

1 **ANTECEDENTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF DESTINATION BRAND LOVE — A CASE**
2 **STUDY FROM FINNISH LAPLAND**

3 **Kaisa Aro¹ – Kati Suomi¹ – Salla Saraniemi²**

4 ¹ Turku School of Economics at University of Turku, Finland, ² University of Oulu, Finland

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8

9 **Abstract**

10 Brand love is a relatively new concept in academic discussion that demonstrates consumers'
11 deepening relationships with brands. The purpose of this study is to conceptualize the antecedents
12 and consequences of destination brand love. This qualitative case study focuses on the destination
13 brand of Ylläs, which is a large outdoor resort located north of the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland.
14 This study builds on the academic literature on brand love, destination brands, and emotional place
15 bonds. The main contribution of the study is the presentation of a framework of antecedents and
16 consequences of destination brand love. The framework provides new knowledge for academics
17 and practitioners alike in conceptualizing tourist-dependent, brand-dependent, and brand-
18 experience-related antecedents and the emotional and behavioral consequences of destination brand
19 love. Our results demonstrate the importance of understanding the extreme emotions related to
20 destinations and encourage further research this rarely studied area.

21

22 **1. Introduction**

23 A significant subset of consumers loves things other than people, including brands (Batra, Ahuvia
24 & Bagozzi, 2012). Brand love, and its counterpart brand hate (e.g., Zarantonello, Romani, Grappi,
25 & Bagozzi, 2016), are relatively new concepts in academic discussion and demonstrate consumers'
26 changing relationships with brands. Research has shown that brand love predicts loyalty better than
27 traditional models related to the perceived quality of brands (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). In
28 addition, it has been posited that brand love results in other favorable consequences for brands, such
29 as positive word of mouth (WOM) and resistance to negative information (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia,
30 2006; Albert, Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2008; Batra et al. 2012). However, brand love has
31 rarely been studied as a way of attracting tourists. The area is clearly relevant for research, given the
32 increasing competition in the tourism sector for visitors, funding, and support from different
33 stakeholder groups.

34

35 In recent years, much has been written about place and destination brands (e.g., Bregoli, 2013;
36 Govers & Go, 2009; Miličević, Mihalič, & Sever, 2016; Pike & Page, 2014), and studies
37 concentrating on people-place relationships are more topical than ever, due to increasing
38 competition between destinations. People-place relationships have been studied specifically in
39 relation to place bonding (e.g., Cheng & Kuo, 2015; Hammitt, Kyle, & Oh, 2009; Lewicka, 2011)
40 and place attachment (e.g., Hwang, Lee, & Chen, 2005; Tsai, 2012). However, studies focusing on
41 the relationships between people and places/destinations as brands are scarce. Studies examining
42 consumers' love toward place/destination brands are particularly rare. Although there are studies
43 dealing with people-place relationships, there is a dearth of studies examining how emotional bonds
44 between people and places are formed (Cheng & Kuo, 2015). In addition, there are some extant
45 studies dealing with brand love toward physical goods (e.g., Albert et al., 2008; Batra et al., 2012;
46 Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) and services (e.g., Long-Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012), but there are only two
47 that focus on brand love in the context of destination brands: Swanson's US-based study (2017),

48 which expands upon preliminary results reported by Swanson (2015), and Lee and Hyun's (2016)
49 study on tourism destinations in Japan after an environmental disaster. Particularly, a study
50 regarding a destination after environmental disaster may not provide conclusions that can be fully
51 transferrable to undamaged locations and are even less applicable to destinations that rely on their
52 connection to unspoiled nature. Thus, understanding of the concept is still limited in terms of its
53 construct, antecedents, and consequences. Certainly, conceptualizing the phenomenon merits
54 further research. Emerging studies on brand love have reported potential dissimilarities between
55 different cultures in both the consequences of brand love and the terms used in relation to the
56 concept (Albert et al., 2008). Prior studies on brand love have mainly been conducted in the USA
57 (e.g., Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), and previous research on destination brand love
58 appears to focus only on the USA and Japan (Swanson, 2015; 2017; Lee & Hyun, 2016), which
59 suggests further studies located in other countries and cultural contexts are merited. Given the
60 current weaknesses in existing knowledge on destination brand love, *the purpose of this study is to*
61 *conceptualize the antecedents and consequences of destination brand love.*

62

63 This qualitative case study concentrates on the destination brand of Ylläs, which is a large outdoor
64 resort located 150 km north of the Arctic Circle in Finnish Lapland. It is currently also growing in
65 popularity among international visitors (Statistics Finland, 2017a). Lapland is associated with
66 unspoiled nature, mysticism, magic, and beauty. The landscape of Ylläs is a combination of fells,
67 untouched forests, wetlands and lakes. Ylläs is an ideal destination for active holiday: it is Finland's
68 largest ski resort with most extensive cross-country ski and bike trail networks of Finland. Popular
69 activities are skiing and cross-country skiing, winter cycling and mountain biking, hiking and berry
70 picking (Ylläs, 2017). Ylläs has 850 residents (Ylläs, 2017), and annually circa 500 000 registered
71 over-night visits (Statistics Finland, 2017b), from which majority is in the winter time. The number
72 of visitors is growing and also summer time has increased its interest among tourists. Ylläs region is

73 partly a part of Finland's most popular national park: Pallas-Yllästunturi National Park, which is
74 proven to have the world's purest air. (Ylläs, 2017) The data informing this study comprise semi-
75 structured interviews with people who have visited Ylläs more than once, and who might exemplify
76 brand love for the destination.

77

78 The study concentrates on describing brand love toward a destination brand, and consequently does
79 not distinguish between emotions felt toward the destination brand and toward the destination itself,
80 as the destination brand is seen as an entity to which the destination and its characteristics are
81 essentially related. Swanson (2015) notes that emotions felt toward a tourist destination form a
82 diverse combination of feelings about both the destination and the destination brand. Govers and Go
83 (2009) concludes that a destination brand's identity should be based on the destination's own DNA
84 as its landscape, nature, and history.

85

86 **2. Theoretical background**

87 *2.1 Brand love as a concept*

88 Brands have been extensively studied through measuring customer satisfaction (e.g., Fournier &
89 Mick, 1999; Higgins, 1997) and brand loyalty (e.g., Oliver, 1999). The focus on customer
90 satisfaction has also been criticized (e.g., Higgins, 1997; Oliver, 1999), as more effective ways of
91 increasing loyalty have been introduced. Brand love has been identified as enhancing loyalty (e.g.,
92 Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In the context of brands, Baldinger and Rubinson (1996) suggest a
93 definition of loyalty that includes both attitudinal and behavioral aspects, as loyalty should not
94 merely be considered a repeat-buying pattern but also include a strong attitude toward the brand.
95 Moreover, utilizing love as a marketing tool has become more common in recent years (Bauer,
96 Heinrich, & Albrecht, 2009).

