

The Influence of Brand Storytelling on Brand Advocacy in Beauty Products: The Mediating Effect of Emotional Attachment

Storytelling, Emotional Attachment, and Brand Advocacy

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ABSTRACT

In the competitive digital market, brands must foster emotional attachment with consumers through storytelling that conveys their identity and values. This paper aims to examine the influence of brand storytelling on brand advocacy with emotional brand attachment as a mediating variable in the context of the digital beauty industry in Indonesia. The design of this research is quantitative with a descriptive-causal approach, using data from 200 active consumers of local cosmetic brands collected through an online survey. The analysis technique used is Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) with the assistance of SmartPLS 4 software. The research results show that brand storytelling has a significant positive effect on emotional brand attachment, and this attachment partially mediates the relationship between brand narrative and advocacy behavior. These findings provide a theoretical contribution by confirming the role of affective mechanisms in shaping loyalty and voluntary support among digital consumers, particularly in the context of emerging market countries. From a practical standpoint, these results recommend that marketers prioritize the development of authentic and emotionally resonant storytelling as a strategy to build psychological closeness and encourage consumers to become active advocates for the brand.

Keywords: Brand Advocacy, Brand Storytelling, Cosmetic Brands, Emotional Brand Attachment, Narrative Marketing, Social Media Engagement.

ABSTRAK

Di pasar digital yang kompetitif, merek harus menumbuhkan keterikatan emosional dengan konsumen melalui storytelling yang menyampaikan identitas dan nilai-nilai mereka. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji pengaruh brand storytelling terhadap advokasi merek dengan keterikatan merek emosional sebagai variabel mediasi dalam konteks industri kecantikan digital di Indonesia. Desain penelitian ini bersifat kuantitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-kausal, menggunakan data dari 200 konsumen aktif merek kosmetik lokal yang dikumpulkan melalui survei online. Teknik analisis yang digunakan adalah Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) dengan bantuan software SmartPLS 4. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa brand storytelling memiliki efek positif yang signifikan terhadap keterikatan brand emosional, dan keterikatan ini

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sebagian memediasi hubungan antara narasi merek dan perilaku advokasi. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi teoretis dengan mengkonfirmasi peran mekanisme afektif dalam membentuk loyalitas dan dukungan sukarela di antara konsumen digital, terutama dalam konteks negara-negara pasar berkembang. Dari sudut pandang praktis, hasil ini merekomendasikan agar pemasar memprioritaskan pengembangan penceritaan yang otentik dan beresonansi secara emosional sebagai strategi untuk membangun kedekatan psikologis dan mendorong konsumen untuk menjadi pendukung aktif merek.

Kata kunci: *Advokasi Merek, Mendongeng Merek, Merek Kosmetik, Keterikatan Merek Emosional, Pemasaran Naratif, Keterlibatan Media Sosial.*

INTRODUCTION

In the midst of an increasingly dense and complex digital market competition, brands can no longer rely solely on transactional communication. They are required to build a deep emotional attachment with consumers, a relationship that goes beyond mere transactions, touching on the affective and meaningful aspects. Brand storytelling emerges as a communication approach that can bridge this gap, presenting narratives that not only describe product features but also bring to life the brand's identity, values, and purpose emotionally (Hall, 2017). These narratives evoke empathy, strengthen symbolic meaning, and enhance consumer engagement across various digital platforms (Natarajan et al., 2023).

As digital content formats evolve, short-form narratives like Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts have become mediums for delivering emotional storytelling. When these narratives align with consumer values and identity, they can foster emotional attachment, a strong and lasting emotional bond between consumers and the brand (Park et al., 2010). This bond plays a crucial role in influencing consumer behavior, from mere word-of-mouth to loyalty and active brand advocacy (Ahmadi & Ateai, 2022; Shimul & Phau, 2023). In Indonesia, as one of the largest digital markets in Southeast Asia, this phenomenon becomes highly relevant. Data from We Are Social in 2023 shows that more than 63% of internet users in Indonesia actively access and share short video content, opening up significant opportunities for brands to establish emotional connections through storytelling tailored to the digital culture of the younger generation. However, empirical studies examining the impact of brand storytelling in short video format on emotional attachment and consumer advocacy in emerging markets like Indonesia are still relatively limited (Choi et al., 2021; Shimul & Phau, 2023).

