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Toward Customer Love: Investigating the Antecedents and Outcomes of Satisfied Customers' Emotional Attachments to Retailers

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Hye-Young Kim entitled "Toward Customer Love: Investigating the Antecedents and Outcomes of Satisfied Customers' Emotional Attachments to Retailers." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Human Ecology.

Youn-Kyung Kim, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Laura D. Jolly, Ann E. Fairhurst, Russell L. Zaretzki

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Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

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TOWARD CUSTOMER LOVE:
INVESTIGATING THE ANTECEDENTS AND OUTCOMES OF SATISFIED
CUSTOMERS' EMOTIONAL ATTACHMENTS TO RETAILERS

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Hye-Young Kim
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I want to thank my father for believing in me all these years no matter what I have chosen to do. He never asked anything more of me in all my years than for me to be happy. My very special thanks go to my mother whom I owe everything I am today. Her unwavering faith and confidence in my abilities and in me is what has shaped me to be the person I am today. *Mom, I love you!*

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to examine "customer love," a new customer-retailer relationship construct, within a comprehensive nomological net. The specific research objectives of this study were: (a) to investigate whether relationship-inducing factors (i.e., tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, preferential treatment, and service quality) have a differential impact on perceived relationship investment; (b) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by perceived relationship investment; (c) to analyze whether the effect of perceived relationship investment on customer love is contingent on two consumer characteristics (i.e., emotional intensity and need for variety); (d) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by two emotion-inducing factors (hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience); and (e) to investigate whether customer love affects four relational outcomes (i.e., self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation).

This study was conducted in the context of apparel and grocery stores. An online self-administered, cross-sectional survey methodology was employed to collect the data. 604 completed responses (301 for apparel and 303 for grocery) were used for the data analysis. Regardless of retail category, the positive relationship between service quality and perceived relationship investment was confirmed. Also, perceived relationship investment, hedonic store experience, and symbolic store experience played an important role in predicting customer love. Across both samples, customer love was found to be a significant predictor of each of the four relational outcome variables. Managerial implications and suggestions for future research based on the findings were provided.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

For more than a half century, customer satisfaction has been central to strategic retail management. Both practitioners and academic researchers alike have argued that an essential strategy for retailing success is the creation and maintenance of satisfied customers (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985; Reichheld & Sasser, 1990; Rust & Zahoric, 1993; Rust, Zahoric, & Keiningham, 1995; Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Bery, 1990). With evidence of strategic links between satisfaction and performance indicators, including market share and profitability (Arnold, Reynolds, Ponder, & Lueg, 2005), it has been common to find retailers' mission statements designed around the satisfaction notion, marketing plans and incentive programs that target satisfaction as a goal, and consumer communications that announce awards for satisfaction achievements in the marketplace (Fournier & Mick, 1999). Furthermore, retailers have made significant financial and human resource investments into the measurement and analysis of customer satisfaction and its subsequent improvement (Arnold et al., 2005; Jones & Reynolds, 2006).

The firmly held doctrine, which proposes that customer satisfaction should be the focal point of retailing strategies, is based on the explicit assumption that satisfied customers are more loyal and thus more profitable (i.e., the longer a customer remains with a retailer, the more profitable s/he becomes). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) specifically identify four factors contributing to this underlying profit growth: (a) profit from increased purchases; (b) profit from reduced operating costs; (c) profit from

referrals to other customers; and (d) profit from price premiums. In other words, loyal customers are more profitable because they buy more over time if they are satisfied. As they become more experienced, they make fewer service demands on the retailer and fewer mistakes (i.e., learning effects), when involved in the operational processes, thus contributing to greater productivity for the retailer and for themselves. More importantly, loyal customers tend to pay regular prices and refer other new customers to the retailer, thereby creating new sources of revenue (Kotler, 1999).

However, while evidence of the importance of customer satisfaction continues to accumulate, in reality, U.S. firms in general are increasingly having difficulty connecting satisfaction efforts to customer profitability (Reichheld, 1996). Arnold et al. (2005) specifically exemplify a study conducted by the Juran Institute. The results of this study show that: (a) fewer than 30% of 200 U.S. firms perceived that their satisfaction management efforts had a positive impact on their bottom line; and (b) fewer than 2% were able to actually measure a bottom-line improvement. Indeed, subsequent studies have consistently shown that many customers who switch are often satisfied with their prior transaction experience, with overall switching among satisfied customers across many industries approaching 80% (Keaveney, 1995; Oliver, 1999; Reichheld, 1996).

In particular, satisfied customers' defection rate is extremely high in the retail industry that is characterized by low switching costs and comparison shopping behavior (Jones & Sasser, 1995; Seiders, Voss, Grewal, & Godfrey, 2005). In conjunction with equivocal research regarding the value of increasing customer satisfaction (Reichheld, 1993), Seiders et al. (2005) argue that, although the retailing literature consistently identifies satisfaction as a key antecedent to customer loyalty, current knowledge fails to

explain fully the prevalence of satisfied customers who switch retailers. In line with this

perspective, Lowenstein (1995) laments this problem in the following way:

> "*Popular belief and much of the writing and thinking about* customers*, centers around having them satisfied ... The reality is, however, that customers who say they are satisfied are often just as likely to be disloyal as other customers*" (p. xvii).

   "Loyalty" itself is a fertile relationship concept beyond that which is reflected in

utilitarian decision-making (Fournier, 1998). Distinguishing "emotional" loyalty from

"functional" loyalty, Barnes (2005, p. 53) argues that "a relationship in its simplest form,

and as understood by customers, is based on feelings and emotions." In other words, the

fact that customers buy a large percentage of their category purchases for a particular

retailer or visit or purchase on a regular basis does not necessarily mean that a

relationship exists. Many customers, for example, will buy a large percentage of their

groceries from a store that is close to their homes. They shop there every week and may

have been doing so for years. However, they may be "loyal" due to such factors as

convenience of location, 24-hour access, large parking lot, short lines at the checkouts

and one-stop shopping. All of these factors relate to more functional utility benefits that

drive repeat buying. These customers are exhibiting functional loyalty. With the

functional loyalty, there is noticeable absence of any sense of attachment to the retailer;

there is no emotional connection. If they were to move across town, the customers would

likely seek out an equally convenient store for the bulk of their grocery shopping. This

form of loyalty is very shallow and vulnerable; there is no relationship from the customer

perspective (Barns, 2005).

Oliver, Rust, and Sajeev (1997) admit that customers expect to be satisfied in today's marketplace and simply meeting those expectations is insufficient. According to Barnes (2005), if retailers are to overcome the simplistic view of relationship building as something that can be imposed on customers, it is essential that retailers appreciate that a relationship is an emotional concept. Arnold et al. (2005) also argue that retailers must overcome the "zero defects" mentality (i.e., customers are satisfied when the retailer can avoid problems) and do more to develop unshakable customer loyalty. For retailers, "doing more" means the generation of higher levels of emotional bonds than those associated with mere satisfaction evaluations. "Emotionally" loyal customers are those who feel so strongly that one particular retailer can best meet their needs and wants and thus its competitors are virtually excluded from their consideration sets (Kumar & Shah, 2004). They shop almost exclusively at this retailer, driving past three or more competing retailers to get there. When these customers move to a new location, they seek out a branch of their retailer. Their loyalty is much more stable and durable (Barnes, 2005). In this regard, such strong emotional bonds may be maintained by some, but not all, satisfied customers. Therefore, a theoretical and managerial imperative is to identify a new construct that helps explain variation in satisfied consumers' emotional responses to retailers.

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROBLEM

Of late, influential business thinkers have attempted to incorporate the concept of "love" into developing strategic business paradigms (e.g., Bell, 2000; Roberts, 2005). They commonly recognize that simply satisfying customers is no longer sufficient for

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continuing success for today's competitive marketplace. In his book "*Customer Love: Attracting and Keeping Customers for Life*," Bell (2000) claims that the renaissance of customer service has raised the bar to such a point that service providers are ready to consider "love" as a behavioral expression of customer devotion. In the area of brand marketing, Kevin Roberts (2005), CEO of Saatchi & Saatchi, puts forward the theory of "Lovemarks." He describes the word "brand" as being overused, sterile, and unimaginative and argues that the idea of a brand is starting to wear thin. According to Roberts (2005), just as products evolved to carry trademarks, and trademarks evolved into brands, now it is time for brands to evolve into "Lovemarks," which are the next evolution in branding. In sum, "Lovemarks" are about building and strengthening emotional bonds between brands and consumers.

Not only practitioners but academic researchers have increasingly paid attention to love as a viable concept for studying the relationships between customers and consumption objects. Fournier (1998) notes the importance of love in consumers' long-term relationships with brands. Using an interpretive paradigm, Fournier (1998) shows that some consumers feel that their brands are "irreplaceable and unique" to the extent that separation anxiety is anticipated upon withdrawal. Consumers in these passionate brand relationships feel that "something is missing" when they have not used their brands for a while. Fournier (1998) concludes that such strong affective ties encourage a biased, positive perception of the brand partner that renders comparisons with alternatives difficult.

In their discussion of the various modes of consumer satisfaction, Fournier and Mick (1999, p. 11) suggest that "satisfaction-as-love probably constitutes the most

intense and profound satisfaction of all." Consistent with this perspective, Caroll and

Ahuvia (2006) conceptualize "brand love" as a mode of satisfaction (i.e., a response

experienced by some, but not all, satisfied consumers) and provide empirical evidence for

the usefulness of brand love as a predictor of strategic consumer behavior. In sum, the

conceptual framework of brand love does not seek to replace satisfaction or to de-

emphasize its importance. Rather, it presumes that the love construct provides a more

nuanced view of satisfied customers' feelings about brands (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Love as a Customer-Retailer Relationship Construct

Building on the aforementioned research stream, this study introduces a new

customer-retailer relationship construct, "customer love." Consistent with Caroll and

Ahuvia (2006), this study conceptualizes the customer love construct within the boundary

of satisfaction. A customer who loves a particular retailer is likely to be satisfied with it.

This satisfaction provides a basis for customer love. Nevertheless, satisfaction and love

are not synonymous. Although two customers are equally satisfied with a retailer's

performance, they may vary greatly in the extent to which they are emotionally attached

to it. While satisfaction can occur immediately following a single store visit, love is a

process phenomenon that evolves over time with multiple interactions (Fournier, 1998).

More importantly, satisfaction tends to be a cognitive judgment and hence it is different

from the affect-laden "love" construct (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005).

In this study, customer love is defined as the degree of emotional attachment a

satisfied customer has for a particular retailer. Reflecting prior research on love (Caroll &

Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998), the concept of customer love encompasses passion for the

retailer, attachment to the retailer, positive evaluation of the retailer, positive emotions in

response to the retailer, and declarations of love for the retailer (e.g., I love this store!).

Since the customer love construct is viewed as a random variable within a population of

satisfied customers, its lower bound is defined simply as the absence of this emotional

response (e.g., the consumer is satisfied at a cognitive level but has "no particular

feelings" for the retailer of reference). Therefore, customer love precludes negative

feelings for the retailer (e.g., "disliking," "hate") (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

"To be loved, be lovable."
-Publius Ovidius Naso-

Retailer as a Relationship Partner (RARP)

Before commencing empirical research on customer love, the legitimacy of

considering the retailer as a partner in the relationship must be considered. Interpersonal

love, by its very nature, involves a relationship between two persons and not the two

persons separately. In other words, love is an outcome of highly dynamic bi-directional

interactions between two partners (Whang, Allen, Sahoury, & Zhang, 2004). For love to

truly exist, interdependence between the partners must be evident. That is, the partners

must collectively affect, define, and redefine the relationship (Fournier, 1988).

In a customer-retailer relationship context, the premise that customer actions

affect relationship dynamics is easily accepted because customers are humans who can

act, think, and feel. However, can the retailer reasonably be construed as an active

contributor in the two-way loving relationship? Some may argue that when the target of

love is replaced with a consumption object, love becomes unidirectional and less dynamic (e.g., Shimp & Madden; 1988; Whang et al., 2004). The rationale for this argument would be that, although a consumer may feel a strong sense of attachment and caring for an object, the object cannot love back or initiate the relationship (Shimp & Madden, 1988).

However, an exception occurs when retail managers, in their role as proxies for the objects, vigorously attempt to initiate relationships between their offerings and consumers (Shimp & Madden, 1988). In this regard, it is not surprising to find that the roots of relationship marketing are metaphorical in nature (O'Malley & Tynan, 1999) and theory is largely influenced by analogies with close personal relationships-in particular, marriage (Levitt, 1983). According to Fournier (1998), in accepting the behavioral significance of every marketing action, one accepts the legitimacy of the consumption object as a reciprocating relationship partner. Delineating this thinking in a consumer-brand relationship context, Fournier (1998) specifically provides rationale supporting the theory of "the brand as a relationship partner (BARP)":

> "*Marketing actions conducted under the rubric of interactive and addressable communications qualify the brand as a reciprocating relationship partner…It is argued, however, that the brand need not engage these blatant strategies to qualify as an active relationship partner. At a broad level of abstraction, the everyday execution of marketing plans and tactics can be construed as behaviors performed by the brand acting in its relationship role*" (p. 345)

Based analogously on Fournier's (1988) BARP theory, this study regards the notion of "the retailer as a relationship partner" (RARP) as an appropriate framework of thought for building the conceptual model depicted in Figure 1. The basic premises underlying the RARP perspective are: (a) retailing practices conducted under the rubric
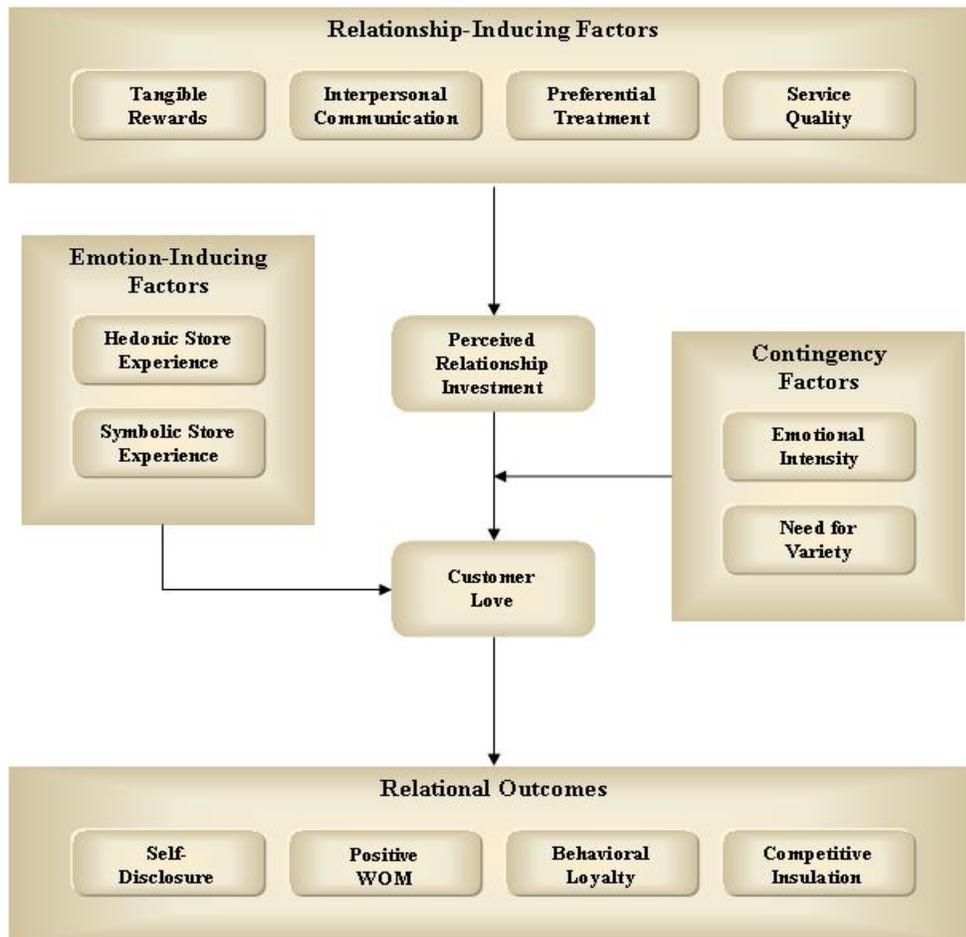
Figure 1. Conceptual Model

of interactive and addressable communications qualify a retailer as a reciprocating partner; (b) the execution of everyday retailing strategies and tactics can be considered as behaviors performed by the retailer acting in its relationship role; and thus (c) the retailer and the customer can be considered as "partners" in a dyadic relationship that is assumed to be conceptually similar to the loving relationship established between two people.

A logical extension of the RARP perspective is to view that love is not only something that happens to the consumer but also something that the retailer can make happen. However, although the retailer behaves as an active contributing member of the relationship dyad (Fournier, 1998), no relationship will exist unless the customer feels that one exists (Barnes, 1997). Thus, the conceptual model focuses on the customer's perspective. In addition to the RARP perspective, the conceptual foundation of the proposed model rests upon several theoretical developments. In order to enhance the interpretability of the conceptual model, each theoretical framework and its relevance to customer love are delineated in the following section. The operational definition of each construct incorporated in the conceptual model is summarized in Table 1.

Principle of Reciprocity

De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, and Iacobucci (2001) introduce a reciprocal consumer-retailer relationship process model based on the principle of reciprocity. In general, reciprocity is identified as a key facet explaining the duration and stability of exchange relationships (Larson, 1992). In addition, it is often considered one of the most robust effects found in psychological literature (Moon, 2000). The generalized norm of

Table 1. Construct Definitions

Source	Constructs	Definition
De Wulf et al. (2001)	Tangible Rewards	A customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer offers tangible benefits such as pricing and gift incentives to its regular customers in return for their loyalty
De Wulf et al. (2001)	Preferential Treatment	A customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer treats and serves its regular customers better than its nonregular customers
De Wulf et al. (2001)	Interpersonal Communication	A customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer interacts with its regular customers in a warm and personal way
Parasuraman et al. (1988)	Service Quality	A customer's perception of the extent to which the service offered by a retailer is superior or excellent
De Wulf et al. (2001)	Perceived Relationship Investment	A customer's overall perception of the extent to which a retailer devotes resources, efforts, and attention aimed at maintaining or enhancing relationships with regular customers.
Caroll & Ahuvia (2005)	Hedonic Store Experience	A customer's overall perception of the relative role of hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) benefits offered by a retailer.
Caroll & Ahuvia (2005)	Symbolic Store Experience	A customer's overall perception of the degree to which a retailer enhances one's social self and/or reflects one's inner self
Caroll & Ahuvia (2005)	Customer Love	The degree of emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular retailer. It includes passion for the retailer, attachment to the retailer, positive evaluation of the retailer, positive emotions in response to the retailer, and declarations of love for the retailer (e.g., I love this store!).
Cho (2006)	Self-Disclosure	The degree to which a customer is willing to reveal his or her personal information to a retailer
Caroll and Ahuvia (2006)	Positive Word-of-Mouth	The degree to which a customer praises a retailer to others
De Wulf et al. (2001)	Behavioral Loyalty	Loyalty measured based on a customer's purchasing frequency and amount spent at a retailer compared with the amount spent at other retailers from which the customer buys.
Caroll and Ahuvia (2006)	Competitive Insulation	The degree to which alternative stores are removed from a customer's patronage consideration
Pelsmacher (2002)	Emotional Intensity	The extent with which a customer experiences his or her positive emotions.
Steenkamp & Baumgartner (1995)	Need for Variety	The extent with which a customer seeks variety in life.

reciprocity "evokes obligation toward others on the basis of their past behavior" (Gouldner, 1960, p. 168). More specifically, actions taken by one party in an exchange relationship will be reciprocated in kind by the other party, because each party anticipates the feelings of guilt it would have if it violated the norm of reciprocity (Li & Dant, 1997). For example, customers may demonstrate loyal behavior to certain retailers in reciprocation of these retailers' efforts in the relationship (Bagozzi, 1995) and feel obligated to pay back their "friendliness" (Kang & Ridgway, 1996). In sum, the principle of reciprocity states that people should return good for good, in proportion to what they receive (Bagozzi, 1995).

By developing a new construct, "perceived relationship investment," De Wulf et al. (2001) specifically apply Blau's (1964) reciprocity perspective to customer-retailer relationships. According to Blau (1964), an investment of time, effort, and other valuable resources in a relationship creates psychological ties that motivate parties to maintain the relationship and sets an expectation of reciprocation. In this study, the principle of reciprocity is applied in the mechanism of customer love formation: (a) the retailer's relationship efforts to be loved by the customer are represented by the construct of perceived relationship investment; and (b) the resulting construct of customer love embodies the customer's reciprocation of the retailer's relationship investment.

In addition, this study empirically investigates the role of four different relationship-inducing factors in strengthening perceived relationship investment: tangible rewards, preferential treatment, interpersonal communication, and service quality. Subsequent studies demonstrate that relationship marketing efforts such as tangible rewards, preferential treatment, and interpersonal communication play a differential, yet

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consistently positive role in affecting perceived relationship investment (e.g., De Wulf et al., 2001; De wulf et al., 2003; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003). In order to fully capture the mechanisms behind the establishment of strong customer-retailer relationships, this study incorporates service quality which is a tangible element in the retail mix as an additional antecedent of perceived relationship investment. While service quality has been shown to lead to increased satisfaction with a single, solitary transaction (e.g. Woodside et al., 1989; Parasuraman et al., 1994), De Wulf et al. (2003) empirically support that service quality is also a strong precursor of a more long-term construct such as perceived relationship investment. Therefore, this study posits that the upfront investments in service quality enhancement will be transformed into strengthened perceptions of relationship investment and, as a result, to customer love.

Contingency Approach

Since the 1970s, consumer behavior journals have reported the effects of situational variables on purchase behavior. Belk's (1975) work in particular not only influenced content in consumer behavior textbooks, but also much of consumer behavior research in the past two decades. In the 1980s, the contingency approach received considerable attention in management and marketing theory (e.g., Zeithaml, Varadarajan, & Zeithaml, 1988). Similar to the previous situational perspective, the contingency approach challenges the existence of universal laws or principles, emphasizing instead the importance of identifying the effects of context on the performance of variables. Since then, the contingency approach has been reflected in many consumer-related studies, including retailing research (e.g., Grewal & Lundsey-Mullikin, 2006; Krishnan, Biswas, & Netemeyer, 2006; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003). Consistent with this

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general research stream, some retailing researchers have taken a contingency perspective in their examination of the effectiveness of retail relationship investment (e.g., De Wulf et al., 2001; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003).

The two contingency factors (i.e., need for variety and emotional intensity) of the conceptual model reflect De Wulf et al.'s (2001) initial attempt toward assessing the role of consumer-level variables that moderate the effectiveness of perceived relationship investment. From a practical perspective, it is important to understand what types of customers are inclined to emotionally reciprocate to retailers' relationship efforts. Identifying such contingency factors enables retailers to understand when investing in emotional bonds is expected to trigger strategic benefits. Prior research indicates that individuals' personality and temperament characteristics are systematically related to their behavior as a consumer (Holbrook, 1988; Foxall & Goldsmith, 1989; Albanese, 1990). In line with this perspective, the conceptual model specifically incorporates a customer's need for variety and emotional intensity as contingency factors that moderate the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love.

Brand Love Model

In this study, customer love is broadly construed in the spirit of emotional loyalty (Barnes, 2005). Given that love is a powerful emotional experience (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006), the study of customer love is inherently concerned with the specification of emotion-inducing factors that systematically influence the depth of emotional bonds. Two such factors, hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience, merit particular attention in light of their controllability through experiential retailing or retail branding strategies and the significance of their effects on shopping behavior. The

approach adopted in identifying emotion-inducing factors is based mainly on Caroll and

Ahuvia's (2006) brand love model.

Consumers' love of particular possessions or activities has been widely noted

(Ahuvia, 1994; 2005), but suggestions that some satisfied customers may have "love-

like" feelings for retailers come mainly from Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) brand love

model. In the context of consumer packaged goods, Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) employs

survey research to test a model involving brand love, a new marketing construct that

assesses satisfied consumers' passionate emotional attachment to particular trade names.

Findings suggest that satisfied consumers' love is greater for brands in product categories

perceived as more hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) and for brands that offer more

in terms of symbolic benefits. Findings of their work also suggest that brand love is

linked to higher levels of brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. In line with this

perspective, the constructs of hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience are

proposed as antecedents of customer love in the conceptual model.

Attachment Theory

The four relational outcomes of customer love are proposed based on attachment

theory (Bowlby, 1979; 1980). In general, attachment is defined as an emotion-laden

target-specific bond between a person and a specific object (Bowlby, 1979; 1980).

Research shows that consumers develop emotional attachments toward consumption

objects throughout their lives. For example, consumers develop attachments to gifts

(Mick & DeMoss, 1990), collectibles (Slater, 2000) and brands (Schouten &

McAlexander, 1995). Individual self-expression (e.g., Kopytoff, 1986; McCracken, 1986)

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and identity development (e.g., Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1991) have been identified as key drivers of consumers' emotional attachments to consumption objects.

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) suggest that although consumers interact with thousands of consumption objects in their lives, they develop an intense emotional attachment to only a small subset of these objects. Attachments vary in strength, and stronger attachments are associated with stronger feelings of love and passion (Sternberg, 987). The possibility that customers can develop strong emotional attachments to retailers is interesting. Attachment theory in psychology (BowIby, 1979) suggests that the degree of emotional attachment to an object predicts the nature of an individual's interaction with the object. Attachment theory suggests that individuals who are strongly attached to a person are more likely to be committed to, invest in, and make sacrifices for that person (Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Likewise, it is expected that, customers' strong emotional attachments to a retailer might predict their loyalty to the retailer and their supportive responses and willingness to make sacrifices (Fournier et al., 1994; Thomson et al., 2005). Therefore, self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation are modeled as the outcomes of customer love.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

While many retailers have focused on improving functional performance to satisfy their customers, the changes in the retail landscape in recent years now demand much more of retailers. Generating satisfied customers simply may not be sufficient in today's marketplace characterized by intense competition, broad product assortment, convenient retail locations, and 24/7 shopping anytime, anywhere on the Internet.

