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Examining the linkages between employee brand love, affective commitment, positive word-of-mouth, and turnover intentions: A social identity theory perspective

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Abstract Brand love has largely been examined from a customer perspective and seldom from an employee perspective. Drawing on the social identity theory, this study attempts to examine employee brand love and its relationship with affective commitment, positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) behaviour, and turnover intention. Using a sample of 289 professionals from public and private sector insurance companies in India, we find that employee brand love has a significant positive effect on affective commitment and PWOM, as well as a significant negative effect on turnover intention. Furthermore, affective commitment mediates the relationship of employee brand love with PWOM and turnover intention. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

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Introduction

The aim of any organisation is to create a committed workforce comprising employees who are willing to serve the organisation's customers to the best of their potential. Brand refers to a reputation that is linked to a specific product or service, or the trade name of a company and represents to an individual (a customer or an employee) an ability

to provide superior performance by an organisation (Love & Singh, 2011). Miles & Mangold (2005) defined workplace branding as a "process by which employees internalise the desired brand image and are motivated to project the image to customers and other organisational constituents" (p. 68). Successful branding depends on both external and internal branding (Xiong & King, 2015). While external branding focuses on how brands communicate with their customers (O'Neill & Mattila, 2010), internal branding emphasises employees' promises to provide brand value through service encounters (Lee et al., 2014; Sirianni et al., 2013). By building a strong brand, organisations strive to develop an identity for their stakeholders, create an everlasting impression

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or image in the minds of their employees as well as their customers, and distinguish themselves from the competition (Love & Singh, 2011).

In recent years, the concept of brand love has attracted considerable attention from researchers, owing to its significance in enhancing customer engagement, brand advocacy, commitment, and loyalty. Brand love is defined as “the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular trade name” (Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006, p. 81). Brand love has emerged as one of “the most emotionally intense consumer-brand relationship” (Langner et al., 2016, p. 624) and has been found to be positively associated with consumers’ brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth (PWOM) behaviour, resistance to negative information, forgiveness of failures, and increased willingness to pay for loved brands (Batra et al., 2012; Lambert & Desmond, 2013; Reimann et al., 2012; Rossiter & Bellman, 2012). The growing significance of brand love has prompted researchers to clarify the definition amongst related constructs (Maxian et al., 2013; Rossiter, 2012), determine its dimensions and contents (Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012), and investigate the structural relationship between the antecedents and consequences from the consumer’s context (Drennan et al., 2015; Kwon & Mattila, 2015; Liu et al., 2018).

Research on brand love has so far been concentrated on consumer-brand relationships. Understanding brand love from an employee perspective has hardly received attention, although doing so may have important implications for the organisational workforce. Examining the employee brand love concept may offer a more nuanced view of satisfied employees’ feelings about their organisations’ brands, a better understanding and prediction of desirable employee attitudes and behaviours, and an updated strategic objective for the management to retain the distinctiveness of the organisational brand. Building on the ideas of social identity theory (SIT), this study attempts to fill the gap in the literature by establishing the significance of employee brand love in organisations and demonstrating its effect on employee attitudes and behaviour.

The extent to which individuals are emotionally attached to the brands influences the nature of their interactions with them (Thomson et al., 2005). From an organisational perspective, this emotional attachment may significantly influence employees’ attitudes and behaviours towards the brands they work for. This study particularly focusses on constructs that can accurately capture such emotional attachment: affective commitment, PWOM, and turnover intention. Affective commitment represents the feeling of belongingness to the organisation. Allen & Meyer (1990) defined affective commitment as an “emotional attachment to the organisation such that the strongly committed individual identifies with, is involved in and enjoys membership in the organisation” (p. 2). Affective commitment has been found to be positively related to various organisational outcomes, including job satisfaction, reduced turnover intention, and loyalty (Evanschitzky et al., 2006; Mosadeghrad et al., 2008). Morhart (2017) defined employee PWOM as “employees’ personal advocacy of the organisation’s brand outside the job context” (p. 36). PWOM also has emotional antecedents in the sense that positive emotions contribute to PWOM (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Individuals are more likely to engage in PWOM when they experience notable

emotional relationships with the brand (Dick & Basu, 1994). Turnover intention refers to an employee’s willingness to voluntarily leave the organisation (Tett & Meyer, 1993). Strong emotional attachment towards the organisation implies negative turnover intention in the sense that employee who is emotionally attached to the organisation would be unwilling to leave the organisation. Thus, high emotional attachment is of paramount importance in driving positive employee attitudes and behaviour towards the organisation.

