



The role of storytelling in the creation of brand love: the PANDORA case

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Abstract

The study of storytelling and brand love is justified by the need to understand the potential of storytelling as a tool that marketers have available to positively influence the love felt by the consumers toward a particular brand. In this case, we address the jewelry brand PANDORA as a case study. In our empirical research, we intend to understand the role of storytelling in the creation of brand love when it is used as a brand communication technique. In addition, we chose the brand PANDORA because its products are also associated with stories; thus, we also intend to investigate whether this use of storytelling contributes to the creation of brand love. The results demonstrate a positive impact of storytelling in the love felt by the consumers regarding the brand PANDORA. In addition, we conclude that the stories consumers associate with their own PANDORA jewelry make them like the jewelry and the brand itself even more, which shows that product narrative is an important concept to add value to the product and the brand.

Keywords Storytelling · Brand love · Love brands · Product narrative · Marketing

Introduction

In our global, fast-paced and connected society, brands face the challenge of standing out and being relevant, and many have undergone a path of humanization, aiming to build deeper connections with loyal consumers (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017). As a result, the concept of brand love has been suggested to describe a long-term relationship between brand and consumers, which is based on “multiple interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements, rather than a specific, single, transient love emotion” (Batra et al., 2012, p. 6). Furthermore, storytelling has been considered a useful tool for expressing brand values, for creating engagement between brands and consumers and consequently for nurturing strong bonds between them (Fog et al., 2010).

Previous research has demonstrated the efficiency of storytelling as a communication technique that prompts emotional connections to brands (Fog et al., 2010) and enhances engagement, particularly online (Signorelli, 2014), as well

as motivates positive Word of Mouth (WOM) (Biesenbach, 2018b). In parallel, previous research has also identified factors that lead to brand love (antecedents)—among which identification with the brand and self-expression are mentioned—and benefits that brand love delivers to brands—among which engagement in online communities, loyalty and positive WOM (Roberts, 2005; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra et al., 2012). Despite some common points between the concepts of brand love and storytelling, previous studies have not, to our knowledge, explored the possibility of storytelling being an antecedent that leads to brand love. Investigating this possibility is important because stories, and the imaginary, emotions and values that are inherent to them, may be another tool available for brands to build brand love and harvest the resulting benefits.

This study addresses the jewelry sector, focusing on PANDORA as a case study. Jewelry is a type of product with a symbolic dimension, that, by itself, is able to tell a story, represent a memorable moment, or even a connection to a person. PANDORA is a relevant case study because it is a jewelry brand that uses storytelling in advertising and communication campaigns and, in addition to this, storytelling is present in its own products. Each PANDORA piece has a distinctive design that associates it with a certain narrative, or that allows consumers to interpret the piece associating

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it with a certain story, occasion, moment or person of their own life. Focusing on this brand allows our research to fulfill its main objective: Understand the role of storytelling in creating brand love when it is used in communication. But the specific nature of PANDORA also enables us to go further and explore to which extent products which, in themselves, tell stories, contribute to adding value to the brand by enhancing brand love. This becomes relevant, given that the concept of product narrative exists and is defined as “type of storytelling that is not about advertising products, services or brands, but that adds value to the product” (Dias & Dias, 2018, p. 2).

Theoretical framework

Brand love and lovemarks

One of the purposes of branding has always been building relationships with (potential) consumers (Fournier, 1998). One of the main goals of these relationships is prompting frequent and/or increased purchases, thus leading to loyalty (Swimberghe et al., 2014). Amaro et al. (2020) point to an important difference between satisfaction and loyalty: Satisfaction is a momentary cognitive judgment resulting from a transaction with a brand, while loyalty implies a long-term affective connection with a brand. However, Ghorbanzadeh and Raheghagh (2020) argue that a theoretical construct that explains “the regular and rational sequence of satisfaction ultimately leading to the formation of consumer loyalty” (p. 1) is lacking and point to emotional attachment and love as possibilities to explore.

In the last few years, as brands strive to stand out and build meaningful and long-lasting relationships with fans and customers, the concept of brand love has been suggested to describe this process, drawing on previous research in the fields of Psychology and Sociology about love for objects and fetishism (Sayers & Monin, 2007). In marketing, Fournier (1998) explored consumer–brand relationships and established that brands can take the role of active partners to establish and nurture a bond. Percy, Hansen and Randup (2004) identified an emotional attachment to brands, and later, Giovanis and Athanasopoulou (2018) argue that emotional connections are used in branding mainly for differentiating purposes, but when they lead to emotional attachment, customers express preference for the brand, and consequently loyalty over time.

Brand love is defined by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) as “the degree of passionate, emotional attachment a satisfied consumer has for a particular trade name” (p. 81), that differs from simple attachment because of its long-lasting nature. It is a type of relationship that is built when consumers fulfill the following requirements: (1) passion for the brand, (2)

attachment to the brand, (3) positive evaluations about the brand, (4) positive emotions and (5) declarations of love. Albert and Merunka (2013) add three fundamental elements in brand love, namely (1) identification with the brand; (2) trust in the brand; and (3) commitment to the brand. Batra et al. (2012) reiterate that brand love is a long-term relationship created between the brand and consumers, which is based on “multiple interrelated cognitive, affective, and behavioural elements, rather than a specific, single, transient love emotion” (p. 6). The authors also point out some distinctions between interpersonal love and love for a brand. While in the former there is a feeling of altruistic concern for the loved one, this is not true in the love for a brand, as there is only concern for what the brand can do for the consumer. In addition, interpersonal love is a mutual feeling, while love for a brand is unidirectional.

