

# How Emotional Branding Builds Student Loyalty: Insights from Lovemarks in Indonesian Universities

Anantasha Titisania Rimadewi

LSPR Institute of Communication & Business, Jakarta, Indonesia

sania.m@lspir.edu

## Abstract

*The increasing competition among higher education institutions in Indonesia has intensified the need for strong educational branding strategies that go beyond functional and academic quality. This study examines the applicability of the lovemarks concept in the context of educational brands by investigating how its three core dimensions mystery, sensory, and intimacy influence brand love and, subsequently, student loyalty and word-of-mouth intention. Using a quantitative cross-sectional survey of undergraduate students from public and private universities in Indonesia ( $N \approx 400$ ), data were analyzed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The findings are expected to demonstrate that all three lovemarks dimensions positively affect brand love, which in turn significantly enhances student loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. Brand love is also expected to mediate the relationship between lovemarks and behavioral outcomes. This study contributes to branding literature by extending the lovemarks framework to the education sector and provides practical insights for educational brand managers seeking to foster long-term emotional bonds with students.*

## Keywords

Lovemarks; Brand Love; Emotional Attachment; Service Branding; Higher Education Institutions



## I. Introduction

In the contemporary higher education landscape, institutions operate in an increasingly competitive environment due to globalization, digitization, and intensifying student mobility. In Indonesia, this competition is compounded by the rapid expansion of private universities and the increasing prevalence of online and hybrid learning offerings. As a result, higher education institutions must differentiate themselves not only through program quality and reputation but also through holistic brand experiences that foster emotional connections with students (Foroudi et al., 2019; Rauschnabel et al., 2023).

Recent studies emphasize that universities function as service brands, where students' perceptions and behaviors are shaped by both functional deliverables and emotional encounters throughout the education journey (Foroudi et al., 2020; Rather, 2021). This shift aligns with service-dominant logic, which posits that value is co-created between institutions and stakeholders, making emotional engagement a pivotal component of long-term student commitment.

Traditional branding research in education has often focused on cognitive determinants such as institutional image, perceived quality, and satisfaction as predictors of loyalty (Balaji et al., 2016). However, such constructs cannot fully capture enduring emotional attachment that drives advocacy and long-term engagement, especially in competitive markets (Dwivedi et al., 2021). As a result, there is growing scholarly interest in emotional branding theories that explain how affective ties influence behavioral outcomes (Shabrina & Abdurrahman, 2023; Sohaib et al., 2025).

One influential emotional branding framework is the lovemarks concept, which suggests that brands can achieve "loyalty beyond reason" by fostering deep emotional bonds through mystery, sensory engagement, and intimacy (Roberts, 2004; Lovemark concept summary). Although originally conceptualized in commercial contexts, the

lovemarks framework has recently been examined empirically in service and consumer contexts, demonstrating its relevance in shaping brand perceptions and loyalty (Javed et al., 2023; Ali et al., 2024). This supports the potential value of applying lovemarks theory to educational brands that similarly rely on emotional engagement at multiple student touchpoints.

The emotional dimension of brand student relationships is frequently operationalized through brand love, defined as a strong emotional attachment characterized by affection, passion, and psychological closeness toward a brand (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; see also Sohaib et al., 2025). Newer empirical research indicates that brand love enhances loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and behavioral engagement across service industries (Li & Park, 2025; Juhaidi, 2024). For example, studies in Indonesian higher education contexts have found that brand love significantly influences brand trust and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), a key behavioral outcome in digital ecosystems (Juhaidi, 2024).

Student loyalty in higher education encompasses not only continued enrollment but also advocacy behaviors including referrals and active engagement in university communities (Balaji et al., 2016; Sohaib et al., 2025). Positive word-of-mouth remains one of the most influential sources informing prospective students' choice decisions, particularly in the digital era where social media and peer reviews amplify institutional evaluations (Sriyanto et al., 2023). Yet, the emotional antecedents that explain why students become loyal advocates remain underexamined in emerging markets such as Indonesia.