Building on the arguments of SIT (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Ashforth et al., 2008; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we propose that people who love an organisation’s brand derive their self-concept from their association with such an organisation, thereby leading to the development of stronger organisational identification with the organisation as well as boosting commitment and leading to greater emotional attachment towards the organisation. In this study, we argue that how employees’ perceived oneness (love) with the organisation’s brand leads them to exhibit high affective commitment, PWOM, and low turnover intention. The study makes multiple contributions to theory and practice. First, by testing the relationships between brand love and employee behaviours, we extend the research on brand love to employee-brand relationships, a topic that has not received attention in the literature so far. Second, by testing these relationships, we contribute to both organisational behaviour and human resource management literature and highlight the importance of brands in driving positive employee behaviours and attitudes. Finally, the study provides insights to practitioners about the need to emphasise the value of their organisation’s brands for their employees and using brand perceptions as instruments to promote positive attitudes and behaviours.

This study is organised as follows. The next section presents the literature review, research framework, and hypotheses used for the study. The method and results sections present the study sample, the measures used, the data analyses performed, and the main findings. Finally, the discussion section concludes the study with theoretical and practical implications, research limitations, and directions for future research.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Employee brand love from a social identity perspective

Social identity theory describes how individuals form their identity by being associated with social categories or groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1988). The theory predicts that people derive their self-concept from their psychological membership in various social groups (Tajfel, 1981; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Tajfel (1981) defined social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group... together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (p. 255). The greater the identification with a group, the more one conceives of oneself as a member of the group, leading to a shift from ‘I’ to ‘we’ intentions as the most basic explanation of behaviour (Brewer, 1991; Turner et al., 1987). As identification strengthens, employees

adhere to and behave in ways that are consistent with organisational norms and values (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). SIT proposes that in defining their self-perception, individuals move beyond their personal identity to develop a social identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Thus, individuals shape their self by internalising shared attitudes, beliefs and values, affective reactions, behavioural norms, and styles of speech amongst members of the same social group (Stets & Burke, 2000). Individuals who develop strong social identities develop emotional connect with those identities and conduct themselves in such a way that augments their self as well as other group members' outcomes (Thoits & Virshup, 1997). They act in the best interest of self and in-group members to maintain and enhance their self-esteem (Turner et al., 1987).

This study extends the application of SIT to the employee-organisation context and proposes that, when employees love their organisational brand, they are likely to be motivated to exhibit positive attitudes and behaviour. Brand refers to the unique and enduring features of a main brand (or a company; Carrol & Ahuvia, 2006; Langner et al., 2016). Brand is the reputation that is linked to a specific product or service, or the trade name of a company. It represents to an individual (a customer or an employee) an ability to provide superior performance by an organisation (Love & Singh, 2011). Building on the works of Wang et al. (2019) and Holzer et al. (2016) on employee brand love, for the purpose of this study, we define employee brand love as "the degree and intensity of positive emotional affection a satisfied employee feels towards the organisational brand he/she works for".

We believe that an organisation having a strong brand enhances its value perception for both its employees as well as its customer (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Such organisations in turn strengthen employees' love for the brand, and in turn with the organisation (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Haslam & Ellemars (2005) stated that an individual can identify with an organisation only when he/she takes pride in being a member of that organisation. The identification with the organisation is driven not only by the organisation but also by its individual elements such as its brand (Pratt, 1998). Employee brand love can lead to an integration of perceived brand attributes into the individual's self-identity which implies that employees show emotional connect with organisations (Burmam & Zeplin, 2005; Hughes & Ahearne, 2010). An employee who loves an organisational brand is more likely to use the attributes of the brand to define himself/herself (Hughes & Ahearne, 2010) and show a strong affiliation towards the brand (organisation) as their identities converge with the attributes of the brand (Aaker, 1999; Burmann & Zeplin, 2005).

