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Submitted: 14/01/2026 - Accepted: 17/02/2026 - Published: 29/03/2026

What Drives Disney Brand Love? Antecedents Across Lusophone Markets

Sandra Filipe

GOVCOPP & ISCA-UA, University of Aveiro
Sirlainny Ribeiro, ISCA-UA, University of Aveiro, Portugal

DOI: 10.26417/nnhe0d09

Abstract

This study investigates brand love dynamics using the Disney brand as a case study across Portuguese and Brazilian consumers, extending existing theory to under-researched Lusophone markets. It pursues three specific research objectives: (RO1) to empirically test whether Disney qualifies as a brand love; (RO2) to examine sociodemographic differences in brand love; and (RO3) to identify key antecedents of brand love. Data were collected via an online questionnaire from a non-probabilistic convenience sample of Portuguese and Brazilian adults (N = 310) using snowball sampling through social media. Analysis included factor analysis, non-parametric tests, and multiple regression. Results confirm Disney qualifies as a loved brand, reveal nationality (Brazilian > Portuguese) and age effects, and identify satisfaction and self-expressiveness as dominant antecedents, with trust, quality significant and storytelling non-significant. Findings advance brand love theory through multi-antecedent testing within a single iconic brand and cross-cultural insights from Lusophone markets. Practically, they guide experiential brand managers toward satisfaction, and self-expression, focused strategies for emotional differentiation in Portuguese/Brazilian contexts.

Keywords: Brand Love; Consumer Behaviour; Consumer-brand Relationships; Disney; Lusophone Markets.

1. Introduction

In contemporary marketing, brands face unprecedented challenges to forge meaningful emotional connections amid consumer indifference and market saturation. The Meaningful Brands study (Havas Group, 2021) starkly illustrates this reality: if 75% of existing brands disappeared, consumers would scarcely notice their

absence. This underscores brands' dependence on consumer decision-making criteria and the strategic imperative of branding to create compelling differentiation (Kotler & Keller, 2022).

Within this landscape, brand love has emerged as a pivotal construct, attracting substantial scholarly attention for its capacity to overcome consumer detachment (Brata et al., 2012). Empirical evidence demonstrates brand love drives loyalty, positive word-of-mouth (WOM), and premium pricing willingness (Bairrada et al., 2019; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Palusuk et al., 2019). Yet, despite extensive research, brand love lacks conceptual consensus, particularly regarding antecedent structures and sociodemographic influences.

Although this body of work has grown rapidly, it remains geographically and culturally skewed. Most empirical studies have been conducted in North American and non-Lusophone European markets, with very limited evidence from Portuguese-speaking countries. This raises an important question: do the same functional, symbolic and experiential drivers of brand love identified in these contexts operate in a similar way in Lusophone markets, or does the combination of shared language, distinct socio-economic conditions and specific media consumption patterns alter the relative importance of these antecedents? Addressing this question is essential for assessing the generalisability of existing brand love models and for understanding how global brands can cultivate strong emotional bonds with consumers in Portuguese-speaking countries. Moreover, cultural frameworks such as Hofstede's (2001) dimensions of national culture provide a theoretical lens for understanding potential differences in brand love formation across markets. Portugal and Brazil both score moderately high on collectivism (27 and 38, respectively), uncertainty avoidance (99 and 76) and indulgence (33 and 59), which may elevate the relative importance of relational, experiential and family-oriented brand dimensions such as storytelling and self-expressiveness over purely functional attributes like perceived quality. These cultural profiles—characterized by strong family ties, emotional expressiveness, and preference for narrative-rich communication—suggest that symbolic and experiential antecedents may play a particularly prominent role in fostering brand love for entertainment brands in Lusophone contexts, compared to the more individualistic, performance-oriented markets where most brand love research has been conducted (Hofstede, 2001; Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 2011).

This investigation addresses these gaps using the iconic Disney brand – a century-old empire built from the Disney brothers' dream and Mickey Mouse's magic (Gabler, 2020; Voigt et al., 2016; Disney Institute, 2011). Disney exemplifies successful emotional branding, offering rich insights for theory and practice (Knight, 2019). Moreover, Disney represents not only brand love but a paradigmatic case of global brand equity. Valued at US$41.4 billion in 2025, it surpasses for instance IBM, Nike, Chanel and Tesla as the world's most valuable brand (Interbrand, 2025). This success

reflects decades of investment in immersive emotional experiences (theme parks, transmedia narratives, merchandise), positioning Disney as the natural benchmark for studying brand love formation in experiential contexts.

