



The influence of hybrid personal interaction and authentic content on customer emotional connection at bt batik trusmi cirebon

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received Apr 14, 2026
Revised Apr 21, 2026
Accepted May 02, 2026

Keywords:

Authentic Content;
Batik Trusmi;
Emotional Connection;
Hybrid Personal Interaction;
PLS-SEM.

ABSTRACT

This research sought to examine the influence of Hybrid Personal Interaction and Authentic Content on Customer Emotional Connection at BT Batik Trusmi Cirebon. The increasing integration of offline and digital channels has shifted customer interactions toward a hybrid experience, requiring firms to manage both service encounters and content authenticity simultaneously to maintain psychological bonds. A quantitative method utilizing a causal design was employed, involving 180 respondents selected via purposive sampling who had experienced both physical store visits and digital interactions. Data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The findings showed that the model had strong explanatory power, with an R^2 value of 0.687, meaning that Hybrid Personal Interaction and Authentic Content jointly explained 68.7% of the variance in Emotional Connection. Hybrid Personal Interaction demonstrated a powerful and noteworthy beneficial impact on Emotional Connection ($\beta = 0.792$, $p < 0.05$), making it the dominant predictor. Meanwhile, Authentic Content also had a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.094$, $p < 0.05$), although its contribution was relatively smaller. These findings suggested that emotional connections in heritage retail are primarily driven by responsive and empathetic service interactions across hybrid channels, while authentic content strengthens cultural value. This research adds to the relationship marketing literature by incorporating hybridity and authenticity in an omnichannel context.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The quick development of digital technology and the experience economy has fundamentally changed marketing practices, shifting the emphasis on long-term rather than transactional exchanges relationship building. This transformation is deeply rooted in the Commitment-Trust Theory of Relationship Marketing, which asserts that long-term

brand relationships are built through effective relational processes and consistent communication (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). In Indonesia, internet penetration was recorded at 78.19% in 2023, with an estimated 215.62 million internet users, The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association claims that (Lavinda, 2023). This figure highlights the significant role of digital channels in information search, interaction, and consumer decision-making in the local market. In line with this development, the sector of the creative economy has also demonstrated a strategic role; data from according to the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, the creative economy's GDP in 2022 reached IDR 1,280 trillion, suggesting that consumers increasingly demand added value in the form of experiences, meaning, and emotional closeness rather than merely commodities (Ahdiat, 2024). In this context, strengthening customer–brand relationships has become an important managerial issue, particularly for brands that carry cultural or heritage values.

This phenomenon is particularly relevant to BT Batik Trusmi in Cirebon, a large-scale batik retailer that faces a dilemma between business expansion and the preservation of sentimental cultural heritage values. The company's expansion is reflected in its profile as a major showroom covering approximately 1.5 hectares and collaborating with approximately 500 artisans (Wijayanti, 2020). Such a massive scale may broaden commercial reach; however, without consistent customer experience management, the brand risks being perceived as a “mass souvenir shop.” This makes building customers' emotional connection a priority for maintaining loyalty amid increasing competition (Yan et al., 2024). Conceptually, an emotional connection is an affective–cognitive link that unites the brand with the customer (Park et al., 2008). Unlike customer satisfaction, which primarily reflects cognitive evaluations of transactional experiences, or loyalty, which often manifests as behavioral persistence, emotional connection establishes a deeper affective-cognitive bond. In the context of heritage retail, where symbolic value and cultural identity are paramount, emotional connection serves as the essential psychological driver that elevates the brand relationship beyond mere utility, fostering a more meaningful and enduring engagement. Accordingly, this study is practically important in helping heritage retailers design customer experiences that preserve cultural value while remaining relevant to customers' increasingly hybrid (offline–online) interaction patterns. In line with this, (Elis & Keni, 2023) highlights that emotional attachment and consumer experience significantly influence customer loyalty, emphasizing the importance of managing customer experiences to strengthen emotional connections.

