

“I love your brand! I engage with you, and I do online brand-related activities (COBRAs)”: the role of brand value

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Abstract

Purpose – Few studies have explained how and when consumers are willing to engage in online brand-related activities (COBRAs). This study examines the role of brand love in a consumer’s decision to engage in online brand-related activities, considering the mediating effect of attitudinal brand engagement and the moderating effect of brand value on this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – The study analysed data from 404 Spanish consumers using structural equation modelling and the PROCESS package in SPSS to test hypotheses, including mediation and moderation effects.

Findings – The study expands on previous research by revealing the mediating role of brand attitudinal engagement in the relationship between brand love and COBRAs and the moderating role of brand value in the relationship between brand engagement and COBRAs. The results show that online consumers who feel brand love from an online store are likelier to be engaged with the brand. This predisposes them to comment on, share, and create content related to the company or brand. Furthermore, consumers who attribute a high value to the brand are likelier to engage in brand-related online activities.

Originality/value – This study offers valuable insights into mechanisms to encourage consumers to generate content, known as user-generated content, to the extent that the tools for developing this content are the same.

Keywords Brand love, Attitudinal brand engagement, Online brand-related activities, COBRAs, Brand value, Online consumer behaviour, Social media platforms, User-generated content, UGC, Food companies

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Social media platforms allow consumers to participate actively in more interactive marketing practices (Wang, 2021). Thus, consumers’ online brand-related activities (COBRAs: the consumption, contribution, and creation of brand-related content) have emerged as a new phenomenon. COBRAs are based on the users as consumers and producers of the content, known as user-generated content (UGC). The importance of UGC lies in the extent to which it builds brand awareness in the community. It transmits trust to consumers, ultimately influencing, in a very significant way, their decision-making (Cheung *et al.*, 2021a; Gómez *et al.*, 2019; Kim and Lee, 2017). According to Hubspot (2021), over 86% of companies use UGC as a marketing strategy. Among the reasons for following this strategy is that it can generate up to 29% more conversions on a website since, according to the same source, 93% of

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consumers view content and read comments and reviews made by other users and/or consumers before making their purchasing decisions.

For this reason, there has been a growing trend in the study of COBRAs in the academic literature in recent years (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020; Cheung *et al.*, 2022a; Schivinski *et al.*, 2022). However, the primary academic challenge remains to deepen our knowledge of why and when consumers carry out online brand-related activities, or, in other words, why and when they consume, contribute, and create content. Most of the studies focus on the impact of four motivational factors on the performance of COBRAs with minor alterations. Thus, it is exciting to study how other novel variables in the marketing context that are of recognised importance can contribute to this activity. Specifically, this paper discusses brand love, affective brand engagement, and value.

There is no doubt about the importance of interpersonal love, but the objects of love may also be objects, concepts, events, and brands. Emotional and passionate feelings for a brand (Ali *et al.*, 2021), or thinking that a brand is incredible, wonderful, or delightful, that is, feeling love for the brand, make consumers react positively to everything around the brand. This love for a brand implies that emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural bonds are constructed by the consumer (Batra *et al.*, 2012). Based on this solid consumer-brand relationship, brand engagement attitudes can emerge (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, all this could lead to positive results for the company, such as sales of its products and services (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016).

Furthermore, for consumers to be willing to make a more significant effort for a brand, the consideration they receive is essential; in this case, the consideration is the brand's value. However, despite the previous arguments, as well as the relevance of the aforementioned variables in marketing and consumer behaviour, there is a lack of studies that demonstrate how these variables interact, specifically how brand love drives online activities for the sake of the brand, how this relationship is mediated by attitudinal brand engagement, and when this relationship is intensified, for example with the intervention of brand value.

Based on the above discussion, this study, therefore, attempts to contribute to the interactive marketing literature, and particularly to the literature on COBRAs, by focusing on the following research questions:

- RQ1. Why do consumers carry out online brand-related activities – consuming, contributing, and creating content (COBRAs)?
- RQ2. When is a consumer most likely to engage with a brand and decide to consume, contribute, and create content?

The impact of brand love on the development of COBRA behaviours has not been effectively examined. While previous literature suggests that brand love motivates social network interactions (Vale and Fernandes, 2017), consumers' positive response towards everything related to the brand suggests a connection between brand love and COBRA behaviours. In this article, we posit that brand love has a positive effect on COBRAs by means of affective brand engagement. To our understanding, this is the first research to examine this link experimentally. Likewise, scrutinising brand engagement from an attitudinal viewpoint as a mediating factor connecting brand love and COBRAs gives an understanding of how brand love cultivates brand-related online activities.

Moreover, it responds, as suggested by Martins Rebouças Nery *et al.* (2021), to the need to consider brand engagement in the online social media environment. In this sense, this paper delves into the antecedents (i.e. brand love) and consequences (i.e. COBRAs) of this variable in the context of content consumption, contribution, and creation. Thirdly, no studies have explored their interaction thoroughly despite the significance of brand love, attitudinal brand engagement, brand value, and the possibility of interrelationships between these three

variables. Additionally, the study examines the moderating effect of brand value. Previous research has concentrated on the mediating role of the variable rather than its moderating effect (Chuenban *et al.*, 2021; Leite, 2022; Schivinski *et al.*, 2020). Finally, this paper addresses recent research calls (e.g. Wang, 2021) by examining consumer behaviour and interaction in social networks within the food sector. Although a new study area, this topic is of great economic significance.

In the following sections, this study describes the theoretical background of the proposed model, explaining the constructs and supporting the hypotheses. Subsequently, it presents data collection and methodology, findings, discussion, and conclusion.