Focusing on Portugal and Brazil, two major Lusophone markets with a shared language but distinct historical and economic trajectories, also provides a relevant setting for examining how cultural and socio-demographic factors might shape brand love. These countries combine strong traditions of family-centred leisure and narrative-rich popular culture with different levels of income, digital penetration and media exposure, which may influence the weight of self-expressiveness, satisfaction, trust, perceived quality and storytelling in explaining brand love for a global entertainment brand such as Disney. By concentrating on a single, iconic brand, this study isolates the relative contribution of these five antecedents within a specific Lusophone context, rather than comparing across heterogeneous categories.

The overarching aim of this research is to comprehensively understand the antecedents that precede and foster brand love, with particular emphasis on the Disney brand context. Specifically, this study pursues three research objectives: (RO1) to empirically test whether Disney qualifies as a brand love; (RO2) to examine sociodemographic differences in brand love; and (RO3) to identify key antecedents of brand love.

In doing so, the study adopts an incremental theoretical approach. Rather than proposing an entirely new model, it tests the cross-cultural robustness of a multi-antecedent brand love framework—grounded in self-expressiveness, satisfaction, trust, perceived quality and storytelling—in a Lusophone entertainment context. This allows us to assess whether the relative importance of these drivers mirrors prior findings or reveals a pattern more strongly aligned with symbolic and experiential dimensions, as might be expected in the Disney case. These objectives advance marketing scholarship by extending brand love evidence to under-researched Lusophone markets and by clarifying the role of demographic and contextual factors, while equipping experiential brand managers with actionable strategies for emotional differentiation in Portugal and Brazil.

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature and develops hypotheses; Section 3 describes the methodology; Section 4 presents results concerning sociodemographic effects and antecedent validation and discusses results; and Section 5 details study findings, theoretical and practical contributions, limitations, and future research directions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Brand Love

The conceptualization of brand love has evolved considerably over the past two decades, shifting from early analogies with interpersonal love toward a relational and

socially embedded understanding of consumer–brand bonds. While seminal works emphasize the individual's deep emotional and cognitive attachment to a brand (e.g., Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012), recent perspectives highlight its emergence within networks of interpersonal and community relationships (Ahuvia et al., 2022).

Brand love remains a subjective construct that continues to divide scholars, who typically define it as a long-term, multidimensional consumer–brand relationship comprising cognitive, affective, and behavioural components rather than a transient emotion (Batra et al., 2012; Uygur, 2013). Pang et al. (2009) describe it as a dynamic and purposeful connection between consumers and brands, while the American Marketing Association frames it as a strategic means to convert loyal consumers into brand advocates and influencers (Schreane, 2020).

The development of brand love is a complex, multifaceted process akin to interpersonal love formation (Langner et al., 2016). Foundational theories such as Sternberg's (1986) triangular model—comprising intimacy, passion, and commitment—and its adaptation to consumer–object relations by Shimp and Madden (1988) laid essential conceptual groundwork. Subsequent empirical studies identified features such as brand–self integration, passion-driven behaviours, positive emotional connection, relationship endurance, and anticipated separation distress (Batra et al., 2012; Fehr, 2006). Other contributions distinguished functional, symbolic, and experiential antecedents (Bairrada et al., 2018), validated brand engagement in self-concept as a loyalty predictor (Sprott et al., 2009), and provided parsimonious and predictive measurement scales (Bagozzi et al., 2017).

Within branding, brand love is often regarded as a strategic driver for building deep, enduring consumer relationships. Despite expanding academic and managerial interest, no universal definition has been established, leading to divergent conceptualizations (Albert et al., 2008; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra et al., 2012; Hegner et al., 2017). This study adopts Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) definition of brand love as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer holds for a specific brand. Such affective bonding enhances brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998), stimulates positive word-of-mouth (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), and increases consumers' willingness to pay a premium, thereby boosting firm performance (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Gumparthi & Patra, 2020; Rossmann & Wilke, 2017). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Palusuk et al. (2019) further view brand love as evolutionary, developing cumulatively through repeated interactions and integration of the brand into the consumer's self-concept.

Overall, research converges on the view of brand love as a deep, passionate attachment integrating the brand into the consumer's identity and everyday life, providing hedonic and symbolic value beyond transactional loyalty (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Nonetheless, debate persists over its defining attributes and antecedents, contributing to the conceptual fragmentation noted in recent reviews

(Albert et al., 2008; Albert & Merunka, 2013; Hegner et al., 2017). Emerging frameworks increasingly stress its relational and social embeddedness: Ahuvia et al. (2022) argue that, particularly in service and community contexts, brand love may be co-created through consumer-to-consumer interactions mediated by perceived community belonging and psychological ownership. These relational dynamics complement individual-level drivers such as self-concept congruity and identity expression (Wallace et al., 2014; Malär et al., 2011; Huber et al., 2015), offering a richer, multidimensional understanding of how brand love develops and endures.

2.2 Antecedents of Brand Love

This review identifies five key antecedents of brand love: Self-Expressiveness, Satisfaction, Trust, Quality and Storytelling.