However, efforts to build customers' emotional connection face a theoretical challenge because empirical findings on its determinants remain inconsistent, particularly in the debate over the effectiveness of physical versus digital interactions. Several studies suggest that face-to-face service encounters have a dominant influence on emotional attachment (Kim et al., 2024), while other studies find that online interaction on social media may be more significant in shaping loyalty among modern consumers (Jiang et al., 2024). These mixed findings indicate a theoretical gap: an integrative model that unifies both forms of interaction into a single construct is still limited. Therefore, this study adopts the construct of Hybrid Personal Interaction, defined as service communication that integrates the personal touch of face-to-face encounters with the efficiency of digital channels to provide a smooth and responsive client experience.

Beyond the interaction dimension, the literature also reveals theoretical tensions regarding the impact of commercialization on perceived brand authenticity. The authenticity-tension perspective highlights that aggressive retail expansion may erode perceptions of artistic value (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024), while the human-artistry perspective emphasizes that content featuring artisans' stories can reduce negative effects and enhance credibility (Demmer et al., 2023). In heritage brand contexts,

authenticity becomes crucial because customers interpret products through originality and craftsmanship. While the extant literature in relationship marketing has extensively explored the drivers of emotional connection in either traditional offline retail or digital marketing separately, there remains a significant theoretical gap regarding their convergence. Existing studies often treat offline service encounters and digital content strategies as distinct silos, failing to account for the modern 'hybrid' customer journey. Consequently, it remains unclear how the interplay between physical human interaction and digital authenticity functions in unison to cultivate psychological bonds, especially in the context of cultural heritage retail. Addressing this, this research proposes and validates a novel integrative model that bridges the dichotomy between hybrid personal interaction and authentic content. By synthesizing these two constructs, this study makes a twofold contribution: first, it operationalizes 'Hybrid Personal Interaction' as a multidimensional construct; and second, it provides empirical evidence on how authentic content serves as a digital anchor for emotional connection, extending relationship marketing theories to the phygital era. Therefore, this study aims to examine the impact of Hybrid Personal Interaction and Authentic Content on Customer Emotional Connection at BT Batik Trusmi Cirebon.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a quantitative methodology to investigate the relationships among hybrid personal interaction, authentic content, and customers' emotional connection in the context of BT Batik Trusmi Cirebon. The research design is framed within the Omnichannel Theory, which emphasizes the importance of delivering a seamless customer experience across multiple integrated touchpoints (Gao & Huang, 2021). The unit of analysis consists of customers who have experienced both offline (physical store visits) and online interactions (digital platforms), reflecting a hybrid customer journey.

A method of non-probability sampling was applied using purposeful sampling in order to ensure that respondents fulfilled certain requirements. According to the screening requirements, participants had to have visited the physical store and interacted with BT Batik Trusmi's social media platforms. The populace is treated as infinite due to the unknown total number of customers. The sample size was determined based on the 10-times rule in Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), this suggests a sample size that is at least ten times the number of indicators used to gauge the constructions (Hair et al., 2021). With 18 indicators in the model, this study collected data from 180 eligible respondents. The sample selection was purposive, resulting in a dataset where 89.44% of respondents fall within the 17–25 age range. While this demographic represents the primary digital-savvy audience engaging with the brand's hybrid content, it is important to acknowledge that this concentration may introduce potential sampling bias. Consequently, the generalizability of these findings to older demographics should be approached with caution, and future research is recommended to employ a more stratified sampling approach across diverse age groups.

An online structured questionnaire was used to gather primary data. A five-point Likert scale was used to quantify each construct's measurement indicators, which were modified from well-known literature. The constructs in this study include hybrid personal interaction, authentic content, and customers' emotional connection. The conceptual relationship between these variables is illustrated in the research framework in Figure 1.

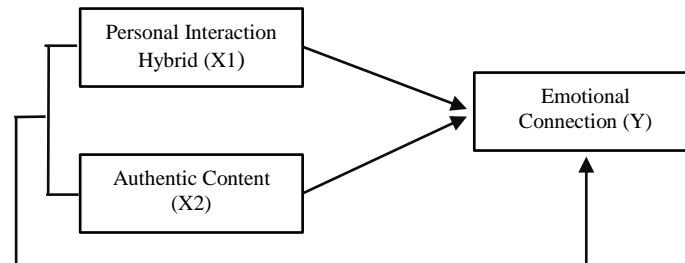


Figure 1. Research Framework

Hybrid personal interaction was measured using service encounter dimensions, including responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (Zeithaml et al., 2018). Authentic content was assessed through authenticity dimensions, namely originality, exceptionality, and referentiality (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Lastly, customers' emotional connection was operationalized using three dimensions: affection, passion, and connection (Park et al., 2008).