2. Literature review and research hypotheses

This study uses the Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Emerson, 1976) to describe the relational dynamics of brand love and engagement on COBRAs. SET has been used to explain the interactions between companies and consumers, focusing on individuals' participatory behaviours and motivations for resource exchanges (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2023; Wu *et al.*, 2023). The theory suggests that people make rational decisions to engage in social exchanges based on their costs and benefits assessments, which involve a reward and cost analysis related to a particular exchange. Ongoing relationships between individuals can involve benefits and costs in economic, social, emotional, or mixed terms derived from unique brand experience. Customers can contribute to the firm by making repeat purchases, being willing to pay premium prices, demonstrating loyalty, and engaging in positive word-of-mouth advocacy, among other supportive behaviours. These interdependent transactions have the potential to cultivate high-quality relationships over time (Emerson, 1976).

While multiple theories have been employed to explain consumer behaviour, including online consumer behaviour, this study finds using the SET particularly valuable in comprehending consumers' social interactions with brands. This choice is also supported by prior research on consumer engagement (Rasool *et al.*, 2021) or COBRAs (Majeed *et al.*, 2022), as consumers are more inclined to invest their time in engaging with a brand's social media activities when they perceive value in the brand (Martín-Consuegra *et al.*, 2019). Reciprocity plays a crucial role in social exchange, and in the context of this research, engagement serves as a mediator between brand love and COBRAs. When consumers perceive positive outcomes from exchanges with the brand, such as consuming, sharing, and creating content, they are more likely to engage in such activities.

2.1 COBRAs

Consumers' online brand-related activities, more commonly known as COBRAs (a concept introduced by Muntinga *et al.* (2015)), are defined as "a set of brand-related online activities on the part of the consumer that vary in the degree to which the consumer interacts with social media and engages in the consumption, contribution, and creation of media contents" (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016). In other words, there are three levels of COBRAs: consuming, contributing, and creating content (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020). The relationship of consumers with, and the degree of consumers' commitment to, content generated on social networks can be very different. This is directly related to the three levels of COBRAs, which go from a more passive stance on the part of the consumer when they only consume content, which represents a traditional consumer role, to an active stance when they take the initiative to create original content, representing a prosumer role.

Consumers consume content when they read a social media post, view a photo, or reproduce a video but do not interact with the content in any way (Schivinski *et al.*, 2016). They connect with the brand through exposure to brand-generated content (Ashley and

Tuten, 2015). When they take a more active role, they may choose to make some contribution. In this case, the consumer is required to interact in some way with the content by, for example, “liking” a post, sharing content generated by others, or participating in conversations through “comments” (Kabadayi and Price, 2014; Schivinski, 2021). Finally, the highest degree of participation is reached when the consumer launches into the creation of original content by, for example, publishing images of products related to the brand, writing a post about the brand or product, creating and sharing videos, or creating content in formats specific to these platforms.

There is no doubt about the importance of COBRAs in companies’ communication strategies and the relationship between the two parties (the consumer and the company). Likewise, their importance and impact are more significant when consumer involvement is achieved. In other words, in today’s communication strategies, consumers must become communicators who can express their opinions about a company’s products and services (Cao *et al.*, 2021).

COBRAs are based on or consist of UGC. The term UGC is frequently used in the information systems and marketing literature. It is sometimes considered an alternative term for electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Babić Rosario *et al.*, 2020). However, recent studies (Thi *et al.*, 2020) show these two similar but different constructs. Specifically, UGC is a broader concept than eWOM and, unlike eWOM, implies a personal contribution by the consumer concerning the content he or she generates; this effort is independent of any commercial objective. In a recent work, Santos (2021) reviews the concept’s meaning and how it has been studied in the literature since its emergence twenty years ago. According to different authors (Cheung *et al.*, 2021a; Ho *et al.*, 2020; Veloso and Gomez-Suarez, 2023), UGC is incredibly influential (Shaker *et al.*, 2021), as it allows users to create and publish multimedia content and achieve considerable reach through dynamic social networks. UGC builds brand awareness in the community and conveys the necessary trust to consumers. This content can be generated on various platforms, but in recent years, there has been particular interest in social networks, which significantly accelerate users’ and consumers’ access to brand content (Zadeh and Sharda, 2022).

Consumers’ motives for participating in social networks provide information about their activities. Recently, several studies have emerged that focus on consumer motivation. The studies mainly find that these motives are rational (e.g. seeking information) and emotional (e.g. entertainment, social interaction, or reward). Several authors have reached these conclusions, and this is supported and extended by other research (Buzeta *et al.*, 2020) that has found two more emotional factors – personal identity and empowerment. Other authors have found motivational factors in brand-related issues – brand equity or brand image (Majeed *et al.*, 2022; Schivinski *et al.*, 2020). As will be proposed below, and in line with these latter studies, this paper analyses issues related to brand perception.

2.2 Brand love and brand engagement

Brand love is “the degree of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (Carroll *et al.*, 2006, p. 81). It can be understood as a strong emotional attachment to a brand characterised by feelings of security, affection and a desire to maintain proximity to the brand (Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, 2020); brand love suggests a solid consumer-brand connection. This is a novel variable (Palusuk *et al.*, 2019; Trivedi and Sama, 2021), although existing studies have already demonstrated its positive influence in obtaining various organisational benefits related to consumer attitudes and behaviours (Palusuk *et al.*, 2019). Among these benefits is engagement (Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014). Consumer engagement “is defined as a customer’s connection to a brand as manifested in cognitive, affective, and behavioural actions outside of the purchase situation” (So *et al.*, 2012,

pp. 311–312) and mainly occurs “when customers are willing to invest time, energy, money, or other resources in the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption” (Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen, 2010, p. 507). For consumer engagement to occur, according to van Doorn *et al.* (2010), there must be a motivational factor that is produced through the experiences of the individual – in this case, the consumer – to the object of commitment – in this case, the brand – which will involve the consumer’s predisposition to respond, get involved, and interact with the brand (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Despite being a pretty recent concept in marketing research, there are distinct definitions and measures of consumer brand engagement (Dessart *et al.*, 2016). From a practical point of view, engagement in social media is understood in terms of likes, shares, posting comments, and subscribers (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Cheung *et al.*, 2022a). However, from a broader and more academic perspective, the concept of brand engagement is closer to this concept in the field of business or human resources, so it is defined as an attitude or behavioural intention that helps to connect with the brand and triggers an activity with positive repercussions for the brand (Gensler *et al.*, 2013).

