

EMOTIONAL BRANDING AS A MARKETING STRATEGY: ANALYZING ITS EFFECT ON SMARTPHONE PURCHASE DECISIONS AMONG GEN Z

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Abstract: Emotional branding has become a vital strategy for companies aiming to build strong consumer relationships, especially in the smartphone industry where technical features alone are insufficient to influence purchase behavior. However, limited quantitative studies have examined its direct effect on Generation Z in Indonesia. This study investigates the influence of emotional branding on smartphone purchase decisions among Gen Z consumers. A quantitative approach was applied, with data collected from 129 respondents using structured questionnaires. Descriptive results show that most respondents perceive emotional branding positively, indicating its important role in shaping purchase considerations. Simple linear regression analysis reveals that emotional branding significantly affects purchase decisions ($\beta = 0.850$, $t = 18.216$, $p < 0.001$), with a coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.723$), meaning that 72.3% of the variance in purchase decisions can be explained by emotional branding. The findings highlight that emotional elements such as brand personality, storytelling, and consumer attachment are crucial in driving purchase decisions. Practically, this study suggests that smartphone marketers should strengthen emotional-based strategies to create deeper consumer engagement.

Keywords: emotional branding, purchase decision, smartphone, Generation Z, consumer behavior

1. Introduction

In the highly competitive smartphone market, technical specifications, hardware performance, and pricing have long been considered the dominant factors influencing consumer choice. However, recent studies suggest that these functional attributes are no longer sufficient to capture the preferences of younger generations, particularly Generation Z, who were born between 1997 and 2012. This consumer group tends to evaluate brands not only by what products can do, but also by how ownership makes them feel, how it aligns with their self-identity, and how it communicates social values (Yang, Rahman, Al-Ainati, et al., 2025). For Gen Z, a smartphone is not merely a communication device but a symbol of lifestyle, social status, and emotional attachment.

One of the key marketing strategies that addresses this shift is emotional branding. According to Gobé (2001), emotional branding is a paradigm that emphasizes building emotional connections between consumers and brands through sensory experiences, imagination, relationships, and vision. These dimensions are designed to go beyond functional benefits, cultivating loyalty and trust by appealing to consumers' deeper emotional needs. This theoretical framework resonates with consumer behavior models such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) and the Stimulus Organism Response (S-O-R) model, both of which highlight the role of emotional and affective responses in shaping consumer decision-making. Emotional branding thus acts as a stimulus that influences attitudes and internal states, ultimately leading to behavioral responses such as purchase decisions.

Over the past decade, a growing body of research has examined the role of emotional branding and emotional value in shaping consumer behavior across industries. Yeoh and Cokki (2024), for instance, found that brand awareness and perceived emotional value significantly influenced smartphone purchase intentions in Jakarta, while functional and social values were less dominant. Similarly, Farizy and Harsoyo (2023) demonstrated that emotional branding, together with electronic word of mouth and brand characteristics, significantly affected fashion product purchasing decisions on e-commerce platforms. Wang, Guo, and Ding (2025) further confirmed the impact of emotional appeals in smartphone advertising, revealing that emotional advertisements were more effective than functional or neutral ones in driving purchase intention. Studies on brand loyalty also suggest that emotional branding dimensions such as sensory experiences, storytelling, and relationships contribute strongly to long-term consumer commitment (Francisca, 2015).

Despite these insights, important gaps remain in the literature. Much of the prior research focuses on purchase intentions rather than actual purchase decisions, leaving a gap in understanding the full decision-making process, which includes problem recognition, evaluation of alternatives, decision, and post-purchase behavior. Furthermore, while emotional branding has been widely studied in categories such as fashion, cosmetics, and services, fewer studies have examined its effects specifically within the smartphone industry, a high-involvement product category where emotional attachment and brand identity play crucial roles. In addition, there is limited empirical evidence on which dimensions of emotional branding are most influential for Gen Z smartphone consumers, particularly in non-Western markets such as Indonesia.

Given these gaps, this study aims to analyze the effect of emotional branding as a marketing strategy on smartphone purchase decisions among Generation Z. By focusing on this demographic, the research seeks to identify not only whether emotional branding significantly influences decisions, but also which dimensions are most effective in shaping consumer choices. Such insights are expected to provide both theoretical contributions to the field of consumer behavior and practical recommendations for marketers in the smartphone industry to refine their branding strategies and better engage the Gen Z market.

