



Emotional Anchoring: Explaining Emotional Persistence in Social Media Marketing

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Abstract

Social media has transformed marketing communication into an emotionally intensive environment where brands compete not only for attention but also for enduring psychological relevance. Although prior research has extensively examined customer engagement, emotional branding, narrative transportation, customer experience, and brand attachment, limited attention has been devoted to explaining how emotionally meaningful social media experiences remain influential long after direct interaction has ended. This conceptual article addresses this theoretical gap by introducing Emotional Anchoring, a higher-order psychological embedding mechanism that explains how emotionally resonant digital experiences become integrated into consumers' memory structures, identity narratives, and relational perceptions toward brands. Drawing on insights from emotional memory theory, identity-based processing, symbolic consumption, emotional branding, customer engagement, narrative transportation, and relationship marketing, the study develops an integrative conceptual framework linking emotional experiences with long-term relational and behavioral outcomes. The proposed framework identifies key antecedents, core psychological mechanisms, reinforcing conditions, and outcomes associated with emotional persistence in social media environments. The study contributes to marketing theory by extending existing explanations of consumer-brand relationships beyond engagement and attachment, while providing a foundation for future empirical research on emotional persistence, digital consumer behavior, and AI-mediated marketing ecosystems.

Keywords

emotional anchoring; social media marketing; emotional memory; consumer-brand relationships; narrative transportation; identity-based processing

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1. Introduction

Social media has fundamentally transformed the architecture of contemporary marketing communication by reshaping how consumers discover, interpret, experience, and relate to brands. Unlike traditional media environments characterized by one-way information dissemination, social media platforms facilitate continuous interaction, user participation, content co-creation, and relational exchange between brands and consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Gensler *et al.*, 2013; Appel *et al.*, 2020). The rapid diffusion of platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and emerging short-form video ecosystems has intensified the role of emotions in marketing effectiveness, as consumers increasingly engage with brands through narratives, visual symbolism, peer interaction, creator-generated content, and digitally mediated social experiences (Stephen, 2016; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021; Li *et al.*, 2021).

The contemporary digital environment is increasingly characterized by what scholars describe as an attention economy, in which organizations compete not merely for consumer awareness but for sustained psychological relevance amid overwhelming information abundance (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Dolan *et al.*, 2019). Consumers are exposed to thousands of commercial messages daily, while algorithmic content curation continuously filters, prioritizes, and amplifies content based on predicted engagement potential (Appel *et al.*, 2020; Nadeem *et al.*, 2020). As a result, informational differentiation alone has become insufficient for sustaining meaningful consumer–brand relationships. Brands must increasingly create emotionally memorable experiences capable of remaining psychologically salient beyond the moment of exposure.

This transformation reflects a broader shift in marketing thought from transactional persuasion toward emotional and relational value creation. Earlier marketing frameworks primarily emphasized awareness generation, attitude formation, and purchase intention through rational evaluation processes (Kotler & Keller, 2016). However, contemporary consumer behavior research suggests that purchasing decisions, engagement behaviors, and relationship development are frequently influenced by emotions, symbolic meaning, identity congruence, and affective experiences rather than purely cognitive assessments (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Batra *et al.*, 2012; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Consumers increasingly seek content that provides emotional stimulation, social belonging, self-expression opportunities, and symbolic affirmation of personal identity (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Phua *et al.*, 2017).

Consequently, social media marketing scholarship has increasingly focused on understanding emotional processes underlying digital consumer behavior. Previous studies have examined customer engagement (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014), customer experience (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016), online brand communities (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Dessart *et al.*, 2015), emotional branding (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Batra *et al.*, 2012), authenticity (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015), storytelling (Woodside, 2010; van Laer *et al.*, 2014), influencer communication (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020), and social media engagement mechanisms (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). These studies consistently demonstrate that emotionally engaging content generates stronger participation, sharing behavior, advocacy, and relational commitment than purely informational communication (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Akpınar & Berger, 2017).

Recent literature further suggests that emotional experiences play an important role in shaping consumer memory, identity construction, and long-term relationship development. Research on emotional brand attachment indicates that emotionally meaningful interactions foster psychological closeness and relational continuity (Park *et al.*, 2010; Loureiro *et al.*, 2012). Studies on self-congruity and symbolic consumption similarly demonstrate that consumers develop stronger brand preferences when brand meanings align with their self-

concept and identity aspirations (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Malär *et al.*, 2011; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020). Meanwhile, narrative transportation research suggests that emotionally immersive storytelling enhances cognitive absorption, emotional processing, and memory retention (Escalas, 2004; van Laer *et al.*, 2014). Collectively, these findings imply that emotionally meaningful experiences may continue influencing consumers long after direct interaction has ended.

Despite these advances, the existing literature remains theoretically fragmented in explaining how emotional experiences generated through repeated social media exposure become psychologically persistent and behaviorally influential over time. Most studies conceptualize emotions as antecedents of engagement, attachment, satisfaction, or behavioral intention, while relatively limited attention has been devoted to understanding the deeper psychological mechanism through which emotional experiences become embedded within consumers' cognitive and relational systems (Park *et al.*, 2010; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). As a result, an important theoretical question remains insufficiently addressed: why do certain emotionally meaningful social media experiences continue shaping consumer interpretation, recall, and relational orientation long after the original interaction has disappeared?

This gap has become increasingly significant within algorithmically driven digital environments characterized by rapid scrolling behavior, fragmented attention, content abundance, and intensified competition for emotional visibility (Dolan *et al.*, 2019; Appel *et al.*, 2020; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2021). Consumers frequently encounter emotionally stimulating content, yet only a small proportion of these experiences remain psychologically accessible and behaviorally influential over time. Existing frameworks of engagement, attachment, customer experience, and brand love offer valuable insights into emotional outcomes, but they provide limited explanation regarding the persistence mechanism through which emotional experiences become durable psychological reference points guiding future interpretation and decision making.

To address this limitation, this article introduces the concept of Emotional Anchoring, defined as the process through which emotionally resonant social media experiences become psychologically embedded within consumers' memory structures, identity narratives, and relational perceptions toward brands. Emotional Anchoring extends beyond temporary emotional reactions by emphasizing emotional persistence, psychological accessibility, and enduring interpretive influence. The concept proposes that repeated exposure to emotionally meaningful, identity-relevant, and symbolically consistent communication gradually creates emotional reference structures that continue shaping future consumer cognition and behavior.

Theoretically, this study contributes to social media marketing literature by integrating insights from emotional branding, customer engagement, narrative transportation, symbolic consumption, emotional memory, and relationship marketing into a unified conceptual framework. The proposed perspective extends existing theories by positioning Emotional Anchoring as a distinct psychological mechanism connecting emotional interaction with long-term relational outcomes. In doing so, the study advances understanding of how emotional experiences evolve from momentary engagement episodes into enduring psychological resources influencing attachment, recall, loyalty, and behavioral persistence.

Managerially, the framework provides strategic insights for organizations operating in increasingly crowded digital markets. As algorithmic competition intensifies and consumer attention becomes more fragmented, marketing effectiveness increasingly depends on a brand's ability to create emotionally memorable experiences rather than merely generating visibility or engagement metrics. Understanding Emotional Anchoring may therefore help organizations design content strategies that foster emotional continuity, symbolic relevance, and relational durability within contemporary social media ecosystems.

Accordingly, this article aims to develop a conceptual framework of Emotional Anchoring in Social Media Marketing by synthesizing insights from emotional branding, customer engagement, narrative transportation, symbolic consumption, emotional memory, and digital consumer behavior literature. The proposed framework seeks to explain how emotionally resonant social media experiences become psychologically embedded and subsequently influence attachment, engagement continuity, brand recall salience, and long-term behavioral intention. By doing so, this study offers a theoretically integrated foundation for future empirical research examining emotional persistence within contemporary digital marketing environments.

2. Theoretical Foundation and Conceptual Development

2.1 Social Media Marketing and Emotional Consumer Dynamics

The emergence of social media has transformed marketing communication from a predominantly one-way persuasive activity into an interactive and relational process involving consumers, brands, creators, and digital communities (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Gensler *et al.*, 2013; Appel *et al.*, 2020). Contemporary consumers no longer engage with digital platforms solely to obtain information. Instead, social media functions as an environment where individuals seek emotional stimulation, express identity, construct symbolic meaning, and participate in ongoing social interaction (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012; Swaminathan *et al.*, 2020).