Perhaps most critically, customers expect to be satisfied; thus, focusing on satisfaction simply is not sufficient (Arnold et al., 2005). Hence, while retailers have built an acute understanding of how to create satisfied customers with quality goods and fair prices, this study attempts to provide retailers with beneficial insights on how to develop and maintain emotional connections with their satisfied customers.

The notion that emotional loyalty is more important than functional loyalty is well documented (Barnes, 2005). However, the search for a framework to quantify, diagnose, and describe the nature of emotional loyalty has proven elusive, especially in a retailing context. Despite the dramatic changes in the strategies and roles of retailers during the past decade, the manner in which researchers assess consumer response to retailers has not changed and retailing research continues to focus primarily on satisfaction as an overall outcome (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). While the concept of love has been suggested as a viable construct for explaining differences among satisfied customers (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998), little research has directly examined the love construct at the store level. Consequently, the processes by which love develops, the critical antecedents and outcomes of love remain to be specified in retailing research.

Thus, this study is designed to examine "customer love" within a comprehensive nomological net. It should be noted that the focus of this study is not on theory development; rather, the researcher pursues an empirical approach to studying the customer love construct by unifying findings from published research into a comprehensive model. In so doing, the present study entails an investigation of the factors systematically affecting customer love and assesses the ability of customer love to predict desirable consumer behavior.

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Toward this end, the specific research objectives of this study are: (a) to investigate whether different relationship-inducing factors (i.e., tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, preferential treatment, and service quality) have a differential impact on perceived relationship investment; (b) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by perceived relationship investment; (c) to analyze whether the effect of perceived relationship investment on customer love is contingent on two consumer characteristics (i.e., emotional intensity and need for variety); (d) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by two emotion-inducing factors (hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience); and (e) to investigate whether customer love affects four relational outcomes (i.e., self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation).

CONSTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH TO KNOWLEDGE

This study is designed to understand how the strength of customer love is affected directly and indirectly by relationship- and emotion-inducing factors. The proposed model rests on the premise that satisfied customers may emotionally reciprocate a retailer's relationship investment based on the perception of retailer behaviors and that these reciprocating responses cohere into a generalized emotional reaction to the retailer in its role as a hedonic and/or symbolic relationship partner. Further, by investigating whether differences in satisfied customers' relationship durability and stability can be predicted by customer love, this dissertation posits that customer love serves as a truly actionable retail management construct. In the course of applying the love construct into

satisfied customers' relationships with retailers, several theoretical contributions can be generated.

First, this study can provide empirical support for the usefulness of the customer love construct for considering differences in satisfied consumers' emotional responses to retailers. Since customer love is examined as a meaningful construct that is linked to strong relational outcomes (self-disclosure, positive WOM, behavioral loyalty, competitive insulation), it may offer retailers a measurable strategic objective that echoes and extends recent industry thinking about the importance of developing emotional relationships with customers (Reichheld, 2003; Roberts, 2004).

Second, this study also contributes to our understanding of how retailers can maintain emotional relationships with satisfied customers through relationship marketing efforts. This issue is important because retailers are often surrounded by uncertainty and incorrect beliefs about what matters to satisfied customers, which results in relationship marketing that is ineffectively implemented (De Wulf et al., 2001). For instance, customer relationship management (CRM) has primarily focused on identifying, selecting, and retaining customers, rather than forming emotional bonds. The province and exact meaning of CRM is often confounded with database management techniques (Parvatiyar & Sheth, 2001), while retailers need strategies for initiating, deepening, and comprehending relationships. Given the observation that retailers largely make the mistake of viewing relationship marketing programs through their own eyes rather than the customers' eyes, it is especially relevant to collect information on satisfied customers' perceptions of relationship-focused strategies (De Wulf et al., 2003). In addition to relationship marketing efforts, this research investigates the antecedent effect of service

quality on perceived relationship investment in order to better capture the mechanism behind the establishment of strong customer-retailer relationships. While the construct of service quality can be applied to a broad spectrum of retailing contexts (Parasuraman et al., 1988; 1991), little research has examined its effects on satisfied customers' perceptions of relationship investment.

Third, this study extends our knowledge of whether retailers can strategically induce satisfied customers' passionate emotional attachments through an experiential retailing approach. In so doing, this study will generate beneficial insight regarding the process of transitioning from a functionally satisfied customer to an emotional relationship partner. In the current retail environment, retailers are increasingly competing with each other on the basis of highly comparable product and pricing offerings (Odekerken-Schroder et al., 2001). Acceptable levels of pricing and product quality are now regarded as hygiene factors or minimal conditions for consumers to engage in exchanges with retailers (Odekerken-Schroder et al., 2001). As a result, the strategies and roles of retailers have been dramatically changed during the past decade, from a pure "product acquisition" focus to a more "store experientialism" focus (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). More attention is needed in academic research that focuses on testing variables that reflect this growing trend in retailing (Jones & Reynolds, 2006).

Finally, to fully understand a consumer behavior phenomenon, methodological pluralism must be ensured (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). While many areas of consumer research address consumers' love of products and brands, little quantitative research has investigated love directly. By developing and testing a formalized relationship process model that contains the measurable antecedents and outcomes of customer love, this

study contributes a positivist investigation to a research area that has been studied

primarily with qualitative approaches.

CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II serves as a theoretical framework for this study. First, existing consumer behavior literature on love is reviewed. Based on the literature review, the construct of customer love is defined and distinguished from other constructs. Next, in order to enhance the interpretability of the conceptual model presented in Chapter I, two sub-models are delineated within the overall model. Each of the constructs incorporated in each sub-model is defined and the arguments underlying the research hypotheses are described in detail.

LOVE: ITS RELEVANCE TO CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The word "love" is used as frequently with a non-person as with a person. We hear it all the time, from "I love shopping" to "I love my new car." Consider the vast number of consumption objects that come and go in our lives, groceries, clothing, gifts, tools, cars, movies, computers, newspapers, art, books, and furniture. The list is virtually endless. However, from this vast sea, only a handful of consumption objects are loved (Ahuvia, 2005).

Consumers' love toward products or brands has been widely noted in the consumer behavior literature. However, the notion that some satisfied customers may have love-like feelings toward retailers comes mainly from the research on consumer-object relations (CORs) (Shimp & Madden, 1988), philopragia (Ahuvia, 1993; 2005), product love (Whang et al., 2005), consumers' emotional attachments to brands (Thomson et al., 2005), consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1994; 1998), and brand

love (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). While customer love may not be perfectly analogous to the feelings one has for another person, the implication from these streams of work is that these feelings can be considerably more intense than simple liking (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Consumer-Object Relations (CORs)

To understand customer love, researchers should go back to the basics, the social psychology origins of interpersonal love. There is much to be learned from the research on love that has been conducted by leading thinkers in social psychology over the past 60 and 70 years. Their conclusions about what contributes to the development and strength of interpersonal love may be just as valid in allowing the researchers to better understand what customers want in their dealings with retailers (Barnes, 2005).

Shimp and Madden's (1988) conceptual paper is the pioneering work that applies theories of interpersonal love directly to consumers' feelings toward consumption objects. Although this initial work does not contain any empirical evidence, this brief conference paper provides a comprehensive overview of the issues involved in applying theories of interpersonal love into consumption contexts (Ahuvia, 1993). Shimp and Madden (1988) introduce a consumer-object relations (CORs) framework based analogously on Sternberg's (1986) triangular theory of love.

Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

Among the social psychology theories that define love in terms of a single underlying construct, Sternberg's triangular theory of love (1986) has become one of the most widely cited love theories. It has been considered an integrative theory that combines aspects of previous love theories and the mechanisms underlying them (Ahuvia,

1993). Shimp and Madden (1988) recognize the conceptual importance of Sternberg's theory and delineate its relevance to consumer behavior in their CORs framework. The triangular theory of love holds that love can be understood in terms of three components. As illustrated in Figure 2, the three components of the theory are intimacy, passion, and decision/commitment (Sternberg, 1986).

The intimacy component refers to "feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119) and also includes sharing, feelings of emotional support, holding another in high regard, and having intimate communications (Shimp & Madden, 1988). It is viewed as the core of the most loving transactions and remains essentially the same phenomenon across relationships with parents, children, friends, and lovers. Intimacy is typically derived from emotional investments in a relationship (Ahuvia, 1993)
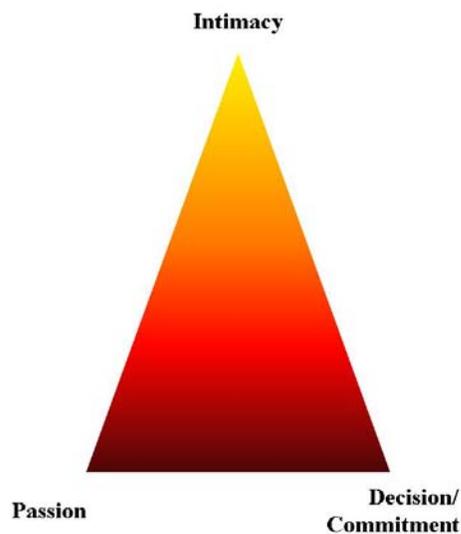
Figure 2. Sternberg's Triangular Theory of Love

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The passion component of love refers to "the drives that lead to romance, physical attraction, sexual consummation, and related phenomena in loving relationships" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). It involves what Hatfield and Walster (1981) refer to as "a state of intense longing for union with the other" (p. 9). The passion component of love is highly and reciprocally interactive with intimacy. However, it is relatively ephemeral compared to the other components of love (Sternberg, 1986).

Sternberg's (1986) third component of love is the decision/commitment. This final component consists of two aspects, a short-term one and a long-term one. The short-term one is the decision that one loves a certain other. The long-term aspect is the commitment to maintain that love over time. These two aspects of the decision/commitment component do not necessarily go together. The decision to love does not always imply a commitment to love. Strangely enough, commitment does not always imply decision. Many people are committed to the love of another without necessarily even admitting that they love or are in love with the other. In most cases, however, decision precedes commitment both temporally and logically (Sternberg, 1987).

Eight Types of Consumer-Object Relations

Shimp and Madden (1988) suggests that the nature of consumers' relations with consumption objects (e.g., brands, products, stores) can be conceptualized based on the three components of Sternberg's theory (1986): liking (intimacy), yearning (passion), and decision/commitment. Interweaving presence/absence on these three components, Shimp and Madden (1988) identify eight possible consumer-object relations (i.e., nonliking, liking, infatuation, functionalism, inhibited desire, utilitarianism, succumbed desire, and loyalty). However, although Shimp and Madden (1988) make an interesting conceptual

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point regarding consumers' relations with products or brands, its contribution is limited because it simply applies Sternberg's (1986) typology to consumer-object relations with only superficial changes in vocabulary to increase its appropriateness (Ahuvia, 1993). Shimp and Madden's (1988) framework is depicted in Table 2.

Philopragia: Love Objects

Ahuvia (1993) comprehensively explores consumers' ability to love consumption objects and activities. Using an interpretive paradigm, Ahuvia (1993) shows that many consumers do have intense emotional attachments to some "love objects," which are broadly defined as anything, human or otherwise, that is loved. In developing an integrative theory of love that is applicable to consumer behavior, Ahuvia (1993) specifically introduces the term "philopragia" that describes love for anything other than a person with whom one has a close relationship. The scope of philopragia includes not only physical objects but also celebrities, ideas, abstractions, and activities. For example, love objects may be an activity (e.g., shopping, playing a musical instrument) or a non-person object (e.g., a pet, one's computer, a painting, an old car that had been a traveling companion, books, and the ocean) (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Ahuvia's (1993) initial empirical research proves that in some instances the experience of philopragia is essentially identical to interpersonal love. However, philopragia and interpersonal love are in most cases at best considered as similar rather than identical. The rationale for this, according to Ahuvia (1993), is the difference in the level of sacredness in the relationship and the extent of reciprocity.

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Table 2. Eight Types of Consumer-Object Relations (CORs)

Type	Composition	Description
Non-liking	Weak on all three components, liking, yearning, and decision/commitment	Consumers have no particular feelings for a consumption object.
Liking	-Strong liking -Weak yearning and decision/commitment	Consumers feel some degree of affinity for a particular consumption object but have no particular desire to either own or purchase the object.
Infatuation	-Strong yearning -Weak liking and decision/commitment	Consumption objects that satisfy symbolic needs (i.e., internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification) as opposed to functional needs are especially prone to infatuated relations.
Functionalism	-Strong decision/commitment -Weak yearning and liking	Consumers decide to purchase a particular consumption object in the absence of any strong emotional attachment to the object or yarning for it.
Inhibited desire	-Strong liking and yearning -Weak decision/commitment	Although consumers like and yarn for a particular consumption object, they cannot buy it due to outside constraints that discourage the behavior.
Utilitarianism	-Strong liking and decision/commitment -Weak yearning	Consumers develop attachments to and fondness for a particular consumption object due to repeat purchasing. However, they do not have a passionate relation with it.
Succumbed desire	-Strong yearning and decision/commitment -Weak liking	Although consumers feel a strong yarning to purchase a particular consumption object, they do not feel any liking for that object. This type of love is infrequent in consumer-object relations.
Loyalty	-Strong on all three components, liking, yearning, and decision/commitment	Consumer feels an intimate relation with a particular consumption object, has a strong yearning to purchase or repurchase the object, and is committed to support that particular object.

Product Love

Citing Ahuvia's working paper, Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) argue that consumers'

mental model of interpersonal love demonstrates a generally good fit with their

descriptions of love objects. They further support the idea that there are fundamental

similarities between interpersonal love and love in consumption contexts. In line with this

perspective, Whang et al. (2004) raise the following issues:

> "*Consumers often say they are in love with a product or brand, but what does*
> *being in love with a product really mean? Is love for a product a strong*
> *expression of attachment or loyalty, or do consumers actually find themselves in a*
> *romantic relationship resembling love toward another person? If product love is*
> *romantic in makeup, then theories in psychology regarding different types of*
> *interpersonal love may be useful in capturing the fundamental nature of this*
> *phenomenon*" (p. 320).

Whang et al. (2004) argue that marketers desire to form close consumer-product

relationships because it leads to customer retention through brand loyalty. Their argument

is evidenced by the notion of "brand community" defined as "a specialized, non-

geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among

admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). With evidence of the existence

of the extremely loyal customers of Harley-Davidson motorcycles (Schouten &

McAlexander, 1995), Whang et al. (2004) directly link Lee's (1977) palette theory of

love to bikers' love toward their motorcycles. According to Lee's palette theory of love,

there are three primary colors of love that can be mixed together to form three secondary

"colors" of love. Based on a sample of 4,000 definitions and descriptions of love

accumulated from the world's literature, and 120 interviews with adults in two British

and two Canadian cities, Lee (1977) produces the typology of six love colors that

represents the complete domain of interpersonal love. Table 3 describes each of the six love colors.

According to Lee (1977), the primary colors of love are Eros, Ludos, and Storge. Eros is based on physical attraction and is highly sexual in nature. Love at first sight is often associated with erotic love because the erotic lover has a very physical ideal in mind. When this ideal is found, love at first sight is often the result. While erotic love is stereotypically ephemeral, it can last longer, and is sincerely felt by the lover during its reign. The term "Ludos" is originated from the Latin word for "play" or "game." Its playful nature creates a light, flirtatious, easygoing, and low commitment to the dyadic relationship. It also increases the likelihood of promiscuity. The final primary color of love is Storge. It is defined as the loving affection that develops slowly over time between siblings or playmates. This style of love is developed slowly through shared activities in warm and comfortable relationships (Ahuvia, 1993).

The secondary colors of love are Mania, Agape, and Pragma. Mania is a combination of Eros and Ludos. It is regarded as an obsessive infatuation. Agape, a combination of Eros and Storge, represents selfless altruistic love in which the lover thinks only of the good for the beloved with little thought of his or her own self interest. Pragma is formed by combining Ludos and Storge and may be warm but lacks the passion of erotic love. The pragmatic lover is likely to engage in "shopping list" love whereby the single shops around for a compatible partner who meets a series of predetermined standards (Ahuvia, 1993).

Conducting a comprehensive factor analysis of five dominant interpersonal love theories, Hendrick and Hendrick (1989) report that Lee's (1977) typology demonstrates

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the most independence among the different styles of love. For that reason, Whang et al.

(2004) apply Lee's six colors of love into assessing consumers' love toward a product.

Their results demonstrate that product love is largely consistent with interpersonal love

where Eros, Mania, and Agape have the most positive impact on successful romantic

interpersonal relationships (Stemberg & Grajek, 1984). Overall, Whang et al.'s (2004)

findings imply that relations between bikers and their bikes is indeed a form of romantic

relationship. More specifically, bikers love for their bikes involves feelings that are

possessive (Mania), caring (Agape), and passionate (Eros), but brand loyalty depends

only on passionate feelings (Eros).

Table 3. Lee's (1977) Six Colors of Love

Color	Definition	Description
Eros	Romantic/passionate Love	The search for a beloved whose physical presentation of self love embodies an image already held in the mind of the lover.
Ludus	Game-playing Love	Playful or game love. Permissive and pluralistic. The degree of 'involvement' is carefully controlled, jealousy is eschewed, and relationships are often multiple and relatively short-lived.
Storge	Friendship love	Based on slowly developing affection and companionship, a gradual disclosure of self, an avoidance of self-conscious passion, and an expectation of long-term commitment.
Mania	Possessive/dependent love	An obsessive, jealous, emotionally intense love style characterized by preoccupation with the beloved and a need for repeated reassurance of being loved.
Agape	All-giving/selfless love	Altruistic love, given because the lover sees it as his duty to love without expectation of reciprocity. Gentle, caring, and guided by reason more than emotion.
Pragma	Logical love 'Shopping list' love	Conscious consideration of 'vital statistics' about a suitable beloved. Education, vocation, religion, age, and numerous other demographic characteristics of the potential beloved are taken into account in the search for a compatible match.

Consumers' Emotional Attachments to Brands

Thomson et al. (2005) argue that, although consumers interact with thousands of brands in their lives, they develop an intense emotional attachment (EA) to only a small subset of these brands. The possibility that consumers can develop strong emotional attachments to brands is important to brand loyalty research as attachment theory in psychology suggests that the degree of emotional attachment to an object predicts the nature of an individual's interaction with the object (Bowlby, 1979). For example, individuals who are strongly attached to a person are more likely to be committed to, invest in, and make sacrifices for that person (Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

Based on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1979; 1980), Thomson et al. (2005) introduce a scale to measure the strength of consumers' emotional attachments to brands. They also prove the predictive validity of the scale showing that consumers' emotional attachments to a brand predict their commitment to the brand (i.e., brand loyalty) and their willingness to make financial sacrifices in order to obtain it (i.e., to pay a price premium). These results are theoretically consistent with attachment theory developed in the field of social psychology.

According to Bowlby (1979; 1980), an attachment is defined as an emotion-laden target-specific bond between a person and a specific object. Attachments vary in strength, and stronger attachments are associated with stronger feelings of connection, affection, love, and passion (Thomson et al., 2005). The desire to make strong emotional attachments to particular others serves a basic human need (Bowlby, 1980), beginning from a child's attachment to his or her mother and continuing through the adult stage with romantic relationships (Hazan & Shaver, 1994).

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Research shows that consumers develop emotional attachments to consumption objects throughout their lives. For example, consumers develop attachments to gifts (Mick & DeMoss, 1990), collectibles (Slater, 2000) and brands (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Individual self-expression (e.g., Kopytoff, 1986; McCracken, 1986) and identity development (e.g., Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1991) have been identified as key drivers of consumers' emotional attachments to consumption objects. The notion that such attachments reflect love is also suggested by consumer behavior researchers. In the use of products, Richins (1997) reports love is a common consumption-related emotion. The notion that love is so prevalent in consumption is also supported by Schultz, Kleine, and Kernan's (1989). Based on this study, consumers tend to describe their feelings about their favorite objects using the word "love."

Consumer-Brand Relationships

Fournier (1994; 1998) has documented compelling evidence for the existence of consumer-brand relationships, and further proposed a Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) framework in consumer-brand contexts. The central premise on which the BRQ framework is founded is the assumption that consumers translate a brand's behavior into trait language from which the brand's personality is construed. By accepting this translation of brand behavior to trait language, Fournier (1994; 1998) argues that the brand passes the personification qualification and can therefore become an active partner in a relationship dyad.

Not surprisingly, the BRQ framework is metaphorical in nature and is influenced largely by analogies with interpersonal relationships. The BRQ concept consists of six dimensions (i.e., love/passion, self-connection, commitment, interdependence, intimacy,

and brand partner quality), each capturing unique aspects of the strength and richness of consumer-brand relationships. As such, Fournier (1994; 1998) notes the importance of love in consumers' long-term relationships with brands. She argues that brand loyalty research has stagnated of late and that the majority of insights and contributions fail to address why and in what forms consumers seek and value relationships with brands. By developing the Brand Relationship Quality (BRQ) framework that can be used as a diagnostic tool for conceptualizing and evaluating relationship strength, Fournier (1998) illuminates the importance and conceptual richness of the emotional and affect-laden ties that exist between consumers and their brands. The BRQ concepts may be broader than love, since love is only one type of consumer-brand relationships, and narrower than philopragia, since the BRQ concepts focus exclusively on brands (Ahuvia, 2005).

Love/passion in the BRQ framework refers to the intensity and depth of the emotional ties between the consumer and the brand. This dimension of BRQ is denoted by a strong attraction and affection toward the brand, and a feeling of fascination, exclusivity, and dependency in the relationship. Conducting an exploratory qualitative study, Fournier (1998) shows that some consumers feel that their brands are "irreplaceable and unique" to the extent that separation anxiety is anticipated upon withdrawal. In other words, consumers in passionate brand relationships feel that "something is missing" when they have not used their brands for a while. Fournier (1998) concludes that such strong affective ties encourage a biased, positive perception of the brand partner that renders comparisons with alternatives difficult.

Brand Love

Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) employ a survey research methodology to test hypotheses involving brand love, a new marketing construct that assesses satisfied consumers' passionate emotional attachment to particular brands. They define brand love within the context of satisfied customers based on Fournier and Mick's (1999) discussion of the various modes of consumer satisfaction. Fournier and Mick (1999, p. 11) suggest that "satisfaction-as-love probably constitutes the most intense and profound satisfaction of all." The findings of Caroll and Ahuvia's empirical research (2006) suggest that satisfied consumers' love is greater for brands in product categories perceived as more hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) and for brands that offer more in terms of symbolic benefits. Brand love, in turn, is linked to higher levels of brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Also, Caroll and Ahuvia's study (2006) reveals that satisfied consumers tend to be less loyal to brands in more hedonic product categories and to engage in more positive word-of-mouth about self-expressive brands.

According to Caroll and Ahuvia (2006), suggestions that consumers have "love-like" feelings for brands come mainly from the research on delight. However, Caroll and Ahuvia's study (2006) seeks to address the limitations of customer delight by investigating consumer-brand relationships that are frequently long term in nature and by focusing more explicitly on explaining differences in consumers' brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. In the following section, the limitations of customer delight identified in the literature are discussed from the perspective of Caroll and Ahuvia (2006).

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Beyond Customer Delight

Recognizing that simply satisfying consumers might not be sufficient for continuing success in today's competitive marketplace (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006), some researchers have started suggesting that going beyond satisfaction to "customer delight" is required. The rationale for this suggestion is that customers exposed to unexpected, pleasant, and delightful experiences are far more likely to develop into long-term loyal customers (Arnold et al., 2005). In particular, service quality and satisfaction researchers have increasingly paid attention to the "customer delight" construct, anticipating that it may generate exceptional results in the form of unshakable customer loyalty (Arnold et al., 2005).

Similar to satisfaction, the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980) provides a basis for understanding the concept of delight. Within this framework, customers are thought to compare perceived performance with prior expectations. If performance exceeds expectations, then a state of positive disconfirmation exists. Disconfirmed performance which is highly unlikely or surprising based on past experience can evoke "surprise disconfirmation" (Oliver, 1997; Oliver et al., 1997), which is customer delight.

Although subsequent work has provided some support for the relevance of delight as a construct of interest to retailers, the results are not unequivocal (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). For instance, outcomes of delight have generally focused on repurchase intentions. Oliver et al. (1997) examine two structural models in two service settings (symphony patrons and wildlife attendees). The results of this study show structural differences across two samples: delight directly affected repurchase intentions only in the symphony

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sample and indirectly affected intentions in the park sample. Other research investigating the competitive implications of delight finds that generating customer delight can pay off, only if: (a) satisfaction strongly affects repurchase intention; (b) the firm values future profits; (c) satisfaction of competitors' customers is low; and (d) the firm is able to attract dissatisfied customers of competitors (Rust & Oliver, 2000). Arnold et al. (2005) point out that generating delight among customers results in higher future expectations, thereby making it more difficult for the firm to generate delight repeatedly. Furthermore, the presence of consumer- and retailer-level moderating influences on the delight-outcome link is identified in the literature, including consumer self-regulation (Babin & Darden, 1995; Bagozzi, Baumgartner, & Youjae, 1992) and industry competitiveness (e.g., Anderson, Fornell, & Lehmann, 1994; Fornell, 1992).