The previous literature shows several antecedents of brand engagement (Liu *et al.*, 2019), and among the key ones is brand love (Joshi and Garg, 2021). However, although several studies focus on understanding the relationship between brand love and brand engagement (Sarkar and Sreejesh, 2014), there is a lack of scholarly agreement on the direction of this relationship, with each of them being considered as a consequence and an antecedent of the other, depending on the study (Machado *et al.*, 2019). This study proposes that brand love generates brand engagement based on the premise that deep, affective emotions towards a brand serve as catalysts for deeper and more meaningful consumer connections (Palusuk *et al.*, 2019). More specifically, brand love is understood as a strong emotional attachment, a desire for continuous interaction and a constant presence of the brand in the consumer’s life, which naturally translates into brand engagement.

Based on the above discussion, we state the following hypothesis:

H1. Brand love positively influences brand engagement.

2.3 Brand engagement and COBRAs

In the online environment, consumers can contribute to the value-creation process by maintaining an active attitude towards the brand (Rasool *et al.*, 2020). However, engaging consumers in brand-facing online activities is necessary to achieve this. Brand engagement is the key to involving consumers. Previous research indicates that engagement can create an emotional connection that promotes the development or influences the generation of consumer trust (Islam and Rahman, 2016a), satisfaction (Rather *et al.*, 2018), attachment (Islam *et al.*, 2019), eWOM (Islam and Rahman, 2016a), or brand loyalty (Islam *et al.*, 2018; Kaur *et al.*, 2020; Perez Benegas and Zanfardini, 2023). Although previous research has shown that engagement significantly impacts various consumer attitudes and behaviours (Islam and Rahman, 2016b for a review), and its relationship with variables such as loyalty is well documented, there is a lack of empirical research on its relationship with COBRAs.

However, although there is no previous evidence on the relationship between brand engagement and COBRAs, there are indications that such a relationship may exist. Hollebeek *et al.* (2019) show in their work that brand engagement leads to developing brand-related operational resources. This means that when engagement has been created with the brand, consumers are willing to put their knowledge and skills at the company’s disposal through deeds, processes, and actions for the company’s benefit. More concretely, consumers who experience engagement with the brand are more willing, for example, to buy more from the brand, to speak well of it, or to exhibit its use to others (Obilo *et al.*, 2021). Specifically, Wang *et al.* (2023) demonstrate that brand engagement directly and positively influences consumers’ intention to co-create with the brand. COBRA behaviours are based on these

actions, supported by social exchange theory. According to this theory, consumers are expected to engage with a brand by consuming its content, sharing their thoughts, and creating positive content due to their affective-emotional connection with the brand. This idea is supported by other authors, such as [Hollebeek \(2011\)](#) or [Verleye et al. \(2014\)](#). This is seen as a cost-benefit exchange, where the customer is willing to spend time on these activities if the brand offers favourable experiences. Consequently, this paper postulates a positive relationship between brand engagement and the purpose of engaging in online brand-related activities.

Based on the above discussion, the following hypothesis is stated:

H2. Brand engagement is positively related to COBRAs.

2.4 Brand love and COBRAs

Brand love was previously defined as an attachment characterised by feelings of security, affection, and a desire to maintain proximity to the brand ([Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh, 2020](#)). This attachment leads to a greater willingness to interact and participate in activities that reinforce the connection with the brand. Active participation in online activities can motivate individuals to seek ongoing and meaningful interactions with the brand ([Zhu et al., 2023](#)). Nevertheless, to date, there are no studies that demonstrate the relationship of brand love with COBRAs, although it is related to other variables that have a particular connection, such as positive word-of-mouth (WOM) ([Karjaluoto et al., 2016](#); [Torres et al., 2022](#)) or eWOM ([Iqbal et al., 2021](#); [Trivedi and Sama, 2021](#)). This could be explained by the feelings mentioned above of attachment naturally leading to a greater willingness to interact and participate in activities that reinforce the connection with the brand.

Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3. Brand love positively influences COBRAs.

Furthermore, this study assumes an indirect path based on what has been discussed. Combining the arguments of [hypothesis 1](#) and [hypothesis 2](#), this study proposes that brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand love and consumers' online brand-related activities. Brand love motivates brand engagement, which leads to higher engagement levels. Consumers who love a brand are likelier to maintain their engagement over time. Brand engagement creates an emotional bond between the brand and the consumer, fostering a solid relationship. This bond encourages consumers to actively engage with the brand and make extra efforts in its favour.

H4. Brand engagement mediates the relationship between brand love and COBRAs.

2.5 The moderating role of brand value

To the best of our knowledge, the previous literature has explained COBRAs under the direct and indirect effects of other variables (e.g. [Cheung et al., 2021b](#); [Mishra, 2021](#); [Mohammad et al., 2020](#)). However, it is well known that the explanation of consumer attitudes and behaviours is more complex. In many cases, the moderating intervention of other variables increases or decreases these effects. Consumer attitudes and behaviours are affected and/or modified by rational (utilitarian) and emotional (hedonic) components. For this reason, the valuation of the usefulness of the brand will intervene in the consumer's decision to engage in online activities concerning it.

Brand value is defined as the "overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given . . . a cognitive trade-off of sacrifices and benefits which are associated with consumption practices" ([Zeithaml, 1988](#), p. 14). Brand

value is composed of utilitarian and hedonic dimensions so that, to determine brand value, the utility of the brand and its economic values are valued, as well as the affective aspect of the brand experience. From a utilitarian point of view, the perception of value for money is critical. However, nowadays, the hedonic value of the brand is of significant importance, which is related to creating an emotional connection with the consumer (Pashchenko *et al.*, 2022). This emotional part can be built on the discourse of the generated content. Messages written by the company or consumers because of the feelings stimulated by the object of the messages guide the perceptions of other consumers; they contain emotional statements and representations and encourage a positive mood, feelings, and tastes towards the company, the brand, the product, and the services (Wang *et al.*, 2017). This triggers positive feelings, such as the enjoyment, pleasure, and relaxation experienced when interacting with a brand (Kim *et al.*, 2012), evokes positive attitudes and affects consumers' decision-making. The existing evidence shows that achieving a strong emotional bond with the consumer is much more important than, for example, communicating the brand's unique selling propositions.