Employee brand love and affective commitment

Organisational commitment exhibits the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation. Meyer & Allen (1991) conceptualised organisational commitment as affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment. Of these, affective commitment is perceived to have the strongest effect on workplace behaviour. Meyer & Allen (1991) defined affective commitment as "an emotional attachment to, identification

with, and involvement in the work organisation" (p. 67). Affective commitment refers to the feelings of belongingness and sense of attachment to the organisation. Human resources management literature suggests that employees with strong affective commitment feel greater emotional attachment to the organisation and more motivated to contribute meaningfully to organisational outcomes than do those who have low affective commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Affective commitment emphasises employees' bond with the organisation, captured by characteristics such as acceptance of organisational goals, values, and a strong desire to associate with the organisation (Perry, 2004). It is viewed as a "psychological bond" an employee has with his or her employer (Meyer & Allen, 1997, p. 14). The psychological state of commitment encourages individuals to pursue courses of action that benefit the organisation. However, the primary behavioural consequence of affective commitment is continued employment with the organisation (Meyer & Allen, 1997; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). The degree of employees' affective commitment depends on to what extent the organisation is able to satisfy employees' needs, meet their expectations, and allow them to achieve their goals (Meyer et al., 1993).

From a SIT perspective, social identity formation has been found to be the antecedent of affective commitment (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Foreman & Whetten, 2002; Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; van Vugt & Hart, 2004). Love for a brand can drive identification with it and boosts commitment as it promotes the feeling of belongingness (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Social identity formation involves individuals' assimilation of group membership as part of their own self (Riketta, 2005), thereby constituting a part of a large whole (Rousseau, 1998). In this sense, brand love can also be regarded as an antecedent of affective commitment (Ashforth et al., 2008). Thus, employees who identify with their organisations develop a strong emotional attachment towards the brand, internalise the brand's identity, and remain committed to their organisations. Based on the above arguments, we hypothesise:

H1. Employee brand love is positively related to affective commitment.

Employee brand love and PWOM

Employees' PWOM has been considered as an important resource for organisations. Any negative word-of-mouth communication can be harmful for the organisational brand (Miles & Mangold, 2014). When employees have a favourable opinion about their organisation, they feel motivated and engage in external PWOM communication (Löhndorf & Diamantopoulos, 2014; Shinnar et al., 2004). Researchers have examined the role of employees' PWOM in strengthening employer brands. For example, highlighting the importance of staff word-of-mouth (SWOM) strategy in companies, Keeling et al. (2013) identified PWOM as the process through which employees communicate information and opinions on an organisation, both internally and externally. Morhart (2017) considered PWOM as a type of employee brand-strengthening behaviour and Collins and Stevens (2002) described employee PWOM as a powerful employer brand communication and promotion tool.

Talking positively about an organisation which one identifies with is a powerful way of expressing one's own identity (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Thus, PWOM constitutes another form of support for the organisation which helps to positively differentiate it from other brands. Employees are motivated to speak positively about the organisational brand only when they internalise the brand's identity and become committed to the brand (Natarajan et al., 2017). People tend to identify with the objects they love, thereby using the important qualities of loved objects in constructing or expressing desired identities (Belk, 1988; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Given the significant role of brands in driving individuals' self-identity, we propose that employee brand love fosters PWOM. From a SIT perspective, employees who feel that the organisational brand reflects their identity will develop positive emotions towards the brand and are likely to share their experiences with others and speak highly about the organisation. Hence, we hypothesise:

H2. Employee brand love is positively related to PWOM.

Employee brand love and turnover intention

Employees select to work in organisations that are in synchronisation with their identities. Love for organisational brand is likely to reduce turnover intentions as people would not prefer to part away with their self-definition, related to organisational membership (Van Knippenberg et al., 2002). Gioia & Thomas (1996) suggested that organisational identification influences an individual's processing and interpretation of information. These identification perceptions help members to observe the positive aspects more profoundly and lessen the difficulties faced in the organisation. Ashforth & Mael (1989) argued that organisational identification is also associated with a stronger support for the organisation. When an individual identifies with the organisation, the organisation becomes a part of his/her self-concept, and he/she gets intertwined with the organisation. The more the individual identifies with the organisation, the more his own future gets determined by the organisation's future. Thus, withdrawal from the organisation would harm one's own self-concept, as doing so would be perceived as leaving a part of oneself (Haslam et al., 2001). Prior research has documented a negative relationship between identification and turnover intentions (Abrams et al., 1998; Riketta, 2005; van Dick et al., 2004).

