How Self-Expressive Brands Influence
Brand Love and Brand Advocacy: A Study on Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Objective – One of the important roles of a brand is to help consumers in developing their self-identity (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Hence, consumers may select a brand for reasons far beyond its functional benefit (McDonald & Wilson, 2011). Previous research has found that social networks allow consumers to show their "ideal self" (Schau & Gilly, 2003). To identify the relationships between brands and consumers' self-identity, this study aims to examine the effect of self-expressive brands towards brand love, brand advocacy through word of mouth, and brand advocacy acceptance, in the social media context.

Methodology/Technique – The sample in this study is comprised of social media (Facebook) users who have liked, commented and shared social media content related to a particular brand within a 6 month period. A total of 225 valid samples were collected. The data was processed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM).

Findings – The results of this study show that both self-expressive brands (inner self) and self-expressive brands (social self) have a positive effect to brand love. Brand love has a positive effect on brand advocacy through word of mouth and brand advocacy acceptance. The results also show that self-expressive brands (inner self) have a positive effect on brand advocacy acceptance, but it does not have an effect to brand advocacy through word of mouth. On the other hand, self-expressive brands (social self) have a positive effect on brand advocacy through word of mouth, but does not have an effect on brand advocacy acceptance.

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Keywords: Brand Advocacy; Word of Mouth; Brand Love; Social Media; Self-expressive Brands.

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1. Introduction

A businesses' brand is central to its ability to maintain its position within its particular market, particularly in an environment of high competition. A brand is defined as a name or symbol that can be used to identify a particular product (McDonald & Wilson, 2011). In other words, a brand is unique to a business and distinguishes it from all others.

One of the reasons consumers select a brand is to develop their "self" and to achieve a certain goal for their overall personal image (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Fournier (1998) states that a brand can reflect important aspects of individual's identity and express the significant aspects of their "self". Brands that contribute to this phenomenon are known as self-expressive brands. Consumers often select brands for reasons far beyond their functional benefits, particularly when they consider that brand can contribute to their perception of their "self" (McDonald & Wilson, 2011).

Schau and Gilly (2003) state that self-expressive brands are not only represented by their appearance in the real world, but can also be recognized through their social media presence. This is because social networks, or social media, allow consumers to show their "ideal self" through the selection of a set of brands that are perceived as having the ability to express their "self" which cannot be presented in the real world. According to APJII (2016), social media is one of the most accessed forms of content on the internet. In Indonesia, Facebook is one of the most visited social media sites with the largest number of users of all social networking sites, with a total of 88 million users (Kompas, 2016).

Cvijikj and Michahelles (2011) found that many companies have already created their brand page on Facebook which is used to provide a wide variety of content with a certain purpose such as to promote and inform consumers about their products and services. A brand page is a platform businesses use to communicate their brand to the public and to facilitate their interactions with consumers (De Vries et. al., 2012; Tafesse, 2015).

Malhotra et. al. (2013) conclude that brands have embraced Facebook as a marketing tool to build consumers engagement and awareness of their brand. This shift in focus from traditional commercial media to modern commercial media such as Facebook aims to counter consumer immunity and avoid skepticism toward traditional commercial media outlets (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

In social media, and in particular Facebook, "likes" are used as a measurement of the extent to which a brand can facilitate the self-expression of consumers (Wallace et. al., 2014). Wallace et. al. (2012) also states that "comments" emphasize the development of a personal relationship between consumers and a brand. Whilst "shares" are used by a consumer if they perceive the content of a particular brand page on Facebook as interesting and appealing (Moore & McElroy, 2012).

This research aims to examine and gain deeper insights about consumer behavior on Facebook and to identify the benefits that can be obtained by brands who engage with social media marketing. First, the authors will elaborate on the theories related to the concept of brand and self-identity. Then, the hypotheses will be empirically tested and the results will be explained. Finally, the managerial implications that can be applied by a company will be discussed.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Self-Expressive Brands and Brand Love

Ball and Tasaki (1992) state that the motivation behind consumer behavior in buying goods or services is to satisfy their psychological needs such as to develop their concept of their self, to enhance and express their identity, to distinguish themselves from others and to confirm their personality. Those brands that are able to reflect the important aspects of a consumer's identity is referred to as self-expressive brands (Loureiro et. al., 2010).

