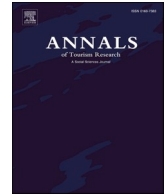




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Full Length Article

## Feeling good - bodies in destination brand love

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## ABSTRACT

This study extends the conceptualization of destination brand love with a bodily dimension. Although tourism research and affective and cognitive science acknowledge that we sense the world through our bodies, the human body seldom appears in brand-love studies. This study shifts the focus from the antecedents and consequences of brand love to consumers' multidimensional brand-love relationships. We distinguish two ontological approaches to brand love by studying an outdoor destination brand. The first conceptualizes destination brand love as a four-dimensional entity of bodily, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. The second is a processual conceptualization considering destination brand-loving as an ongoing process. The study offers two alternative and connected conceptualizations for tourism marketing scholars: destination brand love and destination brand-loving.

## Introduction

The interest in brand relationships has grown since Fournier's (1998) early categorization, spanning from enslavement and enmity to committed partnerships. Tourists' relationships with destination brands include place bonding (Cheng & Kuo, 2015), destination/place attachment (Lee, 2001; Liu et al., 2020), destination brand hate (Farhat & Chaney, 2021), and destination brand love (Aro et al., 2018). Although deep relationships such as brand love are rare, they are meaningful to consumers and brands (Connors et al., 2021; Thomson et al., 2005) and build brand equity (Robertson et al., 2022), thus warranting study.

This paper joins the discussions on tourists' strong positive relationships with destination brands and explicates destination brand love. Although the conceptual landscape is not clear, scholars like Carroll and Ahuvia (2006), Batra et al. (2012), and Rossiter (2012) view brand love as conceptually distinct. Brand love is a deeply affectionate relationship, separate from brand liking (Rossiter, 2012) or brand attachment "the bond that connects a consumer with a specific brand and involves feelings toward the brand" (Malär et al., 2011, p. 36), brand identification "a consumer's psychological state of perceiving, feeling, and valuing his or her belongingness with a brand" (Lam et al., 2013, p. 235), or brand admiration "an enduring affective state reflecting an individual's sustained positive regard for a brand" (Ahmad et al., 2023, p. 552). Brand liking precedes brand love (Batra et al., 2012), and brand identification, attachment (Aro et al., 2018), and admiration (Park et al., 2016) can be parts of brand love.

Brand love encompasses consumers' strong positive emotional bonds with a certain brand (Batra et al., 2012), their behavior (Albert et al., 2008), and cognition (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). The definition by Albert et al. (2008, p. 1063) as "the constellation of behaviors, cognitions, and emotions associated with the desire to enter or maintain a close relationship with a brand" echoes the three aspects that have guided most brand love studies. Likewise, the focus of research has been on the antecedents and consequences of brand love (e.g., Bairrada et al., 2018; Farmaki et al., 2021; Pontinha & Coelho do Vale, 2020), thus approaching brand love as an

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entity in between.

However, the advances in affective (Colombetti, 2014) and cognitive science (Newen et al., 2018; Varela et al., 2017) suggest that brand love depends on the body and the interaction of the body with the environment. Although tourism research (Cohen & Cohen, 2012; McManus, 2020; Rokka et al., 2023) acknowledges that we sense the world through our bodies (Merleau-Ponty, 2012), the human body seldom appears in brand love studies. Maxian et al. (2013) connected physiological responses to brand love and Bıçakcıoğlu et al. (2018), Lv and Wu (2021), Swanson (2017), and Yadav et al. (2023) addressed sensory experiences in brand love. Nevertheless, brand-love research remains silent on other bodily aspects and embodiment, a gap this study will address. We argue that the current conceptualizations of brand love focusing on emotions, cognitions, and behaviors remain incomplete in the context of tourism destinations. This study incorporates bodily aspects to conceptualize destination brand love.

Moreover, the increasing use of process orientation in social science (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) suggests an alternative worldview, where research addresses process rather than substance or entity. The orientation views human cognition as connected and arising from embodied interaction with the world. We argue that process orientation enriches the conceptualization of brand love by offering an alternative. Thus, this study incorporates process orientation and conceptualizes destination brand-loving.

Thus, this study offers two alternative conceptualizations of destination brand love. The first introduces bodies in the destination context and conceptualizes *brand love* with four dimensions: bodily, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The second conceptualization uses process ontology and views the four-dimensional phenomenon as an ongoing, changing process of *brand-loving*.

The results expand the studies of brand love and shed light on the understudied phenomenon of destination brand love (Filieri et al., 2021) via a holistic perspective on consumer-brand relationships. Here, destination brand love refers to a deeply affectionate, long-term consumer-brand relationship created, re-created, maintained, and terminated through active relationship work (see Alvarez et al., 2021; Langner et al., 2015; Rossiter, 2012). That work includes customers' experiences and interactions with the brand during the relationship (Silva et al., 2021). Over time, experiences and brand-related interactions structure the relationship.

The structure of this study goes against publication norms and presents the “results in the manner in which they evolved” (Van Maanen et al., 2007, p. 1146). Hence, we follow abductive reasoning and start with the context and methodology. Thereafter, we present the bodily dimension of brand love that emerged from the data. Next, we build the first alternative, the four-dimensional conceptualization of destination brand love, followed by the second, processual conceptualization of brand-loving.

## Methodology

### The context

Destination brands are excellent contexts for studying brand love because people love places and landscapes more commonly than

