

Brand Attachment in the Age of Digital Consumption: Associations with Emotional Brand Experience and Consumer Self-Identity

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Abstract: This study examines direct and indirect associations among Emotional Brand Experience, Consumer Self-Identity, and Brand Attachment in digital consumption. Consumer Self-Identity is operationalized as perceived brand-self congruity. A cross-sectional explanatory survey included 300 purposively selected consumers aged at least 18 years who had purchased and used an evaluated brand and interacted with it digitally. Data were analyzed using PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4. Emotional Brand Experience was positively associated with Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$) and Consumer Self-Identity ($\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.001$), while Consumer Self-Identity was positively associated with Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.001$). The positive indirect association ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.001$) was consistent with complementary partial mediation. Reliability and validity criteria were met, and positive Q-squared predict values were reported for the evaluated endogenous indicators. The findings distinguish affective experience, perceived brand-self fit, and attachment within one model; the cross-sectional design does not establish causality or the effects of particular digital interventions.

Keywords: Emotional Brand Experience; Consumer Self-Identity (Brand-Self Congruity); Brand Attachment; Digital Consumption; PLS-SEM.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital brand consumption involves more than online purchasing because social media, e-commerce interfaces, brand websites, and digital communications provide recurring occasions for consumers to encounter and evaluate brands. These interactions expose consumers to messages and stimuli that may shape what a brand feels like and how personally relevant it appears, even when the consumer's assessment also draws on actual product use. Studies of branded content and interactive brand pages show that digital encounters can carry experiential and relational meanings beyond information delivery (Paramita et al., 2021; Waqas et al., 2021; Kuo & Chen, 2023). Yet online attention and repeated participation do not necessarily indicate that a brand has become psychologically important to an individual (Baboo et al., 2022). This distinction motivates an examination of emotional brand experience and attachment among consumers who both use products and interact with their selected brands digitally.

Emotional Brand Experience refers to the feelings elicited by brand-related encounters, rather than to overall satisfaction or an evaluation of product utility. The broader brand experience construct includes sensory, affective, intellectual, and behavioral responses (Brakus et al., 2009), but the present study isolates its affective dimension. Emotionally engaging brand

interactions have been associated with favorable consumer responses in several settings, although these responses differ conceptually from enduring attachment (Bagozzi et al., 2021; Mostafa & Kasamani, 2021). Research on attachment in brand settings (Japutra et al., 2014, 2018; Nhi et al., 2023) and human-brand authenticity (Osorio et al., 2023), alongside work linking experience, authenticity, and brand love, also suggests that different relational outcomes should not be treated as interchangeable (Rodrigues et al., 2024). Accordingly, the relevant empirical question is whether stronger reported emotional experiences are associated with attachment after accounting for the perceived fit between the brand and the consumer's self-concept.

Brand Attachment denotes an emotional and psychological bond with a brand, not simply a positive brand attitude or frequent interaction. The distinction is established in work separating attachment from attitude strength and from other brand evaluations (Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2010). Reviews and research on related brand relationship concepts (Martiyanti et al., 2021) have since documented diverse antecedents and consequences of attachment, including emotional experience and self-related perceptions, while emphasizing the need for conceptual clarity across models (Shimul, 2022; Hemsley-Brown, 2023). More recent research examines attachment in influencer marketing, authentic brand relationships, and consumption settings with different psychological needs (Chen & Lu, 2024; Joo & Guèvremont, 2024; Gilal et al., 2025). These studies establish attachment as a meaningful outcome but do not imply that every pleasant digital encounter creates a durable bond.

Consumer Self-Identity is defined here narrowly as brand-self congruity, namely the perceived correspondence between a brand's characteristics and the consumer's personality, values, identity expression, and self-representation. This operational definition does not measure changes in personal identity or the extent to which a brand is incorporated into the self. Distinctions between self-congruity and functional congruity are foundational (Sirgy et al., 1991; Kim, 2015). Self-Congruity Theory provides the basis for examining consumers' perceived fit with brands, while work on self-brand connections explains why symbolic meanings may be personally relevant (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Sirgy, 2018). Work on influencer-product-consumer congruence offers a related but separate form of fit (Belanche et al., 2021). Studies of self-brand values show that congruity and incongruity may generate different consumer responses, so a simple universal explanation would be inappropriate (Michel et al., 2022). Research across global brands, short-video social media, and shopping apps further illustrates that congruity is context-sensitive (Bhattacharjee et al., 2023; Bargoni et al., 2024; El Hedhli et al., 2026).

Prior research offers related but not identical accounts of emotional responses, perceived identity fit, and brand relationships. Shimul and Phau (2022) describe the antecedents and consequences of luxury brand attachment, while Shimul and Phau (2023) connect brand self-congruence with love, attachment, and advocacy. Kumar and Kaushik (2022) examine authenticity and engagement, and Lim et al. (2024) address authenticity in organizational service behavior, and Michel et al. (2022) identify the significance of values-related brand fit. Other research investigates brand attachment following influencer-related cues (Chen & Lu, 2024) and the formation of emotional bonds around brand authenticity (Sun et al., 2024). Previous research has examined brand self-congruence alongside brand love and advocacy (Shimul & Phau, 2023), while other studies have considered authenticity and engagement as distinct consumer responses (Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Sun et al., 2024). These findings suggest that emotional experience, perceived brand-self congruity, and psychological attachment should be examined as related but conceptually distinct dimensions of consumer-brand relationships.