In response to this need, this research is directed to delve deeper into how brand storytelling can activate consumers' emotional responses, which ultimately drives brand advocacy behavior. Brand advocacy is not merely passive loyalty, but rather an active and voluntary expression from consumers who defend and support the brand they believe in (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018). In this perspective, brand advocacy consists of two important dimensions: voluntary brand promotion and brand defense against negative criticism. These two dimensions arise from satisfaction and a strong emotional attachment to the brand. Tyas et al. (2025) demonstrate that storytelling content significantly influences positive emotions, and Ahmadi and Ateai (2022) establish a positive relationship between emotional attachment and brand advocacy, however, there is limited empirical evidence linking these two pathways. These findings are reinforced by studies showing that emotional attachment acts as a key mediator in the relationship between brand reputation perception and advocacy behavior, where symbolic meaning and emotional closeness drive consumers to become active brand supporters.

This research examines the influence of brand storytelling on brand advocacy with emotional attachment as a mediating variable. The research subjects are three well-known local beauty brands in Indonesia, such as Wardah, Make Over, and Emina. This research not only enriches the literature on emotional branding and digital consumer behavior in emerging markets but also provides practical implications for companies in designing

brand storytelling that is more emotionally relevant and capable of building meaningful long-term relationships.

LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

The Effect of Brand Storytelling on Emotional Attachment

Brand storytelling is a strategic communication approach that conveys meaning through emotional, personal, and authentic narratives rather than focusing solely on features and prices (Lu et al., 2023). Unlike traditional promotions, storytelling mirrors brand identity and creates deep resonance with audiences (Pereira, 2019; Aime, 2021). It typically includes four components: narrative structure, characters, emotions, and moral values. In the digital era, social media enhances storytelling by enabling interactive narratives that strengthen engagement and content appeal (Hall, 2017). In this study, storytelling is viewed as a driver of emotional attachment and brand advocacy, as narratives reflecting consumer values foster bonds that lead to voluntary promotion (Shimul & Phau, 2023). Emotional engagement with digital stories has also been shown to increase consumer recommendations and defense of brands (Choi et al., 2021). Thus, brand storytelling serves as more than creative expression; it initiates the emotional journey that builds loyalty and advocacy.

In the digital era dominated by visual content, brand storytelling through short formats like Reels and TikTok is widely used to build consumer-brand closeness. Yet, the extent to which such micro-narratives foster emotional attachment remains debated. Some studies argue that exposure to short-form storytelling alone is insufficient, as self-brand congruity and direct product experience play stronger roles in shaping attachment (Barger et al., 2016; Japutra et al., 2019). Conversely, other research suggests that authentic, affective, and value-aligned short stories can still contribute to lasting emotional bonds and loyalty (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003; Pereira, 2019). On social media, simple yet emotionally charged content with universal themes can effectively connect consumers and brands (Nicoli et al., 2021). Supporting this, Liu et al. (2024) show that even brief videos can evoke strong emotions, while relatable narratives enhance trust and purchase intentions, particularly among young consumers (Hoang et al., 2024). The Dove campaign further illustrates how compelling storytelling can nurture engagement that ultimately drives advocacy (Dessart & Pitardi, 2019).

H1: Brand storytelling has a significant effect on emotional attachment.

The Effect of Emotional Attachment on Brand Advocacy

The concept of emotional attachment in consumer behavior is rooted in Attachment Theory, which was initially developed to explain the human tendency to form emotional bonds in interpersonal relationships that provide a sense of security and psychological meaning. In the context of marketing, this theory has been adapted to explain how emotional attachment to symbolic objects such as brands forms when consumers feel that the brand reflects their personal identity (Bowlby, 1969; Thomson et al., 2005; Park et al., 2006; Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022). Emotional brand attachment, characterized by affection, passion, and self-brand connection, drives long-term loyalty (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020) and often mediates the effect of brand stimuli, such as storytelling, experience, and reputation, on advocacy, reinforced by self-congruence, brand love, and interactions (Shimul & Phau, 2023). In digital contexts, engagement and co-creation strengthen attachment, while internally it enhances employee advocacy (Gill-Simmen et al., 2018; Hongsuchon et al., 2023). The link is not always direct: in fashion retail, attachment influences advocacy through shopping value and store attachment, and in banking, it depends on trust during crises (Choi & Kim, 2022; Shimul et al., 2024). Emotional attachment is a dynamic psychological process shaped by affection, perceived value, and meaningful experiences, consistently recognized as a foundation for loyalty and advocacy (Rather et al., 2022).