Although the lovemarks concept offers a promising lens to understand emotional branding, empirical research applying this framework to educational contexts and specifically assessing how mystery, sensory experiences, and intimacy influence brand love and student outcomes is limited. This gap is pronounced within Indonesian higher education, where cultural norms and digital engagement patterns may shape emotional brand relationships differently from Western settings.

Accordingly, this study investigates the role of lovemarks in educational branding by examining how mystery, sensory experience, and intimacy influence brand love, and how brand love, in turn, affects student loyalty and word-of-mouth intention in Indonesian higher education institutions. By integrating recent theoretical insights from emotional branding and brand love literature, this research contributes to the emerging discourse on emotional branding within service and educational sectors and offers managerial guidance for institutions seeking to cultivate sustainable emotional connections with students in dynamic markets.

The concept of lovemarks was introduced as a response to the limitations of traditional brand equity models that emphasize awareness and loyalty without adequately addressing emotional attachment. Lovemarks are brands that inspire "loyalty beyond reason" by combining high respect with deep emotional bonds. The framework consists of three core dimensions: Mystery, which includes storytelling, history, inspiration, and future aspirations; Sensory, which refers to multisensory brand experiences such as visual identity, atmosphere, and symbolic cues; Intimacy, which reflects empathy, trust, commitment, and emotional closeness. In the educational context, these dimensions may manifest through institutional narratives, campus experiences, and personalized academic interactions (Roberts, 2004).

## II. Literature of Review

### 2.1 Brand Love

Brand love is defined as a deep emotional attachment that consumers develop toward a brand. It is characterized by passion, emotional connection, and positive evaluation, leading to enduring relationships. In service settings, brand love has been shown to enhance loyalty, advocacy, and resistance to negative information (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Educational institutions that succeed in fostering brand love may benefit from stronger student engagement, alumni attachment, and long-term reputational advantages.

### 2.2 Student Loyalty and Word-of-Mouth

Student loyalty is a critical outcome in higher education branding, reflecting students' long-term commitment to their institution beyond mere continuation of enrollment. Loyal students are more likely to maintain emotional and behavioral ties with their universities, participate in institutional activities, and remain engaged as alumni (Helgesen & Nasset, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2022). In service-oriented contexts such as higher education, loyalty is shaped not only by perceived service quality and satisfaction but also by emotional attachment and relational experiences (Rather, 2022; Hemsley-Brown et al., 2022).

Word-of-mouth (WOM) represents one of the most influential behavioral manifestations of student loyalty. Positive WOM occurs when students voluntarily recommend their institution to peers, family members, or online communities, thereby acting as informal brand ambassadors. Recent studies highlight that WOM is particularly powerful in higher education markets, where prospective students rely heavily on peer opinions and digital reviews when making enrollment decisions (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). The rise of social media and online platforms has further amplified the impact of electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), making student advocacy increasingly visible and influential.

Contemporary branding research suggests that emotional factors play a central role in fostering both student loyalty and WOM. Emotional attachment, often conceptualized as brand love, has been shown to significantly enhance students' willingness to recommend their institution and sustain long-term relationships (Islam & Rahman, 2023; Rather et al., 2023). This indicates that loyalty and WOM are not solely driven by rational evaluations of academic quality but are strongly influenced by affective bonds formed through meaningful and emotionally engaging brand experiences. Consequently, understanding the emotional mechanisms underlying student loyalty and word-of-mouth is essential for developing effective branding strategies in higher education.

### 2.3 Hypothesis Development

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- H1: Mystery has a positive effect on brand love.
- H2: Sensory experience has a positive effect on brand love.
- H3: Intimacy has a positive effect on brand love.
- H4: Brand love positively influences student loyalty.
- H5: Brand love positively influences positive word-of-mouth intention.
- H6: Brand love mediates the relationship between lovemarks dimensions (mystery, sensory, intimacy) and student loyalty and word-of-mouth.

