ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF EMOTIONAL MARKETING BASED ON CONSUMER LOYALTY OF MOBILE PHONE BRANDS: THE SEQUENTIAL MEDIATING ROLES OF BRAND IDENTITY AND BRAND TRUST

Yaping JIANG[*], Yanyan SUN, Shibo TU

School of Business, Shanghai Normal University Tianhua College, Shanghai, China

Abstract. With the advent of digital technology and social media, mobile phone companies are increasingly turning to emotional marketing to appeal to consumers' inner preferences. The purpose of this study is to examine the economic consequences of emotional marketing on customer loyalty, while taking into account the mediating variables of brand identity and brand trust. By surveying 647 digitally-savvy consumers in China, the proposed model was empirically validated. The results suggest that emotional marketing plays a crucial role in fostering consumer loyalty towards mobile phone brands, and that brand identity and brand trust play sequential mediating roles in the impact of emotional marketing on consumer loyalty. This research enhances our understanding of emotional marketing and consumer loyalty, and offers valuable insights for mobile phone brands seeking to implement effective emotional marketing strategies.

Keywords: emotional marketing, brand identity, brand trust, consumer loyalty, economic impact.

JEL Classification: L68, M31.

Introduction

With the rapid development of Internet technology and social media, consumers are no longer passively accepting information but actively selecting and disseminating information. Emotions are a powerful determinant of human behavior and purchasing choices. When marketing content manages to establish an emotional connection with the target audience, it has a greater likelihood of generating the desired customer engagement and actions, as noted by Xu (2020). Only those marketing contents that allow consumers to have emotional resonance at the spiritual level and meet the deep-seated needs of consumers can attract consumers' attention and spread. Jenblat (2018) suggests that marketing campaigns that leverage emotional appeals have the potential to go viral and exert a considerable influence

*Corresponding author. E-mail: *jyp2186@sthu.edu.cn*

on brand loyalty. From Apple's Chinese New Year advertisements "Made in the New Year", "Congratulations", and "Old Records" in 2015 to Huawei's advertising films "Love is Waterproof" and "How Many People Are in Your Mobile Phone's Address Book?", all of them can feel the concern for "people" themselves and have an emotional resonance with them through the description of consumers' daily life scenes. Mobile phone brand enterprises increasingly favor emotional marketing methods based on consumers' inner preferences. Nowadays, mobile phone companies have adopted emotional marketing methods, using mobile phones as the connection point around consumers' emotional needs to create an emotional resonance atmosphere and shape consumers' identity to strengthen their recognition and trust in the brand and improve their loyalty to the brand.

The business community's enthusiasm for emotional marketing has also prompted the academic community to pay attention to the research on emotional marketing. It has become a popular area of research in recent years, as marketers have increasingly recognized the importance of emotions in driving consumer behavior. Scholars at home and abroad have researched on the connotation, dimension of emotional marketing and the relationship with brand loyalty. In the past twenty years, the field of marketing has produced numerous studies that concentrate on defining, evaluating, and examining the function of emotional marketing (e.g., Bagozzi et al., 1999; Feig, 2006; Consoli, 2010; Deshwal, 2015; Weinlich & Semerádová, 2022). Research has found that positive emotions, such as happiness, joy, and excitement, can drive customer loyalty by increasing customer satisfaction and creating strong emotional connections between the customer and the brand. Negative emotions, such as anger and frustration, can also impact customer loyalty, but in a negative way, by decreasing customer satisfaction and increasing the likelihood of customers switching to competitor brands (e.g., Izard, 2013; Babaei et al., 2017; Shahid et al., 2022). In terms of customer experience, research has shown that emotional elements, such as atmosphere and customer service, play a critical role in shaping customer perceptions and behaviors. Emotional customer experiences can lead to increased consumer loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and higher customer satisfaction (e.g., Gorn, 1982; Ibrahim, 2021; Guerra-Tamez & Franco-García, 2022; Koay et al., 2022).

Although emotional marketing has been acknowledged to have a positive influence on brand loyalty, the precise mechanism that underlies this connection is still unclear. The objective of this study is to fill the existing void by exploring how brand identity and brand trust function as mediators in the emotional marketing-brand loyalty nexus. Through a comprehensive survey of 647 digital-savvy consumers in China, this study provides empirical evidence and deeper insights into the impact of emotional marketing on brand loyalty, offering valuable guidance for mobile phone brand enterprises looking to implement effective emotional marketing strategies.