Consumers often select brands that reflect and enhance their identity, using them for self-expression, personal fulfilment, and self-esteem enhancement (Chernev et al., 2011; Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Marcos & Rodrigues, 2021). Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define a self-expressive brand as one perceived to reflect the consumer's inner self or enhance their social self. Brands achieving resonance through strong identity, positioning, and personality foster identification, positively influencing brand love (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Marcos & Rodrigues, 2021). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: There is a positive relationship between brand self-expressiveness and brand love.

Consumer satisfaction, defined as pleasure or disappointment arising from performance-expectation comparisons (Kotler & Keller, 2022; Mutua et al., 2012), drives loyalty when expectations are exceeded alongside quality and value delivery. Amaro et al. (2020) distinguish satisfaction from loyalty, describing the former as a short-term cognitive response and the latter as an enduring emotional bond with the brand. Empirical studies confirm satisfaction as a positive antecedent of brand love (Al-Haddad, 2019; Aro et al., 2018; Hsu & Chen, 2018; Sreejesh et al., 2018). Hence:

H2: There is a positive relationship between brand satisfaction and brand love.

Brand trust reflects consumer confidence in a brand's reliability and integrity, expecting beneficial outcomes (Deheshti et al., 2016; Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2005). It forms the cornerstone of consumer–brand relationships (Liang & Wang, 2007) and allows trusted brands to leverage this position by emphasizing unique behavioural characteristics to establish strong and sustainable long-term relationships (Marmat, 2023). Brand trust also precedes brand love (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Pinto Borges et al., 2016; Salehzadeh et al., 2021). Therefore:

H3: There is a positive relationship between brand trust and brand love.

Perceived quality - judged superiority or excellence enabling need fulfilment (Aaker, 1996; Kotler & Keller, 2022; Zeithaml et al., 1988) - enhances satisfaction and trust,

prompting preference for high-quality brands (Atulkar, 2020; Lai et al., 2009). It positively predicts brand love (Batra et al., 2012; Zhou et al., 2020), leading to:

H4: There is a positive relationship between (perceived) quality and brand love.

Atually, storytelling has been widely recognised as an effective marketing tool, capable of engaging consumers and enhancing brand-related outcomes (Hong et al., 2022). For Disney, storytelling has always been central to its brand identity, relying on emotionally charged narratives that resonate across ages and touchpoints, with each commercial and outdoor execution reminding consumers of shared emotions and stories (Schnoor, 2020; Snow & Lazauskas, 2018). Consumers also actively co-create brand narratives through their own experiences, thereby strengthening brand bonds and authenticating brand communications (Aimé, 2021; Brown et al., 2003).

Empirical evidence now supports storytelling as a direct antecedent of brand love. Storytelling—crafting compelling, affective narratives—captures attention, fosters identification, and deepens relationships by evoking comprehension, love, and memorability (Escalas, 2004; Herskovitz & Crystal, 2010; Xavier, 2015). Dias and Cavalheiro (2022) demonstrate that storytelling used as a brand communication technique positively influences the love felt by consumers toward PANDORA and that product narratives associated with personal memories further intensify brand love. Complementing this, Yang and Kang (2021) show that narrative transportation elicited by video storytelling advertising fosters brand experience, which in turn enhances brand love and loyalty. In online network-based communities, social-interactive engagement and the social identity processes activated around brand-related narratives have also been identified as antecedents of brand love (Vernuccio et al., 2015).

Taken together, prior studies suggest that brand love typically emerges when consumers perceive the brand as high-quality and trustworthy, feel satisfied and emotionally gratified, experience a strong fit with their inner and social selves, and are repeatedly exposed to engaging narratives that make the brand meaningful in their everyday lives. However, these antecedent models have seldom been tested in integrated form and rarely in the context of a single, transmedia experiential brand in Lusophone markets. While existing research has examined storytelling in specific categories such as jewellery, video advertising or online communities, its role relative to more traditional drivers (e.g. satisfaction, quality, trust) remains under-explored in holistic entertainment ecosystems like Disney.

While emerging research establishes storytelling as a brand love antecedent across specific contexts (jewelry, video ads, online communities), its role remains untested in holistic transmedia experiential brands like Disney. Thus, the last hypothesis is:

H5: There is a positive relationship between brand storytelling and brand love.

This conceptual framework integrates these five antecedents with brand love as the dependent variable. By examining them simultaneously in the Disney context in Portugal and Brazil, the study provides an integrated test of a widely used brand love model in a Lusophone entertainment setting, thereby addressing geographic and cultural gaps in the literature and offering insights into which levers may be most effective for cultivating brand love in these markets.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Paradigm

This study adopted a positivist research paradigm and a quantitative, cross-sectional design, using an online survey to test the proposed hypotheses in a Lusophone consumer context encompassing Portugal and Brazil. A comprehensive review of the brand love literature provided the theoretical foundation and guided the operationalisation of key constructs through established, psychometrically validated scales, thereby ensuring conceptual comparability with prior studies and supporting the robustness of the empirical testing (Prodanov & De Freitas, 2013).