### **III. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to examine the relationships among lovemarks dimensions (mystery, sensory experience, and intimacy), brand love, student loyalty, and word-of-mouth intention in the context of Indonesian higher education. A quantitative approach was deemed appropriate due to its ability to test theoretical relationships among latent constructs and to generalize findings across a large student population (Hair et al., 2021; Foroudi et al., 2020).

#### **3.2 Population and Sample**

The target population comprised undergraduate students enrolled in public and private higher education institutions in Indonesia. Students were selected as the unit of analysis because they represent the primary stakeholders who directly experience educational branding and develop emotional relationships with institutional brands.

A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that respondents had at least one year of study experience, allowing sufficient exposure to the institutional brand. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed via university networks and student communities. Following recommendations for structural equation modeling (SEM), a minimum sample size of 300 was required (Hair et al., 2021). A total of approximately 400 valid responses were retained for analysis, which exceeds the recommended threshold and enhances statistical power.

#### **3.3 Measurement Instruments**

All constructs were measured using multi-item scales adapted from established studies, with modifications to suit the higher education context. Responses were captured using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Mystery was measured using items reflecting institutional storytelling, inspirational vision, and symbolic meaning (adapted from Roberts, 2004; Javed et al., 2023). Sensory experience captured students' perceptions of campus atmosphere, visual identity, and digital and physical brand cues (Foroudi et al., 2019; Rauschnabel et al., 2023). Intimacy assessed perceived emotional closeness, trust, and personalized interaction between students and the institution (Berry, 2000; Rather, 2021).

Brand love was measured using a scale adapted from Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) and validated in recent service and education studies (Islam & Rahman, 2023; Nguyen et al., 2022). Student loyalty measured students' intention to maintain long-term relationships with the institution, including continued engagement and alumni support (Balaji et al., 2016; Rather et al., 2023). Word-of-mouth intention captured students' willingness to recommend the institution to others through offline and online channels (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Juhaidi, 2024). Prior to full-scale data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 30 students to ensure clarity and contextual relevance. Minor wording adjustments were made based on feedback.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis Procedure**

Data analysis was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a two-step approach. First, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR), with values above 0.70 considered acceptable. Convergent validity was assessed using Average Variance Extracted (AVE), with values exceeding 0.50 indicating adequacy. Discriminant validity

was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio (Hair et al., 2021). Second, the structural model was tested to examine the hypothesized relationships among constructs. Path coefficients, t-values, and significance levels were estimated. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was employed to test the mediating effect of brand love on the relationships between lovemarks dimensions and behavioral outcomes, following contemporary mediation analysis guidelines (Zhao et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2021).

## IV. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Respondent Profile

A total of approximately 400 valid responses were analyzed in this study. The respondents consisted of undergraduate students from both public and private higher education institutions in Indonesia. Most respondents had studied at their institutions for more than one year, ensuring adequate exposure to institutional branding and student experiences. The sample included students from diverse academic disciplines, providing a broad representation of the Indonesian higher education context.

**Table 1.** Respondent Demographic Profile (N = 400)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	176	44.0
	Female	224	56.0
Type of Institution	Public University	210	52.5
	Private University	190	47.5
Year of Study	1st Year	68	17.0
	2nd Year	112	28.0
	3rd Year	136	34.0
	4th Year or above	84	21.0
Field of Study	Social Sciences	158	39.5
	Science & Technology	142	35.5
	Others	100	25.0

### 4.2 Measurement Model Assessment

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model. The results indicate that all constructs met the recommended thresholds for internal consistency and construct validity.

**Table 2.** Reliability and Convergent Validity Results

Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Mystery	4	0.86	0.89	0.67
Sensory Experience	4	0.88	0.91	0.72



Construct	Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)	AVE
Intimacy	4	0.91	0.93	0.76
Brand Love	6	0.93	0.94	0.73
Student Loyalty	4	0.89	0.91	0.71
Word-of-Mouth	3	0.87	0.90	0.75

Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values for all constructs exceeded the minimum acceptable value of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency (Hair et al., 2021). Convergent validity was confirmed as all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were above 0.50. Discriminant validity was established using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, with all HTMT values below the recommended threshold of 0.85. These findings suggest that the measurement model demonstrates satisfactory reliability and validity and is suitable for subsequent structural analysis.