97

98 Brand love as a concept refers to consumers' emotional attachment toward a brand. Speaking about
99 emotional bonds and attachment may sound more natural than expressing love toward brands.
100 Brand love has been categorized as one of the dimensions of attachment, although it is sometimes
101 acknowledged as a separate concept (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010). Brand love can be regarded
102 as deep emotional brand connections (Long-Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012).

103

104 Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) defined brand love as a marketing concept through which desirable post-
105 consumption behaviors among satisfied consumers can be explained and predicted. They (ibid, 81)
106 referred to brand love as "the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has
107 for a particular trade name." Criticism of the existence of a love other than the interpersonal form
108 has also been presented (Ahuvia et al., 2009), which is based on the idea that love is considered
109 sacred. Thus, using the word *love* for objects rather than people is considered a defamation of the
110 nature of love (Ahuvia, 1993). Brands as love objects have spurred more resistance than other non-
111 human objects of love. Despite the criticism, it appears that love is a psychological process that can
112 occur toward people, ideas, activities, and objects (Ahuvia et al., 2009). Research reports that
113 objects related to nature, the landscape, and places are loved most often among the possible non-
114 human objects (Ahuvia, 1993). Ahuvia's (1993) notion provides a particular rationale for studying
115 destination brand love as an individual phenomenon.

116

117 Stenberg's triangular theory of love (1986), which concentrates on interpersonal love, is most often
118 adopted in studies dealing with brand love (Batra et al., 2012). However, Batra et al. (2012)
119 suggested that brand love should not be compared directly to interpersonal love, as multiple types of
120 interpersonal love, such as the romantic, compassionate, and parental, cannot be applied to study

121 brand love. Batra et al. (2012) also found that although respondents in their study felt that they
122 genuinely loved particular brands, they thought it was a different form of love than that expressed
123 toward people. First, the most common difference was that brand love was often described as a less
124 important relationship than interpersonal love. Second, whereas interpersonal love included a strong
125 altruistic concern for the loved one, this was not the case with brand love. Third, in healthy
126 interpersonal relationships, other responses, sometimes including love, are reciprocal. The
127 respondents noted that brand love is one-sided (see Shimp & Madden, 1988), although brands could
128 be considered to be “responding” when they are proving useful for consumers. Fourth, in Stenberg’s
129 triangular theory of love, there is no mention of the integration of the beloved into the self, while
130 integration is deemed important in the literature on brand love. Finally, a person’s conscious choice
131 to view their interpersonal relationship as love differentiates interpersonal love from brand love
132 (Batra et al., 2012).

133

134 The findings on the commonness of the existence of brand love vary. In one US-based study, all the
135 respondents reported that they “love” or “kind of love” some brand (Batra et al., 2012). A study
136 conducted in France found that 55 percent of consumers love some brand. These variations may be
137 due to cultural differences (Albert et al., 2008). Furthermore, it has been found that consumers tend
138 to use the word *love* rather loosely when they speak about commercial products. This is a clear
139 difference compared to interpersonal love (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), but there are presumably
140 cultural differences involved in this phenomenon (Albert et al., 2008; Ismail & Spinelli, 2012).

141

142 Based on our literature review, we propose a new definition for brand love in the current study: “*the*
143 *emotional attachment of a satisfied consumer toward a brand, which can be formed and become*
144 *apparent in different ways for different persons but which typically includes identification with a*
145 *brand to some degree.*” *Satisfaction* and *self-expression*, referring to brands that help shape

146 consumers' identity, are apparent in many studies (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012).
147 However, *passion* is excluded from the definition, although it is evident in several brand love
148 studies (e.g., Batra et al., 2012), because the literature suggests that it is not included in every
149 interpersonal love relationship (e.g., Stenberg, 1986); it is therefore unlikely that it would be a part
150 of all brand love relationships. In addition, although brand love often includes a declaration of love,
151 in this study, a consumer's verbal declaration of love is not considered a requirement for brand love.
152 The feelings (joy, yearning, warmth) and the behavior (loyalty, WOM) directed toward a brand are
153 regarded as more important. The study also takes into account that Finnish consumers may not say
154 that they love something as easily as, for example, consumers in the USA. In accordance with Batra
155 et al. (2012), this study considers brand love to be less important than interpersonal love. However,
156 responsiveness from brands is not totally excluded, as benefits and positive feelings that brands
157 bring to consumers' lives can be considered a response.

158

159 *2.2 Antecedents of brand love*

160 In this section, we review the existing literature regarding the antecedents of brand love.
161 Satisfaction is considered a requirement for brand love, although not all satisfied consumers feel
162 brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Roy, Eshghi & Sarkar, 2013). According to Roy et al. (2013),
163 it is likely that a positive and emotional brand experience leads to brand love. Ahuvia (1993) noted
164 in turn that pleasure, survival, security, esteem, and achievement predict brand love. Kaufmann,
165 Loureiro, and Manariotti (2016) proposed that brand attachment promotes brand love. A person
166 cannot feel love toward a brand without the brand being liked and valued highly (Batra et al., 2012).
167 A positive service experience has been observed to have an extremely important impact on the
168 formation of brand love, as it often results in thankfulness and a feeling of companionship (Long-
169 Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012). Thus, customer service has a direct role in the formation of brand love,

170 because the quality of the interaction between consumer and employee affects the formation of
171 brand love (Yim, Tse & Chang, 2008).

172

173 Existing literature suggests that consumers have a long shared history with brands they love
174 (Ahuvia et al., 2009; Albert et al., 2008). The importance of a brand is reflected through the time
175 spent in consuming and thinking of the brand (Batra et al., 2012; Park et al., 2010). Furthermore,
176 consumers' love toward self-expressive brands is greater than toward brands that do not fit the
177 consumer's identity. The term *self-expressive* refers to a consumer's perceptions of the degree to
178 which the specific brand enhances the consumer's social self and reflects the consumer's inner self
179 (e.g., Ahuvia et al., 2009; Karjaluoto, Munnukka, & Kiuru, 2016). Facebook likes have a
180 connection to brand love in regard to self-expressive brands (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony
181 2014). In addition, beloved objects such as brands relate to the expression of a consumer's self-
182 identity (e.g., Ahuvia, 1993; Batra et al., 2012). The target of a consumer's brand love declares
183 what the consumer is or aspires to be (Ahuvia, 2009; Batra et al., 2012). It may be important for a
184 consumer's self-esteem to be a user of a certain brand (Batra et al., 2012). Higher levels of brand
185 love have been reported when a consumer feels a sense of community with other users of the brand
186 (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

187

188 It is important that a brand connects to a consumer's deeply held values and that the consumer's
189 personal identity matches well with the brand identity (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). It has been
190 proposed that the integration of the loved brand into the consumer's identity may be a central aspect
191 of brand love (Batra et al., 2012). A consumer's feeling of simultaneous passion and natural fit with
192 the brand has been suggested to occasionally result in love at first sight (Batra et al., 2012). Since
193 trust in a brand is deemed important for the formation of brand love, the quality of the brand can be
194 regarded as essential for brand love to occur (e.g., Albert & Merunka, 2013; Kaufmann et al.,

195 2016). Furthermore, anthropomorphism is even more important for the formation of brand love than
196 the perceived quality (Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014). Hedonic products have been found to be more
197 lovable (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016); for example, artistic products and
198 activities that allow self-expression or learning (Ahuvia et al., 2009). Moreover, romanticism, a
199 consumer personality trait, has been found in conjunction with brand love (Roy et al., 2013).

