



Reconceptualizing Digital Emotional Branding: Emotional Brand Attachment as a Core Relational Mechanism

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ABSTRACT

This study is to examine how emotional and experiential factors shape consumers' attachment to brands, and how such attachment translates into loyalty, engagement, and brand equity in digital environments. This study used a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design targeting Gen Z population. Data collection was conducted through online survey. Data analysis used descriptive statistics and structural equation modelling with partial least squares (SEM-PLS) to test the conceptual framework. Findings reveal that emotional branding is a fundamental driver of the consumer-brand relationship in digital settings. Emotional drivers like brand love, brand passion, brand affinity, and brand trust - as well as the elements of experience such as perceived quality, value and satisfaction, brand differentiation, and digital engagement played a significant role in the emotional attachment to a brand. In addition, emotional brand attachment fosters long-term brand loyalty, enhances consumer engagement, and safeguards brand equity, rendering it the crucial mediating core of emotional experience that adds value. A key theoretical contribution of this study is that emotional brand attachment is predominantly experience-based rather than directly stimulated by non-composite emotional drivers. Implications of these results highlight the importance of integrating emotional branding strategies into digital marketing practices and providing a valuable foundation for future research.

Keywords: Emotional Brand Attachment, Emotional Drivers, Emotional Branding, Brand Loyalty, Customer Engagement, PLS-SEM

JEL Classifications: M31, M37, D12

1. INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, brands are not only concerned about communicating functional benefits and utilitarian value, but also about consumer emotions and experiences. With an overwhelming spread of digital platforms, social media, and interactive tools shaping brand-consumer relationships, the competitive pressure has mounted for firms to build lasting emotional connections with their stakeholders. In this context, emotional branding has recently become an important theoretical tool for predicting differences in brand loyalty, consumer engagement and brand equity. Nevertheless, despite its increasing importance, empirical research is scarce on simultaneous impact of emotional and experiential brand antecedents on these outcomes via emotional brand attachment,

especially applying an integrated structural equation modeling perspective towards this relationship.

Historical research and development on branding and consumer values was based mainly on rational-choice perspective and cognitive appraisal theory with product quality, functional differentiation, and perceived utility emphasized as determinants of consumer behavior. Later theoretical developments in marketing and psychology, however, confronted these premises showing that consumer behavior is essentially affective and relational. Hence, the academic interest shifted to latent affective variables like brand love, trust, passion and affinity which all impact on attitudes, loyalty, and advocacy. This conceptual progression culminated in the conceptualization of emotional brand attachment as second order factor reflecting the depth, intensity, and resilience of the consumer-

brand emotional bond—the primary mode by which emotional and experiential instigating factors gave rise to positive brand outcomes.

In a digital mediated environment, emotional brand attachment is most apt, given its high degree of (interactive) novelty, continuous presence, and personal involvement of the consumers on several digital touch points. However, previous studies tend to investigate emotional drivers, brand experience dimensions, or brand outcomes in isolation, and therefore provide fragmented perspectives. No empirical study has yet simultaneously incorporated emotional drivers and brand experience as exogenous latent constructs, while also considering the mediating role of emotional brand attachment and the endogenous outcomes of brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity. In addition, few studies use Structural Equation Modeling with Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) to examine such intricate structural relationships that involve direct, indirect, and mediating effects in one integrated model, which serves explanation as well as prediction.

In view of these shortfalls, the objective of this study is to assess the impact of structural effects of the influential emotional facets such as brand love and passion, and brand affinity and trust, as well as of brand experience factors like perceived quality, value, and satisfaction. Additionally, it examines the extent to which emotional brand attachment has effect on brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity. The focus of this study is to mediate brand attachment by proving emotional brand attachment as a part-mediating latent variable that connects both emotional and experiential antecedents with key brand consequences.

Moreover, this study is driven to add to emotional branding literature by blending the dimensions of emotional brand attachment and brand experience into an integrated, tested framework through which one can account for how emotional brand attachment works as a central force in consumer–brand relationships. In addition, results attempt to prove a hard evidence base which may be useful for brand managers and digital marketing professionals to tactically induce the emotional and experiential correlates into the further development of emotional attachment, brand loyalty generation, and customer engagement stimulation to develop sustainable digital relationships with brands.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Emotional Branding

According to Belk (1988), one of the main motivations behind consumer purchases is the individual's desire to use branded products. Despite the number of studies that have been performed in this area, there is still a limited understanding of the role that emotional and symbolic factors play in consumer behavior and, more importantly, a lack of understanding about the role that these factors play in the formation of consumer brand relationships. Another issue that has received limited attention in the branding literature is that of younger consumers. The purchasing power of teenagers and individuals in Generation Z is rapidly growing, significantly influencing household spending. As digital natives, they give priority to personalized, sustainable, and authentic brands available in social media platforms.

Recent definitions of emotional branding see it as an experiential interaction rather than episodic emotional appeals, especially in connected markets (social media, messaging apps, e-commerce ecosystems) where consumers can experience brand meaning they co-create and test the relationship fit. These relations sanction and enforce continuous exchange, giving brands the privilege of bodily resource transfer. The transaction process transforms formless feelings into relations in which participants experience social validation. Emotional Energy: The mass media is an emotional supercharger creating demand for excitement. These relations permit and carry continuous exchanges, grant branding mobility of embodied resource exchange. Transaction turns formless influence into relation in which actors feel social approval. Emotional Energy: mass media emotional supercharger of thrill consumption. According to Izquierdo et al. (2022), data identifies emotional branding winners in platform-based spaces connected to emotional consistency, authenticity, quality of experience behind it, not separate affective comms, and shows a shift from traditional to experiential brands. Proof of emotional branding effectiveness in platform ecosystems comes from its emotional consistency, authenticity, quality of experience behind it.

2.2. Emotional Drivers

Emotional drivers are fundamental psychological and affective forces that impact individuals' attitudes, decisions, and behaviors. It works through feelings, moods, and affective responses that form perception and action not like purely cognitive determinants. As demonstrated by Damasio (1994), emotions are fundamental to rational decision-making, as affective signals direct individuals in assessing alternatives and predicting outcomes. His hypothesis suggests that emotional processes help in decision efficiency in times of uncertainty. In addition, Watson and Kahneman (2011) highlighted that intuitive, emotion-driven "system 1" thinking significantly influences judgements and choices. These standpoints collectively found that emotional drivers are not secondary to cognition but are fundamental mechanisms in behavioral outcomes.