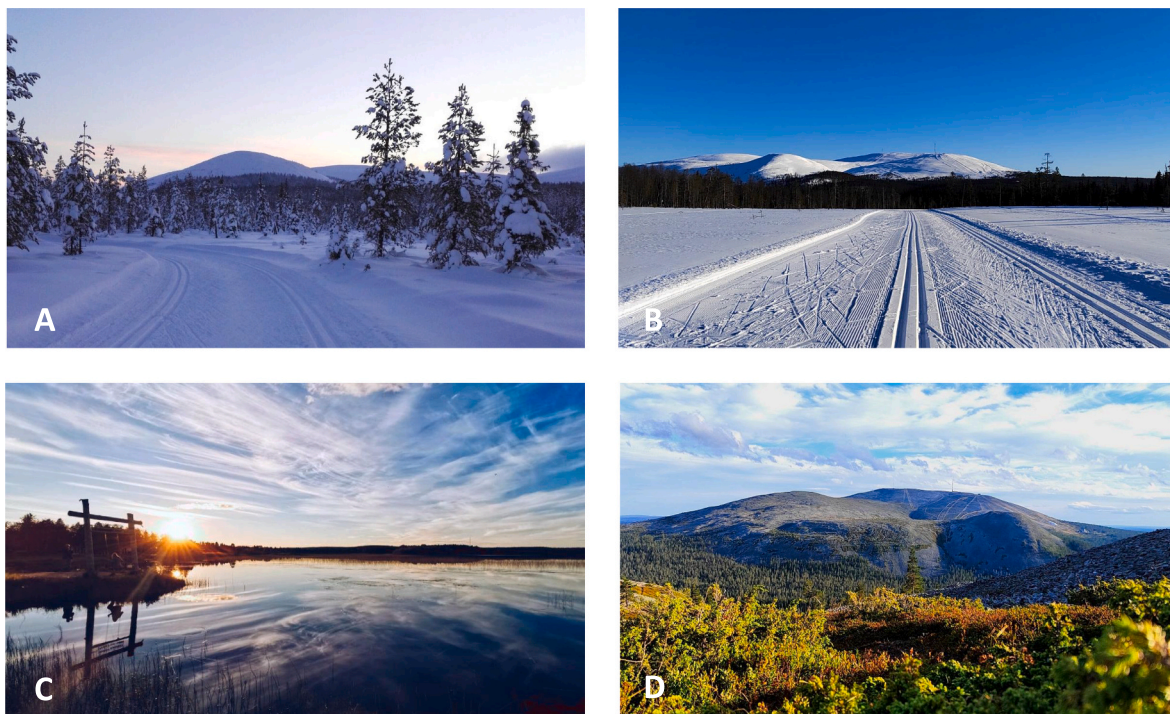


Fig. 1. Ylläs across seasons. Polar night *kaamos* (A), spring sun (B), midnight sun (C), and autumn colors *ruska* (D) on the trails of Ylläs (photos by the first author).

they do other objects (Ahuvia, 1993). Further, outdoor destinations offer a unique space for brand love as tourists consciously use their bodies in outdoor activities. Hence, an outdoor destination brand is a fruitful context to convey the bodily aspects of brand love.

The outdoor destination brand chosen for this study, Ylläs in Finnish Lapland, consists of the place itself and the marketing actions making it an attractive tourism destination (Strandberg & Ek Styvén, 2020). Govers and Go (2009) describe the concept of a destination as encompassing its landscape, history, weather, geography, culture, language, and people. Destination marketing includes branding, improving the infrastructure and services, and everything that affects the tourism experience. Although a destination brand's customers and target groups can be its residents (see Zenker et al., 2017), this study focuses on tourists' relationships. There is no division between love for the destination as a place and love for the brand built around it, as the destination is a key element of the brand (Aro et al., 2018).

We chose Ylläs as it is known to have very loyal customers and is familiar to both authors. The first author has been a loyal customer since 1988, and the second wrote advertising copy for Ylläs in the late 1980s while living in Lapland and visiting Ylläs. Ylläs offers downhill and cross-country skiing, sled-dog safaris, hiking, and mountain biking. Fig. 1 shows examples of settings for outdoor activities offered in Ylläs across seasons. The first domestic tourists arrived at Ylläs in the 1930s, and international tourists followed in the 1940s. Fig. 2 highlights the long history of outdoor tourism in Ylläs. The brand name Ylläs derives from the area's highest fell (a peak). Ylläs covers seven fells and two villages, Äkäslompolo and Ylläsjärvi, with around 1500 inhabitants. Ylläs can accommodate 23,000 tourists (excluding privately used cottages) and attracts around 300–350,000 visitors annually.

### Study methods

The study follows abductive reasoning (Kovács & Spens, 2005; Locke et al., 2008; Peirce, 1931) that alternates between empirical data and theoretical knowledge. This non-linear and non-positivistic research approach aids theory renewal by drawing attention to unexpected data used to support the theorizing process (Van Maanen et al., 2007). The trigger for this study was qualitative data collected for a larger research project on brand love. Bodies and bodily aspects emerged strongly from the data, despite not being mentioned in the interview guide used and rarely in the brand-love literature. That prompted the search for theoretical support on body and embodiment beyond brand love studies and specific data collection on the bodily aspects of brand love. Hence, the abductive continuous process (Van Maanen et al., 2007) unfolded as preliminary empirical data analysis influenced the search for a wider theoretical frame, which influenced additional data collection and analysis.

### Collection of empirical data

The qualitative data consist of researcher-generated and naturally occurring longitudinal data (Silverman, 2000), which permit data-type triangulation (Shenton, 2004) although provided by the same informants. The researcher-generated data were collected through 11 semi-structured interviews of domestic tourists of Ylläs by the first author. Semi-structured interviews are appropriate for understanding complex and partially known phenomena (Gummesson, 2005). The informants were selected from the personal network of the first author (Patton, 2002), ensuring they had a brand relationship with Ylläs (Batra et al., 2012). All the informants



**Fig. 2.** Two bike backers at the Ylläs fells in 1953 (Photo “pyöräretkellä Äkäslompolossa Kolarissa” by Poutvaara, Matti, Kansatieteen kuvakoelma, Finnish Heritage Agency, KK5079:9.KOLA.4).

view Ylläs as a special destination, have visited many times, and practice some favorite outdoor hobbies there.

Table 1 details the two interview rounds. The first focused on brand love without questions about the bodily aspect. Eight of the first interviews were conducted face-to-face and one by telephone. The interview duration was 26–53 min. However, once the bodily aspects emerged from the data, the second round of interviews focused on those. The two informants with the most intense relationship with Ylläs (both in years and in the number of visits) were interviewed in round two. These face-to-face interviews lasted 59 and 64 min and included viewing informants' photos to evoke detailed memories. All 11 interviews were audiotaped (comprising eight hours), with the informants' permission, and transcribed.

The naturally occurring data, 117 chalet guestbook entries, were collected by the first author. The semi-public diary notes (see Patterson, 2005) were written by seven informants and span over 35 years. All users of the same chalet can read the guestbook entries. Guestbooks are traditional ways to document visits informally. They are often re-read upon return to refresh the memories of earlier visits.