While Oliver et al. (1997) proposes customer delight as a key determinant of true customer loyalty and loyalty-driven profits, the customer delight construct seems to have critical limitations. First, customer delight focuses on a single, discrete transaction (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006) and overlooks that relationships are process phenomena and they evolve over a series of interactions (Fournier, 1998). Second, there seems to be little evidence demonstrating that customer delight is a truly actionable retail management construct. From a practical perspective, it is not necessary, or even realistic, for retailers to constantly strive to delight their customers. Although generating a delightful shopping experience results in many positive outcomes, it has the effect of "raising the bar" in the customer's mind regarding the future performance of the retailer. In other words, generating delight among customers results in higher future expectations, thereby making

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it more difficult for the retailer to generate delight repeatedly (Arnold et al., 2005). Thus, Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) attempt to go beyond "delight" to "love" is deemed valuable.

CUSTOMER LOVE

Based on the literature review, this study introduces a new construct, "customer love," defined as the degree of emotional attachment a satisfied customer has for a particular retailer. According to Ahuvia's (1993) philopragia theory, it is likely that satisfied customers' love for retailers is at best understood as something that is similar, rather than identical, to love for a person. However, while customer love may not be perfectly analogous to the stronger forms of interpersonal love, the conclusion from the literature review is that customer love can be considerably more intense than simple liking.

Distinguishing Customer Love from Other Constructs

Customer Satisfaction

A customer who loves a particular retailer is likely to be satisfied with it. This satisfaction provides a basis for customer love. Nevertheless, satisfaction and love are not synonymous. In general, the concept of customer satisfaction is divided into two categories: "transaction-specific satisfaction" and "cumulative satisfaction." Transaction-specific satisfaction is a customer's evaluation of his or her experience with and reactions to a particular transaction, episode, or retail encounter (Olsen & Johnson, 2003), whereas cumulative satisfaction refers to the customer's overall evaluation of a retailer based on all encounters with the retailer (Johnson, Anderson, & Fornell, 1995). Needless to say, customer love is distinguished from transaction-specific satisfaction. While transaction-

specific satisfaction can occur immediately following a single store visit, love is a process phenomenon that evolves over time with multiple interactions (Fournier, 1998).

Customer love also differs from cumulative satisfaction. First, although two customers are equally satisfied with a given retailer, they may vary greatly in the extent to which they are emotionally attached to it. More importantly, while cumulative satisfaction generally is conceptualized as a cognitive judgment, customer love has a much stronger affective focus (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In other words, satisfaction tends to be a cognitive evaluation and hence it is different from the strong emotional attachment construct (Thomson et al., 2005). Second, cumulative satisfaction is frequently linked to the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver, 1980), which posits that customers judge satisfaction by comparing pre-purchase expectations with perceived post-purchase evaluation. However, customer love requires neither pre-purchase standards nor disconfirmation. The customer experiences the emotional response to the retailer in the absence of cognition; the customer knows what to expect from the retailer, so little, if any, disconfirmation occurs (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Finally, customer love represents a powerful emotional experience that includes a willingness to declare love (e.g., "I love this store!") and involves integration of the retailer into the consumer's identity, neither of which is requisite in cumulative satisfaction (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Retailer Interest

Customer love is also conceptually distinguished from the retailer interest construct developed by Jones and Reynolds (2006). Retailer interest is defined as the degree of interest that a consumer has in a given retail store. If a customer has a high

level of interest in a retailer, the customer becomes fascinated with and curious about the

retailer. The customer also desires to learn more and interact with the retailer as a result

of the interest. However, retailer interest is a cognitive state that reflects a motivation or

desire of the consumer (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). Jones and Reynolds (2006) clarify that

interest is not an emotion as follows:

> "*Interest in general has sometimes been included as an emotion in previous research in the field of psychology. However, current theoretical and empirical research on emotions in marketing and psychology clearly indicate that interest is not an emotion. Emotions are generally defined as a valenced affective reaction. Interest is cognitive in nature and is not intrinsically valenced, meaning that interest may result from either positive or negative feelings. Thus, retailer interest is best considered a motivational state that motivates approach, exploration, and creative encounter*" (p. 116).

As such, the concept of retailer interest arguably taps the realm of cognition,

whereas customer love is clearly relevant to the realm of emotions. Further, consumers

may develop an interest in a retailer in which he/she had never visited (e.g., a consumer

sees an advertisement for a new retailer or hears positive word of mouth regarding a new

retailer and becomes interested in visiting this store) (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). However,

customer love involves a relationship that evolves over a series of interactions (Fournier,

1998).

Attitude

A customer who loves a particular retailer is likely to have a favorable attitude

toward it. However, although favorable attitudes may be reflected in customer love, the

constructs differ in several critical ways. First, as previously discussed, customer love

develops over time and is often based on interactions between a customer and a retailer

(Thomson et al., 2005). These interactions encourage the development of meaning and

invoke strong emotions in reference to the retailer. On the other hand, attitudes reflect a customer's evaluative reactions to a retailer and these reactions can develop without any direct contact with it. Thus, a consumer might have a positive attitude toward a retailer without ever having had any experience with it at all (Thomson et al., 2005).

Second, customers can have favorable attitudes toward any number of retailers and toward retailers that have little centrality or importance to their lives. The retailers that customers love, however, are expected to be few in number and are generally regarded as profound and significant (Ahuvia, 2005; Thomson et al., 2005). Prior research implies that love toward a certain object may be attended by a rich set of schemas and affectively laden memories that link the object to the self (Ahuvia, 2005; Thomson et al., 2005). In contrast, favorable attitudes do not necessarily link the object to the self and the self-concept.

Third, according to attachment theory, customer love is likely to involve specific behaviors such as proximity maintenance and separation distress (Bowlby, 1979). These behavioral manifestations are not characteristic of favorable attitudes, the impact of which is highly situation- and context-dependent (Thomson et al., 2005).

Finally, research suggests that individuals who are strongly emotionally attached to a person are generally committed to preserving their relationship with it (Bowlby, 1979; Thomson et al., 2005). Likewise, love for a consumption object is characterized by a perception that the object is irreplaceable (Fournier, 1998). This is not necessarily characteristic of favorable attitudes. For example, it would be unusual for a customer with only a favorable attitude toward a retailer to resist an attractive alternative store. Moreover, a customer who has a favorable attitude toward a retailer often switches to

another retailer that has equally desirable features. Support for this proposition comes from research showing that interpersonal love is not merely a more intense form of interpersonal liking, but also a conceptually and empirically distinct construct (Sternberg, 1987).

HYPOTHESIZED MODEL

In this study, customer love is proposed as a customer-based indicator of the strength and depth of the customer-retailer relationship. This multi-item construct attempts to specify existing concepts of emotional loyalty toward the goal of better understanding customer-retailer dynamics. In order to enhance the interpretability of the conceptual model presented in the previous chapter, two sub-models are delineated within the overall model.

Sub-Model (A)

The conceptual foundation of Sub-Model (A) rests upon several theoretical developments and research findings. Briefly stated, in addition to the overall RARP perspective, recent development in understanding reciprocal customer-retailer relationships (De Wulf et al., 2001; De Wulf, Odekerken-Schröder, & Van Kenhove, 2003; Odekerken-Schröder, De Wulf, & Schumacher, 2003) form the foundation for specific research hypotheses. Incorporating recent findings involving consumer personality and temperament characteristics leads to additional research hypotheses. In Sub-Model (A), a consumer's need for variety and emotional intensity are hypothesized as moderators that influence the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love. Sub-Model (A) is depicted in Figure 3.

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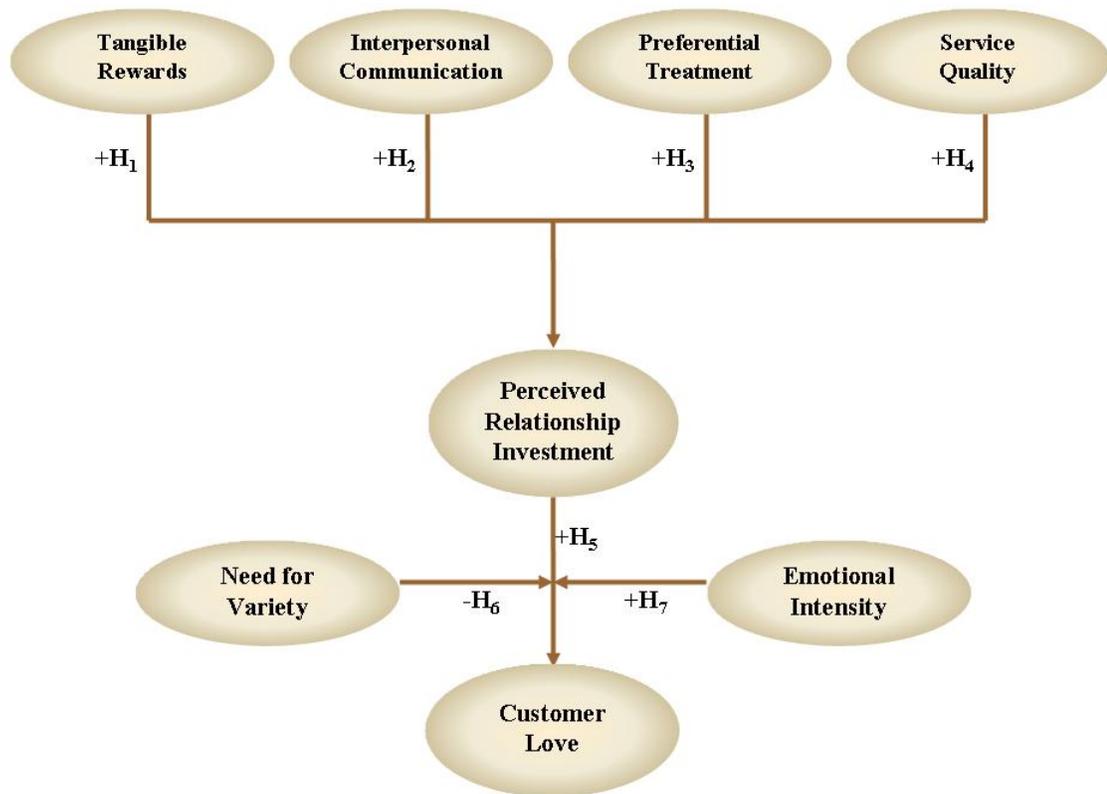
Figure 3. Sub-Model (A)

Tangible Rewards

The construct of tangible rewards is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer offers tangible benefits such as pricing or gift incentives to its regular customers in return for their loyalty (De Wulf et al., 2001). According to Berry and Parasuraman (1991), relationship marketing can focus on building financial bonds. Financial bonds, referred to as level one relationship marketing, enhance customer relationships through special price offers or other financial incentives to loyal customers (Berry, 1995). It is considered the weakest level of relationship marketing because competitors can easily imitate price-related strategies and tactics (De Wulf et al., 2001). Frequent shopper programs, customer loyalty cards, free gifts, personalized cent-off coupons, and other point-for-benefit "clubs" are examples of rewarding tactics (Peterson, 1995). These types of relational offerings encourage customers to return to a retailer in order to save money, receive special offers or extras, or earn additional products or services in appreciation for their loyalty.

Interpersonal Communication

The construct of interpersonal communication is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer interacts with its regular customers in a warm and personal way (De Wulf et al., 2001). More specifically, it refers to the personal touch in communication between a store and its customers. The importance of personal exchanges between consumers and retailers in influencing relationship outcomes should not be surprising given that relationships are inherently social processes (Beatty, Coleman, Reynolds, & Lee, 1996). The social interaction afforded by shopping has been

suggested to be the prime motivator for some consumers to visit retail establishments (Evans, Christiansen, & Gill, 1996).

According to Berry and Parasuraman (1991), a second level of relationship marketing focuses on the social aspects of a relationship. These socially inspired tactics are usually bundled into what is called social bonds. Social bonds are concerned with developing personal ties that pertain to service dimensions that offer feelings of familiarity, friendship, and social support (Berry 1995); personal recognition and use of a customer's name (Howard, Gengler, & Jain, 1995); knowing the customer as a person; engaging in friendly conversations; and exhibiting personal warmth (Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990). These strategies and tactics may result in perceived social benefits, which occurs when a consumer enjoys the feeling of recognition, special attention, and friendship that comes with frequent patronage to a retailer where employees begin to recognize him or her (Gwinner, Gremler, & Bitner, 1998).

Preferential Treatment

The preferential treatment construct is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer treats and serves its regular customers better than its nonregular customers (De Wulf et al., 2001). De Wulf et al. (2001) view preferential treatment as a level-two relationship marketing tactic that focuses on building social bonds. However, preferential treatment differs from interpersonal communication in that the former emphasizes that regular customers receive a higher service level than nonregular customers and that the latter refers to the personal touch in communication between a store and its customers. De Wulf et al. (2001) specifically provide a rationale for why

preferential treatment enables a retailer to address a customer's basic human need to feel important as follows:

> *"For example, account holders at major shops are sometimes offered special shopping evenings or preferential access to certain products for sale… Implicit in the idea of relationship marketing is consumer focus and consumer selectivity, that is, all consumers do not need to be served in the same way… Inadvertently treating all customers as equal; by not differentiating, companies waste resources in oversatisfying less profitable customers while undersatisfying more valuable, loyal customers…" (p. 35).*

Service Quality

Since the 1980s, service quality has been one of the most critical issues in the retailing literature and is considered as a key element in retailing strategies in order to succeed in competitive environments (e.g. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985; 1990). In fact, the pressure of competition in the retail industry has forced retailers to look for ways to enhance their competitive position. Many have decided to improve service quality in order to differentiate their services from those of their competitors. This phenomenon can be attributed, in part, to the fact that today's consumers are more sophisticated and demanding than ever before and have high expectations related to their shopping experiences (Parikh, 2006).

Since services are intangible, heterogeneous, and inseparable, it is difficult to measure service quality objectively (Parikh, 2006). Despite the complex nature of service quality, many researchers have proposed and evaluated instruments for measuring service quality over the years. Among these instruments, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991) is the most prominent and the most widely used scale. Based on the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm,

Parasuraman et al. (1988) developed the SERVQUAL scale, where service quality is viewed as the result obtained from conducting a comparison between expectations and perceptions of performance. Parasuraman et al. (1988) argued that, regardless of the type of service, consumers evaluate service quality using similar criteria, which can be grouped into five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles. Reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness means the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Empathy is considered to be the caring and individualized attention the firm provides its customers. Finally, tangibles refer to physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel.

Despite SERVQUAL having been applied across a wide range of service contexts, it has been criticized on methodological and psychometric grounds by many marketing researchers (Babakus & Boller, 1992; Buttle, 1996; Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Martinez & Martinez Garcia, 2007; Teas, 1993). More specifically, it has been argued that service quality should be measured considering only consumer perceptions rather than expectations minus perceptions (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Carman 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; McDougall & Levesque, 1994). In particular, McDougall and Levesque (1994) consider that including expectation scores on a service quality instrument may be inefficient and unnecessary. This is due to the fact that consumers tend to indicate consistently high expectation ratings and their perception scores rarely exceed their expectations (Babakus & Boller, 1992). This reason has given rise to the development of alternative scales of SERVQUAL, such as SERVPERF (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), the

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Retail Service Quality Scale (Dabholkar, Thorpe, & Rentz, 1996) or the Hierarchical and Multidimensional Model (Brady & Cronin, 2001).

According to Cronin and Taylor (1992), the performance-based measure is a better means of measuring the service quality construct. They introduce the SERVPERF model using the same 22 performance items from Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) SERVQUAL scale. This scale is reported to explain more of the variance in an overall measure of service quality than does SERVQUAL. Cronin and Taylor (1992) also indicate that a psychometrically superior assessment of service quality in terms of construct validity and operational efficacy could be obtained through the SERVQUAL performance items alone.

Another variation of SERVQUAL is the scale developed by Dabholkar et al. (1996). These authors argue that SERVQUAL has not been successfully adapted to and validated for the retail store environment, suggesting that the dimensionality of service quality in a retail setting may not be similar to that of service quality in pure service industries. They propose a hierarchical model of retail service quality, the Retail Service Quality Scale (RSQS). This scale is regarded as suitable for use in retail businesses which offer a mixture of service and goods, such as department and specialty stores (Dabholkar et al., 1996). The RSQS is a multilevel model, where retail service quality is viewed as a higher-order factor that is defined by two additional levels of attributes (i.e., primary dimension level and sub-dimension level). The instrument includes five primary dimensions (physical aspects, reliability, personal interaction, problem solving and policy) and six sub-dimensions (appearance, convenience, promises, doing it right, inspiring confidence and courteous). Dabholkar et al. (1996) use only performance-based measures

and demonstrate that their scale possesses strong validity and reliability and adequately captures customers' perceptions of retail service quality.

Although Dabholkar et al.'s (1996) scale captures, apart from the common dimensions that are likely to be shared by pure service environments and retail environments, additional dimensions of retail service quality relevant to the retail environment, the reliability and validity of this instrument have been questioned (Finn, 2004). For instance, Kim and Jin (2002) fail to find distinct personal interaction and problem solving dimensions or support for a distinct policy dimension using U.S. and Korean samples. Similarly, Mehta, Lalwani, and Han (2000) do not support a distinction between personal interaction and problem solving for supermarkets or for electronic goods retailers in Singapore.

Finally, Rust and Oliver (1994) provide a useful conceptual framework, by identifying the three distinct elements of service quality that management can always target for improvement as the service product, the service environment, and the service delivery process. They define the service product as the service as it is to be delivered, which in a retail context would primarily be the availability of a suitable selection of products and services for customers. The service environment includes the 'atmospherics' of the service, which in the retail context would primarily be the store environment provided for the customers. The service delivery process is primarily the way the service provider's employees perform for the customers. However, Rust and Oliver (1994) do not test their conceptualization.

Brady and Cronin (2001) propose an alternative hierarchical dimensional structure for service quality by combining Rust and Oliver's model and Dabholkar et al.'s

(1996) hierarchical approach to develop a hierarchical and multidimensional model of perceived service quality. According to Brady and Cronin (2001), customers form their service quality perceptions on the basis of an evaluation of performance at multiple levels and ultimately combine these evaluations to arrive at an overall service quality perception. They describe a third-order factor model, where quality service is explained in terms of three primary dimensions: interaction quality, physical environment quality, and outcome quality. Each of these dimensions consists of the three corresponding sub-dimensions: attitude, behavior, and experience (interaction quality); ambient conditions, design, and social factors (physical environment quality); and waiting time, tangibles and valence (outcome quality). To measure these sub-dimensions, Brady and Cronin (2001) cross them with the SERVQUAL concepts of reliability, responsiveness and empathy to generate nine sets of three items. However, whereas Dabholkar et al. (1996) see SERVQUAL tangibles items as measures of the appearance sub-dimension of physical aspects, Brady and Cronin (2001) identify tangibles as a sub-dimension of outcomes. Thus, the dimensionality issue is not fully resolved (Finn, 2004).

In conclusion, the issue of how best to conceptualize and operationalize service quality seems still a subject of heated debate among researchers. However, based on the literature review, it can be concluded that service quality is a multi-dimensional or multi-attribute construct (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Parasuraman et al., 1988). In this study, service quality is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which the service offered by a retailer is superior or excellent and operationalized based on the original SERVQUAL scale. Although the SERVQUAL scale has been subject to a number of detailed criticisms and extensions (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Dabholkar et al., 1996;

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Martinez & Martinez Garcia, 2007), recent research still builds upon the original five-dimension structure (De Wulf et al., 2003; Kassim & Bojei, 2002). For the purpose of critically reassessing De Wulf et al.'s reciprocal consumer-retailer relationship formation model, De Wulf et al. (2003) employ the five-dimension structure of service quality. In line with several authors who advocate considering service quality as an umbrella construct with distinct dimensions (e.g., Babakus & Boller 1992; Cronin & Taylor 1992; Dabholkar et al. 1996), De Wulf et al. (2003) consider retail service quality as a second-order factor. Further, recognizing that the literature offers considerable support for the superiority of simple performance based measures of service quality (e.g., Bolton & Drew 1991; Churchill & Surprenant 1982) as opposed to the expectancy-disconfirmation paradigm, De Wulf et al. (2003) only use perception scores to measure service quality. This study replicates De Wulf et al.'s (2003) approach to the service quality construct and thus examines perceived service quality as a second-order factor.

Perceived Relationship Investment

The focal antecedent of customer love in Sub-Model (A) is perceived relationship investment. In line with De Wulf et al. (2001), perceived relationship investment is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer devotes resources, efforts, and attention aimed at maintaining or enhancing relationships with regular customers that do not have outside value and cannot be recovered if these relationships are terminated. More simply, perceived relationship investment refers to a customer's overall perception of the extent to which a retailer actively makes efforts that are intended to retain regular customers (i.e., the retailer's customer retention orientation) (Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003). In this regard, it may be argued that the perceived

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relationship investment is conceptually similar to "market orientation" (Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003) since both constructs share some underlying thoughts. That is, both constructs represent customer-centric thinking in marketing. However, a fundamental difference exists between these two constructs. The difference between perceived relationship investment and market orientation primarily relates to the focal perspective that is taken. That is, consumer perceptions are at the basis of relationship investment (i.e., a consumer's perspective), whereas the construct of market orientation would refer to an internal assessment a retailer makes related to the extent to which this retailer is oriented towards the market (i.e., ultimately a retailer's perspective). This study explicitly focuses upon the customer-retailer relationship and, within this dyad, it takes the consumer perspective.

De Wulf et al. (2001) empirically investigate the role of different relationship marketing tactics in strengthening customer-retailer relationships including tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, and preferential treatment. Their results indicate that these relationship marketing tactics play a consistently positive role in affecting perceived relationship investment. In addition, signaling theory, emerged from the study of information economics, can make a valuable contribution to understanding the effects of the four-relationship inducing factors on perceived relationship investment (De Wulf et al., 2003). According to signaling theory, different exchange partners possess different amounts of information, affecting the nature of their mutual relationship (De Wulf et al., 2003). In a product consumption context, consumers often have no prior information as to the reliability of a product before it is used. This information asymmetry problem is being reduced when signals representing 'missing' information are transferred from a

seller to a buyer (Boulding & Kirmani, 1993; Kirmani & Rao, 2000). For example, a signal conveyed by manufacturers might be the warranties offered on their products, providing the customer with an indication of the product reliability level to be expected (De Wulf et al., 2003).

From a signaling theory perspective (Boulding & Kirmani 1993), a retailer may emit signals that inform customers about its unobservable intentions. The relationship marketing efforts distinguished by De Wulf et al. (2001) can easily be interpreted as signals meant to inform customers about the retailer's unobservable relationship investment (De Wulf et al., 2003). For example, offering tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, and preferential treatment can be considered as a signal that the retailer wants to build long-term relationships with its customers. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- **H1:** A higher perceived level of tangible rewards leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

- **H2:** A higher perceived level of interpersonal communication leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

- **H3:** A higher perceived level of preferential treatment leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

The area of relationship marketing was pioneered by a prominent services marketing scholar (Berry, 2002) and it has been implied that service quality is a natural venue for the study of customer-retailer relationships (Bitner, 1995). In line with this perspective, De Wulf et al. (2003) critically reassess De Wulf et al.'s (2001) initial framework by investigating the relationship between service quality and perceived

relationship investment. Based upon signaling theory, they extend the original model by incorporating service efforts as an additional antecedent of perceived relationship investment. Retail stores need to make upfront expenditures of money in order to establish an adequate level of service quality. For instance, they need to invest in the training and empowerment of store personnel, infrastructure and interior design, and policies and procedures. The fundamental rationale underlying these investments in service quality is that the retailer spends money at present expecting to recover it in the future. As consumers might consider such investments as true efforts of the retailer to enhance the relationship strength, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- **H4:** A higher perceived level of service quality leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

By developing a new construct, "perceived relationship investment," De Wulf et al. (2001) specifically apply Blau's (1964) reciprocity perspective to customer-retailer relationships. According to Blau (1964), an investment of time, effort, and other valuable resources in a relationship creates psychological ties that motivate parties to maintain the relationship and sets an expectation of reciprocation. In general, reciprocity is identified as a key facet explaining the duration and stability of exchange relationships (Larson, 1992). In addition, it is often considered one of the most robust effects found in the psychological literature (Moon, 2000). The generalized norm of reciprocity "evokes obligation toward others on the basis of their past behavior" (Gouldner, 1960, p. 168). More specifically, actions taken by one party in an exchange relationship will be reciprocated in kind by the other party, because each party anticipates the feelings of guilt it would have if it violated the norm of reciprocity (Li & Dant, 1997). For example,

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consumers demonstrate loyalty to certain firms in reciprocation of these firms' efforts in the relationship (Bagozzi, 1995) and feel obligated to pay back their "friendliness" (Kang & Ridgway, 1996). In line with Balu (1964) and De Wulf et al. (2001), the principle of reciprocity can be applied in the mechanism of customer love formation: (a) the retailer's relationship efforts to be loved by the customer are represented by the construct of perceived relationship investment; and (b) the resulting construct of customer love embodies the customer's reciprocation of the retailer's investment. Therefore,

- **H5:** A higher perceived level of relationship investment leads to a higher level of customer love.

Need for Variety

Sub-Model (A) reflects De Wulf et al.'s (2001) initial attempt toward assessing the role of consumer characteristics that moderate the effectiveness of perceived relationship investment. From a practical perspective, it is important to understand what types of customers are inclined to emotionally reciprocate to retailers' relationship investments. Identifying such contingency factors enables retailers to understand when investing in relationships is expected to establish customer love.