Furthermore, Ball and Tasaki (1992) divide self-concept into 2 categories, namely: inner self and social self. Inner self refers to one's private perception of themselves, hence self-expressive brands (inner self) are a concept that emphasizes the ability of a brand to be able to represent the real personality of a consumer as a means to achieving personal achievement. Meanwhile, social-self refers to the public perception of an individual, hence self-expressive brands (social self) are those that enhance the self-image of a consumer in the public eye.

The concept of brand love is derived from the triangular theory of love coined by Sternberg (1986) which consists of intimacy (including the feelings of closeness that consumers have for a particular brand), passion (including consumer interest in a particular brand), and decisions (including recognition of love by consumers of a particular brand) / commitment (reflecting the desire of the consumer to establish a long-term relationship with a particular brand).

Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as the level of interest and emotional attachment by a consumer to a particular brand. There are 5 characteristics of consumer love according to Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), including: interest in the brand, brand attachment, positive evaluation of the brand, positive emotions toward the brand and a declaration of love toward the brand. In their research, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) also found that there is a positive influence between self-expressive brands and brand love. Self-expressive brands (inner self) are those brands that are able to represent the true personality of a consumer and are regarded as an extension of the customer. Therefore, the researchers propose the following hypotheses.

H1: Self-expressive brands (inner self) have a positive influence on brand love

Self-expressive brands (social self) are those that are able to improve a consumer's self-image in the public eye. Thus, the reason a consumer loves a brand is because of its ability to improve their self-image (Albert et. al., 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Self-expressive brands (social self) have a positive influence on brand love

2.2 Brand advocacy through word of mouth

Word of mouth can be either positive or negative statements made by a consumer regarding a product or company, expressed through both offline and online channels (Hennig-Thurau et. al., 2004). According to Hawkins et. al. (2004), word of mouth is a process that allows consumers to share information and opinions about a specific product, brand, or service. Matzler et. al. (2007) states that brand advocacy through word of mouth refers to the spread of positive reviews and encouragement to persuade others to buy products and bond with the brand. Sivadas and Jindal (2017) state that consumers consider word of mouth as a more credible and reliable source than paid advertising. This indicates the importance of the role of word of mouth for a brand.

According to Schau and Gilly (2003), consumers engage in word of mouth advertising about a brand on social networks such as Facebook in the form of a "like" as part of their impression management. De Angelis et. al. (2012) also found that a consumers seeking self-actualization tend to be more highly associated with positive word of mouth. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Self-expressive brands (inner self) have a positive influence on brand advocacy through word of mouth

According to Iyengar et. al. (2009), consumer motivation through word of mouth occurs online to influence others about the brands they choose as a form of self-expression. This is in accordance with the use of brands by consumers to improve their self-image. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Self-expressive brands (social self) have a positive influence on brand advocacy through word of mouth

2.3 Brand advocacy acceptance

According to Wallace et. al. (2014), brand advocacy acceptance is a concept that emphasizes the ability of a consumer to receive new products from a particular brand (brand extension) and the desire to forgive a certain brand mistake (consumer forgiveness). According to Aaker and Keller (1990), brand extension is the use of a well-known brand name to launch a new product, whilst consumer forgiveness is defined as a

process of exchange between negative emotions into positive emotions that a consumer feels toward a particular brand and the desire for them to behave as before when the brand has not made a mistake (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2012).