The self-determination theory by Deci and Ryan (2000) emphasizes intrinsic motivation as powerful emotional driver. Autonomy, competence, and relatedness needs promote positive mark that stimulates sustained customer engagement and loyalty behaviors. Emotional drivers specifically brand love, brand passion, brand affinity, and brand trust serve as affective mechanisms shaping consumers' emotional evaluations of brands. Through continuous interactions, these emotional drivers facilitate the development of emotional brand attachment which serves as a durable emotional brand amid the brand and consumer.

With the growth of digital platforms, emotional drivers have become increasingly integral in determining user experience. Digital interfaces, social media interactions, and personalized content can induce emotional responses that directly affects consumer behavior.

2.3. Brand Experience

Brand experience has emerged as a significant factor in the equation of emotional brand attachment within the digital environments. Digital platforms allow brands to create various experiences that are tailored to the consumers and provide them

with the information and services that they need. Aleem et al. (2023), pointed out that brands can provide consumers with an experience that is personalized, interactive, and functional through features like usability, recommendations, customer service, and social commerce functions.

Platform-mediated experiences allow consumers to have cumulative and interactive experiences with the different brands that they encounter online. As demonstrated by Wang and Beck (2022), due to these platforms allowing consumers to have continuous interactions with brands, studies based on structural equation modeling and partial least squares models have shown that the overall experience that a brand provides to consumers is the main driver of their emotional attachment to that brand.

Traditional messages that aim to influence consumers emotionally through emotional appeals have become less influential within the digital environment due to the saturation of digital platforms with emotional content from various sources. Feddema et al. (2020) added that consumers are exposed to multiple streams of emotional content and information from other consumers at the same time. For this reason, emotional content within the context of engaging brand experiences that maintain continuous relationships with consumers have been found to be the most influential.

2.4. Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty is also a concept that is often used to describe the tendency of consumers to choose to purchase products from one brand over other brands. Atulkar (2020) explains that the concept of brand loyalty is based upon this same idea: that consumers tend to choose to purchase products from one brand over others. Similarly, Diallo et al. (2020) explain that the concept is based upon the inclination of consumers to return to purchase the same products from the same brand and company.

Beyond explaining the concept of brand loyalty itself, it is also important for companies that sell these products to understand the concept and how it can impact the profitability of those companies. Generally, according to Bairrada et al. (2018), it is more cost-effective for companies to work with customers that it already has relationships with, as compared to acquiring new customers. Additionally, customers that frequently purchase products from a company and exhibit brand loyalty with that company will contribute to the profitability of that company. Thus, these customers have a positive impact upon the long-term success of those companies.

2.5. Consumer Engagement

Consumer engagement is a concept that has been defined in a variety of different ways within the literature related to marketing. Van Doorn et al. (2011) define consumer engagement as the behavioral manifestation of the interaction that a consumer has with the brand or the firm itself. While they assert that engagement is not simply the act of purchasing products from the brand, they do state that the actions that a consumer takes while engaging with a brand are motivated by their own consumerism and desire to interact with that brand.

In contrast, authors Hollebeek et al. (2014) and Brodie et al. (2011) state that consumer engagement is better defined as a psychological concept that emerges from the interaction between the customer and the brand. Further, it is explained that this consumer engagement is a concept related to the motivations that the consumer feels towards the brand, the consumer's relationship with the brand, and how they feel about interacting with it.

Similarly, Vivek et al. (2012) state that consumer engagement can be better understood as the degree of participation that consumers have towards the company and brand with which they have an established relationship. In other words, they define consumer engagement in terms of the role that consumers play in maintaining that relationship through their continued participation and interaction with the brand.

Building upon these definitions, authors France et al. (2016) state that these scholars and others who have come before them have defined the concept of consumer engagement and provided a theoretical foundation upon which to base the development of models that can be used to analyze consumer engagement within marketing research. Earlier to these authors was Bowden (2009) who proposed a model of consumer engagement that would help to further define and explain the concept of consumer engagement.

2.6. Brand Equity

Brand equity refers to the value of the brand contributed to the product or service beyond the functional benefits of the product. According to Aaker (1989), brand equity is the set of assets and liabilities associated with the brand name, including the brand's name, symbol, and reputation. Keller (1993) describes brand equity as the "differential effect of brand knowledge on consumer response to the marketing of the brand." In other words, the knowledge consumers have of the brand affects their response to the marketing efforts of the company. Lassar and Sharma (1995) state that brand equity is the added value and attractiveness that the brand name contributes to the product. Additionally, Clow and Baack (2005) state that brand equity is the collection of qualities that make one brand differ from others and allow the company to charge higher prices for its products.

Strong brand equity often translates into better business performance. When consumers trust and recognize a brand, they are more willing to purchase its products—even when similar generic alternatives are available. This preference can lead to increased sales volume and improved profitability for companies. Brand equity also shapes consumer purchase and consumption behavior, as people tend to associate well-known brands with higher quality, reliability, and value.

Building brand equity requires consistent investment in marketing and brand-building activities. Companies strengthen their brands through various promotional channels such as price promotions, podcasts, television, magazines, and especially digital marketing. In today's digital environment—where social media platforms and websites play a central role in consumer engagement—organizations face both opportunities and challenges in creating strong brand value. As competition intensifies online, firms must

continuously refine their digital marketing strategies to build meaningful connections with consumers and sustain long-term brand equity.

2.7. Mediating Role of Brand Attachment

Emotional brand attachment is often thought to be the mediating variable that links the brand experience to important consumer outcomes. Research conducted by Li and Shin (2023) indicates that the emotional bond that consumers have with a brand can impact how their experiences with that brand can impact the relationship between the consumer and the brand. Thus, emotional attachment to a brand can impact the relationship between the brand experiences and the positive outcomes of that relationship.

Those who have a strong emotional connection to a brand will exhibit different behaviors than those who do not have a strong emotional attachment to a brand. Author Keller (2013) explains that consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand will exhibit behaviors that support the brand and the brand itself. These consumers will exhibit behaviors that contribute to the development of brand equity.