Some consumers actively seek variety as something necessary and desirable in itself (Vazquez-Carrascoa & Foxall, 2005). This tendency to seek or avoid sensations or activities has been conceptualized based on the theory of "Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL)." A generally accepted conceptual treatment of the need for variety construct is that every organism has a preference for a certain level of stimulation which can be called "optimum stimulation level" (Zuckerman, 1994). This OSL concept has been used as a personality trait to predict consumer behavior (Raju, 1980; Steenkamp & Baumgartner,

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1992). OSL theorists assert that when environmental stimulation (derived from experiences such as novelty, ambiguity, and complexity) falls below a desired level, the individual will become motivated to increase the level of arousal; conversely, when the stimulation level rises above the optimum level, the individual will be motivated to reduce it (Hebb, 1955; Maddi, 1989). Raju (1980), for example, found that consumers with high and low OSL scores showed significant differences with respect to risk taking, innovativeness, brand switching, and proneness to repetitive behavior.

According to Vazquez-Carrascoa and Foxall (2005), customers with a high need for variety display a lower level of relationship proneness and they are more prone to switch to an alternative in order to achieve a stimulation level closer to the optimum. Further, it is argued that customers with a high need for variety have a lower intention to stay in the relationship, since this psychological trait leads to variety seeking, which has been identified as a determinant factor in brand/supplier switching (Van Trijp, Hoyer, & Inman, 1996). In line with this perspective, Burgess and Harris (1998) state that the optimum stimulation level is important to identify loyal and disloyal customers. Vazquez-Carrascoa and Foxall (2005) suggest a negative link between the search for variety and customer retention. Therefore, it is expected that customers with a high need for variety may have a lower perception of the existence of relationship investments. This is because their inherent need for novelty and change would make them place no value on relationship efforts made by the current relationship partner (Vazquez-Carrascoa & Foxall, 2005). To them, engaging in an emotional relationship with a single retailer is a relatively less stimulating behavior that is more likely to be adopted by customer with a low need for variety. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated

- **H7:** A higher level of need for variety weakens the impact of perceived relationship investment on customer love.

Emotional Intensity

In this study, emotional intensity is narrowly defined as stable individual differences in the strength with which individuals experience positive emotions (Larsen & Diener, 1987). The emotional intensity construct is conceptualized within the concept of affect intensity that involves both positive and negative emotions. Affect intensity has been one of the most frequently used concepts in marketing research, especially in the area of advertising. This individual difference construct has been applied to identify profiles of consumers who might respond more favorably to emotional advertising appeals. Moore, Harris, and Chert (1995), for example, demonstrated that when participants were exposed to emotional advertising appeals, those who were classified as high in affect intensity manifested significantly stronger emotions to the ad than their low-intensity counterparts.

According to Larsen and Diener (1987), affect intensity can be more appropriately characterized as a temperament construct rather than a personality trait. Personality, it is argued, is linked to a consistent pattern in the content of one's behavior, whereas temperament is a representation of consistencies in the style of the behavior exhibited by the individual (Strelau, 1982). Thus, personality might be construed as what a person does (content), whereas temperament might be consumed as how a person does it, that is, the manner (style) in which an individual displays certain behaviors (Digman & Shmelyov, 1996; Halvorson, Kohnstamm, & Martin, 1994; Maddi, 1989).

The emotional intensity construct can be classified as a dimension of temperament because the style (high vs. low) with which an individual responds to stimuli or experiences in daily living might be manifested across a wide spectrum of emotions in a variety of life situations (Larsen, Diner, Emmons, 1986). Moore and Homer (2000) suggest that this temperament construct has the potential to make an even more comprehensive contribution to marketing if researchers investigate not only advertising responses but also the link between emotional intensity and other dimensions of consumer behavior. If high affect intensity individuals experience their emotions with greater strength, it is logical to predict that these individuals will reciprocate a retailer's efforts more emotionally than their low-intensity counterparts. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- **H7:** A higher level of emotional intensity strengthens the impact of perceived relationship investment on customer love.

Sub-Model (B)

In Sub-Model (B) (see Figure 4), customer love is broadly construed in the spirit of emotional loyalty (Barnes, 2005) and is directly linked to strong relational outcomes. The study of customer love is inherently concerned with the specification of emotion-inducing factors that systematically influence the depth of emotional bonds. Two such factors, hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience merit particular attention in light of their controllability through retailer action and the significance of their relationship effects. The approach adopted in Sub-model (B) is based mainly on work from brand love and attachment theory.
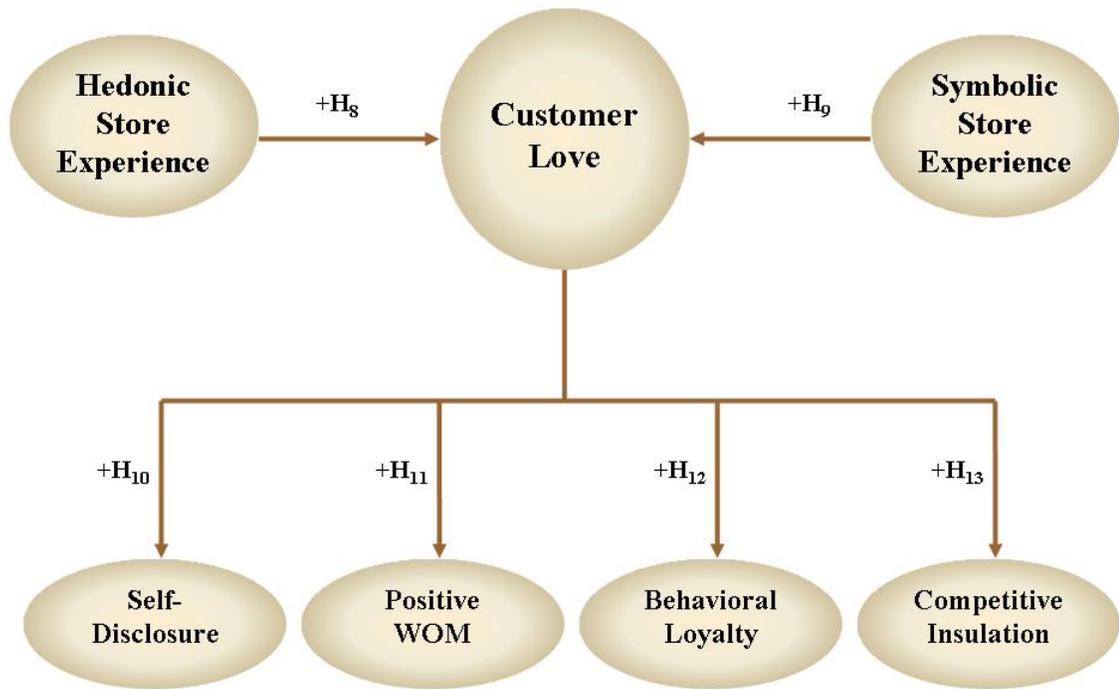
Figure 4. Sub-Model (B)

Hedonic Store Experience

Store shopping is still a dominant way of life in contemporary consumer society. Cox, Cox, and Anderson (2005) stress that, despite a growing array of nonstore shopping alternatives, today's consumers still enjoy store shopping as follows:

> "*To paraphrase Mark Twain, recent reports of the death of the brick-and-mortar store seem to have been greatly exaggerated. Despite a growing array of nonstore outlets (including catalogs, party-concept selling, QVC, personal shopping services, and most recently the internet) consumers still do the vast majority of their shopping in stores. Even in a product category like apparel, where catalog and internet outlets have made some of their greatest inroads, consumers still make 90% of their purchases at brick-and-mortar stores... What explains the persistence of store shopping? One simple explanation, often overlooked in the enthusiasm for new retail technologies, is that many consumers enjoy store shopping. While economic theory tends to view shopping as merely a chore undertaken to acquire utility-producing products, research suggests many consumers derive intrinsic enjoyment from the process of shopping*" (p. 250)

The importance of store shopping is evidenced by the considerable time and energy consumers devote to the endeavor, not only to procure desired products but also to participate in a wide range of experiential activities to satisfy various personal and social motives (Bloch, Ridgway, & Dawson, 1994). Brick-and-mortar stores are responding by attempting to not only satisfy shoppers' basic utilitarian needs through quality products and fair prices, but also to entertain them (Arnold & Reynolds 2003; Buss, 1997; Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Thus, one of a brick-and-mortar store's primary goals in today's competitive environment is to provide hedonic store experience for their customers.

Pine and Gilmore's book, *The Experience Economy* (1999), provides beneficial insights with brick-and-mortar stores eager to differentiate their offerings in an increasingly competitive world. The authors of this best-selling work make an eloquent

case for recognizing the emergence of an "experience economy." They introduce a

provocative paradigm that explicates economic progress as a succession of stages from

commodities to goods to services to experiences. In this progression of economic value,

the nature of the offering and its key attributes advances from fungible and natural

(commodities) to tangible and standardized (goods) to intangible and customized

(services) to memorable and personal (experiences) (Holbrook, 2000). According to Pine

and Gilmore (1999), experiences represent an existing but previously unarticulated genre

of economic value and new sources of differentiation that can save a brick-and-mortar

store from price- or profit-eroding perils of commoditization. Considering an over-supply

of look-alike goods and services in retail markets, Pine and Gilmore (1999) encourage

brick-and-mortar stores to redefine themselves as a source of memories, rather than

goods, as "experience stagers" rather than service providers. Further, Pine and Gilmore

(1999) argue that brick-and-mortar stores who refuse to acknowledge this experience

economy phenomenon will be doomed to suffer from inevitable commoditization and

ultimately fall victim to ruinous price competition. Schmitt (1999, p.3) echoes Pine and

Gilmore's sentiments when he writes:

> "*We are in the middle of a revolution. A revolution that will render the principles and models of traditional marketing obsolete. A revolution that will change the face of marketing forever. A revolution that will replace traditional feature-and-benefit marketing with experiential marketing.*"

Several brick-and-mortar stores, in particular, have followed this edict in

incorporating experience as a part of their product offering. These stores are now

routinely practicing experiential retailing in inducing more store visits by making

shopping fun and entertaining. At Caesar's Palace in Las Vegas, the Forum shops feature

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an hourly show with talking Greek statues among erupting volcanoes and shooting water fountains. The show draws shoppers away from the merchandise, but once the five to ten minutes of entertainment is over, they return to the elegantly designed shops and spend enough to more than make up for the time lost (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). Toys "R" Us spent $35 million to make its Times Square New York store 'the ultimate toy store that is the personification of every kid's dream' (Kaltcheva & Weitz, 2006). Further, Toys "R" Us has converted its four stores in Louisville to its Geoffrey concept, which sells the most popular lines from the company's toy, infant, and children's stores while offering birthday parties, haircuts and family photos to make shoppers feel at home. An increasing number of stores, it seems, are embracing "entertailing" to create emotional reaction and attachment that price or designer labels cannot provide. Home Depot's home improvement clinics and REI's in-store rock climbing walls are other examples of bringing fun and interactivity to the shopping experience (Poulsson & Kale, 2004).

In the consumer behavior literature, hedonic consumption experiences are related to subjective and intangible benefits that are derived from the fun, the enjoyment that the consumption object offers, and the resulting feeling of pleasure it evokes (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982). According to Hirschman (1984), all consumption experiences involve the stimulation of thoughts and/or senses and that they accordingly may be viewed as a process that provides the individual with cognitive (utilitarian) and sensory (hedonic) benefits. Bloch and Bruce (1984) contend that consumers obtain hedonic value as well as task-related or product-acquisition value during the shopping experience. This hedonic value has been linked to "shopping as fun" whereas the utilitarian value is depicted as "shopping as work" (Griffin, Babin, & Modianos, 2000).

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Much of the subsequent research on recreational shopping has tended to adhere to this general idea, focusing primarily on shopping enjoyment. Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) recognize the existence of recreational shoppers defined as "those who enjoy shopping as a leisure-time activity," contrasting them with "economic shoppers" who experienced no pleasure from the shopping process per se (p. 78). Westbrook and Black (1985) report the results of a cluster analysis based on shopping motivations and identify a "shopping process involved" cluster that corresponds to Bellenger and Korgaonkar's (1980) recreational shoppers. In a qualitative study, Prus and Dawson (1991) identify recreational shopping orientations as embracing "notions of shopping as interesting, enjoyable, entertaining and leisurely activity" (p. 149). Lunt and Livingstone (1992) identify five shopping groups, one of which was leisure shoppers, who found shopping "pleasurable" (p. 90). Babin, Darden, and Griffin (1994) introduce a scale measuring hedonic and utilitarian shopping value, where the former dimension captures pleasure, enjoyment, and excitement. In their work, hedonic shopping value is defined as perceived entertainment and emotional worth provided through shopping activities; utilitarian shopping value results from shopping done out of necessity and procuring a product in a deliberate and efficient manner. Mathwick, Malhotra, and Rigdon (2001) introduce a multidimensional measure of retail "experiential value" based on Holbrook's (1994) consumer value typology, with one of the dimensions being "playfulness," which is related to the concept of recreational shopping. Arnold and Reynolds (2003) develop a six-dimensional measure of hedonic shopping motives including adventure shopping, gratification shopping, social shopping, role shopping, value shopping, and idea shopping.

As such, current wisdom states that the "hedonic store experience" is what shall make consumers leave the Internet shopping cart behind, and waltz into a brick-and-mortar store offering the added value of entertainment. It seems that, more and more, value delivery in terms of hedonic store experience becomes an important means of retail differentiation. This may be attributed to the fact that retailers are increasingly competing with each other on the basis of highly comparable product offerings (Odekerken-Schroder et al., 2001). In the past, value was generally perceived to get quality merchandise. However, acceptable levels of product quality are now regarded as hygiene factors or minimal conditions for consumers to engage in exchanges with retailers (Odekerken-Schroder et al., 2001). As a result, the strategies and roles of retailers have been dramatically changed during the past decade, from a pure "utilitarian" focus to a more "hedonic" focus (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). Based on the aforementioned discussion, the construct of hedonic store experience is defined as the customer's perception of the relative role of hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) benefits offered by the retailer. As hedonic stores that entertain customers tend to generate stronger emotional responses, it is expected that hedonic store experience positively affects customer love. Therefore,

- **H8:** A higher level of hedonic store experience leads to a higher level of customer love.

Symbolic Store Experience

Central to contemporary theories of consumption is the recognition that consumers do not engage in consumption solely for consumption objects' utilities but also for their symbolic meanings (O'Cass & Frost 2002; Bhat & Reddy, 1988; Belk, 1988;

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Dittmar, 1992; Ellliot, 1998; Levy, 1959). "That we are what we have . . . is perhaps the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior" (Belk 1988, 139). In his classic article "*Possessions and the Extended Self,*" Belk (1988) assert that: (a) identity issues are central to consumption; and (b) possessions are a part of the self. In line with this perspective, Dittmar (1992, p.3) stresses that "material possessions have a profound symbolic significance for their owners as well as for other people and the symbolic meanings of our belongings are an integral feature of expressing our own identity and perceiving the identity of others." Other researchers also illuminate that symbolic consumption involves consumers' desires for consumption objects that fulfill internally generated needs for self-enhancement, role position, group membership, or ego-identification (e.g., Aron & Frost 2002; Bhat & Reddy 1998; Levy, 1959).

Falk and Campbell (1997) view postmodern consumers as "identity shoppers" seeking consumption experiences that allow them to alter their identities at will. Also, such popular aphorisms as "I Shop, Therefore I Am," reflect the prominent position shopping plays in consumer culture, as well as its potential self-significance (Guiry, Mägi, & Lutz, 2006). Thus, socio-cultural meanings may be transferred to retailers which are often used as symbolic resources for the construction and maintenance of identity (Elliot, 1998). As shopping plays a central role in supplying meanings and values for the creation and maintenance of the consumer's personal and social identity, the issue of where to shop may be as one of the major sources of these symbolic meanings. If customers "identify themselves by the formula: I am = where I shop" and it is symbolic meaning that is used in the "search for the meaning of existence" (Elliot, 1998), then it is

considered that the extraction of symbolic meaning from a store experience as a powerful driver of customer love.

The link between symbolic store experience and customer love is congenial with Belk's (1988) conceptualization of the extended self, in which consumers incorporate their most meaningful and treasured possessions, including experiences (e.g., shopping) and places (e.g., retail marketplace), into the self. Prior research has also focused on the role of love in the construction and maintenance of identity. Aron, Aron, Tudor and Nelson (1991) have shown that interpersonal love involves a fusion of identities in which one's sense of self grows to include the loved other. In the consumer behavior literature, consumer identity has frequently been linked to constructs related more or less directly to love, including involvement (e.g., Bloch, 1986; Bloch & Richins, 1983; Celsi & Olson, 1988), special possessions (e.g., Kleine, Kleine, & Allen, 1991; Kopytoff, 1986; McCracken, 1986), consumer-brand relationships (e.g., Fournier, 1998), object love (Ahuvia, 2005), and brand love (Caroll & Ahuvia , 2006). For some consumers, intense involvement with a product or activity reaches a heightened state of attachment in which the product and/or activity is incorporated into their self-concept (Belk 1988; Bloch 1986). At this highest level of involvement, a consumer defines himself or herself in terms of a product or activity, recognizing the products' or activity's function as a means of self-definition. Further, research shows that consumers develop attachments to special possessions such as gifts (Mick & DeMoss, 1990), collectibles (Slater, 2000), and brands (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Individual self-expression (e.g., Kopytoff, 1986; McCracken, 1986) and identity development (Kleine et al., 1991) have been identified as key drivers of consumers' emotional attachments to these objects. In her Brand Quality

Relationship (BRQ) framework, Fournier (1998) incorporates the self-connection facet that reflects the degree of a brand delivers an important identity concerns, tasks, or themes, thereby expressing a significant aspect of one's self. Ahuvia (2005) also contends that the people, and things, we love have a strong influence on our sense of who we are, on our self. In the context of consumer packaged goods, Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) confirm that satisfied consumers' love is greater for brands that offer more in terms of self-expressive benefits.

The functions of the symbolic meanings of stores operate in two directions, outward in constructing the social world (i.e., social-symbolism) and inward towards constructing one's self identity (i.e., self-symbolism) (Elliott. 1997). In other words, a store exhibiting symbolic meanings can be defined as having a component that is designed to associate the individual customer with a desired social group/role or his or her own inner-self and personality (Bhat & Reddy 1998). In line with this perspective, the symbolic store experience construct is defined as the customer's perception of the degree to which the specific store enhances one's social self and/or reflects one's inner self. It is expected that customers' love should be greater for stores that play a significant role in shaping their identity (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- **H9:** A higher level of symbolic store experience leads to a higher level of customer love.

Self-Disclosure

According to Shimp and Madden (1988), attachment, one important facet of customer love, can be aptly labeled "intimacy" in interpersonal relationships. In his

triangular theory of love, Sternberg (1986) conceptualizes intimacy as an important component of interpersonal love. Intimacy is derived largely from emotional investment in a relationship and refers to "feelings of closeness, connectedness, and bondedness" (Sternberg, 1986, p. 119). It is viewed as the core of most interpersonal loving interactions (Sternberg & Grajek, 1984).

The social psychology literature has suggested that self-disclosure is a salient aspect of intimate relationships. According to Altman and Taylor (1973), intimacy is a deep understanding about the relationship partners as created through information disclosure. Hays (1985) specifically demonstrates that the reduction of uncertainty and the increase of openness account for the greatest percentage of variance in friendship closeness ratings.

In this study, the self-disclosure construct refers to the customer's willingness to share personal information toward the goal of a more intimate relational tie with the retailer (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004). From the customer-retailer relationship perspective, intimacy can be expressed by the degree of self-disclosure between the relationship partners (Fournier, 1998; Thorbjørnsen, Supphellen, Nysveen, & Pedersen, 2002). Specifically in the retailing context, it indicates a consumer's revealing personal information to a retailer. Self-disclosure is a risky behavior because the customer does not know exactly how the retailer will handle his or her personal information (uncertainty); also, significant negative consequences can result when the information is mishandled, such as invasion of privacy, stolen identity, or being targeted by financial fraudsters (vulnerability) (Cho, 2006). Attachment theory suggests that individuals who are strongly attached to a person are more likely to make sacrifices for that person

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(Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1994) even if those behaviors involve financial, social, and psychological risks. Likewise, it is expected that, customers' strong emotional attachments to a retailer might predict their willingness to make sacrifices (Fournier, 1994; Thomson et al., 2005). Therefore, the construct of self disclosure is incorporated as a desirable outcome of customer love.

- **H10:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of self-disclosure.

Positive Word-of-Mouth

Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) contribute to the past work on consumers' love for products by providing a more direct application to marketing theory and practice. They argue that the construct of brand love is expected to enhance both understanding and prediction of satisfied customers' post-consumption behavior. More specifically, their work posits the positive direct effect of brand love on positive word-of-mouth in a population of satisfied customers. Fournier (1994) also supports the idea that love should encourage supportive responses among relationship partners. Positive word-of-mouth is an approach behavior that has been associated with positive emotions such as pleasure and arousal (Jones & Reynolds). In this study, positive word-of-mouth is defined as the degree to which the consumer praises the retailer to others (e.g., Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Westbrook, 1987). Consistent with Caroll and Ahuvia (2006), satisfied consumers who also love the retailer are expected to be more eager to spread "the good word" to others. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- **H11:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of positive word-of-mouth.

Behavioral Loyalty

For any retailer, customer loyalty becomes more meaningful only when it translates into purchase behavior. Purchase behavior generates direct and tangible returns to the retailer (Kumar & Shah, 2004). Therefore, it is imperative for a retailer to build behavioral loyalty. In a retailing context, a relevant indicator of behavioral changes is the extent to which the individual maintains loyalty to the retailer. As a result, the construct of behavioral loyalty is operationalized based a consumer's purchasing frequency, share of purchases, and amount spent at a retailer compared with the amount spent at other retailers where the consumer buys. These measures can serve as an indicator of the strength of the relationship bond (Fournier, 1994)

Attachment theory suggests that individuals who are strongly attached to a person are more likely to be committed to that person (Bowlby, 1980; Hazan & Shaver, 1994). Likewise, it is expected that, customers' strong emotional attachments to a retailer might predict their behavioral loyalty to the retailer (Fournier et al., 1994; Thomson et al., 2005). Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- **H12:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of behavioral loyalty.

Competitive Insulation

In this study, the competitive insulation construct is defined as the degree to which alternative stores are removed from a customer's patronage consideration. Individuals who are strongly emotionally attached to an object display specific behaviors such as proximity maintenance and separation distress (Bowlby, 1979). The stronger one's attachment to an object, the more likely one is to maintain proximity to the object. Moreover, when individuals experience real or threatened separation from the attachment

object, distress can result. Also, individuals who are strongly attached to a person or object are generally committed to preserving their relationship with it (Johnson & Rusbult, 1989; Miller, 1997). In a similar vein, a strong emotional attachment is characterized by a perception that the object is irreplaceable (Thomson et al., 2005).

According to Fournier (1998), love refers to the intensity and depth of the emotional ties between the consumer and the object. Love is characterized by a strong attraction and affection toward the object, and a feeling of fascination, exclusivity, and dependency in the relationship. In a brand context, Fournier (1998) shows that some consumers feel that their brands are "irreplaceable and unique" to the extent that separation anxiety is anticipated upon withdrawal. In other words, consumers in passionate brand relationships feel that "something is missing" when they have not used their brands for a while. Fournier (1998) concludes that such strong affective ties encourage a biased, positive perception of the brand partner that renders comparisons with alternatives difficult. Therefore, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- **H13:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of competitive insulation.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Chapter II provided the conceptual foundations for this study. First, the consumer behavior literature on love was reviewed. Based on the literature review, the construct of customer love was distinguished from other constructs (i.e., customer satisfaction, retailer interest, and attitude). In sum, customer love is proposed as a refined articulation of the emotional loyalty notion (Barnes, 2005). Two sub-models were presented to enhance the

interpretability of the overall model. Sub-Model (A) was proposed: (a) to investigate whether different relationship-inducing factors (i.e., tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, preferential treatment, and service quality) have a differential impact on perceived relationship investment; (b) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by perceived relationship investment; and (c) to analyze whether the effect of perceived relationship investment on customer love is contingent on two consumer characteristics (i.e., emotional intensity and need for variety). Sub-model (B) was proposed: (a) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by two emotion-inducing factors (hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience); and (b) to investigate whether customer love affects four relational outcomes (i.e., self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation).

CHAPTER III
METHODS

Chapter III describes this study's methodology. First, the research hypotheses developed in Chapter II are restated. Second, the data collection procedures are described. Finally, the instrument development procedures are summarized.

RESEARCH MODEL

As shown in Figure 5, the exogenous constructs are the four relationship-inducing factors (i.e., tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, preferential treatment, and service quality) and the two emotion inducing factors (i.e., hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience). The endogenous constructs are perceived relationship investment, customer love, and the four relational outcome constructs (i.e., self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation). Two moderating variables are incorporated in the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love: need for variety and emotional intensity.

