is fit.

Table 5. The goodness of fit of the Model (GoF)

	Saturated model	Estimated model
SRMR	0.075	0.079
d_ULS	1.405	1.564
d_G	0.447	0.454
Chi-square	888.067	900.158
NFI	0.76	0.757

4.4 Predictive Ability of the Structural Model

The Coefficient of Determination (R^2) was calculated in Table 6. to assess the model's explanatory power. It indicates the proportion of variance in each endogenous latent variable explained by the exogenous latent variables in the model, which has to exceed the 0.1 value (Hair et al., 2020). The findings revealed that R^2 for purchase intention is 0.446, which means that brand love explained 44.6% of purchase intentions. The findings also found that the R^2 for brand love accounted for 0.506, meaning that brand experience, trust, and affective commitment explained 50.6% of the variance in brand love.

Moreover, the Q^2 statistic was utilized to evaluate the predictive relevance of the model. It indicates the proportion of variance in the endogenous latent variables that the exogenous latent variables can predict. The model has predictive relevance when Q^2 exceeds zero (Hair et al., 2016). In Table 6, the Q^2 value for the endogenous construct purchase intention is 0.311, and for Brand love, it is 0.483, meaning the research model is predictably relevant.

Table 6. Coefficient of determination (R Square) and Predictive Relevance (Q square)

	R-square (R^2)	R^2 adjusted	Q^2 predict	RMSE
BL	0.506	0.501	0.483	0.724
PI	0.446	0.441	0.311	0.836

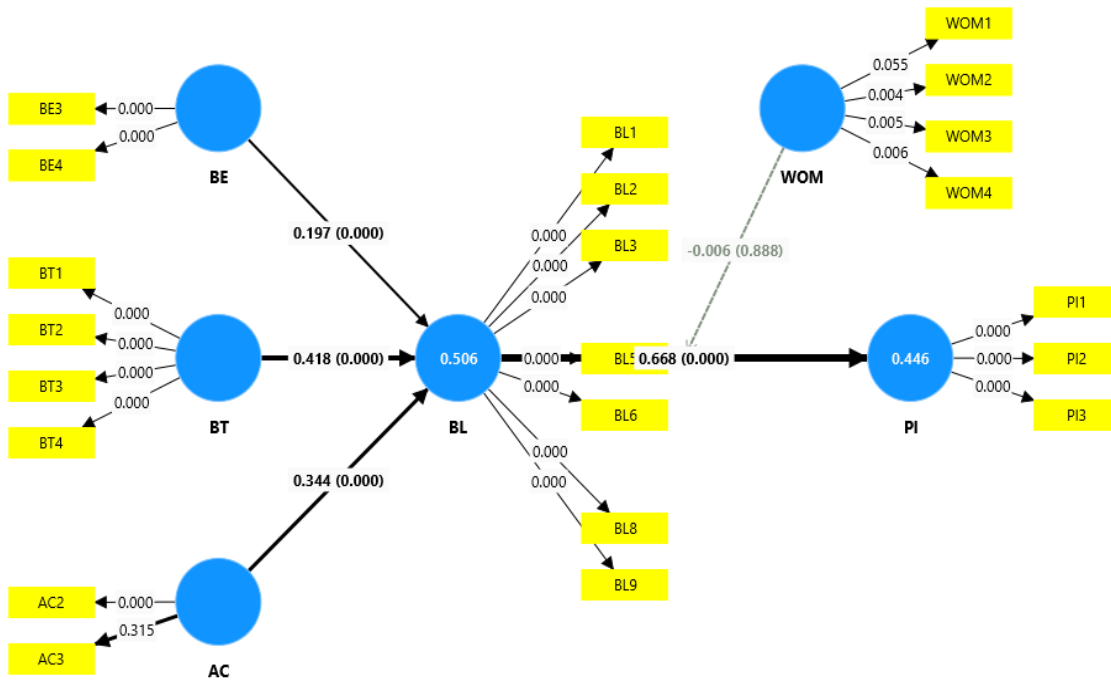
4.5 Hypotheses Testing

According to the path coefficient in Table 7 and Figure 2, the hypothesis is accepted when the P value is less than 0.05 and rejected if it is higher. Our analysis shows that the hypotheses H1, H2, H3, and H4 are accepted. BT has the highest effect on BL (0.418), followed by AC (0.344), and BE has the lowest effect (0.197).