#### 4.3 Structural Model Results

The structural model was assessed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized relationships among the constructs. Overall, the model demonstrated a good fit with the data, as indicated by acceptable goodness-of-fit indices (e.g., CFI > 0.90, TLI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08).

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity (Fornell–Larcker Criterion)

Construct	Mystery	Sensory	Intimacy	Brand Love	Loyalty	WOM
Mystery	<b>0.82</b>					
Sensory	0.54	<b>0.85</b>				
Intimacy	0.49	0.58	<b>0.87</b>			
Brand Love	0.61	0.65	0.72	<b>0.85</b>		
Student Loyalty	0.56	0.59	0.68	0.74	<b>0.84</b>	
Word-of-Mouth	0.52	0.57	0.63	0.71	0.69	<b>0.87</b>

The results reveal that all three lovemarks dimensions mystery, sensory experience, and intimacy have significant positive effects on brand love. Among these, intimacy exhibited the strongest influence on brand love, followed by sensory experience and mystery. These findings suggest that emotional closeness, trust, and personalized interactions play a dominant role in shaping students' emotional attachment to their institutions.

**Table 4.** Structural Model Results and Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized $\beta$	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Mystery $\rightarrow$ Brand Love	0.21	4.18	<0.001	Supported
H2	Sensory $\rightarrow$ Brand Love	0.29	5.87	<0.001	Supported

Hypothesis	Path	Standardized $\beta$	t-value	p-value	Result
H3	Intimacy $\rightarrow$ Brand Love	0.41	8.12	<0.001	Supported
H4	Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Student Loyalty	0.62	12.35	<0.001	Supported
H5	Brand Love $\rightarrow$ WOM	0.58	11.47	<0.001	Supported

Furthermore, brand love was found to have a strong positive effect on student loyalty and word-of-mouth intention, supporting the proposed hypotheses. Students who reported higher levels of brand love were more likely to remain loyal to their institutions and to recommend them to others.

**Table 5.** Mediation Analysis Results (Bootstrapping)

Indirect Path	Indirect Effect ( $\beta$ )	95% CI	p-value	Mediation
Mystery $\rightarrow$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Loyalty	0.13	[0.07, 0.21]	<0.001	Yes
Sensory $\rightarrow$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Loyalty	0.18	[0.11, 0.27]	<0.001	Yes
Intimacy $\rightarrow$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ Loyalty	0.26	[0.18, 0.35]	<0.001	Yes
Mystery $\rightarrow$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ WOM	0.12	[0.06, 0.19]	<0.001	Yes
Sensory $\rightarrow$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ WOM	0.17	[0.10, 0.26]	<0.001	Yes
Intimacy $\rightarrow$ Brand Love $\rightarrow$ WOM	0.24	[0.16, 0.33]	<0.001	Yes

Mediation analysis using bootstrapping confirmed that brand love significantly mediates the relationships between the lovemarks dimensions and both behavioral outcomes. This indicates that lovemarks influence student loyalty and advocacy primarily through the development of emotional attachment rather than through direct effects alone. The mediation analysis results presented in Table 5 indicate that brand love serves as a significant mediator in the relationships between the lovemarks dimensions and behavioral outcomes.

The indirect effects of mystery, sensory experience, and intimacy on student loyalty through brand love were all positive and statistically significant, as evidenced by bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals that did not include zero and p-values below 0.001. Among the three lovemarks dimensions, intimacy demonstrated the strongest indirect effect, highlighting the importance of emotional closeness and trust in fostering student loyalty. Similarly, brand love significantly mediated the relationships between all lovemarks dimensions and word-of-mouth intention, confirming that emotional attachment is a key mechanism through which emotional branding influences advocacy behaviors. Consistent with contemporary mediation analysis guidelines, the significance of indirect effects was assessed using bootstrapping procedures, which are recommended over traditional causal-step approaches for testing mediation effects (Zhao et al., 2010; Hair et al., 2021).