As research moved on to explore the factors that lead to brand love—usually referred to as antecedents—and to demonstrate the benefits that brands harvest when they are the objects of brand love—usually referred to as consequences—becoming a “lovemark” became a goal for many brands worldwide (Sayers & Monin, 2007). Roberts (2004) coined the term “lovemark” to describe a brand capable of creating emotional bonds and personal relationships with the communities and social networks it develops. They are brands capable of triggering respect by being transparent and trustworthy, but others go beyond that by being intimate, mysterious and seductive. Lovemarks understand that love is built upon respect, and these are brands that strive to create strong emotional bonds with their (potential) consumers, offering them more than mere rational arguments or product benefits. Edwards and Day (2005) add that lovemarks have three fundamental features: (1) They are brands with active and inspiring beliefs, and this is because this type of brand seeks to make the world a little better place than this would be if the brand did not exist; (2) they have confidence rooted in their ability to do things: “Confident brands are sexy. They are the ones everyone wants to be seen with” (p. 79); and (3) they remain vibrant despite the changes the world is undergoing because they tend to have a high capacity for adaptation, managing to move in time, remaining faithful to themselves and their history. Thus, brands need to work on brand love antecedents to become lovemarks, and only then can they harvest the benefits of being the object of brand love.

Antecedents and consequences of brand love

Different studies have mapped out several factors that lead to brand love, exploring them as antecedents of this feeling/relationship between a customer and a brand. However, there is no consensus on this matter, as different studies reveal



different aspects. Some authors highlight aspects that are also integrated in the concept of brand equity (Aaker, 1991), and therefore add value to brands. That is the case of perceived quality, as Batra et al. (2012) found that people tend to be attracted to things that provide them with the necessary benefits and demonstrate high quality, arguing that it is challenging to generate love for a brand that does not afford quality. Bairrada, Coelho and Coelho (2018) also refer to perceived value as the evaluation that consumers make regarding the utility of the brand based on the comparison of what they get from it (functional or symbolic characteristics) to what they give (monetary or non-monetary costs). The authors argue that prestige, the degree of status or esteem that consumers associate with a brand (therefore, allied to its most symbolic dimension) leads to brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) highlight, as Roberts (2004), the hedonistic features of the products themselves, that is, “the consumer’s perception of the relative role of hedonic (as compared with utilitarian) benefits offered by the product” (p. 82) and highlight fun and pleasure as the ones that are most connected to brand love. Junaid et al. (2019) add escapism as another feature that leads to brand love. Recently, Safeer et al. (2020) corroborated that sensory and affective brand experiences have significant impact in triggering brand love, while intellectual and behavioral experiences (related to perceived quality, for example) do not have significant impact. Fernandes and Inverneiro (2020) also highlight the importance of brand experience. The authors add that brand experiences that are perceived as authentic are the ones with the most positive impact on brand love, thus identifying authenticity as an important antecedent. In reverse, Rodrigues and Borges (2020) found that distrust and negative emotions have a negative impact on brand love, reiterating the importance of authenticity. Bairrada, Coelho and Coelho (2018) also mention brand uniqueness, that is, the degree to which consumers feel that the brand is distinct from competitors. The human being tends to like the feeling of standing out from the rest, and thus, the choice of unique brands is of high relevance. Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010) stress the importance of the identification with the brand, as the closer the consumer self-image is to the brand image, the higher is the level of identification with the brand. Fernandes and Inverneiro (2020) reiterate the connection between brand identification and brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) also mention self-expression as an antecedent of brand love, as consumers value “the degree to which the specific brand enhances one’s social self and/or reflects one’s inner self” (p. 82), and thus prefer brands that help create and reinforce their identities and its expression. Finally, Keller (2013) mentions the sense of community, the “phenomenon in which customers feel a kinship or affiliation with other people associated with the brand” (p. 121) as a feature that nurtures brand love. However, Fernandes and Inverneiro

(2020) found that engagement in social media brand communities does not lead directly to loyalty (at least among Millennials). People who engage with brands online may feel brand love and be fans without being consumers. Nevertheless, brands can still harvest positive eWOM from these fans. Palazzo, Delgado-Ballester and Sicilia (2019) refer to self-brand connection as the result of the identification with one brand leading to engagement in its communities, arguing that both these factors foster brand love. This rich strand of research shows us that different studies have identified numerous antecedents that lead to brand love. Some of them, such as perceived quality/value, hedonistic features of the brand, self-expression and identification with the brand, are mentioned more often, and others, such as brand uniqueness and authenticity, appear in, so far, standalone studies and require further exploration. It is possible to conclude that brand love only stems from a complex combination of factors, but the impact that each of the factors has on the creation and nurturing of brand love is still unclear, as well as the interdependencies or synergies between the different factors.

On the other hand, brands strive to generate and nurture brand love because of the benefits it affords, about which researchers share more agreement. Loyalty, the degree to which the consumer is committed with the repurchase of a brand, is considered the most important consequence of brand love (Oliver, 1999; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), as it is directly reflected in the performance of the brand, in its profitability. Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh (2020) agree, claiming that “brand love is the strongest antecedent of brand loyalty” (p. 1). Furthermore, Palazon et al. (2019) argued that brand equity can increase as a result of brand love. Bairrada, Coelho and Coelho (2018) also highlight the willingness to pay a higher price for a specific brand in particular, when equivalent brands with lower price could exist as a consequence of brand love. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) add that positive Word of Mouth happens when consumers love a brand, as they tend to speak positively about it. Consumers who love a brand are more likely to comment positively and recommend a brand to others. Amaro et al. (2020), who studied destination brands specifically, stressed WOM and eWOM as good reasons for building brand love. More recently, Giovanis and Athanasopoulos (2020) reiterate that the main positive consequences of brand love are loyalty, willingness to pay premium price and positive eWOM. Keller (2013) adds active involvement as another consequence of brand love, explaining that it “occurs when customers are engaged, or willing to invest time, energy, money, or other resources in the brand beyond those expended during purchase or consumption of the brand” (p. 121). Junaid et al. (2019) also consider brand engagement a consequence of brand love. Thus, although brand love is a complex concept, only generated by a still unexplored combination of antecedents, the literature on its consequences agrees that it



is worth pursuing, as it affords many advantages and added value both to brands and consumers.