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS SEM) with SmartPLS 4 software was used to evaluate the data. A two-stage evaluation approach was used for the analysis: the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model) (Hair Jr et al., 2021 ; Rahadi, 2023). The measuring model was evaluated using indicator reliability, internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability), convergent validity (AVE), and discriminant validity (HTMT). The structural model was assessed using path coefficients, coefficient of determination (R^2), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2) through a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples and a significance level of 0.05 (Hair Jr et al., 2021).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Respondent Profile

This study analyzed data from 180 responders who satisfied the requirements as customers of BT Batik Trusmi Cirebon with hybrid experience, meaning they had interacted with the brand through both offline (physical store) and online (digital channels) platforms.

According to the demographic data, women made up the majority of responders. (112; 62.22%), compared to male respondents (68; 37.78%). The majority of respondents were between the ages of 17 and 25 (169; 93.89%), followed by those aged 26–35 years (5; 2.78%), 36–45 years (3; 1.67%), and 46–55 years (3; 1.67%). Regarding occupation status, the majority were students (161; 89.44%), followed by private employees (12; 6.67%), civil servants (2; 1.11%), entrepreneurs (2; 1.11%), housewives (2; 1.11%), and others (1; 0.56%).

Beyond demographic characteristics, the data confirm respondents' alignment with the study context. All respondents reported having visited the physical store (180; 100%) and having viewed or interacted with BT Batik Trusmi's social media (180; 100%). Therefore, the sample fully satisfies the defined unit of analysis, namely customers with hybrid experience.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics (n = 180)

Category	Response	n	%
Gender	Female	112	62,22%
	Male	68	37,78%
Age	17 – 25 years	169	93,89%
	26 – 35 years	5	2,78%
	36 – 45 years	3	1,67%
	46 – 55 years	3	1,67%

Occupation	Student	161	89,44%
	Private employee	12	6,67%
	Civil servant	2	1,11%
	Entrepreneur	2	1,11%
	Housewife	2	1,11%
	Others	1	0,56%
Visited physical store	Yes	180	100%
	No	0	0%
Interacted with social media (IG/TikTok)	Yes	180	100%
	No	0	0%

3.2 Measurement Model Evaluation (outer model)

The measurement model was assessed to ensure that the indicators reliably and validly measure the research constructs. All constructs in this research hybrid personal interaction, authentic content, and customers' emotional connection were specified as reflective constructs. Indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were all evaluated as part of the outer model.

3.3 Indicator Reliability (outer loadings)

Outer loading values were used to evaluate the indicator's reliability. The results show that all indicators exhibit very high outer loadings and meet the suggested cutoff; consequently, all indicators were retained in the model. Specifically, the outer loadings ranged from 0.945 to 0.987 for hybrid personal interaction (X1), 0.942 to 0.981 for authentic content (X2), and 0.978 to 0.992 for customers' emotional connection (Y). These results show that every indicator significantly contributes to representing its underlying construct.

Table 2. Outer lodings of measurement items

Construct	Item	Outer loading	Decision
X1	X1.1	0.987	Retained
X1	X1.2	0.945	Retained
X1	X1.3	0.987	Retained
X1	X1.4	0.969	Retained
X1	X1.5	0.972	Retained
X1	X1.6	0.983	Retained
X2	X2.1	0.981	Retained
X2	X2.2	0.976	Retained
X2	X2.3	0.942	Retained
X2	X2.4	0.962	Retained
X2	X2.5	0.966	Retained
X2	X2.6	0.969	Retained
Y	Y1	0.980	Retained
Y	Y2	0.984	Retained
Y	Y3	0.978	Retained
Y	Y4	0.992	Retained
Y	Y5	0.982	Retained
Y	Y6	0.988	Retained

3.4 Internal Consistency Reliability (cronbach's alpha and composite reliability)

The consistency of indicators used to measure each concept was evaluated using internal consistency reliability. The findings show that every construct has outstanding reliability. Hybrid personal interaction shows a Cronbach's alpha of 0.989 and composite reliability (CR) of 0.991. Authentic content has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.986 and CR of

0.988. Customers' emotional connection presents a Cronbach's alpha of 0.993 and CR of 0.995. Overall, these findings support the validity of each component.