1. Theoretical background

The stimulus-organism-response (SOR) model posits that various aspects of stimulus influence individual internal states, which in turn drive behavioural responses. According to Cheung et al. (2022), the term "organism" denotes the internal states encompassing perceptions, emotions, and cognitive processes. In this study, an integrative model is developed,
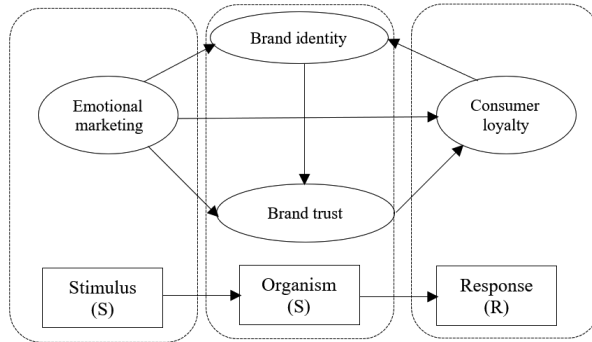
Figure 1. Conceptual framework (source: compiled by the authors)

supported by the S-O-R (Stimulus-Organism-Response) framework. The S-O-R model proposes that external stimuli (in this case, emotional marketing) elicit cognitive and emotional responses within the internal state of an organism (in this case, brand identity and brand trust), which subsequently influence behavioral outcomes (in this case, consumer loyalty).

The interrelationships among the study variables, namely emotional marketing, brand identity, brand trust, and brand loyalty, are illustrated in Figure 1.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Emotional marketing and consumer loyalty

Emotion and image are the source of strength in the marketing world. The concept of emotion is introduced into marketing theory by establishing product models to understand and satisfy customers. The marketing strategy of shaping products and brands through emotion is called "emotional marketing" (Feig, 2006). Consoli (2010) describes emotional marketing as the capacity to deliver personalized messages using a range of techniques that evoke particular emotions and feelings in customers. This involves implementing strategies that establish a deep emotional connection with customers and enable effective communication. More specifically, Deshwal (2015) coined the term emotional marketing to describe advertising efforts that seek to move customers' emotions and memories, using techniques that appeal to feelings such as happiness, sadness, anger, and fear to influence customer response and interaction. According to Babaei et al. (2017), emotional marketing messages are designed to fulfill customers' psychological needs, such as enhancing their self-esteem and confidence by making them feel intelligent, attractive, and sophisticated. These messages may also evoke negative emotions such as fear, sadness, and panic, which can influence customers' purchasing decisions.

Izard's (2013) research reveals that humans are wired to prioritize emotions over rational thinking. This implies that emotional stimuli are processed by the brain's emotional center much faster than cognitive information, highlighting the crucial role of emotional marketing in establishing a positive connection with customers and eliciting a favorable response to a brand or product. When exposed to marketing messages that incorporate emotional

elements, customers can be subconsciously affected and attracted by the positive emotions conveyed by the brand, creating a positive emotional resonance and fostering brand loyalty. Therefore, emotional marketing can be a powerful tool for enhancing customer loyalty and increasing brand stickiness. Brakus et al. (2009) introduced a brand experience scale with four dimensions: perceptual, mood-related, cognitive, and behavioral engagement. Loyalty can be impacted directly or indirectly, depending on the type of experience. When the credibility of a brand or product is low and customers experience a high level of uncertainty, the direct influence of emotional marketing on customer satisfaction and loyalty becomes more pronounced. Emotional appeals may also indirectly affect satisfaction and loyalty through the development of associations with brand personality. Cachero-Martínez and Vázquez-Casielles (2021) conducted an empirical study with a sample of 496 consumers, which demonstrated that emotional experience plays a crucial role in influencing customer loyalty. Additionally, Hur et al. (2013) found that perceived social, emotional, and functional values significantly enhance customer satisfaction with green innovation, based on data collected from a cross-sectional survey of 517 consumers in the USA. Atulkar (2020) suggests that building deep emotional connections with customers is essential to drive brand loyalty, as emotional attachment to a brand is a key factor. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

H1: Emotional marketing will positively influence consumer loyalty.

2.2. Emotional marketing and brand identity

Brand identity refers to the psychological preference state of consumers' cognition and evaluation of a brand, and is the unity of consumers and a brand (Lam et al., 2013). The core logic of emotional marketing is human-oriented. It starts from the emotional needs of consumers, arouses and arouses the emotional resonance of consumers through warmth, humor, entertainment or thought-provoking marketing content, so as to make them love and pay attention to the brand and finally form brand recognition. Jahn and Kunz (2012) conducted an empirical study to investigate the impact of brand fan pages on social media platforms on the relationship between customers and brands. They found that brand fans lead to brand loyalty behavior through brand emotional attribution and value recognition, which is specifically manifested in word-of-mouth communication, brand commitment and repeat purchase behavior. In fact, brand fan page on social media platforms is a form of emotional marketing, which stimulates consumers' brand emotion through interactive content, thus forming brand identity. Thus,

H2: Emotional marketing positively influences brand identity.