Table7. Hypotheses Testing (Path Coefficient)

H	Original sample	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	ULCI 2.50%	LLCI 97.50%	Result
AC -> BL	H1	0.344	7.651	0	0.254	0.431	Supported
BE -> BL	H2	0.197	4.241	0	0.098	0.281	Supported
BT -> BL	H3	0.418	8.430	0	0.313	0.51	Supported
BL -> PI	H4	0.668	15.773	0	0.583	0.744	Supported

Figure 2. The Model



As for the moderating effect of e-WOM on the relationship between brand love and purchase intention, the P value of 0.88 is larger than 0.05 (Table 8). Thus, the moderating effect is insignificant, and H5 is rejected. This suggests that e-WOM does not moderate the relationship between brand love and purchase intention.

Table 8. Hypotheses Testing for Moderating Relation (Path Coefficient)

H	Original sample	Standard deviation	T statistics	P values	ULCI 2.50%	LLCI 97.50%	Result
e-WOM x BL -> PI	H5	-0.006	0.141	0.888	-0.092	0.073	Rejected

5. Discussion

The current study seeks to examine the factors influencing brand love toward e-retailers (brand experience, brand trust, and brand affective commitment), the connection between brand love and purchase intention, and how electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) moderates the link between brand love and purchase intentions from e-retailers.

This study reported that the relationship between brand experience (BE) of e-retailers and brand love is statistically significant. The result is backed up by studies that have reported a significant positive relationship between brand experience and brand love (Safeer, 2020; Zhang, 2019; Madeline & Sihombing, 2019; Choi, 2023). Moreover, the relationship between brand trust in e-retailers and brand love is statistically significant. It makes sense since brand trust (BT) and brand love (BL) are both positive emotions linked in intimate relationships. Karandashev (2019) highlighted the role of trust in creating consumers' feelings of security and comfort. In the current study, both brand trust and brand experience positively affect brand love, but brand trust has a higher effect than brand experience.

Furthermore, the association between e-retailers' affective commitment (AC) and brand love is statistically significant. This result agrees with previous studies that have described a significant positive relationship between AC and brand love (Loureiro et al., 2012; Bachman & Wilkins, 2014). However, AC in the current study has the lowest effect on brand love.

Additionally, the positive relationship between brand love of e-retailers and purchase intention from these e-retailers is statistically significant. This result agrees with previous studies unfolding a significant positive relationship between brand love and purchase intention (Sugiharto et al., 2019; Jin, 2022; Duan et al., 2023; Ertemel & Civelek, 2022).

Lastly, the moderating role of e-WOM in the relationship between brand love and purchase intention was not statistically significant. Although positive e-WOM is proposed to affirm consumers' initial trust and attitudes towards vendors, it also strengthens the relationship between consumers' emotional trust and their engaging intention in online shopping (Cheung et al., 2009); the current study results show no significant effect of e-WOM on the relationship between brand love and purchase intention of e-retailers in the apparel industry for the customers in Saudi Arabia. Reasons for this result could vary; consumers might have varying levels of trust and loyalty in online reviews and recommendations. Strong existing brand loyalty in the apparel market could overshadow the influence of e-WOM. If consumers already have high brand love and loyalty, e-WOM might not significantly alter their purchase intentions. Also, the digital market in Saudi Arabia, particularly for apparel, might still be in a developmental phase. Consumers may not yet fully engage with or rely on e-WOM as they would in more mature markets. Moreover, intense competition in the apparel market might control the impact of e-WOM. Consumers might be more influenced by brand-specific promotions and experiences rather than general online reviews of others.