Table 3. Internal consistency reliability

Construct	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (CR)	Conclusion
X1	0.989	0.991	Reliable
X2	0.986	0.988	Reliable
Y	0.993	0.995	Reliable

3.5 Convergent Validity (average variance extracted)

Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was used to evaluate convergent validity. The AVE values were 0.948 for hybrid personal interaction (X1), 0.933 for authentic content (X2), and 0.968 for customers' emotional connection (Y). All AVE values exceed the recommended minimum threshold, indicating adequate convergent validity. These findings imply that each construct's indicators explain a substantial proportion of the construct variance.

Table 4. Convergent validity (AVE)

Construct	AVE	Criterion	Conclusion
X1	0.948	≥ 0,50	Valid
X2	0.933	≥ 0,50	Valid
Y	0.968	≥ 0,50	Valid

3.6 Discriminant Validity (HTMT)

To make sure that each construct is conceptually unique, discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait–Monotrait ratio (HTMT). All construct pairs' HTMT values fell short of the suggested threshold: X1–X2 = 0.350, X1–Y = 0.831, and X2–Y = 0.371. These results indicate that all constructs satisfy discriminant validity and that there is no substantial conceptual overlap among the constructs.

Table 5. Discriminant validity (HTMT)

Construct pair	HTMT	Criterion	Conclusion
X1 – X2	0,350	< 0,90	Satisfied
X1 – Y	0,831	< 0,90	Satisfied
X2 – Y	0,371	< 0,90	Satisfied

Based on the series of measurement model evaluations, we find that the measurement model meets the necessary validity and reliability requirements. As a result, the analysis can go on to the structural model's evaluation.

3.7 Structural Model Evaluation (inner model)

The purpose of the structural model evaluation is to test the study hypotheses and evaluate the quality of the links between the latent constructs in the suggested model. This stage includes the assessment of multicollinearity, coefficient of determination (R^2), hypothesis testing via bootstrapping, effect size (f^2), and the model's predictive capability (Q^2).

3.8 Multicollinearity Assessment (VIF)

Multicollinearity was assessed to ensure that the exogenous constructs do not have excessively high correlations when predicting the endogenous construct. The results show that the VIF values for the paths X1 → Y and X2 → Y are both 1.136. These

numbers show that multicollinearity is not an issue in this model because they are below the widely accepted threshold.

Table 6. Collinearity statistics (VIF)

Path	VIF	Criterion
X1 → Y	1,136	< 5,00
X2 → Y	1,136	< 5,00

3.9 Coefficient of Determination (R^2)

The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to assess the explanatory power of the exogenous constructs in predicting the endogenous construct. The results show that customers' emotional connection (Y) has an R^2 value of 0.687 and an adjusted R^2 of 0.684. This indicates that the combined effects of hybrid personal interaction (X1) and authentic content (X2) explain 68.7% of the variance in customers' emotional connection, whereas variables not included in the study model account for the remaining variance.

Table 7. R-square

Endogenous construct	R-square	R-square Adjusted
Y (Customers' emotional connection)	0,687	0,684

3.10 Hypothesis Testing (Bootstrapping: β , t, and p)

A bootstrapping approach was used for hypothesis testing in order to assess the path coefficients' relevance. The results show that hybrid personal interaction (X1) has a positive and significant effect on customers' emotional connection (Y) ($\beta = 0.792$; $t = 26.536$; $p < 0.001$), supporting H1. In addition, authentic content (X2) also has a positive and significant effect on customers' emotional connection ($\beta = 0.094$; $t = 2.891$; $p = 0.004$), supporting H2. Overall, both exogenous constructs significantly enhance customers' emotional connection; however, the effect of X1 is substantially stronger than that of X2. The dominant influence of Hybrid Personal Interaction stems from its human-centric nature—specifically its dimensions of responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. While authentic content provides a passive foundation, personal interaction creates a two-way dialogue. In heritage retail, this real-time, personalized exchange bridges the gap between digital accessibility and cultural tradition; it allows customers to feel 'seen' and 'understood' in a way that static content cannot, thereby accelerating emotional attachment more effectively.