Although previous studies have examined relationships among brand experience, self-related evaluations, and attachment, these constructs have been investigated across different models and consumer outcomes. The present study addresses a more specific question by examining whether Emotional Brand Experience and perceived brand-self congruity are independently associated with Brand Attachment and whether a significant indirect association emerges when both constructs are considered within the same model of digitally engaged consumers. The proposed pathway is theoretically plausible, but its status should not be overstated as a newly discovered mechanism because previous research has already linked experience, self-related evaluations, and attachment (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019; Shimul, 2022). Recent work adds evidence on interactivity, identification, authenticity, and attachment, while studying designs and outcomes that cannot be substituted directly for the present three-construct model (Ballester et al., 2025; Fan et al., 2025; Deng et al., 2025). The empirical question is therefore one of differentiation and the pattern of direct and indirect associations, not proof that digital interaction changes identity or causes attachment. Because the study uses a cross-sectional survey, the proposed mediation must be interpreted statistically rather than as an observed temporal process.

This study examines whether Emotional Brand Experience (X) and Consumer Self-Identity, operationalized as brand-self congruity (M), are associated with Brand Attachment (Y) among 300 purposively selected adult consumers who have used products and interacted with their evaluated brands digitally. H1 proposes a positive association between Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment, while H2 proposes a positive association between Emotional Brand Experience and Consumer Self-Identity. H3 proposes a positive association between Consumer Self-Identity and Brand Attachment, and H4 proposes a positive indirect association between Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment through Consumer Self-Identity. The hypotheses are evaluated using PLS-SEM with measurement-model assessment, structural paths, and predictive diagnostics. The theoretical contribution is a bounded evaluation of the distinct affective, self-relevant, and relational constructs within one model, rather than a claim that the broader theories are fully tested. Practically, the study can indicate which dimensions of consumer perceptions warrant closer evaluation in digital brand communication without demonstrating the effectiveness of particular interventions.

METHOD

Research Design and Unit of Analysis

This study employed a quantitative explanatory cross-sectional survey to investigate the proposed associations among Emotional Brand Experience, Consumer Self-Identity, and Brand Attachment. The unit of analysis was an individual consumer who evaluated a brand that the respondent had purchased, used, and interacted with through at least one digital channel. The respondents completed the measures with the same selected brand in mind. This design permits estimation of direct and indirect associations at one observation period but does not establish temporal or causal ordering.

Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised consumers aged 18 years or older with experience purchasing and using a brand and interacting with that brand through social media, e-commerce, brand websites, mobile applications, or other digital channels. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents meeting these criteria. Screening questions covered age, purchasing and product-use experience, digital interaction with the evaluated brand, and the ability to identify

one specific brand as the object of assessment. Following eligibility and response checks, the final dataset consisted of 300 respondents. Because recruitment was nonprobabilistic, the observations describe the sampled consumers rather than a statistically representative population.

Measures and Questionnaire

Primary data were obtained from a structured questionnaire containing 15 reflective indicators rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Emotional Brand Experience was measured with five indicators (X1-X5) covering positive feelings, pleasure, enthusiasm, strong emotional impressions, and memorable affective encounters. Consumer Self-Identity was operationalized as perceived brand-self congruity through five indicators (M1-M5) concerning personality, self-concept, identity expression, personal values, and self-representation. Five Brand Attachment indicators (Y1-Y5) addressed emotional closeness, personal connection, special meaning, anticipated feelings of loss, and psychological bonding. The operational definitions were maintained as supplied in the original study, with Consumer Self-Identity interpreted as brand-self congruity rather than a broad identity construct.

Data Collection and Preparation

Respondents first answered the screening questions and then completed the main questionnaire with reference to their selected brand. Responses were checked for completeness, eligibility, consistency with the inclusion criteria, and appropriate scale values before analysis. The final eligible observations were coded for descriptive statistics and structural equation modeling. Respondent characteristics and the observed distributions of the 15 indicators were summarized using frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and minimum and maximum scores, as appropriate.

Measurement, Structural, and Predictive Analysis

The study applied partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using SmartPLS 4. For the reflective measurement model, outer loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (ρ_A and ρ_C), average variance extracted (AVE), and the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) were evaluated. Inner variance inflation factors (VIF), R-squared and adjusted R-squared values, and f-squared effect sizes were examined for the structural model. Bootstrapping supplied path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values for the three direct hypotheses and the specified indirect association through Consumer Self-Identity. The reported analyses used a significance level of 0.05, and the mediation result is treated as a statistical indirect association. The PLSpredict assessment compared indicator-level Q-squared predict values and prediction errors (RMSE and MAE) with those from a linear-model benchmark; no causal or long-term predictive claim follows from these diagnostics alone. The documented survey and analysis sequence is summarized in Figure 1.