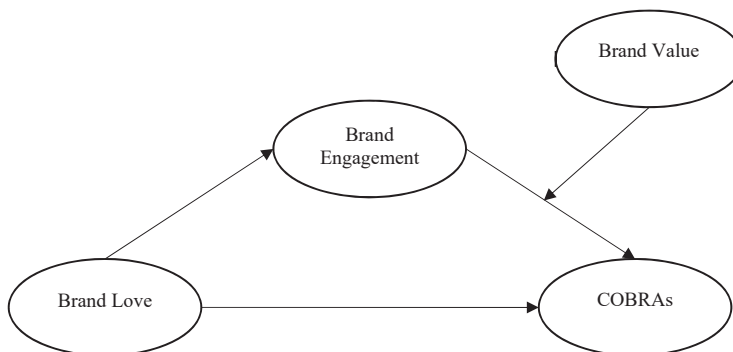
Consumer-perceived brand value has been recognised as a significant issue influencing consumers' relationships with brands offered by online retailers (Li *et al.*, 2012). At the same time, the previous literature demonstrates that perceived brand value is one of the most influential variables in predicting and influencing consumer behaviours (Luo *et al.*, 2020) such as consumer loyalty (Giovani and Athanasopoulou, 2018a) or purchase and repurchase intention (Mayrhofer *et al.*, 2019).

Thus, based on the above arguments and even though the moderating effects of brand value have not previously been tested in studies related to COBRAs, positive emotions and values can be expected to shape consumer attitudes and behaviours. Namely, this study considers brand engagement and intention to perform COBRAs as behavioural responses evoked by an emotional reaction. In this way, it can be expected that consumers who positively value emotional content will vigorously experiment with brand engagement. If they perceive a considerable brand value, they will be more inclined to make an effort for the brand, in this case, by collaborating with COBRAs.

So, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5. Brand engagement and brand value interact so that brand value moderates brand engagement to predict COBRAs.

Taken together, the whole research model is presented in Figure 1.



Source(s): Own elaboration

Figure 1.
Proposed model

3. Research method

3.1 Sample and data collection

To ensure the data were collected effectively, a market research company was carefully selected for its extensive experience conducting similar studies in the relevant geographical area. With its assistance, the necessary data were collected from 404 Spanish consumers from the CINT panel. The CINT panel is a platform with one of the world's most prominent consumer networks for digital market research and is made up of millions of engaged respondents across more than 130 countries. The methodology used was a self-administered online interview (CAWI system). Within the panel, the participants' profiles were selected considering the variables of online food purchases and the availability of the social networks Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Subsequently, the selection of the panellists determined by these profiles was random. Finally, territorial quotas were used according to the Spanish Autonomous Community. A total of 1,428 panellists participated in the questionnaire. Of these, 404 completed the survey successfully; 841 said they did not buy from any of the websites/companies considered; and 183 dropped out before the end of the interview. The responses were collected in January 2022.

The sample size was established, taking two factors into account. On the one hand, the Digital Global Overview Report 2022 elaborated by Hootsuite and We Are Social estimates that the Spanish population using social networks –the first condition for responding to the survey – is 41 million. On the other hand, if an error similar to reference studies in this field of between 5 and 8% is assumed, the sample should have between 150 and 385 respondents. Therefore, this study assumes an error of 4.78% for its sample of 404 consumers. Finally, this research uses a sample size similar to that of other published studies on the main topic of the study. For example, [Cheung et al. \(2022a\)](#) used a sample of 263 consumers, [Wei et al. \(2022\)](#) 390 users, and [Schivinski et al. \(2022\)](#) 414 consumers.

Respondent participation was voluntary, and the respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their information. [Table 1](#) presents the characteristics of the survey sample. Of the respondents, 49.3% were male, and 50.7% were female. Regarding age, 31.2% of the respondents were between 16 and 29, 44.6% were between 30 and 44, 21.8% were between 45 and 64, and 2.5% were 65 or older. Regarding educational level, 55.7% of the participants had completed tertiary education, 28% had completed technical or vocational education beyond the secondary school level, 14.1% had completed secondary education, 1.2% had completed primary education, and 0.7% had no formal education.

Gender	(%)	Age	(%)	Educational level	(%)	Social network profile	(%)	Hours spent on social networks	(%)
Male	49.3	16–29 years	31.1	Primary education	1.2	Facebook	84.2	>0–2	34.2
Female	50.7	30–44 years	44.6	Secondary education	14.2	Twitter	71.8	>2–4	28.2
		45–64 years	21.8	Technical or vocational education	28.0	Instagram	86.9	>4–6	16.3
		>65 years	2.5	Tertiary education	55.7			>6	21.3
				No formal education	0.7				
				No answer	0.2				

Table 1.
Characteristics of the survey sample

Source(s): Own elaboration

Concerning social networks, 84.2% of the respondents had a profile on Facebook, 71.8% on Twitter and 86.9% on Instagram, and they reported spending an average of 5.57 h per day on their social networks, with 34.2% spending up to 2 h on social networks, 28.2% between 2 and 4 h, 16.3% between 4 and 6 h, and 21.3% more than 6 h.

3.2 Measures

The measurement scales for the constructs were taken from scales validated in the previous literature. The surveyed consumers responded using a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with each statement describing their attitudes and behaviours. The measurement items for brand love were retrieved from [Giovani and Athanasopoulou \(2018b\)](#), who adapted the scales from [Heinrich et al. \(2012\)](#) and [Cho et al. \(2015\)](#). The measurement scale for brand engagement was taken from [Kim and Johnson \(2016\)](#). The scale to operationalise COBRAs was adopted from [Schivinski et al. \(2016\)](#). Finally, brand value was measured with the scale retrieved from [Manimont et al. \(2022\)](#).