Emotional attachment often acts as a mediator between brand stimuli such as storytelling, experience, and reputation and consumer advocacy, reinforced by self-congruence and personal interactions (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022; Shimul & Phau, 2023). In digital contexts, engagement and co-creation strengthen attachment, while internally it enhances employee advocacy (Gill-Simmen et al., 2018; Hongsuchon et al., 2023). Yet, the link is not always direct, in fashion, attachment drives advocacy via shopping value and store attachment, and in banking, it depends on trust during crises (Choi & Kim, 2022; Shimul et al., 2023). Emotional attachment remains a dynamic yet central driver of loyalty and advocacy.

H2: Emotional attachment has a significant effect on brand advocacy.

The Effect of Brand Storytelling on Brand Advocacy

Brand advocacy refers to consumer actions that actively recommend, promote, and defend a brand. Brand advocacy goes beyond passive loyalty, reflecting voluntary promotion and defense of brands in both direct and digital interactions (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018). It is rooted less in satisfaction and more in emotional attachment and symbolic identification, where the brand becomes part of the consumer's identity (Shimul & Phau, 2018). In digital contexts, advocacy enhances credibility and makes consumers co-creators of brand reputation (Lawer & Knox, 2006). Motivations include emotional, social, and moral drivers, such as self-enhancement, community connection, and gratitude toward socially responsible brands (Kwon et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2019). Even in luxury sectors, attachment influences advocacy more strongly than satisfaction or loyalty. However, storytelling's impact on advocacy is not always direct. Its effectiveness depends on authenticity, delivery, and emotional resonance. In services, narratives that feel artificial or misaligned with expectations may provoke negative reactions (Schepers & Nijssen, 2018).

Not all visual stories on social media can turn audiences into active brand advocates; impact emerges when narratives foster emotional and participatory engagement, shifting consumers from spectators to co-creators (Choi et al., 2021). Storytelling that lacks shared values or authenticity risks weakening advocacy, with message consistency, active participation, and organizational support identified as key drivers (Aime, 2021). Still, much of the literature highlights its strategic role: storytelling, especially when combined with employee advocacy, enhances engagement and loyalty, while value-aligned and co-created narratives stimulate empathy and advocacy (Hall, 2017; Pereira, 2019; Lu et al., 2023). Recent bibliometric findings further confirm storytelling as a growing driver of advocacy in digital branding (Shimul & Phau, 2023; Suban et al., 2024).

H3: Brand storytelling has a significant effect on brand advocacy.

The Mediating Effect of Emotional Attachment

Although many studies highlight the importance of emotional attachment in driving brand advocacy, the relationship between brand storytelling and advocacy is not always directly mediated by attachment. Research increasingly shows that this pathway is complex and contextual, with additional mediators or alternative routes influencing advocacy outcomes. In experiential fashion stores, for instance, storytelling impacts advocacy more strongly through affective responses, shopping value perception, and store attachment, rather than solely through emotional attachment (Choi & Kim, 2022). This underscores that emotional resonance must be supported by meaningful consumer experiences to create lasting effects.

The specific emotions elicited during brand interactions, such as joy, hope, or anxiety, often explain consumer responses more effectively than general emotional attachment (Proksch et al., 2015). Nonetheless, emotional attachment remains a key affective connector, functioning as a psychological mechanism that aligns consumer identity with brand identity (Ahmadi & Ataei, 2022). The tiered mediation model proposed by Shimul

and Phau (2023) reinforces this role, showing that storytelling first fosters self-congruence and brand love, which then develops into emotional attachment, ultimately driving advocacy.

Strategically designed brand experiences, including store atmosphere, service quality, and interpersonal interactions, further facilitate emotional attachment by creating favorable psychological conditions. Once established, this attachment motivates consumers to recommend the brand through both direct and digital channels (Gómez-Suárez & Veloso, 2020). Brand experiences also enhance attachment indirectly by strengthening brand trust, particularly among younger consumers who value authenticity and transparency (Huaman-Ramirez & Merunka, 2019). In luxury retail, positive experiences similarly create emotional attachment, which mediates loyalty and advocacy (Mostafa & Kasamani, 2020). Across contexts, the three dimensions of emotional attachment, brand affection, brand passion, and self-brand connection- consistently link brand experience with active consumer support, highlighting the central role of affective engagement in converting narratives and experiences into advocacy behaviour.

H4: Emotional attachment mediates the relationship between brand storytelling and brand advocacy.