The similarities between the brand's identity and the identity of the consumer plays a vital role in the success of brand extension (Huang & Mitchell, 2014). According to Du et. al. (2007), when a consumer has a high sense of affection for a particular brand, they will be more likely to want to buy new products from that brand. In addition, Matilla (2001) states that consumers who feel a strong relationship toward a particular brand will tend to have a desire to re-arrange their relationship with the brand as the original situation when the brand has not made a mistake. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Self-expressive brands (inner self) have a positive influence on brand advocacy acceptance

A brand is used by consumers to reflect and affirm their personality and identity (Huang et. al., 2012). Therefore, when a company extends their brand, consumers will assess whether the new product is in line with their personality (Ferguson et. al., 2016). In addition, consumers who feel as though their personality is aligned with the new product are more likely to easily forgive the brand for their mistakes (Chung & Beverland, 2006). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H6: Self-expressive brands (social self) have a positive influence on brand advocacy acceptance

Albert and Merunka (2013) state that if a consumer feels that they love a brand, they are more liekly to give a positive word of mouth review about the brand. In addition, they are also more likely to recommend the brand to their friends or acquaintances (Rageh & Spinelli, 2012). This is in accordance with the definition of word of mouth from Westbrook (1987) wherein word of mouth is defined as a communication flow conducted by a consumer against others where the consumer is talking about a product or service. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H7: Brand love has a positive influence on brand advocacy word of mouth

Kim et. al. (2014) found that when consumers love a brand, they will tend to be loyal to the brand's parent so that if the brand issues a new product, they will buy the product from the brand. Tsarenko and Tojib (2012) also state that consumers who have a strong relationship to a brand will likely want to improve the relationship as it was before the violation was committed by the brand. An individual with a close relationship to a particular brand will have high satisfaction, a sense of closeness and commitment to the brand and a desire to forgive violations committed by the brand (Finkel et. al., 2002). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H8: Brand love has a positive influence on brand advocacy acceptance

3. Research Methodology

A survey was conducted using 225 respondents who are active Facebook users within the last 6 months and who have liked, commented and shared on a particular brand page within that time frame. The respondents are aged between 18-34 years old and reside in Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi (Jabodetabek) area. The respondents were asked to fill in the self-administered questionnaire provided by the researcher with a total of 26 core questions measured using a six-point Likert scale.

The data was processed using structural equation modeling (SEM) in LISREL 8.51, which includes a measurement and structural test. The measurement test was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of each indicator, whilst the structural test was conducted to understand the level of significance of the influence between the variables used in this research.

4. Results

4.1 Pre-test

In the pre-test reliability test, the 5 variables show that the value of the Cronbach's alpha was above 0.6 so it is reliable. In the validity test, 26 of the 27 indicators have a good validity level by seeing Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin (KMO) value> 0.50 and Bartlett's Test <0.05. In addition, the factor loading value is ≥ 0.50. However, one indicator (BRL4 love) has a factor loading value of less than 0.50, with a value of -0.007. Therefore, BRL4 is removed. All other indicators are declared valid.

4.2 Main-test

The main test included a total of 225 respondents, the profiles for which are shown in the table in Appendix A. For the main test, in the structural model fit test, Statistics Chi-Square (χ2) (290) = 581.80, NCP = 291.80, GFI = 0.83, RMR = 0.069 and RMSEA = 0.067. This indicates the overall fit of the model used has shown good value so that it can be used in the next stage.

The next step is testing the hypothesis by performing a structural test by looking at the value of the t-value. In total there are 8 hypotheses in this study. The results of the hypothesis testing achieved interesting results as shown in Table 1 and Figure 1 below.