200

201 *2.3 Consequences of brand love*

202 Next, we review and summarize the possible consequences of brand love. First, consumers'
203 emotional bonds with brands enhance long-term customer relationships (e.g., Long-Tolbert &
204 Gammoh, 2012). Furthermore, it has been noted that brand love has a positive effect on loyalty
205 among satisfied consumers (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Kaufmann et al., 2016; Thomson et al., 2005).
206 Those satisfied customers who also love the brand are more committed to repurchasing it (Carroll &
207 Ahuvia, 2006). It has also been suggested that consumers have a passionate desire for their loved
208 brands (Batra et al., 2012) and a strong willingness to retain their affinity with them. Consumers
209 may even feel anticipated separation distress when parted from the loved brand (e.g., Batra et al.,
210 2012; Swanson, 2015; 2017). A connection between brand love and positive WOM is logical (Batra
211 et al., 2012) because discussions with other people about a loved brand are an important part of
212 identity construction. Accordingly, consumers who are satisfied and love a certain brand display
213 more willingness to spread positive WOM (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Karjaluoto et al., 2016;
214 Wallace et al. 2014). A loved brand provides intrinsic rewards and also enhances extrinsic rewards
215 (Ahuvia et al., 2009; Batra et al., 2012). A loved brand triggers memories of important events and
216 people and a feeling of nostalgia. Loved brands also make consumers dreaming (Albert et al., 2008)
217 and enhance positive attitudes toward those brands (Albert et al., 2008). These attitudes toward the
218 brands have been found to be strong (Batra et al., 2012).

219

220 Interestingly, a consumer may feel personally insulted if someone criticizes or dismisses the loved
221 brand. This may result from considering the love object as a part of oneself (Ahuvia et al., 2009).
222 Brand love results in willingness to forgive (Bauer et al., 2009) and enhances willingness to pay a
223 price premium (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bauer et al., 2009; Thomson et al., 2005). Brand love also
224 enhances willingness to invest other resources, such as time and energy (Ahuvia et al., 2009; Batra
225 et al., 2012) and predicts repurchase decisions (Batra et al., 2012).

226

227 2.4. *Conceptual framework of destination brand love*

228 In addition to reviewing the literature on brand love, this section draws from studies on place and
229 destination branding and place attachment to build a conceptual framework for further empirical
230 study of the destination (brand) Ylläs. Place brands are a result of the interaction between a place's
231 internal identity and external image (cf. Hanna & Rowley, 2011). Place branding may depend on
232 such factors as geography, natural resources, history, infrastructure, and inhabitants (Fan, 2006).

233

234 An increasing number of studies deal with people-place relationships. Research has mainly been
235 conducted in the field of environmental psychology. Nevertheless, scholars from other social
236 sciences disciplines, including tourism and economics, stress the need for this kind of study
237 (Lewicka, 2011). However, as Lewicka's (2011) broad-scoped literature review revealed, studies on
238 people-place relationships are mainly focused on the aspect of residence, not tourism. Two
239 emotional people-place relationships are prevalent in tourism literature: place bonding and place
240 attachment. These two concepts are partly overlapping, and in some studies are treated as
241 synonymous (see Cheng & Kuo, 2015; Hammitt et al., 2009).

242

243 In the literature, *place bonding* is defined as the emotional attachment and the perception of an
244 identity that one associates with a specific place. Although bonding with places is associated with

245 multiple factors, there is little knowledge of how emotional bonds are formed (Cheng & Kuo,
246 2015). Tourists create emotional bonds while visiting places, prompting calls for further knowledge
247 on tourists' behavior (Alegre & Juaneda, 2006; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Tsai, 2012). *Place attachment* is
248 the most common concept for an emotional bond in the academic literature on destinations. It can
249 be regarded as an emotional and psychological bond between a consumer and a specific place (e.g.,
250 Hwang et al., 2005; Prayag & Ryan, 2012; Tsai, 2012). Place attachment is related to emotional
251 branding, wherein emotional and psychological bonds are built through rewarding brand
252 experiences, a brand's meaningfulness, and its functional and sentimental values (Tsai, 2012).

253

254 The destination's attractiveness (Hou, Lin & Morais, 2005) and image as well as the consumer's
255 personal involvement with the destination (Prayag & Ryan, 2012) have been observed as
256 antecedents of place attachment. Furthermore, consumers' identification with the destination's
257 identity enhances satisfaction and loyalty (Yuksel, Yuksel & Bilim, 2010). Prayag and Ryan (2012)
258 suggested that place identity is the strongest construct defining place attachment. According to Hou
259 et al. (2005), a destination's identity is more meaningful for those tourists familiar with the culture
260 or who have a personal bond with it, and place dependence is more important for tourists without a
261 personal connection. Hwang et al. (2005) also used *place dependence* and *place identity* as the main
262 constructs of place attachment. Place dependence is the "functional attachment that can arise as
263 long as the elements of an environment meet an individual's needs" (Cheng & Kuo, 2015, 556).

264

265 Tsai (2012) also recognized place dependence, place identity, and affective attachment as
266 constructing place attachment. Furthermore, six antecedents of place attachment were found in the
267 context of Singapore: functional benefits, emotional benefits, uniqueness, trust, attractiveness, and
268 self-connection (Tsai, 2012). Place attachment appears in terms of revisit intentions,
269 recommendation intentions (Prayag & Ryan, 2012), overall satisfaction, loyalty (Yuksel et al.,

270 2010; Prayag & Ryan, 2012), and revisits (Tsai, 2012), and it has a positive effect on tourist
271 involvement and service satisfaction (Hwang et al., 2005).

272

273 Some people say they feel real love toward places (Ahuvia, 1992) or destinations (Hosany &
274 Gilbert, 2010). Although people take many vacations, only some of their vacation destinations are
275 loved (Ahuvia, 2005). Consequently, a destination brand has to have something special for the
276 tourist to prompt him or her to fall in love with it. Earlier literature (Cheng & Kuo, 2015) suggested
277 that people may have an emotional bond to places that they visit for the first time or even those that
278 are unknown. There are even people who are in love with what some destination brands represent,
279 despite never having visited the locations (Swanson, 2015).