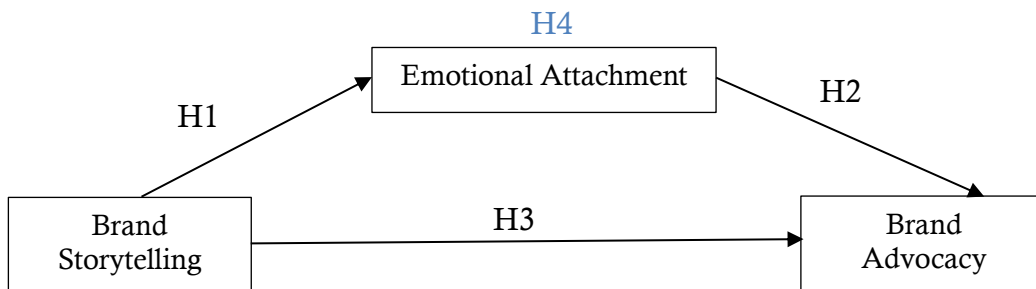


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

This conceptual model serves as the basis for empirical testing and is visually presented in the following Figure 1. Based on the literature review and previous hypothesis development, this study formulates a conceptual model that integrates three main constructs: brand storytelling, emotional attachment, and brand advocacy. In this model, brand storytelling is positioned as an independent variable assumed to trigger emotional attachment through authentic and relevant narratives, while emotional attachment functions as an affective mediator bridging the influence of narratives on consumer advocacy behavior. In addition to the mediation path, this model also tests the direct influence between storytelling and advocacy to capture the possibility of simultaneous effects.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a descriptive-causal design to examine the effect of brand storytelling on brand advocacy through emotional attachment as a mediator. This approach is widely applied in consumer behavior research to identify causal relationships, including attachment as a mediator between brand reputation and advocacy. The population consists of active consumers of three Indonesian cosmetic brands, such as Wardah, Make Over, and Emina, under PT Paragon Technology and Innovation, recognized for using narrative-based engagement on social media. A purposive sampling technique was applied with inclusion criteria such as following the brand’s social media and making at least two purchases in the past six months. From 540 distributed questionnaires, 200 valid responses were obtained after two-stage screening for eligibility, completeness, and quality. The sample size meets PLS-SEM requirements, exceeding the “10 times rule” relative to the 14 indicators of storytelling. Data were collected through Google Forms distributed on Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram,

platforms popular among young Indonesian consumers. Screening logic ensured only qualified respondents could proceed. Validation excluded duplicates and illogical patterns (e.g., straightlining). Early-late response comparison confirmed no significant demographic bias.

The instrument used a 5-point Likert scale and was adapted from established measures. Storytelling was captured by 14 indicators reflecting seven narrative aspects: story, ritual, meaning, transmedia, character, plot, and world by Pereira (2019) and Zimand-Sheiner (2024). Emotional brand attachment was measured with five indicators covering affection, passion, and self-brand connection by Ghorbanzadeh and Rahehagh (2021) and Ahmadi and Ataei (2024). Advocacy was assessed using three indicators: recommendation, defense, and promotion. Instruments underwent TRAPD translation procedures, achieving strong content validity with I-CVI ≥ 0.78 and S-CVI ≥ 0.90 . Harman’s Single Factor Test confirmed no serious common method variance. Analysis employed PLS-SEM using SmartPLS 4, chosen for its suitability with mediation models, reflective constructs, moderate sample sizes, and non-normal survey data (Hair et al., 2017). The outer model was tested for validity and reliability (Cronbach’s Alpha, Composite Reliability, AVE), while the inner model assessed path significance via bootstrapping.

RESULTS

To understand the social context and digital behavior of Indonesian local cosmetic consumers, this research maps the basic profile of respondents. The final response rate of 37% aligns with average online survey rates (Meng-JiaWu et al., 2022). The survey was distributed via Google Forms on Instagram, WhatsApp, and Telegram, with screening logic applied to ensure only eligible respondents participated (Shabani & Keshavarz, 2021). Data validation removed duplicates and inconsistent patterns, while early-late comparison confirmed no demographic bias (Berglund & West, 2017). The instruments were translated using the TRAPD method and demonstrated high content validity (I-CVI ≥ 0.78 ; S-CVI ≥ 0.90) (Rubio et al., 2003; Sha & Immerwahr, 2018). Harman’s Single Factor Test indicated no significant common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The characteristics collected include demographic variables as well as preferences for content and sources of product information. Complete details regarding the characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Characteristics of Digital Cosmetic Consumers