Table 1. Hypothesis Testing Result

Hyp.	Hypothesis Statement	SLF	T-value	Research Result
H1	Self-expressive brand (inner self) → brand love	0.40	3.61	H1 Accepted
H2	Self-expressive brand (social self) → brand love	0.26	2.30	H2 Accepted
H3	Self-expressive brand (inner self) → brand advocacy WoM	0.16	1.48	H3 Rejected
H4	Self-expressive brand (social self) → brand advocacy WoM	0.22	2.13	H4 Accepted
H5	Self-expressive brand (inner self) → brand advocacy acceptance	0.22	2.20	H5 Accepted
H6	Self-expressive brand (social self) → brand advocacy acceptance	-0.04	-0.37	H6 Rejected
H7	Brand love → brand advocacy WoM	0.44	5.35	H7 Accepted
H8	Brand love → brand advocacy acceptance	0.67	6.86	H8 Accepted

Source: LISREL 8.51 Output Researcher's Processing Result

With the t-value being ≥ 1.645, H1 and H2 are accepted meaning there is a positive influence between self-expressive brands, both inner self and social self-image, and brand love. This indicates that consumer love for a particular brand can expressed through the inner self or can be used to improve the self-image of a consumer. Further, H3 has a t-value of 1.48 meaning that hypothesis is rejected. Hence, self-expressive brands (inner self) have no effect on brand advocacy through word of mouth. The opposite results are achieved for self-expressive brands (social self), which have a positive influence on brand advocacy through word of mouth (t-value ≥ 1.645). Therefore, H4 is accepted.
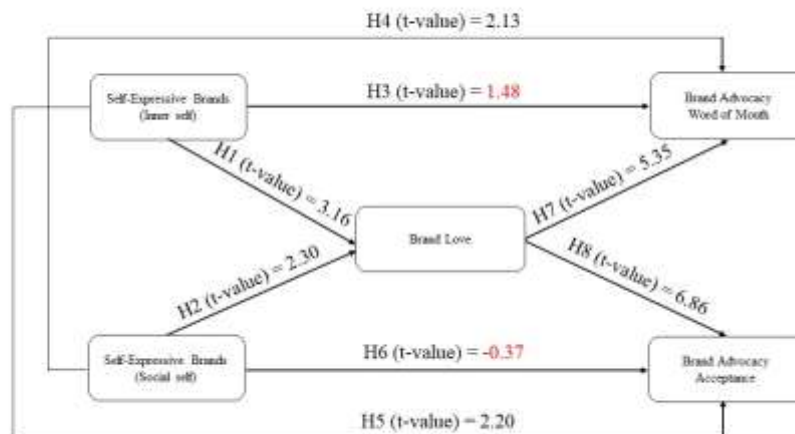
Figure 1. Structural Testing Result of the Research Model

In the discussion of brand advocacy acceptance, H5 shows the value of t-value ≥ 1.645 which means H5 accepted. In other words, self-expressive brand (inner self) on Facebook has a positive influence on brand advocacy acceptance. While in self-expressive brand (social self), consumers tend not to want to do brand advocacy acceptance. Finally, H7 and H8 have t-value value ≥ 1.645 which means both hypotheses are accepted. This indicates that consumer's love for a particular brand will lead them to discuss and recommend others to use the product of the brand, make purchases on new products and accept brand mistakes if it is found that the brand is making a mistake or violation.

5. Discussion

This study identified a positive influence between self-expressive brands (inner self) on Facebook toward brand love. In his research, Batra et. al. (2011) concludes that a brand that is loved by a consumer allows the consumer to express who they are. This is consistent with the definition of self-expressive brands (inner self) as referring to the ability of a brand to represent the real personality of a consumer (Ball & Tasaki, 1992). Therefore, consumer love can arise due to the ability of a brand to reflect their inner self. This can be caused by the similarities in the identity and personality of the consumer and the identity and personality of the brand that makes consumers interested in the brand (Ball & Tasaki, 1992). The existence of identity similarity also contributes to an emotional attachment between consumers with a brand. These are 3 characteristics of consumer love for a brand (brand love) identified by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006).

Self-expressive brands (social self) on Facebook also have a positive influence on brand love. The results of this study are in line with research by Albert et. al., (2008) who found that the suitability of self-image and product-image of a brand can increase brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) also state that consumers are more likely to love a brand that they consider is capable of supporting them and their self-image. The similarity between the consumer's "ideal self" with the personality and identity of the brand contributes to consumer love for the brand.

