Bridging brand satisfaction and brand loyalty: The inseparable emotional roles of brand attachment and brand love

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ABSTRACT

Brand loyalty is a critical determinant of business sustainability because it secures long-term repeat purchasing. This study examines how emotional brand attachment and brand love shape customer loyalty in micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, using Rokket Café in Probolinggo, Indonesia, as the empirical setting. A mixed-methods sequential explanatory design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 160 customers and analyzed using SmartPLS, followed by focus group discussions to enrich interpretation. The findings reveal that brand satisfaction positively influences emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty. Moreover, emotional brand attachment and brand love partially mediate the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty, indicating that loyalty is not produced solely by functional evaluations. Instead, enduring commitment emerges through affective bonds and relational experiences with the brand. This study extends the literature by demonstrating that emotional mechanisms operate within MSME contexts and encourages owners to design emotionally driven experiences for resilient customer loyalty.

Keywords: *Brand Satisfaction; Brand Loyalty; Emotional Brand Attachment; Brand Love*

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly competitive business environment, customer loyalty has become a strategic asset that determines long-term sustainability, particularly for micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) (Cardoso et al., 2022) . Unlike large corporations that possess substantial financial and technological resources, MSMEs rely heavily on stable customer relationships to ensure continuity and resilience. Loyal customers not only engage in repeat purchases but also contribute through positive word-of-mouth, resistance to competitors' offerings, and emotional advocacy for the brand (Cardoso et al., 2022). Consequently, understanding the mechanisms that foster customer loyalty is of critical importance, especially within experience-based service contexts such as cafés and community-oriented businesses.

Traditional marketing perspectives have largely conceptualized loyalty as a behavioral outcome driven by satisfaction and perceived value (Thamrin et al., 2020). However, recent developments in relationship marketing and consumer brand relationship theory suggest that loyalty is not merely transactional in nature, but is deeply rooted in affective and relational processes (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021; Robertson et al., 2022) . Satisfaction may initiate favorable evaluations, yet it does not automatically translate into enduring loyalty. Customers may remain satisfied while still switching to alternative brands when presented with more attractive options. This phenomenon indicates that cognitive evaluations alone are insufficient to explain long-term commitment, and that emotional dimensions play a central role in shaping sustained brand relationships (Apria & Parahiyanti, 2023).

Within this evolving perspective, emotional brand attachment and brand love have emerged as central constructs for explaining how consumers form deep, enduring bonds with brands (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021). Emotional brand attachment reflects the strength of the emotional connection between consumers and a brand, characterized by feelings of closeness, affection, and psychological bonding. Brand love, in turn, represents a more intense and passionate form of affect, encompassing feelings of joy, pride, and personal identification with the brand (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021; Robertson et al., 2022). These emotional constructs transform brands from functional entities into meaningful relational partners, thereby strengthening resistance to switching behavior and reinforcing loyalty over time (Robertson et al., 2022).

While prior studies have provided substantial evidence of these mechanisms in the context of large corporations and global brands, empirical research within MSME settings remains limited (Ghorbanzadeh & Rahehagh, 2021; Hajjid et al., 2022; Laras Wati & Riorini, 2023). Small, experience-based businesses such as local cafés operate in environments where interpersonal interaction, atmosphere, and community engagement play a dominant role in shaping customer experiences (Ferreira et al., 2021; Rancati et al., 2024). In such contexts, emotional processes may be even more salient than in standardized, large-scale operations. However, the extent to which emotional brand attachment and brand love mediate the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in MSMEs has not been sufficiently explored.

To address this gap, the present study investigates the roles of emotional brand attachment and brand love in linking brand satisfaction to brand loyalty within an MSME context, using Rokket Café in Probolinggo City as the empirical setting. By employing a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design, this study not only tests the proposed relationships quantitatively but also explores the lived experiences through which emotional bonds are formed. Through this approach, the study seeks to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how affective relationships emerge in small,