Characteristic	Category	Result
Gender	Female	89.6%
	Male	10.4%
Age	18-25 Years	45.1%
	26-35 Years	38.4%
	>35 Years	16.5%
Latest Education Level	Highschool	18.9%
	Diploma	20.3%
	Bachelor Degree	47.6%
	Postgraduate	13.2%
Brand Used	Wardah	48.6%
	Make Over	31.4%
	Emina	19.9%
Purchase Frequency	≥ 2 Times/Month	34.7%
	Once/Month	40.5%
	<1 Time/Month	24.8%
Type of Cosmetic Product	Skincare	52.3%
	Makeup	34.7%
	Personal Care	6.5%
Social Media Platform Followed	Instagram	72.9%
	Tiktok	64.3%
	Youtube	28.4%
Duration of Brand Engagement	<1 Year	29.5%

Characteristic	Category	Result
Purchase Evaluation Criteria	1-2 Years	41.8%
	>2 Years	28.7%
	Product Quality	39.1%
Source of Product Information	Affordable Price	34.6%
	Influencer/Content	26.3%
	Brand's Social Media	53.2%
Brand Content Preference	User Reviews	31.5%
	Friends/Family	15.3%
	Testimonials	42.7%
	Product Tutorials	38.9%
	Brand Social Campaigns	18.4%

As seen in Table 1, the majority of respondents are young women aged between 18 and 35 years and have at least a bachelor's degree. They tend to make regular cosmetic purchases, particularly skincare and makeup products. Instagram and TikTok have become the main platforms for interaction with brands, while brand social media and user reviews are the dominant sources of information. Wardah emerged as the brand with the highest engagement, demonstrating the power of narrative and the emotional connections successfully built among its consumers.

Table 2. Non-response Bias

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig. Levene	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Brand Storytelling	Early	74	2.9974	0.39291	0.241	0.624	0.038	198	0.970
	Late	126	2.9996	0.38986					
Emotional Brand Attachment	Early	74	3.0445	0.37986	0.429	0.513	1.025	198	0.306
	Late	126	2.9855	0.40018					
Brand Advocacy	Early	74	2.9614	0.37618	0.495	0.483	1.361	198	0.175
	Late	126	3.0392	0.39857					

Table 2 shows that the non-response bias test was conducted by comparing the early and late responder groups using an independent samples t-test. The results show no significant differences in the three main variables ($p > 0.05$), so the potential bias due to response delay can be disregarded, and the data are considered representative for further analysis.

Next, to identify the possibility of common method bias, Harman's Single Factor test was conducted using a principal component analysis approach without rotation. The results show that the first factor explains only 41.2% of the total variance. This value is below the 50% threshold commonly used to detect common method bias. Therefore, it can be concluded that common method variance is not a significant issue in this study.

After ensuring that there is no significant common method bias, the next step is to evaluate the validity and reliability of the constructs in the measurement model. This evaluation includes the outer loading values of each indicator, Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The assessment is conducted to ensure that each construct has high internal consistency and adequate convergent validity. Based on the results in Table 3, all constructs show outer loading values > 0.70 , indicating that each indicator has a significant contribution to the measured construct. The Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability values for all constructs are within the recommended range (0.70–0.90), indicating high internal consistency without any indication of indicator redundancy. Furthermore, all constructs have AVE values above the threshold of 0.50, indicating that convergent validity can also be considered met.

Table 3. Measurement Model Evaluation: Outer Loading, CA, CR, and AVE

Construct	Code	Item	Loading	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Brand Storytelling	BST1	The brand's story has a clear and engaging narrative structure	0.788	0.876	0.902	0.583
	BST2	The brand's narrative includes a consistent plot, characters, and objectives	0.751			
	BST3	The brand's story conveys meaningful and relevant values to consumers	0.790			
	BST4	The brand narrative reflects cultural and social values shared by its audience	0.812			
	BST5	The brand story includes symbolic behaviors or rituals that consumers can relate to	0.734			
	BST6	The story encourages consumer participation in brand-related symbolic acts	0.721			
	BST7	The brand story is consistently communicated across multiple platforms	0.771			
	BST8	The brand story uses diverse media formats to reach broader audiences	0.769			
	BST9	The brand portrays the customer as the protagonist in its story	0.705			
	BST10	The consumer sees themselves as part of the story told by the brand	0.753			
	BST11	The brand delivers an inspiring and engaging journey	0.736			
	BST12	The brand narrative shows a transformation that is relevant	0.728			
	BST13	The brand creates a context aligned with the consumer's personal values	0.732			
	BST14	The context built by the brand makes me feel emotionally connected	0.719			
Emotional Brand Attachment	EBA1	The consumer feels a unique relationship with the brand	0.814	0.862	0.897	0.636
	EBA2	The consumer identifies themselves with what the brand stands for	0.822			
	EBA3	The consumer feels a sense of belonging in regard to the brand	0.779			
	EBA4	The consumer feels proud to be a consumer of the brand.	0.765			
	EBA5	The brand fits with the consumer's personality	0.801			
Brand Advocacy	BA1	The consumers are recommended to other people, and they would support the brand	0.821	0.795	0.876	0.704
	BA2	The consumers talk directly to other people about their experience with the brand	0.847			
	BA3	The consumers suggest to others that they should buy the brand product	0.842			