Hypothesized Relationships

- **H1:** A higher perceived level of tangible rewards leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

- **H2:** A higher perceived level of interpersonal communication leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

- **H3:** A higher perceived level of preferential treatment leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.
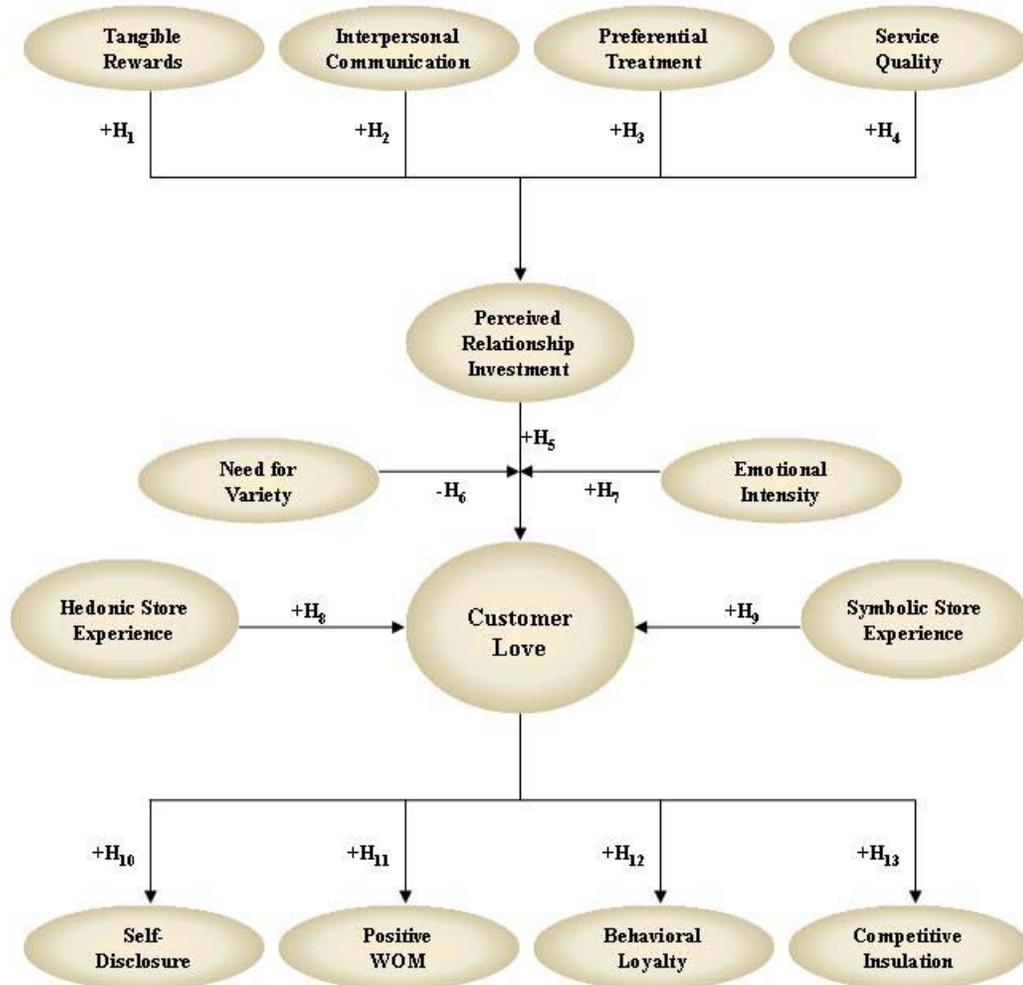
Figure 5. Hypothesized Relationships

- **H4:** A higher perceived level of service quality leads to a higher perceived level of relationship investment.

- **H5:** A higher perceived level of relationship investment leads to a higher level of customer love.

- **H6:** A higher level of need for variety weakens the impact of perceived relationship investment on customer love.

- **H7:** A higher level of emotional intensity strengthens the impact of perceived relationship investment on customer love.

- **H8:** A higher perceived level of hedonic store experience leads to a higher level of customer love.

- **H9:** A higher perceived level of symbolic store experience leads to a higher level of customer love.

- **H10:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of self-disclosure.

- **H11:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of positive word of mouth.

- **H12:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of behavioral loyalty.

- **H13:** A higher level of customer love leads to a higher level of competitive insulation.

RESEARCH DESIGN

An online self-administered, cross-sectional survey methodology was employed to collect the data. Online surveys are increasingly used in both academic and market

research (Deutskens, Jong, Ruyter, &Wetzels, 2006). They offer numerous advantages

including lower costs, faster response times, and wider geographic reach. In fact, one can

easily conduct surveys across regional boundaries. Moreover, the Internet allows quick

feedbacks. If the surveys are properly designed, it is possible to program data collection

such that consumers directly feed their responses into an online database. In other words,

respondent-entered data from the Web site will be easily exported to an SPSS-compatible

format. This can avoid costly and time-intensive manual entry of survey responses into a

database. Furthermore, the Internet allows for the use of uncomplicated directions (e.g.,

through automatic routing), as well as richer and more interesting question formats.

Online surveys also have been found to be useful in reaching today's busy consumers, a

population for whom mail surveys suffer from low and continually declining response

rates (Deutskens et al., 2006).

Setting

An externally valid, more complete understanding of customer-retailer

relationships requires that the validity of a conceptual model developed in one setting be

tested in another setting as well (De Wulf et al., 2001). Also, to examine the constructs of

behavioral loyalty and competitive insulation included in the model, it is necessary to

focus on routinely and heavily patronized retail categories (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Thus,

this study was conducted in the apparel and grocery retail categories, covering a wide

variety of retailers, including discount stores, mass merchandisers, traditional department

stores, and prestige stores. These two categories were considered similar with respect to

the competitiveness of their industry environment and the opportunities for consumers to

switch (De Wulf et al., 2001). However, they are assumed to differ on many other

dimensions. For example, emotion-inducing factors might be expected to be more important in the apparel retail category that is characterized by a high degree of experiential retailing or retail branding practices. When patronizing grocery stores, however, relationship-inducing factors such as financial/social bonds or service quality are often of greater essence than a hedonic or symbolic store experience (Poulsson & Kale, 2004).

Sampling Frame

The population of this study was defined as satisfied store shoppers. The sampling frame was constructed from the list of consumer panel members managed by e-Rewards, a U.S. marketing research firm specializing in consumer surveys. According to e-Rewards.com, the e-Rewards panel is currently composed of three million members that mirror the U.S. population. Among the panel members, the target respondents of this study were adult consumers (18 or older) who have visited an apparel or grocery store in the past six months. It should be noted that this study relied on a realistic sample of general consumers. Student samples have often been used in consumer behavior research, despite criticism that they might be atypical consumers because of their "restricted age range, limited consumption experience, and relatively low income" (Szymanski & Henard, 2001, p. 20). While this study did not employ perfect probabilistic sampling, the findings are based on responses obtained from a sample of actual (non-student) consumers.

Data Collection

Data were collected from the e-rewards panel in November 2006. A total of 8,620 members were systematically selected so that the key demographic profiles of

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participants could be identical across the two samples (i.e., apparel and grocery). E-mail invitations were sent by e-rewards to the selected panel members asking for their participation in the surveys: 4551 invitations for apparel and 4069 invitations for the grocery category. The emails included the domain address where they could find the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to complete the questionnaire to which they were invited. Among the invited members, 430 members visited the apparel survey whereas 389 members visited the grocery survey. The data collection process lasted five days.

Respondents with incomplete answers were excluded (104 for apparel and 79 for grocery), as were shoppers who indicated that they had not visited a store in the past six months (25 for apparel and 7 for grocery). Excluding these responses, 604 completed responses (301 for apparel and 303 for grocery) were used for the data analysis. The click-through rate for the apparel survey was 75.8%. For the grocery survey, the click-through rate was 79.8%. Both samples had no duplicated responses (i.e. respondents' e-rewards IDs were thoroughly checked). Respondents were reimbursed for their participation through e-Rewards currency that can be used to purchase items/services through the company's redemption partners.

Samples

An overview of the characteristics of the samples can be found in Table 4. Statistical analyses (i.e., t-tests and χ^2 analyses) were first applied to detect any notable discrepancies in demographic characteristics between the two groups. As shown in Table 5 and 6, significant group differences were not found in key demographics across different retail categories. Overall, respondents' ages ranged from 18 to 95 with 57.8% of the respondents aged between 18 and 45. Slightly more than half of the total respondents

Table 4. Demographic Characteristics of the Samples

		Apparel (N = 301)	Grocery (N = 303)
Gender	Female	52.2%	53.5%
	Male	47.8%	46.5%
Age	18-25	24.6%	20.1%
	26-45	35.5%	35.3%
	46-65	23.6%	29.4%
	65+	16.3%	15.2%
Income	Under $20,000	14.3%	10.6%
	$20,000~$39,999	24.9%	26.4%
	$40,000~$59,999	25.5%	24.1%
	$60,000~$79,999	16.0%	12.8%
	$80,000~$99,999	6.0%	12.5%
	Over $100,000	13.3%	13.9%
Education	High school or less	9.0%	9.6%
	Vocational/technical school (2 year)	2.0%	4.0%
	Some college	32.6%	31.0%
	College graduate (4 year)	36.2%	32.0%
	Master's degree (MS)	14.3%	14.9%
	Doctoral degree (PhD)	2.3%	3.0&
	Professional degree (JD, MD)	3.0%	3.6%
	Other	0.7%	2.0%
Marital Status	Single	39.5%	34.3%
	Married/living with partner	47.8%	53.5%
	Divorced	8.3%	7.9%
	Separated	1.7%	0.0%
	Widowed	2.7%	4.3%
Ethnicity	Caucasian	78.1%	76.6%
	Non-Caucasian	21.9%	23.4%
Employment	Full-time	52.8%	54.5%
	Part-time	18.9%	14.5%
	Retired	20.6%	22.1%
	Unemployed	7.6%	8.9%

Table 5. Sample Comparison: χ^2 Analyses

Variable	Retail Category	N	Mean	t-statistic	p-value
Household Size	Apparel	301	2.34	-0.04	0.97
	Grocery	303	2.35		
Age	Apparel	301	42.21	-1.28	0.20
	Grocery	303	44.07		
Income[1]	Apparel	301	4.73	-1.59	0.11
	Grocery	303	5.11		

[1]Mean scores are based on a 10-point rating scale (1 = "under $20,000," 2 = "$20,000 to $29,999," "3 = "$30,000 to $39,999," 4 = "$40,000 to $49,999," 5 = "$50,000 to $59,999," 6 = "$60,000 to $69,999," 7 = "$70,000 to $79,999," 8 = "$80,000 to $89,999," 9 = "$90,000 to $99,999," 10 = "over $100,000").

Table 6. Sample Comparion: t-tests

	χ^2	df	p-value
Gender	0.10	1	0.75
Education	5.35	7	0.62
Marital Status	8.27	4	0.82
Ethnicity	7.11	5	0.21
Employment	2.29	3	0.54

were female (52.8%). With respect to ethnicity, 77.3% were Caucasian. The sample represented all income categories with $40,000-$49,999 as the median income. Additionally, 34.1% of the respondents had a four-year college degree and 51.7% were married or living with a partner.

Procedures

At the outset of the apparel survey, the opening instructions indicated the research was a study on apparel store shopping conducted by a Ph.D. candidate at a major university. Immediately after this introduction, the term "store" was defined as a traditional street-side retail shop that is located in a building (excluding Internet, television, and catalog retailers). Respondents were first asked whether they had visited an apparel store in the past six months. This screening question was designed to prevent potential recall loss in terms of behavioral loyalty measures (i.e., shopping frequency and share of wallet). If the respondents answered "No" to this question, they were not given any more questions. Those who answered "Yes" to this question were asked to recall a specific apparel store with which they were satisfied in an open-ended question format. Respondents then completed the questionnaire with reference to the store they had identified. The same procedure was used for the grocery survey. In both samples, half of the respondents indicated that their relationship with the identified store was more than five years (51.2% for apparel, 53.1% for grocery).

A conscious attempt was made to avoid measurement artifacts. This included assessing key dependent variables prior to their predictors and interspersing items of the same scale type (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006). All Likert-type items were divided into four sets. First, each of the three behavioral loyalty items (two open-ended questions and one

Likert-type item) was presented separately (i.e., one-at-a-time format). The first set of

Likert-type items were then presented in the following order: self-disclosure + positive

word-of-mouth + competitive insulation (interspersed), the items for the two dimensions

of symbolic store experience (interspersed), and, finally, the customer love items. Next,

the hedonic store experience items were presented with a semantic differential scale and a

separate set of instructions. Immediately after this, the second set of Likert-type items

were presented in the following order: perceived relationship investment + the five

dimensions of service quality (interspersed), and the items for the three remaining

relationship-inducing factors (interspersed). Next, the items for emotional intensity were

presented one by one. Finally, the items for need for variety were presented. General

questions on demographic information were included at the end of the survey. On

average, the surveys took 13.5 minutes to complete (13 minutes for apparel and 14

minutes for grocery). A copy of the apparel survey is included in the Appendix.

MEASURE DEVELOPMENT

The measurement items employed in the current study were developed based on

the following four steps: (a) literature search; (b) 1st content validity testing; (c) pre-

testing; and (d) 2nd content validity testing.

Literature Search: Initial Item Generation

An initial listing of relevant items was compiled from the previous literature.

Most measurement items were available in the literature, although slight modifications

were needed to tailor them to the chosen research settings. All initial scales generated

from the literature review are listed in the following. In addition, sources used in the creation of each scale are provided along with the operational definition of the construct.

Tangible Rewards

The construct of tangible rewards is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer offers tangible benefits such as pricing and incentives to its regular customers in return for their loyalty. Measurement items for this construct were adapted from De Wulf et al. (2001).

- This store rewards regular customers for their patronage.

- This store offers regular customers something extra because they keep buying there.

- This store offers discounts to regular customers for their patronage.

Interpersonal Communication

Interpersonal communication is defined as customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer interacts with its regular customers in a warm and personal way. Measurement items for this construct were adapted from De Wulf et al. (2001).

- This store takes the time to personally get to know regular customers.

- This store often holds personal conversations with regular customers.

- This store often inquires about the personal welfare of regular customers.

Preferential Treatment

Preferential treatment is defined as a customer's perception of the extent to which a retailer treats and serves its regular customers better than its nonregular customers. Measurement items for this construct were adapted from De Wulf et al. (2001).

- This store makes greater efforts for regular customers than for nonregular customers.

- This store offers better service to regular customers than to nonregular customers.

- This store does more for regular customers than for nonregular customers.

<u>Service Quality</u>

Service quality is a customer's perception of the extent to which the service offered by a retailer is superior or excellent. Measures for the service quality construct were originated from Parasuraman et al.'s (1994) SEVQAUL scale. De Wulf et al.'s (2003) modified this original SEVQAUL scale and modeled service quality as a second-order factor with five first-order factors (i.e., reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles). In the SERVQUAL scale, service quality is conceptualized based on the disconfirmation paradigm. In other words, service quality is a comparison between consumers' expectations and their perceptions of the service they actually received (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1990). However, recognizing that marketing literature offers considerable support for the superiority of simple performance based measures of service quality (e.g., Bolton & Drew 1991; Churchill & Surprenant 1982), De Wulf et al. (2003) only used perception scores to measure service quality. This study replicated De Wulf et al.'s (2003) approach to the service quality construct and thus only perceived service quality measures were used in this study.

Tangibles refer to physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel. Reliability is defined as the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness means the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to

inspire trust and confidence. Finally, empathy is considered to be the caring and individualized attention the retailer provides its customers with.

- Reliability:

  o When this store promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.

  o When you have a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it.

  o This store performs the service right the first time.

  o This store provides its service at the time it promises to do so.

- Responsiveness:

  o Employees in this store cannot give you prompt service.

  o Employees in this store are always willing to help you.

  o Employees in this store are often too busy to respond to your requests.

- Assurance:

  o The behavior of employees in this store instills confidence in you.

  o Employees in this store have the knowledge to answer your questions.

  o Employees in this store are consistently courteous with you.

  o Employees in this store are well equipped to perform their tasks properly.

- Empathy:

  o This store does not give you individual attention.

  o This store does not have your best interests at heart.

  o Employees of this store do not understand your specific needs.

- Tangibles:

  o This store has modern-looking equipment.

  o This store's physical facilities are visually appealing.

- The store's employees are neat-appearing.

- Materials associated with this store's service (e.g., shopping bags) are visually appealing.

- The layout of this store enables customers to locate things easily.

- The layout of this store enables customers to wander around at ease.

- This store has clean, attractive, and accessible toilets.

Perceived Relationship Investment

Perceived relationship investment is defined as a customer's overall perception of the extent to which a retailer devotes resources, efforts, and attention aimed at maintaining or enhancing relationships with regular customers. Measurement items for this construct were adapted from De Wulf et al. (2001).

- This store makes efforts to increase regular customers' loyalty.

- This store makes various efforts to improve its tie with regular customers.

- This store really cares about keeping regular customers.

Emotional Intensity

In this study, emotional intensity is defined as the degree to which a customer experiences his or her positive emotions. This construct is proposed as a moderating variable on the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love. Measurement items for this construct were adapted from Plesmacher's (2002) emotional intensity scale.

- Someone compliments me. I feel:

  1. It has little effect on me

  2. Mildly pleased

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3. Pleased

4. Very pleased

5. Ecstatic—on top of the world

- I am happy. I feel:

1. It has little effect on me

2. Mildly happy

3. Happy

4. Extremely happy

5. Euphoric—so happy I could burst

- Someone I am very attracted to asks me out for coffee. I feel: (reversed)

1. Ecstatic—on top of the world

2. Very thrilled

3. Thrilled

4. Mildly thrilled

5. It has little effect on me

- I am at a fun party. I feel:

1. It has little effect on me

2. A little lighthearted

3. Lively

4. Very lively

5. So lively that I almost feel like a new person

- Something wonderful happens to me. I feel:

1. Extremely joyful—exuberant

2. Extremely glad

3. Glad

4. A little glad

5. It has little effect on me

- I have accomplished something valuable. I feel:

1. It has little effect on me

2. A little satisfied

3. Satisfied

4. Very satisfied

5. So satisfied it's as if my entire life was worthwhile

- A person with whom I am involved prepares mea candlelight dinner. I feel:

1. It has little effect on me

2. Slightly romantic

3. Romantic

4. Very romantic

5. So passionate nothing else matters

- I am involved in a romantic relationship. I feel: (reversed)

1. So consumed with passion I can think of nothing else

2. Very passionate

3. Passionate

4. Mildly passionate

5. It has little effect on me

- Someone surprises me with a gift. I feel:

1. It has little effect on me

2. A little grateful

3. Grateful

4. Very grateful

5. So grateful I want to run out and buy them a gift in return

Need for Variety

Need for variety is defined as the degree to which a customer seeks variety in life. This construct is proposed as a moderating variable on the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love. Measurement items for this construct were adapted from Vazquez-Carrascoa and Foxall (2005).

- I am a person who always likes to do the same things rather than try new and different things.

- I like to experience novelty and change in my daily routine.

- I would like a job that would offer change, variety and travel, even though it would involve some danger.

- I continually seek out new ideas and experiences.

- I like to switch activities continuously.

- When things become boring, I like to find a new and unfamiliar experience.

- I prefer a routine way of life to an unpredictable one full of changes.

Hedonic Store Experience

Hedonic store experience is defined as a customer's overall perception of the relative role of hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) benefits offered by a retailer. To

measure this construct, Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) six-item semantic differential scale was applied in a store retailing context. This store:

- Is Functional/Is Pleasurable

- Affords Enjoyment/Performs a Task

- Is Useful/Is Fun

- Is a Sensory Experience/Does a Job

- Is a Necessity/Is an Indulgence

- Is a 'Must' in Life/Is One of Life's 'Rewards'

<u>Symbolic Store Experience</u>

Symbolic store experience is defined as a customer's overall perception of the degree to which a retailer enhances one's social self and/or reflects one's inner self. To measure this construct, Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) an eight-item "self-expressive brand" scale was applied in a store retailing context.

- Inner Self:

    o This store symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside.

    o This store reflects my personality.

    o This store is an extension of my inner self.

    o This store mirrors the real me.

- Social Self:

    o This store contributes to my image.

    o This store adds to a social 'role' I play.

    o This store has a positive impact on what others think of me.

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o This store improves the way society views me.

Customer Love

Customer love is defined as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular retailer. It includes passion for the retailer, attachment to the retailer, positive evaluation of the retailer, positive emotions in response to the retailer, and declarations of love for the retailer (e.g., I love this store!). To measure this construct, Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) a ten-item "brand love" scale was applied in a store retailing context.

- This is a wonderful store.

- This store makes me feel good.

- This store is totally awesome.

- I have neutral feelings about this store.

- This store makes me very happy.

- I love this store!

- I have no particular feelings about this store.

- This store is a pure delight.

- I am passionate about this store.

- I'm very attached to this store.

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure is the degree to which a customer is willing to reveal his or her personal information to a retailer. As suggested in the literature review, high quality relationships such as love should encourage openness between relationship partners, even

if those responses involve a degree of financial, social, and psychological risks (Fournier, 1994). In this study, self-disclosure represents a type of customer sacrifice with theoretically justified connections to customer-retailer relationship maintenance. The following three items were adapted from Cho (2006).

- I am willing to provide my personal information when asked by this store.

- I am willing to disclose even sensitive personal information to this store.

- I am willing to be truthful in revealing my personal information to this store.

Positive Word-of-Mouth

Positive word-of mouth refers to the degree to which a customer praises a retailer to others. Positive word-of mouth serves as a measure of supportive customer responses for the retailer. Traditionally, this construct has been an important customer response variable in marketing and consumer behavior research. Four items were adapted from Caroll and Ahuvia (2006) and reworded in accordance with the store retailing context.

- I have recommended this store to lots of people.

- I 'talk up' this store to my friends.

- I try to spread the good-word about this store.

- I give this store tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising.

Behavioral Loyalty

Behavioral loyalty is operationalized based on a customer's purchasing frequency and amount spent at a retailer compared with the amount spent at other retailers from which the customer buys. The following three questions of a behavior nature represent the measurement items for this construct. The first two items serve as a measure of share

of wallet and indicate the strength of the relationship. The third item, shopping frequency, is an indicator of relationship depth.

- What percentage of your total expenditures for clothing/groceries do you spend in this store?

- Of the 10 times you select a store to buy clothes/groceries at, how many times do you select this store?

- How often do you buy clothes/groceries in this store compared to other stores where you buy clothes/groceries?

Competitive Insulation

Competitive insulation refers to the degree to which alternative stores are removed from a customer's patronage consideration. This construct involves the customer's "conative" loyalty that constitutes the development of behavioral intentions characterized by a deeper level of commitment (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Oliver, 1999). The first three items were adapted from Caroll and Ahuvia's (2006) "brand loyalty" scale and the remaining two items were adapted from De Wulf et al.'s (2001) "relationship commitment" scale.

- This is the only store that I will buy clothing.

- When I go shopping, I don't even notice competing apparel stores.

- I'll 'do without' rather than shop at another store.

- I am willing to "go the extra mile" to remain a customer of this store.

- Even if this store would be difficult to reach, I would still keep buying there.

1st Content Validity Testing

In an effort to enhance content validity, a group of expert judges (i.e., three academic researchers and six doctoral students specializing in Retail and Consumer Sciences) qualitatively tested the measurement items generated from the literature review. Experts were provided with the definition of each construct and asked to assess item clarity, readability, and content validity. Revisions were made based on the judges' feedback. The revised items from this stage were summarized in Table 7.

Pre-test

Next, a pre-test online survey was conducted to refine and validate the measurement items generated in the previous steps. The 88 item apparel survey was administered to 110 students registered in undergraduate Retail and Consumer Sciences classes at a major southern university. Student subjects received extra credit for their participation. The survey sessions took 13 minutes on average.

A primary objective at this stage was to achieve unidimensionality in measures of each construct by eliminating items that did not adequately reflect any of the theoretical components of the construct. Exploratory factor analysis results for each of the 18

Table 7. 1st Content Validity Testing

Construct	Initial Item	Revised Item
Hedonic Store Experience	Is a Sensory Experience/Does a Job	Is a Sensory Experience/Is a No-Frills Experience
Symbolic Store Experience	This store symbolizes the kind of person I really am inside.	This store says a lot about the kind of person I really am inside.
Positive Word-of-Mouth	I give this store tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising.	I give this store positive word-of-mouth advertising.

constructs were reviewed independently to assure unidimensionality within each construct. Also, Cronbach's alpha was examined to assess reliability and internal consistency of each scale. Items with low factor loadings were called into question, as were those with low item-total correlations. Based on the sample size, any factor loading greater than 0.4 was assumed to have practical significance (Hair, 1995). The results of the exploratory factor analysis are summarized in Table 8. In addition, the rationale for dropped items is provided in the following.

Tangibles

Exploratory factor analysis revealed one item (i.e., this store has clean, attractive, and accessible toilets) in the construct of tangibles had the factor loading of 0.33. If this item was removed, the scale reliability would be improved from 0.68 to 0.73. However, rather than eliminating this item, the author decided to reword the item since it is regarded as reflecting the theoretical domain of the construct. Consistent with Dabholkar, Thorpe and Rentz (1996) who developed a retail service quality instrument based on SERVQUAL, the item was reworded into "this store has clean, attractive, and convenient public areas (e.g., rest rooms)."

Hedonic Store Experience

In the hedonic store experience construct, one item (i.e., Is 'Must' in Life/Is One of Life's Rewards) had the factor loading of 0.38. Removing the item produced a more robust, unidimensional five-item scale. Thus, this item was dropped for the main study.