280

281 A study conducted in the USA identified 13 themes through which tourists articulate their love
282 toward destination brands. These themes formed four categories: 1) *antecedents*: things to do,
283 weather, people, logistics; 2) *relational issues*: brand/visitor community, family and friends,
284 relationship to home, self-brand integration; 3) *experimental issues*: agelessness, escape, feelings
285 while there, mystery, senses; and 4) *outcomes*: positive attitude, resistance to negative information,
286 and separation distress (Swanson, 2015; 2017). Furthermore, the study identified three different
287 types of destination brand love: *philia*, a friendship kind of love; *storge*, an affection type of love;
288 and *eros*, a passionate and romantic kind of love (love at first sight). These three types of
289 destination brand love are connected to different types of destinations, so it is proposed that
290 different destination types attract different kinds of love (Swanson, 2017). However, in this study,
291 we consider that different people can experience love for the same destination in diverse ways. In
292 addition, we view love as capable of changing over time, from passionate love toward more caring
293 love. In line with Swanson, the study by Lee and Hyun (2016), which was conducted in a disaster
294 area in Japan, also noted that three dimensions of brand love (passionate love, emotional

295 attachment, and self-brand integration) have a positive effect on switching resistance loyalty, which
296 then has a positive effect on behavioral loyalty.

297

298 Prior studies (Swanson, 2015; Lee & Hyun, 2016) have briefly discussed place attachment and
299 destination brand love in conjunction, and have found them to be closely related concepts, but these
300 studies fall short of pinpointing the differences between the two. The literature review shows that
301 brand love appears to have many similarities with place attachment, but there are also differences;
302 the most notable of which is the fact that brand love is a more complex phenomenon than mere
303 attachment. A further difference is that place attachment (e.g., Hwang et al., 2005; Prayag & Ryan,
304 2012; Tsai, 2012) is discussed in reference to places and not specifically place brands.

305

306 **3. Methodology**

307 A case-study strategy was chosen because it offers new insights into a phenomenon of which little
308 is known (Eisenhardt, 1989). The case study aims at theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989) and is
309 particularly useful in forming a holistic view of context-specific and complicated situations and
310 topics. (Yin, 2003; Halinen & Törnroos 2005). The current study is exploratory in nature (Yin,
311 2003), in that the aim was to conduct an in-depth exploration of the antecedents and consequences
312 of the emerging concept of brand love, particularly in a novel destination context. Prior research on
313 the topic is scarce and fragmented, offering only limited knowledge, which this study aims to
314 integrate. Accordingly, a single-case design was deemed suitable (Creswell, 2003). We aimed to
315 identify an information-rich, relevant case that would make it possible to transfer findings to similar
316 contexts (Patton, 1990). The destination in question is Ylläs, which is a tourist resort for active
317 outdoor holidays throughout the year and is located in the middle of the wilderness in Finnish
318 Lapland. According to the literature on brand love, self-expressive brands and brands with which

319 consumers have a long shared history enjoy greater love (e.g., Ahuvia et al., 2009). Ylläs is known
320 in Finland for attracting many tourists with a long history of repeat visits, and for enabling self-
321 expression among tourists in the form of outdoor activities, and accordingly this study focuses on
322 tourists visiting Ylläs. Ylläs, and Finnish Lapland in general, is also currently enjoying the
323 recognition of international travel influencers (Lonely Planet, 2016; National Geographic, 2016;
324 World Travel & Tourism Council, 2017) and that might give a destination brand from Finnish
325 Lapland extra impetus to be presented as a case.

326

327 The research followed abductive logic, in terms of continually transitioning between different
328 research activities, as well as empirical observations and theory (Dubois & Gadde, 2002, 556). Data
329 were gathered using semi-structured interviews, which is appropriate given the complex and
330 ambiguous nature of the phenomenon to be studied (Gummesson, 2005). The conceptual
331 framework, in terms of the antecedents and consequences of brand love identified in prior literature,
332 directed the construction of the interview protocol for the study. The main themes of the interview
333 protocol were WOM; the similarity of identities between the interviewees and Ylläs, and between
334 the interviewee and typical tourists; any negative experiences of Ylläs; the interviewee's
335 relationship with Ylläs, and determining whether that relationship might be construed as love. The
336 interview protocol included open questions, such as "Why have you visited Ylläs several times?",
337 "What if you could not visit Ylläs anymore?", and more precise questions, such as "What kind of
338 feelings do you get when you think of Ylläs?", "Have you had any negative experiences in Ylläs?"
339 "How would you describe Ylläs? How would you describe yourself? Are there some similarities?"
340 "What kind of perceptions do you have about visitors to Ylläs? Are there similarities between you
341 and them?"

342 Table 1 summarizes the background information on the informants.

343

344 -Place Table 1 about here (The study informants and their background)-

345

346

347 We aimed to purposively select information-rich participants (Patton 2002), and thus set the
348 following criteria for them: the interviewees should come from diverse demographic backgrounds
349 and crucially have visited Ylläs more than once, and feel it is a special destination for them. This
350 information was elicited from the interviewees by way of a questionnaire before the actual
351 interviews. Interviewees were selected from the first author's existing network, by characters
352 described above. Neither Ylläs resort itself, nor its actors, was involved in selection of interviewees.
353 The first author conducted 10 interviews between November and December 2016. Nine were face-
354 to-face interviews, and one was conducted by telephone. Interviewees were co-operative and they
355 participated willingly to the study. There were not any conflicts of interests and the purpose of the
356 study was not reported beforehand. Atmosphere during the interviews can be characterized as
357 relaxed. The interviews lasted between 26 and 53 minutes. The final number of interviews was not
358 determined beforehand; following the principles of saturation, the data collection was ended when
359 "no or little new information [was] added (Gummesson, 2005, 322)." The
360 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. We used theory-based content analysis, wherein
361 the first phase was to arrange the material according to the four main themes of the interview
362 protocol. Thereafter, the material was condensed and split into short, one- or two-sentence-long
363 units. These text units were interpreted in light of the individual antecedents and consequences of
364 brand love noted in the literature review, and were then categorized accordingly. Although the
365 existing theoretical knowledge guided categorization, new topics such as *interest in the well-being*
366 *of the brand* were allowed to freely emerge from the interviews and the text units. If they did not
367 match any existing category, those topics were then categorized as their own elements. The original
368 transcript of the text was then double-checked to improve credibility. Based on this initial coding,

369 authors agreed upon the interpretations together and formed the final three groups of antecedents
370 and two groups of consequences of destination brand love, as described later in the discussion
371 section and Figure 1.

372 **4. Findings**

373 We present and summarize the empirical findings below based on our previously described
374 categorization of the interview protocol. We identified eight categories, which consist of both
375 antecedents and consequences of destination brand love. Additionally, we noted the different ways
376 in which the interviewees discuss brand love.