These concepts are evident within countries like those in Southeast Asia, where the majority of consumers utilize digital technology in connection with brands, and where those brands have strong presences within social media and social commerce platforms. Blome et al., (2023), emphasized that these brands are able to continuously interact with consumers through these digital platforms, creating a continuous experience with each consumer of the brand.

As mentioned by Shaw and Sullivan (2013), attachment theory suggests that consumers who are strongly emotionally attached to a brand will perceive the brand as more distinctive and valuable than brands from which they do not have such strong attachments. Therefore, consumers who have positive experiences with a brand will develop a stronger emotional attachment, leading to higher levels of brand loyalty, engagement, and equity.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationships among emotional drivers, brand experience, emotional brand attachment, and key brand outcomes, including brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity, in the context of digital branding.

3.2. Research Instrument and Sampling Strategy

A researcher-administered structured questionnaire was used as an instrument for the study. The questionnaire was specifically developed to measure the constructs of the study. The respondents of the study were 294 Gen Z who are emotionally expressive toward brands and more responsive to experiential and symbolic branding in the province of Surigao del Sur. In addition, the sampling method used was purposive sampling to select respondents who were exposed to digital brand interactions such as social media engagement, sharing activities, and online brand

interactions and were thus able to provide insights into emotional branding constructs. The sample size was adequately sized for SEM-PLS analysis.

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the participants, which served as an essential basis for the study examining fundamental variables such as age, course, sex, access to the internet, and the device used for internet access.

Regarding variables of age and sex, the groups that were analyzed included 18-24 years, and 25-34 years. The findings indicated that the most frequent age group was 18-24 years (92.50% [272]), and 25-34 years (7.50% [22]). The 18-24 years old age group includes individuals who are college-age, and is characterized by individuals who are skilled in the use of digital technologies, who are more adaptable to changes in technologies, and who are often more responsive to emotional connections with brands. On the other hand, the limited representation of participants aged 25-34 years suggests that findings primarily reflect the perspectives of younger students whose emotional attachment and experiential expectations toward brands may differ from those of older learners.

Additionally, there were more females with 79.30% (233) than males with 20.70% (61). The identified university students were predominantly female, aligning with NCES's expected 56.7% female ratio for 2020. Results fall well within the margin of error NCES expects for 2020.

The study also reveals that hospitality (44.20%) and business courses (43.50%) are the preferred choice of the participants. Additionally, participants opt to use mobile phones (98.30%) rather than computers (1.70%), which represents an opportunity for those who traditionally lag in accessing the internet. Overall, the demographic profile reflects a digitally connected, predominantly female, and service-oriented student population.

The research instrument has six constructs. The six scales in this study includes Emotional Drivers, Brand Experience, Emotional Brand Attachment, Brand Loyalty, Consumer Engagement, and Brand Equity. Emotional Drivers and Brand Experience each contain 20 items that measure consumers' emotional responses to the brand. Emotional Brand Attachment contains 15 items that measure the emotional bond and dependence that consumers

Table 1: Demographic profile

Variable	Subgroup	Frequency	Percent
Age	18-24 years old	272	92.50
	25-34 years old	22	7.50
Course	Education	1	0.30
	Business	128	43.50
	Hospitality	130	44.20
	IT/Computer Studies	30	10.20
	Others	5	1.60
Sex	Male	61	20.70
	Female	233	79.30
Access to internet	Wi-Fi	201	68.40
	Data	93	31.60
Device use to access internet	Mobile/Phone	289	98.30
	Laptop/Computer	5	1.70

have towards the brand. Finally, each of the remaining scales contains five items that measure the various aspects of consumer engagement and brand equity. Each item was rated on a Likert-type scale, allowing quantitative measurement of the factors influencing entrepreneurial intentions and enabling statistical analysis to determine their relative impact.

3.3. Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data were collected from the administered online via Google Forms, with the link distributed through email and messaging platforms. Ethical protocols were strictly observed. All study subjects participated voluntarily, and the purpose of the study was disclosed before starting the questionnaire.

Data analysis was carried out in two stages. At the first stage, descriptive statistics were applied in order to analyze the characteristics of the respondents and their answers to the survey questionnaire. At the second stage, the SEM-PLS approach was utilized in order to analyze both the measurement model and the structural model of the study. The measurement model was used to assess the reliability and validity of the constructs that were measured within the study, while the structural model was used to assess the relationships between the variables within the study and the contribution of each of those constructs to the overall model.

Several different indicators were used to evaluate the overall model. These indicators included those that measured the relationships between the constructs within the model, such as path coefficients, effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2). Additionally, various indicators were used to assess the fit of the model to the data, such as the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value and the Normed Fit Index (NFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), and Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI). Additional indicators were examined as well in order to determine the validity and reliability of the constructs within the model.

The structural model analysis was performed in order to evaluate the strength and significance of the relationships between the variables within the study. The use of path coefficients (β), effect sizes (f^2), standard errors (SE), and P-values helped to indicate the relationships between the constructs in the model. Additionally, the use of path analysis helped to determine the direct and indirect relationships between the constructs within the model, including any potential mediating variable of one of the variables in the model.

3.4. Study Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study are expressed as follows:

- H₁: Emotional drivers (brand love, brand passion, brand affinity, and brand trust) have a significant positive effect on emotional brand attachment.
- H₂: Brand experience factors (perceived quality, value and satisfaction, brand differentiation, and digital engagement) have a significant positive effect on emotional brand attachment.
- H₃: Emotional brand attachment has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty.
- H₄: Emotional brand attachment has a significant positive effect on consumer engagement.

- H₅: Emotional brand attachment has a significant positive effect on brand equity.
- H₆: Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between emotional drivers and brand loyalty.
- H₇: Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between emotional drivers and consumer engagement.
- H₈: Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand experience factors and brand loyalty.
- H₉: Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand experience factors and consumer engagement.
- H₁₀: Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between emotional drivers and brand equity.
- H₁₁: Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand experience factors and brand equity.

In summary, research hypotheses are illustrated in the conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 below.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Assessment of Measurement Model

Table 2 presents the model that fits the data from the observed variables. In particular, the model revealed a significant fit ($\chi^2 = 31398$, $P < 0.000$) and demonstrates a high goodness-of-fit (TLI = 0.998, CFI = 0.983). However, Kline (2023) stated that passing the chi-square test does not mean that the local fit of the model is likewise satisfactory. The chi-square test is susceptible to sample size, meaning that even minor, practically irrelevant differences can yield statistically significant results. Consequently, the study also explores the significant influence of the distribution of loadings of emotional drivers, brand experience, and emotional brand attachment as presented in Table 3.