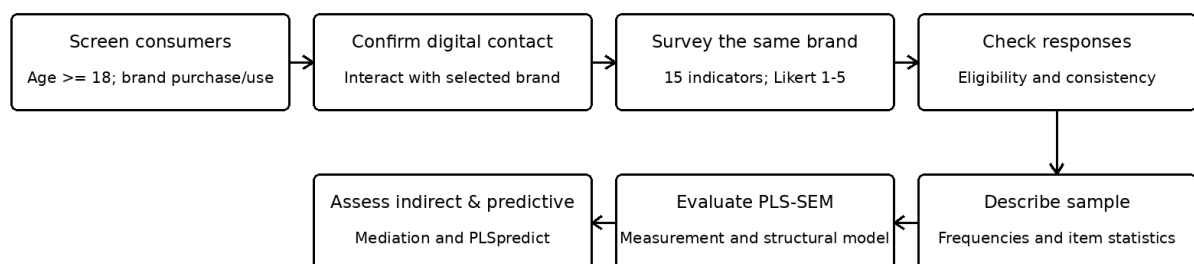


Figure 1. Research Method Flow

Figure 1 summarizes screening, brand-referenced questionnaire administration, response checks, and descriptive, structural, mediation, and predictive analyses; it does not imply a longitudinal design.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Results

Respondent characteristics and digital brand-interaction patterns are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

Characteristics	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–24 years	101	33.7
	25–34 years	82	27.3
	35–44 years	57	19.0
	45–54 years	35	11.7
	55 years and above	25	8.3
Gender	Male	156	52.0
	Female	137	45.7
	Prefer not to answer	7	2.3
Highest Educational Attainment	High School/Vocational School	118	39.3
	Diploma	44	14.7
	Bachelor's degree	128	42.7
	Master's degree (S2) or higher	10	3.3
Occupation	Private sector employee	83	27.7
	Self-employed	60	20.0
	Students	56	18.7
	ASN/BUMN	40	13.3
	Professional	35	11.7
	Other	26	8.7
Product categories	Fashion	72	24.0
	Electronics	52	17.3
	Food/drinks	50	16.7
	Personal care/cosmetics	44	14.7
	Home equipment	42	14.0
	Other	40	13.3
Main interaction platform	More than one platform	132	44.0
	Social media	81	27.0
	E-commerce	71	23.7
	Official brand website/app	16	5.3
Length of time using the brand	Less than 6 months	29	9.7
	6–12 months	64	21.3
	1–3 years	118	39.3
	More than 3 years	89	29.7
Frequency of digital interactions	Seldom	41	13.7
	Several times a month	87	29.0
	Several times a week	105	35.0
	Almost every day	67	22.3
Total	All respondents	300	100.0

As shown in Table 1, the largest age group comprised respondents aged 18–24 years (101 respondents, 33.7%). There were 156 male respondents (52.0%) and 137 female respondents (45.7%). Bachelor's degree graduates (S1) formed the largest educational group (128 respondents, 42.7%). Private-sector employees formed the largest occupational group (83 respondents, 27.7%), followed by self-employed respondents (60 respondents, 20.0%).

Based on the product categories evaluated, fashion was the largest category, with 72 respondents (24.0%), followed by electronics with 52 respondents (17.3%). In terms of digital interaction, 132 respondents (44.0%) used more than one platform, while 81 respondents (27.0%) primarily interacted through social media. The largest group had used the brand for 1–3 years, with 118 respondents (39.3%). The most frequent digital-interaction category was several times a week, with 105 respondents (35.0%). These characteristics describe the diversity of respondents' backgrounds, brand-use experiences, and digital interactions relevant to Emotional Brand Experience, Consumer Self-Identity, and Brand Attachment. The distribution of responses to the 15 measured indicators is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

Construct	Indicator	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Emotional Brand Experience	X1	2.863	1.059	1	5
	X2	2.963	1.143	1	5
	X3	2.910	1.206	1	5
	X4	3.023	1.166	1	5
	X5	3.170	1.151	1	5
Consumer Self-Identity	M1	2.937	1.142	1	5
	M2	3.043	1.166	1	5
	M3	3.100	1.175	1	5
	M4	3.130	1.154	1	5
	M5	3.083	1.169	1	5
Brand Attachment	Y1	2.920	1.122	1	5
	Y2	3.033	1.150	1	5
	Y3	2.863	1.132	1	5
	Y4	3.077	1.215	1	5
	Y5	2.970	1.146	1	5

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics. The mean score for Emotional Brand Experience was 2.986, with indicator means ranging from 2.863 to 3.170. Indicator X5 had the highest average of 3.170, while X1 had the lowest average of 2.863. For Consumer Self-Identity, the mean score was 3.059, with indicator M4 obtaining the highest value of 3.130 and M1 the lowest of 2.937. Meanwhile, Brand Attachment had a mean score of 2.973, with the highest value in indicator Y4 at 3.077 and the lowest in Y3 at 2.863.

In general, the mean scores for the three constructs were around the midpoint of the five-point Likert scale. The average scores for Emotional Brand Experience (2.986), Consumer Self-Identity (3.059), and Brand Attachment (2.973) were close to the midpoint of the five-point response scale. These results suggest that respondents, on average, did not express consistently strong agreement with the measured statements. However, the observed standard deviations indicate variation across individual responses, suggesting that the aggregate means should not be interpreted as uniform levels of emotional experience, brand–self congruity, or attachment. The standard deviations of the indicators ranged from 1.059 to 1.215, indicating variation in responses among respondents. These descriptive findings summarize respondents' perceptions; relationships among constructs and support for the hypotheses are assessed through PLS-SEM measurement and structural model testing.

Measurement Model Assessment

Indicator reliability for the three reflective constructs is assessed through the outer loadings in Table 3.