Emotional connectedness to the brand is an important aspect of brand love (Thomson et al., 2005). Researchers have found that, apart from positive emotions, individuals will tend to have strong feelings to maintain proximity with the objects they love and are likely to feel "separation distress" when they foresee or experience separation from them (Hazan & Shaver, 1994; Park et al., 2010). We apply this reasoning to the employee-organisation context and argue that employees would not be willing to leave the organisational brand they love. Based on the SIT, employees who strongly identify with their organisations are likely to refrain from turnover because of a partial overlap between their self and the organisation (Avanzi et al., 2014). Thus, we hypothesise:

H3. Employee brand love is negatively related to turnover intention.

Mediating role of affective commitment

When individuals like (or, in some cases, love) a particular firm or brand, they demonstrate affective attachment or commitment (Fullerton, 2003). As such, emotional or affective commitment involves feeling like loving a partner (organisation), enjoying the company, and having a sense of belongingness (Geyskens et al., 1996; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). The sense of belongingness will result in positive attitudes and behaviours. Dick & Basu (1994) argued that the potential outcome of commitment may involve PWOM communications, and Paulin et al. (2006) argued that organisational commitment influences employees' intentions to recommend the organisation to others. Employees who feel proud of and are committed to their organisation are likely to recommend it to prospective employees. We argue that employee brand love fosters employee PWOM through affective commitment. Employees who love their organisation are also likely to recommend it to others. From a SIT perspective, such employees begin to believe that their organisation is the best workplace brand in the industry because the organisation fulfils their need for affiliation and provides them with a sense of belongingness. As such, they are more likely to speak highly about the organisation. Thus, we hypothesise:

H4. Affective commitment mediates the relationship between employee brand love and PWOM.

Researchers have found that employees who are emotionally involved with the organisation are less inclined to leave the organisation (Richer et al., 2002; Sjöberg & Sverke, 2000). Moreover, a negative relationship exists between affective commitment and turnover intention (e.g. Allen & Meyer, 1996; Clugston et al., 2000; Griffeth et al., 2000; Khatri et al., 2001; Meyer et al., 2002). Employees with high affective commitment are more emotionally attached to, involved in, and identify with the organisation. Therefore, they would be more willing to be a part of the organisation (Meyer et al., 1993; Thompson & Prottas, 2005) and are not likely to leave (Meyer & Allen, 1997). Thaneswor et al. (2001) suggested that affective commitment is an important predictor of turnover intention. Baotham et al. (2010) argued that lack of affective commitment amongst employees has detrimental effects, including increase in turnover rate and turnover intention. In other words, employees who are more committed are less likely to leave the organisation. Basing our arguments on SIT, we argue that when employees get emotionally attached to their organisation, they tend to attain positive social identity and enhance their self-esteem and may not wish to move away from their identity. Accordingly, employees would prefer to stay with the organisation and are not likely to leave. Thus, we hypothesise:

H5. Affective commitment mediates the relationship between employee brand love and turnover intention.

Method

Sample and data collection

We followed purposive sampling in our study. The target population comprised managerial and non-managerial

personnel from three publicly listed and three private insurance companies in India. The insurance sector in India, and worldwide, faces huge attrition rate in the domain of sales. Studies suggest that turnover in insurance sector salesforce is nearly 30% in year 1 and nearly 18% in fourth year (Agrawal, 2015). Moreover, there is high attrition in insurance sector globally (Roy & Roy, 2022). The insurance sector was chosen for this study because insurance companies cannot easily differentiate from competition, as most of the products are similar. In such a situation, a company's brand image plays a crucial role in driving behaviours of both customers and employees. Past studies related to employer branding issue have also taken samples from the insurance sector (Bodderas et al., 2011). Thus, we considered that insurance was an appropriate sample for the study.