Table 8. Hypothesis testing results (bootstrapping)

Hypothesis	Path	β	t-statistics	p-values	Decision
H1	X1 → Y	0,792	26,536	0,000	Supported
H2	X2 → Y	0,094	2,891	0,004	Supported

Figure 2 provides an overview of the PLS-SEM model, including the path coefficients and the R^2 value.

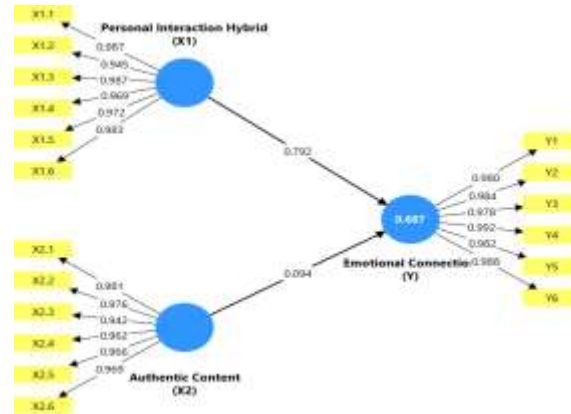


Figure 2. Research Model (SmartPLS Output)

a. Effect Size (f^2)

Effect size (f^2) was evaluated to see how much each foreign construct contributed to the endogenous construct. The results show that the effect size for the path $X1 \rightarrow Y$ is 1.765, indicating a large (very strong) effect. In contrast, the effect size for the path $X2 \rightarrow Y$ is 0.025, indicating a small effect. These findings suggest that hybrid personal interaction contributes far more strongly to customers' emotional connection than authentic content, even though both relationships are statistically significant.

Path	f^2	Category
$X1 \rightarrow Y$	1,765	Large (very strong)
$X2 \rightarrow Y$	0,025	Small

b. Predictive Assessment (PLSpredict)

The model's predictive performance was as-sessed using PLSpredict. The results show that all indicators of customers' emotional connection (Y) have Q^2 predict values greater than zero, ranging from approximately 0.638 to 0.687, demonstrating the predictive relevance of the model. Furthermore, the comparison of prediction errors demonstrates that the RMSE and MAE values of the PLS-SEM model are lower than those of the benchmark linear model (LM) across all indicators. Therefore, the PLS-SEM model exhibits superior predictive performance.

Table 10. PLSpredict summary (MV summary)

Indikator	Q^2 predict	PLS-SEM RMSE	PLS-SEM MAE	LM RMSE	LM MAE	Conclusion
Y1	0,687	0,519	0,386	0,533	0,391	PLS-SEM performs better
Y2	0,659	0,559	0,425	0,570	0,432	PLS-SEM performs better
Y3	0,662	0,549	0,404	0,569	0,415	PLS-SEM performs better
Y4	0,662	0,551	0,408	0,557	0,412	PLS-SEM performs better
Y5	0,638	0,582	0,425	0,626	0,457	PLS-SEM performs better
Y6	0,667	0,539	0,402	0,577	0,429	PLS-SEM performs better

Overall, the model indicates strong explanatory power ($R^2 = 0.687$). Hypothesis testing confirms that both hybrid personal interaction and authentic content have positive and significant effects on customers' emotional connection. However, hybrid personal interaction exerts a substantially stronger influence than authentic content, as indicated by the path coefficients and effect sizes (f^2). The model also shows predictive relevance, as all $Q^2_{predict}$ values are positive.