Table 3. Outer Loadings

Construct	Indicator	Outer Loading	Criteria	Information
Consumer Self-Identity (M)	M1	0.880	≥ 0.708	Valid
	M2	0.884	≥ 0.708	Valid
	M3	0.873	≥ 0.708	Valid
	M4	0.876	≥ 0.708	Valid
	M5	0.862	≥ 0.708	Valid
Emotional Brand Experience (X)	X1	0.859	≥ 0.708	Valid
	X2	0.873	≥ 0.708	Valid
	X3	0.891	≥ 0.708	Valid
	X4	0.880	≥ 0.708	Valid
	X5	0.870	≥ 0.708	Valid
Brand Attachment (Y)	Y1	0.898	≥ 0.708	Valid
	Y2	0.888	≥ 0.708	Valid
	Y3	0.866	≥ 0.708	Valid
	Y4	0.886	≥ 0.708	Valid
	Y5	0.873	≥ 0.708	Valid

Table 3 presents the outer loadings. All indicators had outer loadings between 0.859 and 0.898, all exceeding the minimum threshold of 0.708. In the Consumer Self-Identity construct, the outer loading values range between 0.862 and 0.884, with the highest value in M2 of 0.884. The Emotional Brand Experience construct has values between 0.859 and 0.891, with the highest value in X3 of 0.891. Meanwhile, the Brand Attachment construct shows values between 0.866 and 0.898, with the highest value in Y1 of 0.898.

These outer loadings support indicator reliability and retention under the stated loading criterion. Convergent validity also requires assessment of AVE. The subsequent assessment examines construct reliability using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability, and convergent validity using average variance extracted (AVE), against the stated measurement criteria. Internal consistency and convergent validity are evaluated using the coefficients reported in Table 4.

Table 4. Construct Reliability and Validity

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (ρ_a)	Composite Reliability (ρ_c)	AVE	Information
Consumer Self-Identity (M)	0.924	0.926	0.942	0.766	Reliable and valid
Emotional Brand Experience (X)	0.923	0.924	0.942	0.765	Reliable and valid
Brand Attachment (Y)	0.929	0.929	0.946	0.778	Reliable and valid

Table 4 presents construct reliability and validity. The evaluation results show that the three constructs have good reliability and convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.923 to 0.929, while composite reliability (ρ_a) ranged from 0.924 to 0.929 and composite reliability (ρ_c) ranged from 0.942 to 0.946. All values exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.70, indicating the indicators' internal consistency in measuring their respective constructs.

The AVE value for Consumer Self-Identity is 0.766, Emotional Brand Experience is 0.765, and Brand Attachment is 0.778. All values are higher than the minimum threshold of 0.50, so all three constructs meet the convergent validity criteria. Thus, the measurement model demonstrates adequate construct reliability and convergent validity. The next assessment uses

HTMT to examine whether the constructs are empirically distinguishable. The empirical distinction among the latent constructs is examined through the HTMT ratios in Table 5.

Table 5. Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

Construct	Consumer Self-Identity (M)	Emotional Brand Experience (X)	Brand Attachment (Y)
Consumer Self-Identity (M)			
Emotional Brand Experience (X)	0.579		
Brand Attachment (Y)	0.639	0.605	

Table 5 presents discriminant validity. The results of the discriminant validity test using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) showed that all pairs of constructs had values below the threshold of 0.90. The HTMT value between Consumer Self-Identity and Emotional Brand Experience was 0.579, between Consumer Self-Identity and Brand Attachment was 0.639, and between Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment was 0.605. All three values were also below the stricter limit of 0.85. Thus, the test results indicate that the three constructs have adequate discriminant validity. These HTMT results support empirical distinguishability under the stated criterion. Establishing the conceptual distinction also requires examining the wording and source of the items; HTMT alone does not establish content validity.

Structural Model Assessment

The estimated path coefficients and indicator loadings are visualized in Figure 2.