In the next section, we explore whether and how storytelling fits within this overview of antecedents and consequences of brand love.

Storytelling in brand communication

According to Fisher (1984), storytelling is such a powerful communication tool because human beings are inherently storytellers and symbol makers, that is, we are *homo narrans*. Since ancestral times, human beings create symbols and communicate them through stories, thus organizing their experiences and promoting a communal way of life. Thus, storytelling can be defined, in a broader sense, as “conveying messages and sharing accumulated knowledge and wisdom to help navigate and explain the world around us” (Mancuso & Stuth, p. 18). Baker and Boyle (2009) add that storytelling goes well beyond the cognitive level, operating deeper, on an emotional and even “visceral” level. In addition, they argue that stories connect people to visions for the future that are larger than themselves and give them a purpose, connecting them to each other.

As the online world emerged and expanded, brands became the focus of online communities, in which storytelling stood out as a very effective way of prompting engagement and motivating shares (Pulizzi, 2012). Storytelling became a fundamental marketing tool, consisting of “using a narrative to connect your brand to customers, with a focus on linking what you stand for to the values you share with your customers” (Loyal, 2018, online). Woodside, Stood and Miller 2008 present five arguments to why storytelling is essential to marketing: (1) people naturally think narratively; (2) stories reinforce memorization; (3) stories afford pleasurable experiences; (4) brands and products can appeal to psychological archetypes, thus reaching a strong identification with consumers; and (5) stories afford clarity.

These arguments resonate with some antecedents of brand love. For example, storytelling provokes emotional reactions and connections with consumers, allowing them to lower their defenses and be more easily persuaded (Biesenbach, 2018). It is also fundamental for brands to stand out in the digital world, as storytelling conveys distinctive elements of brands, it helps consumers understand the brand’s identity and core values (Mucundorfeanu, 2018). Stories enrich brands with a more substantial emotional and imagetic heritage and, therefore, make them more attractive to consumers. Roberts (2004) was the first to allude to storytelling as a tool that contributes to strengthening the position of lovemarks, as this communication technique appeals to emotions and inspires consumers. Stories highlight information, appeal to emotions and sensory details and, therefore, have the power to reinforce lovemarks.

Junaid et al. (2019) alluded to the importance of the imaginary, as they consider escapism a hedonistic feature of brands that leads to brand love.

In addition, as brands become storytellers, they also become humanized, as they gain and express a personality (Biesenbach, 2018). Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010) also stress that brand love stems from strong symbolic and emotional meanings that make a brand unique and trigger brand identification. Delgado-Ballester (2020) also stresses that stories are essential to create brand–consumer identification. In addition, Kemp, Porter III, Anasa and Min 2021 studied brand storytelling online and found that stories lead to personal connections with brands, particularly if they convey emotions. Personal connections, on their turn, lead to consumer engagement online and to positive eWOM. This effect is even stronger if the storytelling stems from user-generated content instead of branded content.

Research on storytelling as a brand communication technique reveals several components that are needed in a storytelling campaign. Structural aspects such as a timeline structure and a contextual setting are mentioned by Delgadillo and Escalas (2004). The importance of strong characters is stressed by Fog, Budtz, Much and Blanchette (2010), as well as Biesenbach (2004) and Denning (2006). Fog, Budtz, Much and Blanchette (2010) and Delgadillo and Escalas (2004) also emphasize the importance of a plot, and Biesenbach (2018) adds that the plot is more alluring if it revolves around conflict. There is a stronger trend toward the importance of conveying a strong message—identified as an important feature by Fog, Budtz, Much and Blanchette 2010, Denning (2006), Simmons (2009) and Mckee and Gerace (2018)—and its symbolic dimension that conveys emotions and values—emphasized by Fog, Budtz, Much and Blanchette (2010), Denning (2006), Simmons (2009), Tormes et al. (2016) and Mucundorfeanu (2018). Regarding the content of storytelling, Williams, Atwal and Bryson 2019, researching on luxury brands, suggest that the most common topics are craft, innovation, origins, myth, celebrity, provenance and collectability. Dias and Dias (2018) suggested that storytelling can go beyond communication and be applied to products, adding value to them through an additional symbolic layer.

Considering the components of stories, and the benefits that storytelling can afford to brands, our study sets out to explore whether storytelling can be considered an antecedent of brand love.

Methodology

Research questions

Our research aims to explore whether using storytelling has a positive effect on the development of brand love. We consider the use of storytelling within two dimensions of



marketing that are explored by PANDORA, adopting the following research questions:

RQ1—Does using storytelling as a communication technique contribute to the development of brand love?

RQ2—Does integrating storytelling in products contribute to the development of brand love?