The survey was administered in Spanish. The measurement scales used in the model's constructs were initially composed in English and subsequently underwent a translation procedure employing the methodology suggested by [Brislin \(1986\)](#). [Table A1](#) in the [Appendix](#) summarises the indices of the scales used and their factor loadings, weight and VIF. Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and Rho_A confirmed an acceptable internal consistency of the measurement scales, and convergent validity was also established ([Table 2](#)). [Tables A2 and A3](#) in the [Appendix](#) show the discriminant validity test. All previous results indicate that all the variables are statistically unique, and our measurement model fits the data nicely.

4. Results

A conditional process model is estimated to test the study's hypotheses, which include mediating and moderating effects. Specifically, the model 14 of Hayes, a moderated mediation model. This model proposes that brand love affects COBRA directly and indirectly through brand engagement. In addition, the indirect effect is expected to be conditional or dependent on the level of brand value, a variable that would act as a moderator.

The results of the estimation of this model, following the methodology proposed by [Hayes \(2022\)](#), are shown in [Table 3](#).

	Mean	SD	Cronbach's alpha	CR	Rho_A	AVE
Brand love	5.542	1.048	0.925	0.938	0.925	0.655
Brand commitment	5.614	1.178	0.794	0.907	0.796	0.829
Brand intimacy	5.444	1.170	0.859	0.914	0.859	0.780
Brand passion	5.567	1.109	0.848	0.908	0.849	0.767
Brand engagement	5.524	1.103	0.895	0.919	0.898	0.656
COBRA	5.213	1.280	0.969	0.972	0.969	0.670
Contribution	5.246	1.322	0.931	0.946	0.933	0.744
Consumption	5.240	1.306	0.906	0.930	0.906	0.726
Creation	5.152	1.416	0.935	0.948	0.935	0.754
Brand value	5.524	1.037	0.867	0.904	0.872	0.654

Note(s): SD: Standard Deviation; CR: composite reliability; AVE: average variance extracted

Source(s): Own elaboration

Table 2.
Descriptive measures,
reliability estimates
and convergent
validity

The results of the model estimation show that brand love is a significant predictor of brand engagement ($a = 0.743, p < 0.01$) and this variable, in turn, is a significant predictor of COBRA ($b = 0.453, p < 0.01$). A positive and significant direct effect of brand love on COBRA is also observed ($c' = 0.549, p < 0.01$). In addition, a positive and significant coefficient associated with the interaction term is obtained ($b_3 = 0.063, p < 0.01$), which is the first evidence of moderation by the brand value variable. We can conclude that brand love positively affects COBRA, both directly and indirectly, through brand engagement. Moreover, the indirect effect is not fixed or unconditional but depends on the level of brand value.

The Johnson-Neyman approach is used to test the interaction. Table 4 estimates the brand engagement-COBRA effect for different brand value moderator variable values, significance levels, and confidence intervals. The region of significance for this effect is marked by the

Table 3.
Model coefficients for the conditional process model

Antecedent	Coeff.	Consequent			Y (COBRAs)		
		M (BE) SE	<i>p</i>	Coeff.	SE	<i>p</i>	
Constant	-4.114	0.210	<0.01	2.115	0.331	<0.01	
X (BL)	0.743	0.037	<0.01	0.549	0.594	<0.01	
M (BE)	-	-	-	0.453	0.064	<0.01	
W (BV)	-	-	-	0.049	0.069	0.475	
MxW	-	-	-	0.063	0.024	0.010	
	$R^2 = 0.497, F(1, 402) = 397.399;$ $p < 0.01$			$R^2 = 0.590, F(4, 399) = 143.739;$ $p < 0.01$			

Source(s): Own elaboration

Table 4.
Conditional effect of brand engagement at values of the brand value

Brand value	Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
1.200	0.182	0.112	1.632	0.104	-0.037	0.402
1.490	0.200	0.106	1.892	0.059	-0.008	0.408
1.568	0.205	0.104	1.966	0.050	0.000	0.410
1.780	0.218	0.100	2.178	0.030	0.021	0.416
2.070	0.237	0.095	2.493	0.013	0.050	0.423
2.360	0.255	0.090	2.839	0.005	0.078	0.431
2.650	0.273	0.085	3.217	0.001	0.106	0.440
2.940	0.291	0.080	3.626	0.000	0.133	0.449
3.230	0.309	0.076	4.064	0.000	0.160	0.459
3.520	0.327	0.072	4.526	0.000	0.185	0.470
3.810	0.346	0.069	4.999	0.000	0.210	0.481
4.100	0.364	0.066	5.470	0.000	0.233	0.494
4.390	0.382	0.065	5.918	0.000	0.255	0.509
4.680	0.400	0.063	6.320	0.000	0.276	0.524
4.970	0.418	0.063	6.655	0.000	0.295	0.542
5.260	0.436	0.063	6.908	0.000	0.312	0.560
5.550	0.454	0.064	7.072	0.000	0.328	0.581
5.840	0.473	0.066	7.149	0.000	0.343	0.603
6.130	0.491	0.069	7.151	0.000	0.356	0.626
6.420	0.509	0.072	7.092	0.000	0.368	0.650
6.710	0.527	0.075	6.989	0.000	0.379	0.675
7.000	0.545	0.080	6.855	0.000	0.389	0.702

Source(s): Own elaboration

value 1.568 on the brand value scale. When the brand value is lower than this value, the effect of brand engagement is not significant; however, above this value, the effect is positive and increases, reaching 0.545 at the end of the scale (when the brand value is equal to 7).