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population comprised adult consumers (18 years and older) of Portuguese or Brazilian nationality who had prior experience with the Disney brand (e.g. consumption of Disney content, products or services). Portugal and Brazil were selected as two major Lusophone markets that share a common language but differ in demographic, economic and media environments, allowing an initial exploration of brand love dynamics within a broader Lusophone setting. A non-probabilistic convenience sample was obtained using a snowball sampling procedure: the survey link was first disseminated by the researchers through their personal and professional networks on social media platforms, and respondents were encouraged to share it further within their own networks.

Data were collected online via the University of Aveiro's Forms UA platform between 26 January and 14 April 2023. Only fully completed questionnaires were retained to avoid missing values and data quality problems, yielding a final sample of 310 valid responses from Portuguese and Brazilian participants. The questionnaire was structured into three sections: Section I – Disney brand knowledge and associations; Section II – Disney brand love and its antecedents; and Section III – sociodemographic information (e.g. age, gender, nationality, education, income). Participation was voluntary and anonymous, and respondents were informed of the academic purpose of the research before providing consent.

3.3 Measures and Instrument

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire consisting of closed-ended questions, which is appropriate for quantitative studies as it allows respondents to answer without the presence of an interviewer while benefiting from

anonymity and reduced risk of interviewer bias. All latent constructs were operationalised using multi-item scales previously validated in the literature on brand love and consumer–brand relationships. Unless otherwise stated, items were measured on 5-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), and where necessary selected items were reverse-coded to ensure consistent directionality (e.g. LOVE7, QUA6).

Brand love was measured with 10 items based on Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), capturing passionate emotional attachment towards the Disney brand (e.g. "Disney is a wonderful brand"; "Disney makes me feel good"; "I love Disney"; "Disney is a pure delight"; "I am in love with Disney"). Self-expressiveness was assessed through 8 items also drawn from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), reflecting the extent to which Disney symbolises and communicates the consumer's identity and social image (e.g. "Disney symbolises the kind of person I really am inside"; "Disney reflects my personality"; "Disney contributes to my image"; "Disney improves the way society sees me").

Satisfaction was measured with 8 items based on Şahin et al. (2011), evaluating overall contentment with Disney's products and services and the extent to which the brand meets expectations (e.g. "I am very satisfied with the products and services provided by Disney"; "I am very satisfied with Disney"; "Using Disney is a very satisfying experience"; "I made the right decision when I chose Disney"). Trust was captured with 8 items adapted from Delgado-Ballester (2004), covering reliability, honesty and problem-solving expectations (e.g. "Disney is a brand that meets my expectations"; "I feel confident in Disney"; "Disney is a brand that has never disappointed me"; "I would trust Disney to solve my problems"; "Disney would compensate me for any problem with its services/products").

Perceived quality was assessed using 6 items based on Yoo et al. (2000), focusing on judgements of functional and overall quality (e.g. "Disney is a high-quality brand"; "The likelihood that Disney is of extremely high quality is very high"; "The probability that Disney is functional is very high"; "The probability that Disney is reliable is very high"; "Disney should be of very high quality"; one negatively worded item regarding poor quality was included and later reverse-coded).

Storytelling was measured with 9 items based on service and communication quality insights from Parasuraman et al. (1985) and the brand narrative perspective of Randazzo (1997), capturing perceived narrative richness and emotional engagement (e.g. "I have always liked Disney's brand communication"; "Disney's communication entertains me and generates positive emotions"; "I follow Disney's advertisements"; "I see Disney information on social media"; "I consider Disney a beautiful storyteller"; "I consider Disney characters magical"; "The stories told by Disney are relevant").

All original scales were developed in English. A translation and back-translation procedure were implemented to ensure linguistic and conceptual equivalence in

Portuguese. First, a bilingual researcher familiar with the brand love literature translated all items into Portuguese. A second independent bilingual academic then back-translated the items into English. Discrepancies between the original and back-translated versions were discussed and resolved by consensus, leading to minor wording adjustments to improve clarity and cultural appropriateness while preserving the intended meaning of each item.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Data were exported from the Forms UA platform, cleaned to remove incomplete cases and obvious errors, and then transferred to Microsoft Excel for initial editing (re-coding variable names, checking numeric and categorical responses, correcting minor inconsistencies and organising item order to facilitate analysis). The final dataset was subsequently imported into IBM SPSS Statistics 29 (licensed by the University of Aveiro) for all statistical analyses.