The factor loadings of Emotional Drivers (ED) are between 0.816 and 0.909 for all constructs: brand affinity (0.909), brand love (0.902), brand trust (0.883), and brand passion (0.816). Each factor loading surpasses the critical cut-off of 0.70, establishing the strong convergent validity of the construct. The distribution of each latent variable is highly consistent with the distributions of

Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework

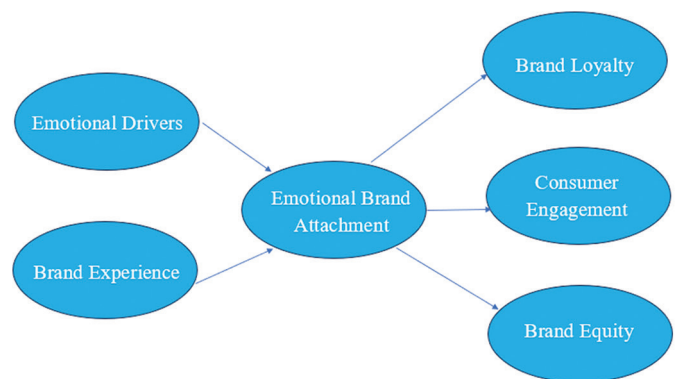


Table 2: Fit indices of the model

χ^2	P-value	SRMR	NFI	CFI	TLI
398	0.000	0.027	0.999	0.983	0.998

Table 3: Loadings distribution of emotional drivers, brand experience, and emotional brand attachment

Emotional drivers		Brand experience		Emotional brand attachment	
Items	Loadings	Items	Loadings	Items	Loadings
Brand Love	0.902	Perceived quality	0.915	Strength of emotional brand	0.943
Brand Passion	0.816	Value and satisfaction	0.935	Personal identification with brand	0.933
Brand Affinity	0.909	Brand differentiation	0.937	Sense of brand dependence	0.921
Brand Trust	0.883	Digital engagement	0.900	-	-

Table 4: Loadings distribution of brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity

Brand loyalty		Consumer engagement		Brand equity	
Items	Loadings	Items	Loadings	Items	Loadings
Repeat Purchase intention	0.917	Social media interaction	0.948	Brand Awareness	0.940
Resistance to Switch	0.914	Content Sharing	0.961	Perceived value	0.935
Advocacy Behavior	0.913	User-generated Content	0.935	Brand Association	0.936

Table 5: Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) of emotional drivers, brand experience, emotional brand attachment, brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
Emotional drivers	0.901	0.909	0.771
Brand experience	0.941	0.941	0.850
Emotional brand attachment	0.924	0.926	0.869
Brand loyalty	0.903	0.903	0.837
Consumer engagement	0.944	0.949	0.899
Brand equity	0.930	0.932	0.878

CR>0.70 (Byrne, 2016)

the other latent variables, proving that the indicators used in this study are indeed effective representations of the latent variables they are intended to measure. Brand affinity and brand love have the highest factor loadings. This indicates that feelings of closeness and attachment are the most critical components of Emotional Drivers (ED) for respondents. The substantially strong loading of brand trust as a construct also demonstrates that being reliable and dependable is essential in eliciting emotional responses to brands. Although brand passion has the lowest loading value of 0.816, the value is still remarkably above the cut-off, proving that it is a suitable indicator of Emotional Drivers (ED).

In addition, Brand Experience (BE) is a significant predictor of the latent variable, since perceived quality (0.915), value and satisfaction (0.935), brand differentiation (0.937), and digital engagement (0.900) all lie above the 0.70 threshold. Brand differentiation, value, and satisfaction are the most important predictors, indicating that the differentiating value of the brand and the value-for-money experience is central to the brand experience. Perceived quality and digital engagement also have high loadings, indicating that functional quality of brands and engaging digital experiences matter to consumers' brand experience. The high loadings across all indicators, however, indicate well-specified constructs.

In a similar manner, Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) also shows up well, loading strongly with emotional brand (0.943),

personal identification with the brand (0.933), and a sense of brand dependence (0.921). These strong indicators are a positive sign for convergent validity. This proves the critical role that emotional brand attachment plays, summarizing the role of consumers' emotions attached to brands. Personal identification with the brand also shows strongly, proving that the right fit with one's self is an important factor in attachment. A sense of brand dependence, while slightly lower, is still a strong indicator, proving that consumers feel a need to have certain brands to rely on for their needs.

The study also considers the factor loading of brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity as summarized in Table 4. The factor loadings of Brand Loyalty (BL) were all above the 0.70 level for the factor to be linked with the construct, i.e., in the findings for repeat purchase intention (0.917), resistance to change (0.914), and advocacy behavior (0.913). This distribution of loadings suggests well-defined constructs across all latent variables.

Furthermore, correlations with user-generated content (0.935), content sharing (0.961), and social media interaction (0.948) demonstrate that Consumer Engagement (CE) has a uniform distribution of loadings and desirable convergent validity. These loadings show consistency in Brand Equity (BEq) since the factor loadings only ranges from 0.935 to 0.940. A uniform distribution of the perceived value (0.935), brand association (0.936), and brand awareness (0.940) indicates strong convergent validity.

The study also examines Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability, and average variance extracted (AVE) of emotional drivers, brand experience, emotional brand attachment, brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity, though factor loading indicates how strongly each observed variable is connected to a latent factor, as shown in Table 5. Emotional Drivers (ED) further supports the convergent validity in parallel with acceptable internal consistency reliability (0.901), composite reliability (0.909), and an AVE value of 0.771 greater than the recommended criterion of 0.5. This demonstrates that emotional cues are successful in eliciting consumer responses and explain a significant amount of variance in the dependent variables.