This transformation has elevated the importance of emotions in shaping digital consumer behavior. Within algorithmically curated environments, consumers are exposed to large volumes of competing content, making attention an increasingly scarce resource (Dolan *et al.*, 2019; Appel *et al.*, 2020). Under such conditions, emotionally meaningful content possesses a greater likelihood of attracting attention, stimulating interaction, and remaining memorable than purely informational communication. Consequently, social media marketing effectiveness increasingly depends on a brand's ability to generate emotional relevance rather than simply communicate product-related information.

Previous studies consistently demonstrate that emotionally engaging content generates stronger participation, sharing behavior, advocacy, and relational commitment (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Voorveld *et al.*, 2018). Consumers are more likely to engage with content that evokes inspiration, empathy, excitement, nostalgia, or personal relevance because emotional experiences encourage both cognitive involvement and social expression. Despite these insights, existing literature primarily examines immediate engagement outcomes while paying less attention to the persistence of emotional influence beyond the moment of interaction. This limitation suggests the need for a deeper theoretical explanation of how emotionally meaningful experiences continue shaping consumer perceptions and behavior over time.

2.2 Emotional Memory and Psychological Embedding

A useful foundation for understanding emotional persistence can be found in emotional memory research. Emotional memory refers to the tendency for emotionally significant experiences to be encoded, consolidated, and retrieved more effectively than emotionally neutral experiences (Hamann, 2001; Kensinger, 2009). Neuroscientific studies indicate that emotional arousal strengthens memory formation through interactions between emotional and memory-related neural systems, enabling emotionally meaningful experiences to remain more cognitively accessible over time (Phelps, 2004; Dolcos *et al.*, 2004).

From a psychological perspective, emotions function not merely as reactions but also as mechanisms that shape attention, interpretation, and decision making (Damasio, 1994;

Kahneman, 2011). Experiences perceived as emotionally meaningful receive greater cognitive processing because they signal personal relevance. As a result, emotionally charged events are more likely to be retained and later reactivated during evaluation, judgment, and behavioral decision making (Lerner *et al.*, 2015; Murty *et al.*, 2019).

Within social media environments, consumers encounter numerous emotionally stimulating messages every day. However, only a limited number of these experiences remain psychologically influential. This phenomenon suggests that emotional persistence is influenced not only by emotional intensity but also by the extent to which experiences become embedded within broader cognitive structures. Psychological embedding occurs when experiences become integrated into an individual's interpretive framework and remain accessible for future retrieval and meaning construction (Tyng *et al.*, 2017).

These insights are highly relevant for the present study because they suggest that emotionally resonant social media experiences may continue influencing consumer cognition long after direct exposure has ended. Emotional Anchoring builds on this perspective by proposing that emotionally meaningful digital experiences can become psychologically embedded and subsequently function as enduring reference points in future consumer evaluations and behaviors.

2.3 Identity-Based Processing and Symbolic Consumption

Emotional persistence becomes even stronger when emotional experiences are connected to consumer identity. Identity-based processing theory suggests that consumers interpret information and evaluate brands in ways that reinforce or support their self-concepts (Reed *et al.*, 2012). Information perceived as personally relevant is more likely to receive attention, generate emotional responses, and be incorporated into long-term memory.

The symbolic consumption literature similarly argues that brands frequently function as symbolic resources through which consumers express values, aspirations, and social identities (Belk, 1988; Schouten, 1991). Rather than being evaluated solely on functional attributes, brands often acquire meaning because they help consumers communicate who they are and how they wish to be perceived. Emotional significance emerges when brand symbolism aligns with consumers' personal narratives and identity aspirations.

Social media amplifies these symbolic processes because digital participation is highly visible and socially performative. Consumers frequently use interactions such as liking, sharing, commenting, and content creation as forms of identity expression (Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). Consequently, emotionally meaningful brand experiences become more influential when they are perceived as congruent with consumers' self-concepts.

Research on self-congruity supports this argument by demonstrating that consumers develop stronger emotional connections with brands that reflect either their actual selves or aspirational identities (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Malär *et al.*, 2011). Identity-congruent experiences are therefore more likely to remain psychologically salient because they become integrated into enduring self-related narratives. This perspective suggests that identity relevance represents a critical condition under which emotional experiences become persistent and psychologically influential.

2.4 Emotional Branding, Attachment, and Relational Development

The emotional branding literature extends these ideas by emphasizing the role of emotions in fostering durable consumer–brand relationships. Emotional branding proposes that successful brands create meaningful affective experiences that go beyond functional benefits and become embedded within consumers' psychological lives (Fournier, 1998; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006).

Relationship theory suggests that consumers can develop bonds with brands resembling interpersonal relationships characterized by trust, intimacy, commitment, and emotional closeness (Fournier, 1998). Subsequent studies on brand attachment demonstrate that repeated emotionally meaningful interactions contribute to enduring emotional bonds that influence loyalty, advocacy, and relationship continuity (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Park *et al.*, 2010). Likewise, brand love literature highlights how strong emotional connections generate long-term preference and commitment toward brands (Batra *et al.*, 2012).

Authenticity and storytelling further strengthen these relational processes. Authentic brands are perceived as more trustworthy and emotionally meaningful because consumers view them as sincere and psychologically credible (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). Storytelling facilitates emotional immersion by allowing consumers to experience brand meanings through narratives rather than direct persuasion (Escalas, 2004; Woodside, 2010; van Laer *et al.*, 2014).

Although this literature effectively explains emotional outcomes such as attachment and brand love, it offers limited insight into the psychological process through which emotional experiences become sufficiently persistent to generate such outcomes. Emotional Anchoring addresses this limitation by positioning psychological embedding as a mechanism linking emotional experiences to enduring relational consequences.

2.5 Customer Engagement and Narrative Immersion

Customer engagement literature emphasizes consumers' active participation within brand ecosystems through cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social investment (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Social media has intensified engagement opportunities by enabling continuous interaction between brands and consumers through comments, sharing behavior, user-generated content, and community participation (Dessart *et al.*, 2015).

Emotions play a central role in this process because emotionally stimulating content encourages participation and interaction (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). However, engagement theory primarily explains interaction behavior rather than emotional persistence. Consumers may stop interacting with a brand while still retaining emotionally significant impressions that continue shaping future perceptions.

Narrative transportation theory offers additional insights by explaining how storytelling facilitates deeper cognitive and emotional immersion (Green & Brock, 2000; van Laer *et al.*, 2014). Through narrative immersion, consumers become emotionally involved in stories and mentally integrate symbolic meanings into their own interpretive frameworks. Such immersion enhances emotional processing, memory retention, and attitude formation (Escalas, 2004).

Together, customer engagement and narrative transportation literature suggest that emotionally engaging interactions and immersive narratives create favorable conditions for deeper psychological processing. However, they do not fully explain how such experiences become stabilized within consumers' long-term cognitive and relational systems. This limitation creates the need for a broader integrative mechanism capable of linking emotional interaction, memory formation, identity relevance, and relational continuity.

2.6 Toward Emotional Anchoring: Integrating Emotional Memory, Identity, and Relational Processes

The preceding discussion highlights an important theoretical gap. Existing literature provides valuable explanations regarding emotional engagement, emotional memory, identity congruence, brand attachment, and narrative immersion, yet these perspectives remain largely fragmented. As a result, contemporary social media marketing research lacks a

comprehensive explanation of how emotionally meaningful experiences become enduring psychological resources that continue influencing consumer interpretation and behavior.

The conceptual novelty of Emotional Anchoring depends on demonstrating that it occupies a distinct theoretical position within the consumer–brand relationship literature. Existing constructs such as customer engagement, brand attachment, and brand love explain participation, emotional bonds, and relationship outcomes, but they provide limited insight into the psychological embedding process through which emotionally meaningful social media experiences acquire enduring influence. The proposed figure clarifies this theoretical positioning by locating Emotional Anchoring as an intervening psychological mechanism rather than an antecedent or outcome.