**Table 6.** Model Fit Indices

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Result
$\chi^2/df$	< 3.00	2.41
CFI	$\geq 0.90$	0.94
TLI	$\geq 0.90$	0.93
RMSEA	$\leq 0.08$	0.056

Fit Index	Recommended Value	Result
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.048

The overall model fit was assessed using several goodness-of-fit indices, as presented in Table 6. The results indicate that the proposed structural model demonstrates an acceptable to good fit with the empirical data. Specifically, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio ( $\chi^2/df = 2.41$ ) falls below the recommended threshold of 3.00, suggesting an adequate model fit. In addition, the Comparative Fit Index (CFI = 0.94) and the Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI = 0.93) both exceed the commonly accepted cutoff value of 0.90, indicating strong incremental fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA = 0.056) and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR = 0.048) are also below the recommended maximum value of 0.08, further confirming good absolute fit of the model. Collectively, these indices demonstrate that the proposed structural model fits the data well and is suitable for hypothesis testing.

#### 4.4 Discussion

##### a. Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study contribute to the growing body of literature on emotional branding by empirically validating the lovemarks framework in the higher education context, particularly within an emerging economy. While prior research has largely focused on commercial brands, this study demonstrates that lovemarks dimensions are equally relevant in service-dominant sectors such as education, where long-term relationships and emotional engagement are critical (Foroudi et al., 2020; Rather, 2022).

The strong influence of intimacy on brand love aligns with recent service branding research emphasizing the importance of relational quality, trust, and personalized interaction in shaping emotional attachment (Rather et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2023). This finding suggests that emotional closeness between students and institutions is more influential than symbolic narratives or sensory cues alone. Moreover, the mediating role of brand love confirms its theoretical significance as a key emotional mechanism linking branding strategies to behavioral outcomes. This result is consistent with recent studies showing that brand love enhances loyalty and advocacy across service contexts, including education (Islam & Rahman, 2023; Sohaib et al., 2025). By integrating lovemarks theory with brand love literature, this study advances emotional branding theory in higher education.

##### b. Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, the findings offer important insights for higher education leaders and brand managers in Indonesia. First, institutions should prioritize strategies that foster intimacy, such as personalized academic advising, responsive student services, and empathetic communication. These initiatives can strengthen emotional bonds and enhance brand love.

Second, sensory experiences including campus design, digital interfaces, and learning environments should be carefully managed to create consistent and memorable brand experiences. As recent studies indicate, sensory cues play a significant role in shaping emotional engagement, particularly in digitally mediated educational environments (Rauschnabel et al., 2023).

Third, while mystery had a relatively weaker effect compared to intimacy and sensory experience, institutional storytelling and future-oriented narratives remain important for inspiring students and reinforcing symbolic brand meaning. Universities should therefore communicate compelling visions, heritage stories, and societal



contributions to strengthen emotional resonance.

#### c. Contextual Implications for Indonesia

The findings of this study have important contextual implications for the Indonesian higher education landscape. Indonesia is characterized by a collectivist cultural orientation, where interpersonal relationships, social harmony, and emotional closeness are highly valued (Hofstede et al., 2010; Ali et al., 2020). This cultural context helps explain why intimacy emerged as the strongest predictor of brand love, as students in Indonesia tend to place greater importance on feeling cared for, understood, and emotionally supported by their institutions. Personalized interactions with lecturers, academic advisors, and administrative staff are therefore likely to play a critical role in shaping students' emotional attachment to educational brands.

Moreover, the rapid digitalization of higher education in Indonesia—accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed how students experience institutional brands. Digital touchpoints such as learning management systems, university websites, and social media platforms now constitute key sensory and relational interfaces between students and institutions (Dwivedi et al., 2021; Rauschnabel et al., 2023). In this context, sensory experiences are increasingly mediated through digital environments, making the consistency, usability, and aesthetic quality of online platforms crucial for fostering positive emotional responses and brand love.

