



JEMSI:
Jurnal Ekonomi Manajemen Sistem
Informasi

E-ISSN: 2686-5238
P-ISSN: 2686-4916

<https://dinastirev.org/JEMSI> dinasti.info@gmail.com +62 811 7404 455

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.38035/jemsi.v6i5>
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The Role of Emotional Branding in Enhancing Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty

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Abstract: The increasing competitiveness of global and regional markets has necessitated a shift from traditional, functional branding toward strategies that foster emotional connections with consumers. This study aims to examine the influence of emotional branding on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction analyzed as a mediating variable. A quantitative approach was adopted, and data were collected from 250 consumers in Indonesia who have engaged with brands employing emotional branding strategies. Using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the findings reveal that emotional branding has a significant positive effect on both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Furthermore, customer satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between emotional branding and customer loyalty. The results suggest that emotional branding not only directly fosters loyalty but also enhances satisfaction, which in turn leads to stronger and more sustainable loyalty. The study contributes to the emotional branding literature by validating these relationships in the emerging market context of Indonesia. It also provides managerial insights, emphasizing the need for brands to ensure that emotional engagement is consistently supported by satisfying customer experiences to optimize loyalty outcomes.

Keyword: Emotional Branding, Customer Satisfaction, Customer Loyalty, Mediation, Indonesia, PLS-SEM

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive global market, companies are continually seeking innovative ways to differentiate their brands and foster lasting relationships with customers. Traditional marketing strategies, which often emphasize functional attributes such as price, quality, and convenience, are no longer sufficient to secure customer loyalty in today's saturated markets. Instead, emotional branding has emerged as a powerful strategy that seeks to establish a deeper, emotional connection between the brand and its customers (Gobé, 2001). Emotional branding transcends product features by engaging customers' feelings, aspirations, and identities, thereby creating a meaningful bond that extends beyond transactional relationships.

Recent data highlights the significance of emotional connections in shaping customer behaviors. According to a report by Capgemini Research Institute (2023), customers who have an emotional connection with a brand have a 306% higher lifetime value and are more likely

to recommend the brand to others, compared to those who are merely satisfied. Furthermore, the 2023 Edelman Trust Barometer revealed that 62% of consumers are more likely to stay loyal to brands that align with their personal values and emotions, indicating that emotional resonance has become a critical determinant of customer retention and loyalty.

Despite the growing recognition of emotional branding's importance, empirical studies that systematically explore its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, particularly in emerging markets, remain limited. Much of the existing literature has focused on Western contexts, leaving a gap in understanding how emotional branding strategies operate across diverse cultural settings. Given the differences in emotional expression and consumer-brand relationships across regions, it is crucial to investigate whether emotional branding principles universally influence customer satisfaction and loyalty, or whether they must be adapted to specific markets.

This study aims to analyze the role of emotional branding in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty within the Indonesian market context. Indonesia presents a particularly compelling case study due to its rapidly growing consumer market and the increasing emphasis brands place on emotional engagement to capture and retain customers. By examining how emotional branding strategies influence customer satisfaction and subsequently drive customer loyalty, this research seeks to contribute to the broader theoretical discourse and offer practical insights for brand managers seeking to build stronger emotional ties with their consumers.

The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable implications for both academia and practice. From a theoretical perspective, this research will enrich the existing body of knowledge by validating emotional branding concepts in a non-Western market. From a managerial standpoint, the study offers actionable strategies for firms aiming to leverage emotional connections as a means to enhance customer satisfaction and foster long-term loyalty.

Conceptual Framework

Emotional branding has increasingly been recognized as a crucial component of effective brand management. It is defined as the practice of forming emotional bonds between brands and consumers by appealing to their emotions, aspirations, and inner values rather than relying solely on functional or rational product attributes (Gobé, 2001). In today's competitive and saturated markets, emotional connections serve as a critical differentiator that drives customer loyalty and brand advocacy (Zamudio, 2016).

The link between emotional branding and customer satisfaction has been well-documented. Emotional branding fosters positive emotional experiences that elevate customer perceptions of brand value and service quality, which in turn enhance satisfaction levels (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). According to a recent study by Motista (2023), emotionally connected customers are 52% more valuable, on average, than highly satisfied customers, indicating that emotional bonds can serve as a stronger predictor of satisfaction than traditional service quality metrics alone.