Data were collected during a training program conducted by the authors. This helped us to get a response rate which was close to 100%. The sample size was 289. The survey was conducted between March and September of 2016. Questionnaires were randomly distributed to the employees during the training sessions. The sample comprised 166 males (57.4%) and 123 females (42.6%). One hundred forty-eight employees (51.2%) had one year of experience, 55 employees (19%) had two years of experience, three employees (1%) had three years of experience, 78 employees (27%) had four years of experience, and five employees (1.7%) had five years of experience. In terms of functional roles, 203 respondents (70.24%) belonged to the sales function, 47 respondents (16.26%) belonged to the marketing function, 12 respondents (4.15%) belonged to the HR function, and 27 respondents (9.34%) belonged to other functions (such as IT, operations and compliance). There were no significant differences in the responses on the study variables collected from employees belonging to public and private companies. We provide the analysis of the data in Tables 1 and 2. As can be seen from the tables, there were no significant difference in the means of brand love, intention to quit, affective commitment, and PWOM across the six companies. Hence, we combined the data collected from different organisations and performed analysis on the overall sample.

Measures

The following subsections describe the measures used in this study along with the results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for each individual measure. The full measures are provided in Appendix A of the manuscript.

Employee brand love

Employee brand love was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006). Responses were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). The alpha reliability of the scale was 0.93. The model consisting of 10 items and one latent employee brand love factor showed very good fit ($\chi^2 [35] = 40.7$; CFI = 0.99; TLI = 0.99; RMSEA = 0.02; NFI = 0.97; GFI = 0.97).

Table 1 Sample break-up and descriptives.

Name of company	Number of participants	Average brand love	Std. dev: Brand love	Average ITQ	Std. dev: ITQ	Average Aff Comm	Std. dev: Aff Comm	Average PWOM	Std. dev: PWOM
Public Sector Insurance Company 1	48	4.88	0.82	2.79	1.09	4.98	1.09	4.60	0.87
Public Sector Insurance Company 2	47	4.92	0.77	2.44	0.92	4.88	0.97	4.96	0.90
Public Sector Insurance Company 3	48	4.84	0.95	2.77	1.47	4.87	1.21	4.69	1.05
Private Sector Insurance Company 1	47	4.92	0.78	2.59	1.08	4.96	0.99	5.10	0.88
Private Sector Insurance Company 2	49	4.82	0.89	2.60	0.89	5.20	1.03	4.68	0.98
Private Sector Insurance Company 3	50	4.74	1.03	2.93	1.40	4.92	0.99	4.80	1.03
Grand total	289	4.85	0.88	2.69	1.18	4.97	1.06	4.80	0.97

Note. Aff Comm = affective commitment; ITQ = intention to quit; PWOM = positive word of mouth.

Table 2 ANOVA results to test for differences in means of variables across companies.

		Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Brand love	Between groups	1.10	5	0.22	0.28	0.92
	Within groups	224.94	283	0.80		
	Total	226.04	288			
Intention to quit	Between groups	7.36	5	1.47	1.06	0.381
	Within groups	392.17	283	1.39		
	Total	399.54	288			
Positive word-of-mouth behaviour	Between groups	8.47	5	1.69	1.81	0.11
	Within groups	265.04	283	0.94		
	Total	273.51	288			
Affective commitment	Between groups	3.68	5	0.74	0.65	0.66
	Within groups	318.28	283	1.12		
	Total	321.96	288			

Affective commitment

Employees' affective commitment to the organisation was measured using the affective commitment questionnaire developed by Meyer & Allen (1997). Six items were used to measure affective commitment and responses to the items were rated on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). This study adapted Meyer & Allen's (1997) scale because several studies have assessed its construct validity and the scale has been found to be valid in the Indian context (Meyer et al., 2002; Namasisvayam & Zhao, 2007). The alpha reliability of the scale was 0.86. The model comprising six items and one latent factor showed very good fit with the data ($\chi^2[6] = 3.4$; TLI = 1; GFI = 0.99; NFI = 0.99; CFI = 1.00; RMSEA < 0.001).

PWOM behaviour

PWOM was measured using the four-item scale developed by Carroll & Ahuvia (2006). Responses were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The alpha reliability of the scale was 0.89. The model comprising four items and one latent PWOM factor showed very good fit ($\chi^2[1] = 0.20$; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; RMSEA = 0.001; NFI = 1; GFI = 1).

Turnover intention

Turnover intention was measured using a scale adapted from Rosin & Korabik (1991).