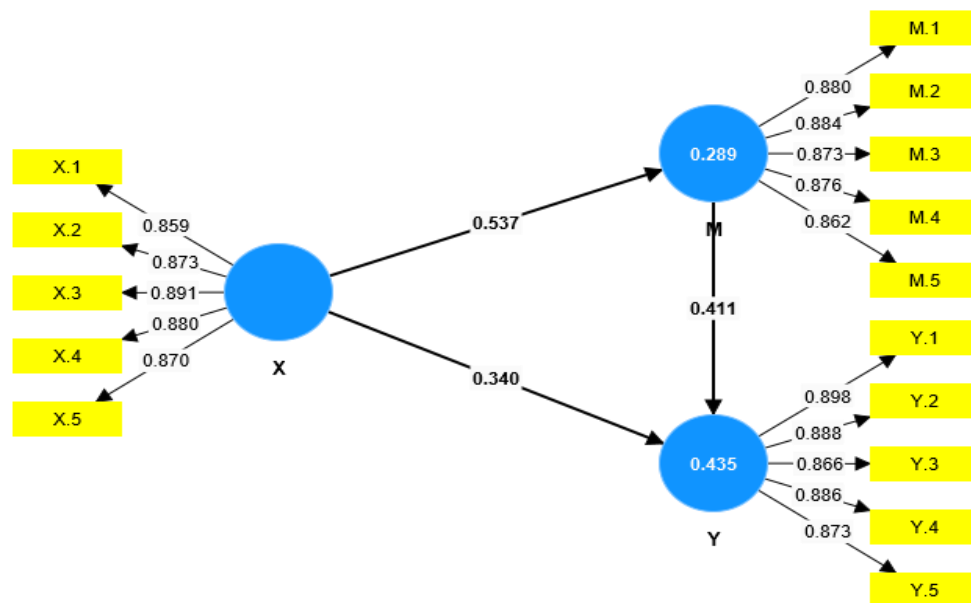


Figure 2. PLS-SEM Structural Model

Figure 2 presents the structural model. The PLS-SEM structural model describes the relationships among Emotional Brand Experience, Consumer Self-Identity, and Brand Attachment. The Emotional Brand Experience construct is measured using five indicators (X1–X5), the Consumer Self-Identity construct uses five indicators (M1–M5), while the Brand Attachment construct uses five indicators (Y1–Y5). The outer loading values range from 0.859 to 0.891 for Emotional Brand Experience, 0.862–0.884 for Consumer Self-Identity, and 0.866–0.898 for Brand Attachment. All 15 indicators exhibited outer loadings between 0.859 and 0.898, exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.708 and supporting adequate indicator reliability. These results indicate that the observed indicators were strongly associated with their respective latent constructs. Evidence of

convergent and discriminant validity was assessed separately through average variance extracted (AVE) and heterotrait–monotrait ratios (HTMT), providing complementary support for the measurement model.

The model also displays structural path coefficients of 0.537, 0.411, and 0.340. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for the Consumer Self-Identity construct is 0.289 and for the Brand Attachment construct is 0.435. These results indicate that the model is able to explain 28.9% of the variation in Consumer Self-Identity and 43.5% of the variation in Brand Attachment. Meanwhile, the significance of the relationships between constructs needs to be confirmed through bootstrapping test results, specifically the t-statistic, p-value, and confidence interval.

Before interpreting structural associations, the inner-model collinearity diagnostics are provided in Table 6.

Table 6. Collinearity Statistics (Inner VIF)

Interconstruct Relationships	VIF	Criteria	Information
Consumer Self-Identity (M) → Brand Attachment (Y)	1.406	VIF < 5.00	There is no multicollinearity
Emotional Brand Experience (X) → Consumer Self-Identity (M)	1.000	VIF < 5.00	There is no multicollinearity
Emotional Brand Experience (X) → Brand Attachment (Y)	1.406	VIF < 5.00	There is no multicollinearity

Table 6 presents the collinearity statistics. The results of the collinearity test indicate that all relationships between constructs in the structural model have VIF values below 5.00. The relationship between Emotional Brand Experience and Consumer Self-Identity has a VIF value of 1.000, while the relationship between Consumer Self-Identity and Brand Attachment and Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment each have VIF values of 1.406. All of these values are also below the threshold of 3.00, indicating that the model does not experience significant collinearity problems. These results allow structural model evaluation and hypothesis testing to proceed. The explanatory power of the two endogenous constructs is assessed in Table 7.

Table 7. Coefficients of Determination (R^2)

Endogenous Construct	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Information
Consumer Self-Identity (M)	0.289	0.286	28.9% of the construct variation is explained by the model
Brand Attachment (Y)	0.435	0.431	43.5% of the construct variation is explained by the model

Table 7 presents the coefficients of determination. Consumer Self-Identity has an R^2 value of 0.289 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.286. These results indicate that Emotional Brand Experience is able to explain 28.9% of the variation in Consumer Self-Identity, while the remaining 71.1% remains unexplained by the fitted model.

For the Brand Attachment construct, the R^2 value was 0.435 with an adjusted R^2 of 0.431. Emotional Brand Experience and Consumer Self-Identity jointly explain 43.5% of the variation in Brand Attachment, while the remaining 56.5% remains unexplained by the fitted model. The analysis does not identify specific sources of that unexplained variance. Overall, the model has greater explanatory power for Brand Attachment than for Consumer Self-Identity. The coefficient of determination provides an overview of the model's explanatory power, but does not directly indicate the significance of the relationship between constructs.

The relative incremental contributions of each predictor are reported as f-squared values in Table 8.

Table 8. Effect Size (f^2)

Interconstruct Relationships	f^2 value	Criteria	Information
Consumer Self-Identity (M) → Brand Attachment (Y)	0.213	$0.15 \leq f^2 < 0.35$	Moderate effect
Emotional Brand Experience (X) → Consumer Self-Identity (M)	0.406	$f^2 \geq 0.35$	Large effect
Emotional Brand Experience (X) → Brand Attachment (Y)	0.146	$0.02 \leq f^2 < 0.15$	Small effect

Table 8 presents the effect sizes. Emotional Brand Experience has a large incremental explanatory contribution to Consumer Self-Identity, with an f^2 value of 0.406. This finding indicates that Emotional Brand Experience makes a substantive contribution to explaining variation in Consumer Self-Identity in the research model.

Meanwhile, the influence of Consumer Self-Identity on Brand Attachment has an f^2 value of 0.213, placing it in the medium effect category. This result indicates that Consumer Self-Identity makes a moderate incremental explanatory contribution to Brand Attachment. These effect-size categories describe explanatory contribution; statistical significance is assessed through bootstrapping. Meanwhile, the direct influence of Emotional Brand Experience on Brand Attachment has an f^2 value of 0.146, slightly below the medium effect threshold of 0.15 and therefore in the small effect category. The effect-size results indicate that Emotional Brand Experience made a large incremental contribution to explaining Consumer Self-Identity ($f^2 = 0.406$). Within the Brand Attachment equation, Consumer Self-Identity showed a moderate incremental contribution ($f^2 = 0.213$), whereas Emotional Brand Experience showed a comparatively smaller contribution ($f^2 = 0.146$). This pattern suggests that perceived brand-self congruity provides additional explanatory information about attachment beyond the direct association with emotional experience.