2.3. The mediating role of brand identity

Enterprises utilize emotional marketing strategies to enhance consumers' brand recognition, creating a sense of emotional attachment and loyalty to the brand while simultaneously enabling consumers to resist negative brand information (Elbedweihy et al., 2016). This approach is particularly effective in establishing a strong connection with customers and boosting loyalty. Keller's (1993) brand equity model highlights that consumers who are familiar

with a brand and have established unique and robust brand associations tend to closely link their perception of the brand to their personal identity, leading to an emotional bond and brand identity. As a result, brand equity is developed, which ultimately leads to increased brand loyalty. Brand association, which is a powerful emotional marketing strategy, indirectly affects consumers' brand loyalty through brand identification. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

H3: Emotional marketing influences consumer loyalty through the mediation of brand identity.

2.4. Emotional marketing and brand trust

Park and Kim (2016) define trust as a positive belief that customers have in a brand's perceived products, services, and overall identity. A strong brand identity, characterized by high prestige and distinctiveness, can make a brand more trustworthy by increasing the perceived cost of engaging in untrustworthy behavior due to the potential damage to its reputation (He et al., 2012). Ibrahim et al. (2021) provide empirical evidence that social media marketing, which is considered an important form of emotional marketing, can enhance brand trust. Content marketing, which engages consumers cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally, can help customers make sense of the brand, identify with it, and engage in behaviors that support it, which in turn can trigger brand trust and positive attitudes (Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Based on the conclusions above, we hypothesized the following:

H4: Emotional marketing will positively influence brand trust.

2.5. The mediating role of brand trust

Trust is an essential factor in building strong relationships between consumers and brands, which aligns with the objective of emotional marketing to cultivate long-term customer loyalty (Kim & Ko, 2010). Atulkar's (2020) research findings suggest that brand loyalty is not only influenced by affective factors such as perceived quality, value, satisfaction, and differentiation, but also by direct influence of trust in the brand. Additionally, Park and Kim (2016) conducted a comparative study on loyalty formation for sustainable fashion brands and fast fashion brands and discovered that consumers develop loyalty differently for each type of brand. Nonetheless, in both cases, the perceived value of the brand indirectly impacts brand loyalty through trust in the brand. Thus,

H5: The relationship between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty is mediated by brand trust.

2.6. The sequential mediating role of brand identity and brand trust

Emotional marketing promotes brand identity, enhances brand trust, and then turn into brand loyalty through meeting the emotional needs of consumers. He et al. (2012) utilized mall intercept interviews to collect survey data and found that a strong brand identity is positively associated with brand trust. Furthermore, they demonstrated that a strong brand identity has an indirect effect on brand loyalty through its impact on brand value, customer

satisfaction, and brand trust. The positive links between brand image dimensions and brand loyalty types are mediated by attachment, trust, and brand identification, as found by Diallo et al. (2020). Emotional marketing transmits the core values of the brand to consumers, strengthens consumers' brand identity, enhances consumers' trust in the brand, and finally enhances consumers' brand loyalty. Accordingly, we hypothesized:

H6: The relationship between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty is sequentially mediated by brand identity and brand trust.

Based on the reviewed literature and the research hypotheses, the conceptual framework is presented in Figure 1.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Measures

The survey questionnaire comprises five sections: (1) emotional marketing, (2) brand identity, (3) brand trust, (4) consumer loyalty, and (5) respondent information. The study utilized a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, to measure the different constructs. The scale items for assessing emotional marketing were adapted from Sun's (2016) research, whereas the measure for brand identity was adapted from Jin (2006) and consisted of four items. The four-item scale for brand trust was adapted from McKnight's et al. (2002) work. The five items measuring consumer loyalty were adapted from Ding and Tseng's (2015) study. The participants used a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (not at all descriptive of my feelings) to 5 (extremely descriptive of my feelings), to rate their agreement with each item. The items are listed in Table 1.