All informants permitted the use of the entries; all notes are authentic. Although sometimes brief, guestbook notes are a valuable source of naturally occurring data (Silverman, 2000) on “impressive extraordinary experiences” (Lv & Wu, 2021, p. 183), but also contain notes on mundane happenings and weather. As a form of a real, semi-public diary, guestbooks are “an exciting methodological alternative” (Patterson, 2005, p. 142). Since the guestbook entries are made during or at the end of a vacation, they represent follow-up data (see Patterson, 2005), strengthening the study's longitudinal nature.

### Data analysis

The data analysis used NVivo software and followed the principles of qualitative content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). First, all body-related data from the round-one interviews were coded into a ‘body’ node. All informants spoke about body-related aspects. Then, the second round of interviews was conducted, and the guestbook entries were collected. Of 117 guestbook entries, 115 contained body-related texts. Hence, the bodily aspects of destination brand love emerged strongly from the data. The second analysis phase revealed several themes forming an inductive coding tree of the bodily dimension, of 16 body-related themes, which remained more scattered than insightful.

Next, the first author cultivated a theoretical understanding of body-related tourism research (e.g., Tussyadiah et al., 2018) and consumer and brand experience studies (e.g., Kuuru & Närvänen, 2019; Stevens et al., 2019). For example, Kuuru and Närvänen (2019) categorize embodied customer experiences into three sources: i) individuals' bodies, ii) the relationship between an individual and another living body (or bodies), and/or iii) the relationship between an individual and a surrounding space. Because the current study investigates relationships rather than episodic experiences, the categorization was modified to reflect our data. During this third analysis phase, the 16 themes were grouped into four to form the bodily dimension of destination brand love.

The fourth analysis phase employed doubt in the research process and “re-entered the present” (Locke et al., 2008, p. 917). The first author returned to the brand-love literature to create the first alternative conceptualization of the phenomenon. As existing destination-brand-love studies are rare (e.g., Kim et al., 2024; Zhang & Xu, 2024), brand-love studies from other contexts were also used. The findings of this study were used to categorize earlier literature, resulting in a four-dimensional conceptualization of brand love. The studies used represent a major body of brand-love literature that presents a rich collection of antecedents and consequences. The categorization revealed that cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects, later labeled as dimensions, prevail in brand-love research, while the body-related aspects remain scarce.

The authors discussed the analysis in the fifth phase, revisited the data, and explored research on cognition, affection, embodiment, and processes. The authors followed the abductive reasoning where the concepts, conjectures, and data interplay (Van Maanen et al., 2007) and noted that brand love can be conceptualized using a processual approach (Langley & Tsoukas, 2010) as *brand-loving*. The sixth phase of refining the analysis intertwined with the reporting of this study and included sharpening the concepts, tables, and descriptions and mirroring the four-dimensional re-conceptualization of brand love with the processual conceptualization of brand-

**Table 1**  
Empirical data.

The informant	Length of Ylläs relationship	Number of visits to Ylläs	Interview on brand love	Interview on the bodily aspects of brand love	Guestbook entries during 1988–2024
Female, 64, Julia	30 years	>50	x	x	x
Female, 59, Kristiina	24	>10	x		x
Female, 39, Elisa	8	>10	x		
Female, 36, Nina	29	>10	x		x
Female, 33, Hanna	29	>10	x		x
Female, 29, Maria	20	>10	x		x
Male, 69, Mikael	29	>50	x	x	x
Male, 36, Nooa	30	>10	x		x
Male, 33, Matias	18	6–10	x		
9 informants			9 interviews, 5 h 57 min	2 interviews, 2 h 3 min	117 guestbook entries from seven informants

loving.

## Findings and discussion

### The bodily dimension of destination brand love

This section describes the bodily dimension of destination brand love developed in this study. The bodily dimension includes four sub-categories: 1) sensing the brand, 2) the bodily self-expression, 3) the embodied brand, and 4) personal well-being.

#### Sensing the brand

Sensing the brand consists of multiple sensory experiences and an awareness of the bodies of others. In both cases, the consumer senses something external—whether environmental or interpersonal.. Sensations—sensory experiences created through the sense—are formed in a body as a sensory response to external stimuli (Brakus et al., 2009). The basic senses are visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and tactile forms, all intrinsically related to the human body. Visual and auditory senses are considered primary, but awareness of others—especially tactile forms—is growing (Achrol & Kotler, 2012).

The data show that pleasurable sensory experiences are connected to the informant's relationship with Ylläs, including the beauty and purity of the landscape, the enjoyment derived from quietness, the beauty of autumn colors, the northern lights, and the midnight sun but also thick fog or snowstorm shrouding the fells.

*“In the summertime, the lightness, midnight sun, is why it is so great to be there, [along with] the summer environment... The originality... the environment is untouched, it is nice... All the plants and trees.”*

(Mikael)

*“We arrived at 3 am on Saturday [from X] escorted by bone-chilling cold and lovely northern lights to await Christmas in the peace of Lapland.”*

(Guestbook entry, Kristiina)

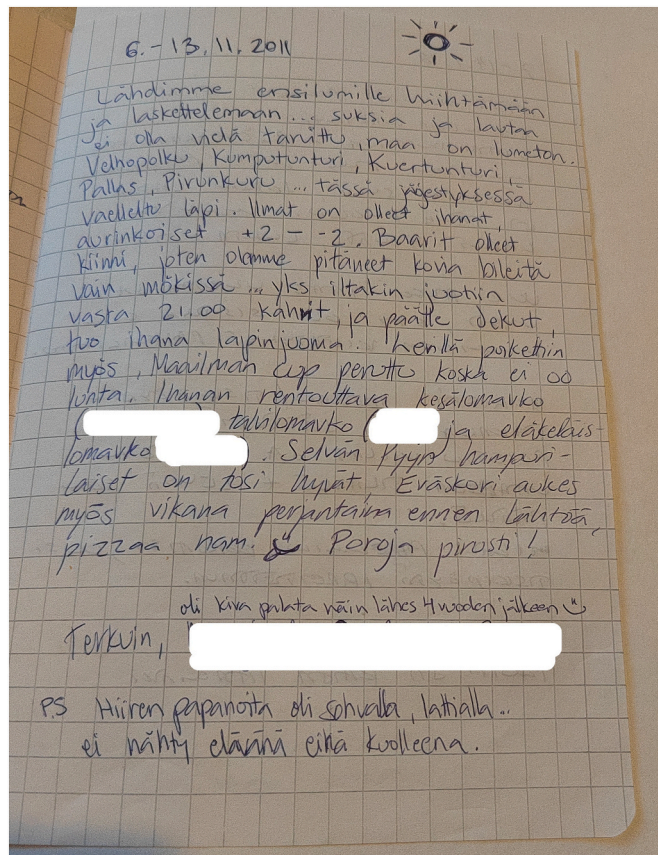


Fig. 3. Hanna's guestbook entry (photo by the first author).