Competitive Insulation

The five-item scale clearly loaded on two factors. The first factor was composed of the three items adopted from Caroll & Ahuvia's (2006) conative loyalty scale that

Table 8. Pretest: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Construct	Number of Items		Variance Explained	Reliability
	Initial	Retained		
Tangible Rewards	3	3	74.25%	0.83
Preferential Treatment	3	3	67.66%	0.76
Interpersonal Communication	3	3	70.88%	0.79
Reliability	4	4	62.67%	0.80
Responsiveness	3	3	66.74%	0.72
Assurance	4	4	67.38%	0.84
Empathy	3	3	58.25%	0.62
Tangibles	7	6	43.38%	0.73
Perceived Relationship Investment	3	3	86.44%	0.92
Emotional Intensity	9	9	35.29%	0.76
Need for Variety	7	7	51.65%	0.81
Hedonic Store Experience	6	5	53.89%	0.78
Symbolic Store Experience	8	8	61.61%	0.91
Customer Love	10	10	59.51%	0.90
Self-Disclosure	3	3	74.68%	0.83
Positive Word-of-Mouth	4	4	70.54%	0.85
Behavioral Loyalty	3	3	62.07%	0.68
Competitive Insulation	5	3	69.19%	0.78

measures active behavioral intentions. On the other hand, the second factor includes the two items from De Wulf et al.'s commitment scale (2001) that reflects attitudinal loyalty. Since the first factor was empirically proven to be an outcome of customer love (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006), only the first factor items were retained. The three-item scale improved explained variance (49.8% versus 69.2%), and increased the coefficient alpha measure of reliability (0.74 versus 0.78). Thus, the three-item scale was used for the main study.

2nd Content Validity Testing

Content validity of the refined items including the modified items was examined by a group of four graduate students majoring in consumer services management for the clarity and adequacy of the item presentation. One item was refined from this process. In the responsiveness construct, "employees in this store cannot give you prompt service" was changed into "employees in this store do not give you prompt service." As a result of these exercises, 84 of the original 88 items were kept.

Final Measures

Final attempts at measure purification were conducted on the main data. Three different item analysis approaches were undertaken to assure unidimensionality within each construct. First, descriptive statistics were analyzed to reveal problems with individual scale items that could complicate or temper subsequent analyses. Items with low variances (i.e., high kurtosis) or skewed distributions were flagged at this stage. Exploratory factor analysis results for both the 84 item set as a whole and for each of the 18 constructs independently were then reviewed. Items cross-loading on two or more factors were called into question, as were those with low-item total correlations. As a final step, confirmatory factor analysis results for each of the 18 constructs taken

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independently were considered for their diagnostic capabilities. The construct

measurement models were assessed through confirmatory factor analysis using maximum

likelihood estimation on the item correlation matrices. The magnitude of item error

variances, prevalence of large modification indices, and significance of residual

covariation flagged items for potential deletion from the pool. Results from each of the

three item analysis techniques were considered collectively in reaching a final decision

regarding which items to retain and which to delete.

As a result of these exercises, 71 of the 84 items were retained. The final

measures used for the data analysis are organized by construct in Table 9. In the

constructs of hedonic store experience, symbolic store experience, and customer love,

significant improvements in fit were observed in comparing χ^2 statistics for models with

and without problematic items highlighted in the exercises detailed above. Moreover, the

fit of all reduced-item set models was satisfactory, with CFI statistics of 0.95 and higher

(see Table10). Reliability and internal consistency at the individual construct level were

supported, using Cronbach's alpha (see Table 11). These findings support the conclusion

that within each construct, each of the items is measuring the same underlying construct.

In Table 12-13, descriptive statistics of the final measurement items are provided for

evidence of the assumption of multivariate normality necessary for structural equation

modeling (SEM) analysis (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

Table 9. Summary of Final Measures

Construct	Measures	Scale
Tangible Rewards	**TR1:** This store rewards regular customers for their patronage.	5-point scales anchored at "1 = Strongly disagree" and "5 = Strongly agree"
	TR2: This store offers regular customers something extra because they keep buying there.	
	TR3: This store offers discounts to regular customers for their patronage.	
Interpersonal Communication	**IC1:** This store takes the time to personally get to know regular customers.	
	IC2: This store often holds personal conversations with regular customers.	
	IC3: This store often inquires about the personal welfare of regular customers.	
Preferential Treatment	**PT1:** This store makes greater efforts for regular customers than for nonregular customers.	
	PT2: This store offers better service to regular customers than to nonregular customers.	
	PT3: This store does more for regular customers than for nonregular customers.	
Service Quality (Reliability)	**SQ1:** This store provides its service at the time it promises to do so.	
	SQ2: This store performs the service right the first time.	
	SQ3: When you have a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it.	
Service Quality (Responsiveness)	**SQ4:** Employees in this store are often too busy to respond to your requests.*	
	SQ5: Employees in this store are always willing to help you.	
	SQ6: Employees in this store do not give you prompt service.*	
Service Quality (Assurance)	**SQ7:** The behavior of employees in this store instills confidence in customers.	
	SQ8: Employees in this store have the knowledge to answer your questions.	
	SQ9: Employees in this store are well equipped to perform their tasks properly.	
Service Quality (Empathy)	**SQ10:** This store does not give you individual attention.*	
	SQ11: This store does not have your best interests at heart.*	
	SQ12: Employees of this store do not understand your specific needs.*	
Service Quality (Tangibles)	**SQ13:** This store has modern-looking equipment.	
	SQ14: This store's physical facilities are visually appealing.	
	SQ15: Materials associated with this store's service (e.g., shopping bags) are visually appealing.	

Table 9. Continued.

Construct	Measures	Scale
Perceived Relationship Investment	**PRI1:** This store makes efforts to increase regular customers' loyalty.	5-point scales anchored at "1 = Strongly disagree" and "5 = Strongly agree"
	PRI2: This store makes various efforts to improve its tie with regular customers.	
	PRI3: This store really cares about keeping regular customers.	
Hedonic Store Experience	**HSE1:** Is Functional/Is Pleasurable	5-point semantic differential scales
	HSE2: Is Useful/Is Fun	
	HSE3: Is a Necessity/Is an Indulgence	
Symbolic Store Experience	**SSE1:** This store says a lot about the kind of person I am.	5-point scales anchored at "1 = Strongly disagree" and "5 = Strongly agree"
	SSE2: This store mirrors the real me.	
	SSE3: This store is an extension of my inner self.	
	SSE4: This store has a positive impact on what others think of me.	
	SSE5: This store improves the way society views me.	
	SSE6: This store adds to a social role I play.	
Customer Love	**CL1:** This store is totally awesome.	
	CL2: This store makes me happy.	
	CL3: I have no particular feelings about this store.*	
	CL4: I love this store!	
	CL5: I am passionate about this store.	
	CL6: I'm very attached to this store.	
Self-Disclosure	**SD1:** I am willing to provide my personal information when asked by this store.	
	SD2: I am willing to disclose even sensitive personal information to this store.	
	SD3: I am willing to be truthful in revealing my personal information to this store.	
Positive Word-of-Mouth	**WOM1:** I have recommended this store to lots of people.	
	WOM2: I try to spread the good-word about this store.	
	WOM3: I give this store tons of positive word-of-mouth advertising.	
	WOM4: I 'talk up' this store to my friends.	
Competitive Insulation	**CI1:** This is the only store that I will buy clothing.	
	CI2: When I go shopping, I don't even notice competing apparel stores.	
	CI3: I'll 'do without' rather than shop at another store.	

Table 9. Continued.

Construct	Measures	Scale
Behavioral Loyalty	**BL1:** What percentage of your total expenditures for clothing do you spend in this store?	0~100
	BL2: Of the 10 times you select a store to buy clothes at, how many times do you select this store?	0~10
	BL3: How often do you buy clothes in this store compared to other stores where you buy clothes?	5-point scale anchored at "1 = Very Rarely" to "5 = Very Frequently"
Need for Variety	**NV1:** I am a person who always likes to do the same things rather than try new and different things.*	5-point scales anchored at "1 = Strongly disagree" and "5 = Strongly agree"
	NV2: I like to experience novelty and change in my daily routine.	
	NV3: I would like a job that would offer change, variety and travel, even though it would involve some danger.	
	NV4: I continually seek out new ideas and experiences.	
	NV5: I like to switch activities continuously.	
	NV6: When things become boring, I like to find a new and unfamiliar experience.	
	NV7: I prefer a routine way of life to an unpredictable one full of changes.*	

Table 9. Continued.

Construct	Measures	Scale
Emotional Intensity	**EI1:** Someone compliments me. I feel:	5-point scale "1 = It has little effect on me," "2 = Mildly pleased," "3 = Pleased," "4 = Very pleased," and "5 = Ecstatic—on top of the world"
	EI2: I am happy. I feel:	5-point scale "1 = It has little effect on me," "2 = Mildly happy," "3 = Happy," "4 = Extremely happy," and "5 = Euphoric—so happy I could burst"
	EI3: Someone I am very attracted to asks me out for coffee. I feel:*	5-point scale "1 = Ecstatic—on top of the world," 2 = Very thrilled," "3 = Thrilled," "4 = Mildly thrilled," and "5 = It has little effect on me"
	EI4: I am at a fun party. I feel:	5-point scale "1 = It has little effect on me," "2 = A little lighthearted," "3 = Lively," "4 = Very lively," and "5 = So lively that I almost feel like a new person"
	EI5: Something wonderful happens to me. I feel:*	5-point scale "1 = Extremely joyful—exuberant," 2 = Extremely glad," "3 = Glad," "4 = A little glad," and "5 = It has little effect on me"
	EI6: I have accomplished something valuable. I feel:	5-point scale "1 = It has little effect on me," "2 = A little satisfied," "3 = Satisfied," "4 = Very satisfied," and "5 = So satisfied it's as if my entire life was worthwhile"
	EI7: A person with whom I am involved prepares mea candlelight dinner. I feel:	5-point scale "1 = It has little effect on me," "2 = Slightly romantic," "3 = Romantic," "4 = Very romantic," and "5 = So passionate nothing else matters"
	EI8: I am involved in a romantic relationship. I feel:*	5-point rating scale "1 = So consumed with passion I can think of nothing else," "2 = Very passionate," "3 = Passionate," "4 = Mildly passionate," and "5 = It has little effect on me"
	EI9: Someone surprises me with a gift. I feel:	5-point rating scale "1 = It has little effect on me," "2 = A little grateful," "3 = Grateful," "4 = Very grateful," and "5 = So grateful I want to run out and buy them a gift in return

*The item is reverse scored.
Note: The items formulated in Table 9 were based on the apparel sample. In the grocery sample, the term "apparel store" was replaced by "grocery store."

Table 10. Goodness-of-Fit Statistics for Full and Reduced Item Sets

Construct	Number of Items		Full Item Set		Reduced Item Set	
	Full	Reduced	Apparel	Grocery	Apparel	Grocery
Hedonic Store Experience	5	3	$\chi^2 = 35.47$ $df = 6$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.88	$\chi^2 = 43.69$ $df = 6$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.91	$\chi^2 = 3.57$ $df = 1$ $p = 0.06$ CFI = 0.99	$\chi^2 = 1.28$ $df = 1$ $p = 0.26$ CFI = 1.00
Symbolic Store Experience	8	6	$\chi^2 = 174.22$ $df = 20$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.92	$\chi^2 = 239.01$ $df = 20$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.91	$\chi^2 = 66.48$ $df = 9$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.96	$\chi^2 = 56.69$ $df = 9$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.97
Customer Love	10	6	$\chi^2 = 314.21$ $df = 35$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.88	$\chi^2 = 288.52$ $df = 35$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.87	$\chi^2 = 66.91$ $df = 9$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.95	$\chi^2 = 39.14$ $df = 9$ $p = 0.00$ CFI = 0.97

Table 11. Final Measures: Reliability

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients	
		Apparel	Food
Tangible Rewards	3	0.88	0.86
Preferential Treatment	3	0.84	0.84
Interpersonal Communication	3	0.85	0.84
Reliability	3	0.87	0.86
Responsiveness	3	0.79	0.83
Assurance	3	0.89	0.85
Empathy	3	0.87	0.91
Tangibles	3	0.85	0.86
Perceived Relationship Investment	3	0.91	0.93
Emotional Intensity	9	0.78	0.80
Need for Variety	7	0.83	0.82
Hedonic Store Experience	3	0.70	0.82
Symbolic Store Experience	6	0.93	0.95
Customer Love	6	0.73	0.88
Self-Disclosure	3	0.81	0.77
Positive Word-of-Mouth	4	0.92	0.88
Behavioral Loyalty	3	0.83	0.79
Competitive Insulation	3	0.82	0.74

Table 12. Assessment of Normality: Apparel

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard Deviations	Skewness	Kurtosis
Tangible Rewards	TR1	3.45	1.01	-0.45	-0.22
	TR2	3.16	1.02	-0.12	-0.69
	TR3	3.20	1.07	-0.20	-0.88
Preferential Treatment	PT1	2.83	0.86	0.11	-0.04
	PT2	2.60	0.83	0.20	0.16
	PT3	2.68	0.89	0.23	-0.15
Interpersonal Communication	IC1	2.94	0.93	0.12	-0.30
	IC2	2.90	0.88	0.06	-0.08
	IC3	2.65	0.86	0.36	0.18
Reliability	SQ1	3.73	0.77	-0.30	0.32
	SQ2	3.80	0.72	-0.78	1.47
	SQ3	3.76	0.70	-0.49	1.02
Responsiveness	SQ4	3.87	0.84	-1.01	1.54
	SQ5	3.85	0.79	-1.00	1.77
	SQ6	3.74	0.86	-0.89	1.24
Assurance	SQ7	3.68	0.77	-0.95	1.79
	SQ8	3.84	0.70	-0.70	1.57
	SQ9	3.80	0.72	-0.90	2.01
Empathy	SQ10	3.69	0.97	-0.77	0.27
	SQ11	3.77	0.86	-0.69	0.75
	SQ12	3.71	0.88	-0.69	0.60
Tangibles	SQ13	3.87	0.69	-0.85	1.68
	SQ14	3.89	0.74	-0.83	1.59
	SQ15	3.74	0.77	-0.73	1.11
Perceived Relationship Investment	PRI1	3.72	0.84	-0.91	1.06
	PRI2	3.70	0.85	-0.65	0.48
	PRI3	3.67	0.82	-0.62	0.61
Hedonic Store Experience	HSE1	3.28	1.11	-0.31	-0.64
	HSE2	3.02	1.14	-0.11	-0.78
	HSE3	3.05	1.10	-0.08	-0.72
Symbolic Store Experience	SSE1	2.85	0.99	-0.01	-0.88
	SSE2	2.94	0.98	-0.07	-0.84
	SSE3	2.99	0.98	-0.19	-0.62
	SSE4	2.59	1.01	0.26	-0.49
	SSE5	2.70	0.97	0.08	-0.57
	SSE6	2.78	1.02	0.07	-0.79

Table 12. Continued.

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard Deviations	Skewness	Kurtosis
Customer Love	CL1	3.32	0.98	-0.23	-0.48
	CL2	3.44	0.88	-0.54	0.09
	CL3	3.51	0.97	-0.49	-0.22
	CL4	3.45	1.05	-0.52	-0.70
	CL5	2.96	0.98	-0.08	-0.51
	CL6	3.15	1.04	-0.42	-0.65
Self-Disclosure	SD1	3.36	1.03	-0.40	-0.49
	SD2	2.30	0.99	0.61	0.00
	SD3	3.37	1.06	-0.76	-0.17
Positive Word-of-Mouth	WOM1	3.99	0.92	-1.28	1.93
	WOM	3.61	0.96	-0.74	0.02
	WOM	3.78	0.87	-0.89	0.75
	WOM	3.88	0.78	-1.22	2.35
Behavioral Loyalty	BL 1	2.65	1.23	0.09	-1.08
	BL 2	3.02	1.28	-0.17	-1.08
	BL 3	3.65	0.91	-0.63	0.65
Competitive Insulation	CI1	2.12	0.96	1.12	1.12
	CI2	2.31	0.88	0.99	0.59
	CI3	2.10	0.80	0.77	0.73

Table 13. Assessment of Normality: Grocery

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard Deviations	Skewness	Kurtosis
Tangible Rewards	TR1	3.41	1.00	-0.30	-0.63
	TR2	3.07	1.02	-0.07	-0.69
	TR3	2.96	1.11	0.04	-1.02
Preferential Treatment	PT1	2.69	0.85	0.22	0.14
	PT2	2.42	0.77	0.32	0.22
	PT3	2.45	0.86	0.41	0.05
Interpersonal Communication	IC1	2.95	0.96	0.12	-0.42
	IC2	2.99	0.97	-0.11	-0.55
	IC3	2.72	0.95	0.31	-0.36
Reliability	SQ1	3.76	0.75	-0.51	0.93
	SQ2	3.74	0.71	-0.62	1.10
	SQ3	3.73	0.70	-0.40	0.89
Responsiveness	SQ4	3.93	0.77	-1.03	1.78
	SQ5	3.88	0.79	-0.98	1.64
	SQ6	3.89	0.86	-0.89	1.00
Assurance	SQ7	3.68	0.76	-0.50	0.55
	SQ8	3.86	0.71	-0.71	1.57
	SQ9	3.50	0.73	-0.11	0.60
Empathy	SQ10	3.66	0.94	-0.48	-0.44
	SQ11	3.87	0.80	-0.71	0.77
	SQ12	3.79	0.84	-0.62	0.47
Tangibles	SQ13	3.80	0.82	-1.02	1.37
	SQ14	3.77	0.81	-0.96	1.53
	SQ15	3.49	0.82	-0.49	0.38
Perceived Relationship Investment	PRI1	3.71	0.85	-0.61	0.31
	PRI2	3.66	0.87	-0.55	0.10
	PRI3	3.70	0.85	-0.59	0.76
Hedonic Store Experience	HSE1	3.03	1.27	-0.18	-1.03
	HSE2	2.68	1.29	0.18	-1.09
	HSE3	2.34	1.17	0.52	-0.66
Symbolic Store Experience	SSE1	2.44	0.97	0.56	-0.11
	SSE2	2.62	1.02	0.26	-0.63
	SSE3	2.44	0.93	0.37	-0.08
	SSE4	2.29	0.98	0.42	-0.44
	SSE5	2.35	0.95	0.33	-0.38
	SSE6	2.25	0.95	0.37	-0.33

Table 13. Continued.

Construct	Item	Mean	Standard Deviations	Skewness	Kurtosis
Customer Love	CL1	3.19	1.04	-0.21	-0.44
	CL2	3.30	0.86	-0.34	0.11
	CL3	3.26	0.95	-0.28	-0.19
	CL4	3.14	1.10	-0.02	-1.13
	CL5	2.69	1.03	0.30	-0.39
	CL6	2.98	1.07	-0.04	-0.75
Self-Disclosure	SD1	3.25	1.12	-0.48	-0.49
	SD2	2.15	1.04	0.69	-0.09
	SD3	3.27	1.11	-0.62	-0.43
Positive Word-of-Mouth	WOM1	3.91	0.87	-0.98	1.24
	WOM	3.48	1.02	-0.50	-0.48
	WOM	3.75	0.86	-0.85	0.69
	WOM	3.84	0.76	-0.79	1.22
Behavioral Loyalty	BL 1	3.79	1.15	-0.80	-0.16
	BL 2	3.96	1.05	-0.90	0.17
	BL 3	4.32	0.79	-1.35	2.72
Competitive Insulation	CI1	2.40	1.08	0.90	0.02
	CI2	2.58	1.08	0.62	-0.63
	CI3	2.12	0.85	1.27	2.22

CHAPTER IV
DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings from the main data and describes the analyses conducted to test the hypotheses stated in Chapter III. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modeling (SEM) were used to test the proposed model. The AMOS 6.0 program was employed for this purpose. The goodness-of-fit of the estimated models was assessed with χ^2 tests, the ratios of chi-square to degrees of freedom (df), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), the non-normed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). In general, satisfactory model fits are indicated by non significant χ^2 tests, RMSEA and SRMR values less than or equal to 0.08 and NNFI and CFI values greater than or equal to 0.90 (Hair et al., 1999).

SERVICE QUALITY: SECOND-ORDER CFA

With respect to the five sub-constructs of service quality (i.e., reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles), the multi-item scales for each construct were factor-analyzed separately; across the apparel and grocery samples, a single factor emerged in each case. As Cronbach's alpha values ranged between .79 and .91, reliability was uniformly high in both samples for all five constructs (see Table 11). Table 14 and 15 also provide an overview of construct means, standard deviations, and correlations. Evidence of discriminant validity for each of the five sub-constructs is also provided in Table 16.

Table 14. Sub-Constructs Service Quality: Means and Standard Deviations

Construct	Apparel		Grocery	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Reliability	3.76	0.63	3.74	0.62
2. Responsiveness	3.82	0.69	3.90	0.70
3. Assurance	3.77	0.64	3.68	0.62
4. Empathy	3.72	0.81	3.77	0.79
5. Tangibles	3.83	0.61	3.69	0.70

Table 15. Sub-Constructs Service Quality: Correlations

Construct	Correlations				
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Reliability	**1.00**	.76	.89	.61	.73
2. Responsiveness	.63	**1.00**	.90	.87	.64
3. Assurance	.90	.74	**1.00**	.67	.70
4. Empathy	.59	.87	.64	**1.00**	.47
5. Tangibles	.73	.41	.72	.42	**1.00**

Note: Correlations above the diagonal are for the apparel sample; those below the diagonal are for the grocery sample.

Table 16. Discriminant Validity: Sub-Constructs of Service Quality

Construct Pair	$\Delta\chi^2$ (Δdf)	
	Apparel	**Grocery**
Reliability ↔ Responsiveness	64.26*** (1)	123.33*** (1)
Reliability ↔ Assurance	30.08*** (1)	16.32*** (1)
Reliability ↔ Empathy	199.22*** (1)	192.55*** (1)
Reliability ↔ Tangibles	84.12*** (1)	92.08*** (1)
Responsiveness ↔ Assurance	20.61*** (1)	67.20*** (1)
Responsiveness ↔ Empathy	25.85*** (1)	53.06*** (1)
Responsiveness ↔ Tangibles	99.68*** (1)	247.50*** (1)
Assurance ↔ Empathy	188.50*** (1)	159.66*** (1)
Assurance ↔ Tangibles	192.58*** (1)	263.62*** (1)

***$p < .001$

Note: Discriminant validity was evaluated by a chi-square difference test between an unconstrained model estimating the correlation between a pair of constructs and a constrained model with the correlation between that pair of constructs fixed to 1.0. A significant chi-square demonstrates discriminant validity by showing that the correlation between the pair of constructs is significantly less than 1.0 (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1981).

Next, the second-order factor model as illustrated in Figure 6 was examined with

the first-order factors that originated from the higher-order factor service quality. These

measurement results were acceptable in each sample: CFI and NNFI ranged from .92

to .94 for CFI and from .90 to .93 for NNFI). All first-order and second-order factor

loadings were significant, demonstrating convergent validity ($p < .001$) (see Table 17-18).