Hypothesis Testing

The bootstrapped direct associations corresponding to H1-H3 are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Direct Effects

Hypothesis	Interconstruct Relationships	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	SD	t-Statistics	p-Values	Decision
H1	X → Y	0.340	0.342	0.051	6.736	<0.001	Supported
H2	X → M	0.537	0.538	0.042	12.894	<0.001	Supported
H3	M → Y	0.411	0.409	0.049	8.396	<0.001	Supported

Table 9 presents the direct effects. Emotional Brand Experience has a positive and statistically significant association with Brand Attachment, with a path coefficient of 0.340, a t-statistic of 6.736, and $p < 0.001$. The positive relationship between Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$) indicates that respondents who reported stronger emotional experiences with their selected brands also tended to report higher levels of psychological attachment. This association remained statistically significant after accounting for Consumer Self-Identity in the specified model, supporting H1 without establishing the temporal development of attachment. Thus, H1 is supported.

Testing the relationship between Emotional Brand Experience and Consumer Self-Identity yielded a path coefficient of 0.537, a t-statistic of 12.894, and $p < 0.001$. These results indicate a

positive and statistically significant association, with the largest path coefficient among the three direct relationships tested. Consumers' emotional brand experiences are thus closely associated with perceived alignment between the brand and their self-identity. Therefore, H2 is supported.

Furthermore, Consumer Self-Identity has a positive and statistically significant association with Brand Attachment, with a path coefficient of 0.411, a t-statistic of 8.396, and $p < 0.001$. This finding indicates that the stronger the fit between the brand and the consumer's self-identity, the higher the consumer's attachment to the brand. Thus, H3 is supported.

All three direct coefficients are positive and significant, supporting the hypothesized relationships and providing a basis for examining the indirect effect through Consumer Self-Identity.

Mediation Analysis

The statistical indirect association underlying H4 is presented in Table 10.

Table 10. Specific Indirect Effect

Hypothesis	Interconstruct Relationships	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	SD	t-Statistics	p-Values	Decision
H4	$X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$	0.221	0.220	0.033	6.658	<0.001	Supported

Table 10 presents the specific indirect effect. Emotional Brand Experience has a positive and statistically significant indirect association with Brand Attachment through Consumer Self-Identity, with an indirect effect coefficient of 0.221, a t-statistic of 6.658, and $p < 0.001$. This reported indirect association is consistent with the proposed mediating role of Consumer Self-Identity, interpreted statistically rather than as a demonstrated causal process. Thus, H4 is supported. Emotional brand experiences are related to attachment both directly and through perceived congruence between the brand and consumers' self-identity. Respondents reporting stronger emotional experiences also tended to report greater brand-self congruity and attachment. This pattern is consistent with the proposed indirect association, without establishing a temporal sequence.

Since the direct effect of $X \rightarrow Y$ is also significant at 0.340 ($p < 0.001$), while the indirect effect of $X \rightarrow M \rightarrow Y$ is significant at 0.221 ($p < 0.001$), this pattern of results is consistent with partial mediation. However, to determine the type of mediation more fully, it is necessary to ensure the direction and significance of the direct effect and the suitability of the model specifications.

Predictive Assessment

Indicator-level predictive relevance and error benchmarking are evaluated in Table 11.

Table 11. PLSpredict

Indicator	Q^2_{predict}	PLS-SEM RMSE	PLS-SEM MAE	LM RMSE	LM MAE
M1	0.235	1.000	0.806	1.011	0.812
M2	0.215	1.035	0.844	1.035	0.853
M3	0.226	1.036	0.858	1.047	0.865
M4	0.235	1.011	0.807	1.023	0.814
M5	0.164	1.071	0.886	1.081	0.894
Y1	0.254	0.970	0.786	0.970	0.785
Y2	0.219	1.019	0.824	1.031	0.835
Y3	0.236	0.992	0.789	0.999	0.797
Y4	0.228	1.070	0.877	1.078	0.876
Y5	0.259	0.988	0.804	0.998	0.813

Table 11 presents the predictive assessment. All indicators of the endogenous constructs have positive Q^2_{predict} values, ranging from 0.164 to 0.259. In the Consumer Self-Identity construct, the Q^2_{predict} value ranges from 0.164 in indicator M5 to 0.235 in indicators M1 and M4. Meanwhile, in the Brand Attachment construct, the value ranges from 0.219 in indicator Y2 to 0.259 in indicator Y5. The positive Q^2_{predict} values across the ten endogenous indicators provide evidence of predictive relevance relative to the prediction benchmark used in PLSpredict. However, relative predictive performance requires consideration of prediction errors. Based on the reported rounded values, PLS-SEM achieved lower RMSE values than the linear model for eight indicators and equal values for two, while MAE values were lower for eight indicators and higher for two. These findings suggest generally favorable but not uniformly superior predictive performance across the evaluated indicators.