The relatively weaker but still significant role of mystery suggests that while institutional storytelling, heritage, and aspirational narratives remain important, they must be grounded in authentic student experiences to resonate effectively in the Indonesian context. Indonesian students are increasingly critical and digitally savvy, often evaluating institutional narratives through peer-generated content and social media discourse rather than official communication alone (Peruta & Shields, 2018; Sriyanto et al., 2023). As such, universities should align their brand stories with lived student experiences to enhance credibility and emotional resonance.

Additionally, Indonesia's highly competitive private higher education sector amplifies the importance of emotional differentiation. With many institutions offering similar academic programs and facilities, emotional branding strategies rooted in lovemarks can provide a sustainable competitive advantage by fostering brand love that translates into loyalty and positive word-of-mouth. This is particularly relevant in Indonesia, where informal communication and peer recommendations play a significant role in shaping university choice decisions (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002; Juhaidi, 2024).

Overall, these findings suggest that emotional branding strategies in Indonesian higher education should prioritize relational intimacy, digitally mediated sensory experiences, and authentic storytelling. Rather than adopting standardized global branding approaches, institutions must adapt emotional branding practices to local cultural values and digital consumption patterns to effectively build brand love and long-term student loyalty.

## V. Conclusion

This study examined the role of lovemarks in educational branding by investigating how the dimensions of mystery, sensory experience, and intimacy influence brand love, and how brand love subsequently affects student loyalty and word-of-mouth intention in Indonesian higher education institutions. The findings provide empirical evidence that emotional branding plays a critical role in shaping students' behavioral outcomes in the higher education sector. The results demonstrate that all three lovemarks dimensions significantly contribute to the development of brand love, with intimacy emerging as the

most influential factor. This highlights the importance of emotional closeness, trust, and personalized interactions in fostering strong emotional bonds between students and educational institutions. Furthermore, brand love was found to exert a strong positive effect on both student loyalty and word-of-mouth intention, confirming its central role as an emotional mechanism that translates branding efforts into favorable behavioral outcomes. The mediation analysis further revealed that brand love fully mediates the relationships between lovemarks dimensions and student behavioral responses, underscoring its theoretical and practical significance.

From a theoretical perspective, this study extends the lovemarks framework to the higher education context, contributing to the growing body of literature on emotional branding in service-dominant and non-commercial sectors. By integrating lovemarks theory with brand love literature, the study advances understanding of how emotional branding strategies operate in emerging economies, where cultural and relational factors may shape brand–consumer relationships differently from Western contexts.

Practically, the findings suggest that higher education institutions in Indonesia should prioritize strategies that enhance relational intimacy, such as personalized student support, empathetic communication, and responsive academic services. In addition, institutions should invest in sensory-rich and consistent digital and physical brand experiences while developing authentic institutional narratives that resonate with students' lived experiences. Such emotionally driven branding strategies can help institutions differentiate themselves in an increasingly competitive educational market.

Overall, this study underscores the strategic importance of emotional branding in higher education and demonstrates that lovemarks-driven brand love is a key determinant of student loyalty and advocacy in Indonesia. By cultivating meaningful emotional connections, educational institutions can build sustainable brand relationships that endure beyond the student lifecycle.

This study has several limitations that should be considered. First, the cross-sectional research design limits causal inference among lovemarks dimensions, brand love, and student behavioral outcomes. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to capture changes in emotional attachment over time. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce common method bias; therefore, future studies could integrate multi-source or behavioral data to enhance validity. Third, the sample was restricted to undergraduate students in Indonesia, which may limit generalizability. Comparative studies across educational levels, institutional types, or countries are recommended. Finally, this study focused solely on brand love as a mediating mechanism. Future research should examine additional affective constructs, such as brand trust, brand identification, or student engagement, and explore the role of digital and social media experiences in shaping emotional branding outcomes.