Method

We adopted a qualitative method, developing a single exploratory case study focused on the brand PANDORA. The qualitative approach, although not offering the generalizability that is characteristic of the quantitative method, can afford an in-depth understanding of a relevant case that can provide insights and spot trends that can be applicable to other cases, as the different possibilities of analytical generalizability demonstrate (Hoijer, 2008; Halkier, 2011).

Within the sector of jewelry and watches, PANDORA stands out as a brand with the features required to be the object of this type of case study: It uses storytelling as a promotional communication technique and, additionally, it is unique in associating storytelling to its products, thus being a critical case to study the relationship between storytelling and the development of brand love (Yin, 1994).

PANDORA as a case study

PANDORA was founded in 1982 by the jeweler Per Enevoldsen and his wife Winnie, in Copenhagen, Denmark. Currently, it covers the design, production and sales of the products. According to PANDORA's 2020 Annual Report, the brand is present in over 100 countries and employs about 26 000 people. Its revenues in 2020 were around 2,56 billion euros.

The year 2000 was a turning point for PANDORA, when the brand launched its iconic bracelet that can be personalized with collectable differently shaped pieces. This product was so successful that it opened the way for PANDORA's internationalization. The brand arrived in Portugal in 2004.

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the obligation to close stores worldwide during considerable periods, Alexander Lacik, the CEO, considers that 2020 was a "turnaround" year for the brand, as online sales grew 103%, and that company was able to focus on becoming more sustainable. He states that in 2020, PANDORA "cemented [its] position as a desirable and affordable luxury brand" (PANDORA Annual Report 2020, p. 6).

According to the brand's Web site, its mission is to offer women a universe of high-quality jewelry, with handmade finishing, contemporary design and affordable prices, thus encouraging women to express their individuality. The

brand's slogan is "unforgettable moments," because the brand believes that the individuality of each woman is shaped by personal, unique and memorable moments that they have lived, their stories. Thus, the brand's identity is built around personal stories and the special moments that each woman lives.

Thus, PANDORA is a relevant brand as a case study because it consistently uses storytelling in its promotional communication, whether in advertising, whether in content marketing. In addition, it incorporates storytelling in its own products, as each PANDORA piece has a unique design that affords it a symbolic dimension, thus enabling consumers to associate a specific piece to a certain moment, story or even person. When this bracelet with personalized pieces was launched, it was innovative and unique. The symbolic dimension of PANDORA's products enables the consumers to eternize the most important moments of their lives. Also, it takes the concept of product narrative (Dias & Dias, 2018) to another level: Brand communication may suggest a narrative—storytelling, but each customer appropriates the pieces and ascribes meaning to them—storydoing (Natal et al., 2017; Lledó, 2019; Rojas, 2019). As a consequence, each bracelet is personal and unique, and "tells the story" of its user.

PANDORA is an appropriate brand for studying the relationship between storytelling and the creation of antecedents and consequences of brand love because it uses this technique in its communication, incorporates it in its products and brand identity and enables their customers to use it, creating their own stories.

Data collection and analysis techniques

In order to explore our research questions, we conducted interviews with loyal customers of PANDORA, because these are the most likely to present brand love (Roberts, 2004), and we also wanted to make sure that our sample was familiar with PANDORA's storytelling, both being users of its products and following its communication, particularly on social media.

As a data collection technique, we used in-depth semi-structured interviews (Guerra, 2006). The previous research on the antecedents and consequences of brand love that we discussed above is quantitative and relies mostly on surveys. To our knowledge, the qualitative method has not been applied to explore this topic. However, the qualitative approach affords deeper insight into the "views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of consumers" (Gill, Stuart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008, p. 292). We considered this approach appropriate to study why loyal customers develop brand love toward PANDORA.



Before the interview, an informed consent form was sent to all volunteer participants by email, explaining the research protocol, what their participation would entail, ensuring their anonymity, and also that their data would be used only for scientific purposes. The form also collected their authorization to record the audio of the interviews, explaining that these would be transcribed and anonymized, and after that the recordings would be destroyed (Creswell, 2009).

The interviews were face to face, and lasted, on average, 52 min. We followed a protocol with three moments: (1) greetings, summary of the research project and of what is required of the participant, clarification of any questions and collection of the signed consent form; (2) semi-structured interview, addressing three themes (antecedents of brand love; storytelling in the communication and products of PANDORA; consequences of brand love); and (3) thank you and goodbye.

For data analysis, we used thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) using nVivo software. We considered as categories the antecedents and consequences of brand love, and also the components of storytelling that were reviewed in the theoretical section. Our analysis consisted of two stages: (1) First, we selected units of analysis that fit our predefined (drawing on theory) categories and (2) second, we overviewed our data, looking for emergent categories. In Table 1, we present an overview of our interview script, demonstrating the correspondence between the script questions and the thematic analysis' categories, as well as their theoretical grounding.

Sampling and sample

We studied a non-probabilistic sample of 20 participants, selected according to two eliminating criteria: (1) being loyal customers of PANDORA, that is, owning more than one piece of PANDORA jewelry and using it regularly, and (2) following at least one PANDORA social media profile.

Within these homogeneous criteria, we tried to obtain a diversified sample according to age, residence area and lifestyle and used the snowball sampling method for that purpose (Taherdoost, 2016). We started with five participants who were recruited among the researchers' contacts' network, and then, they were asked to recommend other acquaintances who filled our eliminatory criteria. This technique also prevented biases inherent to convenience samples, as we did not know most of our participants previously (only the first 5).

Possible participants were invited via phone call. If they were interested, the informed consent form was sent via email. If they agreed to participate, the face-to-face interview was scheduled. We describe them in more detail in Table 2.