experience-based businesses and how they contribute to the development of long-term customer loyalty.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand loyalty represents the ultimate outcome of consumers' evaluative and experiential processes toward a brand. In classical perspectives, loyalty has often been viewed as a direct consequence of customer satisfaction (Robertson et al., 2022; Thamrin et al., 2020). Johnson et al. (1995) and Mano and Oliver (1993) define satisfaction as a form of cognition that emerges from specific purchase or consumption experiences, reflecting the extent to which brand performance meets or exceeds consumer expectations. However, contemporary literature suggests that satisfaction alone is not always sufficient to generate stable and enduring loyalty. Oliver (1999) defines brand loyalty as a deeply held commitment to repurchase or consistently patronize a preferred brand in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that may induce switching behavior. This definition emphasizes that loyalty extends beyond repeated purchase behavior and reflects a strong psychological bond between consumers and brands. Accordingly, sustainable loyalty depends not only on functional evaluations but also on consumers' emotional engagement with the brand.

Within this framework, emotional dimensions have become increasingly central. Thomson et al. (2005) conceptualize emotional brand attachment as a positive emotional outcome derived from a strong relationship between consumers and brands, manifested in feelings of closeness, connection, and psychological bonding. Meanwhile, Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as the degree of passionate emotional attachment that consumers develop toward a particular brand. Brand love represents a more intense form of affect, extending beyond mere liking and reflecting a deeply personal and meaningful relationship. Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh (2021) examined the relationships among brand satisfaction, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty in the context of smartphone and apparel brands. Their findings indicate that brand satisfaction does not exert a direct effect on brand loyalty. Instead, satisfaction positively influences emotional brand attachment and brand love, which subsequently serve as mediating mechanisms in the formation of loyalty. These results suggest that loyalty is not constructed solely through cognitive evaluations of brand performance but emerges through emotional involvement that evolves from satisfying consumption experiences.

Consistent evidence is provided by Wati and Riorini (2023) in their study of laptop users in Jakarta and West Java. Their findings reveal that brand satisfaction does not directly influence brand loyalty but significantly affects emotional brand attachment and brand love. Furthermore, brand love exerts a direct and significant impact on loyalty, whereas emotional brand attachment does not demonstrate a direct effect. These results reinforce the notion that satisfaction must be transformed through affective mechanisms in order to produce enduring loyalty. Hajjid et al. (2022) further substantiate this pattern through an empirical examination of the relationships among brand satisfaction, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty. Their results indicate that brand satisfaction positively and significantly influences brand loyalty, emotional brand attachment, and brand love. Moreover, emotional brand attachment is found to positively and significantly affect brand love.

These findings confirm that satisfaction functions as an initial trigger that fosters emotional bonding, which subsequently evolves into deeper affection toward the brand. In other words, the formation of loyalty unfolds sequentially from satisfaction to

attachment, and ultimately to brand love. Collectively, prior studies demonstrate a consistent pattern: brand loyalty does not always arise directly from satisfaction but is mediated by emotional variables. Loyal consumers are not merely those who feel satisfied; rather, they are individuals who develop psychological and affective relationships with brands. This perspective aligns with the view that modern consumers do not act purely rationally but form personal, symbolic, and emotional connections with the brands they consume.

Despite these insights, the majority of existing research on emotional brand attachment and brand love has concentrated on large corporations, global brands, or high-technology products. The context of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), particularly experience-based businesses such as cafés, remains relatively underexplored. This is notable, as MSMEs are often characterized by close customer relationships and direct interpersonal interactions, which are highly conducive to the development of strong emotional bonds. This limitation highlights an important research gap. There is still insufficient empirical evidence regarding whether the same emotional mechanisms namely, whether the transformation of satisfaction into loyalty through emotional brand attachment and brand love operates within the MSME context.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to re-examine the relationships among brand satisfaction, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty in the context of MSMEs, while also exploring how these emotional processes emerge within customers' lived experiences.

METHOD

This study employs a sequential explanatory mixed methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches across two successive stages (Creswell, 2009). The research process begins with quantitative data collection and analysis, which is subsequently followed by a qualitative phase designed to clarify, expand, and provide deeper insight into the statistical outcomes obtained earlier (Fitri & Haryanti, 2020). This design is appropriate for the present study, as it not only examines causal relationships among variables but also seeks to understand the underlying reasons and processes through which these relationships develop based on customers' experiences.

The quantitative stage was carried out through a survey targeting customers of Rokket Café located in Probolinggo City. Data were collected from 160 respondents who had visited the café more than once, using a structured questionnaire. Measurement items were adapted from well-established instruments in branding and consumer behavior research and assessed using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The variables examined in this study include brand satisfaction, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty, as specified in the proposed conceptual framework.