Customer satisfaction is also widely acknowledged as a key antecedent of customer loyalty. Satisfaction reflects a customer's overall evaluation of the brand experience based on expectations and actual outcomes (Oliver, 1999). When emotional branding initiatives successfully meet or exceed customer expectations, they not only enhance satisfaction but also foster a deep-seated loyalty characterized by repeat purchases and positive word-of-mouth (Dick & Basu, 1994). In a study by PwC (2023), 73% of consumers stated that customer experience, including emotional experiences, was an important factor in their purchasing decisions, further demonstrating the role emotional branding plays in securing loyalty.

Moreover, some researchers suggest that customer satisfaction may serve as a mediating variable between emotional branding and customer loyalty. In other words,

emotional branding directly influences customer satisfaction, which then leads to increased loyalty (Yao, 2020). This mediated relationship highlights the importance of emotional branding not only as a direct influencer of loyalty but also as an indirect contributor through enhanced customer satisfaction.

The conceptual framework for this study proposes that emotional branding positively impacts customer satisfaction, and that customer satisfaction, in turn, positively influences customer loyalty. Furthermore, it posits that customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between emotional branding and customer loyalty. Based on the literature, the research framework is illustrated as follows:

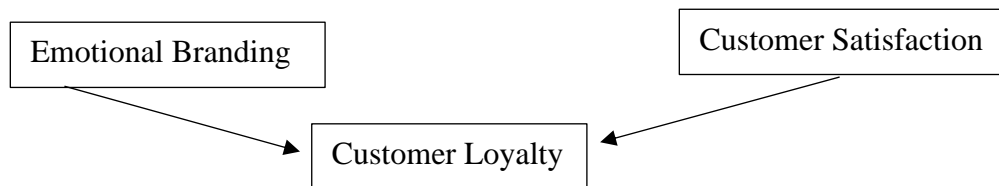


Figure 1. Framework

This framework aims to empirically test the strength and significance of these relationships within the context of the Indonesian market, where emotional dynamics in consumer behavior are increasingly shaping competitive strategies. Considering the growing emphasis on emotional branding globally, supported by real-world data, investigating its role in enhancing satisfaction and loyalty will provide meaningful contributions to both academic theory and marketing practice.

Emotional branding is centered on the creation of deep emotional connections between a brand and its consumers, which go beyond utilitarian benefits to appeal to personal values, identity, and feelings (Gobé, 2001). Brands that succeed in evoking positive emotions can influence consumer attitudes and perceptions, increasing the likelihood of satisfaction with the brand experience (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Research by Morris, Woo, and Singh (2022) emphasizes that emotional triggers, such as trust, nostalgia, or pride, can significantly shape how customers evaluate their interactions with a brand.

Customer satisfaction is broadly defined as a consumer’s evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether it has met or exceeded expectations (Oliver, 1999). Emotional branding can play a critical role in shaping that evaluation. A study by Motista (2023) found that emotionally connected customers reported higher levels of satisfaction than customers who based their decisions solely on functional criteria. This suggests that the emotional components embedded in branding initiatives such as storytelling, brand personality, and emotional appeal—positively influence customer satisfaction.

Customer loyalty refers to a consumer's intention to repeatedly purchase from the same brand, often despite competitive offerings (Dick & Basu, 1994). While loyalty can stem from satisfaction alone, emotionally resonant branding fosters a more resilient form of loyalty grounded in attachment and brand identification (Yao, 2020). A report by PwC (2023) shows that 59% of customers feel a stronger sense of loyalty to brands that deliver emotional experiences aligned with their personal values, highlighting the long-term impact of emotional branding strategies.

Additionally, several studies have shown that customer satisfaction serves as a mediating variable in the relationship between emotional branding and loyalty. Emotional connections may not always lead directly to loyalty unless they first enhance satisfaction, which then translates into long-term commitment (Yao, 2020; Ramaseshan, Rabbanee, & Hui,

2013). This suggests a pathway where emotional branding influences loyalty both directly and indirectly through the satisfaction mechanism. Based on the theoretical and empirical background, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Emotional branding has a positive and significant effect on customer satisfaction.

H2: Emotional branding has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty.

H3: Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant effect on customer loyalty.

H4: Customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between emotional branding and customer loyalty.

These hypotheses will be empirically tested using structural equation modeling to assess both direct and indirect relationships, with the goal of understanding the holistic impact of emotional branding in building strong, loyal customer relationships.