A comparison of prediction errors between PLS-SEM and the linear model (LM) shows that PLS-SEM produces lower root mean squared error (RMSE) values for eight of the ten indicators and equal values for two indicators, with no higher values. For mean absolute error (MAE), PLS-SEM produces lower values for eight indicators and higher for two indicators. Thus, PLS-SEM shows generally comparable or better predictive performance than the linear model on the tested indicators, although it does not outperform the linear model consistently across indicators.

Overall, the PLSpredict results support the model's predictive relevance. However, the model's relative predictive ability cannot be determined solely based on Q^2_{predict} . Further assessment should consider the comparative patterns of RMSE and MAE with the comparison models and the PLSpredict interpretation guidelines used.

Discussion

The first result was a positive association between Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$). Related work also differentiates attachment from other brand relationship outcomes (Hung & Lu, 2018). This relationship is consistent with the proposition that affective encounters accompany a stronger psychological connection to the evaluated brand, but it does not show that the experiences caused attachment to develop. Mostafa and Kasamani (2021) relate brand experience and emotion to loyalty, an adjacent but distinct outcome, while Rodrigues et al. (2024) examine the role of authenticity in a brand experience-brand love relationship. The present outcome is specifically Brand Attachment, thereby avoiding the assumption that love, loyalty, and attachment are equivalent. Related work on attachment to brands in influencer marketing and themed-restaurant consumption likewise emphasizes the relevance of relational and psychological cues, although in contexts not directly comparable with this sample (Chen & Lu, 2024; Gilal et al., 2025). Within the current cross-sectional model, emotional experience retained an association with attachment even after self-congruity was included.

The size of the direct association warrants attention alongside its statistical significance. Although the H1 coefficient was positive, its incremental explanatory effect size ($f\text{-squared} = 0.146$) fell just below the conventional moderate threshold, indicating a relatively small unique contribution once Consumer Self-Identity was included. Respondents' item means for the three constructs were generally near the midpoint of the five-point response scale rather than uniformly high, which discourages an interpretation of pervasive strong attachment. Research on brand authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015) and consumer bonds indicates that relational perceptions can depend on additional cues such as credibility and perceived consistency (Joo & Guèvremont, 2024; Sun et al., 2024). Previous studies of brand experience and pleasure in

attachment (공란란 et al., 2015; 윤경구, 2016) similarly focus on particular products and cultural contexts. The survey did not separately measure these alternatives, and the residual direct association should not be interpreted as proof of any particular unobserved mechanism. A responsible interpretation is that affective experience is related to attachment while leaving substantial variation to other measured or unmeasured factors.

The second result was a positive relationship between Emotional Brand Experience and Consumer Self-Identity (beta = 0.537, $p < 0.001$), with R-squared = 0.289 for the latter construct. This is the largest of the three direct path coefficients and is compatible with the idea that consumers reporting pleasant brand encounters also tend to perceive a closer match between a brand and their self-concept. The measures, however, capture perceived brand-self congruity rather than a change in who respondents are. Michel et al. (2022) show that congruity in brand values is analytically different from other forms of identification, and Bhattacharjee et al. (2023) demonstrate that different dimensions of self-congruity can matter differently across consumer contexts. Bargoni et al. (2024) observe brand-personality self-congruity in video-based social media, while El Hedhli et al. (2026) examine identity-related congruity in retail-app experiences. Together these comparisons support the relevance of self-related evaluations without permitting conclusions about identity formation from the current survey.

Consumer Self-Identity was also positively associated with Brand Attachment (beta = 0.411, $p < 0.001$), with a moderate incremental effect size (f-squared = 0.213). This pattern suggests that brand-self congruity represents a distinct correlate of attachment rather than merely another name for emotional experience. Shimul and Phau (2023) report that brand self-congruence relates to brand love, attachment, and advocacy, while their earlier study of luxury brands illustrates how attachment can vary with market context (Shimul & Phau, 2022). Consumer-brand relationship theory offers a wider relational context for these constructs (Fournier, 1998; Park et al., 2013). The distinction between a perceived match and an emotional bond remains essential: consumers can recognize a brand as self-relevant without necessarily feeling that its loss would matter to them. Recent evidence on attachment and authenticity (Deng et al., 2025) and on attachment under unfavorable brand conduct (Lee Park & Fracarolli Nunes, 2025) also indicates that attachment has consequences beyond simple brand-image congruence. The current analysis supports empirical separation among the three latent variables through HTMT values of 0.579–0.639, without establishing complete content validity from statistical tests alone.

The positive indirect association from Emotional Brand Experience to Brand Attachment through Consumer Self-Identity (beta = 0.221, $p < 0.001$) is consistent with complementary partial mediation because both the direct and indirect paths were positive and significant. This result provides a compact statistical account of how emotional experience and self-relevance coexist within the reported attachment model, not evidence that experience first changed congruity and then generated attachment. A related Indonesian study considered emotional brand attachment in online transportation (Tasya & Aruan, 2022), although its book chapter and outcome are not direct evidence for the present mediation. Theoretical comparisons help define the contribution: Rodrigues et al. (2024) position brand authenticity in a different mediation model, whereas Shimul and Phau (2023) test a more elaborate sequence involving brand love and advocacy. Deng et al. (2025) likewise consider attachment alongside trust in a brand-authenticity model, implying that plausible relational explanations extend beyond the present mediator. Unlike models incorporating multiple relational mechanisms, the present three-construct specification focuses on the indirect association between Emotional Brand Experience and Brand Attachment through perceived brand-self congruity. The analysis was conducted among

consumers who met the study's product-use and digital-interaction eligibility criteria. These characteristics define the sampled population rather than representing statistically controlled predictors, and the resulting indirect association should be interpreted within this empirical context. Longitudinal or experimental evidence would be required before interpreting this cross-sectional indirect association as a temporal psychological mechanism.