6. Conclusion

This paper studied the determinants of brand love of e-retailers, the relationship between brand love and purchase intention, and the moderating role of e-WOM in the context of the e-retail industry in Saudi Arabia. The findings emphasize the importance of brand trust, brand experience, and affective commitment in promoting brand love, respectively, with a higher impact of brand trust followed by brand experience and affective commitment. Brand love, in turn, influences consumers' intentions to purchase products from e-retailers in the apparel industry. By understanding and leveraging the determinants of brand love of e-retailers, businesses in the e-retail industry can equip themselves for sustainable growth and achievements in the dynamic and competitive Saudi marketplace. Continued research in this area will contribute to a profound understanding of consumer behavior and deliver valuable guidance for effective marketing strategies in the digital era.

7. Implication and Recommendations

The outcomes of this study have several implications for policymakers, government agencies, and researchers focusing on the determinants of brand love and purchase intention in the e-retail industry in Saudi Arabia. Businesses can consider these suggestions to develop effective marketing strategies and improve their competitive position in the digital market. Companies operating in the e-retail industry in Saudi Arabia should focus on building trust, improving the brand experience, and encouraging affective commitment with consumers. These factors play a significant role in developing brand love and inducing purchase intention. Companies can accomplish this by providing a whole and enjoyable customer journey experience, providing high-quality products, guaranteeing transparent and reliable transactions, and engaging with customers through personalized communication and engagement.

To improve digital purchase intention, businesses must build tailored marketing strategies that align with the exceptional features of the apparel digital market in Saudi Arabia. Data analytics and consumer insights can help companies customize marketing messages, offer targeted promotions, and form engaging content that flows with their target audience. Businesses must continuously monitor and analyze consumer behavior, market trends, and competitors' strategies in the dynamic Saudi marketplace. Companies can adapt their marketing strategies, improve customer satisfaction, and stay ahead of the competition through regular data collection, social listening, and market research.

8. Limitations and Further Research

While this study provides valuable insights into the exploration and development of understanding the determinants of brand love, purchase intention, and the moderating role of e-WOM in the e-retail industry, certain limitations should be acknowledged. Addressing these limitations and conducting future studies in these areas would contribute to a more inclusive understanding of consumer behavior in the digital marketplace.

The study used a snowball sampling technique, which may present biases and limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could use probability sampling methods to acquire a more representative sample of Saudi residents who purchase clothing from electronic retail store platforms (e-retailers). Also, while the study relied on quantitative data, future

research could include qualitative approaches, such as interviews or focus groups, to understand better consumers' experiences, perceptions, and emotions linked to brand love and purchase intentions. Qualitative methods can provide deep insights into consumers' underlying motivations and drivers of brand love and intentions.

While the study mentioned ensuring construct validity through convergent and discriminant validity checks, future research could improve measurement validity by using multiple items for each construct. This would provide a more robust assessment of the variables under inquiry. Furthermore, the study focused on the e-retail industry in Saudi Arabia, which has an exceptional cultural context. Future research could explore how cultural factors, such as Islamic values, affect consumer-brand relationships, brand love, and purchase intention. This would provide deeper insights into how cultural factors form consumer behavior in the Saudi Arabian market.

Moreover, the study examined the moderating role of e-WOM in the relationship between the brand love of e-retailers and the purchase intention of these retailers. Future studies could explore additional moderating factors influencing this relationship, such as customer involvement, product type, or brand reputation. Investigating these factors would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the composite dynamics of this relationship. Lastly, future research could study the long-term impact of brand love on customer loyalty and repeat purchase behavior. Understanding the constant effects of brand love would enable businesses to develop strategies that encourage long-term customer relationships and brand advocacy.

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