These findings substantiate the hypothesis which underlines how emotions are central to shaping consumer perceptions

Table 6. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

	Emotional Drivers	Brand Experience	Emotional Brand Attachment	Brand Loyalty	Consumer Engagement	Brand Equity
Emotional Drivers						
Brand Experience	0.878					
Emotional Brand Attachment	0.811	0.828				
Brand Loyalty	0.893	0.855	0.821			
Consumer Engagement	0.782	0.862	0.801	0.824		
Brand Equity	0.800	0.885	0.822	0.849	0.865	

Heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) < 0.90 (Henseler et.al., 2015)

Table 7: Assessment of structural model

Hypotheses	Structure	B	f ²	Standard error	P-value	Remark
H ₁	ED=>EBA	-0.027	0.066	0.289	0.932	Not significant
H ₂	BE=>EBA	0.983	0.283	0.286	0.000	Significant
H ₃	EBA=>BL	0.972	3.190	0.015	0.000	Significant
H ₄	EBA=>CE	0.874	1.886	0.013	0.000	Significant
H ₅	EBA=>BEq	0.949	2.099	0.016	0.000	Significant
H ₆	ED=>EBA=>BL	-0.027	-	0.270	0.921	Not significant
H ₇	ED=>EBA=>CE	-0.024	-	0.268	0.919	Not significant
H ₈	BE=>EBA=>BL	0.955	-	0.266	0.000	Significant
H ₉	BE=>EBA=>CE	0.859	-	0.265	0.000	Significant
H ₁₀	ED=>EBA=>BEq	-0.026	-	0.267	0.000	Significant
H ₁₁	BE=>EBA=>BEq	0.932	-	0.263	0.000	Significant

Table 8: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) results of emotional drivers, brand experience, and emotional brand attachment

Emotional drivers		Brand experience		Emotional brand attachment	
Items	VIF	Items	VIF	Items	VIF
Brand Love	2.955	Perceived quality	3.563	Strength of Emotional Brand	3.994
Brand Passion	2.104	Value and Satisfaction	4.758	Personal Identification with Brand	3.532
Brand Affinity	3.202	Brand Differentiation	4.724	Sense of Brand Dependence	3.219
Brand Trust	2.754	Digital Engagement	3.111	-	-

VIF<5.0

and behavioral intentions towards brands. Likewise, Brand Experience (BE) also demonstrates strong internal consistency and reliability (0.941) and its AVE value of 0.850 demonstrating its convergent validity. This construct's strong convergent validity substantiates the experience marketing theory that the memorable brand experience considerably impacts consumer evaluations of the brand, especially the long-term experience consumers cultivate with the brand. Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) also demonstrates a relatively high average variance extracted value of 0.869, exhibiting strong internal and construct consistencies (0.924 & 0.926). These results further validate EBA's role as a basic construct that differentiates emotions and brand experience as emotional precursors to translating consumers into loyalty and equity outcomes. For Brand Loyalty (BL), an AVE value of 0.837 demonstrates that the construct accounts for its variance in its indicators and shows strong internal consistency and construct reliability (0.903). This result aligns with other branding-connected studies that conceptualize loyalty as a multidimensional response with repurchase intentions.

In comparison, the Customer Engagement (CE) has a convergent validity of 0.899 for AVE value, 0.944 internal consistency, and 0.949 construct reliability. Therefore, active content sharing, social media engagement, and user-generated content are all strong indicators of engagement, highlighting the importance of digital

and participatory connections between consumers and brands.

In conclusion, Brand Experience (BE) still indicates that the construct accounts for variance of its indicators with 0.878 AVE, well over the threshold of 0.50. Furthermore, it also has a high degree of reliability, showing 0.930 internal consistency and 0.932 construct reliability. So, perceived value, brand awareness, and brand associations do accurately measure brand equity.

Overall, these findings importantly prove that perceived value is the most significant driver of brand loyalty and the importance of brand loyalty for customer-brand relationships. In general terms, the strong reliability and convergent validity values of all constructs presented have offered robust evidence on empirical support to the proposed model. These findings give greater confidence in the structural model analysis to follow and indicate that the constructs are both theoretically based and empirically separate.

The study also examined the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT), which compares the average correlations between indicators of different constructs. The results are presented in Table 6. Within the Emotional Drivers (ED) framework, Brand Experience (BE) records an HTMT value of 0.878, demonstrating adequate discriminant validity between the two constructs under

consideration. Although it is slightly over the more conservative threshold of 0.85 proposed by Henseler et al. (2015), values between 0.85 and 0.90 are usually considered adequate in social science research, especially in constructs that are conceptually related. Meanwhile, the top HTMT value was between Emotional Drivers (ED) and Brand Loyalty (BL) at 0.893, which is just under the 0.90 limit. This finding implies that emotional antecedents are shaping brand experience, however, the two constructs do still empirically differ.

Furthermore, the maximum HTMT with respect to ED and BL equals 0.893, which is just below the 0.90 threshold value. The outcome implies a high level of construct relationship yet without contamination of discriminant validity, hence verifying the measurement model integrity. Because those constructs are conceptually similar, this high level of association may be theoretically justified. Other pairs with high values are Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Equity (BEq) (0.885), and Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Loyalty (BL) (0.855) but they are within the acceptable range. These coefficients are both within range and reflect the correlated but distinguishable nature of experiential, attitudinal, and behavioral brand dimensions. Their associations are in line with predictions of the branding literature, which asserts that a positive brand experience contributes to stronger brand equity and loyalty while remaining analytically distinct constructs. All other HTMT values are well below the 0.85 threshold that indicates good discriminant validity (e.g., Emotional Drivers–Consumer Engagement = 0.782; and Emotional Brand Attachment–Brand Loyalty = 0.821). These are lower values that are indicative of related but distinct constructs within the proposed framework.

- H_1 : Emotional drivers (brand love, brand passion, brand affinity, brand trust) have a significant positive effect on emotional brand attachment. The initial hypothesis trial goes through ED \Rightarrow EBA, which implies that Emotional Drivers (ED), ($\beta = -0.027$, $P = 0.932$), with a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.066$), has no direct impact on Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA). This shows that Emotional Drivers (ED) contribute minimally in amplifying Emotional Brand Attachment. Emotional constructs like brand love, passion, affinity, and trust are conceptually important drivers but lack the direct explanatory power when accounting for brand experience. Therefore, H_1 is not supported, and the magnitude of effect size also shows that the Emotional Drivers alone do not hold a significant practical weight. Thus, feelings alone may not be effective at getting the individual to experience felt attachment unless those feelings are first reinforced. Moreover, this also indicates that emotional stimuli alone might not be enough to evoke attachment if it is not supported by prior brand experiences.
- H_2 : The concept of brand experience has a significant positive influence on the emotional brand attachment. The results indicate that the concept of brand experience (BE) has a strong prediction of the concept of emotional brand attachment (EBA). The path coefficient between BE and EBA was $\beta = 0.983$ with $P = 0.000$. The effect size was $f^2 = 0.283$, which is considered to be a moderate to substantial effect size. Therefore, brand experience is an important concept in