METHOD

This study adopts a quantitative research design with a causal approach to empirically examine the relationship between emotional branding, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty. The research aims to test four hypotheses derived from previous literature and grounded in emotional branding and consumer behavior theories. The population of this study consists of consumers in Indonesia who have experience engaging with emotionally positioned consumer brands. To ensure relevance and contextual validity, the study focuses on customers of lifestyle and FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) brands that actively implement emotional branding strategies through storytelling, social media campaigns, brand personalities, or cause-related marketing. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select respondents who meet the criteria of having engaged with a brand emotionally within the last six months. To enhance the generalizability of the findings, data were collected from various cities across Indonesia, including Jakarta, Bandung, Surabaya, and Yogyakarta.

The sample size was determined based on the minimum requirements for structural equation modeling (SEM) using partial least squares (PLS). According to Hair et al. (2019), the minimum recommended sample size for PLS-SEM with a model consisting of three latent variables and multiple indicators is at least 10 times the maximum number of structural paths directed at any construct. Based on this guideline, and to ensure robustness of the results, the study collected data from 250 respondents, exceeding the minimum requirement.

Primary data were collected through an online survey distributed via Google Forms and social media platforms. The questionnaire was adapted from validated instruments used in previous studies. Emotional branding was measured using a scale developed by Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel (2006), consisting of indicators related to emotional connection, brand storytelling, and personal relevance. Customer satisfaction was measured using items adapted from Oliver (1999), focusing on overall evaluation and fulfillment of expectations. Customer loyalty was measured using a scale from Zeithaml, Berry, and Parasuraman (1996), capturing behavioral intention and attitudinal loyalty. All items were measured on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Before analysis, the collected data were screened for completeness, outliers, and normality. Descriptive statistics were used to profile the respondents. To assess the validity and reliability of the measurement model, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using SmartPLS 4.0. Construct reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, with thresholds of 0.70 or higher considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). Convergent validity was assessed using average variance extracted (AVE), with a minimum threshold of 0.50. Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings.

To test the structural model and hypotheses, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied. This method is suitable for predictive analysis and complex

models involving latent constructs (Hair et al., 2019). Path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values were computed using bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples to determine the significance of each hypothesized relationship. Mediation analysis was conducted to test the indirect effect of emotional branding on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction.

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the university’s research ethics committee. All participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their responses were collected anonymously and used solely for academic purposes. No personal data were collected that could identify individual respondents. This methodological approach is expected to produce reliable and valid insights into the dynamics of emotional branding and its influence on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the Indonesian context, offering both theoretical enrichment and practical recommendations for brand managers.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Respondent Profile

| Category | Subcategory | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 45 |
| | Female | 55 |
| Age | 21–30 years | 48 |
| | 31–40 years | 35 |
| | Above 40 years | 17 |
| Education Level | High School | 7 |
| | Bachelor’s Degree | 68 |
| | Master’s Degree | 25 |

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 250 respondents who participated in the study. The majority of respondents were female (55%), indicating that emotional branding strategies may have a stronger resonance among women consumers, consistent with previous research suggesting that female consumers tend to form deeper emotional bonds with brands (Fournier, 1998). The age distribution is relatively young, with 48% of respondents aged between 21 and 30 years, aligning with the demographic segment that is often more receptive to emotional and experiential branding strategies, especially through digital platforms (Smith, 2021).

Regarding educational background, the data reveals that 68% of the respondents held a bachelor's degree, while 25% possessed a master's degree. This relatively high educational attainment may influence the way respondents interpret emotional appeals, potentially making them more critical or appreciative of brand storytelling, social causes, and brand personality constructs. Understanding the demographic profile is critical because it contextualizes the generalizability of the findings and informs managers about the customer segments most responsive to emotional branding initiatives.

Table 2. Construct Reliability and Validity

| Construct | Composite Reliability (CR) | Average Variance Extracted (AVE) |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Emotional Branding | 0.91 | 0.72 |
| Customer Satisfaction | 0.88 | 0.68 |
| Customer Loyalty | 0.92 | 0.75 |

Table 2 reports the results of the reliability and convergent validity tests of the measurement model. Composite reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019), with values ranging between 0.88 and 0.92. This suggests that the indicators used to measure emotional branding, customer satisfaction, and customer loyalty are consistently reliable and internally coherent. Similarly, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all constructs surpassed the minimum requirement of