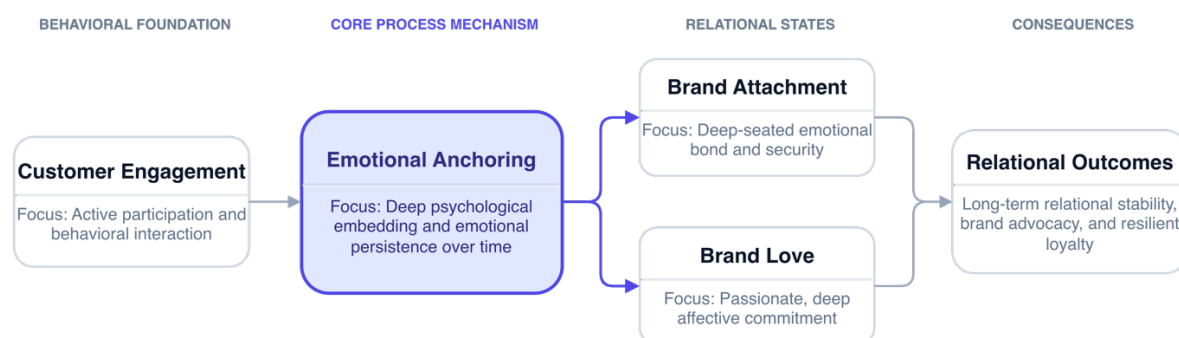


Figure 1. Theoretical Positioning of Emotional Anchoring within Consumer–Brand Relationship
Source: Author's conceptualization

As articulated in Figure 1, Emotional Anchoring occupies an intermediate theoretical position between observable consumer interaction and enduring relational outcomes. Rather than representing participation behavior (customer engagement) or relational consequences (brand attachment and brand love), Emotional Anchoring explains the psychological embedding process through which emotionally meaningful social media experiences become persistent and behaviorally influential. This positioning strengthens the article's novelty claim by establishing Emotional Anchoring as a distinct mechanism that connects emotional experiences with long-term consumer–brand relationships.

To address this limitation, the present study introduces Emotional Anchoring as a higher-order psychological embedding mechanism. Emotional Anchoring refers to the process through which emotionally resonant social media experiences become integrated into consumers' memory structures, identity narratives, and relational perceptions toward brands. Unlike customer engagement, which focuses on participation behavior, Emotional Anchoring emphasizes emotional persistence. Unlike brand attachment, which represents an emotional outcome, Emotional Anchoring focuses on the psychological process through which such outcomes emerge.

The proposed concept integrates insights from emotional memory theory, identity-based processing, emotional branding, customer engagement, and narrative transportation. Emotional experiences become anchored when they are emotionally meaningful, identity relevant, narratively immersive, and repeatedly reinforced through relational interaction. Through this process, emotional experiences evolve from temporary reactions into durable psychological reference points that shape future evaluation, interpretation, attachment formation, and behavioral intention.

By conceptualizing Emotional Anchoring as a mechanism linking emotional experiences to long-term relational outcomes, the present study provides a more comprehensive explanation of emotional persistence within social media environments. This perspective advances existing theory by explaining not only how consumers emotionally respond to digital experiences but also how those experiences continue influencing consumer behavior long after direct interaction has ended.

3. Emotional Anchoring Framework in Social Media Marketing

3.1 Conceptual Architecture of Emotional Anchoring

Building upon the theoretical foundations discussed previously, this study proposes the Emotional Anchoring Framework as an integrative conceptual model explaining how emotionally resonant social media experiences become psychologically embedded and subsequently influence long-term consumer–brand relationships. The framework synthesizes insights from emotional memory theory, identity-based processing, emotional branding, customer engagement, narrative transportation, and relationship marketing to explain emotional persistence within contemporary digital environments.

The Emotional Anchoring Framework integrates previously fragmented perspectives on emotional memory, identity-based processing, narrative immersion, and relationship development into a unified explanation of emotional persistence in social media marketing. The framework proposes that emotionally meaningful digital experiences become influential over time when they are psychologically embedded through Emotional Anchoring, thereby connecting antecedent conditions with enduring relational and behavioral consequences.

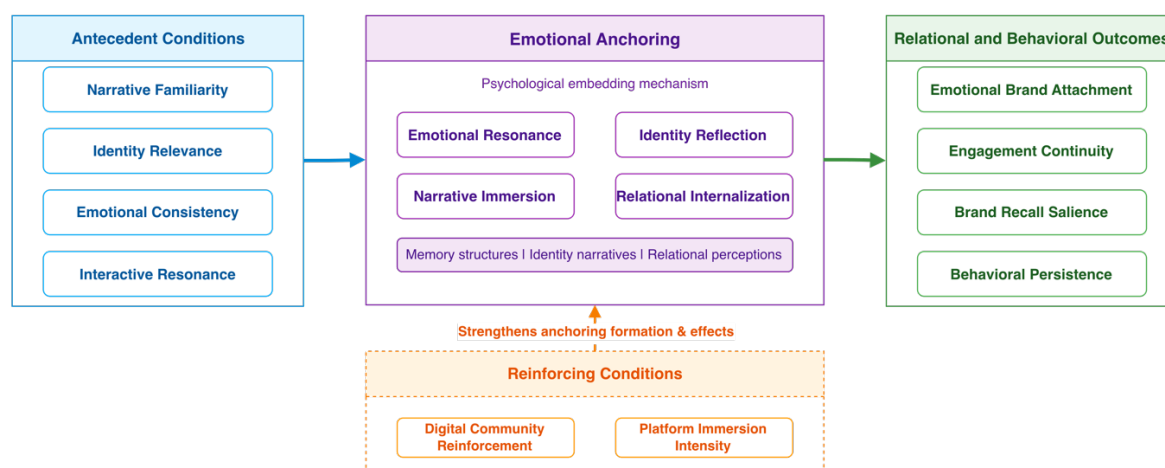


Figure 2. Emotional Anchoring Framework in Social Media Marketing

Source: Developed by the authors

The framework articulated in Figure 2 explains how Emotional Anchoring emerges from four antecedent conditions: Narrative Familiarity, Identity Relevance, Emotional Consistency, and Interactive Resonance, and subsequently shapes enduring consumer–brand outcomes. Emotional Anchoring is conceptualized as a multidimensional embedding process encompassing Emotional Resonance, Identity Reflection, Narrative Immersion, and Relational Internalization. By linking antecedents, psychological mechanisms, reinforcing conditions, and outcomes within a single architecture, Figure 2 provides the article’s central theoretical model and clarifies the causal logic through which emotionally meaningful social media experiences become persistent sources of relational and behavioral influence.

The central premise of the framework is that emotional influence does not emerge solely from emotional intensity. Rather, enduring influence develops when emotionally meaningful experiences become psychologically embedded within consumers’ memory structures, identity narratives, and relational perceptions. Emotional Anchoring therefore represents a higher-order psychological mechanism that transforms temporary emotional reactions into durable cognitive and relational resources.

The framework proposes that Emotional Anchoring develops through a cumulative process involving repeated emotional exposure, symbolic interpretation, identity congruence, narrative immersion, and relational reinforcement. Through these processes, selected

emotional experiences acquire psychological accessibility and continue influencing future evaluation, interpretation, attachment formation, and behavioral intention.

Unlike traditional models emphasizing exposure–response relationships, the Emotional Anchoring Framework emphasizes psychological persistence. The framework argues that emotionally meaningful experiences remain influential because they become embedded within consumers’ interpretive systems and are repeatedly reactivated during subsequent decision-making and relational encounters.

3.2 Antecedents of Emotional Anchoring

The proposed framework identifies four primary antecedent dimensions that facilitate the development of Emotional Anchoring.

1) Narrative Familiarity

Narrative Familiarity refers to the extent to which social media content reflects experiences, situations, aspirations, or challenges that consumers perceive as relatable and psychologically meaningful. Familiar narratives enhance emotional processing because consumers are more likely to connect stories with their own experiences and personal memories (Escalas, 2004; van Laer *et al.*, 2014). As narrative familiarity increases, emotional experiences become more personally relevant and cognitively accessible.

2) Identity Relevance

Identity Relevance reflects the degree to which brand communication aligns with consumers’ self-concepts, values, aspirations, and symbolic identities. Identity-congruent experiences generate stronger emotional responses because consumers perceive them as personally meaningful rather than externally imposed messages (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed *et al.*, 2012). Such experiences are more likely to become psychologically embedded because they reinforce existing identity structures.

3) Emotional Consistency

Emotional Consistency refers to the continuity of emotional tone, symbolic meaning, and relational positioning across repeated brand interactions. Consistency enhances emotional credibility and trust because consumers interpret coherent communication as authentic and reliable (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Napoli *et al.*, 2014). Repeated exposure to emotionally consistent communication strengthens memory consolidation and psychological familiarity.