The soundscape, for example, the calls of willow grouse and ptarmigans flying, were part of the love expressed. Further, human sounds, such as the songs of Lapland, were mentioned in both the interviews and guestbook entries.

*“The jingling of reindeer bells and (the voice of) these birds, Siberian jays.”*

(Julia)

Ylläs was also connected to certain scents, smells, and tastes, such as the scent of a round-log house and the taste of sautéed reindeer.

*“...when you walk in the swamp in summer, there's a unique smell. It's wonderful, even though it has a bit of a fermentation note, but it's still a wonderful smell ...”*

(Mikael)

Fig. 3 features Hanna's humorous account of outdoor activities and culinary treats at local restaurants, “wild” cabin parties, coffees enjoyed with “Jekku [Jägermeister], that lovely favorite drink,” and traces of mice—without ever seeing the animals themselves. Everyone felt that the week was lovely and relaxing.

Sensations are powerful tools for creating a brand (Moreira et al., 2017) and tourism experiences (Li et al., 2023; Tussyadiah, 2014). Accordingly, our finding supports research linking pleasurable sensory experiences to destination brand love (Swanson, 2017) and brand love (Bıçakcıoğlu et al., 2018). Further, our findings expand Li et al.'s (2023) on sensory experiences as a part of tourists' spatial destination experience by taking these activities and space-related sensory experiences as elements of destination brand love.

In addition to sensing the space or environment, the bodies of others are part of sensing the brand. Humans are sensitive to the presence of others, such as service personnel and other customers (Söderlund, 2016; Söderlund, 2018; Zhang et al., 2010). Specifically moving bodies influence how individuals experience the surrounding space (Crossley, 2005). Two strangers can feel connected because they share a space (Tombs & McColl-Kennedy, 2010). Attitudes toward others and their behavior are reflected in the experience (Zhang et al., 2010). Greater identification with others increases liking and positive experiential influence (Grove & Fisk, 1997).

The informants referred to their travel companions (often unchanged for years) when describing outdoor activities, accommodation experiences, and joyful nights at restaurants. The informants also felt an affinity with strangers at Ylläs and were comfortable chatting at ski huts and restaurant terraces. The presence of strangers also offered security and a potential helping hand, as accidents can happen during outdoor activities. A stranger met first at Ylläs became the informant's life partner, which deepened her love for Ylläs.

*“You can go on your own if you want since there are safe places [refers to wilderness cafes, etc.] where you can get help—and I'd help others, too. I'd (for example) give my gloves if someone didn't have any.”*

(Julia)

*“Met my current husband there ... we got engaged there in 2011 on the slopes... Those are maybe the most unforgettable happenings there. Yes, they are truly unforgettable on a lifetime level.”*

(Elisa)

The informants could enjoy being alone in nature and in a crowded pub equally. Informants thanked prior users, who they had not necessarily met, for leaving the chalet clean. In addition, the absence of traces of humans, such as litter and dense construction, was seen as a positive (see Grimwood et al., 2015).

*“It's authentic; the nature is untouched; it's wonderful.”*

(Mikael)

*“I hope it can remain as it is. Without being spoiled by excessive services or construction.”*

(Hanna)

The informants' descriptions of their destination relationships with Ylläs included animals and traces of them (see Granås, 2018). Reindeer, huskies, and certain birds were associated with Ylläs, as was spending time with pets.

*“Maria took a husky safari, it was so nice & the dogs were lovely.”*

(Guestbook entry, Maria)

*“Luckily, very few mosquitoes here.”*

(Guestbook entry, Julia)

### *Bodily self-expression*

This sub-category combines the active use of the body and self-expression. Self-expression is strongly connected to brand love (Batra et al., 2012), and individuals use their bodies for self-expression (Crouch, 2000). People express certain traits of themselves through a loved self-expressive brand (Ahuvia et al., 2009). Skiing enthusiasts express their sporty identity by skiing on the fells and posting photos of ski adventures. Physical activity was central to the informants' Ylläs relationships. Even if the informants practice the same sports at home, doing so at Ylläs feels different.

*“Here [at home], when I go skiing, I think about how amazing the ski trails up there [in Ylläs] are in comparison...It would not be easy to replace [Ylläs], I don't know what place could be comparable.”*

(Elisa)

Interviewees referred to an active body. Enjoying the scenery after hiking to the top of Kuer-fell, dancing the night away, or taking a dip in a fell lake all require an active body. Ylläs makes it possible to challenge and positively surprise oneself physically.

*“There's [at Ylläs] a sufficient challenge...it [the first long ski trip] sticks in my mind as I have not skied for a long time, and I was positively surprised by how well I could ski.”*

(Nooa)

Informants also used Ylläs-branded clothing—a form of bodily self-expression.

Physical surroundings are strongly connected to the bodily dimension as they influence and guide actions and sensations (Crouch, 2000; Stevens et al., 2019). As individuals engage with the environment and material objects of a destination, they form memories and relationships tied to it. People use their bodies while interacting with brands (Stevens et al., 2019) and tourism destinations (Crouch, 2000). These bodily practices help them connect with and perceive the place—to emplace the place or destination (Grimwood, 2015). Accordingly, a tourist establishes a bodily connection with the physical aspects of the destination brand.

Closely related to self-expression is self-extension, where an individual sees the brand as a part of the self (Ahuvia et al., 2022). A physical connection between a tourist's body and a brand is a way to enhance self-extension. Our findings echo Ahuvia et al.'s (2022) idea of self-extension as “a relationship warmer” in brand love.