This provided the researcher with enough confidence to calculate averages for reliability,

responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibles based on the number of items of each

construct and use these averages as indicators of the construct service quality (De Wulf et

al., 2003). Table 19 provides an overview of construct means and standard deviations for

the resultant measurement model.
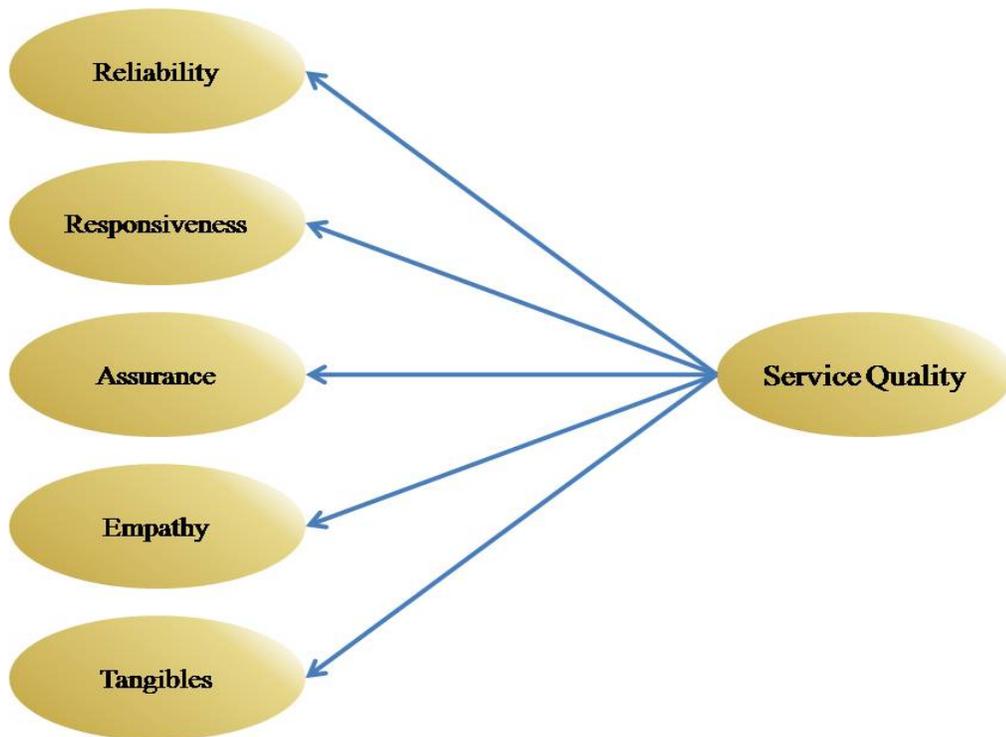
Figure 6. Second-Oder Factor Structure: Service Quality

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Table 17. Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Service Quality (Part I)

Construct	Item	Standardized Loading		Construct Reliability[a]		Variance Extracted[b]	
		Apparel	Grocery	Apparel	Grocery	Apparel	Grocery
Reliability	SQ1	0.83	0.81				
	SQ2	0.74	0.78	0.82	0.83	0.61	0.62
	SQ3	0.82	0.75				
Responsiveness	SQ4	0.62	0.68				
	SQ5	0.91	0.90	0.82	0.83	0.62	0.62
	SQ6	0.49	0.60				
Assurance	SQ7	0.82	0.69				
	SQ8	0.86	0.84	0.82	0.83	0.60	0.62
	SQ9	0.76	0.77				
Empathy	SQ10	0.90	0.88				
	SQ11	0.80	0.88	0.81	0.79	0.59	0.56
	SQ12	0.81	0.88				
Tangibles	SQ13	0.74	0.69				
	SQ14	0.83	0.87	0.81	0.86	0.59	0.68
	SQ15	0.66	0.78				

[a]Construct Reliability = $(\sum \text{standardized loading})^2 / ((\sum \text{standardized loading})^2 + \sum \text{measurement error})$

[b]Variance Extracted = $\sum (\text{standardized loading})^2 / \sum (\text{standardized loading})^2 + \sum \text{measurement error}$

Table 18. Second-Order Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Service Quality (Part II)

Path	Loading (*t*-value)		Error Variance		R^2	
	Apparel	Grocery	Apparel	Grocery	Apparel	Grocery
Reliability ← SQ	0.89 (14.38***)	0.91 (13.01***)	0.22	0.18	0.78	0.82
Responsiveness ← SQ	0.94 (17.90***)	0.89 (15.98***)	0.12	0.22	0.88	0.78
Assurance ← SQ	0.97 (17.38***)	0.99 (16.52***)	0.06	0.03	0.94	0.97
Empathy ← SQ	0.72 (12.38***)	0.69 (11.68***)	0.48	0.52	0.52	0.48
Tangibles ← SQ	0.74 (11.53***)	0.71 (10.61***)	0.45	0.50	0.55	0.50
Goodness-of-Fit Measure	**Apparel (N = 301)**			**Grocery (N =303)**		
χ^2 (*df*)	246.05*** (84)			323.97*** (84)		
χ^2/df	2.93			3.86		
CFI	0.94			0.92		
NNFI	0.93			0.90		
RMSEA	0.08			0.10		
SRMR	0.07			0.08		

***$p < .001$

Table 19. Construct Means and Standard Deviations

Construct	Apparel		Grocery	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Tangible Rewards	3.27	1.03	3.15	1.05
Interpersonal Communication	2.83	0.89	2.89	0.96
Preferential Treatment	2.70	0.86	2.52	0.83
Service Quality	3.78	0.68	3.76	0.69
Hedonic Store Experience	3.12	1.12	2.68	1.24
Symbolic Store Experience	2.81	0.99	2.40	0.97
Perceived Relationship Investment	3.70	0.83	3.69	0.85
Customer Love	3.31	0.98	3.09	1.01
Self-Disclosure	3.01	1.03	2.89	1.09
Positive Word-of-Mouth	3.81	0.89	3.75	0.88
Behavioral Loyalty	3.12	1.15	4.02	1.01
Competitive Insulation	2.18	0.88	2.37	1.01

MEASUREMENT MODEL

As shown in Table 20, the results of confirmatory analysis indicated that the measure had acceptable construct validity and reliability. First for apparel, the χ^2 of the measurement model was 1556.16 with 873 *df.* The overall fit statistics ($\chi^2/df = 1.78$, CFI = .93, NNFI = .92, RMSEA = 0.051, and SRMR= .054) suggested that the measurement model had a good fit. All the factor loadings to their respected constructs were higher than 0.77. Convergent validity was supported by the facts that: (1) all loadings were significant ($p < .001$), (2) the composite reliability for each construct exceeded the recommended level of .70, and (3) the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct fulfills or is close to the recommended benchmark of .50 (Hair et al, 1988). The fit indices for the measurement model for the grocery category also indicated a good fit ($\chi^2 = 1{,}344.43$ with 873 *df*, $\chi^2/df = 1.54$, CFI = .95, NNFI = .94, RMSEA = 0.042, and SRMR= .059). All the factor loadings were significant ($p < .001$), with composite reliability greater than 0.74 and AVE all greater than or close to .50.

Table 20. Measurment Model Evaluation: Goodness-of-Fit Statistics

Fit Statistics	Apparel (N = 301)	Grocery (N =303)
χ^2 (*df*)	1556.16*** (873)	1344.83*** (873)
χ^2/df	1.78	1.54
CFI	0.93	0.95
NNFI	0.92	0.94
RMSEA	0.051	0.042
SRMR	0.054	0.059

***$p < .001$

Next, discriminant validity was examined by comparing the final measurement model to the one that constrained the correlation of the two constructs to 1. The χ^2 difference test between the two models was conducted to determine whether they were significantly different for each pair of constructs. For instance, the measurement model was compared to the one with the correlation of service quality and perceived relationship investment set to 1. The results of the model comparison strongly indicated that service quality and perceived relationship investment are distinct constructs for both apparel ($\Delta\chi^2 = 212.54$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$) and grocery ($\Delta\chi^2 = 147.53$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < .001$). As such, a χ^2 difference test was performed for each pair of constructs, a total of 66 tests in all for each sample, and in every case resulted in a significant difference, again suggesting that all measures of constructs in the measurement model achieve discriminant validity.

STRUCTURAL MODEL EVALUATION

The correlation matrices of the constructs and results of path analysis are presented in Table 23-25. As shown in Table 24, all fit indices show that the model has a good fit for both the apparel category ($\chi^2 = 1741.80$ with 914 df, $\chi^2/df = 1.91$, CFI = .91, NNFI = .90, RMSEA = 0.055, and SRMR= .074) and the grocery category ($\chi^2 = 11538.48$ with 914 df, $\chi^2/df = 1.68$, CFI = .93, NNFI = .93, RMSEA = 0.048, and SRMR= .075). Table 25 indicates that in each sample, all significant relationships between latent constructs are in the hypothesized direction, which provides initial evidence for our conceptual model and supports the nomological validity of the constructs.

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Table 21. Measurement Model Evaluation: Standardized Loadings

Construct and Measures	Number of Items	Standardized Loading (min.-max)	
		Apparel	Grocery
Tangible Rewards	3	0.81-0.87	0.77-0.87
Interpersonal Communication	3	0.77-0.82	0.72-0.88
Preferential Treatment	3	0.73-0.85	0.71-0.87
Service Quality	5	0.64-0.88	0.61-0.87
Hedonic Store Experience	3	0.43-0.81	0.61-0.86
Symbolic Store Experience	6	0.80-0.84	0.83-0.91
Perceived Relationship Investment	3	0.87-0.92	0.89-0.90
Customer Love	6	0.52-0.86	0.55-0.88
Self-Disclosure	3	0.71-0.84	0.69-0.81
Positive Word-of-Mouth	4	0.84-0.90	0.70-0.87
Behavioral Loyalty	3	0.77-0.87	0.55-0.94
Competitive Insulation	3	0.75-0.80	0.67-0.73

Table 22. Measurement Models

Construct	Construct Reliability		Variance Extracted	
	Apparel	Grocery	Apparel	Grocery
Tangible Rewards	0.88	0.86	0.71	0.67
Interpersonal Communication	0.85	0.84	0.65	0.64
Preferential Treatment	0.84	0.85	0.63	0.66
Service Quality	0.86	0.86	0.56	0.55
Hedonic Store Experience	0.71	0.82	0.47	0.61
Symbolic Store Experience	0.93	0.95	0.80	0.86
Perceived Relationship Investment	0.91	0.93	0.78	0.81
Customer Love	0.91	0.89	0.63	0.58
Self-Disclosure	0.93	0.78	0.87	0.54
Positive Word-of-Mouth	0.93	0.89	0.87	0.82
Behavioral Loyalty	0.85	0.81	0.65	0.60
Competitive Insulation	0.82	0.74	0.60	0.49

[a]Construct Reliability = $(\sum \text{standardized loading})^2 / ((\sum \text{standardized loading})^2 + \sum \text{measurement error})$

[b]Variance Extracted = $\sum (\text{standardized loading})^2 / \sum (\text{standardized loading})^2 + \sum \text{measurement error}$

Table 23. Correlations

Construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Tangible Rewards	1.00	0.53	0.62	0.49	0.23	0.30	0.62	0.27	0.24	0.25	0.23	0.14
2. Interpersonal Communication	0.58	1.00	0.59	0.63	0.25	0.39	0.46	0.43	0.21	0.35	0.14	0.38
3. Preferential Treatment	0.55	0.50	1.00	0.18	0.13	0.18	0.24	0.11	0.12	0.16	0.00	0.17
4. Service Quality	0.38	0.66	0.13	1.00	0.29	0.48	0.72	0.56	0.15	0.55	0.33	0.35
5. Hedonic Store Experience	0.00	0.34	0.08	0.33	1.00	0.40	0.27	0.50	0.17	0.35	0.15	0.22
6. Symbolic Store Experience	0.10	0.34	0.22	0.34	0.39	1.00	0.34	0.71	0.33	0.47	0.29	0.57
7. Perceived Relationship Investment	0.43	0.65	0.23	0.80	0.27	0.35	1.00	0.37	0.18	0.39	0.30	0.25
8. Customer Love	0.07	0.44	0.09	0.59	0.50	0.65	0.45	1.00	0.28	0.67	0.30	0.51
9. Self-Disclosure	0.20	0.28	0.05	0.28	0.11	0.35	0.31	0.29	1.00	0.26	0.17	0.14
10. Positive Word-of-Mouth	0.10	0.37	0.05	0.62	0.41	0.45	0.51	0.69	0.24	1.00	0.41	0.42
11. Behavioral Loyalty	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.03	0.17	0.11	0.16	0.14	0.12	1.00	0.53
12. Competitive Insulation	0.17	0.40	0.24	0.35	0.31	0.51	0.30	0.55	0.24	0.44	0.46	1.00

Note: Correlations above the diagonal are for the apparel sample; those below the diagonal are for the grocery sample. χ^2 difference tests support that each of the above correlations is significantly different from 1.0, providing evidence that the constructs within each of the pairs are different from each other. This pattern of results support discriminant validity across all constructs as a whole.

Table 24. Structural Model Evaluation: Goodness of Fit Statistics

Fit Statistics	Apparel (N = 301)	Grocery (N =303)
χ^2 (df)	1741.80*** (914)	1538.38*** (914)
χ^2/df	1.91	1.68
CFI	0.91	0.93
NNFI	0.90	0.93
RMSEA	0.055	0.048
SRMR	0.074	0.075

***p < .001

Table 25. Structural Models

Endogenous Constructs		Apparel		Grocery	
		Estimate	t-value	Estimate	t-value
Perceived Relationship Investment					
R^2		0.62		0.66	
H1	Tangible Rewards	0.44	5.67***	0.07	1.22
H2	Interpersonal Communication	-0.08	-0.88	0.17	2.03*
H3	Preferential Treatment	-0.08	-0.89	0.02	0.40
H4	Service Quality	0.57	6.77***	0.65	9.00***
Customer Love					
R^2		0.60		0.59	
H5	Perceived Relationship Investment	0.14	2.89**	0.27	5.57***
H8	Hedonic Store Experience	0.24	4.37***	0.26	5.00***
H9	Symbolic Store Experience	0.58	9.86***	0.49	8.71***
Self-disclosure					
R^2		0.09		0.10	
H10	Customer Love	0.30	4.55***	0.32	4.75***
Positive Word-of-Mouth					
R^2		0.46		0.49	
H11	Customer Love	0.68	11.87***	0.70	11.12***
Behavioral Loyalty					
R^2		0.12		0.03	
H12	Customer Love	0.34	5.40***	0.19	2.96**
Competitive Insulation					
R^2		0.30		0.34	
H13	Customer Love	0.55	8.29***	0.58	7.77***

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001

Antecedents of Perceived Relationship Investment

First, for apparel, tangible rewards ($\beta = 0.44$, $t = 5.67$) and service quality ($\beta = 0.57$, $t = 6.77$) had significant effects on perceived relationship investment at $p < 0.001$. For the grocery store category, interpersonal communication ($\beta = .28$, $t = 5.79$, $p = 0.05$), and service quality ($\beta = .40$, $t = 8.30$, $p = 0.001$) had significant effects on perceived relationship investment. Preferential treatment, however, was insignificant in both apparel and grocery categories.

In examining H1-H4, which explicate the associations between relationship-inducing factors and perceived relationship investment, only for service quality was there a consistent pattern of effects across the two store categories. Apart from these effects, the data provided mixed evidence. Specifically, tangible rewards had a positive impact on perceived relationship investment (H1) in the apparel category as opposed to the grocery category, in which no significant path was detected. Interpersonal communication had a positive impact on perceived relationship investment (H2) in the grocery category. However, the data did not provide evidence for this path in the apparel category.

Antecedents of Customer Love

For apparel, symbolic store experience ($\beta = 0.58$, $t = 9.86$) was most significant, followed by hedonic store experience ($\beta = 0.24$, $t = 4.37$), and perceived relationship investment ($\beta = 0.14$, $t = 2.89$) at $p < 0.001$. For the grocery category, symbolic store experience was also most significant in building customer love ($\beta = .44$, $t = 5.40$, $p < .005$), followed by perceived relationship investment ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 5.37$), and hedonic store experience ($\beta = 0.26$, $t = 5.00$) at $p < 0.001$. Consequently, there was strong and uniform support for H5, H8, and H9.

Outcomes of Customer Love

For both categories, the path from customer love to self-disclosure was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 4.55$ for apparel; $\beta = 0.32$, $t = 4.75$ for grocery) at $p < 0.001$. The path from customer love to positive word-of-mouth was significant for both store categories ($\beta = 0.68$, $t = 11.87$ for apparel; $\beta = 0.70$, $t = 11.12$ for grocery) at $p < 0.001$. For behavioral loyalty, the coefficient of customer love was significant and positive for both categories ($\beta = 0.34$, $t = 5.40$, $p < 0.001$ for apparel; $\beta = 0.19$, $t = 2.96$, $p < .01$ for grocery). The positive effect of customer love on competitive insulation was significant for both categories ($\beta = 0.30$, $t = 4.55$ for apparel; $\beta = 0.32$, $t = 4.75$ for grocery) at $p < 0.001$. In sum, the positive paths from customer love to four relational outcome variables were confirmed across the two categories. Thus, H10, H11, H12, and H13 were supported.

Invariance Test of Structural Relationships

To examine the robustness of the structural model across two different store categories, tests of structural invariance were conducted by means of multiple group SEM analysis. Two nested models were constructed and tested: (a) a model which assumes the same configuration for both categories with the values of path coefficients to be freely estimated across categories (Free Model: χ^2 with 1830 $df = 3328.21$; $\chi^2/df = 1.82$; CFI = .92, NNFI = .91; RMSEA = 0.37 and SRMR= .073); and (b) a model with structural invariance, which assumes the same structural relationships and the same path coefficients between the two categories (Equal Model: χ^2 with 1841 $df = 3359.49$; $\chi^2/df = 1.83$; CFI = .92, NNFI = .91; RMSEA = 0.37 and SRMR= .076). Although the model fit deteriorated slightly as the invariance restriction was imposed ($\Delta\chi^2 = 31.285$, $\Delta df = 11$, p

= .001), the models with the key structural invariance exhibited good fit. This indicated that the structural relationships can be assumed to be the same for both apparel and grocery.

A Rival Model

It is generally recommended that researchers should compare rival models and not just test the performance of a proposed model (Bagozzi & Yi 1988). Based on the literature review, customer love is positioned as a mediating variable in the proposed model. For example, hedonic store experience is expected to influence each of the four relational outcomes but only through customer love. Because this parsimonious hypothesized model allows no direct paths from any of the precursors (i.e., perceived relationship investment, hedonic store experience, symbolic store experience) to self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, or to competitive insulation, it implies a central nomological status for customer love. A nonparsimonious rival model would hypothesize only direct paths from each of the precursors to the outcomes (i.e., customer love, self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation). This model makes customer love nomologically similar to the four relational outcomes. The tested rival model (see Figure 7) therefore permits no indirect effects, implying that customer love is not allowed to mediate any of the relationships.

On the basis of De Wulf et al. (2001), the hypothesized model was compared with the rival model on the following criteria: overall fit, parsimony, percentage of either model's parameters that were statistically significant, and R^2s for the endogenous constructs. Since the structural invariance was confirmed across the two store categories,

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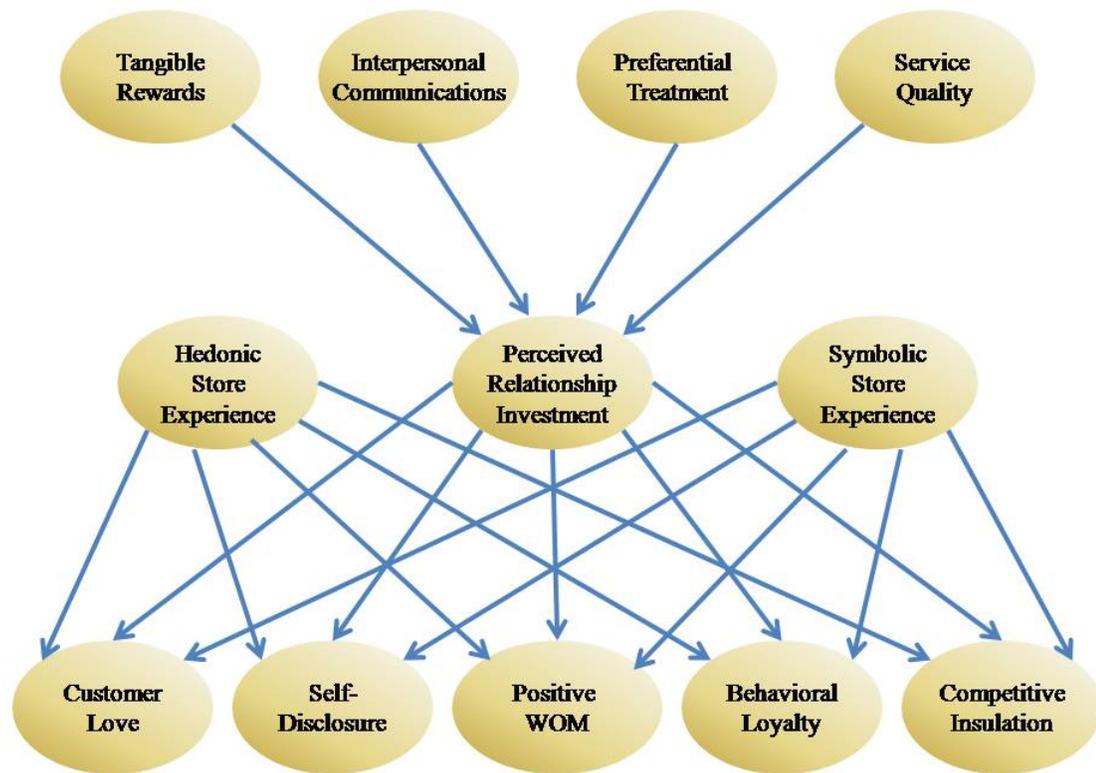
Figure 7. A Rival Model

the two models were compared on the pooled data. With respect to overall fit, the CFI of

the proposed model was higher than that of the rival model (0.928 versus .926), and the

hypothesized model's ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom was lower than that of the

rival model (2.44 versus 2.50). Although the fit measures of the rival model are close to

those of the hypothesized model, it should be noted that to achieve this fit, eight

additional paths were estimated in the rival model, which reduced the rival model's

parsimony. In addition, only 68.4% of the paths in the rival model were significant as

opposed to 81.8% in the hypothesized model, which suggested that the additional paths

were not meaningful theoretically or empirically. Finally, the average explained variances

of self-disclosure and behavioral loyalty were 0.14 and 0.04, respectively, in the rival

model as opposed to 0.10 and 0.03 in the hypothesized model. In contrast, the average

explained variances of positive word-of-mouth and competitive insulation were 0.37 and

0.27, respectively, in the rival model as opposed to 0.47 and 0.29 in the hypothesized

model. This means that the explanatory power of customer love as a single antecedent of

positive word-of-mouth or competitive insulation is stronger than the combined

explanatory power of the two emotion-inducing factors (i.e., hedonic store experience

and symbolic store experience) plus perceived relationship investment.

On the basis of these findings, it can be concluded that the exercise of fitting a

rival model has strengthened the support for the meaningfulness and robustness of the

hypothesized model. In addition to the conceptual support found for positioning customer

love as a mediating variable in the hypothesized model, the rival model empirically

demonstrates its added value. Neglecting the mediating role of this construct reduces its

overall fit and parsimony, and results in a lower percentage of significant path

coefficients.

Moderating Influences

Moderating effects were tested through multiple group SEM analyses, splitting

the samples into sub-samples according to whether participants scored high or low on the

moderating variables to ensure within-group homogeneity and between-group

heterogeneity. The subgroup method is a commonly preferred technique for detecting

moderating effects (De Wulf et al., 2001). For each moderator, Table 26 displays the

results for four separate structural model estimations in terms of chi-square and degrees

of freedom.

Table 26. Moderating Influences

Moderator: Need for Variety		Apparel	Grocery
Equal Model	χ^2	2832.07	2728.46
	df	1829	1829
H8: Perceived Relationship Investment	χ^2	2829.67	2728.25
→ Customer Love (Free)	df	1828	1828
	$\Delta\chi^2$	2.40 ($p = 0.12$)	0.21 ($p = 0.65$)
Moderator: Emotional Intensity			
Equal Model	χ^2	2941.34	2660.06
	df	1829	1829
H9: Perceived Relationship Investment	χ^2	2941.24	2660.05
→ Customer Love (Free)	df	1828	1828
	$\Delta\chi^2$	0.10 ($p = 0.76$)	0.01 ($p = 0.96$)

Moderating Influence of Need for Variety

Considering need for variety as a moderator, in the equal models, all paths of the structural model were set to equal across high and low need for variety sub-samples. In the free models, all paths were constrained to be equal across high- and low-need for variety sub-samples, except for the link that was potentially affected by the moderator variable. Differences in chi-square values between models determine whether need for variety acts as a moderating variable; that is, a significant decrease in chi-square from the equal model to a model in which one relationship is set free implies that the moderator variable has a significant influence on that relationship. The results show that the level of need for variety does not moderate the impact of perceived relationship investment on customer love in both apparel and grocery categories. Thus, H6 was not supported. Regardless of the level of need for variety, perceived relationship investment had a positive impact on customer love.

Moderating Influence of Emotional Intensity

The same procedure was used to assess the moderating impact of emotional

intensity. According to the results, emotional intensity did not moderate the impact of

perceived relationship investment on customer love in both categories. Thus, H7 was not

supported. Regardless of the level of emotional intensity, perceived relationship

investment had a positive impact on customer love.

CHAPTER V
DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the findings of this study are discussed in relation to managerial implications. Next, the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are provided.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The specific research objectives of this study were: (a) to investigate whether relationship-inducing factors (i.e., tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, preferential treatment, and service quality) have a differential impact on perceived relationship investment; (b) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by perceived relationship investment; (c) to analyze whether the effect of perceived relationship investment on customer love is contingent on two consumer characteristics (i.e., emotional intensity and need for variety); (d) to investigate whether customer love is predicted by two emotion-inducing factors (hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience); and (e) to investigate whether customer love affects four relational outcomes (i.e., self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation).

Effects of Relationship-Inducing Factors on Perceived Relationship Investment

With respect to tangible rewards, mixed evidence was found. Interestingly, no empirical support was found for the positive effect of tangible rewards on perceived relationship investment in the grocery sample. This finding may be attributed to the general trend that the longer tradition of providing tangible rewards such as customer

loyalty points, coupons, and free gifts with grocery shoppers has worn out its effect on perceived relationship investment (De Wulf et al., 2001). Tangible rewards are the most easily imitated element of relationship marketing (Berry, 1995). As tangible rewards become widespread, especially in grocery retailing, their absence may disappoint satisfied customers. However, the presence of tangible rewards would not necessarily boost satisfied customers' good will (De Wulf et al., 2001). This is also evidenced by the fact that today's grocery shoppers join several loyalty card programs simultaneously (Mauri, 2003). Theoretically, some authors have argued that tangible rewards in grocery retailing may not qualify as real relationship investments, as they rely on operant conditioning resulting in a lack of mental processing in customers' minds (e.g., Sharp & Sharp, 1997; Jacoby & Chestnut, 1978).

However, in the apparel sample, tangible rewards revealed a significant relationship with perceived relationship investment. The reason for this difference might reside in the fact that apparel shoppers hold different expectations in terms of receiving relationship marketing efforts (De Wulf et al., 2003). Alternatively, perhaps, the aforementioned "wear-out" effect of tangible rewards may be occurring less in apparel retailing. If so, the natural appeal of tangible rewards can be assumed to decrease if more and more apparel stores start offering them (De Wulf et al., 2001). However, it should be noted that rewarding strategies can lead to sustainable competitive advantages if such strategies are not short-term promotional give-aways, but planned and implemented parts of a larger loyalty management strategy (O'Brien & Jones, 1995).

Likewise, mixed evidence was detected for the positive effect of interpersonal communication on perceived relationship investment. Surprisingly, interpersonal

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communication proved to be an important determinant of perceived relationship investment in the grocery sample. This finding validates the notion that grocery shoppers should not be seen as 'calculating accountants' or 'coupon clippers' who are concerned only about monetary value (Cottet, Lichtlé, & Plichon, 2006). Further, this finding suggests that satisfied customers' relationships with grocery stores may be more socially-oriented than with apparel stores. Grocery stores capable of training and motivating their employees to show warm and personal feelings toward customers can reap the resulting benefits in terms of improved perceptions of relationship investment (De Wulf et al., 2001). Also, when hiring store personnel, store management needs to focus on applicants' social abilities that facilitate social interactions with customers (De Wulf et al., 2001; De Wulf et al., 2003; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003). This implication is especially important to large supermarket chains, because the emergence of automated retailing technologies (e.g., self-scanning check-out lines, in-store kiosk operations) has gradually reduced opportunities for social interaction in the store. Technology-prone retailers should investigate whether their satisfied consumers are willing to trade off the loss of social contact for the benefits of retail automation technologies (De Wulf et al., 2001; De Wulf et al., 2003; Odekerken-Schröder et al., 2003).