2. Literature Review

Emotional Branding

The concept of emotional branding was first introduced by Gobe (2001) as a marketing approach that emphasizes creating an emotional connection between consumers and brands. This strategy differs from traditional branding approaches that focus primarily on the rational functions of a product. Emotional branding aims to evoke feelings, experiences, and emotional associations that strengthen consumer loyalty. Recent studies confirm that emotional branding plays a crucial role in building brand love, brand trust, and brand loyalty (Iglesias et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2022).

In the context of smartphones, emotional branding can be manifested through product design, user experience, advertising communication styles, and brand engagement with social issues relevant to younger consumers (Kumar & Kaushik, 2018). Thus, emotional branding is not merely about visual differentiation but about cultivating psychological and emotional bonds with consumers.

Generation Z as Consumers

Generation Z, referring to those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s, is widely recognized as a digital-native cohort highly accustomed to technology (Francis & Hoefel, 2018). For them, smartphones are not only communication tools but also symbols of lifestyle, self-expression, and social identity. Studies show that Generation Z tends to be more influenced by emotional factors, experiences, and brand values rather than solely by technical product functions (Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017).

This makes Generation Z a primary target market for smartphone companies. They expect brands to deliver not only quality products but also emotional messages aligned with their aspirations. In other words, smartphone purchase decisions among Generation Z are largely determined by the extent to which brands can build meaningful emotional connections.

Emotional Branding and Purchase Decision

Purchase decision is the final stage of the consumer's psychological process, involving cognitive, affective, and conative considerations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Emotional branding exerts a strong influence on the affective stage in the Hierarchy of Effects Model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), where consumers form positive emotional attitudes toward a brand before making a purchase.

A growing body of research supports the role of emotional branding in influencing purchase decisions. Hwang and Kandampully (2012) found that emotional attachment strengthens customer loyalty in the service industry. In the smartphone industry, Kumar and Kaushik (2018) identified that brand experience and brand identification driven by emotional factors positively affect consumer-brand relationships. Similarly, Wang et al. (2022) demonstrated that emotional branding enhances purchase intentions and fosters long-term consumer engagement in the smartphone market.

Moreover, the Consumer-Brand Emotional Attachment theory (Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005) posits that consumers' emotional attachment to brands increases purchase intention and fosters long-term loyalty. This is consistent with recent findings in the digital era, where consumers more easily internalize brand values through emotional campaigns on social media (Hudson et al., 2016).

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the notion that emotional branding strategies are capable of building strong emotional ties between brands and consumers. In the smartphone context particularly for Generation Z, who are more emotionally driven, digital-native, and view smartphones as extensions of their identity emotional branding is expected to exert a significant influence on purchase decisions.

The conceptual framework of this study suggests that the stronger the implementation of emotional branding, encompassing sensory experiences, imagination, and emotional relationships between consumers and brands, the higher the likelihood that Generation Z will decide to purchase a specific smartphone brand. Accordingly, emotional branding serves as the independent variable, while smartphone purchase decision among Generation Z functions as the dependent variable.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

Research Gap and Hypothesis

Although the importance of emotional branding has been widely discussed in the literature, several research gaps remain. First, most prior studies have focused on industries such as services, fashion, and cosmetics (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012; Farizy & Harsoyo, 2023), while research in the smartphone industry, a high-involvement product category remains relatively limited. Yet, in this context, brand identity and emotional attachment play a crucial role in shaping consumer decisions.

Second, many studies emphasize purchase intention rather than actual purchase decision (Kotler & Keller, 2016; Wang et al., 2022). However, purchase decision represents the final and more complex stage of consumer psychology, encompassing alternative evaluation and final decision-making.

Third, although Generation Z has been recognized as a potential market segment with unique characteristics in forming emotional brand relationships (Francis & Hoefel, 2018; Priporas, Stylos, & Fotiadis, 2017), empirical evidence on how emotional branding influences smartphone purchase decisions among this generation, particularly in developing countries such as Indonesia, is still scarce.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to analyze the impact of emotional branding as a marketing strategy on smartphone purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers.