Quantitative data analysis was conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 3 software (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015). This analytical technique was chosen due to its suitability for predictive-oriented research, its ability to accommodate complex models involving mediating variables, and its effectiveness when applied to studies with moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2013). The analysis consisted of two stages: assessment of the measurement model covering convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability and evaluation of the structural model to test the proposed hypotheses (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015).

After completing the quantitative analysis, a qualitative phase was undertaken to enrich the interpretation of the findings. In-depth interviews were conducted with four loyal customers who demonstrated strong emotional connections with the café. Participants were selected purposively based on visit frequency and observable engagement with the brand. The interviews focused on participants' personal experiences and emotional responses toward the café, particularly examining the progression from satisfaction to emotional attachment, brand love, and eventual loyalty.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns that explain the emotional and relational mechanisms underlying customer loyalty (Fitri & Haryanti, 2020). This phase served an explanatory role by offering contextual understanding of how emotional brand attachment and brand love are formed and sustained within an MSME environment.

Overall, the integration of quantitative analysis and qualitative insights enables a comprehensive examination of brand loyalty development. This mixed methods approach captures both the statistical relationships among constructs and the emotional processes that shape long-term customer–brand relationships in an experience-oriented small business context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis

To assess the adequacy of the reflective measurement model, this study evaluated indicator loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) as measures of convergent validity, along with discriminant validity. These assesment were conducted to establish the validity and reability of the measurement model before examining the relationship among the constructs (Hair et al.,2013).

Convergent validity concerns the extent to which the indicators of a construct are strongly correlated with that construct, whereas reliability concerns the internal consistency of those indicators. Convergent validity is met when outer loadings are greater than 0.70 and AVE is greater than 0.50 and reliability is met when CR and Cronbach's alpha are greater than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2013). Establishing these properties first ensures that each construct is measured accurately and consistently before the structural relationships are tested (Abdillah & Hartono, 2015).

Table 1 presents the outer loading of each of the 40 indicators together with the AVE, Cronbach's alpha, and CR of the four constructs, which serve as the evidence for convergent validity and reliability.

Table 1
Validity and Reliability of Constructs, Mean and Standard Deviation (SD)

Construct name	Items	Loading	AVE	α	CR
Brand satisfaction	BS1	0,873	0,660	0,948	0,955
	BS2	0,836			
	BS3	0,801			
	BS4	0,824			
	BS5	0,804			
	BS6	0,888			
	BS7	0,830			
	BS8	0,788			
	BS9	0,724			
	BS10	0,780			
	BS11	0,775			

Emotional Brand Attachment	EBA1	0,834	0,660	0,926	0,939
	EBA2	0,806			
	EBA3	0,842			
	EBA4	0,816			
	EBA5	0,818			
	EBA6	0,807			
	EBA7	0,820			
	EBA8	0,753			
Brand Love	BLo1	0,857	0,624	0,959	0,964
	BLo2	0,746			
	BLo3	0,818			
	BLo4	0,805			
	BLo5	0,763			
	BLo6	0,729			
	BLo7	0,784			
	BLo8	0,749			
	BLo9	0,725			
	BLo10	0,811			
	BLo11	0,740			
	BLo12	0,817			
	BLo13	0,763			
	BLo14	0,816			
	BLo15	0,847			
	BLo16	0,847			
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0,858	0,649	0,864	0,902
	BL2	0,786			
	BL3	0,743			
	BL4	0,768			
	BL5	0,865			

Source: Data Analyzed, 2024

The analysis shows that all indicators exceeded the minimum recommended loading value of 0.70 (Chin et al., 2008). The lowest loading observed was 0.724 for item BS9, while the remaining indicators ranged between 0.73 and 0.88. These results indicate that each indicator sufficiently represents its associated latent construct, demonstrating acceptable indicator reliability. Construct reliability was further examined using composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha to assess internal consistency among indicators. The findings indicate that all constructs achieved CR and Cronbach's alpha values above the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Hair et al., 2013).