Responses were measured on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The alpha reliability of the scale was 0.93. The model consisting of four items and one latent turnover intention factor showed very good fit with the data ($\chi^2[2] = 0.06$; CFI = 1; TLI = 1; GFI = 1; RMSEA < 0.001).

Results

Discriminant and convergent validity

Discriminant validity of the constructs was assessed by computing average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct. The factor means, standard deviations, inter-correlations between factors, Cronbach's alpha reliability, and AVE are presented in Table 3. The measurement model comprising employee brand love, affective commitment, PWOM, and turnover intention as four distinct constructs showed a superior fit as compared to the one-dimensional model where the correlation between the constructs were constrained to unity. The χ^2 -difference test was significant ($\Delta\chi^2[5] = 262.34$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that the correlation between the constructs significantly differed from 1. The AVE for each factor is provided in the parentheses along the

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	Mean	SD	CR	Alpha	EBL	AC	PWOM	TI
EBL	4.85	0.88	0.93	0.93	(0.59)	0.22	0.36	0.33
AC	4.97	1.05	0.87	0.86	0.47**	(0.54)	0.20	0.19
PWOM	4.8	0.97	0.90	0.89	0.60**	0.45**	(0.70)	0.28
TI	2.68	1.05	0.93	0.93	-0.58**	-0.44**	-0.53**	(0.77)

Note. AC: affective commitment; EBL: employee brand love; PWOM: Positive word of mouth; TI: turnover intention. Values in parentheses represent average variance extracted; values above the parentheses represent the square of correlations between the variables; values below the parentheses represent the correlations between the variables. **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two tailed); $N = 289$.

Table 4 Standardised loadings of measurement models.

Item	Standardised loading	Latent construct	AVE	CR
BL1	0.74	Employee brand love	0.59	0.93
BL2	0.74			
BL3	0.80			
BL4	0.80			
BL5	0.73			
BL6	0.76			
BL7	0.78			
BL8	0.75			
BL9	0.79			
BL10	0.79			
AC1	0.82	Affective commitment	0.54	0.87
AC2	0.67			
AC3	0.78			
AC4	0.73			
AC5	0.67			
AC6	0.72			
PWOM1	0.79	Positive WOM	0.7	0.9
PWOM2	0.78			
PWOM3	0.83			
PWOM4	0.94			
TI1	0.86	Turnover intention	0.77	0.93
TI2	0.89			
TI3	0.88			
TI4	0.88			

Note. EBL1-10: items of employee brand love; AC1-6: items of affective commitment; PWOM1-4: items of positive word-of-mouth; TI1-4: items of turnover intention. $N = 289$.

diagonal in Table 3. The AVE values for all the factors were greater than 0.5, signifying adequate convergent validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Ping, 1996). The square of the correlation between any two factors (values given above the diagonal in Table 3) was not more than the AVEs of the individual constructs, signifying that the factors have greater internal (extracted) variance than the variance shared between them and have adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Ping, 1996).

The internal consistency of the measurement model was found by computing composite reliability. The composite reliability coefficients ranged from 0.87 to 0.93 and were greater than the suggested value of 0.70 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The Pearson correlations amongst the study variables are presented in Table 3. All the correlation coefficients were significant. All measures showed adequate levels of reliability (0.89-0.93). Table 4 reports the standardised loadings of the observed items on their respective latent constructs.

Hypotheses testing

The study relationships were analysed at the individual level and AMOS 22 was used to analyse the data. The results of covariance-based structural equation modelling are presented in Figure 1. The fit indices of the structural model showed good fit with the data ($\chi^2[244] = 401.5$; $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.04; NFI = 0.91; GFI = 0.90). The model showed that all the paths were significant.

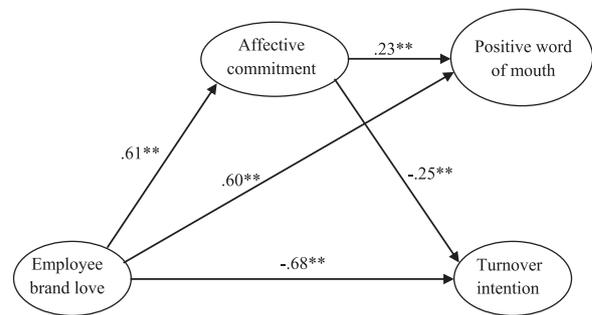


Figure 1. Structural model with standardised path coefficients. Note: ** $p < 0.01$ $N = 289$. The result represents the standardised path coefficients of the structural model. Model fit: $\chi^2[244] = 401.5$; $p < 0.001$; CFI = 0.96; RMSEA = 0.04; NFI = 0.91; GFI = 0.90.

