

When brands and customers become friends



Facebook, as the world's most popular social network site, attracts a variety of online users. The number of active users on Facebook is 1 712 million people (without Facebook Messenger users), of which 14 million users hail from South Africa. Many people who use Facebook indicate their support of a brand on the platform by becoming fans through "liking" the brand's page and in this way Facebook fans can also be considered as prospective assets for companies. Being a fan of a brand on Facebook presents the opportunity for spreading positive word-of-mouth about the brand.

A research study was conducted by Marilee Klopper, a [Master's](#) student in the [Department of Marketing Management](#), to investigate how brand love and brand loyalty predict word-of-mouth behaviour in an online social media context - specifically Facebook. Data were collected from a convenience sample of 487 using a structured online questionnaire. This study was unique as it investigated the relationships between brand love, brand loyalty and word-of-mouth, in an online social media context in a non-Western culture.

Results indicated that both brand love and brand loyalty significantly predicted positive word-of-mouth. This means that if brand love and brand loyalty of brand fans are developed (offline or online), positive word-of-mouth would be an outcome on Facebook brand communities (communities of brand fans). Brand love was a stronger predictor of positive word-of-mouth than brand loyalty, therefore more focus should be on increasing brand love.

Brand managers can increase brand love by firstly, enticing customers to engage with the brand as well as other customers. Customers must want to invest and interact frequently with the brand. A possible way of doing this is through developing personalised products. Secondly, brands should try and develop a positive emotional bond with the customers. Brands developed from a certain heritage and from the hearts of the producers provide a special connection with customers.

This research was conducted as part of the fulfilment of the [Master's degree](#) in Marketing Management in 2016 with the [Department of Marketing Management](#) by Marilee Klopper under the supervision of [Dr T. Maree](#).