Composite reliability values ranged from 0.902 to 0.964, and Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.864 to 0.959, indicating strong internal consistency and reliable measurement instruments. Additional support for convergent validity was provided by the AVE values, all of which exceeded the minimum criterion of 0.50, ranging from 0.624 to 0.660 (Hair et al., 2013). These values suggest that each construct explains a substantial proportion of variance in its respective indicators.

Having established convergent validity and reliability, the next step was to examine discriminant validity. Discriminant validity addresses the principle that measures of different constructs should not be highly correlated. Its purpose is to ensure that each construct is empirically distinct from the other constructs in the model, so that an indicator explains its own construct better than it explains any other construct (Henseler et al., 2014). In variance-based structural equation modelling such as partial least squares, the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the inspection of cross-loadings are the dominant approaches for this assessment (Henseler et al., 2014). The Fornell–Larcker criterion compares the square root of the AVE of each construct with the correlations

between that construct and every other construct, and discriminant validity is established when the square root of the AVE is greater than those correlations. Cross-loadings are examined by checking that the loading of an indicator on its own construct is greater than its loading on any other construct (Ghozali, 2013).

Table 2 reports the results of the Fornell–Larcker test, with the square root of each construct's AVE on the diagonal and the correlations between constructs in the remaining cells.

Table 2
Discriminant Validity Results Based on Fornell–Larcker Criterion

	1	2	3	4
1. Brand Love	0,790			
2. Brand Loyalty	0,763	0,806		
3. Brand Satisfaction	0,785	0,660	0,812	
4. Emotional Brand Attachment	0,734	0,688	0,602	0,812

Source: Data Analyzed, 2024

The results demonstrate that the square root of AVE for each construct is higher than its corresponding inter-construct correlations. For example, the square root of AVE for Brand Love (0.790) exceeds its correlations with Brand Loyalty (0.763), Brand Satisfaction (0.785), and Emotional Brand Attachment (0.734). Similar patterns were observed for the remaining constructs. These findings confirm that the constructs are empirically distinct and that the measurement model meets the criteria for discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

Overall, the results indicate that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability, thereby supporting its suitability for subsequent structural model analysis.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis testing was performed using PLS-SEM with a two-tailed t-test to evaluate the significance of the structural relationships (Ghozali, 2013) . Structural paths were considered statistically significant when the t-value exceeded 1.96 or when the p-value was below 0.05(Ghozali, 2013) .

Table 3 presents the results of the hypothesis testing, reporting the path coefficient, t-statistic, p-value, and decision for each of the five hypothesized paths among Brand Satisfaction (BS), Emotional Brand Attachment (EBA), Brand Love (BLo), and Brand Loyalty (BL).

Table 3
Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses	Path	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values	Decision
H1	BS → EBA	0,561	5,044	0,000	Supported
H2	BS → BLo	0,538	4,358	0,000	Supported
H3	EBA → BL	0,602	5,922	0,000	Supported
H4	Blo → BL	0,410	2,974	0,003	Supported
H5	EBA → BLo	0,276	2,581	0,010	Supported

Source: Data Analyzed, 2024

The results reveal that all proposed hypotheses exhibit positive and statistically significant relationships among the examined constructs ($p < 0.05$). Emotional brand attachment has the strongest relationship with brand loyalty ($\beta = 0.602$), followed by the relationships between brand satisfaction and emotional brand attachment ($\beta = 0.561$) and brand love ($\beta = 0.538$). The remaining paths, from brand love to brand loyalty and from emotional brand attachment to brand love, are also positive and significant. Overall, the findings support the proposed relationships among brand satisfaction, emotional brand attachment, brand love, and brand loyalty at Rokket Café.

Qualitative Results

The qualitative phase was conducted to deepen the quantitative findings, which indicated that emotional brand attachment and brand love mediate the relationship between brand satisfaction and brand loyalty, with brand love emerging as the more dominant mediator. While the quantitative analysis established the statistical relationships among variables, it could not fully explain how these emotional mechanisms are formed in customers' lived experiences. Therefore, in-depth interviews were employed to explore the relational and affective dynamics underlying consumers' connections with the brand.