For some informants, the only reason to stop visiting Ylläs would be deteriorating health, and even that was unlikely to deter them. Even the most senior continued to enjoy Ylläs, though more tranquilly. Those who had visited Ylläs since childhood described how their physical activities there diversified as they grew up. The consumer's physical body thus forms the basis of bodily self-expression with the loved brand.

### *Embodied brand*

This sub-category contains the ways to embody the brand. The informants related embodied memories and learning to the loved brand. Both memories and learning are ways to store the loved brand in the body. People's lives are full of experiences, but only some become memorable and embodied. A person would not necessarily remember how it felt to cycle home yesterday but might remember the sensations experienced while cycling under the African sun ten years ago. The stronger the emotions during an event, the longer it will be remembered (Bastiaansen et al., 2019). Conran (2011) suggests that the most memorable events are sentimental and embodied, gained through bodily activity. McManus (2020) found that tourists rekindle their holiday memories at home by imitating the bodily practices and embodied rituals performed during their vacation. Like memories in brand love (Albert et al., 2008), embodied memories form part of the bodily dimension of destination brand love.

Interviews are based on memories and their role in Ylläs relationships. All informants discussed body-related aspects of their Ylläs relationship. Hence, bodily aspects are a meaningful part of the memories of a loved brand. Informants described how cold winds, snowstorms, feeling sunshine, extraordinary physical exertions, and traditional activities are all memorable parts of the relationship with Ylläs.

*“Sometimes you want to try something new, like ice-floating...maybe you remember best the things you do for the first time there.”*

(Hanna)

*“Kesäging Keidas [a wilderness café] is such a place that I often plan my ski route to pass through it at some point.”*

(Elisa)

The embodied brand can also come alive through the senses. Certain scents and tastes can revitalize the brand wherever the person is. Even seeing snowy landscapes reminiscent of Lapland on TV or hearing Lapland songs or songs sung at Ylläs triggers memories of the brand.

*“...sometimes, the smell of timber makes me think about the Lapland chalet [at Ylläs].”*

(Nina)

*“If I hear a Lapland song...I start to recall Ylläs, as the song mentions the tracks of a willow grouse...I have traced those footprints at Ylläs.”*

(Julia)

Some informants learned a new bodily skill at Ylläs. One informant reported learning to snowboard at Ylläs; now, when she snowboards elsewhere, she automatically compares that place to Ylläs. When a new skill is learned in a loved brandscape, the brand may become associated with that skill and performing it elsewhere can trigger memories of the brandscape where it was learned. This suggests that embodied learning is part of the bodily dimension of brand love.

One form of embodying the Ylläs brand involves searching for, picking, and eating berries and mushrooms. Cloudberry is a popular treat indigenous to Lapland. Engaging with berries and other gifts of nature provides a bodily connection to the destination and allows visitors to bring a part of the destination brand home.

*“A few cloudberry and blueberry to bring home. Toured the fells, cycled, and picked mushrooms!”*

(Guestbook entries, Julia)

*“We crouched in the cloudberry bog with success.”*

(Guestbook entry, Kristiina)

Relating to plants and other non-human kin — such as experiencing meaningful moments with cranberries or blueberries — offers one potential pathway for building a relationship with a tourism destination (Grimwood & Höckert, 2023). Searching, being with, and eating berries and other treasures of the plant kingdom is part of the bodily dimension of destination brand love.

The informants included technology and social media in their Ylläs-love relationships. A GPS device makes it safe to walk alone in the woods without fear of getting lost, but it can also curtail excitement.

*“... before GPS, you could not be sure where you were. It was quite exciting...There were some pretty tough situations [being lost] with your friend and alone, having an adventure.”*

(Mikael)

*“...sharing photos and updates from my bike rides, I've probably shared a few from the nightlife too (to social media).”*

(Elisa)

Today, technology is part of embodied experiences (Tussyadiah et al., 2018). Wearable technology monitors and extends understanding of how one's body functions. Technology becomes part of the human body and mediates between tourists and destinations. As wearable technology may increase pleasure and supplement experiences with destination brands, it is part of the bodily dimension.

#### *Personal well-being*

The final sub-category is personal well-being, which refers to an individual's subjective judgment of their life (Diener, 1984). Albert et al. (2008) suggested that consumers' well-being should be studied in relation to brand love. Maxian et al. (2013) report that even seeing the logo of a loved brand can trigger smiling muscles and slow the heart rate. Here, the bodily aspects of personal well-being include health, relaxation, enjoyment, and positive bodily sensations.

*“Tomorrow we're heading home, body and soul full of solar energy.”*

(Guestbook entry, Kristiina)

*“Somehow, Ylläs just makes me think that all my stress would disappear instantly if I could go there.”*

(Matias)

Informants felt relaxed at Ylläs; the physical tiredness from outdoor activities, a suntan from spring skiing, and a refreshed body and mind all contribute to brand-love relationships—this is presented in Fig. 4. Hence, personal well-being is part of the bodily dimension.

Table 2 summarizes the content of the bodily dimension and its four sub-dimensions. Instead of considering the body-related aspects as antecedents or consequences of destination brand love, we view them as the content of its bodily dimension through which embodied brand love is built, maintained, fostered, and weakened. Accordingly, here the content of the bodily dimension joins to relationship work (see Alvarez et al., 2021) in the process of loving a brand, rather than preceding brand love.

Identifying the bodily dimension led us to re-examine existing brand-love research and to offer the first alternative conceptualization.

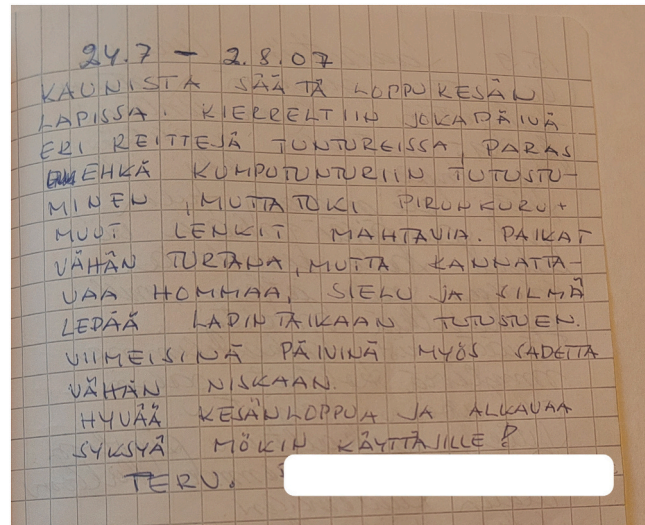


Fig. 4. Julia's Guestbook entry (photo by the first author): "Body is a bit sore, but it's all worth it: soul and eyes rest while exploring the magic of Lapland. ..."