3.11 Discussion

a. The Effect of Hybrid Personal Interaction on Emotional Connection

This high coefficient suggests that integrated personal interaction is the primary predictor of emotional bonds at BT Batik Trusmi. These findings align with (Saptono, 2022), who emphasizes that high-quality customer service is fundamentally linked to emotional attachment. This result is also supported by (Sasmita, 2024), who found that service quality significantly influences emotional attachment in an omnichannel context, reinforcing the importance of integrated service interactions in building customer emotional bonds. The "human touch" provided by empathetic staff, as measured through responsiveness and assurance (Zeithaml et al., 2018), combined with digital efficiency, creates a seamless experience that reinforces loyalty (Afiftama & Nasir, 2024). Furthermore, this study supports the view of (Andika et al., 2024) that omnichannel properties and channel integration enhance affective engagement. In a heritage context, this interaction allows customers to feel a sense of unity and oneness with the brand (Canto & Vallejo-Martín, 2021), successfully bridging the gap between digital convenience and tangible tradition.

b. Effect of Authentic Content on Emotional Connection

Authentic Content was also discovered to have a favorable and substantial impact on Emotional Connection ($\beta = 0.094$; $p = 0.004$). Although its impact is smaller, it remains a crucial "cultural anchor." This is consistent with (Nasrul et al., 2023), who argue that brand authenticity is a key driver of "Brand Love" in heritage settings. Content that highlights craftsmanship and originality allows customers to perceive the brand as genuine, a factor that (Kalyana, 2025) identifies as critical for the success of Indonesian fashion brands. Moreover, storytelling through digital platforms builds brand intimacy (Prayoga & Novandari, 2024) and mitigates the perceived distance caused by commercial expansion (Demmer et al., 2023). However, the small effect size indicates that while content builds credibility, it must be supported by excellent service, especially as heritage brands face increasing challenges in maintaining innovative yet authentic values amidst modern retail transformations (Wahyuni & Astuti, 2025).

c. Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, this study enriches relationship marketing by integrating hybridity and authenticity within an omnichannel framework. It proves that emotional connection is a relational outcome of both what is communicated and how it is managed across touchpoints. Practically, the management of BT Batik Trusmi must prioritize staff training in empathy and digital responsiveness to maintain the "human touch" identified by (Zeithaml et al., 2018) as a core service dimension. This balanced approach ensures that the brand remains culturally relevant while scaling its business operations. Our findings suggest that for the dominant 17–25 age demographic, emotional connection is driven by a 'phygital' perception of heritage. This group links traditional craftsmanship with digital accessibility, implying that their emotional bond is formed when cultural narratives are seamlessly integrated into their interactive digital lifestyles.

The study suggests that BT Batik Trusmi should adopt an integrated 'phygital' omnichannel strategy. By aligning frontline service encounters with consistent, artisan-

focused digital storytelling, the brand can humanize its presence, transforming the retail space into an experiential hub that fosters long-term loyalty through shared cultural appreciation.

4. CONCLUSION

This research comes to the conclusion that Hybrid Personal Interaction and Authentic Content have a favorable and substantial effect on Customer Emotional Connection at BT Batik Trusmi Cirebon. Hybrid Personal Interaction emerges as the most dominant factor, indicating that the integration of warm, face-to-face service in showrooms with responsive digital communication is the primary driver of emotional intimacy in heritage retail. While Authentic Content has a smaller effect, it remains a crucial "cultural anchor" that preserves brand identity and credibility amidst commercial expansion.

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the extension of the Commitment-Trust Theory within an omnichannel framework for heritage brands. By identifying Hybrid Personal Interaction and Authentic Content as primary drivers of emotional connection, this research shifts the relationship marketing paradigm from a binary choice between online and offline channels to a unified 'hybrid' perspective. This study empirically demonstrates that for heritage retail, the synergy between human-centric service and digital authenticity is the foundational requisite for building long-term emotional loyalty, thereby providing a novel theoretical lens for managing brand relationships in the digital era.

Strategically, management should prioritize the 'humanization' of the hybrid customer experience. This involves two core actions: first, training frontline staff to act as 'digital brand ambassadors' who mirror the responsiveness and empathy customers expect from online platforms, thereby ensuring a seamless experience across all touchpoints. Second, management must integrate artisan-led storytelling into both physical showrooms and digital platforms. By using authentic content as a consistent cultural anchor, the brand can foster emotional intimacy, transforming the retail experience from a mere transaction into a meaningful cultural journey.

This study is limited by its focus on a specific demographic (primarily aged 17–25) and its cross-sectional design. Future research should involve a broader range of age groups and consider longitudinal methods to capture the long-term evolution of emotional connection. Furthermore, adding elements like brand love or trust could offer a more thorough comprehension of relationship marketing in the context of heritage multichannel.

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