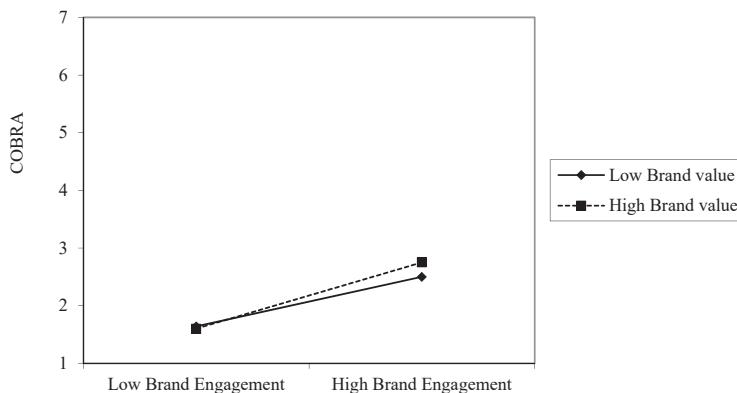
The graph in [Figure 2](#), obtained following the process proposed by [Dawson \(2014\)](#), confirms this interpretation and shows a positive slope in the relationship between brand engagement and COBRA for the two groups of consumers with low and high brand value. However, the slope is sharper in the second case.

Additionally, to test the moderation of the mediation and following the recommendations of [Hayes \(2022, p. 515\)](#), a pick-a-point procedure is followed, which consists of “choosing values of the moderator, quantifying relative conditional indirect effects at those values, and then conducting an inference about those relative conditional indirect effects”. [Table 5](#) shows the conditional indirect effects of brand love for relatively low ($W = 4,600$, the 16th percentile), moderate ($W = 5,600$, the 50th percentile), and relatively high values of brand value ($W = 6,600$, the 84th percentile). The 95th bootstrap confidence intervals for these effects are entirely above zero, so not only can we say that this indirect effect is moderated by brand value and is more robust as the moderator reaches higher values, but also that this effect is significantly different from zero for these three values. Finally, [Table 5](#) also shows another test of the moderator effect, with a confidence interval for the index of moderated mediation that does not include the value zero.

Overall, the data support hypotheses [H1](#), [H2](#), [H3](#), [H4](#) and [H5](#), reflecting a moderated mediation model. The analyses performed indicate that: (1) as consumers show greater love for the brand, they show greater engagement; (2) engagement is positively related to COBRA; (3) the latter relationship is not unconditional but is dependent on the degree of brand value; and (4) brand love is an essential antecedent of COBRA, either directly or indirectly, and the level of perceived value modulates part of its effect.

5. Discussion

This research improves our understanding of the factors that motivate consumers to engage in online brand-related activities (COBRAs) by examining the relationship between brand love and COBRAs, emphasising brand engagement as a mediator. It investigates the nuanced role of brand value as a conditional factor, providing insights into the specific circumstances in which consumers are more likely to engage in COBRAs. In addition, this study contributes



Source(s): Own elaboration

Figure 2.
Conditional effects of brand engagement on COBRA: two-way interaction effects for unstandardised variables

Direct effect of brand love on COBRA					
Effect	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
0.549	0.059	9.246	<0.01	0.432	0.666
Conditional indirect effects of brand love → brand engagement → COBRA					
	Effect	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
4.600*	0.293	0.071	0.166	0.447	
5.600	0.340	0.074	0.206	0.500	
6.600	0.386	0.081	0.237	0.562	
Index of moderated mediation (moderator: brand value)					
	Index	BootSE	BootLLCI	BootULCI	
Brand value	0.046	0.019	0.005	0.081	

Table 5. Direct and indirect effects of brand love on COBRA

Note(s): *Moderator values are the 16th, 50th, and 84th percentiles

Source(s): Own elaboration

significantly to the existing body of knowledge by expanding current theoretical frameworks and introducing new perspectives on consumer-brand interactions in the digital domain.

5.1 Theoretical contributions

The present study adds to the knowledge of online brand-related activities by providing new insights into the interrelationships among consumer brand love, brand engagement, COBRAs, and brand value.

This study is possibly the first to test the relationship between brand love and COBRAs using brand engagement as a mediator, but, most importantly, using a moderation analysis, in this case, for the effect of brand value. COBRAs have recently emerged as an essential concept among practitioners and academics, and theoretical progress is still underdeveloped. From a day-to-day point of view, it seems to be assumed that consumers are increasingly taken into account and play an active role in the communication by companies, products, and brands; however, from an academic point of view, little has been explained about how and when consumers perform COBRAs. The majority of the studies around this concept are focused on the impact of four motivational factors – entertainment, information seeking, social interaction and reward – on the performance of COBRAs (Cheung *et al.*, 2022a, b; Nastisin *et al.*, 2022), with, from time to time, some modifications being introduced. For example, Cheung *et al.* (2021b) include customisation and trendiness instead of information seeking and reward. Buzeta *et al.* (2020) add two more variables – personal identity and empowerment – to these four variables. However, these studies have barely considered variables related to brand perception or the more attitudinal variables of consumers. To our knowledge, only three studies have analysed this type of variable about COBRAs. Schivinski *et al.* (2022) find that consumer-based brand equity, composed of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty, positively affects a consumer's intention to engage in COBRAs. Previously, in another study, some of these authors had demonstrated a positive relationship between brand image, brand equity and COBRAs (Schivinski *et al.*, 2020). From the perspective of consumer attitudes, Majeed *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that consumer satisfaction is an antecedent of COBRAs. Our study partially fills the research gap by examining the underlying mechanism that compels consumers to consume, share, and

create online content about a brand, which is a crucial strategy in the era of interactive marketing in general and corporate communication strategy in particular.

Thus, this research significantly advances the literature on consumers' online brand-related activity in four essential ways. First, it considers two relatively new marketing variables: brand love and engagement. As previously mentioned, the studies that consider COBRAs as a dependent variable have not considered these two variables. Therefore, on the one hand, it broadens our knowledge about the motivations for consumers to perform online activities related to a brand, and, at the same time, it responds to calls for research on specific questions related to these two variables (Martins Rebouças Nery *et al.*, 2021).