Table 2

The bodily dimension of destination brand love.

Bodily dimension of destination brand love	
Sub-dimensions	Content
Sensing the brand	Pleasurable sensory experiences, sensing the bodies of others and the environment, the brand as a bodily extension of the brand-loving consumer
Bodily self-expression	Bodily self-expression with the brand, active use of the body while interacting with the brand and the brandscape
Embodied brand	Memories, embodied learning, bodily connection with nature, wearing the brand, technological embodiment
Personal well-being	The physical well-being of the brand-loving consumer

#### A four-dimensional concept of brand love

Batra et al.'s (2012, p. 2) definition of brand love "as a higher-order construct including multiple cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, which consumers organize into a mental prototype" remains the most influential. Hence, existing research on brand love has focused on cognitions, emotions, and behavior, leaving the body almost unstudied.

We employed Gardner et al.'s (2017) procedure to review existing brand-love research using the logic of the bodily dimension, where the dimension continuously *builds* a brand-love relationship (instead of being an antecedent or outcome). Using previous brand-love literature as data, we constructed three dimensions: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Table 3 illustrates the four-dimensional conceptualization of brand love used to categorize the research.

The conceptualization follows the recent cognitive science scholars' views on cognition as an embodied, extended, and embedded phenomenon where the brain, body, and environment are coupled or integrated with cognition (Newen et al., 2018, p. 4). Accordingly, even cognitive phenomena (e.g., understanding one's own and other's emotions) depend on the body, the environment, and the active and embodied interaction with the environment (Carr et al., 2018; Varela et al., 2017). Hence, brand love is built on the body, emotions, cognitions, behaviors, and their interaction with the brand.

The four dimensions are interdependent, lack clear boundaries, and overlap. For example, the soundscape, an element of sensations (a bodily dimension), also triggers emotions (an emotional dimension), and strong emotions create memories (a cognitive dimension). The informants' social media postings represent e-word-of-mouth (a behavioral dimension) where pictures show active bodies and smiling faces (bodily and emotional dimensions) and, through intonations of *Loving Ylläs*, the psychological connection and satisfaction with the brand (cognitive dimension).

"... my first autumn trip to Ylläs, when the chapel was new; we were there at Petri Laaksonen's concert. It was touching and has remained in my mind."

(Kristiina)

To summarize, the emergence of the bodily dimension led us to construct the first alternative, a four-dimensional conceptualization of destination brand love with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and bodily dimensions.

**Table 3**  
A four-dimensional conceptualization of brand love.

Dimension	Content of dimension	Example references
Cognitive dimension	Identification with the brand	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
	Identification with the users of the brand	Albert & Merunka, 2013
	Sense of community with other customers	Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010
	Brand enables self-expression	Ahuvia et al., 2009
	Anthropomorphism	Rauschnabel & Ahuvia, 2014
	Brand personality (e.g., sincerity & excitement)	Roy et al., 2016
	Brand gender	Machado et al., 2019
	Meaningfulness	Barker et al., 2015; Ahuvia et al., 2022
	Intrinsic rewards	Batra et al., 2012
	Positive, strong attitude to the brand	Batra et al., 2012
	Positive evaluation of the brand	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
	Satisfaction with the brand	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
	Brand prestige & reputation	Bairrada et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018
	Brand trust & brand credibility	Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bairrada et al., 2018
	Brand innovativeness & novelty perception	Bairrada et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2018
	Functional value (e.g., quality) & perceived value	Albert et al., 2008; Bairrada et al., 2018
	Brand's familiarity	Barker et al., 2015
	Attitudinal loyalty & Engagement	Bairrada et al., 2018; Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010
	Anticipated separation distress	Batra et al., 2012
	Willingness to pay a premium price, to invest money	Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bairrada et al., 2018
	Willingness to invest time & to forgive	Batra et al., 2012; Bauer et al., 2009
	Precluding negative feelings about the brand	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006
	Resistance to negative information & experiences	Batra et al., 2012; Aro et al., 2018
	Dreams (of using the brand in the future)	Albert et al., 2008
	Interest in the brand's well-being	Aro et al., 2018
	Cognitive experiences	Biçakcıoğlu et al., 2018
	Activity opportunities	Swanson, 2017
Memories (with the brand), linkage to childhood	Albert et al., 2008; Langner et al., 2016	
Individual's psychological well-being, happiness	Kai, 2019	
Emotional dimension	Positive emotional connection	Batra et al., 2012
	Passion and attraction for the brand	Albert et al., 2008
	Attachment to the brand	Loureiro et al., 2012
	Brand intimacy, a feeling of closeness, warmth	Bairrada et al., 2018; Ahuvia et al., 2009
	Brand jealousy (others using the brand)	Sarkar & Sreejesh, 2014
	Positive emotions in response to the brand, emotional well-being	Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Kim et al., 2024
	The feel of family togetherness	Kai, 2019
	Hedonism (and hedonic brands)	Huber et al., 2015
	Escape (being able to "escape reality")	Swanson, 2017
	Affective brand commitment	Albert & Merunka, 2013
	Affective experiences	Biçakcıoğlu et al., 2018
Behavioral dimension	The feel of the brand's uniqueness	Bairrada et al., 2018
	Mystery, surprise	Swanson, 2017
	Self-expression with the brand (using the brand as self-expression)	Huber et al., 2015
	Behavioral loyalty (actual repurchases)	Albert & Merunka, 2013; Bairrada et al., 2018
	Things done in the past (with the brand)	Batra et al., 2012
	Active relationship, frequent interactions with the brand	Aro et al., 2018
	Taking good care of the brand (product)	Langner et al., 2015
	Positive word-of-mouth (Online & Offline)	Filieri et al., 2021; Strandberg & Ek Styvén, 2020
Bodily dimension	Declaration of love	Batra et al., 2012; Filieri et al., 2021
	Senses/sensory experiences	Biçakcıoğlu et al., 2018; Lv & Wu, 2021; Swanson, 2017; Yadav et al., 2023
	Physiological response	Maxian et al., 2013
	Embodied brand, bodily self-expression, sensing the brand, personal well-being	In this study, see <a href="#">The bodily dimension of destination brand love section</a>