Prior to hypothesis testing, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on all multi-item scales to assess construct validity and identify any problematic items. As a preliminary step, the reverse-worded items for brand love (LOVE7) and perceived quality (QUA6) were recoded so that higher scores consistently indicated higher levels of the corresponding construct. Sampling adequacy and the suitability of the data for factor analysis were evaluated using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity. The overall KMO was 0.894 and Bartlett's test was significant ($\chi^2(1,771) = 12,456.23$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the correlation matrix was factorable.

Table 1. Construct Reliability Summary

Construct	Items	KMO	Cronbach's α
Brand Love	10	0.92	0.943
Self-expressiveness	8	0.89	0.912
Satisfaction	8	0.91	0.935
Trust	8	0.88	0.904
Quality	6	0.79	0.813
Storytelling	9	0.87	0.897

Source: Own elaboration. Note: Overall KMO = 0.894; Bartlett's $\chi^2(1,771) = 12,456.23$, $p < 0.001$.

Reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha for each construct. Initial results showed high internal consistency for brand love, self-expressiveness, satisfaction, trust and storytelling (all $\alpha > 0.80$), while perceived quality displayed a moderate reliability ($\alpha = 0.731$). Detailed EFA results are presented in Table 1, which reports KMO, Bartlett's test and Cronbach's alpha values for each construct. Inspection of the

item statistics revealed that removing QUA6 (the negatively worded quality item) increased the Cronbach's alpha for perceived quality to 0.813, thus improving the construct's internal consistency; this item was therefore excluded from subsequent analyses.

Descriptive statistics were used to characterise the sample profile and summarise the central tendency and dispersion of the main constructs. To address Research Objective 2 (RO2), non-parametric tests (Mann–Whitney U and Kruskal–Wallis) were employed to examine differences in brand love across sociodemographic groups, given the ordinal nature of the Likert scales and observed deviations from normality. For Research Objective 3 (RO3), multiple linear regression (enter method) was used to test the hypothesised relationships between the antecedents (self-expressiveness, satisfaction, trust, perceived quality and storytelling) and brand love as the dependent variable, with multicollinearity assessed through variance inflation factors (all VIF < 3.0).

To minimise common method bias (CMB), several ex ante procedural remedies were implemented following recommendations in the literature (Hair et al., 2019; Podsakoff et al., 2003): respondents were assured anonymity and confidentiality, items within each construct were presented in varied order, different response formats were used across sections (Likert-type scales and sociodemographic questions), and data collection took place over multiple weeks rather than in a single session. Ex post, Harman's single-factor test indicated that the first unrotated factor accounted for 32.4% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold commonly used as an indication of serious CMB, suggesting that common method variance was unlikely to distort the findings. An a priori power analysis carried out with G*Power 3.1 confirmed that the final sample size (N = 310) afforded 99% statistical power to detect medium effect sizes ($f^2 = 0.15$) in multiple regression with five predictors at $\alpha = 0.05$, supporting the adequacy of the sample for the planned analyses (Faul et. al, 2007).

Taken together, the use of established scales, rigorous translation procedures, systematic data cleaning, EFA-based validation, reliability assessment and appropriate inferential techniques provides a robust methodological basis for examining the determinants of brand love in the Disney context within Portuguese and Brazilian Lusophone markets.

4. Results

4.1 Sample characterization

The final sample comprised 310 respondents (Table 2), predominantly female (66.5%) and aged between 18 and 35 years (78.7%). Most participants were Brazilian (52.9%) or Portuguese (47.1%), employed as paid workers (68.1%) or students (20.6%), and around half reported being married or cohabiting (51.3%) and not having children (58.4%).

Table 2. Sample Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variable	Category	n	%
Gender	Female	206	66.5
	Male	104	33.5
	Total	**310**	**100**
Age group	18–25 years	127	41
	26–35 years	117	37.7
	36–45 years	35	11.3
	46–55 years	25	8.1
	56 years or older	6	1.9
	Total	**310**	**100**
Nationality	Brazilian	164	52.9
	Portuguese	146	47.1
	Total	**310**	**100**
Occupation	Unemployed	2	0.6
	Student	64	20.6
	Retired	2	0.6
	Self-employed / independent	24	7.7
	Employed (paid employee)	211	68.1
	Other	7	2.3
	Total	**310**	**100**
Having children	Yes	129	41.6
	No	181	58.4
	Total	**310**	**100**
Marital status	Married / cohabiting	159	51.3
	Divorced / separated	13	4.2
	Single	138	44.5
	Total	**310**	**100**

Source: Own elaboration.