the formation of emotional brand attachment. These results support the hypothesis that the emotions that consumers have for a brand are largely the result of the experiences that they have with that brand. The various components of brand experience (perceived quality, value and satisfaction, brand differentiation, and digital engagement) all have an impact upon the development of emotional attachment to that brand. Therefore, these results support the hypothesis that brand experience is important in the formation of emotional brand attachment. Further analysis of the relationship between brand experience and emotional brand attachment confirms that brand experience has a strong direct influence on emotional brand attachment ($\beta = 0.983$, $f^2 = 0.283$, $SSE = 0.286$, $P = 0.000$). These results indicate that positive and engaging experiences with brands are crucial in the development of emotional relationships between those brands and the consumers with whom they interact.

- H_3 : Emotional brand attachment has a significant positive effect on brand loyalty. Results indicate that Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) has a significant effect on Brand Loyalty (BL) with a beta coefficient of 0.972 and a $P = 0.000$, with an effect size (f^2) of 3.190, which is indicative of a large effect size. These results indicate that EBA is a good predictor of BL, as they are strongly associated with the willingness of consumers to repurchase the product from the brand, to switch brands, and to advocate for the brand to others. Therefore, these two constructs are robust in both statistical and substantive meanings. There is a strong positive relationship between EBA and BL. The indicated path coefficient of 0.972 indicates that the two constructs are strongly related, and that there is a non-relationship between the two constructs. With respect to the SE coefficient of 0.015 indicates that the coefficient is accurate. Additionally, the $P = 0.040$ indicates that the relationship is statistically significant, as it is less than the usual value of 0.05. Thus, the high positive correlation between EBA and BL indicates that customers who feel an emotional attachment to a brand are likely to exhibit loyalty towards that brand, indicated through the purchasing of the brand's products compared to competitors' products.
- H_4 : Emotional brand attachment has a significant positive effect on consumer engagement. Emotional Brand Attachment also has a significant effect on Consumer Engagement ($\beta = 0.874$, $P = 0.000$), with an $f^2 = 1.886$. This large effect size indicates that there is a high probability that consumers who are emotionally attached to a brand will interact more with the brand via social media, share content of the brand, and even generate content about the brand. Therefore, H_4 is practically significant with strong support. Furthermore, the implication of the findings is that affective commitment from consumers has a significant effect on the consumers involvement with the brand, for example, in social media conversations about the brand, leaving feedback about the brand, and participating in campaigns of the brand.
- H_5 : Emotional brand attachment has a significant positive effect on brand equity. Equally, Emotional Brand Attachment has a large and significant effect on Brand Equity (BEq), ($\beta = 0.949$, $P = 0.000$), with an $f^2 = 2.099$. Thus, H_5 is supported. Similarly, Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) significantly enhances

Brand Equity (Beq) ($\beta = 0.949$, $P = 0.000$). Consumers who have a stronger emotional attachment to a brand will perceive more of its value.

- For the indirect hypotheses (H_6-H_{11}), effect sizes cannot be reported since mediation is established by the significance of the indirect path and not by f^2 .
- H_6 : Emotional Drivers \rightarrow Emotional Brand Attachment \rightarrow Brand Loyalty. The mediation analysis tests indicate that the indirect effect of Emotional Drivers on Brand Loyalty and Consumer Engagement, respectively, through Emotional Brand Attachment is weak and not significant ($P > 0.05$). Therefore, consistent with the PLS-SEM analysis approach, the absence of significant indirect effect, especially in combination with the absence of a strong direct path and effect size (f^2) from Emotional Drivers on Emotional Brand Attachment, suggests absence of explanatory/predictive relevance of Emotional Drivers in the structure model. Thus, hypotheses H_6 and H_7 are rejected. Specifically, the indirect effect of Emotional Drivers (ED) on Brand Loyalty (BL) through Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) is weak and not significant ($\beta = -0.027$, $P = 0.921$), indicating lack of mediation influence; specifically, that Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) does not mediate between Emotional Drivers (ED) and Brand Loyalty (BL). Yet this outcome should not be surprising within a theoretical context, since it merely supports the finding that emotional drivers alone cannot drive brand loyalty in consumers without sufficient brand experiences that strengthen brand attachments to the brand and convert emotional reactions to behavioral loyalty.
- H_7 : Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between emotional drivers and consumer engagement. Emotional Drivers (ED) exerts no significant, indirect effect on Customer Engagement (CE) via Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) ($\beta = -0.024$, $P = 0.919$), making it a non-mediator. This result implies that Emotional Brand Attachment does not work as a vehicle through which emotional drivers can generate customer attachment. In practical terms, the finding implies that emotional cues by themselves lack sufficient power to trigger consumer engagement on a significant scale in any sustained way unless they are reinforced with highly compelling brand experiences capable not only of shaping affective responses but also turning these into ongoing and proactive consumer behaviors.
- H_6 and H_7 : The mediating role of Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) between Emotional Drivers (ED) and Brand Loyalty (BL), and Consumer Engagement (CE) is not statistically significant ($P > 0.05$). Completely in line with the weak direct relationship and low effect size (f^2) of Emotional Drivers (ED) on Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA), these findings suggest that Emotional Drivers (ED) have relatively low explanatory power by which they influence downstream behavioral outcomes through attachment mechanisms. Thus, hypotheses 6 and 7 are not supported.
- H_8 : Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand experience factors and brand loyalty. The mediating role of Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) in the relationship between Brand Experience (BE) and Brand Loyalty (BL) is significant ($\beta = 0.955$, $P = 0.000$). This finding verifies H_8 , and that EBA operates as a partial mediator in the relationship between BE and BL, ($\beta = 0.955$, $P < 0.001$). This significant and positive indirect effect implies that positive brand experiences are translated into loyal consumer behavior through the mediating of emotional attachment. This is particularly the case when brand-related activities are construed by consumers as being meaningful and engaging, with this experience creating a strong emotional tie that then leads to loyalty outcomes in terms of resistance to switching and intention to repeat purchase. Results also provide additional support that brand experience serves as a key antecedent to emotional attachment and influence on loyalty. The strong mediation therefore establishes the importance of emotions in the loyalty chain, implying that experiential cues are futile in this model unless they invoke an emotional bond with the brand. Such findings support attachment-based marketing and experience-based marketing theories that both posit that emotional consumer-brand relationships are the most critical asset before establishing loyalty toward a brand. Thus, the findings that loyalty is indeed mediated by emotional attachment in the strong model to such an extent ultimately support H_8 and provide a mechanism through which the brand experience operates.
- H_9 : Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand experience factors and consumer engagement. Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) is a significant mediator of the association between Brand Experience (BE) and Consumer Engagement (CE) in the model of $\beta = 0.859$, $P = 0.000$). The path coefficient is both large and positive, which implies that there exists a significant indirect effect such that brand experience significantly impacts consumer engagement via the formation of emotional attachment. The finding ($P < 0.001$) indicates that positive, dynamic, and memorable brand experiences effectively reinforce an emotional connection of the consumers towards the brand, thereby increasing engagement with it. This participation may be in the form of active interaction and involvement in brand activities. The results suggest that consumers are more likely to interact with a brand, not solely as the result of experiential contact but for these experiences' successful creation of emotional relationships.
- H_8 , H_9 and H_{11} (Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between brand experience factors and brand equity) have significant and strong indirect effects for Brand Experience (BE) \rightarrow Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) \rightarrow Brand Loyalty (BL), Brand Experience (BE) \rightarrow Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) \rightarrow Consumer Engagement (CE) and Brand Experience (BE) \rightarrow Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) \rightarrow Brand Equity (BEq) respectively. The results ($\beta = 0.955$, $\beta = 0.859$ and $\beta = 0.932$) evidence that Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) works as a core mediating construct between Brand Experience (BE) subsequently is explained using loyalty, engagement, and brand equity ($P < 0.001$). This highlights that positive and meaningful brand experiences are highly effective in building emotional connections, which lead to both relational-equity-based outcomes.
- H_{10} : Emotional brand attachment mediates the relationship between emotional drivers and brand equity. Emotional

