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## LOVE AND RESPECT IN THE SOCCER INDUSTRY

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**Keywords:** Brand love, Brand performance, Brand heritage, Corporate reputation, Brand trust and Brand co-creation

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### Extended Abstract

**Purpose:** The aim of this study is to follow Roberts' concept of Lovemarks and develop a scale to measure Lovemarks brands, using soccer context industry. For scale development, we followed the Churchill's (1979) paradigm.

**Conceptualization:** Investing in consumer-brand relationships has become central to many brands seeking to build lasting and profitable links with their consumers (Pang, Keh, and Peng, 2009; Loureiro, 2015). The term Lovemark is associated, initially, with terms defined by Ahuvia (2005) as positive emotions such as brand response, brand connection, brand declarations of love. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) also define brand love as an emotional bond between a consumer' satisfied by a particular brand, assigning the concept with the name of Love to the Brand. Albert, Merunka, and Florence (2008), on the other hand, argue that brand passion is supported by three dimensions: cognitive - brand idealization and its presence in the consumer mind; Emotional - desire, attraction and link between the consumer and the brand; Behavioural - where the positive word-of-mouth is inserted, the purchase of the brand at higher prices and the persuasion of other consumers to buy it.

Lovemarks transcend brands. They reach something beyond their good performance. They aim to reach the heart as well as the mind, creating an intimate and emotional connection with the consumer. According to Roberts (2005), if a brand is discontinued

from the market, consumers find a substitute. If a Lovemark disappears, consumers will miss them. Roberts' (2005) theory point out two core faces of Lovemarks: love and respect. Love has been regarded as an emotion but also as a relationship (Batra *et al.*, 2012). The respect associated with a particular brand ensure the type of emotional relationship that consumers develop with a certain brand in relation to a competitor (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010).

We employ the Batra et al. (2012) prototype model of love to measure brand love, which presents seven dimensions of love: passion-driven behaviours (passionate desire to use, willingness to invest resources, things done in the past); Self-brand integration (desired self-identity, current self-identity, meaning of life, frequent thoughts); Positive emotional connection (intuitive fit, emotional attachment, positive emotions); Long-term relationship; Anticipate separation distress; Positive attitude valence (liking); and Attitudes held with high certainty and confidence. The authors use a grounded theory approach to capture the uncovered consumer-experienced features of the brand love prototype leading to a much more comprehensive and integrated understanding of how consumers experience brand love than past research.

Brand respect comprises five components: Brand performance, Brand heritage, Corporate reputation, Brand trust and Brand co-creation. Brand performance, therefore, represents a tool to analyse the consumer's experience, insofar as it evaluates the positive and / or negative physical and emotional benefits consumers have found in relation to the brand (Banerjee, 2008). Keller (2001) states that the consumer analyses and compares the value proposition of the brand with other competitors in the market and evaluates whether or not it holds a higher value. Brand heritage concept represents an overview of the past influencing long-term relationship, moments of the present and perspectives of the future (Urde et al., 2007).

Corporate reputation is built and fortified by representing a set of positive and / or negative ideas and impressions with stakeholders and allowing them to conclude about the company's identity (Walsh and Beatty, 2007). Brand trust reflects the assumptions of trustworthy, honesty and altruism that consumers ascribe to brands (Loureiro et al., 2012). Co-creation represents a common experience between the company and the consumer, in which there are a definition and solution of the problem together based on the exchange of ideas and innovative experiences. The passive consumer is replaced by the creation of active value, giving space for the consumer to interact with this type of processes,

supported by constructive criticism and efficient solutions for the creation and / or optimization of products (Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004).

Regarding nomological validity and predictive validity, we employed Mystery, Intimacy, and Sensuality as antecedents and behavioural intentions as outcomes. Mystery brings together stories, metaphors, dreams and symbols and increases the complexity of relationships and experiences since people are drawn to the unknown and have the desire for discovery. Sensuality comes from the senses. These senses work together to alert and stimulate consumers to new sensations, creating new memories and memories. Intimacy, in turn, can generate empathy, commitment, and passion. This component creates loyalty relationships between the consumer and the brand that can be remembered over the long term regardless of whether the functions and benefits have disappeared or not. Lastly, we expected that behavioral intentions –purchase intentions, willing to pay and word of mouth- is an outcome of being in love and respect a brand (Loureiro, 2015; Xie et al., 2015).

The scale was developed in the context of soccer industry. Collective sports at a global level, and soccer- in particular- are made up of activities and events mostly based in the service sector, lived in small periods of time, that instil subjective attitudes and behaviours in their consumers and which have unforeseen results given the existing competitiveness (Underwood et al., 2001). Soccer, as a collective sport, represents the most popular sport in the world (Cayolla and Loureiro, 2014). A team sport generates a social experience in which the whole is greater than the sum of all its parts. Soccer can be worth around 250 billion dollars worldwide. This value generates competitiveness not only within each modality but also between different sports (Cayolla and Loureiro, 2014). Soccer represents a way of life. Several feelings can be generated for one person, and the same feeling can be conveyed by many people (Keller, 2003).

The connection among fans is related to their loyalty and commitment. A kind of religious cult is identified for the club, which can overcome insufficient performance phases, scandals and negative publicity in the media, high ticket prices, among others. The representation of the colours of the club, the identification of places as sacred (stadium, museum), the organization and dynamism of cheerleaders, the purchase of allusive products (scarves, equipment, balls) reveal a strong and stable connection between the club and the Its adherents (Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004). The good results and success of a team can be rapid, but the loyalty and commitment present in the brand-consumer relationship can be slow to develop (Gladden et al., 2001).