Although a qualitative approach allowed us to get deeper insight into the relationship between storytelling and brand love, we stress that our sample is small and non-probabilistic and therefore does not allow any generalization of the findings. Our findings are insights and trends that point to topics which should be addressed in further research.

Table 1 Summary of interview script and thematic analysis' categories

Structure of the interview	Thematic analysis' categories and script questions	Theoretical grounding
Part 1—Antecedents of brand love	Hedonism and experience Identification with the brand (Q1) Self-expression using the brand (Q2) Prestige (Q3) Uniqueness (Q4) Belonging to a community (Q5) Perceived value (Q6) Perceived quality (Q7)	Roberts (2004); Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Bergkvist and Bech-Larsen (2010); Batra et al. (2012); Albert and Merunka (2013); Bairrada, Coelho and Coelho (2018); Junaid et al. (2019); Palazzo, Delgado-Ballester and Sicilia (2019); Safeer et al. (2020); Fernandes and Inverneiro (2020)
Part 2—Storytelling in PANDORA's communication and products	Storytelling in communication (Q8 to Q12) Narrative products (Q13 to Q17)	Delgadillo and Escalas (2004); Roberts (2004); Simmons (2009); Karahanolu and Sener (2009); Fog et al. (2010); Mucundorfeanu (2018); Dias and Dias (2018); Tormes et al. (2016); Biesenbach (2018); Delgado-Ballester (2020); Kemp, Porter III, Anasa and Min (2021)
Part 3—Consequences of brand love	Loyalty (Q18) Positive WOM (Q19) Active engagement (Q20) Availability to pay more (Q21) Brand love (Q22)	Roberts (2004); Carroll and Ahuvia (2006); Keller (2013); Batra et al. (2012); Albert and Merunka (2013); Bairrada, Coelho and Coelho (2018), Junaid et al. (2019); Palazon et al. (2019); Amaro et al. (2020); Ghorbanzadeh and Rahegh (2020)



Table 2 Characterization of our sample

Participant	Age	District of Portugal	Lifestyle	Follows PANDORA on social media
P1	23	Guarda	Just finished college, is looking for a first job. Single	Facebook
P2	52	Leiria	Primary teacher. Married, two children	No
P3	45	Castelo Branco	Nurse. Married, one child	Facebook
P4	23	Lisboa	Communication. Single	No
P5	25	Lisboa	Retail. Single	Instagram + Facebook
P6	37	Leiria	High School teacher. Married, two children	Instagram
P7	23	Setúbal	Just finished college, is looking for a first job. Single	No
P8	18	Porto	Student. Single	No
P9	23	Madeira	Student. Single	No
P10	31	Lisboa	Unemployed. Single	No
P11	25	Lisboa	Copywriter. Single	Instagram
P12	63	Leiria	Primary teacher. Married, two children	Facebook
P13	33	Lisboa	Sales. Single	Facebook + Instagram
P14	24	Faro	Marketeer. Single	No
P15	23	Lisboa	Flight Assistant. Single	No
P16	45	Madeira	Early Childhood Educator. Married, one child	No
P17	29	Setúbal	Designer. Single	No
P18	26	Faro	Dentist. Single	Instagram
P19	25	Lisboa	Human Resources. Single	Facebook + Instagram
P20	24	Lisboa	Flight Assistant. Single	No

Findings and Discussion

Antecedents of brand love

Among our 20 participants, who are loyal customers of PANDORA, we found all the antecedents of brand love that we considered as data analysis categories and were able to observe that some of them are more frequent or considered more important by our participants. Table 3 presents a summary of the presence of brand love antecedents towards the brand PANDORA in our sample, and examples of quotes by our participants.

The brand love antecedents that are mentioned more frequently and afforded more importance are a strong identification with the brand, reinforced by self-expression (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), as all participants consider that the brand enables them to express certain aspects of their identity (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010) and this is achieved due to the great variety of pieces and the ability to personalize the products and also because the self-image of most participants correspond with the brand image that they perceive (Kapferer, 2003; Albert & Merunka, 2013).

Regarding self-expression, the participants referred to two aspects: The brand helps them in expressing their identity and personality, but also in expressing their life story. For some of the participants, these two aspects are closely connected, as they believe that they “are” their

stories—“*I have a piece in my bracelet that is a hedgehog. Other people usually find it cute and funny, but it has a story. One day I saved a hedgehog that had been run over and was lying in the middle of the road. For me, that piece represents who I am, my values, someone who stops and helps a poor animal*” (P10). Others consider that it is an added value the fact that the jewels have a symbolic dimension connected to memories, important moments, emotions and even people. This is also the most mentioned element of singularity associated with the brand (Bairrada, Coelho & Coelho, 2018), along with the association between the products and stories (Dias & Dias, 2018).

The symbolic dimension of each PANDORA piece is important for each user, even if others do not know the story behind them. However, there is also a sense of belonging to a community (Keller, 2013), as several participants reported having talked to other PANDORA users about the meaning behind each piece, shared stories and felt an instant connection because of their love for the same brand.

Prestige was the brand love antecedent that caused more debate among our participants. Prestige is usually associated with luxury and exclusivity (Bairrada, Coelho & Coelho, 2018), and PANDORA is an affordable brand that can be used by anyone, every day. However, our case study demonstrates that it is possible to feel brand love without the presence of this antecedent.