Table 4. Discriminant Validity Evaluation (Fornell–Larcker Criterion and HTMT Ratio)

Construct	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ (Diagonal)	Brand Advocacy	Brand Storytelling	Emotional Brand Attachment
Brand Advocacy	0.839	—	0.629 (0.663)	0.692 (0.749)
Brand Storytelling	0.763		—	0.725 (0.847)
Emotional Brand Attachment	0.797			—

Based on Table 4, the diagonal values ($\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$) are displayed in bold for each construct. The values outside the diagonal show the correlations between constructs based on the Fornell–Larcker criterion, while the numbers in parentheses represent the HTMT values. All HTMT values are < 0.90 , and each $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ value is greater than the correlation between constructs; thus, it can be concluded that discriminant validity has been met (Hair et al., 2019).

The evaluation of the structural model is conducted by reviewing the R^2 value to measure the predictive ability of the endogenous construct, f^2 to identify the magnitude of each predictor construct’s contribution, and Q^2 to test the model’s predictive relevance. In evaluating the model, three key measures were considered. First, the R^2 value indicates the proportion of variance explained by the model, where values of 0.75 or higher are considered substantial, 0.50 moderate, and 0.25 weak. Second, the f^2 effect size assesses the contribution of each exogenous variable, with thresholds of 0.35 (large), 0.15 (medium), and 0.02 (small). Lastly, the Q^2 value reflects predictive relevance, with values above 0.35 indicating strong predictive power, above 0.15 moderate, and above 0.02 weak (Hair et al., 2019). The complete results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Structural Model Evaluation: R^2 , f^2 , and Q^2

Endogenous Construct	Predictor	R^2	R^2 Category	f^2	Effect Size	Q^2	Predictive Relevance
Emotional Brand Attachment	Brand Storytelling	0.453	Moderate	1.877	Large Effect	0.480	Large Predictive Relevance
Brand Advocacy	Brand Storytelling	0.342	Moderate	0.028	Small Effect	0.426	Medium Predictive Relevance
	Emotional Brand Attachment			0.192	Medium Effect		

The results in Table 5 show that Brand Storytelling has a significant influence on Emotional Brand Attachment ($f^2 = 1.877$) with high predictive ability ($Q^2 = 0.480$). Meanwhile, Brand Advocacy is moderately explained by Brand Storytelling and Emotional Brand Attachment, with the latter construct contributing more significantly to that variable ($f^2 = 0.192$). Overall, the model demonstrates adequate predictive quality. The results of the hypothesis testing are presented in Table 6, which includes direct effects and indirect effects (mediation effect) between constructs.

Table 6 shows that all hypothesised paths were found to be significant ($p < 0.05$), including the mediating effect of Emotional Brand Attachment in the relationship between Brand Storytelling and Brand Advocacy. The bootstrapping results (Figure 2) support these findings, showing that Brand Storytelling significantly affects Emotional Brand Attachment ($\beta = 0.808$; $t = 29.311$), and emotional attachment strongly contributes to Brand Advocacy ($\beta = 0.530$; $t = 6.047$). Thus, the proposed structural model has been statistically validated and supported by empirical data. The bootstrap output can be seen in Figure 2.

Table 6. Path Coefficients and Mediation Effects

Path	β	Mean	SE	t-stat	p-value	Significant codes
Brand Storytelling → Brand Advocacy	0.201	0.203	0.089	2.269	0.023	p < 0.05
Brand Storytelling → Emotional Brand Attachment	0.808	0.809	0.028	29.311	0.000	p < 0.001
Emotional Brand Attachment → Brand Advocacy	0.530	0.526	0.088	6.047	0.000	p < 0.001
Brand Storytelling → Emotional Brand Attachment → BA (Mediation)	0.428	0.426	0.076	5.645	0.000	p < 0.001