The digital setting provides relevant context but is not itself a tested moderator or explanatory variable. Respondents reported digital interactions, yet no comparison between digital and offline consumers or among platforms was estimated. Prior work on social-media brand engagement (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Dwivedi et al., 2019) and online booking brand attachment (Tran & Chang, 2024) provides additional context. Kuo and Chen (2023) found that perceived experiences with interactive Facebook brand pages were positively related to attachment to those pages and subsequent participation intentions. Similarly, Baboo et al. (2022) examined attachment to social media as a distinct construct. Although these studies demonstrate the relational significance of digital environments, their attachment targets differ from the consumer-brand attachment measured in the present research. This distinction suggests that evidence concerning digital interaction and platform attachment should be interpreted cautiously when explaining emotional bonds with brands. Ballester et al. (2025) study engagement with influencer content via emotional and rational routes, and Fan et al. (2025) synthesize evidence on brand interactivity and consumer responses in digital environments. Related work on site attachment and social identity in virtual product consumption points to different digital objects of attachment (Kim et al., 2025). Xiao and Chen (2025) also show the importance of distinguishing social-media engagement measures from the psychological attachment construct. These studies make digital interaction theoretically relevant while reinforcing why the present results should not be presented as effects of platform design, specific content strategies, or interaction frequency.

The study's explanatory and predictive assessments place meaningful limits on the strength of its conclusions. The model accounted for 28.9% of the variance in Consumer Self-Identity and 43.5% of the variance in Brand Attachment, leaving sizable portions of each construct unexplained. Positive Q-squared predict values were reported for all ten endogenous indicators; compared with the linear-model benchmark, the PLS model showed lower RMSE for eight indicators and the same rounded RMSE for two. Its MAE was lower for eight indicators and higher for two, so predictive performance was not uniformly superior across metrics. Research on the consequences of brand ambassadors' wrongdoing points to additional relational boundary conditions (Lau et al., 2026). Evidence from studies of brand values, authenticity, and even negative brand experiences suggests that relationships can be contingent on the consumption setting and the particular outcome measured (Gerrath & Biraglia, 2021; Kumar & Kaushik, 2022; Ittefaq et al., 2024). The present findings support the specified associations in this sample but do not eliminate alternative explanations or establish predictive accuracy for new populations.

Managerial implications follow from the observed perceptions rather than from tested interventions. The relevance of brand experience and attachment in specific retail branding settings has also been discussed by Kim (2020). Brand managers could examine both the emotional quality of digital brand encounters and whether consumers regard the brand as consistent with their own values and self-presentation; these are distinct diagnostic questions. Studies of brand authenticity in fashion and the stability of attachment under controversial brand conduct show why visually engaging campaigns should not be assumed sufficient to support trusted relationships (Hyun et al., 2024; Lee Park & Fracarolli Nunes, 2025). Research on consumer relationships after service failures likewise cautions against treating a single positive

encounter as a complete relationship explanation (Lim et al., 2025). Responsible brand communications, congruent representations, and product-service consistency are therefore areas to evaluate rather than practices shown by this survey to cause attachment. The evidence is bounded by purposive sampling, self-reported questionnaire responses, one observation period, and the pooling of product categories and digital interactions in a single model. Future research could test competing explanations such as trust, authenticity, and interaction quality with stronger measurement documentation, more representative samples, or longitudinal and experimental designs.

CONCLUSIONS

Emotional Brand Experience was positively associated with Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.340$, $p < 0.001$) and Consumer Self-Identity operationalized as brand-self congruity ($\beta = 0.537$, $p < 0.001$). Consumer Self-Identity was also positively associated with Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.411$, $p < 0.001$). The positive indirect association ($\beta = 0.221$, $p < 0.001$), alongside a significant direct association, was consistent with complementary partial mediation in the specified PLS-SEM model. The findings differentiate affective experience, perceived self-relevance, and psychological attachment in a sample of 300 consumers who used products and interacted with selected brands digitally; they do not establish a causal sequence.

This study contributes to consumer-brand relationship research by empirically distinguishing Emotional Brand Experience, perceived brand-self congruity, and Brand Attachment and examining their direct and indirect associations within a single model of digitally engaged consumers. The positive indirect association provides additional evidence consistent with a mediating role for brand-self congruity, suggesting that emotional evaluations and perceived identity fit represent related yet distinguishable dimensions of brand attachment. These findings extend the empirical application of existing theoretical perspectives without establishing a new causal mechanism or theory of attachment. For practice, the findings suggest evaluating the emotional relevance of brand experiences alongside consumers' perceptions of brand-self fit, without assuming that any particular communication strategy has been proven effective. The cross-sectional and nonprobability design, reliance on self-reported responses, and absence of tested platform differences limit generalization and causal interpretation. Research employing temporal designs and carefully measured alternative mechanisms would help explain how these associations change across consumers, products, and digital settings.

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