4) Interactive Resonance

Interactive Resonance describes the extent to which consumers perceive emotional reciprocity and meaningful participation within social media interaction. Social media differs from traditional communication because consumers expect responsiveness, acknowledgement, and relational interaction (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Brodie *et al.*, 2013). When consumers experience emotional reciprocity, emotional experiences become more socially validated and psychologically significant.

Collectively, these antecedents create favorable conditions for emotional experiences to move beyond temporary reactions and become candidates for psychological embedding.

3.3 Core Mechanisms of Emotional Anchoring

At the center of the framework lies Emotional Anchoring itself, conceptualized as a multidimensional psychological embedding process consisting of four interrelated mechanisms.

1) Emotional Resonance

Emotional Resonance represents the degree to which social media experiences evoke personally meaningful emotional reactions. Emotional resonance functions as the initial

gateway through which experiences acquire psychological salience and emotional significance.

2) Identity Reflection

Identity Reflection occurs when consumers integrate emotional experiences into self-related narratives and identity construction processes. Through identity reflection, emotional experiences become connected to broader personal meanings and therefore gain greater persistence.

3) Narrative Immersion

Narrative Immersion refers to deep cognitive and emotional absorption within stories, symbolic experiences, and emotionally engaging content. Immersive experiences stimulate richer emotional processing and stronger memory formation, increasing the likelihood of long-term accessibility.

4) Relational Internalization

Relational Internalization represents the process through which emotionally meaningful experiences become integrated into consumers' perceptions of their relationship with brands. Through repeated reinforcement, emotional experiences contribute to psychological closeness, familiarity, and trust.

Together, these four mechanisms transform emotional experiences from transient reactions into durable psychological references that remain influential across future interactions.

This figure isolates the internal logic of Emotional Anchoring by showing how emotional experiences become psychologically embedded. It clarifies that persistence emerges through a mechanism sequence linking emotional salience, self-related interpretation, narrative absorption, and relational meaning formation.

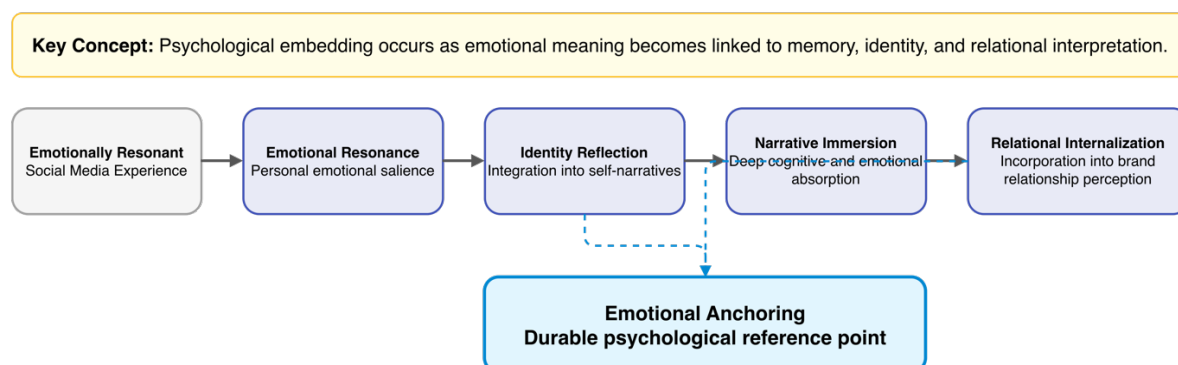


Figure 3. Internal Psychological Embedding Mechanism of Emotional Anchoring

Source: Author's conceptualization

Figure 3 clarifies the internal mechanism through which Emotional Anchoring develops. The visual shows that emotionally resonant social media experiences do not become persistent merely because they are affectively intense; they acquire durability when emotional meaning is reflected through identity, absorbed through narrative immersion, and internalized within consumer–brand relationship perceptions. This mechanism-level explanation supports the article's theoretical contribution by showing how emotional experiences become psychologically embedded before producing long-term relational and behavioral consequences.

3.4 Relational and Behavioral Outcomes

The framework proposes that Emotional Anchoring influences both relational outcomes and behavioral outcomes.

The first outcome is Emotional Brand Attachment. Consumers experiencing stronger Emotional Anchoring are expected to develop deeper psychological bonds because

emotionally embedded experiences repeatedly reinforce relational significance (Park *et al.*, 2010; Thomson *et al.*, 2005).

The second outcome is Engagement Continuity. Unlike engagement intensity, which reflects interaction at a specific moment, engagement continuity reflects sustained involvement over time. Emotionally anchored consumers remain psychologically connected even when interaction frequency fluctuates.

The third outcome is Brand Recall Salience. Emotionally anchored experiences are more likely to be retrieved during future evaluations because emotional memories remain cognitively accessible and influential.

The fourth outcome is Behavioral Persistence. Emotional Anchoring contributes to the stability of future behavioral intentions, including loyalty, advocacy, content sharing, and relational commitment. Emotionally embedded experiences therefore function as psychological resources that support long-term consumer–brand relationships.

3.5 Boundary Conditions and Reinforcing Factors

Although Emotional Anchoring is expected to influence consumer outcomes positively, its strength may vary across contexts.

One important reinforcing factor is Digital Community Reinforcement. Emotional experiences frequently gain additional meaning through community participation, social validation, and collective interpretation (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Communities amplify emotional significance by transforming individual experiences into socially shared meanings.

A second reinforcing factor is Platform Immersion Intensity. Platforms characterized by visual richness, algorithmic personalization, and high interaction frequency may strengthen emotional embedding because consumers encounter emotionally meaningful experiences more frequently and more intensely (Voorveld *et al.*, 2018; Appel *et al.*, 2020).

Consumer characteristics may also influence anchoring formation. Individuals with stronger emotional sensitivity, identity salience, and digital involvement may be more likely to develop Emotional Anchoring than those with lower emotional responsiveness.

3.6 Theoretical Propositions

Based on the proposed framework, the following propositions are advanced:

P1: *Narrative Familiarity positively influences Emotional Anchoring.*

P2: *Identity Relevance positively influences Emotional Anchoring.*

P3: *Emotional Consistency positively influences Emotional Anchoring.*

P4: *Interactive Resonance positively influences Emotional Anchoring.*

P5: *Emotional Anchoring positively influences Emotional Brand Attachment.*

P6: *Emotional Anchoring positively influences Engagement Continuity.*

P7: *Emotional Anchoring positively influences Brand Recall Salience.*

P8: *Emotional Anchoring positively influences Behavioral Persistence.*

P9: *Digital Community Reinforcement strengthens the relationship between Emotional Anchoring and relational outcomes.*

P10: *Platform Immersion Intensity strengthens the formation of Emotional Anchoring.*

The conceptual framework culminates in a set of theoretically derived propositions that specify the expected relationships among antecedents, Emotional Anchoring, reinforcing conditions, and relational outcomes. Presenting the propositions in tabular form improves

analytical clarity by consolidating the framework's causal logic into a structured and easily interpretable format.

Table 1. Summary of Theoretical Propositions

	Proposition & Relationship	Expected Effect	Theoretical Basis
P1	Narrative Familiarity → Emotional Anchoring	Positive	Narrative Transportation
P2	Identity Relevance → Emotional Anchoring	Positive	Identity-Based Processing
P3	Emotional Consistency → Emotional Anchoring	Positive	Emotional Branding and Authenticity
P4	Interactive Resonance → Emotional Anchoring	Positive	Customer Engagement Theory
P5	Emotional Anchoring → Emotional Brand Attachment	Positive	Relationship Marketing
P6	Emotional Anchoring → Engagement Continuity	Positive	Consumer Engagement Literature
P7	Emotional Anchoring → Brand Recall Salience	Positive	Emotional Memory Theory
P8	Emotional Anchoring → Behavioral Persistence	Positive	Consumer Behavior Theory
P9	Digital Community Reinforcement × Emotional Anchoring → Relational Outcomes	Positive Moderating Effect	Brand Community Theory
P10	Platform Immersion Intensity → Emotional Anchoring Formation	Positive Reinforcing Effect	Platform Affordance and Immersion Perspectives

Source: Author's conceptualization

Table 1 consolidates the framework's theoretical logic by translating the conceptual arguments into explicit propositions suitable for future empirical testing. The structure demonstrates that Emotional Anchoring occupies a central position within the model, functioning as the primary mechanism through which antecedent conditions are translated into long-term relational and behavioral consequences. By summarizing the proposed relationships in a single format, Table 1 facilitates theory testing, construct operationalization, and future model validation.