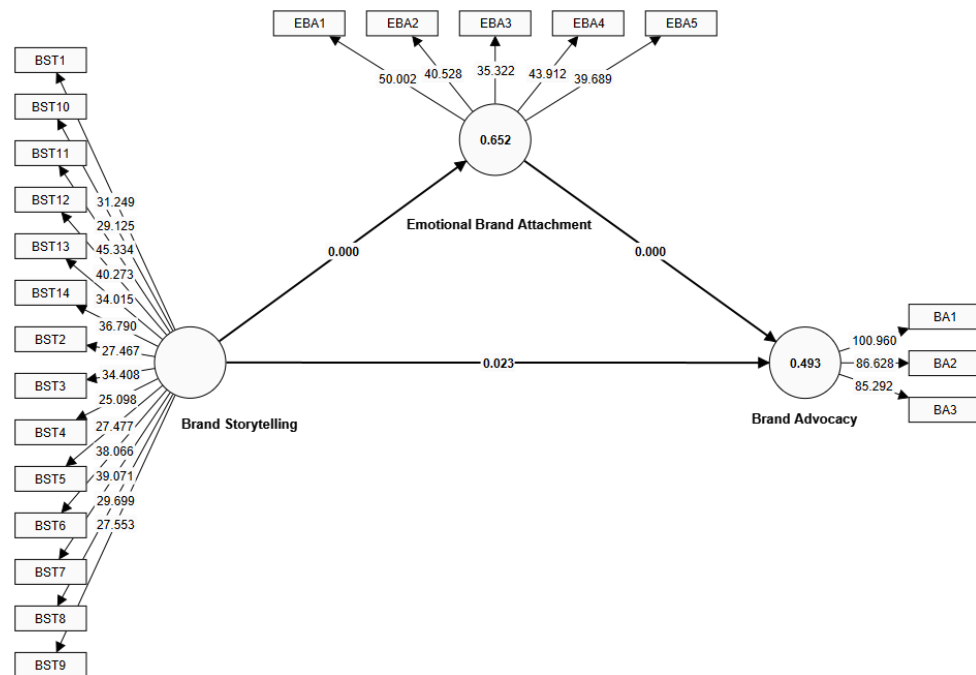


Figure 2. Bootstrapping output

To evaluate the overall fit of the structural model, several model fit indices were analyzed. The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.035 is well below the general threshold of 0.08, indicating that the model has a good fit. The values of d_{ULS} and d_G , which are 0.313 and 0.291, respectively, indicate a very small difference between the empirical correlation matrix and the one generated by the model. The chi-square statistic was recorded at 321.656 for both the saturated and estimated models, while the Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.920 exceeded the minimum threshold of 0.90, further reinforcing the model specification fit.

After ensuring the model's fit, the analysis continued with Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) to identify the relative contribution (importance) and performance perception (performance) of each construct towards Brand Advocacy. IPMA (see Table 7) provides more practical managerial insights by highlighting priority areas in strengthening brand strategy.

Table 7. Importance–Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) Results

Latent Variable (LV)	LV Performance	Importance of Brand Advocacy
Brand Advocacy	47.878	—
Brand Storytelling	49.319	0.201
Emotional Brand Attachment	49.016	0.530

Table 7 shows that Emotional Brand Attachment has the highest level of importance towards Brand Advocacy (0.530), followed by Brand Storytelling (0.201). Both constructs

also have a relatively high perception performance (LV performance), each above 49. These findings indicate that marketing strategies focused on creating emotional attachment have the greatest potential impact on consumer advocacy behavior.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis is supported, showing that brand storytelling has a significant effect on emotional brand attachment ($\beta = 0.808$; $p < 0.001$). This aligns with Attachment Theory in marketing, which highlights how meaningful narratives, through characters, plot, symbolic values, and story worlds, create affective consumer–brand bonds (Park et al., 2008). Respondent profiles reinforce this finding: the majority are aged 18–35 (83.5%) and follow brands on Instagram (72.9%) and TikTok (64.3%), platforms central to visual micro-storytelling. Their preference for skincare (52.3%) and makeup (41.2%) highlights the relevance of narratives tied to self-care, confidence, and identity, exemplified by campaigns from Wardah, Make Over, and Emina. Frequent purchases ($\geq 1x$ /month: 75.2%) further suggest engagement that extends beyond transactions, underscoring the need for authentic, value-driven storytelling that reflects social values, cultural context, and shared experiences (Nicoli et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2024).