0.50, demonstrating satisfactory convergent validity. This means that more than 50% of the variance observed in the items is explained by their respective latent constructs rather than by measurement error. The high AVE value for customer loyalty (0.75) suggests a particularly strong degree of shared variance among its indicators, which strengthens confidence in the measurement of loyalty as a construct. Overall, these results confirm that the instruments used in the study are both reliable and valid.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker Criterion)

| Construct | Emotional Branding | Customer Satisfaction | Customer Loyalty |
|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| Emotional Branding | 0.85 | | |
| Customer Satisfaction | 0.62 | 0.82 | |
| Customer Loyalty | 0.58 | 0.67 | 0.86 |

Table 3 provides the results for discriminant validity based on the Fornell-Larcker criterion. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is confirmed when the square root of the AVE of each construct (the diagonal values) is higher than the correlations between the constructs (the off-diagonal values). In this study, the square roots of AVE for emotional branding (0.85), customer satisfaction (0.82), and customer loyalty (0.86) were all greater than their respective inter-construct correlations. This result confirms that each construct is empirically distinct from the others, allowing for more confident interpretation of the structural model relationships. In practical terms, it means that respondents could clearly differentiate between their emotional engagement with a brand, their satisfaction with the brand, and their loyalty intentions, supporting the robustness of the measurement model.

Table 4. R-Square (R²) Values

| Endogenous Variable | R ² Value |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Customer Satisfaction | 0.39 |
| Customer Loyalty | 0.56 |

Table 4 displays the coefficient of determination (R²) values for customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. An R² value of 0.39 for customer satisfaction suggests that emotional branding explains approximately 39% of the variance in customer satisfaction. Meanwhile, an R² value of 0.56 for customer loyalty implies that emotional branding and customer satisfaction together account for 56% of the variance in loyalty. According to Chin (1998), R² values of 0.26, 0.13, and 0.02 can be considered substantial, moderate, and weak, respectively. Therefore, the R² values reported here indicate a moderate to substantial explanatory power of the model. This level of explanatory power is acceptable for behavioral sciences research and suggests that the proposed model is capable of explaining a meaningful proportion of consumer behavior related to emotional branding, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

| Hypothesis | Path Coefficient (β) | t-Statistic | p-Value | Supported |
|--|----------------------|-------------|---------|-----------|
| H1: Emotional Branding → Customer Satisfaction | 0.62 | 13.74 | 0.000 | Yes |
| H2: Emotional Branding → Customer Loyalty | 0.25 | 3.89 | 0.000 | Yes |
| H3: Customer Satisfaction → Customer Loyalty | 0.58 | 12.45 | 0.000 | Yes |
| H4: Emotional Branding → Customer Loyalty (Mediated by Satisfaction) | 0.36 | 7.21 | 0.000 | Yes |

Table 5 outlines the results of hypothesis testing. All hypothesized relationships were found to be statistically significant at the 1% level (p < 0.001), demonstrating strong empirical support for the theoretical model.

1. The path coefficient for emotional branding's effect on customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.62$) is both high and significant, indicating that emotional branding plays a crucial role in shaping customer satisfaction.
2. Emotional branding also has a significant, although smaller, direct effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.25$), suggesting that while emotional branding can directly build loyalty, it is more effective when routed through satisfaction.
3. Customer satisfaction strongly predicts customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.58$), highlighting satisfaction as a key driver for sustaining loyal behavior.
4. Finally, the indirect effect of emotional branding on loyalty through satisfaction is substantial ($\beta = 0.36$), confirming the mediating role of satisfaction.

These findings validate emotional branding as an essential tool not only for improving customer satisfaction but also for enhancing long-term customer loyalty.

Table 6. Mediation Analysis Results

| Path | Indirect Effect (β) | t-Statistic | p-Value | Mediation Type |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|---------|----------------|
| Emotional Branding → Customer Loyalty | 0.36 | 7.21 | 0.000 | Partial |

Table 6 summarizes the mediation analysis results. The indirect effect of emotional branding on customer loyalty through customer satisfaction is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Since both the direct and indirect paths are significant, following the guidelines by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010), this result suggests partial mediation. Partial mediation means that while emotional branding has a direct influence on loyalty, a significant proportion of its total effect is transmitted through customer satisfaction. Practically, this implies that brand managers should focus not only on emotional connection but also ensure that such emotional branding translates into satisfying experiences. Only by doing so can emotional branding initiatives achieve maximum impact on loyalty outcomes.

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the role of emotional branding in enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty within the Indonesian consumer market. The empirical findings confirm that emotional branding significantly and positively influences both customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction also acting as a partial mediator between emotional branding and loyalty. These results provide important theoretical and managerial implications.