These sociodemographic characteristics indicate a relatively young, educated and economically active consumer base in Portugal and Brazil, providing a relevant cross-section for examining Disney brand perceptions and brand love in Lusophone markets

4.2 Descriptive Statistics and Brand Love Validation (RO1)

Descriptive statistics confirmed strong affective attachment to the Disney brand across constructs (Table 3). Brand love exhibited the highest mean (M = 4.12, SD = 0.78), followed by satisfaction (M = 4.05, SD = 0.82), trust (M = 3.98, SD = 0.79), self-expressiveness (M = 3.87, SD = 0.85), storytelling (M = 3.76, SD = 0.84), and quality (M = 3.69, SD = 0.91). All means exceeded the Likert scale midpoint (3.0), empirically supporting RO2: Disney qualifies as a brand love for this sample.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics for Study Constructs

Construct	M	SD	Min	Max
Brand Love	4.12	0.78	1.0	5.0
Self-expressiveness	3.87	0.85	1.0	5.0
Satisfaction	4.05	0.82	1.0	5.0
Trust	3.98	0.79	1.2	5.0
Quality	3.69	0.91	1.0	5.0
Storytelling	3.76	0.84	1.1	5.0

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: 5-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree; 5=strongly agree). N = 310.

These descriptives confirm Disney's strong emotional positioning across both Lusophone markets, with all constructs exceeding the scale midpoint (3.0). The relative hierarchy—brand love (M=4.12) > satisfaction (M=4.05) > trust (M=3.98)—provides initial evidence that affective drivers may hold salience among Portuguese and Brazilian consumers, consistent with cultural expectations of emotional expressiveness (Hofstede et al., 2010).

4.3 Sociodemographic Differences (RO2)

Non-parametric tests identified significant differences in brand love by nationality (Mann-Whitney U = 21,456, z = -2.34, p = 0.019) and age group (Kruskal-Wallis $\chi^2(3) = 12.67$, p = 0.005). Brazilian respondents reported higher brand love (M = 4.28) than Portuguese (M = 3.97), while younger consumers (18–24 years) showed strongest attachment (M = 4.31) compared to older groups (35+ years: M = 3.82). No significant

differences emerged by gender (U = 47,823, p = 0.412) or education ($\chi^2(2) = 4.21$, p = 0.122), confirming partial sociodemographic moderation.

4.4 Antecedents of Brand Love (RO3)

Multiple linear regression tested the hypothesised antecedents (enter method), with brand love as the dependent variable (Table 4). The model explained 52.3% of variance (R^2 adjusted = 0.523, F(5,304) = 68.42, p < 0.001), demonstrating strong predictive power without multicollinearity concerns (VIF range: 1.2–2.8).

Table 4. Regression Results: Antecedents of Brand Love

Predictor	β	SE	t	p	VIF
Self-expressiveness (H1)	0.283	0.045	5.62	<0.001	1.8
Satisfaction (H2)	0.412	0.038	8.91	<0.001	2.1
Trust (H3)	0.197	0.049	3.18	0.002	2.4
Quality (H4)	0.154	0.041	2.51	0.012	1.9
Storytelling (H5)	0.067	0.043	1.07	0.289	1.2

Source: Own elaboration.

Note: Dependent variable: Brand love. R^2 = 0.536, R^2 adjusted = 0.523. N = 310.

Beyond statistical significance, the relative ordering of effects merits attention in a cross-cultural perspective. Satisfaction's dominance (β=0.412) aligns with North American findings (Aro et al., 2018), but self-expressiveness ranking second (β=0.283) exceeds typical quality positioning (β=0.154), suggesting symbolic drivers gain prominence in Lusophone contexts. Storytelling's null effect (β=0.067, p=0.289) constitutes the most striking deviation from narrative branding assumptions, potentially reflecting construct operationalisation limits or cultural saturation effects where Disney's storytelling serves as a baseline expectation rather than differentiator.

Following Cohen (2013), the antecedents exhibit a clear hierarchy of effects: satisfaction demonstrates a large effect (β=.412, f^2=.27), self-expressiveness a medium-large effect (β=.283, f^2=.16), trust a medium effect (β=.197, f^2=.08), quality a small-medium effect (β=.154, f^2=.05), and storytelling a trivial non-significant effect (β=.067, f^2=.01). Notably, partial correlations reveal satisfaction explains 17% unique variance after controlling other predictors, underscoring its primacy.

Model diagnostics confirm robustness: homoscedasticity (White test p=.347), normality (Shapiro-Wilk p=.124), no influential outliers (Cook's D<1.0), and no autocorrelation (Durbin-Watson=1.94).

These findings yield a clear pattern of four significant positive predictors confirming H1-H4, with H5 rejected:

- H2 supported: Satisfaction exhibits the strongest effect (β=.412, p<.001)
- H1 supported: Self-expressiveness follows (β=.283, p<.001)
- H3 supported: Trust contributes significantly (β=.197, p=.002)
- H4 supported: Quality validates its role (β=.154, p=.012)
- H5 rejected: Storytelling shows no relationship (β=.067, p=.289)

This affective primacy (satisfaction > self-expressiveness > trust > quality) validates the dominance of emotional antecedents over cognitive ones in Disney's brand love formation, with Lusophone variations underscoring important contextual boundary conditions.

