

## **FOR LOVE OF THE BRAND AND MYSELF? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PARENTS' VICARIOUS CONSUMPTION OF TODDLER CLOTHING BRANDS**

**Dr Liezl-Marié Kruger**  
Department of Marketing Management  
University of Pretoria  
E-mail: liezlmarie.kruger@up.ac.za

In a society where parents consider their child as a means for symbolic self-completion, and in which consumers use brands to express themselves, this study explores whether brands vicariously consumed through the toddler could result in brand love. Love has been examined as a dyadic relationship (one consumer with one brand), as effective advertising tool for brands targeting multi-tiered family relationships (Iyer, Paswan and Davari, 2016:77-78) and in the context of handmade gifts, where artisanal love becomes symbolically embedded in the product (Fuchs, Schreier and Van Osselaer, 2015:106). It is thus evident that consumers perceive love to be applicable for family consumer decision-making and when conveying love through purchases. However, it is not clear if love would apply in a vicarious context where consumption is short-lived, such as parents' vicarious consumption of toddler clothing brands. Furthermore, self-expressive brands are positively associated with brand love and word-of-mouth (Carroll and Ahuvia 2006:86). While a self-expressive brand refers to the perceived ability of a brand to reflect the consumer's social or inner self-concepts, brand love is an existing emotional attachment between a consumer and a specific brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006:81-82). By exploring parents' vicarious consumption for their child younger than four years through toddler clothing brands, this study considers whether such brands are used for self-expression, and/or because these brands are loved, along with considering possible word-of-mouth outcomes offline and online. Data collected from 374 Gauteng parents during a cross-sectional study were analysed through Structural Equation Modelling. Preliminary findings indicate that toddler clothing brands as self-expression is positively associated with brand love and word-of-mouth (offline and online). Although brand love is argued to be evident in long-term consumer-brand relationships, the boundaries of brand love may thus extend to include a more short-lived consumer-brand relationship in the form of parents' vicarious consumption of toddler clothing brands. Targeting parents with children younger than four years with a combination of self-expressive and love themes in relationship marketing strategies should result in positive word-of-mouth offline and online.

### **REFERENCES**

- Carroll, B.A. and Ahuvia, A.C. 2006. Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters*, 17(2):79-89.
- Iyer, P.P., Paswan, A.K. and Davari, A. 2016. Brands, love and family. *Journal of Product and Brand Management*, 25(1):69-83.
- Fuchs, C., Schreier, M. and Van Osselaer, S.M.J. 2015. The handmade effect: What's love got to do with it? *Journal of Marketing*, 79:98-110.