Interviews with four loyal customers of Kafe Rokket revealed a relatively consistent pattern of experiences. Informants perceived Kafe Rokket as distinctive due to its mobile vintage concept; however, the primary source of attachment did not stem solely from visual appeal or business novelty. Rather, emotional bonds were shaped predominantly by the warm atmosphere, intensive personal interactions, and the social relationships cultivated within the café. Customers felt recognized, welcomed, and treated not merely as consumers, but as part of a circle of friends or even an extended family. Several informants reported that they initially visited the café alone, yet gradually developed new social networks as a result of the inclusive environment fostered by the brand.

Personalized interactions such as the owner and baristas remembering customers' names, engaging in casual conversations, and acknowledging personal moments (e.g., birthdays) were found to generate strong emotional ties. These forms of attention nurtured feelings of closeness and psychological ownership toward the brand. Some customers even voluntarily assisted with simple operational activities, such as arranging chairs or organizing the space, because they felt emotionally connected to Kafe Rokket. Such behaviors reflect a relationship that transcends economic exchange and illustrates the emergence of affective commitment.

All informants also expressed a strong willingness to recommend Kafe Rokket to others. Their motivation extended beyond product quality, it was rooted in the emotional experiences they associated with the café feeling comfortable, accepted, and socially fulfilled. Kafe Rokket was perceived not merely as a place to consume coffee, but as a community space that offered positive energy and meaningful social value. This perception encouraged repeated visits and proactive advocacy within their social circles.

Taken together, these qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results by demonstrating that emotional brand attachment and brand love are cultivated through warm, consistent, and personal relational interactions. Such experiences transform the consumer–brand relationship from a purely functional exchange into a meaningful affective bond, which ultimately facilitates the development of enduring brand loyalty.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that brand satisfaction exerts a positive and significant influence on emotional brand attachment, confirming that satisfaction constitutes a critical prerequisite for the emergence of emotional bonds between consumers and brands. In the context of Kafe Rokket, satisfaction is not derived solely from functional attributes such as product quality, service consistency, or operational reliability. Rather, it is embedded within a holistic service experience in which interpersonal interactions, atmosphere, and social engagement play a central role. The qualitative evidence reveals that customers perceive their encounters with Kafe Rokket as inherently relational, characterized by warmth, inclusivity, and personal recognition. These elements function as affective stimuli that enhance psychological comfort and generate perceived social value. This dynamic aligns with Thomson et al. (2005), who argue that emotional attachment is formed through repeated, meaningful, and consistent interactions rather than through momentary functional evaluations.

The study further indicates that brand satisfaction has a significant positive effect on brand love, supporting prior literature that positions satisfaction as an essential emotional trigger in the development of deep brand affection (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Satisfied customers exhibit stronger emotional engagement, manifested in pride toward the brand, heightened recommendation intentions, and a willingness to share positive experiences through word-of-mouth. Qualitative insights illustrate that personalized services such as remembering customers' names, acknowledging personal milestones, and engaging in informal yet meaningful conversations create emotional resonance that serves as the foundation for brand love. Hence, the transition from satisfaction to brand love is mediated by relational and human-centered experiences, underscoring the importance of the interpersonal dimension in experience-based services.

Moreover, the results confirm that both emotional brand attachment and brand love significantly influence brand loyalty. Consumers who are emotionally attached to and in love with a brand demonstrate stronger commitment, greater preference stability, and higher resistance to competitive switching. Their loyalty extends beyond repurchase intentions to include affective behaviors, such as defending the brand against criticism, rejecting alternatives despite more attractive offers, and expressing willingness to pay a premium. Such behaviors indicate a shift from purely functional evaluations toward an appreciation of symbolic and emotional value. These findings are consistent with Albert & Merunka (2013) and Batra et al. (2012), who argue that brand love enhances commitment, mitigates negative reactions to brand shortcomings, and strengthens long-term loyalty.

Importantly, the study also confirms that emotional brand attachment significantly predicts brand love. Attachment serves as a structural foundation upon which deeper affection develops, resulting in a relationship characterized by intimacy and passion toward the brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). In the case of Kafe Rokket, customers exhibit signs of self brand integration, as reflected in voluntary behaviors such as assisting staff, offering informal operational support, and expressing solidarity with the café's challenges. These behaviors suggest that customers perceive the brand as part of their social and emotional identity, indicating that the relationship transcends conventional transactional boundaries. This finding reinforces the notion that attachment evolves into brand love when consumers experience identity congruence, emotional value, and meaningful interpersonal connections.