The second hypothesis is supported, showing that emotional brand attachment significantly drives brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.530$; $p < 0.001$). This reinforces prior studies that attachment fosters not just passive loyalty but also active behaviors such as recommendations, advocacy, and voluntary promotion (Shimul & Phau, 2023; Ahmadi & Ataei, 2024). The high IPMA performance score for emotional attachment (49.016) and its top importance value (0.530) further confirm that emotional relationships are central to advocacy, consistent with symbolic interactionism theory, where brands reflecting self-identity amplify consumer engagement. Respondent profiles strengthen this finding: most are active brand social media users (53.2%), rely on reviews (31.5%), and prefer testimonials (42.7%). This suggests that emotionally attached consumers embed personal experiences into the brand narrative and feel responsible for recommending or defending it. Longer engagement durations (1–2 years: 41.8%; >2 years: 28.7%) also show advocacy emerges gradually, reflecting consistent affection rather than impulse, aligning with Schepers and Nijssen’s (2018) defensive advocacy dimension. Brands should foster authentic consumer expression, build value-based communities, and emphasize emotional resonance in campaigns to cultivate sustainable advocacy.

The third hypothesis is supported, showing that storytelling has a significant direct effect on advocacy ($\beta = 0.201$; $p = 0.023$), though the effect size is small ($f^2 = 0.028$). This suggests that narratives can independently trigger advocacy by shaping perceptions and social engagement, consistent with Hall (2017) and Pereira (2019). Respondent profiles highlight Instagram (72.9%) and TikTok (64.3%) as effective platforms, with testimonials (42.7%) and tutorials (38.9%) driving relatable, actionable engagement. While quality (39.1%) and affordability (34.6%) dominate purchase drivers, influencers/content (26.3%) show that credible storytelling still motivates advocacy. However, the modest effect supports Choi et al.’s (2021) view that only authentic, participatory storytelling transforms consumers into organic advocates.

The fourth hypothesis test shows that emotional brand attachment significantly mediates the effect of brand storytelling on brand advocacy ($\beta = 0.428$; $p < 0.001$), stronger than its direct effect ($\beta = 0.201$). This confirms that the main strength of storytelling lies in fostering attachment, supporting Shimul and Phau’s (2023) view that attachment is the key psychological bridge converting narratives into advocacy. The large effect size for BST on EBA ($f^2 = 1.877$) and the highest IPMA importance score for attachment (0.530) reinforce its central role. Respondent characteristics, predominantly 18–35 years old (83.5%), active social media users (53.2%), and engaged >1 year (70.5%), further suggest that repeated, identity-driven narratives nurture emotional closeness.

Thus, storytelling must be framed as a long-term, value-driven strategy, where authentic and consistent narratives build attachment that naturally leads to advocacy. This study demonstrates that brand storytelling drives consumer advocacy primarily

through emotional attachment, highlighting that deep, value-relevant engagement is more effective than mere exposure or visual appeal, especially among digitally active young consumers. It reinforces the theoretical link between narrative, identity, and voluntary brand support while offering practical guidance for long-term, emotionally grounded digital brand strategies.

CONCLUSION

This research provides empirical evidence regarding the strategic role of brand storytelling in driving brand advocacy, with emotional attachment as the primary mediator, particularly in the context of local beauty brands in the emerging digital market. Based on Attachment Theory and Symbolic Interactionism, these findings affirm that emotional narratives aligned with consumer identity and values play a central role in shaping voluntary brand support behavior. The results of the analysis using PLS-SEM show that storytelling not only functions as an effective tool but also as a mechanism that forms sustainable emotional bonds, ultimately transforming consumers into brand advocates. This transformation appears to be dominant among young women who actively consume short visual content on platforms like Instagram and TikTok.

This study contributes both theoretically and practically by demonstrating that brand storytelling drives brand advocacy primarily through emotional attachment, expanding the understanding of Attachment Theory and Symbolic Interactionism in digital branding, particularly in emerging markets like Indonesia. By framing storytelling as a reflective construct encompassing character, plot, rituals, and values, the study provides a holistic and replicable framework for examining consumer emotional engagement and its effect on voluntary brand support. Findings highlight that brands targeting digitally active young consumers (18–35 years) should focus on authentic, value-driven narratives, such as empowerment, self-expression, and confidence, communicated across platforms like Instagram and TikTok through transmedia storytelling and participatory campaigns. Emotional attachment was shown to be a stronger predictor of advocacy than the direct effect of storytelling, emphasizing the need for long-term relationship-building rather than momentary campaigns. Limitations include reliance on self-reported online surveys, a focus on a single mediator (emotional attachment), and a lack of cross-cultural comparison. Future research should consider longitudinal designs, explore additional mediators or moderators, refine storytelling measurement frameworks, and adopt cross-cultural approaches to assess the universality of emotional brand narratives, ideally integrating interdisciplinary methods from communication, psychology, and digital technology.

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