377 Discussing brand love

378 All 10 interviewees said they are attached to Ylläs, like Ylläs, or both. The majority (7) even stated
379 that they could say they were in love with Ylläs. Three of them said they cannot really claim to be
380 in love with anything but another person. However, the same elements and emotions were apparent
381 in the answers of both groups, regardless of whether the interviewees themselves had verbally
382 described their feelings toward Ylläs as love or not. Some earlier studies (e.g., Batra et al., 2012)
383 have also shown that not all people are willing to use the word love in relation to brands, even
384 though they have a kind of relationship with a certain brand that could be acknowledged as brand
385 love. Thus, for the purposes of this study the answers of all the interviewees were included.

386

387 Those that did not refer to themselves as *in love* described their thoughts about love as follows:

388 *“‘Love’ is a very strong word for a Finnish person, so that one maybe finds it too strong. I cannot*
389 *say that I would be in love with anything other than a person. I think this is something different;*
390 *maybe it is a different form of love...I’m strongly attached [to Ylläs], but not in love. (Woman 33)”*

391 *“Maybe [in love] in an American way, but I think Finnish loving is a different kind of thing. Finnish*
392 *loving is when you really love something. Maybe I could say as an American that “I love Ylläs,”*
393 *but not in Finnish. (Man 36)”*

394 *“The thing is, I only fall in love with humans. (Man 39)”*

395 Interestingly, the interviewees themselves noticed the possibility for potential cultural differences in
396 the use of the word “love” in Finland and in the USA. In addition, those three interviewees who did
397 not verbally express feeling love nevertheless stated that they felt an attachment to Ylläs. Our
398 analysis shows that their relationships with Ylläs include elements of brand love, such as loyalty,
399 WOM, anticipated separation distress, and resistance to negative elements, and that these three
400 spoke about their relationship with Ylläs in a very similar way to those who said they love Ylläs.
401 Brand love was discussed as the final theme in the interview, so that potential challenges related to
402 the word *love* would not interfere with the content and the progress of the interviews.

403

404 Antecedents:

405 *The first visit and the length of the brand relationship*

406 According to the interviewees, Ylläs had positively surprised them on their first visit. None of them
407 reported disappointment during the first visit. Interviewees even stated that this first visit had been
408 unforgettable. Relationships with the destination were described as changing over time. People who
409 had a long-term relationship with Ylläs and/or frequent visits there mentioned a shared history with
410 the destination, which was characterized by memories and certain phases of life, as two of the
411 interviewees described:

412 *“It was exotic; the first visit has etched itself on my memory. (Woman 59)”*

413 *“It became familiar to me when I was a child, so it is kind of an easy place to go. It is familiar and*
414 *safe, so to speak. (Woman 36)”*

415 *“As I have come back here, and chosen this from all alternatives, it has strengthened the*
416 *relationship. (Man 39)”*

417

418 *Brand experiences and interaction*

419 As the interviewees spoke about their experiences with Ylläs, most of them mentioned familiarity,
420 internal peace and relaxation, joy, and other positive and warm feelings. This represents the
421 hedonistic nature of the destination brand in question for the interviewees. The interviewees stated
422 that they were satisfied, or mostly satisfied, with Ylläs, and all said that Ylläs is a unique
423 destination for them. The uniqueness was described as resulting from familiarity, a feeling of home,
424 pleasant memories, people, the best options for various activities, a special atmosphere, a beautiful
425 landscape, the best ski trails in Finland, the magic of Lapland, and being relaxing. These can be
426 seen categories of place dependent issues and activity opportunities. All the interviewees pointed
427 out that it was extremely important for them to be able to express themselves through their much-
428 loved hobbies when in Ylläs, so Ylläs can be considered to be a self-expressive brand for the
429 interviewees. An interviewee described how he experiences the atmosphere at Ylläs:

430

431 *“There is a kind of unique atmosphere. In nature, there is a certain kind of silence and space. There*
432 *is plenty of space to be and think. At Ylläs, one finds the magic of Lapland that one cannot find from*
433 *Levi, for example. At least, not if you have visited Ylläs. (Man 36)”*

434 Those who had visited Ylläs over a long period also felt that they could still experience something
435 new during future visits, and all the interviewees felt that they wanted to visit Ylläs again.
436 Willingness to visit again can be seen as attitudinal loyalty and actual revisits as behavioral loyalty.

437 Some of the interviewees stated that interactions during service encounters had shaped their
438 impression of Ylläs, while others maintained that customer service only influenced their thoughts
439 about the service provider in question and not the destination in general.

440

441 *Identification and self-expression*

442 When interviewees were asked to describe Ylläs as a person, each one did so differently. Ylläs was
443 described as having characteristics that the interviewees respected in people, such as authenticity.
444 Anthropomorphism was noted here. The majority of the interviewees found something similar
445 between themselves and Ylläs. The interviewees stated that at Ylläs they were able to do things that
446 are important and pleasurable for them. When interviewees described typical visitors to Ylläs, they
447 found similarities between the typical visitor and themselves. One of the interviewees said:

448 *“Yes, I find quite a number of similarities. It’s even almost exactly the same. (Woman 59)”*

449

450 *Meaningful people for the interviewees*

451 The interviewees mentioned that they associate particular meaningful people with Ylläs, such as
452 close relatives and friends, with whom they have had vacations there. Moreover, people at the
453 destination were also mentioned. The interviewees felt the association with meaningful people is
454 very important when considering Ylläs as a special destination.

455 *“When you have spent time with nice people there [Ylläs], you might therefore think that it is a nice*
456 *place as well. (Woman 29)”*

457

458 Consequences

459 *Interest in the well-being of the destination brand*

460 The interviews demonstrated that many of the interviewees were in some way interested in the well-
 461 being of Ylläs. Prior literature on destination brand love has not discussed this. Several interviewees
 462 wished for Ylläs to prosper and be able to stay active and provide work and services for the people
 463 living in the village. Interviewees said, however, that they wished that the Ylläs resort would not
 464 grow too much and that development would continue with a respect for nature, as the whole
 465 destination relies on its natural environment.

466 “...so that there would be work for people and they could maintain this service infrastructure here
 467 [at Ylläs] — because this is wilderness...I’m worried about projects related to building a mine and
 468 also a little bit worried about snowmobile driving in protected areas, which should be untouchable.
 469 (Man 39)”

470 “I’m fascinated with Ylläs as a whole, and its vividness...that it is not too vivid but hope that it
 471 won’t start to wither...that’s what worries me somewhat. (Woman 59)”

472

473 *Positive word of mouth*

474 All interviewees stated that they have spoken about Ylläs with other people, and many of the
 475 interviewees said that they had recommended and praised it. Discussing Ylläs was felt to be natural,
 476 as one of the interviewees said:

477 “Speaking about Ylläs feels good; it feels more natural than speaking about Levi or Ruka [which
 478 the interviewee has visited often]. (Man 39)”

479 Most of the interviewees are users of social media and follow “Visit Ylläs”, and other actors, such
 480 as stores, restaurants and activities in the destination, on social media. They had also liked, shared,
 481 or commented on postings of Ylläs or some of its actors and shared their own pictures and other

482 publications from Ylläs. Almost all the interviewees had at some point worn clothing with the logo
483 of Ylläs or some of its firms. This is interpreted as a declaration of love.