The proposed framework positions Emotional Anchoring as the missing psychological mechanism connecting emotionally meaningful social media experiences with long-term relational and behavioral consequences. By integrating emotional memory, identity processing, narrative immersion, and relationship development into a unified structure, the framework offers a more comprehensive explanation of emotional persistence within contemporary social media marketing environments.

4. Discussion of the Emotional Anchoring Framework

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

The Emotional Anchoring Framework contributes to social media marketing literature by offering a novel explanation of how emotionally meaningful digital experiences become enduring psychological influences. Existing scholarship has generated substantial insights regarding customer engagement, emotional branding, narrative transportation, customer experience, and brand attachment (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Park *et al.*, 2010; van Laer *et al.*, 2014). However, these theoretical perspectives generally focus either on emotional antecedents or relational outcomes while providing limited explanation of the psychological mechanism through which emotional experiences persist over time. The present framework addresses this limitation by positioning Emotional Anchoring as a higher-

order psychological embedding mechanism that connects emotional experiences with long-term relational and behavioral consequences.

This table strengthens the theoretical distinctiveness of Emotional Anchoring by differentiating it from adjacent constructs in consumer–brand relationship literature. Its analytical role is to prevent conceptual overlap and clarify why Emotional Anchoring should be treated as a psychological embedding mechanism rather than a renamed form of engagement, attachment, or brand love.

Table 2. Distinguishing Emotional Anchoring from Related Constructs

Construct	Primary Focus	Level of Analysis	Temporal Orientation	Analytical Limitation
Customer Engagement	Consumer participation, interaction, and behavioral involvement	Observable interaction	Short- to medium-term	Explains activity but not why emotional influence persists after interaction declines
Customer Experience	Consumer responses across touchpoints	Experiential encounter	Episodic or journey-based	Captures experience quality but not psychological embedding over time
Brand Attachment	Emotional bond with a brand	Relational outcome	Long-term	Explains bond strength but not the mechanism through which the bond becomes formed
Brand Love	Deep affective commitment and passion toward a brand	Advanced relational outcome	Long-term	Explains intense affection but not the embedding process preceding durable affect
Consumer–Brand Identification	Perceived overlap between self-concept and brand meaning	Identity alignment	Medium- to long-term	Explains identity congruence but not how emotional experiences become persistent reference points
Emotional Anchoring	Psychological embedding of emotionally meaningful brand experiences	Memory, identity, and relational perception	Persistent and cumulative	Explains how emotional experiences become durable, accessible, and behaviorally influential

Source: Author's conceptualization

Table 2 clarifies the conceptual boundaries of Emotional Anchoring by positioning it as a mechanism rather than an outcome or behavioral indicator. The comparison shows that existing constructs explain participation, experience, identification, attachment, or affective commitment, whereas Emotional Anchoring explains how emotionally meaningful social media experiences become embedded within memory structures, identity narratives, and relational perceptions. This distinction supports the article's analytical logic by reducing construct ambiguity and strengthening the claim that Emotional Anchoring adds explanatory value beyond established consumer–brand relationship concepts.

The first contribution lies in extending social media marketing theory beyond interaction-based explanations of consumer behavior. Existing digital marketing research often relies on engagement indicators such as participation, sharing behavior, commenting activity, or interaction frequency to explain marketing effectiveness (Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Hollebeek &

Macky, 2019). While such indicators provide useful insights into observable behavior, they do not fully explain why certain brand experiences continue influencing consumers after direct interaction has ended. Emotional Anchoring introduces the concept of emotional persistence, suggesting that the influence of social media communication depends not only on engagement intensity but also on the degree to which experiences become psychologically embedded within consumers' memory and identity structures.

A second contribution concerns emotional memory theory. Previous marketing research has acknowledged the importance of emotions in shaping consumer judgment and decision making, yet emotional memory has received comparatively limited attention within social media marketing scholarship. Insights from cognitive psychology and neuroscience demonstrate that emotionally significant experiences are encoded and retrieved more effectively than neutral experiences (Hamann, 2001; Phelps, 2004; Kensinger, 2009). The present framework extends these insights by proposing that emotional memory processes operate within digital marketing environments through mechanisms of emotional resonance, identity relevance, narrative immersion, and relational reinforcement. Emotional Anchoring therefore represents a marketing-specific extension of emotional memory theory capable of explaining the persistence of brand-related emotional influence.

The third contribution involves the integration of identity-based processing into explanations of emotional persistence. Identity literature suggests that consumers are more responsive to information aligned with their self-concepts and symbolic aspirations (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Reed *et al.*, 2012). However, existing studies typically examine identity congruence as a direct antecedent of preference, attitude, or attachment. The Emotional Anchoring Framework proposes a more nuanced explanation by suggesting that identity relevance strengthens psychological embedding. Emotional experiences become enduring not merely because they are emotionally stimulating but because they become integrated into consumers' self-narratives. This perspective provides a stronger theoretical explanation for why identity-congruent brand experiences often generate greater durability than identity-neutral communication.

The framework also contributes to relationship marketing theory. Traditional relationship marketing perspectives emphasize trust, commitment, satisfaction, and attachment as drivers of long-term consumer relationships (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Fournier, 1998). Although these constructs successfully explain relational outcomes, they provide less insight into the process through which emotionally meaningful experiences become relationally significant. Emotional Anchoring fills this gap by identifying a psychological mechanism that precedes attachment formation. Rather than treating attachment as an isolated phenomenon, the framework conceptualizes attachment as one potential consequence of emotionally embedded experiences. This distinction clarifies the developmental pathway linking emotional interaction with relational continuity.

A fifth contribution involves the refinement of customer engagement theory. Engagement research has traditionally emphasized active participation and behavioral involvement within brand ecosystems (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Yet consumers frequently maintain strong psychological connections with brands despite periods of reduced interaction. Emotional Anchoring offers an explanation for this phenomenon by distinguishing between engagement behavior and emotional persistence. The framework suggests that emotionally anchored experiences remain influential even when observable engagement declines, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of long-term consumer–brand relationships.

Most importantly, the framework integrates previously fragmented theoretical domains into a unified conceptual structure. Emotional memory theory, identity-based processing, emotional branding, narrative transportation, relationship marketing, and customer engagement have often evolved as separate streams of inquiry. The Emotional Anchoring Framework

synthesizes these perspectives by demonstrating how emotional experiences are encoded, interpreted, embedded, and subsequently translated into relational and behavioral outcomes. This integration advances theoretical understanding of emotional persistence within digital environments and provides a coherent foundation for future empirical investigation.

4.2 Managerial Implications

The proposed framework offers several important implications for organizations operating within increasingly competitive social media environments. One of the most significant implications concerns the strategic role of emotional persistence in digital marketing effectiveness.

Many organizations continue to evaluate social media performance using short-term indicators such as reach, impressions, clicks, and engagement rates. Although these metrics remain valuable, they do not necessarily capture the enduring psychological influence of marketing communication. The Emotional Anchoring Framework suggests that sustainable competitive advantage may depend less on temporary visibility and more on the creation of emotionally memorable experiences that remain psychologically accessible over time. Consequently, organizations should complement engagement metrics with strategies designed to foster emotional continuity and long-term relevance.

The framework also highlights the importance of narrative-based communication. Storytelling should not be viewed merely as a creative communication technique but as a mechanism facilitating emotional embedding. Narratives that reflect consumers' aspirations, challenges, identities, and lived experiences are more likely to generate emotional resonance and narrative immersion. Such experiences increase the probability that consumers will integrate brand meanings into broader self-related narratives, thereby strengthening Emotional Anchoring.

Authenticity emerges as another critical managerial consideration. Consumers increasingly demonstrate skepticism toward highly polished promotional content while responding more positively to communication perceived as transparent, human, and relatable (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). Authentic communication enhances emotional credibility and increases the likelihood that emotional experiences will be interpreted as personally meaningful. Brands seeking to cultivate Emotional Anchoring should therefore prioritize consistency, sincerity, and emotional transparency across digital touchpoints.