The finding that emotional branding has a strong and positive effect on customer satisfaction aligns with prior literature emphasizing the emotional dimensions of customer evaluations. Gobé (2001) theorized that emotional branding engages consumers on a deep psychological level by resonating with their values, aspirations, and emotions. Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) also found that emotional attachment to brands results in higher satisfaction levels. In the current study, the significant path coefficient between emotional branding and customer satisfaction ($\beta = 0.62$) supports these theories, demonstrating that brands that successfully foster emotional engagement are more likely to satisfy their customers.

The positive but comparatively weaker direct effect of emotional branding on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.25$) suggests that emotional appeals alone are insufficient for sustaining loyalty unless they are reinforced through satisfying brand experiences. This finding is consistent with Oliver's (1999) cognitive-affective model of loyalty, which posits that loyalty is developed not merely from positive affect but through repeated confirmation of satisfaction over time. Brands, therefore, must ensure that the emotional narratives they create are matched by the quality of the customer experience.

Customer satisfaction was found to have a strong direct effect on customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.58$), consistent with extensive prior research (e.g., Dick & Basu, 1994; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996). This finding underscores satisfaction as a critical precursor to loyal behavior. Brands that fail to meet customer expectations, even if they are emotionally appealing, risk losing long-term loyalty. This has significant managerial implications: emotional branding should be integrated with operational excellence and service delivery to optimize both satisfaction and loyalty outcomes.

The mediation analysis further revealed that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between emotional branding and customer loyalty ($\beta = 0.36$). This suggests that while emotional branding directly fosters loyalty, a substantial portion of its influence is exerted through increasing satisfaction. This finding refines the understanding of the emotional branding process by highlighting satisfaction as a critical mechanism through which emotional connections translate into sustained loyalty. It echoes the assertions by Yao (2020), who argued that emotions without satisfaction may generate initial interest but not long-term commitment.

From a theoretical standpoint, this study contributes to emotional branding literature by empirically validating the role of customer satisfaction as a mediator in the branding-loyalty relationship. It provides evidence from an emerging market context (Indonesia), which has been underrepresented in emotional branding research predominantly focused on Western markets. Given the cultural differences in emotional expression and brand perception, the findings add cross-cultural validity to emotional branding theories.

From a managerial perspective, the findings suggest that brand managers should not rely solely on emotional storytelling and identity appeals. Instead, they must ensure that emotional branding is closely linked to satisfying product or service performance. Managers should continuously monitor customer satisfaction levels to identify gaps between emotional promises and actual experiences. Furthermore, emotional branding strategies should be tailored to resonate authentically with local cultural values to deepen emotional connections and sustain loyalty.

In summary, this study reaffirms that emotional branding is a powerful driver of both satisfaction and loyalty, but its full potential is realized when supported by consistent, satisfying brand experiences. Future research could further explore the moderating role of consumer characteristics, such as emotional intelligence or brand involvement, in the emotional branding-satisfaction-loyalty chain.

CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of emotional branding on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, with customer satisfaction analyzed as a potential mediator in this relationship. Using empirical data collected from Indonesian consumers, the study validated that emotional branding plays a significant and positive role in enhancing both customer satisfaction and loyalty. The findings revealed that emotional branding has a strong and direct effect on customer satisfaction, confirming the theoretical assertions that emotional appeals can deepen customers' favorable evaluations of brands. Moreover, emotional branding was also shown to directly impact customer loyalty, although this effect was somewhat weaker compared to its influence on satisfaction. These results highlight that while emotional connections are critical, they are more effective when coupled with consistently satisfying experiences. Customer satisfaction emerged as a significant predictor of customer loyalty, affirming existing loyalty models that posit satisfaction as a fundamental antecedent to enduring loyalty. Importantly, the mediation analysis demonstrated that customer satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between emotional branding and customer loyalty. This partial mediation underscores that emotional branding initiatives achieve their greatest impact when they are capable of not only connecting emotionally but also delivering experiences that

meet or exceed customer expectations. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its empirical validation of the emotional branding model within the Indonesian context, offering a cross-cultural extension to predominantly Western-centered emotional branding research. Practically, the study provides actionable insights for brand managers, emphasizing that emotional branding must be integrated with excellent service delivery and authentic customer experiences to achieve sustainable loyalty.

Overall, this research underscores the strategic importance of emotional branding as a tool for building meaningful customer relationships. Brands that successfully create emotional connections, while simultaneously ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction, are better positioned to cultivate strong, lasting loyalty in increasingly competitive markets.

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