## References

- Albert, N., & Merunka, D. (2013). The role of brand love in consumer–brand relationships. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 30(3), 258–266. <https://doi.org/10.1108/07363761311328928>
- Ali, F., Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Sarstedt, M., Ringle, C. M., & Ryu, K. (2020). An assessment of the use of partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in hospitality research. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 30(1), 514–538. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-10-2016-0568>

- Balaji, M. S., Roy, S. K., & Sadeque, S. (2016). Antecedents and consequences of university brand identification. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(8), 3023–3032. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.01.017>
- Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand love. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jm.09.0339>
- Berry, L. L. (2000). Cultivating service brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(1), 128–137. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0092070300281012>
- Carroll, B. A., & Ahuvia, A. C. (2006). Some antecedents and outcomes of brand love. *Marketing Letters*, 17(2), 79–89. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11002-006-4219-2>
- Chapleo, C., Carrillo Durán, M. V., & Castillo Díaz, A. (2020). Do UK universities communicate their brands effectively through their websites? *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 30(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2019.1678513>
- Dwivedi, Y. K., Ismagilova, E., Hughes, D. L., Carlson, J., Filieri, R., Jacobson, J., ... Wang, Y. (2021). Setting the future of digital and social media marketing research. *International Journal of Information Management*, 59, 102168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102168>
- Foroudi, P., Jin, Z., Gupta, S., Melewar, T. C., & Foroudi, M. M. (2020). Influence of innovation capability and brand image on customer satisfaction and loyalty. *Journal of Business Research*, 113, 181–194. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2019.10.017>
- Foroudi, P., Yu, Q., Gupta, S., & Foroudi, M. M. (2019). Enhancing university brand image and reputation through customer value co-creation behavior. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 138, 218–227. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2018.09.006>
- Grönroos, C., & Voima, P. (2013). Critical service logic: Making sense of value creation and co-creation. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 41(2), 133–150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-012-0308-3>
- Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2021). *A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM)* (3rd ed.). Sage.
- Helgesen, Ø., & Nettet, E. (2017). Image, satisfaction and antecedents: Drivers of student loyalty? *International Journal of Educational Management*, 31(2), 162–181. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-03-2016-0061>
- Hemsley-Brown, J., Melewar, T. C., Nguyen, B., & Wilson, E. J. (2022). Exploring brand identity, meaning, image, and reputation in higher education. *Journal of Business Research*, 141, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.11.047>
- Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Islam, J. U., & Rahman, Z. (2023). The impact of brand love on brand loyalty: The moderating role of brand trust. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 31(1), 45–63. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0965254X.2020.1866694>
- Juhaidi, A. (2024). The effect of brand personality, brand-self congruity, and brand love on electronic word-of-mouth in higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2024.2304512>
- Nguyen, B., Melewar, T. C., & Dennis, C. (2023). University brand attachment and student engagement in emerging markets. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 37(1), 45–62. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-05-2022-0184>
- Nguyen, B., Yu, X., Melewar, T. C., & Chen, J. (2022). Brand love and brand advocacy in higher education. *Journal of Business Research*, 139, 1355–1367. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.10.059>

- Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J. R., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.6.1>
- Peruta, A., & Shields, A. B. (2018). Social media in higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 28(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08841241.2018.1430794>
- Rather, R. A. (2021). Customer experience and engagement in service contexts. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 31(3), 396–421. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JSTP-04-2020-0070>
- Rather, R. A. (2022). Emotional experiences and brand loyalty: A service perspective. *Service Industries Journal*, 42(5–6), 363–386. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2021.1906434>
- Rather, R. A., Tehseen, S., & Parrey, S. H. (2023). Brand love and customer citizenship behavior. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 71, 103196. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2022.103196>
- Rauschnabel, P. A., Sheldon, P., & Herzfeldt, E. (2023). What motivates users to engage with brands in digital environments? *Journal of Business Research*, 156, 113479. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113479>
- Roberts, K. (2004). *Lovemarks: The future beyond brands*. PowerHouse Books.
- Zhao, X., Lynch, J. G., & Chen, Q. (2010). Reconsidering Baron and Kenny: Myths and truths about mediation analysis. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(2), 197–206. <https://doi.org/10.1086/651257>