Figure 2: Structural model

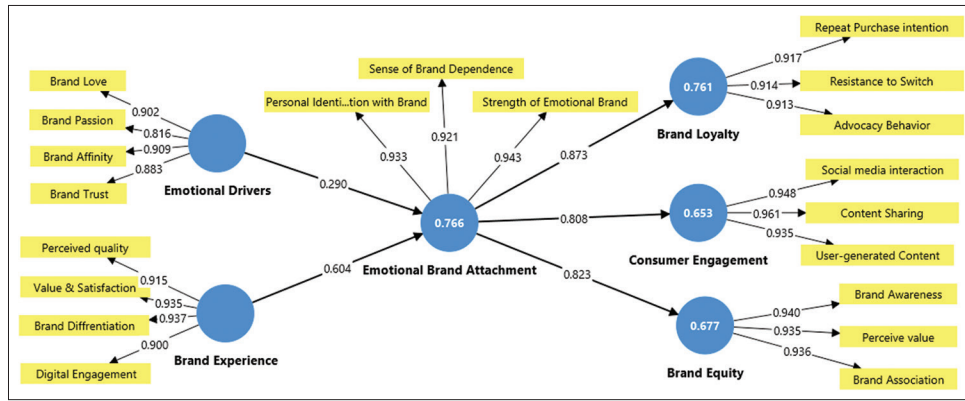


Table 9: Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) results of brand loyalty, consumer engagement, and brand equity

Brand loyalty		Consumer engagement		Brand equity	
Items	VIF	Items	VIF	Items	VIF
Repeat Purchase intention	2.973	Social media interaction	4.398	Brand Awareness	4.120
Resistance to Switch	2.798	Content Sharing	4.835	Perceive value	3.747
Advocacy Behavior	2.824	User-generated Content	4.160	Brand Association	3.701

VIF < 5.00

Drivers (ED) → Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) → Brand Equity (BEq) is then supported with a significant but negative mediating effect of linkage ($\beta = -0.026, P < 0.001$). While this hints that Emotional Drivers (ED) are not directly linked to Brand Equity (BEq), they do exert subtle and intricate effects on Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA). There’s always hardly any practical significance of a statistically detectable effect in such small size and negative direction towards the goal, and there remain areas to clarify how emotional drivers might affect attachment processes differently under contextual or particularly moderating circumstances.

Figure 2 displays the confirmed structural model, highlighting the theoretical centrality of Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) and its empirical robustness as a single mediating construct that bridges upstream brand stimuli with key relational and equity-based outcomes. The model is highly explanatory likewise, with large R² values for Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) ($R^2 = 0.766$), Brand Loyalty (BL) ($R^2 = 0.761$), Consumer Engagement (CE) ($R^2 = 0.653$), and Brand Equity (BEq) ($R^2 = 0.677$) that surpass the thresholds recommended, showing high predictive relevance. Of the antecedents, Brand Experience (BE) has a significantly higher impact on Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) ($\beta = 0.604$) than Emotional Drivers (ED) ($\beta = 0.290$). This discovery echoes the theoretical postulates of experience and relationship marketing, because experiences between people that are emotionally loaded, interactive, and memorable stimulate stronger long-term emotional ties than mere isolated emotional stimuli. Emotional factors like brand love, trust and passion are indeed included, but the relatively minor role they play suggests that emotions need to be entrenched in brand experience if they are to be relied upon to extract attachment.

Brand attachment positively impacts all downstream outcomes, brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.873$), consumer engagement ($\beta = 0.808$) and

brand equity ($\beta = 0.823$), making it an emphasized psychological process that transforms experience-based output into behavior and attitude-based output. These path coefficients (without denying their enormous effect size) suggest that brand attachment is not a mere mediator, but the primary explanation for long-term brand relationships. On the measurement level, Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) is based in brand self-identification, brand dependence, and strength of emotional bond distinctly measuring attachment depth and multidimensionality.

Similarly, Repeat Purchase Intention, Resistance to Switch, and Advocacy reflect Brand Loyalty which is both transactional and relational. Consumer Engagement (CE) is clearly described by interactive and participative activities, like social media conversation, content sharing, and user generated content, while Brand Equity (BEq) is rightly captured by brand knowledge value, perceived value, brand associations.