The framework further emphasizes the strategic importance of identity relevance. Social media communication is more likely to generate durable influence when it aligns with consumers' values, aspirations, and self-concepts. Rather than focusing exclusively on product attributes, organizations should consider how brand narratives contribute to consumers' identity construction and symbolic self-expression. Emotional Anchoring is expected to develop more strongly when consumers perceive brands as supporting who they are or who they aspire to become.

Community development represents another important implication. Digital communities function as reinforcing environments where emotional experiences receive social validation and collective interpretation (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau *et al.*, 2009). Organizations should therefore view communities not simply as communication channels but as emotional ecosystems capable of amplifying emotional meaning. Encouraging shared experiences, user-generated storytelling, and peer interaction may strengthen the formation and persistence of Emotional Anchoring.

Finally, the framework has implications for influencer and creator-based marketing. Influencers often succeed because they establish emotionally meaningful relationships through perceived intimacy, authenticity, and narrative continuity (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020;

Hudders *et al.*, 2021). The effectiveness of influencer communication may therefore be understood not merely through credibility or persuasion but through its capacity to facilitate emotional embedding. This perspective offers a broader understanding of why emotionally resonant creators often generate stronger long-term influence than traditional promotional communication.

4.3 Boundary Conditions and Future Research

Although the Emotional Anchoring Framework offers a comprehensive explanation of emotional persistence within social media marketing, several boundary conditions should be acknowledged.

First, Emotional Anchoring may vary across platform environments. Different platforms provide distinct affordances, interaction structures, and communication formats that influence emotional processing. Short-form video platforms such as TikTok may facilitate rapid emotional stimulation, whereas platforms such as Instagram may support stronger identity expression and relational continuity. Future research should therefore investigate platform-specific anchoring mechanisms.

Second, consumer characteristics are likely to influence anchoring formation. Emotional sensitivity, identity salience, self-monitoring tendencies, and digital involvement may affect the extent to which consumers internalize emotional experiences. Individual differences therefore represent important contingencies that warrant further investigation.

Third, cultural context may shape emotional interpretation and symbolic meaning construction. Emotional relevance, identity expression, and relational expectations vary across cultural environments, suggesting that Emotional Anchoring may not develop uniformly across populations. Cross-cultural studies would contribute significantly to understanding the universality and contextual variability of the proposed framework.

Future research should also develop and validate a multidimensional Emotional Anchoring scale. The present study conceptualizes Emotional Anchoring through four interrelated dimensions: Emotional Resonance, Identity Reflection, Narrative Immersion, and Relational Internalization, but empirical measurement remains necessary. Scale development would enable more rigorous testing of the framework and facilitate comparison across contexts.

Longitudinal research designs are particularly important because Emotional Anchoring explicitly concerns persistence over time. Most social media marketing studies rely on cross-sectional data that capture emotional responses at a single moment. Longitudinal approaches would provide stronger evidence regarding how emotional experiences evolve, stabilize, and influence future consumer behavior.

Emerging technologies provide another promising avenue for future investigation. Artificial intelligence, generative content systems, virtual influencers, and algorithmic personalization are increasingly shaping consumer experiences within digital environments (Huang & Rust, 2021; Davenport *et al.*, 2020). Future studies should examine whether AI-mediated interactions facilitate or weaken Emotional Anchoring and how consumers respond to emotionally meaningful experiences generated through artificial rather than human sources.

Taken together, these research opportunities suggest that Emotional Anchoring represents a promising theoretical domain with substantial potential for advancing understanding of digital consumer behavior. By focusing on emotional persistence rather than momentary emotional reactions, future scholarship can develop a richer and more dynamic understanding of how social media experiences continue influencing consumers long after direct interaction has ended.

5. Research Agenda and Future Directions

The introduction of Emotional Anchoring opens multiple opportunities for future research across marketing, consumer behavior, digital communication, and information systems. Because the concept is proposed as a novel higher-order psychological embedding mechanism, substantial empirical work remains necessary to validate, refine, and extend the framework. Future research should move beyond examining short-term emotional reactions and instead focus on understanding how emotionally meaningful digital experiences become durable psychological resources influencing consumer cognition and behavior over time.

5.1 Measurement and Scale Development

One of the most immediate priorities concerns the development of a robust measurement instrument for Emotional Anchoring. While the present study conceptualizes Emotional Anchoring as a multidimensional construct consisting of Emotional Resonance, Identity Reflection, Narrative Immersion, and Relational Internalization, empirical validation is required before the construct can be widely adopted within marketing scholarship.

Future studies should employ established scale development procedures to identify, refine, and validate measurement items. Exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses could be used to determine whether Emotional Anchoring operates as a second-order construct or as a set of closely related dimensions. Researchers should also examine convergent, discriminant, and nomological validity to establish clear distinctions between Emotional Anchoring and adjacent constructs such as customer engagement, brand attachment, brand love, customer experience, and consumer-brand identification.

Particular attention should be devoted to demonstrating theoretical uniqueness. Because Emotional Anchoring shares conceptual proximity with several established constructs, rigorous empirical testing will be essential to confirm that it captures a distinct psychological phenomenon rather than merely repackaging existing concepts. Establishing discriminant validity will therefore represent a critical milestone in the maturation of the Emotional Anchoring research program.

5.2 Longitudinal Dynamics of Emotional Anchoring

The proposed framework emphasizes emotional persistence, suggesting that Emotional Anchoring develops gradually through repeated exposure, reinforcement, and interpretation. Consequently, longitudinal research designs are particularly important for testing the framework.

Most social media marketing studies rely on cross-sectional surveys that capture consumer perceptions at a single point in time. Such approaches provide limited insight into how emotional experiences evolve, stabilize, or fade. Future research should therefore employ longitudinal panel studies, experience sampling methods, digital trace data, and repeated-measurement designs to observe anchoring formation across extended periods.

Longitudinal investigations could address several important questions. How long does Emotional Anchoring persist after direct interaction ends? Does anchoring strengthen through repeated exposure or reach a saturation point? Can Emotional Anchoring deteriorate following negative experiences or brand crises? Under what conditions can emotionally anchored perceptions be replaced by competing experiences? Addressing these questions would substantially deepen understanding of emotional persistence within digital environments.

Researchers may also examine potential life-cycle effects. Emotional Anchoring may emerge, strengthen, stabilize, weaken, or transform across different stages of consumer–brand relationships. Such dynamic perspectives would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of long-term relationship development and emotional continuity.

5.3 Cross-Platform and Cross-Cultural Validation

The current framework is intentionally broad and designed to apply across social media environments. Nevertheless, platform characteristics may significantly influence the formation and consequences of Emotional Anchoring.

Different platforms provide distinct communication affordances, interaction structures, and content formats. Video-centric platforms such as TikTok and YouTube may stimulate stronger narrative immersion, whereas visually curated environments such as Instagram may reinforce identity expression and symbolic self-presentation. Community-oriented platforms may amplify relational internalization through collective participation and social reinforcement. Future studies should therefore compare anchoring mechanisms across different platform ecosystems.

Cross-cultural validation also represents an important research priority. Identity expression, emotional communication, relational expectations, and symbolic meaning vary considerably across cultural contexts. Consumers in collectivist societies may develop Emotional Anchoring through community reinforcement and social belonging, whereas consumers in individualistic cultures may rely more heavily on identity congruence and self-expression. Investigating these differences would contribute to the generalizability and contextual refinement of the framework.

Comparative studies across countries, demographic segments, and generational cohorts may reveal important variations in anchoring formation. Such findings would help identify universal versus context-specific dimensions of Emotional Anchoring and strengthen the theoretical robustness of the model.

5.4 AI-Mediated Emotional Anchoring

One of the most promising areas for future investigation concerns the role of artificial intelligence in shaping emotionally meaningful consumer experiences. Contemporary digital environments are increasingly influenced by algorithmic personalization, generative artificial intelligence, conversational agents, virtual influencers, and automated content creation systems (Davenport *et al.*, 2020; Huang & Rust, 2021; Dwivedi *et al.*, 2023).

These developments raise important theoretical questions regarding the nature of emotional embedding in AI-mediated environments. Can consumers develop Emotional Anchoring through interactions with AI-generated content? Do virtual influencers create anchoring processes comparable to those generated by human creators? How does algorithmic personalization influence emotional resonance, identity relevance, and narrative immersion?

Future research should also examine whether AI-generated emotional experiences are perceived as authentic. Authenticity has consistently been identified as a critical factor in emotional relationship formation (Beverland, 2005; Morhart *et al.*, 2015). As generative AI becomes increasingly capable of producing emotionally persuasive content, researchers must investigate whether consumers respond differently when emotional experiences originate from artificial rather than human sources.