Employee brand love was significantly related to affective commitment ($\beta = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$) and PWOM ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$), while it was negatively related to turnover intention ($\beta = -0.68$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypotheses 1-3 were supported. The indirect effect of employee brand love on PWOM, calculated by multiplying the path coefficients of the relationships between employee brand love and affective commitment and between affective commitment and PWOM (Baron & Kenny, 1986), was positive and significant ($\beta = 0.14$, Sobel 't' = 3.36, $p < 0.001$). The results indicated that the effect of employee brand love on PWOM is mediated by affective commitment. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. Similarly, the indirect effect of employee brand love on turnover intention, calculated by multiplying the path coefficients of the relationships between employee brand love and affective commitment and between affective commitment and turnover intention, was significant ($\beta = -0.15$, Sobel 't' = -3.25, $p < 0.001$). The results indicated that the effect of employee brand love on turnover intention is mediated by affective commitment. Hypothesis 5 was, therefore, also supported.

To test the mediation effect of affective commitment on the employee brand love-turnover intention relationship, we also followed the bootstrap method as it allows for unbiased estimates of standard errors for indirect effects (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). We evaluated the indirect effects with 10,000 bootstrap samples of the data. Mediation effect was established when the 95% confidence interval around the average indirect effect did not include zero. The unstandardised bootstrap confidence interval ranged from -0.27 to -0.06, showing that the indirect effect was different from zero. To test the significance of the indirect effect of employee brand love on PWOM through affective commitment, 95% bootstrap was computed. The unstandardised bootstrap confidence interval ranged from 0.06 to 0.24, showing that the indirect effect was different from zero.

Discussion

Effective brands can generate competitive advantages, aid employee attraction and retention, and help employees internalise organisational values (Love & Singh, 2011). Brand love has garnered more attention from consumers' perspective than from employees' perspective. In this article, we

attempt to address this issue by conceptualising and demonstrating the significance of employee brand love. Drawing on the SIT, the present study examined the effect of employee brand love on employee attitudes and behaviours towards organisations. Specifically, the study analysed the relationship of employee brand love with affective commitment, PWOM behaviour, and turnover intention. The empirical results demonstrated that employee brand love has a significant positive relationship with PWOM behaviour and affective commitment, and a significant negative relationship with turnover intention. Moreover, affective commitment mediated the relationship of employee brand love with PWOM behaviour and turnover intention. From a SIT perspective, these findings suggest that stronger identification (love) with the organisation (brand) leads employees to exhibit high affective commitment, PWOM behaviour, and low turnover intention.

The current study extends our understanding on how emotional experience of employees with their organisational brands, which in turn can have a positive impact on employee attitudes and behaviours. The positive emotional feelings provide an important basis upon which employee brand love is established. Thus, the important message conveyed by this study is that employees intend to stay in an organisation or recommend it to others not only for the functional values but also for the symbolic values that originate from their strong identification with the organisation's brand.

Theoretical and practical implications

This study makes important contributions to the existing literature. First, by establishing the significance of employee brand love, the study makes an important contribution to the brand love literature, which is largely focussed on consumer-brand relationships and hardly on employee-brand relationships. Employees' love for their organisational brands is as important as consumers' love for their product/service brands. Second, by conceptualising employee brand love from a SIT perspective, which has so far not been researched, this study makes an important addition to the SIT literature. Third, by demonstrating the relationship of employee brand love with three important employees' behavioural and attitudinal outcomes - affective commitment, turnover intention, and PWOM - which has so far not been analysed, the study strengthens the concept of employee brand love and makes an important contribution to both organisational behaviour and human resource management literatures. Finally, this study contributes to the internal branding literature, which largely focusses on how employees can deliver on the brand promise by strengthening their brand-building behaviours.