The finding regarding interpersonal communication also presents strategic insights for small grocery stores. In the U.S., the establishment of "all-in-one" supercenters such as Target and Wal-Mart has forced consolidation among the grocery retail business. The global buying power of such retail giants has put an increased financial burden on small local grocery stores as well as national supermarket chains (Duff, 2002). The positive path from interpersonal communication to perceived

relationship investment in the grocery sample suggests that, when a small grocery store is in competition in large supermarkets, the store needs to build strategies to facilitate and accelerate the delivery of social benefits. For instance, there are several strategies aimed at developing "commercial friendship," such as using customers' names, asking them for a recent journey, and being aware of their families' preferences (Beatty et al., 1996). The development of interpersonal bonds may be fostered by an adequate design of the environment in which the service is delivered, so that there is an opportunity to establish (formal and informal) customer-employee interactions (Gremler, Gwinner, & Brown, 2001). For instance, a space for children playing could be provided, so that their parents would spend more time inside the store.

Preferential treatment revealed a nonsignificant relationship with perceived relationship investment in both samples, and this contradicts the popular assumption in customer relationship management (CRM) that profitable customers should be treated and served differently than unprofitable customers should (Peppers & Rogers, 2005). This could be a discouraging finding for those retailers who are undertaking efforts to make their offerings of preferential treatment salient and critical for promoting satisfied customers' long-term patronage. A potential explanation for this finding might be that satisfied customers do not appreciate being openly favored above other customers (De Wulf et al., 2001; De Wulf et al., 2003). As noted by De Wulf et al. (2001), if this is true, it would hold important implications for retailers, because it emphasizes that efforts directed at satisfied customers should be made delicately to avoid putting them in an uncomfortable position. This is further evidenced by Cho's (2006) research indicating that, in private Internet settings, the perception that regular customers are being treated

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and served more favorably than nonregular customers tends to enhance relationship durability (Cho, 2006).

Overall, with respect to the effectiveness of relationship marketing, this study did not fully replicate De Wulf et al.'s (2001) results. Thus, the researcher concludes that the findings of this study should be interpreted with their context specificity in mind. The three constructs of tangible rewards, interpersonal communication, and preferential treatment were tested in the context of satisfied customers. Thus, one should be cautious in generalizing the findings of this study to a broader scope covering general "regular" customers.

Regardless of retail category, the relationship between service quality and perceived relationship investment was confirmed. The concept of 'return on service quality' facilitates retailers to determine the expected financial impact from service expenditures (Rust et al., 1995). While this study did not deal with a retailer's specific financial service expenditures, it empirically assessed whether service quality is perceived as the retailer's true relationship investments by satisfied customers. The findings clearly demonstrate that satisfied customers indeed recognize service quality to be a strong signal of perceived relationship investment. In fact, service quality was the strongest predictor of perceived relationship investment among the four relationship-inducing factors included in the model (see Table 25). This result can provide retailers with enough confidence that the upfront investments in service quality enhancement will be transformed into strengthened perceptions of relationship investment, ultimately leading to strong emotional bonds with satisfied customers (De Wulf et al., 2003).

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Effects of Perceived Relationship Investment on Customer Love

This study assessed the effect of perceived relationship investment on customer love. Regardless of retail category, the results confirmed that perceived relationship investment positively affects customer love. As hypothesized, satisfied customers are likely to reciprocate a retailer's relationship efforts by exhibiting emotional attachments to the retailer.

Some may ask, "Is it necessary to measure perceived relationship investment in addition to hedonic store experience and symbolic store experience as a determinant of customer love?" The answer is yes as this study provides empirical evidence that perceived relationship investment positively influences customer love, even when the effects of all three constructs are considered simultaneously. This not only underscores the practical significance of the perceived relationship investment construct, but also emphasizes the need to adopt a more holistic view of the literature. To date, previous studies have primarily focused on the effect of perceived relationship investment on relationship satisfaction, trust, and commitment (De Wulf et al., 2001; De Wulf et al., 2003; Odekerken-Schroder et al., 2001). It is clear that the role of perceived relationship investment is far more powerful than previously reported since it contributes to the formation of customer love. Circumstances may exist where a retailer's store experience is less hedonic and less symbolic and cannot be easily enhanced by those elements in the short run. The findings of this study suggest that under such circumstances, retailers may want to concentrate directly on their relationship efforts through factors suggested in this study. It will pay off for retailers to invest in such efforts, because it is likely to result in not only positive performance judgments but also customer love.

Effects of Contingency Factors

This study examined whether personality-related variables (i.e., need for variety and emotional intensity) can influence the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love. Should retailers focus their relationship efforts on those customers who are less likely to seek variety? Not necessarily. The results of this study failed to show that need for variety moderates the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love. Regardless of need for variety, satisfied customers tend to reciprocate a retailer's relationship efforts in the form of emotional attachment to the retailer. This finding does not support Vazquez-Carrasco and Foxall's (2006) assertion that a retailer needs to identify those customers who have a greater need for variety, since this group of customers will be the individuals less prone to engage in the relationship with the retailer.

Likewise, emotional intensity did not qualify as a moderator of the effectiveness of perceived relationship investment. This finding suggests that individuals who possess high emotional intensity in life do not carry that same intensity into the store realm. This contradicts with the thinking of social critics who charge members of materialist society with a misplaced affinity toward establishing emotional attachments to consumption objects (Fournier, 1994).

A potential reason for not finding significant moderating influences might be related to the fact that both moderating variables were somewhat skewed toward a more positive side, causing restriction in variation in each construct. This study used a median split (high vs. low) in testing the moderating variables. Given the sample size, the sample could not be trichotomized (high vs. (middle) vs. low).

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Effects of Emotion-Inducing Factors on Customer Love

Regardless of retail category, hedonic store experience was found to have a positive effect on customer love. This finding suggests that, in order to enhance customer love, retailers need to create a store environment and atmosphere that enables them to experience the various hedonic dimensions while shopping. In addition, advertising and other communication efforts designed to keep satisfied customers should not only focus on the merchandise a store offers but also extol the hedonic aspects of shopping at the store.

Some may argue that, although incorporating a hedonic experience in a product or service offering does provide a competitive advantage, not all retail offerings need to take the "experience route" to survive or prosper in the current retail environment (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). For instance, Poulsson and Kale (2004) wrote:

> *"Discount retailers as well as middle-of-the-road merchandisers such as Walmart, Sears, and Target will continue to offer relevant utility to many consumers. They need not fret if they do not happen to be located in an experiential complex such as the West Edmonton Mall ... When buying groceries, time and convenience are often of greater essence than an engaging grocery shopping experience. In the course of a consumer's commercial transactions, an occasional experience offering that is well executed is indeed appreciated. However, this does not mean that all marketers have to retool and reinvent themselves as experience marketers" (p. 275).*

However, this study confirmed the positive effect of hedonic store experience on customer love in the grocery sample as well as in the apparel sample. In fact, some upscale supermarkets have made significant strides in creating excitement and retailing theater. Successful examples include Dallas-based H.E. Butt's Central Market with its

roving "foodie" experts, impressive visual merchandising and sights and smells of fresh food (Howell, 2003).

Increasingly, retailers will be expected to create hedonic store experiences as one of the means to survive in the competitive marketplace (Jones & Reynolds, 2006). Current wisdom states that the "hedonic experience" is what shall make today's shoppers leave the Internet shopping cart behind, and waltz into a brick-and-mortar store offering the added value of entertainment (Poulsson & Kale, 2204). However, retailers need an understanding of how experiential retailing creates value for themselves and customers. Without this understanding, too much is left to gut feeling or intuition, thereby making the experiential retailing proposition incredibly speculative (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). In this regard, this study provides empirical evidence that experiential retailing strategies could be understood as a source of customer love, a long-term competitive advantage.

Also, this study confirms the idea that satisfied customers love a particular store when the store helps classify or distinguish them in relation to relevant others and when its symbolic meaning is integrated into their own self-identity. The results of this study suggest that one of the roles of strategic retail management is in elucidating satisfied customers how to feel about stores, and this is exemplified in the current move toward symbolizing many retail brands. For instance, an item as mundane as coffee has been turned into a brand experience by Starbucks. Consumers are willing to pay as much as five dollars a cup to partake in this European culinary experience (Poulsson & Kale, 2004). Also, other mass market luxury retailers have been positioned successfully as stores with symbolic connotations (e.g., Pottery Barn, Victoria's Secret, Panera Bread, Crate & Barrel, Williams-Sonoma, Bath & Body Works, Diesel, Coach, Aveda)

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(Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Unlike "old" luxury retail brands (e.g., Neiman Marcus, Brooks Brothers), "new" luxury retail brands cater to the mass market and thus generate high volumes of sales despite their relatively high prices (Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). This "luxury for the masses" trend, also termed "the new luxury," "the main-streaming of affluence," "trading-up" or "the democratization of luxury," has been widely recognized as one of the most influential factors affecting the current U.S. retail industry (e.g., Cline, 2004; Darlington, 2004; Gogoi, 2005; McCrea, 2005; Silverstein & Fiske, 2003). Silverstein and Fiske (2003) attribute this "new luxury" phenomenon to the fact that today's consumers feed their aspirations for a better life by patronizing new luxury retail brands they can afford and access. In this regard, customer love could be cultivated through retail branding with heightened self- and social-symbolism appeals.

Effect of Customer Love on Relational Outcomes

Across both samples, customer love was found to be a significant predictor of each of the four relational outcome variables: self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation. These results are in line with previous studies on love (Caroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Fournier, 1998). Customer love was found to encourage supportive activities such as self-disclosure and positive word-of-mouth on the part of the customer. Also, customer love was proven to lead to satisfied customers' behavioral loyalty and insulate them from the temptations of competitive stores.

However, these results should be interpreted in a cautious manner. Although the results of this study suggest that customer love predicts self-disclosure, this study does not suggest that customer love is the only driver of self-disclosure or that self-disclosure requires customer love. Similarly, although customer love predicts positive word-of-

mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation, this study does not propose that it is the best or only predictor of these outcome variables. Rather, this study provides empirical support for the usefulness of the customer love construct for considering differences in satisfied consumers' emotional responses to retailers. The findings of this study highlight that the customer love construct is valid because it predicts these outcomes in a manner consistent with theoretical conceptions. Consistent with Caroll and Ahuvia (2006), underlying thinking of this study was that testing the love construct developed specifically for stores might contribute to: (a) a more nuanced view of satisfied consumers' feelings about stores; (b) a quantitative measure of satisfied consumers' love response to a given store; and (c) an increased understanding and prediction of desirable relational outcomes (e.g., self-disclosure, positive word-of-mouth, behavioral loyalty, and competitive insulation).

LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study has certain limitations and consequent opportunities for future research. First, the results of this study are largely in accord with theoretical expectations. However, as in any study, further research is needed to replicate and extend the proposed model. The proposed model was tested in the context of apparel and grocery stores. While the invariance test found the model to be robust for both cases, one should be cautious in generalizing the findings to other situations. It would be interesting to apply the proposed model to other contexts such as luxury goods, services, and impulse purchases. These attempts might reveal findings that corroborate or extend the proposed model.

Second, it is still necessary to develop a more detailed understanding of the relationship between customer love and other retailing-related variables. Reverse

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causality is always a possibility and should continue to be considered in future studies that use different methodological designs. This study has performed a cross-sectional analysis and it would be desirable to carry out a longitudinal analysis using the same customers as the unit of analysis. For example, this study suggested that customer love is a key determinant of behavioral loyalty. However, this does not preclude the possibility that continuous behavioral loyalty in turn may also create customer love. Indeed, it is likely that studies over time will find that such a relationship is ongoing and reciprocal. Also, another potential limitation is related to the measurement of behavioral loyalty. The true meaning of behavioral loyalty may only be partially captured given that its measure was based on self-reports. Database information could be used as an input for measuring actual purchasing behavior. The confidence in the results could be strengthened with access to behavioral data on customer purchase histories that are not subject to potential recall loss. It would then be possible to look at longer strings of purchases and to perhaps incorporate contextual information (De Wulf et al., 2001)

Third, it must be recognized that the sample of U.S. consumers cannot necessarily be generalized to other cultural contexts. To say "I love this store!" is relatively widespread in the American society and is distinct from the way the word 'love' is used in many other cultures where the concept has a more restricted applicability (Bengtsson, 2003). Future research should recognize the ways in which the proposed model is a reflection of the Western, individualistic culture in which it was developed and tested. In conducting research in less materialistic cultures, care must be taken to ensure that the concept of customer love is socially and culturally appropriate.

An interesting avenue for future research would be to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of customer love in a Web-based shopping environment. On one hand, it seems difficult to conceive of online retailers as "emotional" relationship partners in the same sense as brick-and-mortar stores. On the other hand, the capabilities offered by rich media and a broadband connection create an intimate environment that customer love for the online retailer can be established. For example, chat rooms or other types of virtual communities for socially-oriented people are not just playgrounds where people come to play, but a place where online retailers can expand their businesses by interacting with customers and giving them the human element that they crave. eBay and Amazon owe their phenomenal success to the creation of such compelling community culture (Williams & Cothrel, 2004). Thus, it seems plausible that some satisfied customers might also be likely to develop intense emotional ties with online retailers.

Finally, the relationships between customer love and relational outcomes are probably much more complex than initially assumed. This study has looked only at a limited part of the puzzle of how customer love translates into relational outcomes. Further research on how the effect of customer love on the tested outcome variables is moderated by different consumer characteristics would advance retailing research as well as be of great managerial significance.

Also, in what way consumer characteristics moderate the relationship between perceived relationship investment and customer love is likely to be contingent on the product or service category and the buying and usage process for that category. Other consumer characteristics not included in this study, such as gender or age could potentially be important in many retail industries. An equally important issue is whether

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consumer characteristics moderate effects of emotion-inducing factors of customer love.

In the context of retailing, it is, for example, possible that improvements in hedonic store experience through store atmosphere might have a large effect on customer love for some, but not all, shoppers. A closer understanding of such mechanisms, coupled with good knowledge about the customer base of individual retail sectors, would have great managerial implications for how increases in customer love can be efficiently obtained.

CONCLUSIONS

This study began with the proposition that satisfied customers should not be viewed generically and defined simply on the basis of the functional loyalty paradigm, as has been done in past research. The present study built upon the premise that satisfied customers vary in their level of emotional attachments to retailers. Many conceptual developments have been incorporated in this study. In developing the conceptual model focusing on the mechanism of customer love formation, new ideas for the study of consumer behavior and strategic retail management have been proposed; many more are left to the agendas for future researchers. In the end, "to be loved, be lovable," and love is a powerful one.

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APPENDIX

Section I

SURVEY ON APPAREL STORE SHOPPING

Welcome to the survey! I thank you in advance for your participation. This survey is being conducted by Hye-Young Kim, a Ph.D. candidate in Retail and Consumer Sciences at the University of Tennessee. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and greatly appreciated. All information you provide in this survey will remain completely confidential.

In the sections to follow, you will be asked to complete a series of questions about your thoughts and feelings toward a specific apparel store you know and visit. Please take the time to answer these questions thoughtfully and accurately. Also, included are some questions about you as an individual. These questions are used to help me classify your answers. Your honest reactions are greatly appreciated. They will, of course, remain completely confidential.

Should you have any questions or need to get in touch with me, I can be reached at (865) 974-6243.

In this survey, the term "store" is defined as a traditional "street-side" retail shop that is located in a building. Thus, Internet, television, and catalog retailers are excluded in this survey.

Have you visited an apparel store in the past six months?

○   Yes
○   No

Section II

Please think for a moment about all the different apparel stores you visit. Try to consider the whole range of stores that you visit: including traditional department stores, discount stores, designer boutiques, and specialty stores.

I would like you to pick THE ONE APPAREL STORE with which you are SATISFIED. Please write the name of this store in the space below:

Which of the following most adequately describes the area this store is located?

○ Rural
○ Urban
○ Suburban

How long have you been a customer of this store?

○ Less than 1 year
○ 1 to 2 years
○ 3 to 4 years
○ 4 to 5 years
○ More than 5 years

What percentage of your total expenditures for clothing do you spend in this store? *Please enter a number between 0 and 100.*

Of the 10 times you select a store to buy clothes at, how many times do you select this store? *Please enter a number between 0 and 10.*

How often do you buy clothes in this store compared to other stores where you buy clothes?

- ○ Very Rarely
- ○ Rarely
- ○ Occasionally
- ○ Frequently
- ○ Very Frequently

Section III

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to provide my personal information when asked by this store.	○	○	○	○	○
I have recommended this store to lots of people.	○	○	○	○	○
This is the only store that I will buy clothing.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to disclose even sensitive personal information to this store.	○	○	○	○	○
I 'talk up' this store to my friends.	○	○	○	○	○
When I go shopping, I don't even notice competing apparel stores.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am willing to be truthful in revealing my personal information to this store.	○	○	○	○	○
I try to spread the good-word about this store.	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to accept higher prices, if this store raises its prices.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I will keep buying at this store, if its prices increase.	○	○	○	○	○
I give this store positive word-of-mouth advertising.	○	○	○	○	○
I'll 'do without' rather than shop at another store.	○	○	○	○	○

Section VI

Following is a series of questions that explores your thoughts and feelings toward this store in more detail. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store says a lot about the kind of person I am.	○	○	○	○	○
This store contributes to my image.	○	○	○	○	○
This store reflects my personality.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store adds to a social 'role' I play.	○	○	○	○	○
This store has a positive impact on what others think of me.	○	○	○	○	○
This store is an extension of my inner self.	○	○	○	○	○
This store mirrors the real me.	○	○	○	○	○
This store improves the way society views me.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This is a wonderful store.	○	○	○	○	○
This store makes me feel good.	○	○	○	○	○
This store is totally awesome.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have neutral feelings about this store.	○	○	○	○	○
This store makes me very happy.	○	○	○	○	○
I love this store!	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have no particular feelings about this store.	○	○	○	○	○
This store is a pure delight.	○	○	○	○	○
I am passionate about this store.	○	○	○	○	○
I'm very attached to this store.	○	○	○	○	○

Section V

For each item below, please indicate the number that best describes your overall experience with this store. If the way you feel about this store is well described by one end of the scale, you should indicate the number closest to the end of the scale (a "1" or a "5"). If you feel one of the ends of the scale closely but not perfectly describes your overall experience with this store, you should indicate the "2" or "4" on the scale.

This Store:

Is Functional	1	2	3	4	5	Is Pleasurable
Affords Enjoyment	1	2	3	4	5	Performs a Task
Is Useful	1	2	3	4	5	Is Fun
Is a Sensory Experience	1	2	3	4	5	Is a No-Frills Experience
Is a Necessity	1	2	3	4	5	Is an Indulgence

Section VI

The following questions concern how this store treats regular customers. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store makes efforts to increase regular customers' loyalty.	O	O	O	O	O
This store makes various efforts to improve its tie with regular customers.	O	O	O	O	O
This store really cares about keeping regular customers.	O	O	O	O	O

Section VII

The following set of statements relate to your feelings about this store's service. For each statement, please indicate the extent to which you believe this store has the feature described by the statement. There are no right or wrong answers. All I am interested in is a degree that best shows your perceptions about this store's service.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
When this store promises to do something by a certain time, it does so.	O	O	O	O	O
This store has modern-looking equipment.	O	O	O	O	O
When you have a problem, this store shows a sincere interest in solving it.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store performs the service right the first time.	O	O	O	O	O
This store's physical facilities are visually appealing.	O	O	O	O	O
This store provides its service at the time it promises to do so.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employees in this store do not give you prompt service.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Employees in this store are always willing to help you.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Employees in this store are often too busy to respond to your requests.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The behavior of employees in this store instills confidence in customers.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Materials associated with this store's service (e.g., shopping bags) are visually appealing.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Employees in this store have the knowledge to answer your questions.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
Employees in this store are consistently courteous with you.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
This store has clean, attractive, and convenient public areas (e.g., rest rooms).	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍
Employees in this store are well equipped to perform their tasks properly.	❍	❍	❍	❍	❍

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	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store does not give you individual attention.	O	O	O	O	O
This store does not have your best interests at heart.	O	O	O	O	O
Employees of this store do not understand your specific needs.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
The store's employees are neat-appearing.	O	O	O	O	O
The layout of this store enables customers to locate things easily.	O	O	O	O	O
The layout of this store enables customers to wander around at ease.	O	O	O	O	O

Section VIII

Below are several items that explore your thoughts about this store. Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with each statement.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store rewards regular customers for their patronage.	O	O	O	O	O
This store takes the time to personally get to know regular customers.	O	O	O	O	O
This store makes greater efforts for regular customers than for nonregular customers.	O	O	O	O	O

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store offers regular customers something extra because they keep buying there.	○	○	○	○	○
This store often holds personal conversations with regular customers.	○	○	○	○	○
This store offers better service to regular customers than to nonregular customers.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
This store offers discounts to regular customers for their patronage.	○	○	○	○	○
This store often inquires about the personal welfare of regular customers.	○	○	○	○	○
This store does more for regular customers than for nonregular customers.	○	○	○	○	○

Section IX

Now we are going to shift gears from the store to asking questions about you. Imagine yourself in the following situations and then choose the answer that best describes how you usually feel.

Someone compliments me. I feel:

- ○ It has little effect on me
- ○ Mildly pleased
- ○ Pleased
- ○ Very pleased
- ○ Ecstatic—on top of the world

I am happy. I feel:

- ○ It has little effect on me
- ○ Mildly happy
- ○ Happy
- ○ Extremely happy
- ○ Euphoric—so happy I could burst

Someone I am very attracted to asks me out for coffee. I feel:

- ○ Ecstatic—on top of the world
- ○ Very thrilled
- ○ Thrilled
- ○ Mildly thrilled
- ○ It has little effect on me

I am at a fun party. I feel:

- ○ It has little effect on me
- ○ A little lighthearted
- ○ Lively
- ○ Very lively
- ○ So lively that I almost feel like a new person

Something wonderful happens to me. I feel:

- ○ Extremely joyful—exuberant
- ○ Extremely glad
- ○ Glad
- ○ A little glad
- ○ It has little effect on me

I have accomplished something valuable. I feel:

- ○ It has little effect on me
- ○ A little satisfied
- ○ Satisfied
- ○ Very satisfied
- ○ So satisfied it's as if my entire life was worthwhile

A person with whom I am involved prepares me a candlelight dinner. I feel:

- ○ It has little effect on me
- ○ Slightly romantic
- ○ Romantic
- ○ Very romantic
- ○ So passionate nothing else matters

I am involved in a romantic relationship. I feel:

- ○ So consumed with passion I can think of nothing else
- ○ Very passionate
- ○ Passionate
- ○ Mildly passionate
- ○ It has little effect on me

Someone surprises me with a gift. I feel:

- ○ It has little effect on me
- ○ A little grateful
- ○ Grateful
- ○ Very grateful
- ○ So grateful I want to run out and buy them a gift in return

Section X

Please indicate your degree of agreement or disagreement with the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I like to experience novelty and change in my daily routine.	○	○	○	○	○
I would like a job that would offer change, variety and travel, even though it would involve some danger.	○	○	○	○	○
I continually seek out new ideas and experiences.	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
I like to switch activities continuously.	○	○	○	○	○
When things become boring, I like to find a new and unfamiliar experience.	○	○	○	○	○
I prefer a routine way of life to an unpredictable one full of changes.	○	○	○	○	○
I am a person who always likes to do the same things rather than try new and different things.	○	○	○	○	○

Section XI

The following questions will be used for description purposes only. Your information will remain completely confidential.

What is your sex?

○ Female
○ Male

What is your age?

Please indicate the highest level of education completed.

○ High School or Less
○ Vocational/Technical School (2 year)
○ Some College
○ College Graduate (4 year)
○ Master's Degree (MS)
○ Doctoral Degree (PhD)
○ Professional Degree (MD, JD, etc.)
○ Other :

What is your ethnic background?

○ Caucasian
○ African-American
○ Hispanic
○ Asian or Pacific Islander
○ Native American
○ Other :

Including yourself, how many people live in your household?

What is your annual household income (before taxes)?

○ Under $20,000
○ $20,000 to $29,999
○ $30,000 to $39,999
○ $40,000 to $49,999
○ $50,000 to $59,999
○ $60,000 to $69,999
○ $70,000 to $79,999
○ $80,000 to $89,999
○ $90,000 to $99,999
○ Over $100,000

What is your marital status?

○ Single
○ Married / Living with partner
○ Divorced
○ Separated
○ Widowed

Which of the following categories best describes your job?

○ Full-time
○ Part-time
○ Retired
○ Unemployed

VITA

Hye-Young Kim was born on January 12, 1969, in Seoul, Korea, as the youngest daughter to Kwang-Duk Kim and Ok-Sun Cho. She received an M.S. degree in Merchandising from the University of North Texas (2003), and a B.A. in Education, from Hong-Ik University in Seoul, Korea (1991). During her graduate career, she has presented research papers at national/international meetings, including the American Collegiate Retailing Association (ACRA) and the International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA). At the 2005 ACRA conference, she received the "ICSC Best Paper Award" and this paper was published in the *Journal of Shopping Center Research*. Starting Fall 2007, she will serve as Assistant Professor of Apparel, Merchandising, Design, and Textiles at Washington State University. Beyond her dissertation research on customer love, she has conducted research on the dynamics of retail competition and experiential e-tailing. Her work in these areas will be published in the *Clothing & Textiles Research Journal* and the *Journal of Value Chain Management.*