3.2. Data collection

Cluster Sampling was utilized in this study. The Cluster Sampling was selected because it can quickly yield valuable information from a large population. We conducted an online survey of digital enthusiasts who are familiar with and passionate about some certain mobile phone brand. The respondents had to select one mobile phone brand and answered the questionnaire items with that brand in mind. Digital enthusiasts were selected because they have a certain understanding and cognition of mobile phone brand, and like to discuss and study the products and marketing contents released by domestic and foreign mobile phone brands through Digital enthusiast QQ group or Weibo fan group, so as to better make cognitive judgments.

To encourage participation in this survey, the researchers sent a gift (Red Packet with random amount) to respondents who were willing to complete the questionnaire. Of the 647 questionnaires returned, we obtained 599 usable questionnaires after removing 37 surveys in which respondents did not answer the questionnaire items carefully (answer time less than 100 seconds), 11 surveys in which respondents chose the same answer for all the items. The valid response rate was 92.6%.

Table 2 provides an overview of the study's participants, indicating that the majority were male (63.1%), and 47.1% reported a monthly income between 5000 and 10000 RMB.

Table 1. Scale items

Variable	Measuring items
Emotional marketing	The content posted by the mobile phone brand strikes an emotional chord with me.
	The content posted by the mobile phone brand touches the heart.
	The content posted by the mobile phone brand is down-to-earth.
	The content posted by the mobile phone brand induces feelings and sentiments.
	The content posted by the mobile phone brand is something I can relate to.
Brand identity	This mobile phone brand personality is consistent with my lifestyle.
	This mobile phone brand personality is consistent with my personal pursuit.
	I feel honored to use this mobile phone brand.
	Using this mobile phone brand makes me feel different.
Brand trust	This brand of mobile phones can be counted on to effectively address any issues that arise with their products.
	I have a high level of confidence in this particular mobile phone brand.
	This brand of mobile phones is attentive to the real needs of its consumers.
	This brand of mobile phones demonstrates honesty and sincerity towards all of its customers.
Consumer loyalty	I intend to continue using this mobile phone brand for the next several years.
	Should I need to replace my current mobile phone, I would opt for the same brand.
	I view myself as being loyal to this particular brand of mobile phones.
	If someone were to seek my opinion, I would recommend this brand of mobile phones.
	I would remain loyal to this brand of mobile phones even if there was a slight increase in its rates.

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Index	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	378	63.1%
	Female	221	36.9%
Age	18–28	363	60.6%
	28–45	215	35.9%
	45-above	21	3.5%
Education	Without	80	13.4%
	Bachelor's Degree	322	53.8%
	Post-Graduate Degree	197	32.8%
Incomes (RMB per month)	Lower than 5000	57	9.5%
	5000–10000	282	47.1%
	10000–20000	213	35.6%
	More than 20000	47	7.8%
Mobile phone brands	Apple	215	35.9%
	Huawei	198	33.1%
	Vivo	74	12.4%
	Oppo	59	9.8%
	Lenovo	36	6%
	Others	17	2.8%

In addition, concerning the age distribution of the sample, 60.6% of the participants were aged between 18 and 28 years old, with the second largest group being those aged between 28 and 45 years old (35.9%). Consumers at these two age groups pay the highest attention to digital products and mobile phone brands. In terms of education, 86.6% have bachelor's degree or above. This group has a good educational foundation and is more likely to accept new things. It is the main target group of emotional marketing. Among the various brands of mobile phones, 35.9% are familiar with and passionate about Apple, followed by Huawei (33.1%).

4. Data analysis and results

4.1. The measurement model evaluation

4.1.1. Test of common method bias

When variables are measured using the same methods, correlations between them may be inflated due to the presence of common method bias (CMB), also known as common method variance (Bagozzi et al., 1991). As our study relied solely on self-reported data from a single source, we conducted Harman's single-factor test to evaluate the potential impact of common method bias (CMB). Initially, we performed Harman's single-factor test utilizing exploratory factor analysis (EFA) through the use of SPSS 26.0. The results indicated that four factors had eigenvalues greater than 1, with the first factor explaining only 37.054% of the total variance. This was below the threshold of 40%, suggesting that the questionnaire was not impacted by common method bias (CMB). Furthermore, we conducted Harman's single-factor test based on confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using AMOS24.0. Our findings indicated that all 18 scale items (indicators) were loaded onto a single latent variable. However, the single factor model did not adequately fit the data ($\chi 2/df$ = 23.248, NFI = 0.522, IFI = 0.533, TLI = 0.464, CFI = 0.531, RFI = 0.454, RMSEA = 0.200, RSMR = 0.1728), providing evidence that the study was not influenced by common method bias (CMB).