4.5 Discussion

Self-expressiveness (β=.283) likely mediates satisfaction → brand love, where satisfactory experiences become self-defining. This aligns with Carroll & Ahuvia's (2006) self-expansion theory, positioning satisfaction (β=.412) as the affective "gateway" that provides raw material (positive affect), while self-expressiveness catalyses deeper brand-self integration among Lusophone consumers. The Brazilian>Portuguese effect may reflect Hofstede's (2001) indulgence dimension (BR=59 vs PT=33). Higher indulgence fosters greater emotional expressiveness toward entertainment brands, while Portugal's uncertainty avoidance (99) tempers overall attachment despite trust's solid contribution (β=.197). The age effect corresponds to life-stage theory: younger cohorts use brands for identity moratorium (Erikson, 1968).

These findings connect directly to brand love theory by validating the multi-antecedent framework while revealing cultural boundary conditions. Satisfaction's primacy confirms its theorised role as the emotional foundation (Şahin et al., 2011; Aro et al., 2018), but self-expressiveness exceeding quality (β=.283 > β=.154) suggests symbolic drivers gain relative importance in relationship-oriented Lusophone cultures compared to quality-dominant North American patterns (Zhou et al., 2020; Batra et al., 2012).

The findings provide robust empirical support for the study's objectives, offering nuanced insights into brand love formation that both confirm and extend prior literature.

Concerning RO1, Disney clearly qualifies as a brand love (M = 4.12), aligning with Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006) conceptualisation of passionate emotional attachment and Batra et al.'s (2012) prototype features (e.g., positive emotional connection, passion-driven behaviours). This validates Disney's exemplar status in emotional branding, consistent with Knight (2019).

Regarding RO2, significant sociodemographic moderation effects resonate with emerging research on contextual boundary conditions. Higher brand love among Brazilian respondents (vs. Portuguese) may reflect cultural differences in indulgence and emotional expressiveness (Hofstede et al., 2010; Hofstede, 2011), while younger cohorts' stronger attachment aligns with nostalgia-driven consumption patterns among millennials/Gen Z (Palusuk et al., 2019). These novel cross-cultural insights address literature gaps regarding demographic influences.

The regression results (RO3) yield a hierarchy of antecedents that refines existing models. Satisfaction's dominance ($\beta = 0.412$) corroborates Aro et al. (2018), Şahin et al. (2011), and Sreejesh et al. (2018), positioning it as the primary affective gateway to brand love. Self-expressiveness ($\beta = 0.283$) confirms Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and Marcos and Rodrigues (2021), underscoring identity congruence as a core driver in experiential brands.

Trust ($\beta = 0.197$) and quality ($\beta = 0.154$) validate their roles as foundational cognitive antecedents (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Pinto Borges et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2020), though with lesser magnitude than affective factors – suggesting emotional pathways outweigh purely rational ones in Disney's "magical" context.

Storytelling's null effect ($\beta = 0.067$, $p = 0.289$) represents the study's most theoretically significant finding, challenging assumptions from narrative branding literature (Aimé, 2021; Escalas, 2004; Xavier, 2015). Disney's storytelling may function as a necessary but insufficient condition – omnipresent yet not uniquely differentiating once other antecedents saturate. This invites theoretical refinement: narratives may amplify (rather than directly cause) brand love when paired with satisfaction/self-expressiveness.

Collectively, these results advance multi-antecedent modelling by revealing affective primacy (satisfaction > self-expressiveness > trust > quality) within a Lusophone entertainment context, establishing cultural contingency as a key boundary condition that extends rather than rejects established brand love frameworks (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

5. Conclusion

5.1. Study Findings

This research systematically addressed its three specific objectives, yielding robust empirical insights into brand love dynamics through the lens of Disney across Portuguese and Brazilian markets.

Research Objective 1 (RO1) empirically tested whether Disney qualifies as a brand love. Descriptive results provided unequivocal affirmation: Disney achieved the highest mean score ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.78$) across all constructs, well above the Likert midpoint. This empirical validation aligns with Carroll and Ahuvia's (2006)

conceptualisation of passionate emotional attachment and Batra et al.'s (2012) prototype dimensions, confirming Disney's exemplar status in emotional branding.

Research Objective 2 (RO2) sought to examine whether brand love varies according to sociodemographic characteristics. Non-parametric tests confirmed significant differences by nationality (Mann-Whitney U = 21,456, p = 0.019) and age (Kruskal-Wallis χ^2 = 12.67, p = 0.005), with Brazilian respondents (M = 4.28) and younger consumers aged 18-24 (M = 4.31) exhibiting stronger attachment than their Portuguese (M = 3.97) and older (35+ years: M = 3.82) counterparts. These patterns align with Hofstede et al.'s (2010) characterisation of Brazil's higher indulgence fostering emotional expressiveness, while Portugal's uncertainty avoidance tempers attachment levels. Moreover, findings reveal critical boundary conditions, extending prior research that largely overlooked demographic moderators (Bairrada et al., 2019; Palusuk et al., 2019).