Table 3 Antecedents of brand love toward PANDORA in our sample

Antecedents of brand love	Presence regarding PANDORA in our sample	Example quotes
Identification with the brand	All participants claimed to identify with the brand PANDORA: 12 participants refer that the jewels enable the eternalization of memorable moments, 7 participants use the brand to express their identity, and 1 participant likes the personalization afforded by the brand	<p>“Yes, I identify with the brand, and I find it hard to believe that someone doesn't. The brand has so many pieces that can represent so many different moments. Each person can use the products and personalize them to their taste, and each piece will tell a story” (P2)</p> <p>“I identify with the brand because it's high quality, I love the design, and it's very feminine. I totally relate, I am very feminine and stylish” (P18)</p> <p>“The brand expresses my personality and my story. I buy a certain piece because I identify with it, it defines me. And my story too, in the sense that each piece brings me a memory” (P17)</p> <p>“In other jewel brands, jewels are ready-made. In PANDORA, we can shape them according to our style and to important moments that we wish to eternalize. That is something very personal, and we relate to the jewel on a deep level” (P13)</p>
Self-expression	All participants consider that the brand expresses part of their identity: 9 mention personality and personal story, 7 mention only their stories, 3 mention only their personalities, and 1 claims the brand makes her feel special	<p>“I think PANDORA is in between worlds, because it is affordable, but it also has some high-end pieces, with higher prices” (P11)</p> <p>“I wouldn't say it's a prestige brand. You can wear it every day, anyone can wear it. It's not a luxury brand, it's affordable” (P17)</p> <p>“PANDORA is different because it gives us the possibility of ascribing a special meaning to each piece, and each piece tells a story of ours. Also, the way they present their collections, always associated with a story, to an imaginary, to certain features. Because of that, each jewel earns a special meaning, and I don't see that in other brands. Other brands are just accessories, PANDORA pieces are part of me” (P14)</p> <p>“Yes, I have talked to several friends about the stories behind PANDORA pieces. For example, this piece, my mother offered it to me on my graduation day. We share the meaning of each piece and decode who the other person is” (P15)</p> <p>“I have never felt comfortable asking people about their PANDORA pieces, but I admit that I notice if other people wear PANDORA and I feel an instant connection” (P7)</p> <p>“With PANDORA, we want to build our bracelet piece by piece. We add value to it, symbolic and real, as the full bracelet turns out to be quite expensive. I think it is this collecting that hooks me as a PANDORA consumer, that is what I appreciate. I continuously add pieces that add value to my bracelet because each of them is a story” (P11)</p> <p>“The jewellery is high quality and then you have excellent customer care. Each piece has a two-year warranty. I've had PANDORA jewels for years and they are as good as new” (P13)</p>
Prestige	13 participants consider PANDORA a prestigious brand, and 7 disagree because it is affordable	
Uniqueness	All participants agree that PANDORA stands out when compared to other brands: 8 mention that it enables consumers to express their stories, 6 refer personalization, 5 mention the brand's communication, 3 mention the product's quality, and 1 mentions being contemporary and updated	
Sense of community belonging	18 participants have talked to other women after noticing that they were also using PANDORA's jewelry, 9 participants are members of the brands community on social media	
Perceived value	All participants consider the brand valuable: 14 value the symbolic dimension of the jewels and the stories they convey, 7 identify with the brand or with certain pieces, and 6 mention quality	
Perceived quality	All participants assess PANDORA as a high-quality brand	



Storytelling and brand love

In the second part of the interview, we explored to which extent the storytelling of the brand PANDORA was important and valued by our participants, considering if different applications of this technique—in branded content, in advertising and in products—were recognized and valued. On Table 4, you can find information regarding the importance of PANDORA using storytelling, and corresponding quotes.

All of the participants acknowledge that PANDORA uses storytelling as a communication strategy. All the participants follow PANDORA on social media and enjoy the content created by the brand very much. They claim to connect with the brand because of the stories portrayed and of the values conveyed, which they relate to the brand love antecedents of brand identification and self-expression. For example, Participant 2 states: “*For me, PANDORA is about love, friendship, connection. It’s also about each woman being unique, being a result of the most important moments in her life.*” Among the consumers who follow different profiles, Instagram is the favorite.

All of our participants also identify storytelling in PANDORA’s advertising, although they claim not enjoying advertising and not paying much attention to it. McKee and Gerace (2018) claim that storytelling and appeal to emotions favor memorization when compared to facts and information, and although most participants claim disliking ads and not paying attention to them, 12 were able to recall ads, 5 found out about new products because of ads and 2 bought PANDORA products due to ads.

All of the participants agreed that using storytelling in communication is key to catching their attention and is one of the main reasons they like PANDORA. When asked about the importance of different components of stories discussed—characters, time and space, plot and message—they highlighted the message, explaining that when the brand tells stories that resemble their lives or appeal to values that they share, they identify with it (Mucundorfeanu, 2018). Thus, the appeal to shared values stands out as the main reason why our participants identify with PANDORA and appropriate it for their self-expression (Fog, Budtz, Much and Blanchette (2010); Tormes et al., 2016).