484

485 *Resistance to negative experiences*

486 The interviewees had noticed some weaknesses or challenges related to visiting Ylläs; for example,
487 a long journey to Ylläs was mentioned. Many also had some negative experiences related to Ylläs,
488 for example one of the interviewees had badly broken her shoulder on ski track. However, when the
489 interviewees were asked whether the weaknesses and challenges they had faced would stop them
490 returning to Ylläs, they said they would not, which indicates a resistance to negative experiences.

491 *“I wouldn’t stop visiting Ylläs for those reasons...I can’t figure out why I wouldn’t visit there;
492 maybe if I became paralyzed...maybe I would still visit. (Woman 36)”*

493

494 *Anticipated separation distress and willingness to invest*

495 When the interviewees were asked how they would feel if they were not able to travel to Ylläs
496 again, they said they would feel bad, miserable, or a little sad. They mentioned that it would be
497 unlikely that they would find a destination comparable to Ylläs. Their attachment to the place itself
498 became apparent. They also mentioned that they would probably travel less or stop altogether, and
499 they said it would be a pity for other visitors, as well.

500 *“It would feel sad for other people who cannot visit there in the future. I have been able to visit
501 quite a lot, so I wouldn’t feel too sorry for myself...but on behalf of others, because then they
502 wouldn’t be able to experience it [Ylläs]. (Man 69)”*

503 With regard to being willing to invest to Ylläs, some of the interviewees had bought a timeshare
504 cottage in Ylläs, and they reported that they might visit Ylläs several times a year, even though the
505 journey is time-consuming. All the interviewees were also willing to spend time and money to visit
506 Ylläs in the future. None of them admitted that potentially increasing costs would stop them
507 visiting, which indicates the absence of price sensitivity in relation to the destination.

508

509 *Memories*

510 Most of the interviewees had special memories of Ylläs, and all of them had pleasant memories.
511 Specific treasured memories were also mentioned; for example, buying a timeshare cottage,
512 meeting a future spouse, and a proposal at the Ylläs fell. When reminiscing, the interviewees said
513 that they also wished to create special memories for their children at Ylläs and that when they saw
514 familiar views on TV, for example, it made them want to travel to Ylläs. This can be viewed as
515 longing for the destination.

516

517 *“Things that become etched into one’s memory may be...when you learn something new or there’s*
518 *some new thing, so somehow you relate that [new thing] to Ylläs. (Woman 33)”*

519 In the discussion section, the above findings are further categorized into three themes of
520 antecedents: *brand experiences*, *tourist-dependent antecedents*, and *brand-dependent antecedents*,
521 and two themes of consequences: *emotional* and *behavioral consequences*.

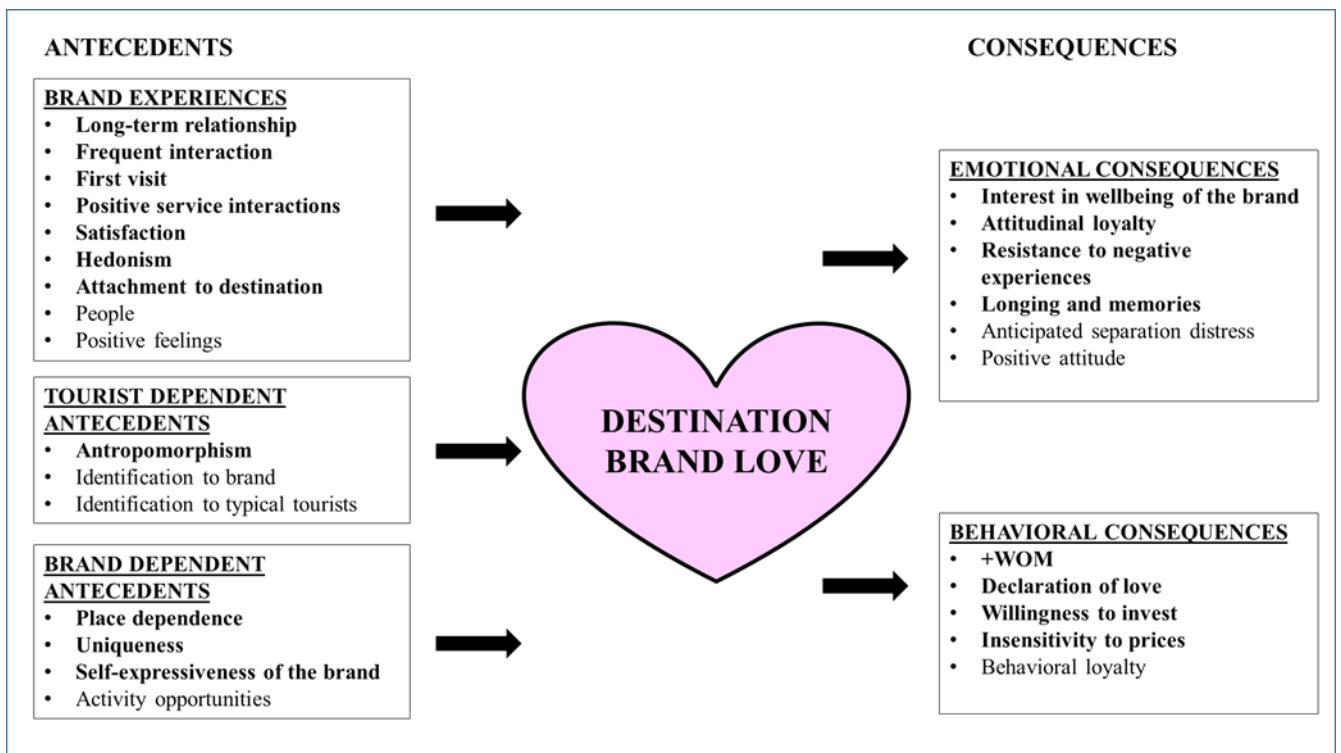
522

523 **5. Discussion**

524 *5.1 Antecedents of destination brand love*

525 The discussion in this section centers on the antecedents of destination brand love identified above,
526 and comparing them with findings from prior studies. We contribute to the academic literature on

527 destination brands and brand love by identifying and discussing several antecedents of destination
 528 brand love, only a few of which have previously been analyzed. We categorize the antecedents into
 529 three wider themes, *brand experiences*, *tourist-dependent antecedents*, and *brand-dependent*
 530 *antecedents*, depending on whether a certain antecedent mainly relates to the tourist him/herself, the
 531 destination brand, or the experiences at the destination. Figure 1 summarizes the suggested
 532 antecedents and consequences of destination brand love discussed in this section. The highlighted
 533 elements have never before been reported in the context of destination brand love.