4.1.2. Reliability and validity analysis

Prior to examining the conceptual model, we assessed the reliability and validity of the scales used in our study.

First, the reliability of the measures, that is, internal consistency for the constructs were evaluated based on the factor loadings of the items on their respective constructs and Cronbach's alpha coefficient values. The last item in brand trust (listed in the Table 1) were removed from further study because of low factor loading (<0.5). Then, as shown in Table 3, all the factor loadings were higher than the threshold value of 0.5, and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient values for all constructs met the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that our questionnaire had high reliability.

Next, we conducted exploratory factor analysis to evaluate the construct validity. Before factor analysis, the study performed KMO and Bartlett' test of sphericity using SPSS 26.0. The results were as follows: KMO value was 0.887, greater than the 0.7 threshold, and the approximate chi- square value of Bartlett's test was 6162.075, the degree of freedom (df) was 136,

Table 3. Reliability and validity analysis

Latent variable	Constructs	Item count	Factor loadings	Cronbach alpha
Emotional Marketing	CMA1 CMA2 CMA3 CMA4 CMA5	5	0.721 0.796 0.857 0.827 0.814	0.899
Brand identity	BI1 BI2 BI3 BI4	4	0.643 0.794 0.846 0.741	0.840
Brand trust	BT1 BT2 BT3	3	0.856 0.734 0.514	0.716
Consumer loyalty	CL1 CL2 CL3 CL4 CL5	5	0.858 0.906 0.869 0.847 0.842	0.937

Table 4. Pattern matrix, eigenvalues and variance explained

	Component			
	Consumer loyalty	Emotional Marketing	Brand identity	Brand trust
CMA1		0.672		
CMA2		0.770		
CMA3		0.878		
CMA4		0.836		
CMA5		0.828		
BI1			0.662	
BI2			0.804	
BI3			0.830	
BI4			0.718	
BT1				0.909
BT2				0.715
BT3				0.458
CL1	0.810			
CL2	0.889			
CL3	0.872			
CL4	0.870			
CL5	0.877			
Eigenvalues	5.979	2.108	1.593	1.230
Variance explained %	35.173	12.402	9.368	7.232
Cumulative %	35.173	47.575	56.943	64.176

and the significance (sig.) = 0.000 (perfectly significant), indicating that the questionnaire data is suitable for factor analysis. Then, this study conducted exploratory factor analysis on the obtained data of 17 items. The analysis parameters were set as follows: the extraction method was "Principal Axis Factoring" (the number of factors is 4), and the rotation method is "Promax with Kaiser Normalization", the coefficient display format is "sorted by size", "suppress small coefficients" (absolute value below 0.4). Results as shown in Table 4, four latent constructs were extracted from the 17 measurement indicators of the questionnaire data, the factor structure was clear, and the cumulative variance explained reached 64.176%, indicating that these four factors can reflect 64.176% of the information of 17 items. This indicates that the questionnaire data demonstrated good construct validity.

Finally, we performed a validity check using AMOS 24.0, examining both convergent and discriminant validity. Results in Table 5 indicate that composite reliability (CR) was within the acceptable range of 0.751–0.937 for all variables, surpassing the threshold of 0.7. Additionally, the average variance extracted (AVE) for each variable ranged from 0.512 to 0.748, surpassing the minimum threshold of 0.5, confirming convergent validity. Furthermore, Table 5 demonstrates that all squared correlations were less than the extracted variances for each construct, indicating that discriminant validity was established.

Table 5. Convergent validity and discriminant validity

| Latent Variance | CR | AVE | Latent Variance | | | |
			Emotional Marketing	Brand identity	Brand trust	Consumer loyalty
Emotional Marketing	0.901	0.647	**0.804**			
Brand identity	0.844	0.577	0.419***	**0.760**		
Brand trust	0.751	0.512	0.226***	0.302***	**0.715**	
Consumer loyalty	0.937	0.748	0.404***	0.396***	0.285***	**0.865**

4.2. The structural model evaluation

Based on the previously discussed reliability and validity of the measurement model, we can proceed with evaluating the structural model. There are various measures that can be used to evaluate the overall fit of a structural equation model. We assessed the model fit based on Wu (2013)'s study. He divided the measurement indicators into three categories: absolute fit index, value-added fit index and simple fit index. The specific classification and reference standard of each index are shown in Table 6. Accordingly, our proposed conceptual model revealed an overall good fit to the data: $\chi2/df$ = 2.713, SRMR = 0.035, RMSEA = 0.054, GFI = 0.942, AGFI = 0.921, NFI = 0.951, IFI = 0.968, TLI = 0.968, CFI = 0.968, RFI = 0.941. Figure 2 shows the estimated structural model.