Second, this is the first study to explore brand love as a predictor of COBRAs in a context such as the food industry; this variable can directly affect or act indirectly through the brand engagement variable. So far, to the best of our knowledge, only one study has explicitly considered brand love as a motivation for interacting with brands on social media (Vale and Fernandes, 2017). This study demonstrated that brand love is one of the main drivers of COBRAs in sports teams' social networks. However, despite the demonstrated importance of these variables, in the study by Vale and Fernandes (2017), they are diluted amid other motivational factors more related to personal motivation. Hence, the present study provides new empirical evidence of the critical relationship between these two variables. In the context of food companies, the results show that brand love drives increased brand engagement and intention to support the brand by engaging in online activities.

Third, this study adds to the literature by demonstrating that brand engagement is an essential driver of COBRAs. This study is one of the first, in this context, to assimilate the engagement variable to how this variable is considered in the organisational context (Gensler *et al.*, 2013; Ndhlovu and Maree, 2022). That is, it is not measured in terms of social interaction with the brand (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Cheung *et al.*, 2022b; Schaefers *et al.*, 2021) but as a perception of connection with the brand by the consumer (Cheung *et al.*, 2021c; Wang *et al.*, 2023). As for the results, to the best of our knowledge, this study is the first to demonstrate a direct and positive relationship between brand engagement and COBRA. However, the results are in line with those of previous research. For example, Wang *et al.* (2023) demonstrated that brand engagement influences consumer continuance intentions, that is, the intention to participate in the brand community. Moreover, by considering it as a mediator, the study responds to calls by Martins Rebouças Nery *et al.* (2021) for analyses and comprehension of the antecedents and consequences of this variable.

Finally, this study supports the moderating role of brand value regarding brand engagement and COBRAs. This study thus shows that consumers are more likely to engage in online brand activities when the brand value is high for them. This is the only study to have found and analysed this result. Previous studies (e.g. Chuenban *et al.*, 2021) have analysed the mediating influence, but this has never been analysed concerning COBRAs. However, a previous work studies the relationship of brand equity with COBRAs (Schivinski *et al.*, 2020), and this variable shares certain similarities with brand value (Leite, 2022). This supports the argument that consumers' positive emotions and values experienced about a brand will shape their attitudes and behaviours.

5.2 Managerial implications

These research findings have valuable practical implications for marketers. First, by revealing the significant impact of brand love on consumer online brand-related activities, the study suggests that marketing managers should implement strategies to help induce consumers to experience a feeling of desire and a wish to belong to the brand. They can achieve this by working on the brand experience in such a way as to evoke positive feelings and associations, that is, to build an emotional connection. To this end, companies could use

emotionally meaningful imagery and messaging. In general, they should take action to connect with consumers personally.

Secondly, the study shows that brand love, in turn, affects consumers' engagement with the brand and, therefore, their propensity to become brand advocates. Creating a positive customer experience can improve brand engagement and love. Companies should work on their customer journey map. This includes ensuring customers have a seamless experience across all touchpoints, from browsing products to post-purchase support. Furthermore, companies must personalise the customer experience by leveraging customer data to provide customised recommendations and offers (Badenes-Rocha *et al.*, 2022; Farías *et al.*, 2022). Likewise, companies can improve their engagement by leveraging influencer marketing (Barbosa and Añaña, 2023; Pérez-Cabañero *et al.*, 2023) and gamification (Bitrián *et al.*, 2023).

Since brand value has been demonstrated to have a moderating influence, marketers must work on what they deliver to the consumer. Thus, they must consider, among other things, product quality and value for money and the emotional aspects linked to the brand. Brand value depends on product quality. To this end, companies should work on objective quality related to standards and subjective quality. Furthermore, they must work adequately on their value proposition by developing a clear brand purpose, values, and personality and creating a unique brand voice and visual identity, ultimately standing out from competitors. In this sense, to improve the perception of brand value, the company can also get involved in practices related to sustainability or corporate social responsibility (Andersson *et al.*, 2022; Martínez and Castro-González, 2023).

6. Conclusions

This study develops a theoretical and empirical framework to explore the linkage between brand love and COBRAs through brand engagement practices and under the condition of brand value. It demonstrates how and when consumers respond to online brand-related activities by feeling brand love. This study expands on previous research by revealing the mediating role of brand engagement between brand love and COBRAs and the moderating role of brand value on the relationship between brand engagement and COBRAs. All the proposed hypotheses are confirmed based on data collected from 404 Spanish consumers. Thus, the study's findings contribute to the existing research on explanations of the phenomenon under investigation. Lastly, this study suggests some practical implications and directions for future research.

6.1 Limitations and future lines of research

Although the research offers significant insights into the COBRAs literature, some limitations still exist that need to be addressed by future researchers. First, the data are cross-sectional, so the results should be interpreted cautiously. Future studies could adopt longitudinal research to better explain the mechanism behind the evolution of online brand-related activities. Second, the model was tested with Spanish consumers, so future research could include a cross-cultural or comparative study. Finally, the survey refers to a specific category of product, food. It may be that the effects of the studied variables in other product categories and industries differ.

Nevertheless, in addition to work to overcome these limitations, the study's results open up new avenues of research. Complementing the study with a qualitative analysis would be interesting to understand consumers' opinions and reactions to a brand. Also, future work should consider new COBRA antecedents of COBRAs and analyse in depth what role emotions play in content generation and whether they impact the type of content generated.