534

535 Fig. 1. Antecedents and consequences of destination brand love

536

537 *Brand experiences*: Our findings show that a long and shared history with a destination brand
 538 enhances the formation of brand love. Several informants felt that a long relationship with Ylläs and
 539 frequent visits were reasons for the destination brand becoming important to them. Although a long
 540 history appears to enhance brand love, the results indicate that it is possible to fall in love with a
 541 destination brand during the first visit. Our findings related to the length of the relationship and the
 542 impact of the first visit has not been reported in earlier studies on destination brand love. Therefore

543 they are novel. However Cheng and Kou (2015) did observe that emotional place bonds can be
544 formed during the first visit, although studies mainly suggest developing a bond with a location is a
545 function of a longer-term relationship. Positive brand experiences stood out in the data. This study
546 is the first to suggest that satisfaction is an antecedent of destination brand love and that positive
547 brand experiences lead to destination brand love. The interviewees' perceptions of the importance
548 of the service experience varied. Some interviewees deemed the service experience important to
549 their overall impressions of Ylläs, but others did not. Nevertheless, based on the empirical findings
550 and existing literature on service brand love (e.g., Long-Tolbert & Gammoh, 2012), interaction with
551 service providers is here considered an antecedent of destination brand love for the first time in
552 destination brand love research. The findings of this study suggest that pleasant people (e.g.,
553 relatives, friends, and customer service people) associated with the destination brand are also
554 important for the formation of brand love (Swanson, 2015; 2017). The interviewees associated
555 several positive feelings with Ylläs. Many types of hedonistic enjoyment were described, and
556 accordingly we suggest that positive feelings about the brand (see also Swanson, 2017) and
557 hedonism enhance the formation of destination brand love. Furthermore, attachment to Ylläs as a
558 tourist destination emerged consistently from the interviews, indicating that attachment to a place is
559 an antecedent of destination brand love that has not been reported in earlier studies.

560

561 *Tourist-dependent antecedents:* Our findings suggest that the interviewees identify with both the
562 destination brand and with typical visitors to Ylläs. This study supports the notion that identification
563 relates to the concept of brand love as regards destination brands (see also Swanson, 2017).
564 Identification is influenced by a consumer's experience of whether a brand's values and personality
565 match with his/her own identity (e.g., Batra et al., 2012; Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014).
566 Anthropomorphism appeared in this study when the interviewees were asked if they could describe
567 Ylläs as a human, as they all offered a perception of the destination's personality. We suggest, for

568 the first time in the context of destination brand love, that anthropomorphism enhances the
569 formation of destination brand love.

570

571 *Brand-dependent antecedents:* Place dependence has been found to be important in prior research
572 on place attachment (Hou et al., 2005; Tsai, 2012) and place bonding (Cheng & Kuo, 2015;
573 Hammitt et al., 2009), and the findings of this study offer the first clear indications that place
574 dependence may be an important antecedent of destination brand love too. In addition, perceptions
575 of Ylläs as a unique and irreplaceable destination emerged in the interviewees' accounts, in line
576 with earlier studies on brand love (Ahuvia, 1992; Albert et al., 2008) and place attachment (Tsai,
577 2012) but is observed here for the first time in the context of destination brand love. A destination
578 brand's ability to enhance a consumer's self-expression relates to identification, and further
579 identification with a brand enhances brand love. This theme emerged in the interviewees' accounts
580 of their important hobbies. Self-expression has been found important for the formation of brand
581 love, and the results of this study suggest for the first time that the self-expressiveness of the brand
582 is also an antecedent of destination brand love. A variety of activities seems to affect the formation
583 of destination brand love, which is in line with Swanson's findings (2015; 2017).

584

585 5.2. *Consequences of destination brand love*

586 In this section, we discuss the various consequences of destination brand love identified from our
587 empirical data. It is notable that this is the first presentation of certain consequences in relation to
588 destination brand love. Consequences were categorized into two wider themes, *emotional*
589 *consequences* and *behavioral consequences*, according to whether they appear internally (emotional
590 consequences) or externally (behavioral consequences).

591

592 *Emotional consequences:*

593 Interest in the well-being of Ylläs was noticeable in the interviews. This finding is very interesting
594 as it contrasts with the earlier study by Batra et al. (2012) that suggests that brand love differs from
595 interpersonal love in that it does not include concern for the object. Our findings suggest that
596 interest in the well-being of the brand is a particular consequence of destination brand love. This
597 study is the first to report that interest in a brand's well-being is part of brand love. This could be
598 due to the fact that brand love has not been widely studied among destination brands and, as
599 mentioned earlier, that people are likely to form attachments to and bond with destinations, which
600 may even enhance their willingness to act to support a destination's well-being.

601

602

603 Although the interviewees were not asked directly about loyalty, their attitudinal loyalty (Baldinger
604 & Rubinson 1996) became apparent in terms of a long shared history with Ylläs and their
605 willingness to visit Ylläs again. The interviewees indicated that they felt anticipated separation
606 distress if they thought that they would not be able to visit Ylläs anymore. This is in line with
607 earlier findings dealing with destination brands (Swanson, 2015; 2017) and supports the
608 consideration of anticipated separation distress as a consequence of destination brand love. A
609 positive attitude toward the Ylläs brand was apparent in all the interviews, supporting the findings
610 of Swanson (2017) on positive and strong attitudes. It can be argued that brand love enhances a
611 positive attitude toward the destination brand. The interviews clearly indicate that even the
612 shortcomings of Ylläs did not deter the interviewees from returning there. Thus, brand love protects
613 a destination brand and encourages tolerance of its shortcomings. Some similarities have been
614 found in relation to destination brands, even though resistance to negative experiences has not been
615 previously introduced as a consequence of destination brand love and only resistance to negative
616 information has been mentioned (Lee & Hyun, 2016; Swanson, 2015; 2017). The interviewees
617 discussed their memories related to Ylläs, and some hoped that their children might create their own

618 memories there. Furthermore, their memories seemed to prompt a longing for (dreaming of) Ylläs
619 among the interviewees, suggesting longing and memories are consequences of destination brand
620 love. These have not previously been reported in the context of destination brand love.