In addition, all the participants also acknowledge that PANDORA associates stories to its products (Dias & Dias, 2018). Consumers value this very much, as stories add a symbolic dimension to products that enhance their value (Biesenbach, 2018; Fog et al., 2010). For example, Participant 17 states: “*If the pieces didn’t have a story, they would be ordinary. If I lost them I wouldn’t be sad. If I lost PANDORA, it would be a disaster.*”

Each of the 20 participants told us a story about one PANDORA piece that was special for them, usually associated with an important moment or memory, or to a person—e.g., “*I have one piece that always makes me laugh. Right before turning 18, I got my drivers’ license and asked my parents for a car. On my birthday, my father gave this PANDORA piece that is a car and said ‘Here you go, that’s the car you have been asking for’. I was a bit mad at the time, but now it’s my favourite piece because I laugh every time I look at it and it’s a memory of my 18th birthday*” (P14). All the

Table 4 Importance of storytelling and relation with brand love toward PANDORA in our sample

Storytelling and brand love	Presence regarding PANDORA in our sample	Example quotes
Storytelling in content marketing (social media)	All participants follow PANDORA on social media; all recognize and value the use of storytelling and imaginary universes, particularly in new products launching campaigns	“ <i>Instagram is great, the content appeals to stories and different imaginaries</i> ” (P5)
Storytelling in advertising	All participants don’t pay much attention to advertising; they recognize the use of storytelling; 2 have bought products because of adds	“ <i>I saw a video on social media revealing a necklace that works as the bracelet, and told the story of a girl that was finding different pieces. I’m not going to rush off to buy it, but it caught my interest</i> ” (P11)
Storytelling in products	All participants recognize and value the association of storytelling to products; products gain symbolic value; products become memories; products enable self-expression All participants told one story about one special PANDORA piece for them, associated to specific moments, memories and people	“ <i>Stories create an automatic relation between the customers and the brand. I think people don’t buy PANDORA just because the jewels are cute, PANDORA creates a true connection with people because it helps consumers carry with them important memories of their lives. I love my PANDORA jewels even more because of the symbolic value of the stories I associate with each of them</i> ” (P4)
Storytelling and brand love	All participants reported brand love; all participants reported that storytelling contributed to this brand love (for 8 it was essential); all participants declared they would not feel the same way about the brand if it did not use storytelling	



consumers agree that the story associated with the product adds value to it, as it gains a symbolic and affective dimension (Dias, L. & Dias, P., 2018)—“*The pieces remind me of important moments, moments that made me who I am. These pieces eternize festive dates, and when I wear the jewelry I carry with me memories of those good moments, a positive energy. The story behind each piece is very valuable and meaningful for me*” (P12). This shows that storytelling integrated in products even prompts consumers to go from storytelling to storydoing, embedding the brand in their own stories (Natal et al., 2017; Lledó, 2019; Rojas, 2019).

All of the participants mention the values depicted in the stories, highlighting family, love, friendship and self-expression. If the values conveyed by the brand and the ones that are important for consumers coincide, this leads to a strong identification of the consumers with the brand (Signorelli, 2014). Thus, according to our participants, stories and values do reinforce brand love, as they favor the creation of an emotional and affective relationship with the jewels, and by extension with the brand. This is illustrated by Participant 15: “*The stories make me develop a special affection for the brand. When I think about jewelry, the first brand that pops to mind is PANDORA. I think that’s because every piece I own is very meaningful for me.*” Thus, we concluded that storytelling plays a very important role in the development of brand love, particularly if entailing shared values and personalization (Karahanolu & Sener, 2009), and that it can, therefore, be considered a brand love antecedent.

Consequences of brand love

After verifying that most antecedents of brand love are present in our interviewees regarding PANDORA, and observing that, in their view, the use of storytelling by the brand enhances their connection to it, we set out to search for the consequences of brand love. Table 5 presents a summary of the presence of consequences of brand love towards the brand PANDORA in our sample, and examples of quotes by our participants. We consider these elements as consequences of brand love, and not of similar concepts such as satisfaction, loyalty or emotional attachment to brands, because we have already established the existence of brand love for PANDORA among our participants—they all own PANDORA pieces and use them regularly, they follow PANDORA on social media, and they express a strong identification with the brand. Thus, they have a long-lasting relationship with PANDORA, and they expressed “declarations of love” during the interviews (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006).

Loyalty is a very evident brand love consequence present among our participants. All of them already own several PANDORA pieces and expressed intention of buying more in the near future (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Oliver, 1999).

Actually, 13 of the participants already know exactly what they are going to buy.

Another important consequence of brand love is positive WOM (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2009), as all of the participants declare having recommended PANDORA in the past and being willing to recommend it again in future. The main reason for this is that, according to them, the brand is meaningful, is more than a piece of jewelry, it has an important symbolic and affective dimension (Dias & Dias, 2018). Also, all participants declare being willing to pay a bit more for PANDORA’s products, if necessary, mostly because they value the symbolic and affective dimension of the products. Participant 11 also refers to collecting as an important factor leading to loyalty and to willingness to pay more for the products—“*Then you have to feed your addiction, you have your bracelet and you want to complete it, to fill it with important moments and stories.*”

Concerning active engagement, it was more difficult to assess this brand love consequence because, out of the 20, only half declared actively searching about the brand or engaging with it in some way (Keller, 2013). We observed that younger consumers (under 25 years old) are more actively engaged with the brand.

Finally, 16 of our participants declared considering themselves as PANDORA “brand lovers.” They justify their answer mentioning that they wear their jewelry frequently and mostly that they have created emotional links to the jewels due to the stories and moments that they represent.

Thus, we conclude that using storytelling in communication is important for setting a context for the brand and for expressing values that generate identification from the consumers (Roberts, 2004; Newlin, 2009), but applying storytelling to the products really makes a difference in adding symbolic and affective value to them (Dias & Dias, 2018). Storytelling can be considered an antecedent of brand love and has a stronger impact when it is applied to products themselves.

Conclusion

Our findings have shown the presence of most antecedents and consequences of brand love regarding the brand PANDORA among our sample, and 16 out of our 20 interviewees describe themselves as PANDORA lovers. In addition, we also observed that they acknowledge the use of storytelling by PANDORA, both in brand communication content marketing and advertising and associated with the brand’s products.