**Design/methodology/approach:** The process starts with an extensive literature review to identify the facets of Lovemarks regarding love and respect. We employed the short scale of eleven items provided by Batra et al. (2012) to measure brand love. Respect was conceptualized through five components based on Robert's (2005): co-creation, trust, heritage, performance, and corporate reputation. Each of these components was defined previously in the theoretical background.

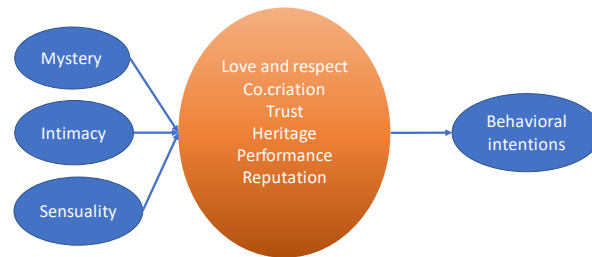
We employed five items to measure co-creation based on Prahalad *et al.* (2004), four items for trust adapted from Chaudhuri *et al.* (2001), twelve items for measure heritage (Merchant and Rose, 2013), performance with three items (Luxton *et al.*, 2015) and corporate reputation with 16 items (Walsh and Beatty, 2007). In order to measure drivers and outcomes, we used four items to measure mystery, three items to measure intimacy, three items to measure intimacy adapted from Roberts (2005) and Fournier (1998). Finally, we employed four items to measure behavioural intentions based on Xie *et al.* (2015).

Three-month surveys (from February 15, 2016, until May 15, 2016) were carried out through the online platform Qualtrics. It is a free and duly authorized program when registering through the academic email address of ISCTE-IUL (mmgrs@iscte.pt). The use of Qualtrics has proven to be a relevant option in that it provides an accessible use for both researchers and respondents. The survey consists of three parts, structured in order to make it easier for the respondent to read: first, the brand community to which he belongs is questioned, as well as the degree of affinity he/she feels to the same; Second, seven randomly organized blocks of items (69 in total) representing the constructs under study are carried out; Finally, certain personal data are requested so that a sociodemographic analysis can be carried out on the sample. The analysis of the items had as a method of classification the degree of agreement and disagreement on the same, using the Likert scale with 5 points (1 - totally disagree; 2 - disagree; 3 - neutral; 4 - agree; 5 - agree fully). Statistical analysis, in a research dissertation of this nature, represents a fundamental vehicle for the development of the exploratory study, making possible the analysis of the data as well as the collection of the necessary conclusions.

The data collected through the preparation of surveys were analysed in their entirety by the IBM SPSS Statistics 22 tool. It is a software that contributes to productivity improvement and decision making using analytical techniques. Through the Qualtrics program used to create the survey, it was possible to transfer the collected data automatically to SPSS having facilitated not only in the speed of the process but also in

reducing the risk of error. A sample of 348 completed surveys was used from 500 collected, representing 69.6% of the total.

Figure 1. Nomological framework



**Main findings:** Several aspects come from the study. First, sensuality stands out as the variable that best explains brand Love ( $\beta=0.836$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ), co-creation ( $\beta=0.486$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ), trust ( $\beta=0.728$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ), heritage ( $\beta=0.554$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ), performance ( $\beta=0.500$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ) and reputation ( $\beta=0.490$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ). Second, the three variables (mystery, sensuality, and intimacy) contribute to explain in 90.7% the variability of brand love, 62.5% the variability of co-creation, 76.5% the variability of trust, 70.7% the variability of heritage, 65.5% the variability of performance and 64.0% the variability of reputation. Third, Intimacy does not explain the variability of trust and performance significantly. Fourth, considering love and respect, brand love is the one to have the higher explanatory power on behavioral intentions ( $\beta=0.802$ ,  $p< 0.001$ ). However, 83,6% of the behavioural intentions are explained by brand love and the five dimensions of respect. Heritage is the one with less explanatory power over behavioral intentions ( $\beta=0.144$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ).

**Practical implications:** Today's brands should increasingly focus on consumer needs, their expectations and desires as a way to develop long-lasting emotional and sentimental ties and bonds. The brand that does it the best reaches a special place in the head and the mind of the consumer, being titled Lovemark.

The fact that a brand achieves this status allows it not only to create loyalty for the consumer but also to generate a deep relationship. This situation implies, above all, that the brand maintains its quality standards and that does not disappoint the consumer, always meeting their needs.

Achieving a Lovemark implies a constant building of emotional bonds beyond brand-consumer reason, as well as the creation of differentiating factors, sustained by symbolic, emotional, and intangible characteristics based on well-defined strategies. Sensuality and mystery are key factors in building love and respect. Yet, more than respect, it is the relational love (the deep passion connection) that leads consumers to keep in close contact

with brands, for good and bad moments. These findings are quite important for brand management.

The present research was based on the behaviour of soccer club fans in Portugal, and it was interesting to analyse the pragmatism, desire, and passion demonstrated by the club fans. It would be interesting for marketing management to develop an analysis in another industry.

***Originality/value:*** As far as we know, this is the first attempt to provide a full scale to measure love and respect following Churchill's paradigm into the context of soccer industry. Even so, the scale must be tested and extended to other iconic brands in other industries.

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