Based on the definition of self-expressive brands (inner self) proposed by Ball and Tasaki (1992), where the concept is more private and used to achieve personal achievement, self-expressive brands (inner self) on Facebook have no influence on brand advocacy through word of mouth. This is possibly because consumers tend to not mention and inform others that a brand reflects their personality. Moreover, self-expressive

brands (inner self) are a private matter, therefore, consumers feel that there is no need for them to tell others about the brand they perceive to reflect their true personality.

In contrast to self-expressive brands (inner self) that have no influence on brand advocacy through word of mouth, the opposite result is found for self-expressive brands (social self) whereby consumers who use a particular brand for the benefit of their social self tend to talk about the brand to others. Batra et. al. (2012) states that a consumer who loves a brand that suits their personality through the process of identity building is more likely to talk positively about the brand to others. Furthermore, according to Ball and Tasaki (1992), self-expressive brands (social self) are more public and are used to seek recognition from reference groups. Therefore, there is a possibility that a consumer will talk about a brand to others to improve the consumer's self-image in the eyes of others. By providing positive reviews and recommendations to others to buy the brand's products, consumers hope to be associated with the brand. Furthermore, consumer wants to demonstrate the similarities between their own identity and the brand's identity. In the end, the consumer feels that a brand can contribute to their self-image, support his social role, and have a positive impact on other's perception about them.

Ball and Tasaki (1992) assert that the motivation of ownership of goods by consumers is driven by their psychological needs, one of which is to build their self-concept and strengthen the self-concept. Previous research has found that self-expressive brands (inner self) have a positive influence on brand advocacy acceptance. Therefore, a consumer who feels that a particular brand reflects their personality is more likely to want to buy products offered by that brand. In addition, consumers tend to forgive mistakes made by a brand where the identify with that brand and see the brand as an extension of themselves.

The opposite occurs with respect to self-expressive brands (social self), which have no effect on brand advocacy acceptance. Based on the results of this study, a consumer who uses a brand to gain recognition from the people around them and to improve their image in the public eye are less to buy new products and accept mistakes made by the brand. This may be because self-expressive brands (social self) are temporary only. Consumers who use these brands to gain acceptance in the social environment and to improve their image in the public eye are usually motivated by current trends. Once that trend has passed, those consumers will likely lose interest in that particular brand and move on to another brand. This makes it less likely that those consumers will form an emotional attachment to those brands.

Finally, this research also demonstrates that there is a positive relationship between brand love and brand advocacy through word of mouth and brand advocacy acceptance. This is supported by the research results of Dick and Basu (1994) which show that consumers are an important spokesperson for a brand that they love. The reason why consumers who loves a certain brand ted to advocate for that brand through word of mouth can be explained by the characteristics of brand love established by Carroll and Ahuvia, (2006) including positive evaluation, positive emotions and love declaration of the brand. Word of mouth can be achieved by talking about the brand to others, both online and offline. When consumers love a brand, consumers will gladly and voluntarily provide a review of the brand and recommend the brand to others. Some consumers who are particularly fond of a brand may even seek to correct negative reviews of a brand (Grisaffe & Nguyen, 2011) and are more willing to accept and forgive mistakes made by the brand (Sabrina et. al., 2017). Kim et. al. (2014) found that when consumers love a particular brand, they are more likely to be loyal to the brand's parent so that if the brand issues a new product, they will likely buy that product from the brand.

6. Conclusion

This study aims to determine the effect of self-expressive brands on brand love, brand advocacy through word of mouth and brand advocacy acceptance, in a social media context. The results of this study indicate that the ability of brands to reflect one's inner self and improve the social self of a consumer will make them love the brand. Furthermore, if consumers feel that a brand reflects their inner self, they are more likely to accept the mistakes of the brand and buy new products from the brand. However, they are not likely to talk

about the brand to others. This is different for self-expressive brands (social self); consumers who use a brand to improve their social self, are more likely to discuss and promote the brand to others.

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