621

622 *Behavioral consequences:* Our findings indicate that positive WOM is one of the consequences of
623 destination brand love. The declaration of brand love partially overlaps with positive WOM. The
624 interviews show that in addition to verbal communication, love can be declared, for example, by
625 buying branded clothes and accessories. Our findings expand upon prior research on product brands
626 (Albert et al., 2008; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) and suggest that a declaration of love is one of the
627 consequences of destination brand love. The willingness to invest money, time, and energy in Ylläs
628 was apparent. Therefore we suggest the current research is pioneering in its interpretation of
629 willingness to invest being a consequence of destination brand love. Increasing prices would not
630 stop our interviewees from traveling to Ylläs, and hence, we suggest that insensitivity to price is a
631 consequence of destination brand love. Furthermore, loyalty is also a behavioral consequence, as it
632 induces revisits. Behavioral loyalty (see Baldinger & Rubinson 1996) has earlier been reported to
633 be positively effected through passionate love, emotional attachment, and self-brand identification
634 in the context of destination brand love (Lee & Hyun, 2016).

635

636 **6. Conclusions**

637 The purpose of this study was to conceptualize the antecedents and consequences of destination
638 brand love. This study combined earlier, scarce literature on brand love with studies of destination
639 brands and emotional bonds of places and people. A framework of the antecedents and
640 consequences of destination brand love was offered as the main contribution and yields new
641 knowledge for academics and practitioners alike. Our findings indicate the concepts of place
642 bonding and place attachment partially overlap the concept of destination brand love (see Cheng &

643 Kuo, 2015), as all deal with emotional bonds between people and places. We propose that
644 destination brand love be considered an individual form of place bonding; it is a powerful form of
645 bonding focused on a destination brand, as indicated by its consequences. We further suggest that
646 people who have already bonded with a place may also feel destination brand love. We consider
647 attachment to place as an antecedent of destination brand love. When comparing our findings to
648 those of studies on place attachment (e.g., Hwang et al., 2005; Tsai, 2012), destination brand love
649 appears to have a richer variety of antecedents and consequences than place attachment.
650 Furthermore, in the case of destination brand love, some of the consequences are powerful, such as
651 anticipated separation distress. This implies that destination brand love could be considered to
652 establish a stronger bond than place attachment. Moreover, as a destination brand is a more
653 complex entity than a destination itself, these two theoretical concepts are different.

654

655 While earlier studies on destination brand love have been conducted solely in the USA and Japan
656 (Lee & Hyun, 2016; Swanson, 2015; 2017), this study offers a Nordic perspective on both
657 destination brand love studies and on brand love in general, as the majority of the research on brand
658 love occurs in the USA and Central Europe (e.g., Albert et al., 2008; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).
659 Another notable contribution is that interest in the well-being of the brand is presented in relation to
660 brand love for the first time. The cultural aspect is relevant insofar as it appears that there are
661 differences between countries in this respect. Studies undertaken in the USA find that the word *love*
662 is likely to be used in relation to objects and activities as frequently as for people (Ahuvia, 2005).
663 The findings of this study are closer to the results of Albert et al. (2008) and Batra et al. (2012),
664 which suggest that consumers might prefer other expressions than *to love* and *beloved* when
665 speaking about objects other than people. Nevertheless, although some interviewees did not
666 verbally express love toward the destination brand, the way in which the person described his/her
667 brand relationship revealed the same elements as the brand relationships of people who verbally

668 expressed brand love. Therefore, we suggest that studies on brand love might approach the
669 phenomenon more deliberately (Batra et al., 2012) and go beyond merely asking consumers
670 whether they love a certain brand or brands. This study also supports earlier findings (Albert et al.,
671 2008; Batra et al., 2012) indicating that all antecedents and consequences of brand love do not have
672 to be present for brand love to occur. The findings also indicate that people experience brand love
673 toward the same destination in varying ways and that the relationship with the destination brand can
674 change over time.

675

676 In terms of managerial implications, this study suggests that the consequences of brand love are
677 favorable to destination brands. For that reason, it is beneficial to be aware of both the antecedents
678 and consequences of brand love when branding a destination. However, marketers of destination
679 brands are not completely familiar with the brand love phenomenon (Swanson, 2017). The most
680 desirable consequence is likely to be loyalty, which manifests as attitudinal (intention to visit again)
681 and behavioral (actual repeated visits to the destination) loyalty. To increase the number of repeat
682 visitors, destination branding should concentrate on those aspects that enhance destination brand
683 love, such as the self-expressiveness of the brand, tourists' identification with the brand, the variety
684 of activities at the destination, and the uniqueness of the destination brand. One possible method
685 could be fostering tourists' passion-driven behavior and opportunity to express themselves by
686 giving them an application presenting transportation and accommodation options, and also location
687 specific activities that would help them plan their dream visit. Second, it is worthwhile
688 incorporating destination brands' uniqueness into the brand's communicated identity, such as by
689 including landscape, history, and authenticity. Third, destination brands could connect actions to
690 tourists love to the brand. Nike presents a good example, as Nike links consumers' love of running
691 to Nike brand shoes (Ahuvia et al., 2009). Fourth, destination brands could encourage tourists to
692 develop long-term relationships instead of visiting the destination just once. That might be achieved

693 by fostering a brand community on social media that encourages tourists to continually interact (see
694 also Batra et al., 2012). Destinations could also use slogans that inspire thoughts of the next visit. In
695 addition, because satisfaction and trust are important antecedents of brand love, it is essential to
696 safeguard the quality of services offered at the destination. Finally, as Batra et al. (2012) stated, it is
697 important for marketers of destination brands to find ways to maintain the brand love over time.
698 Interestingly, our findings imply that destination brand love results in an interest in the brand's
699 well-being, suggesting that destination marketers could, for example, gather focus groups of tourists
700 experiencing destination brand love and co-create a more sustainable brand. Lastly, as destination
701 brands can be considered business networks (Lemmetyinen & Go, 2009), this study offers new
702 insight into how brand love can be enhanced in business networks.

703

704 **7. Limitations and future studies**

705 As this study was conducted in the context of a destination brand that specializes in outdoor
706 tourism, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized to other types of destination brands.
707 Nevertheless, our study encourages analytical generalization and thus, theory building, where the
708 relevance of case studies in business research has been widely acknowledged (Eisenhardt, 1989;
709 Gummesson, 2005). In this respect, future studies focusing on other types of destinations and
710 tourism (for example, cities and cultural destinations) could prove beneficial. In addition, as the
711 sample of this study was composed of domestic tourists, the existence of destination brand love
712 could also be explored among foreign visitors. Furthermore, as prior literature has rarely explored
713 the influence of consumers' personal traits on the formation of brand love, such future research
714 could yield useful information both academically and managerially. As positive WOM is a
715 consequence of destination brand love and social media is an important marketplace and source of
716 information, how the destination brand love appears in social media is an interesting area for further
717 research. For example, information on how frequently different antecedents and consequences

718 occur, could be useful in targeting destinations' branding and marketing efforts. Once destination
719 brand love has been sufficiently explored qualitatively, further studies could develop quantitative
720 measures. In addition, brand hate in the context of destination brands could be studied to obtain
721 more information about the love or hate relationships that tourists have toward destinations. To the
722 best of our knowledge, brand hate toward destinations has not previously been studied.

723

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