Collectively, these results underscore that customer loyalty in experience-based service contexts is fundamentally shaped by emotional and relational factors and cannot

be adequately explained through transactional logic alone. Within Kafe Rokket, satisfaction functions as a cognitive foundation that initiates affective responses, which then evolve into emotional brand attachment and brand love as the quality and intensity of interactions increase. These emotional states subsequently foster a form of loyalty that is more stable, profound, and resilient to competitive pressures. Consequently, emotional brand attachment and brand love may be regarded as high-value strategic assets that contribute to sustainable competitive advantage, particularly in service industries where customer experience constitutes the primary source of differentiation. Through high-quality interactions, an inclusive atmosphere, and consistent personal engagement, Kafe Rokket is perceived not merely as a service provider but as a community space offering emotional and social value that is difficult for competitors to replicate.

This study extends existing literature by demonstrating that emotional brand attachment and brand love function as complementary and sequential mechanisms linking brand satisfaction to brand loyalty within the MSME context. While prior studies have predominantly focused on large firms, the present findings reveal that similar emotional processes operate in small, experience-based businesses. This evidence broadens the theoretical applicability of emotional branding frameworks and highlights the strategic relevance of affective relationships in resource-constrained enterprises.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

This study demonstrates that brand satisfaction serves as the primary foundation for the development of emotional relationships between consumers and brands, as reflected in emotional brand attachment and brand love. Customers who experience high levels of satisfaction tend to form stronger emotional bonds and deeper affection toward a brand, particularly when their experiences are characterized by consistent product quality, pleasant service encounters, personal attention, and warm interpersonal interactions.

Furthermore, emotional brand attachment and brand love are shown to play a pivotal role in strengthening brand loyalty. Emotional attachment encourages customers to remain committed to a brand despite the presence of competitive alternatives, while brand love motivates them to exhibit active support behaviors, such as repeated purchases and positive recommendations. These two emotional constructs operate in a complementary manner, whereby attachment provides the foundation upon which brand love emerges. The resulting emotional relationship leads customers to perceive the brand as valuable not only in functional terms but also in emotional and symbolic dimensions, fostering feelings of pride, comfort, and happiness in their engagement with the brand.

The qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative results by revealing that personal interactions among customers, owners, and baristas are central to the formation and deepening of emotional attachment and brand love. Warm, consistent, and human-centered interactions collectively cultivate strong and enduring customer loyalty, even within the constraints faced by small-scale enterprises. This indicates that emotional value creation does not depend on organizational scale but rather on the quality of relational experiences offered to customers.

From a managerial perspective, these findings suggest that business owners, particularly within the MSME sector, should strategically cultivate emotional bonds by sustaining customer satisfaction through high product quality, friendly service, and a comfortable, inclusive environment. Personal interactions such as remembering customers' names, using familiar greetings, and engaging in warm conversations have proven effective in generating positive emotional experiences and making customers feel

genuinely valued. Such practices foster unique and intimate relationships between customers and brands, thereby encouraging long-term loyalty.

Accordingly, MSME practitioners are encouraged to invest in training employees in interpersonal communication and personalized service delivery. By strengthening the emotional value perceived by customers, small businesses can build meaningful differentiation and establish sustainable competitive advantages rooted in affective relationships rather than purely transactional exchanges.

This study was conducted at a single MSME café in Probolinggo. Therefore, the findings reflect the specific context of Rokket Café and may differ in other business settings. In addition, the qualitative phase involved four selected customers, providing insights into emotional brand attachment and brand love but not fully capturing the diversity of customer experiences.

The interviews also revealed that social bonds among customers may play an important role in developing brand loyalty. However, these relationships were not incorporated into the proposed model, which focused on individual-level brand loyalty. Future research could therefore examine the role of organically formed brand communities, particularly community identification, in explaining the relationship between brand love and brand loyalty. This may be especially relevant for small businesses, where direct interactions between customers, owners, and staff can foster closer relationships (Vernuccio et al., 2015).

To gain a deeper understanding of how these social relationships emerge and influence customer loyalty, future studies could employ exploratory qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews or grounded theory. Such approaches may help explain how customer communities develop around a brand and how changes in business operations affect these relationships and the loyalty they support.

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