The intersection of Emotional Anchoring and artificial intelligence may ultimately become one of the most important areas of inquiry within future digital marketing research, particularly as consumers increasingly interact with algorithmically generated social environments.

5.5 Expanding the Emotional Anchoring Research Program

Beyond immediate empirical validation, Emotional Anchoring offers opportunities for broader theoretical expansion. Future research should explore how the framework interacts with related concepts such as customer journey management, consumer well-being, digital

communities, social commerce, influencer marketing, customer experience management, and brand ecosystem theory.

Researchers may also investigate potential negative forms of Emotional Anchoring. While the present study primarily focuses on positive consumer–brand relationships, emotionally embedded experiences may also generate negative consequences. Brand scandals, misinformation, emotional manipulation, or controversial social media campaigns may create negative anchors that persist over time and influence consumer evaluations long after the original event. Understanding both positive and negative anchoring processes would contribute to a more balanced and comprehensive theoretical perspective.

Another promising avenue involves examining Emotional Anchoring within collective rather than individual contexts. Communities, fandoms, brand tribes, and digital movements often develop shared emotional narratives that influence collective interpretation and behavior. Future studies could investigate how Emotional Anchoring operates at group, community, or ecosystem levels and whether collective emotional anchors differ from individual psychological anchors.

Finally, future scholarship should explore the role of Emotional Anchoring within emerging hybrid human–AI ecosystems. As digital interactions increasingly involve both human and artificial actors, understanding how emotional experiences become embedded across complex socio-technical environments will become increasingly important. Such research would not only refine the Emotional Anchoring Framework but also contribute to broader debates concerning the future of consumer behavior, digital relationships, and marketing communication in technologically mediated societies.

Taken together, these research opportunities suggest that Emotional Anchoring represents more than a single conceptual contribution. Rather, it provides the foundation for a broader research program capable of advancing understanding of emotional persistence, psychological embedding, and long-term consumer–brand relationships within rapidly evolving digital environments.

6. Discussion

The proposed Emotional Anchoring Framework offers a comprehensive perspective for understanding how emotionally resonant social media experiences become psychologically embedded within consumer cognition, identity, and relational perception. The framework extends existing knowledge by integrating emotional marketing, consumer engagement, narrative transportation, identity theory, and relationship marketing into a unified conceptual explanation of long term emotional persistence in digital environments. This integration contributes to both theoretical advancement and managerial practice while opening several avenues for future scholarly investigation.

6.1 Theoretical Contributions

One of the primary contributions of this study lies in its extension of social media marketing literature. Previous studies have extensively examined customer engagement, digital interaction, online participation, and social media communication effectiveness (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Dessart *et al.*, 2015; Hollebeek & Macky, 2019). Existing engagement literature generally emphasizes behavioral participation, interaction intensity, and emotional involvement as outcomes of social media communication. However, less attention has been devoted to understanding how emotionally meaningful experiences become cognitively stabilized and psychologically influential over extended periods.

The Emotional Anchoring Framework addresses this limitation by introducing an emotional embedding perspective. Rather than viewing emotional engagement solely as a temporary

reaction generated by content exposure, the framework proposes that emotionally resonant experiences can become embedded within consumers' memory structures and identity systems. This perspective extends current engagement theory by explaining why certain digital experiences continue influencing consumer perception long after direct interaction has ended. Emotional Anchoring therefore provides a deeper explanation regarding the persistence of emotional influence in social media environments.

A second contribution relates to consumer behavior theory. Traditional consumer behavior research frequently acknowledges the importance of emotions in shaping attitudes, evaluations, and purchase decisions (Thomson *et al.*, 2005; Park *et al.*, 2010; Batra *et al.*, 2012). Nevertheless, the literature often treats emotions as immediate antecedents of behavioral responses rather than examining their long term psychological continuity. The proposed framework contributes by explaining the process of emotional persistence through psychological embedding mechanisms.

The concept of Emotional Anchoring suggests that emotional experiences remain influential because they become integrated into consumers' interpretive systems and self related meaning structures. This perspective contributes to a more dynamic understanding of consumer behavior by emphasizing that emotional influence does not necessarily disappear after exposure but may continue shaping future interpretation, preference formation, and relational evaluation. Such a perspective is particularly relevant in contemporary digital environments characterized by repeated interaction, algorithmic content exposure, and ongoing consumer participation.

The framework also contributes by bridging emotion literature and identity literature. Previous studies often investigate emotional responses and identity related processes separately (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Hollenbeck & Kaikati, 2012). The Emotional Anchoring Framework proposes that emotional meaning becomes stronger when consumers perceive identity congruence between themselves and the symbolic messages communicated through social media content. Emotional experiences therefore function not only as affective reactions but also as mechanisms supporting identity construction, self expression, and symbolic self verification.

A third theoretical contribution concerns brand relationship research. Relationship marketing literature has long emphasized trust, commitment, attachment, and relational continuity as central elements of successful consumer brand relationships (Fournier, 1998; Verhoef *et al.*, 2010). However, relatively limited attention has been given to the internal psychological mechanisms through which digital interaction evolves into enduring relational orientation.

The proposed framework introduces the concept of relational internalization as a central explanatory mechanism. Relational internalization refers to the process through which emotionally meaningful experiences become psychologically integrated into consumers' relational perceptions toward brands. Through repeated emotional interaction, consumers gradually develop psychological closeness, emotional familiarity, and relational intimacy that extend beyond transactional evaluation.

This contribution is particularly important because it provides a theoretical explanation regarding attachment formation within social media environments. Existing attachment research demonstrates that emotional bonds influence loyalty and long term relationship continuity (Park *et al.*, 2010; Loureiro *et al.*, 2012). The Emotional Anchoring Framework extends this literature by identifying how emotional resonance, identity reflection, and narrative immersion contribute to attachment formation through relational internalization processes.

Collectively, these theoretical contributions position Emotional Anchoring as a novel conceptual lens capable of integrating fragmented streams of literature related to social

media marketing, consumer engagement, emotional branding, identity construction, and relationship marketing.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The framework also provides several important implications for marketing practitioners operating in increasingly competitive digital environments. One of the most significant implications concerns digital brand strategy.

Many contemporary digital marketing initiatives continue to prioritize visibility, reach, and short term engagement metrics such as impressions, clicks, and interaction volume. While such indicators remain important, the Emotional Anchoring Framework suggests that long term relational success depends on the creation of emotionally memorable experiences rather than merely attracting temporary attention.

Consumers are exposed to large volumes of digital content every day. Under these conditions, content that simply captures attention may quickly disappear from memory. By contrast, emotionally meaningful experiences possess greater potential to remain psychologically accessible and influence future perception. Organizations should therefore focus on creating communication that generates emotional relevance, symbolic familiarity, and personal meaning rather than relying solely on attention seeking tactics.

The framework also offers important implications for content marketing strategy. The findings emphasize the strategic value of storytelling, authenticity, and emotional symbolism as mechanisms facilitating Emotional Anchoring formation.

Storytelling should be designed not merely to communicate information but to facilitate emotional immersion and symbolic interpretation. Narratives that reflect consumer aspirations, challenges, identities, and emotional experiences are more likely to become psychologically embedded within memory structures. Story driven communication therefore represents a critical mechanism for building emotional continuity in social media environments.

Authenticity similarly emerges as an essential strategic consideration. Consumers increasingly demonstrate skepticism toward highly polished promotional communication while responding more positively to transparent, relatable, and humanized brand narratives (Morhart *et al.*, 2015; Beverland, 2005). Authentic communication strengthens emotional credibility and increases the likelihood that emotional experiences become internalized within relational perception.

Emotional symbolism represents another important managerial implication. Visual imagery, symbolic cues, cultural references, and emotionally meaningful narratives can strengthen emotional resonance by enabling consumers to connect communication experiences with broader identity related meanings. Brands that successfully integrate emotional symbolism into content strategy may generate stronger psychological embedding and greater relational persistence.

The framework also contributes to community based marketing strategy. Contemporary digital marketing increasingly recognizes the importance of communities as mechanisms facilitating participation, advocacy, and relational continuity (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau *et al.*, 2009). The Emotional Anchoring Framework suggests that effective communities are not merely informational networks but emotional ecosystems.