Thus, the structural model confirms that Brand Experience (BE) is the strongest direct antecedent of Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) and that EBA is the primary mediator that transforms experience into loyalty, engagement, and brand equity. The comparatively weaker effect of Emotional Drivers (ED) indicates that managers should reconsider the priority they give to creating emotional appeals and concentrate on the more important challenge of building a holistic brand and fostering emotional continuity. The integrated model makes important theoretical and managerial contributions by providing insights into how experience-based branding processes maintain consumer/brand relationships in today’s marketplace.

4.2. Variance Inflation Factor

The VIF results for the Emotional Drivers (ED), Brand Experience (BE), and Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA) are offers justification that there is no problem with multicollinearity in

the measurement model as shown in Table 8. The VIF estimates for multicollinearity do not exceed the threshold of 5.00, which implies that the indicators demonstrate no problematic collinearity; and because such a problem would follow from the constructs adding nothing unique (explanatory) to the model. VIF values for Emotional Drivers (ED) are between 2.104 and 3.202, which indicates that there are moderate correlations among indicators like brand love, passion, affinity, trust but none at a level that would cause standard errors to inflate, or path estimates to be biased. The VIF values for the Brand Experience (BE) variables range from 3.111 to 4.758, which are also relatively high but acceptable, given the more or less inseparable relationship of experiential factors in general (perceived quality/value/satisfaction, brand differentiation and digital engagement). On Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA), the VIF varies between 3.219 and 3.994 indicating that attachment dimensions—Intensity of emotional bond, Personal self-extension with the brand, Brand dependence—are conceptually but empirically distinct. Taken together, the findings in Table 9 provide further evidence of non-existence of multicollinearity and therefore strengthen the stability, reliability and interpretability on structural relationships involved in the model.

In addition, the VIF values for Brand Loyalty (BL), Consumer Engagement (CE), and Brand Equity (BEq) constructs are less than the critical value of 5.00, which suggests that multicollinearity is not an issue for endogenous constructs in the model. For Brand Loyalty (BL), the VIF varies between 2.798 and 2.973, indicating a weak to moderate correlation among the constructs of repeat purchase intention, resistance to switching, and advocacy behavior.

These findings are consistent with the idea that the measures tap into non-redundant aspects of loyalty. Likewise, the VIF values of Consumer Engagement (CE) indicators range from 4.160 to 4.835. Although relatively higher, these values still fall within an acceptable range and tap the high conceptual overlap between social media interaction, content sharing, and user-generated content which logically co-occur when engage consumers are involved without biasing estimates. On the other hand, the VIF value (3.701 to 4.120) for Brand Equity (BEq) shows that there exists acceptable amount of inter-item correlations between brand awareness, perceived value, and brand associations. This agrees with the multi-dimensional perspective of brand equity as separate latent variables. The results from Table 9 indicate that the measurements of the endogenous variables are not affected by multicollinearity, making the estimated path coefficients valid and interpretable.

5. THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

The specific theoretical contribution of this study is its proposition that emotional brand attachment in digital marketplaces is experience-based, rather than the result of non-composite emotional stimuli. This proposition counters the universalistic implications of most established emotional branding theories, which justify an assumption of emotional signals—whether appeals, symbols, or narratives—as determinants of brand attachment. The emotional brand attachment forms from the aggregate quality of these experiences with the brands rather

than the valued nature of encounters. Aspects such as usability, responsiveness, customization, and perceived effort reportedly demonstrate more explanatory power than emotional triggers.

Emotional brand attachment additionally mediates brand outcomes in an impressive way, enabling the relationship-based theories on branding. Emotional brand attachment is the relational mechanism that links the increasingly prevalent experiential inputs to downstream brand outcomes such as loyalty and engagement towards a specific brand. This furthers the understanding of attachment as a relational, rather than an affective construct, effectively turning digital “engagements” into “brand relationships”. The loss of explanatory value of emotional drivers, on the other hand, indicates that emotion-based branding mechanisms need recalibration toward a digitally enhanced context rather than merely the application and extension of existing theories.

6. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates the importance of emotional branding as a critical driver of the relationships between consumers and brands in digital environments. The study finds that emotional antecedents, such as love, passion, affinity, and trust in brands, have a significant impact upon the formation of emotional brand attachment. Similarly, factors that influence the consumer’s experience of the brand also have an impact upon the development of emotional connections between consumers and brands. Thus, both emotional and experiential factors have an impact upon the development of strong relationships between consumers and brands within digital contexts.

Furthermore, the findings of the study also indicate that emotional brand attachment is recognized as the mediating factor that exists between the emotional and experiential brand drivers and the outcomes of those brands. In particular, the study finds that emotional attachment to brands has an impact on the development of brand loyalty, the development of consumer engagement with those brands, and brand equity. Thus, emotional attachment is found to be a crucial component of the digital brand experience and the relationship between the consumer and brand.

From a managerial perspective, the findings of the study highlight the importance of focusing on developing emotional attachment to brands and ensuring that digital brand experiences are strong and high quality. Brand managers can focus on the development of brands that incorporate elements that encourage emotional connections with consumers, such as storytelling, communication, and digital platforms that encourage interaction with brands. Incorporating both elements into brand development strategies can lead to the creation of strong, lasting relationships between consumers and brands.

Finally, the study indicates that brands should focus upon ensuring that both emotional and experiential aspects of the digital brand experience are evaluated and managed in order to maximize the outcomes of those brands. Brand managers can focus upon evaluating aspects such as emotional attachment to

brands, consumer engagement with brands, the perceived value of brands, and the level of satisfaction that consumers feel from their experiences with brands. By managing these aspects, brands can maximize the outcomes of their brands. In highly competitive digital environments, brands that incorporate elements of both emotional branding and digital experiences will be the most successful in developing and maintaining strong relationships with their consumers and maximizing their brand outcomes.

Future researchers are encouraged to study not only other mediating or moderating effects like culture, risk perceptions, and brand trust, but also longitudinal studies of brand attachment sustainability and its effects on consumer behavior. This brand of industry-based research could include digital-intensive sectors like e-commerce, lifestyle, and entertainment markets, thereby replicating this research. The strategic emotional branding implementation to foster stronger emotional brand attachment should benefit practitioners and researchers with a competitive edge in digital markets through the practical application of these recommendations.

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