Branding has become quintessential for organisations, as it has been found to generate competitive advantage, help employees in internalising organisational values, and assist in employee attraction and retention (Alnawas & Altarifi, 2016). Love towards the organisational brand can lead to the development of positive emotions amongst employees. Emotions drive actions and our study provides evidence for the fact that employees who are deeply in love with their organisation are likely to exhibit higher affective

commitment, PWOM behaviour, and lower turnover intention. An emotionally connected employee may love both the brand as well as the organisation, work towards the organisation's success, and be more willing to accept organisational failures (Love & Singh, 2011). The present study can provide useful insights to managers as well as organisations to better understand the impact of brand love on employee attitudes and behaviours. In particular, the results could be useful for employer brand managers to better the outcomes of employees loving their organisational brands and accordingly develop strategies to strengthen the organisational brand to attract potential employees as well drive their positive performance. The study also has important implications for human resource managers, who can frame effective strategies to develop a committed and competent workforce, which is key to organisational growth and success.

Limitations and future research directions

While this study offers valuable theoretical and practical implications, it is not free from limitations. Firstly, the data collected were self-reported and there is a possibility of inflated correlations. Future studies can address this issue by collecting brand love ratings from both employees and supervisors. Secondly, this study solely focussed on the mediating role of affective commitment in the relationship of employee brand love with PWOM and turnover intention. Examining other mediating mechanisms in these relationships would be meaningful. Thirdly, cross-sectional data were used in this study and hence claims of causality are limited. Alternate study designs such as longitudinal studies could be useful to better understand the influence of employee brand love on employee attitudes and behaviours. Finally, the study sample comprised professionals from public and private insurance companies located in India. To enable better generalisability of the findings, future research should consider using cross-country and cross-industry data.

Appendix. Questionnaire used to collect responses for the study

Please fill this information as it applies to you. Place a tick mark in the appropriate box

- | | |
|--|---|
| Gender: | <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female |
| Age: | <input type="checkbox"/> 20-25 years <input type="checkbox"/> 26-30 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 31-35 years <input type="checkbox"/> Above 35 years |
| Educational qualification: | <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate
<input type="checkbox"/> Post Graduate <input type="checkbox"/> Others |
| Total work experience: | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than a year
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-4 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> More than 10 years |
| Work experience in the current organisation: | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than a year
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-4 years
<input type="checkbox"/> 5-10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> More than 10 years
<input type="checkbox"/> Sales
<input type="checkbox"/> Marketing |

(continued)

What is your current job profile in your organisation

Human Resource Management
 Operations
 Compliance
 Information Technology
 Others

Name of your current organisation

Brand love: The following questions are related to your organisation. Kindly answer all the questions. In this instrument 'Brand' refers to brand (the organisation) with which you are working. Please answer all items. Only if an item is irrelevant or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank. Kindly indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7.

(Adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006)

My company is a wonderful brand.
 My company brand makes me feel good.
 My company brand is totally awesome.
 I have neutral feelings about my company brand.
 My company brand makes me very happy.
 I love my company's brand.
 I have no particular feelings about my company's brand.
 My company's brand is a pure delight.
 I am passionate about my company's brand.
 I'm very attached to my company's brand.

Intention to quit: The following questions are about your current job. Kindly indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7. (Adapted from Rosin & Korabik, 1991).

I will be with my current company five years from now.
 How likely is it that you will be working with your current company this time next year?
 I will probably look for a job at a different company in the next year.
 How likely is it that you will take steps during the next year to secure a job at a different company?

Positive word of mouth behaviour: The following questions are related to your organisation. Kindly answer all the questions. Please answer all items only any item is irrelevant or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank. Kindly indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7.

(Adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006)

I have recommended my company as an employer to lots of people.
 I 'talk up' about my company's brand to my friends.
 I try to spread the good-word about my company's brand.
 I give my company's brand tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising.

Affective commitment: Following questions are related to your organisation. Kindly answer all the questions. Please answer all items. Only if an item is irrelevant or if you are unsure or do not know the answer, leave the answer blank. Kindly indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale of 1-7. (Adapted from Meyer & Allen, 1997)

I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career in my current organisation.
 I really feel as if this organisation's problems are my own.
 I don't feel like 'part of the family' at my organisation.
 I do not feel 'emotionally attached' to this organisation.
 This organisation has a great deal of personal meaning for me.
 I don't feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation.

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