Table 6. Model fit criteria

| Categories	Fitting index	Fit criteria	
Simple fit index	χ^2/df	<2.00	Perfect fit
		<3.00	Good fit
Absolute fit index	SRMR	<0.05	Perfect fit
		<0.08	Good fit
	RMSEA	<0.05	Perfect fit
		<0.08	Good fit
	GFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
	AGFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
Value added fitness index	NFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
	IFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
	TLI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
	CFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
	RFI	>0.95	Perfect fit
		>0.90	Good fit
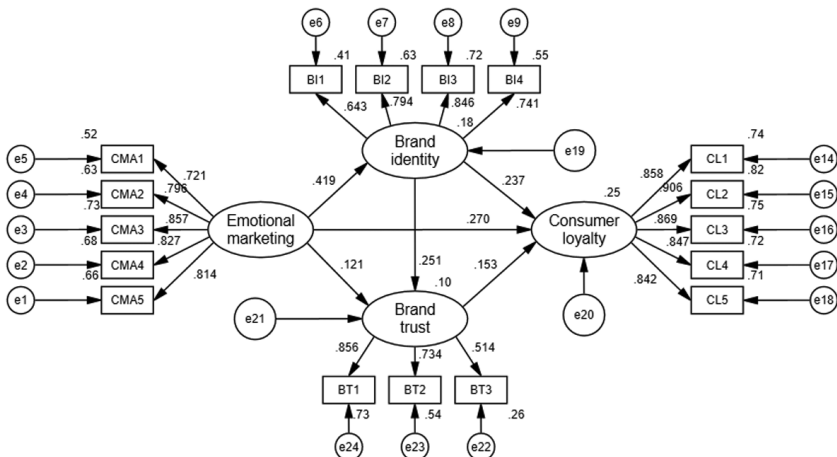
Figure 2. The outcomes of the SEM analysis

4.3. Test of hypotheses

In this study, we employed an empirical structural equation modeling approach to examine the degree of alignment between the collected data and the hypothesized theoretical model. Table 7 exhibits hypothesized paths directions, β coefficients, critical ratios (CR) and significance levels, etc. Consistent with expectations (*H1*), emotional marketing (β = 0.348, p < 0.001) exert a significant, positive impact on consumer loyalty. As expected, the effect of emotional marketing on brand identity (β = 0.463, p < 0.001) and brand trust (β = 0.124, p = 0.022) is significant, supporting *H2* and *H4*. By order of importance of those coefficients, the emotional marketing-brand identity path (β = 0.463, p < 0.001) is much stronger than both the emotional marketing-brand trust (β = 0.124, p = 0.022) and the emotional marketing-consumer loyalty paths (β = 0.348, p < 0.001). In addition, brand identity (β = 0.276, p < 0.001) and brand trust (β = 0.192, p < 0.001) both have significant positive impact on consumer loyalty, and brand identity-brand trust path (β = 0.233, p < 0.001) is significant, which to some extent can demonstrate that emotional marketing can indirectly affect consumer loyalty through the intermediary roles of brand identity and brand trust, partly supporting *H3*, *H5* and *H6*.

Table 7. Path coefficients and significance levels

Structural Path	Std. Estimate	Estimate (β)	S.E.	C.R.	p-value
Emotional Marketing → Consumer loyalty	0.270	0.348	0.059	5.889	***
Brand identity → Consumer loyalty	0.237	0.276	0.057	4.813	***
Brand trust → Consumer loyalty	0.153	0.192	0.058	3.299	***
Emotional Marketing → Brand identity	0.419	0.463	0.055	8.467	***
Emotional Marketing → Brand trust	0.121	0.124	0.054	2.285	0.022*
Brand identity → Brand trust	0.251	0.233	0.054	4.323	***

Note: * p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001.