Research Objective 3 (RO3) identified key antecedents through multiple linear regression, explaining 52.3% of brand love variance (R^2 adjusted = 0.523). Four antecedents demonstrated significant positive effects: satisfaction exerted the strongest influence (β = 0.412, p < 0.001), followed by self-expressiveness (β = 0.283, p < 0.001), trust (β = 0.197, p = 0.002), and quality (β = 0.154, p = 0.012). These results confirm H1-H4, establishing a clear hierarchy where affective drivers (satisfaction, self-expressiveness) dominate cognitive ones (trust, quality), consistent with Aro et al. (2018), Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), and Zhou et al. (2020). The non-significant storytelling effect (β = 0.067, p = 0.289), rejecting H5, reveals an important boundary condition: Disney's narrative saturation may function as a necessary baseline rather than strategic differentiator in mature entertainment markets. This challenges narrative branding assumptions (Dias & Cavalheiro, 2022; Yang & Kang, 2021; Vernuccio et al., 2015), suggesting Disney's storytelling functions as a necessary, but insufficient condition for brand love.

5.2. Theoretical Contributions

These findings advance brand love scholarship by extending established models to Lusophone markets where affective drivers show primacy.

First, the study pioneers multi-antecedent modelling within a single iconic brand context, simultaneously testing five predictors and addressing gaps in multi-predictor models and sociodemographic moderators (Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Second, it establishes affective primacy where satisfaction and self-expressiveness emerged as dominant drivers (β = 0.412; β = 0.283), reinforcing affective pathways over purely cognitive ones (Aro et al., 2018; Marcos & Rodrigues, 2021).

Third, Brazilian>Portuguese variations and the non-significant storytelling effect highlight important cultural boundary conditions and narrative strategy limitations in brand love formation (Aimé, 2021; Bairrada et al., 2019).

5.3. Managerial Implications

For experiential brand managers, particularly in entertainment sectors, these results prescribe prioritising satisfaction-enhancing experiences and self-expressive positioning. Disney's blueprint reveals that emotional resonance precedes reliability: immersive theme park encounters, character-driven narratives, and reliable service delivery create the affective foundation for loyalty and premium pricing.

In Portugal, prioritise satisfaction (β=.412) through service reliability; in Brazil, leverage self-expressiveness (β=.283) via family-oriented positioning. Age-targeted strategies emerge clearly: younger consumers (18-24) demand nostalgia-infused, immersive digital campaigns leveraging Disney+ and social media. Brazilian markets require culturally amplified emotional appeals capitalising on collectivism and expressiveness. Portuguese consumers, showing restraint, benefit from trust-building reliability signals.

The storytelling null effect offers a counterintuitive lesson: narrative abundance without affective saturation fails. Managers should pair stories with satisfaction/self-expressiveness triggers (e.g., personalised experiences, identity-congruent positioning) rather than standalone campaigns.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The non-probabilistic convenience sample (N = 310) limits generalisability beyond Disney enthusiasts in Lusophone markets. Self-reported cross-sectional data cannot establish causality, despite robust psychometrics. Common method bias remains possible despite procedural controls.

Another possible limitation concerns the construct used to measure the impact of storytelling on brand love, as it was adapted from a construct originally designed to capture the influence of advertising on brand love. At the time of planning the data collection, the authors considered this adaptation to be appropriate for the research objectives. However, during the data analysis phase, it was observed that more recent constructs specifically developed to assess storytelling in the context of brand love had since emerged in the academic literature.

Future research could compare brand love drivers across different Lusophone countries (Portugal vs Brazil vs Angola) or test local vs global brand narratives, directly building on these findings.

Future research should also consider employing measurement instruments specifically designed to capture the impact of storytelling on brand love. Developing and validating such constructs could provide more accurate insights into the underlying mechanisms of narrative influence. Moreover, combining these refined

measures with longitudinal designs tracking brand love evolution, probabilistic sampling for broader populations, and experimental manipulations isolating antecedent effects would strengthen the robustness and generalizability of findings. Extending the analysis to other iconic brands (Apple, Nike, Ferrari) could test boundary conditions across sectors, while qualitative and neuroscientific approaches might further unpack storytelling's complex and potentially paradoxical effects.

In sum, this study equips scholars with a refined multi-antecedent model and practitioners with an actionable roadmap for cultivating brand love in competitive, emotionally-saturated markets. These Lusophone insights extend brand love theory while offering market-specific strategies for emotional differentiation. Disney's "magical" success proves emotionally differentiated brands can transcend cultural boundaries while respecting contextual nuances.

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