Organizations should therefore focus on facilitating emotional community formation by encouraging shared experiences, collective storytelling, and emotionally meaningful interaction among members. Communities characterized by emotional connection are more likely to generate trust, participation, and long term relational commitment.

The framework further highlights the importance of developing shared emotional identity within digital communities. When consumers perceive emotional commonality with other community members, emotional reinforcement becomes stronger and relational continuity becomes more sustainable. Shared emotional identity may therefore function as an important strategic resource for community driven marketing initiatives.

6.3 Future Research Directions

Although the Emotional Anchoring Framework provides a comprehensive conceptual explanation of emotionally embedded social media experiences, several opportunities remain for future empirical investigation.

First, future research should empirically validate the proposed framework using structural equation modeling and partial least squares approaches. The conceptual relationships among Emotional Resonance, Identity Reflection, Narrative Immersion, Relational Internalization, and behavioral outcomes require rigorous empirical examination across different consumer contexts and industries.

Second, future studies should investigate cross platform variations in Emotional Anchoring formation. Different social media platforms possess distinct communication structures, interaction mechanisms, and content formats that may influence emotional embedding processes. Comparative investigations involving platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and emerging social media ecosystems could provide valuable insights regarding platform specific emotional dynamics.

Particularly promising is the comparison between TikTok and Instagram. TikTok emphasizes algorithm driven discovery, short form video immersion, and rapid emotional stimulation, whereas Instagram often emphasizes visual identity construction, lifestyle presentation, and relational continuity. These differences may generate distinct patterns of Emotional Anchoring formation and persistence.

Third, future research should explore cross cultural variations in Emotional Anchoring. Emotional interpretation, symbolic meaning, and identity construction are influenced by cultural values and social norms. Comparative studies across different cultural contexts may enhance understanding regarding the universality and contextual variability of Emotional Anchoring mechanisms.

Fourth, future scholarship should focus on developing and validating a dedicated Emotional Anchoring measurement scale. The present study conceptualizes Emotional Anchoring as a multidimensional construct involving Emotional Resonance, Identity Reflection, Narrative Immersion, and Relational Internalization. Future research should establish reliable measurement instruments capable of capturing these dimensions and distinguishing Emotional Anchoring from related constructs such as engagement, attachment, and brand love.

Finally, future studies should adopt longitudinal approaches to investigate emotional persistence over time. Most contemporary social media marketing research relies on cross sectional designs that capture emotional responses at a single point in time. However, Emotional Anchoring explicitly emphasizes durability and psychological continuity. Longitudinal research designs would therefore provide stronger evidence regarding how emotional experiences evolve, persist, and influence consumer behavior across extended periods.

Taken together, these future research opportunities highlight the potential of Emotional Anchoring as an emerging theoretical domain within social media marketing and consumer behavior research. Continued empirical investigation may further refine the construct, strengthen its explanatory power, and expand its applicability across diverse digital marketing contexts.

7. Conclusion

This study was motivated by a growing recognition that contemporary social media marketing operates within increasingly complex emotional environments where consumers are continuously exposed to vast amounts of content competing for attention, relevance, and psychological significance. Although prior research has generated extensive knowledge regarding customer engagement, emotional branding, narrative transportation, brand attachment, customer experience, and identity-based consumption, a critical theoretical gap remains concerning how emotionally meaningful social media experiences persist over time and continue influencing consumer cognition and behavior after direct interaction has ended. Existing frameworks provide valuable explanations of emotional antecedents and relational outcomes, yet they offer limited insight into the underlying mechanism through which emotional experiences become psychologically enduring. In response to this gap, the present study sought to develop a conceptual framework capable of explaining emotional persistence within digital environments by introducing the concept of Emotional Anchoring.

The central contribution of this study lies in the conceptualization of Emotional Anchoring as a higher-order psychological embedding mechanism through which emotionally resonant social media experiences become integrated into consumers' memory structures, identity narratives, and relational perceptions toward brands. Unlike engagement, which primarily captures participation and interaction behaviors, or brand attachment, which reflects an emotional bond that develops over time, Emotional Anchoring focuses on the underlying process through which emotional experiences acquire durability, accessibility, and continuing influence. By positioning Emotional Anchoring between emotional experiences and long-term relational outcomes, the proposed framework advances current understanding of how emotional influence is formed, maintained, and reactivated within social media ecosystems.

The study contributes to theory by integrating several previously fragmented streams of literature into a coherent conceptual architecture. Drawing upon emotional memory theory, identity-based processing, symbolic consumption, emotional branding, narrative transportation, customer engagement, and relationship marketing, the framework demonstrates that emotional persistence emerges through the cumulative interaction of emotional resonance, identity relevance, narrative immersion, and relational reinforcement. This integration extends existing knowledge by moving beyond isolated explanations of consumer behavior and providing a more comprehensive account of how emotional experiences evolve from temporary reactions into enduring psychological reference points. In doing so, the study contributes not only to social media marketing scholarship but also to broader discussions concerning consumer memory, identity construction, and long-term relationship development in digitally mediated environments.

A further theoretical advancement concerns the distinction between Emotional Anchoring and adjacent constructs that dominate current marketing literature. While brand attachment, brand love, consumer-brand identification, customer experience, and engagement each capture important aspects of consumer–brand relationships, none explicitly explains the process through which emotionally meaningful experiences become sufficiently embedded to influence future interpretation and behavior. The Emotional Anchoring Framework addresses this limitation by identifying psychological embedding as a distinct explanatory mechanism. This perspective provides a richer understanding of why certain brands, narratives, creators, or experiences remain emotionally influential despite fluctuations in interaction frequency, changing market conditions, or prolonged periods without direct exposure.

Beyond its theoretical contributions, the framework offers important managerial implications. The findings suggest that organizations should reconsider the tendency to evaluate social

media performance solely through short-term metrics such as impressions, clicks, reach, and engagement rates. Sustainable influence may depend less on temporary visibility and more on the ability to create emotionally meaningful experiences that remain psychologically salient over time. The framework highlights the strategic importance of narrative communication, authenticity, identity relevance, emotional consistency, and community reinforcement in fostering durable consumer–brand relationships. It further suggests that managers should view social media not simply as a communication channel but as an environment in which emotional meanings are created, embedded, and reinforced through ongoing interaction and symbolic interpretation. Such insights are particularly relevant for brands, influencers, creators, and organizations seeking to establish long-term relevance within increasingly crowded and algorithmically driven digital ecosystems.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. As a conceptual study, the framework remains theoretical and has not yet been subjected to empirical validation. The proposed dimensions, antecedents, and outcomes of Emotional Anchoring require systematic testing across diverse contexts, industries, platforms, and consumer populations. In addition, the framework is intentionally broad and therefore does not fully account for platform-specific dynamics, cultural differences, individual psychological characteristics, or contextual contingencies that may influence anchoring formation. These limitations do not diminish the value of the framework but instead highlight opportunities for future refinement and empirical development.

Future research should prioritize the development and validation of a multidimensional Emotional Anchoring scale capable of distinguishing the construct from related concepts such as engagement, attachment, and consumer-brand identification. Longitudinal studies are particularly important because the framework explicitly concerns persistence and psychological continuity over time. Researchers should also investigate how Emotional Anchoring operates across different social media platforms, cultural environments, and demographic segments, as well as explore its potential role in emerging domains such as social commerce, creator economies, digital communities, and customer journey management. Equally important is the examination of AI-mediated environments, where algorithmic personalization, generative artificial intelligence, virtual influencers, and conversational agents increasingly shape consumer experiences. Understanding whether emotionally meaningful experiences generated through artificial systems can create forms of Emotional Anchoring comparable to human-generated interactions represents a particularly promising avenue for future inquiry.

In conclusion, this study argues that understanding social media marketing requires moving beyond explanations centered solely on exposure, engagement, or attachment and toward a deeper understanding of emotional persistence. By introducing Emotional Anchoring as a higher-order psychological embedding mechanism, the study provides a novel conceptual lens for explaining how emotionally meaningful digital experiences become enduring influences on consumer cognition, relationships, and behavior. As digital environments continue to evolve and emotional competition becomes increasingly intense, the ability to understand, measure, and manage emotional persistence may emerge as one of the most important frontiers in marketing theory and practice. Emotional Anchoring therefore offers not only a new conceptual framework but also the foundation for a broader research agenda capable of reshaping how scholars and practitioners understand long-term influence in the age of social media.

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