4.4. Tests of mediation effects

Additionally, this study utilized the bootstrapping technique to analyze the direct and indirect effects among constructs, using bootstrap samples of 5000 with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals. This allowed for the testing of indirect effects to further examine the relationships in the proposed model. As shown in Table 8, the total effect between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty was 0.404 with its significance value less than 0.001. And the bootstrap 95% confidence interval for the total indirect effect (β = 0.134) through brand identity and brand trust did not contain zero (95% CI = 0.082, 0.202), further affirming that brand identity and brand trust serve as partial mediators in the association between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty. Concretely, the path (emotional marketing → brand identity → consumer loyalty) was 0.099, the path (emotional marketing → brand trust → consumer loyalty) was 0.018, and the path (emotional marketing → brand identity → brand trust → consumer loyalty) was 0.016. Among them, the 95% confidence interval of the path (emotional marketing → brand trust → consumer loyalty) included zero (95% CI = 0.000,

0.056), indicating that the mediating influence of brand trust between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty is not significant. Thus, *H5* wasn't supported. On the contrary, the mediating influence of brand identity between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty did not include zero (95% CI = 0.052, 0.166), supporting *H3*. The sequential intermediary effect of brand identity and brand trust between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty did not include zero (95% CI = 0.004, 0.039), supporting *H6*.

Table 8. The results of mediation test

	Effect Size (β)	% Of total effect size	S.E.	p-value	Bootstrap 95%CI	
					LLCI	ULCI
Direct effect	0.270	66.83%	0.061	***	0.148	0.386
Emotional marketing → brand identity → consumer loyalty	0.099	24.50%	0.028	***	0.052	0.166
Emotional marketing → brand trust → consumer loyalty	0.018	4.46%	0.013	0.051	0.000	0.056
Emotional marketing → brand identity → brand trust → consumer loyalty	0.016	3.96%	0.008	0.006	0.004	0.039
Total indirect effect	0.134	33.17%	0.030	***	0.082	0.202
Total effect	0.404	–	0.055	***	0.291	0.506

Conclusions

To verify the influence mechanism of mobile phone brand emotional marketing on consumer loyalty, this paper takes digital amateurs who are concerned about mobile phone brands as the survey respondents, and conducts a questionnaire survey on 647 consumers by applying SPSS and AMOS software to analyze 599 valid questionnaires. Statistical analysis came to the following conclusions:

Firstly, emotional marketing, brand identity, and brand trust are all factors that contribute directly to the development of consumer loyalty. By comparing the standardized path coefficients, it can be seen that emotional marketing has the most significant impact on consumer loyalty to a brand, followed by brand identity and brand trust. In this era of "users are king", emotional marketing must truly focus on user needs and provide consumers with professional, novel, contagious and captivating content. Colourful brand stories or deep brand culture can be used to guide and attract user groups, making them grow and improve. At the same time, different from traditional marketing methods, emotional marketing pays more attention to long-term benefits and long-term returns, and lays more emphasis on establishing stable and long-term trust relationships with consumers, so as to enhance consumer loyalty to a brand.

Secondly, emotional marketing significantly contributes to the strengthening of brand identity. Mobile phone companies place great value on emotionally connecting with consumers, as it can evoke positive emotions such as joy, optimism, and energy, leading to the development of a strong brand loyalty among consumers.

Thirdly, the impact of emotional marketing on consumers' brand trust is positive and direct, but relatively weaker compared to the impact of brand identity. The main reason may be that in the market environment with many mobile phone brands at home and abroad, consumers not only pay attention to the spiritual connotation or brand spirit conveyed by the brand, but also make a comprehensive comparison and judgment on the price, quality and performance of many manufacturers when purchasing mobile phones. Solely satisfying consumers' psychological and emotional needs is inadequate to make consumers fully trust a brand.

Fourthly, the results show that emotional marketing has a stronger direct effect on brand trust than on brand identity in influencing consumer loyalty towards mobile phone companies. However, brand identity partially mediates the relationship between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty, while the mediating effect of brand trust is not significant. This suggests that emotional marketing primarily influences consumer loyalty through brand identity rather than brand trust for mobile phone companies. The present study demonstrated the sequential mediating effect of brand identity and brand trust for the first time: emotional marketing affects the brand identity of mobile phone consumers, which in turn affects consumers' trust in the mobile phone brand, and further affects consumer loyalty.

Our results align with prior research demonstrating the potential of emotional marketing to build brand identity and trust, factors which have been linked to higher levels of consumer loyalty. However, the existing literature has not clearly proposed the impact mechanism of emotional marketing on consumer loyalty, and this study fills this gap.

Research implications

Theoretical implications

This study's discoveries carry significant theoretical implications for the marketing field and our understanding of consumer loyalty. Firstly, our study provides empirical evidence for the role of emotional marketing in building consumer loyalty in the mobile phone industry. This supports the notion that emotions play a crucial role in consumer decision-making and that emotional appeals can be a powerful tool for firms to build consumer loyalty.