Next, we set out to explore the relationship between storytelling and brand love, in the case of PANDORA. According to most of our interviewees, the use of storytelling has the effect of generating, enhancing and reinforcing brand



Table 5 Consequences of brand love toward PANDORA in our sample

Consequences of brand love		Presence regarding PANDORA in our sample	Example quotes
Loyalty	All participants have more than one PANDORA products; all participants have the intention of buying more PANDORA products in the future; 13 participants already know which product they will buy next		<p>“Yes, I saw that PANDORA launched some animal pieces and I thought right away that I would like to buy a dog piece to represent my dog, which recently died” (P4)</p> <p>“I’m sure that when a special moment happens I will buy a new piece to eternize it. I have two bracelets and my whole life is depicted in them” (P10)</p> <p>“I definitely recommend PANDORA, particularly if it’s for a present, because it is so meaningful” (P5)</p> <p>“I recommend PANDORA because it’s the only brand of jewelry I wear, and the first that comes to mind” (P12)</p>
Positive WOM	All participants have recommended the brand to others and would do it again; they mention being a meaningful gift, having high quality, and being the first brand they think about in the jewelry category		<p>“I actively search about the brand. I like to search online and when I go to the store I know exactly what I want because they don’t have the whole collection in stores” (P11)</p> <p>“I really like PANDORA’s Instagram. I follow it and I usually like the posts, but I rarely comment. If I see a new product that I like, I may share it because I know my friends will also like it” (P6)</p>
Active engagement	10 participants mentioned actively searching about the brand; out of the 9 participants that follow the brand on social media, 5 referred being active in liking, sharing and commenting on content		<p>“I would pay more for the products because they have quality, I know I will have a two-year warranty and good customer care, and above all, I know that the product will have a story associated, and therefore a special meaning” (P13)</p> <p>“PANDORA is absolutely my favourite brand!” (P3)</p>
Willingness to pay more	All participants are willing to pay a bit more for PANDORA; they mention that the symbolic value of the pieces does not have a price		<p>“I think I am a ‘distracted’ brand lover because I don’t pay attention to advertising or follow the brand on social media, but I wear my PANDORA jewelry every day, they are like an extension of me. So I consider myself a brand lover” (P14)</p>
Being a brand lover	16 participants think about themselves as “brand lovers” of PANDORA		<p>“I am in love with PANDORA and all the jewels that I own are very dear to me, they all have a personal story that makes me love them, and the brand” (P11)</p>



love, as it was a crucial factor for them to feel identification with the brand and to develop emotions toward it. Using storytelling in communication is important to catch attention and generate identification between the values embedded in the stories and the ones that are important for consumers (Pulizzi, 2012). This identification based on shared values is a deeper connection than the ones based on individual features or lifestyle and thus is an important foundation for loyalty and positive WOM, beneficial consequences of brand love (Kotler, Kartajaya & Setiawan, 2017). However, our participants highlight the importance of associating stories to products as a way of extending the products and enhancing their value. These narrative products (Dias & Dias, 2018) have a symbolic and affective dimension that makes them more than products, and they become symbols, mementos, an extension of the user. In the case of PANDORA, because of the collectible nature of their products, necklaces and bracelets that can be personalized with diverse pieces, the association between products and stories goes beyond storytelling, as users become storydoers (Natal et al., 2017; Lledó, 2019; Rojas, 2019), using the pieces to build their own symbolic narratives. This holistic approach to storytelling as a branding strategy (Fog et al., 2010) is, therefore, key to success in building and nurturing brand love. Thus, we conclude that storytelling can be considered an antecedent of brand love, that our interviewees relate specifically with loyalty, positive WOM and willingness to pay more.

Our participants consider that storytelling prompts identification with the brand, self-expression, sense of belonging to a community and perceived value of the products and brand, and this effect is shaped by brand identity, as the personalizable nature of PANDORA's products is intimately connected to self-expression and identity. Despite being central in the case of PANDORA, in which storytelling is not only applied to communication but also to products, there is the possibility of other brands being able to nurture brand love without resorting to storytelling. The literature on the antecedents of brand love, so far, reveals that each of them is not a requirement for the blossoming and nurturing of brand love, but they are complementary and act synergically, reinforcing each other.

Retrieving our research questions, we concluded that storytelling as a communication technique contributes to the development of brand love, particularly by triggering identification with the brand values and emotional attachment to the brand (Berkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010; Biesenbach, 2018). Thus, one academic contribution of our study is presenting storytelling as an additional antecedent of brand love. Also, storytelling contributes to reinforcing other antecedents of brand love, namely brand identification. Another contribution is highlighting the strength of applying storytelling to products, as this symbolic dimension adds value to

the products, and enables users to appropriate them for self-expression (Dias & Dias, 2018). In the case of PANDORA, our participants stress that it is because of their symbolic dimension that they feel so attached to PANDORA's products, and are loyal and engaged customers.

Our research presents contributions to communication and marketing professionals, by attesting the strength of storytelling and by demonstrating the synergic nature of the relationship between several antecedents and consequences of brand love. Additionally, other brands can learn from PANDORA to use storytelling beyond their communication, because it is precisely the narrative nature of the brand's products that our participants value the most (Dias & Dias, 2018).

Being a case study, our findings are not generalizable but they reveal relevant insights for using storytelling in branding, and for the design of future research on storytelling as an antecedent of brand love, on the synergies between antecedents and consequences of brand love, and on narrative products, with a broader scope, considering different product categories and different types of brands.

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