### The processual nature of brand-loving

The categorization of existing research (see [Table 3](#)) and the ontology of becoming ([Seibt, 2022](#)) helped create another alternative conceptualization: The process of brand-loving. Recent studies acknowledge dynamic aspects of brand love. For example, [Huber et al. \(2015\)](#), [Langner et al. \(2016\)](#), and [Schmid and Huber \(2019\)](#) focus on brand love formation and manifestation, and [Aro et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasize interactions, ongoing changes, and the controversial dynamicity of brand love. This study extends the emerging stream with a processual approach that perceives the phenomenon as an ongoing process of brand-loving. The approach is based on an ontology of becoming ([Mesle, 2008](#)), where change is endemic, reflecting ways in which the world is brought into being ([Langley & Tsoukas, 2016](#)).

Destination brand loving includes processes that strengthen and sustain love or weaken and break it ([Alvarez et al., 2021](#); [Langley & Tsoukas, 2010](#); [Smallman & Moore, 2010](#)). Although negative impressions do feature in the data, including untidy chalets, feeling

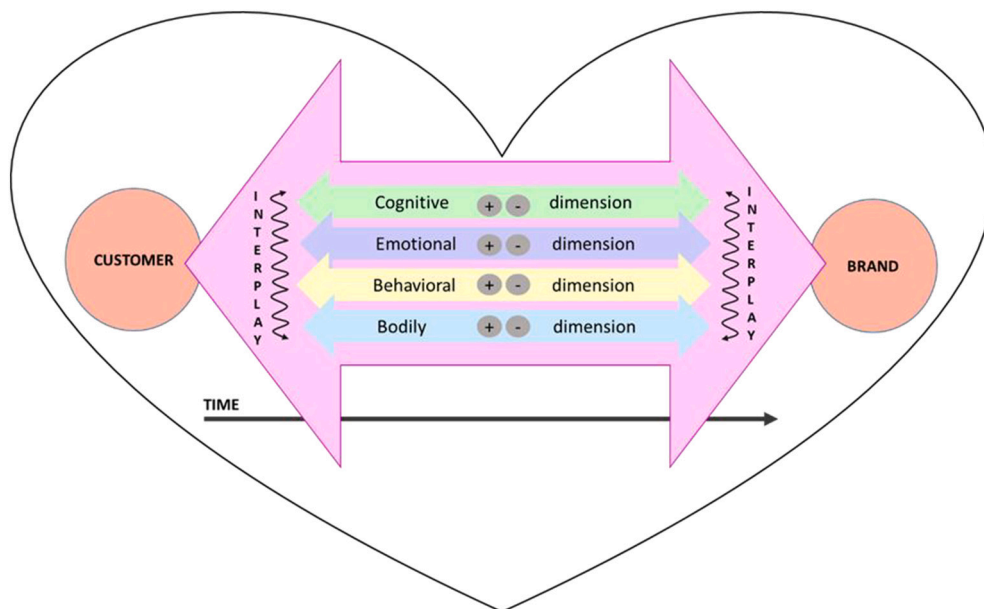


Fig. 5. A processual conceptualization of brand-loving.

unwell at Ylläs, suffering from stomach flu, accidents, heart attacks, and exhausting 12-hour drives to Ylläs, those issues did not seem to significantly undermine the informants' brand love for Ylläs.

*“The bathroom had been left uncleaned by the previous guests (not nice), a moldy smell filled the apartment, and there were completely moldy loaves of bread in the cupboard.”*

(Guestbook entry, Julia)

*“Two weeks went well, but then COVID hit. Rest of the time, we felt a bit under the weather. Thank you [names] for letting us stay a bit longer to recover.”*

(Guestbook entry, Julia)

Brand-loving is a process where cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and bodily dimensions interplay over time and include both positives and negatives. Fig. 5 depicts the phenomenon of brand-loving, an ongoing process where the four dimensions interplay: weakening, maintaining, or strengthening as the customer and brand interact over time. However, a slice of Fig. 5 can be used to conceptualize brand love at a certain point in time, where the dimensions are frozen.

Our results indicate that not all brand-loving relationships are similar and that the relationship changes. Further, negatives, neutrals, and positives co-exist in the processes of brand-loving. This differs from a view of brand love as a positive state resistant to external negative influences (Batra et al., 2012).

## Conclusions

### Theoretical contribution

This study aimed to extend the discussion on consumer-brand relationships with two alternative conceptualizations of destination brand love, highlighting the bodily dimension. In so doing, the paper makes four central theoretical contributions. The first adds the bodily dimension to brand-love conceptualizations, where only a few exceptions have discussed any bodily aspects. The bodily dimension not only combines existing results about sensory experiences (e.g., Lv & Wu, 2021) and physiological responses (Maxian et al., 2013) into a comprehensive concept but also adds previously undiscovered bodily aspects, such as embodying the brand. Although two body-related aspects have been associated with brand love, the crucial role of bodies and embodiment has not previously been revealed.

Second, the results specify the content of the bodily dimension and divide it into four sub-dimensions: sensing the brand, bodily self-expression, the embodied brand, and personal well-being. This study is the first to unveil several body-related aspects. It adds *bodily* self-expression as a specific form of self-expression unidentified in brand love research to date (e.g., Batra et al., 2012). The study connects embodied technology, earlier noted as part of the tourism experience (Tussyadiah et al., 2018), with brand love. Further, this paper includes physical well-being as a part of brand love, following the call by Albert et al. (2008) for research on consumers' well-being in brand love. These first two contributions offer a holistic understanding of destination brand love and a nuanced understanding of brand love. Our findings support the findings of Aro et al. (2018) and Ahuvia et al. (2022) that likable co-guests and identification

with other tourists enhance brand love. Further, this research adds to a novel research stream on the role of emotion-laden, or affective, bodily aspects in tourism (Rokka et al., 2023).