Our study demonstrates that emotional marketing positively affects consumer loyalty through the sequential mediating mechanisms of brand identity and brand trust. This suggests that firms should focus on developing emotional marketing campaigns that not only build a strong brand identity but also maintain high levels of transparency and ethical behavior in order to increase consumer trust and, ultimately, consumer loyalty.

Additionally, our research serves to enrich the existing body of literature on brand identity and brand trust by demonstrating the important role that emotional marketing can play in the development of these constructs. By showing the sequential mediating roles of brand identity and brand trust, our study provides important insights into the underlying mechanisms through which emotional marketing can affect consumer loyalty.

In summary, our study advances our understanding of the economic implications of emotional marketing on consumer loyalty in the mobile phone industry and provides valuable insights into the role of emotions, brand identity, and brand trust in consumer decision-making.

Practical implications

In the digital age, content marketing has emerged as the preferred marketing strategy for many manufacturers due to its precision, efficacy, and control. Among various content marketing techniques, emotional marketing has gained prominence among major corporations for capturing consumer attention. Drawing on the research findings and the current state of emotional marketing for mobile phone brands, this paper proposes the following recommendations:

First and foremost, when developing advertising concepts, it is essential to thoroughly consider consumer emotional needs and employ creative, impactful content and artistic expression techniques to effectively convey the brand message and foster consumer recognition. By doing so, brand trust can be strengthened and consumer loyalty enhanced. As an example, Huawei Mate 10 Pro's "Love is Waterproof" advertising film showcases a father who, as a firefighter, is covered in dust after a firefighting mission. He wearily uses his mobile phone to make a video call with his wife and daughter, assuring them that he's okay. The daughter then uses her tiny hands to wash the phone screen, as if trying to wash her father's face on the other side. The slogan "HUAWEI Mate 10 Pro: Love is Waterproof" effectively summarizes the product's functionality and touches the hearts of consumers.

Secondly, utilizing online social platforms to regularly publish content that resonates with consumer interests, encouraging them to share and spread the message, can effectively build a strong user community and enhance the social function of the brand page, fostering convenient communication and interaction between consumers and the brand. For instance, Huawei's promotion of the HUAWEI P30 series on microblog using a highly controversial black hole photo with the accompanying copy "We are used to using images to go back to the past; now we are used to using images to travel through the future" effectively sparked interest and engagement with consumers. The brand engaged with consumers in the comments section, discussing the shooting functions of the P30 series, and further strengthened emotional connection through activities such as live sweepstakes.

Thirdly, prioritizing the co-creation of value for consumers by designing creative, engaging activities that stimulate their involvement is crucial. Encouraging consumers to actively produce content and spread it through social media platforms can enhance their sense of participation, fostering closer relationships with the brand and boosting brand recognition, trust, and loyalty. As an example, Apple's annual iPhone photography competition provides a platform for users to showcase their creative skills and participate in co-creating value with the brand, igniting their enthusiasm and further strengthening brand awareness.

Limitations and future research

While the findings of this research provide a valuable contribution to the literature by determining the economic impact of emotional marketing based on consumer loyalty with brand identity and brand trust as two mediation variables, it incurs some limitations. First, the sample used in this study was limited to consumers of mobile phone brands in China, and therefore, the generalizability of our results may be limited to other regions or countries. To assess the generalizability of the results, it would be beneficial to replicate this study in various contexts. Second, the study was based on self-provided information, which has

the potential to be affected by response bias due to social expectations. In future research, objective measures, such as sales data, to more accurately measure consumer loyalty could be employed. And scholars could use experimental design to test consumers' experiential and behavioural responses toward a company's emotional marketing activities. Thirdly, it is difficult in accurately measuring emotions, as emotions are subjective and can be influenced by many different factors. Finally, it is the lack of generalizability of results, as emotions can vary across cultures, time periods, and other contextual factors. Additionally, the complex nature of consumer behaviour and the relationships between emotions and consumer loyalty make it challenging to determine cause and effect.

The limitations mentioned above imply that there is still much to be explored in this area, providing numerous opportunities for future research. One promising avenue of research is to explore the role of different emotions in driving consumer loyalty and to develop more accurate and reliable methods for measuring emotions in marketing contexts. Additionally, future studies could focus on exploring how emotions impact consumer behavior in diverse cultures, as well as how this connection evolves over time. Finally, research can also examine the interplay between emotions and other factors that influence consumer loyalty, such as brand image, perceived value, and product attributes. By exploring these and other aspects of the relationship between emotional marketing and consumer loyalty, researchers can develop a more profound comprehension of how emotions can be leveraged to drive customer loyalty and improve marketing outcomes.

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