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Items	Factor loadings	Factor weights	VIF
<i>Brand love</i> (Giovannis and Athanasopoulou (2018a, b), who adapted the scales from Heinrich et al. (2012) and Cho et al. (2015))			
<i>Brand commitment</i>			
I have solid support for this brand	0.915	0.563	1.766
I am committed to this brand	0.906	0.535	1.766
<i>Brand passion</i>			
I am passionate about this brand	0.891	0.386	2.251
This brand is a captivating brand	0.852	0.367	1.863
I am enthusiastic about this brand	0.884	0.388	2.158
<i>Brand intimacy</i>			
Most of the time I feel very close to this brand	0.876	0.373	2.093
There is a close connection between me and this brand	0.885	0.374	2.207
There is a certain intimacy between me and this brand	0.888	0.385	2.204
<i>Brand engagement</i> (Kim and Johnson, 2016)			
I would like to talk about this brand with others	0.791	0.192	2.061
I am interested in learning more about this brand	0.789	0.189	2.151
I would be interested in other products offered by this brand	0.796	0.190	2.265
I would be proud to have others know that I use this brand	0.847	0.220	2.484
I like to visit the website for this brand	0.803	0.215	2.382
I would closely follow news about this brand	0.829	0.228	2.609
<i>COBRA</i> (Schivinski et al., 2016)			
<i>Consumption</i>			
I read posts related to this brand on social media	0.853	0.230	2.510
I read fan page(s) related to this brand on social networking sites	0.870	0.238	2.718
I watch pictures/graphics related to this brand	0.852	0.234	2.405
I follow blogs related to this brand	0.847	0.237	2.335
I follow this brand on social networking sites	0.837	0.235	2.224
<i>Contribution</i>			
I comment on videos related to this brand	0.870	0.200	3.105
I comment on posts related to this brand	0.873	0.197	3.260
I comment on pictures/graphics related to this brand	0.886	0.201	3.538
I share this brand related posts	0.883	0.200	3.256
I "Like" pictures/graphics related to this brand	0.818	0.178	2.823
I "Like" posts related to this brand	0.843	0.182	3.084
<i>Creation</i>			
I initiate posts related to this brand on blogs	0.845	0.186	2.739
I initiate posts related to this brand on social networking sites	0.892	0.201	3.710
I post pictures/graphics related to this brand	0.878	0.193	3.536
I post videos that show this brand	0.858	0.185	3.130
I write posts related to this brand on forums	0.856	0.191	2.851
I write reviews related to this brand	0.878	0.195	3.185

(continued)

Table A1.
Items, factor loadings,
and VIF

EJMBE

Items	Factor loadings	Factor weights	VIF
<i>Brand value (Manimont et al., 2022)</i>			
This food brand has reasonable prices	0.760	0.242	1.652
Considering what I would pay to experience this food brand, I will get much more than my money's worth	0.845	0.279	2.173
The cost of buying this food brand are a bargain relative to the benefits I receive	0.808	0.216	2.049
Buying this food brand is economical	0.811	0.258	1.962
Buying this food brand is a good deal	0.816	0.240	2.031

Table A1.

	Brand love	Brand love commitment	Brand love intimacy	Brand love passion	Brand engagement	Brand value	COBRA contribution	COBRA consumption	COBRA creation
Brand love	<i>0.809</i>								
Brand commitment	0.876	<i>0.911</i>							
Brand intimacy	0.920	0.707	<i>0.883</i>						
Brand passion	0.930	0.754	0.764	<i>0.876</i>					
Brand engagement	0.707	0.619	0.675	0.776	<i>0.810</i>				
Brand value	0.712	0.643	0.634	0.669	0.776	<i>0.809</i>			
COBRA contribution	0.730	0.582	0.737	0.650	0.699	0.622	<i>0.818</i>		
COBRA consumption	0.741	0.610	0.729	0.666	0.714	0.636	0.968	<i>0.863</i>	
COBRA creation	0.665	0.552	0.667	0.582	0.640	0.567	0.938	0.886	<i>0.852</i>
COBRA contribution	0.666	0.493	0.697	0.595	0.630	0.563	0.943	0.863	0.809
COBRA consumption									
COBRA creation									

Note(s): Fornell-Larcker Criterion: Diagonal elements (italic) are the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures (AVE; average variance extracted). Off-diagonal are the correlations among constructs. For discriminant validity, diagonal elements should be larger than off-diagonal elements

Source(s): Own elaboration

Table A3.
Discriminant validity:
Heterotrait-Monotrait
ratio (HTMT.90 and
HTMTInference)

	Brand love	Brand commitment	Brand love intimacy	Brand love passion	Brand engagement	Brand value	COBRA contribution	COBRA consumption
Brand love Brand intimacy		0.854 CI[0.762; 0.928]						
Brand love Brand passion		0.919 CI[0.860; 0.969]	0.895 CI[0.822; 0.946]					
Brand engagement	0.776 CI[0.677; 0.845]	0.733 CI[0.619; 0.826]	0.769 CI[0.677; 0.837]	0.725 CI[0.614; 0.808]				
Brand value	0.794 CI[0.696; 0.867]	0.774 CI[0.667; 0.864]	0.732 CI[0.619; 0.822]	0.780 CI[0.679; 0.855]	0.881 CI[0.825; 0.825]			
COBRA	0.770 CI[0.697; 0.827]	0.662 CI[0.563; 0.743]	0.808 CI[0.741; 0.862]	0.716 CI[0.628; 0.789]	0.744 CI[0.666; 0.805]	0.675 CI[0.567; 0.756]		
COBRA contribution	0.800 CI[0.729; 0.855]	0.713 CI[0.616; 0.789]	0.816 CI[0.747; 0.873]	0.752 CI[0.667; 0.819]	0.780 CI[0.703; 0.838]	0.708 CI[0.605; 0.788]		
COBRA consumption	0.726 CI[0.645; 0.797]	0.650 CI[0.543; 0.742]	0.756 CI[0.675; 0.823]	0.664 CI[0.677; 0.845]	0.703 CI[0.564; 0.749]	0.636 CI[0.524; 0.728]	0.963 CI[0.935; 0.84	
COBRA creation	0.715 CI[0.636; 0.781]	0.570 CI[0.465; 0.662]	0.777 CI[0.703; 0.839]	0.667 CI[0.574; 0.747]	0.682 CI[0.596; 0.751]	0.621 CI[0.512; 0.707]	0.923 CI[0.880; 0.955]	0.878 CI[0.815; 0.922]

Note(s): Fornell-Larcker Criterion: Diagonal elements (italic) are the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures (AVE; average variance extracted). Off-diagonal are the correlations among constructs. For discriminant validity, diagonal elements should be larger than off-diagonal elements. HTMT ratio: the three results marked in italic indicate discriminant problems according to the HTMT₉₀ criterion. HTMT_{inference} does not indicate discriminant validity problems

Source(s): Own elaboration

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