Third, the paper advances the conceptualization of brand love by distinguishing two parallel approaches: An entity approach perceiving *brand love* as static and a processual approach highlighting the dynamic in-the-making nature of *brand-loving*. The alternative conceptualizations are important and useful but ontologically different. They are connected as the first entitative approach to brand love manifests processes of brand-loving at a certain time (see Whitehead, 1929/1969). We believe this is the first study to construct two ontologically different approaches and conceptualizations of brand love and brand-loving.

The four-dimensional conceptualization of brand love comprises bodily, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. This conceptualization extends the existing ones (e.g., Albert et al., 2008; Bagozzi et al., 2017; Batra et al., 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006) with the bodily dimension. Further, the four-dimensional conceptualization shifts the view from the antecedents and consequences of brand love as an emotion (e.g., Farmaki et al., 2021) to conceptualizing the content of brand love as a complex entity of four dimensions. Although the four dimensions of brand love are conceptually separate, they interplay, a finding reflecting the complexity of the phenomenon that complements Farmaki et al. (2021), Robertson et al. (2022), and Aro et al. (2023).

The conceptualization of brand-loving outlines an *in-the-making* understanding of the phenomenon as a set of processes. Brand-loving conceptualizes the relationship as dynamic and containing positive (strengthening) and negative (weakening) processes. This expands the boundaries of brand-love research (e.g., Bairrada et al., 2018; Farmaki et al., 2021; Pontinha & Coelho do Vale, 2020) where the topic is viewed as an entity. Although this study suggests that a dynamic approach is fruitful, the approaches complement each other; a snapshot of a moment reveals a consumer's brand love, but a longitudinal study can grasp the in-the-making nature of brand-loving. In addition, the study contributes to tourism studies acknowledging the aspect of processes between tourists and destinations as "landscapes and practices are a function of relationships always in-the-making" (Grimwood & Höckert, 2023, p. 11). Further, this study addresses the need for research on the dynamic nature of brand relationships (Alvarez et al., 2021; MacInnis & Folkes, 2017).

Finally, this article expands the currently scant literature on destination brand love (Aro et al., 2018; Filieri et al., 2021). Despite calls by scholars (Singh, 2002), studies on love in tourism remain scarce (Christou, 2018; Conran, 2011; Heimtun, 2019; Pruitt & LaFont, 1995). This study contributes to the socially and cross-culturally relevant research on love in tourism. By grounding its findings in brand-love relationships relating to an outdoor destination, the work shows how an understudied context and abductive logic aid theory development by providing alternatives to current understanding.

#### Managerial contribution

This study equips destination managers with two alternatives to understanding customer-brand relationships. The results clarify the four dimensions through which consumers love brands. Alongside the 4Ps, there could be 4Ds in brand marketing strategies. Brand managers might ask, what are the brand's cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and bodily offerings to customers? What are the brands' strengths and weaknesses in each of the four dimensions? The evaluation could shape brand strategy by revealing the strengths to focus on and the weaknesses to address. Managers can choose to increase the number of loving customers or leverage those loving individuals to strengthen the brand relationship with other customers and/or to attract new ones. As no destination can be the most beloved for all its visitors, marketing cannot be directed solely at current or future brand-lovers.

Further, looking at brand-loving as an ongoing process, brands wishing to retain their loving customers must sustain the love and nurture the four dimensions. The best data informing the evaluation come from customers; current data-based management systems enable ongoing assessment of the brand's equity. Understanding brand-loving highlights that a destination brand need not excel in all dimensions at all times; for instance, a destination with a strong bodily dimension may prioritize that while still acknowledging the other three.

Outdoor destination brands can use the findings to foster a deep and lasting bodily connection with customers by activating the bodily sub-dimensions. For example, an outdoor destination could help visitors to sense the brand and embrace the destination by suggesting what to see, listen to, taste, smell, and touch during the stay or on a particular nature trail. Offering information and facilities to practice (and learn new) activities increases bodily self-expression and embodiment of the brand. Encouraging visitors to relax and feel empowered supports their destination-linked personal well-being. This study shows that a brand attuned to what matters to customers need not perform extraordinary feats to foster a loving relationship. Concentrating on and building the brand around the strengths of the place is at the core of a destination brand love.

#### Limitations and future studies

We used Tracy's (2010) criteria to assess the quality of this study. We argued the merits of the topic in the introduction and aimed for rigor concerning the theoretical and empirical questions. We did our best to foster sincerity in self-reflection and methodological transparency. We established the credibility of the study in the methodology section, where we described the research phases as multivocal. Research ethics were followed by obtaining each informant's permission to use their data, anonymizing them, and using inclusive language. This study targets resonance and coherence through its evocative presentations and makes a significant conceptual contribution. The purpose of the study is met through the application of appropriate methods.

In this context-related study of an outdoor destination brand, the context enabled the surprise emergence of the bodily dimension that earlier brand-love research had barely mentioned. Future studies might examine how this study's findings relate to, for example, city destinations (Filieri et al., 2021) or hotel brands (Wang et al., 2019). Further, as our data were collected from brand-loving tourists

who repeatedly visited the destination, we lack knowledge of potential visitors', residents', and other target groups' destination brand-loving. In addition, further studies on the nature and different roles of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions in brand-loving would be welcome. The processual understanding of brand-loving has just begun, and we suggest that future brand-loving research might scrutinize process ontology (Seibt, 2022).

Finally, we encourage studies on other consumer-brand and tourist-destination relationships to consider the conceptualization of the four dimensions and the processual approach. For example, research on brand hate (Aziz & Rahman, 2022), brand polarization (Osuna Ramírez et al., 2019), destination attachment (Yuksel et al., 2010), place attachment (Chen et al., 2021), and place bonding (Cheng & Kuo, 2015) might benefit from acknowledging the cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and bodily dimensions and a fresh perspective on what a bodily dimension of those relationships entails.

### CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Kaisa Aro:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Supervision, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Jaana Tähtinen:** Writing – review & editing, Conceptualization.

### Declaration of competing interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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### Data availability

The authors do not have permission to share data.

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