Hypothesis:

- H1: Emotional branding has a positive and significant effect on smartphone purchase decisions among Generation Z.

3. Method

Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach with a causal research design, which aims to examine the influence of independent variables on dependent variables (Sugiyono, 2019; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The quantitative approach was chosen because the research focuses on measuring the relationship between variables using numerical data and statistical analysis. The independent variable in this study is emotional branding, while the dependent variable is purchase decision.

The population of the study consists of Generation Z consumers who use smartphones, with a total sample of 129 respondents. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*), designed to capture the level of agreement of respondents toward the given statements. The emotional branding variable was measured using four indicators, while the purchase decision variable was also measured with four indicators. The relatively concise number of items was intended to keep respondents focused and avoid survey fatigue.

For data analysis, simple linear regression was applied to examine the direct effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (Gujarati & Porter, 2012; Ghozali, 2018). The analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26.

Prior to regression testing, descriptive analysis was performed to provide an overview of the data distribution, including mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for each variable (Nazir, 2014; Ferdinand, 2014). This analysis was intended to give an initial understanding of respondents' tendencies regarding the studied variables.

Next, classical assumption tests were conducted to ensure the validity of the regression model. The normality test was performed using both graphical (Normal P-P Plot) and statistical approaches (Kolmogorov-Smirnov test) (Ghozali, 2018). Data were considered normally distributed if the points on the P-P Plot spread closely around the diagonal line and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov significance value exceeded 0.05.

The heteroscedasticity test was carried out using a residual scatterplot against predicted values and the Glejser test, by regressing the independent variable on the absolute residual values (Nachrowi & Usman, 2006; Ghozali, 2018). If the scatterplot showed a random distribution above and below the horizontal axis without a specific pattern, and the Glejser test significance value was greater than 0.05, the data were considered free from heteroscedasticity.

After fulfilling the classical assumptions, the simple linear regression test was conducted to evaluate the research hypothesis: whether emotional branding has a positive and significant influence on purchase decisions. The regression results were interpreted through the regression coefficient, *t*-value, and significance value.

Overall, this research methodology was designed to ensure empirically reliable findings. By following regression analysis procedures and classical assumption tests as outlined by Ghozali (2018) and Gujarati & Porter (2012), the study is expected to produce valid evidence on the effect of emotional branding on smartphone purchase decisions among Generation Z consumers.

4. Result and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

Before conducting regression analysis, descriptive statistics were presented to provide an overview of the research variables. Table 1 shows the descriptive results for the variables Emotional Branding and Purchase Decision.

Table 1. Result of Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Minimum	Maksimum	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emotional Branding	4	20	17.02	3.02
Purchase Decision	4	20	17.02	3.11

Source : Processed Data, 2025

The results indicate that the mean value of Emotional Branding is 17.02, while the mean value of Purchase Decision is 16.97, suggesting that respondents' perceptions of both variables tend to be high. Furthermore, respondents' responses were categorized into three levels: Poor, Fair, and Good (Table 2).

Table 2. Categorization of Respondent's Responses

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Emotional Branding	Poor	6	4.70%
	Fair	5	3.90%
	Good	118	91.50%
Purchase Decision	Poor	5	3.90%
	Fair	12	9.30%
	Good	112	86.80%

Source : Processed Data, 2025

The findings demonstrate that the majority of respondents rated both Emotional Branding and Purchase Decision in the “Good” category. This indicates that emotional branding strategies in smartphone products are well received by consumers, particularly Generation Z, and are positively correlated with higher purchase decisions.

Classical Assumption Test

Normality Test

Residual normality was examined using the Normal P–P Plot. As illustrated in Figure 1, the residual points do not perfectly follow the diagonal line, although their distribution remains close to it, indicating a slight deviation from normality.

The Kolmogorov–Smirnov test yielded a significance value of 0.000 (< 0.05), which statistically suggests non-normal distribution. However, given the sufficiently large sample size ($n = 129$), this deviation is considered acceptable. Hair et al. (2019) emphasize that for large samples, graphical inspection is more reliable than statistical testing, as the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test is highly sensitive to sample size. Accordingly, based on the Central Limit Theorem (CLT), the normality assumption was deemed fulfilled in this study.

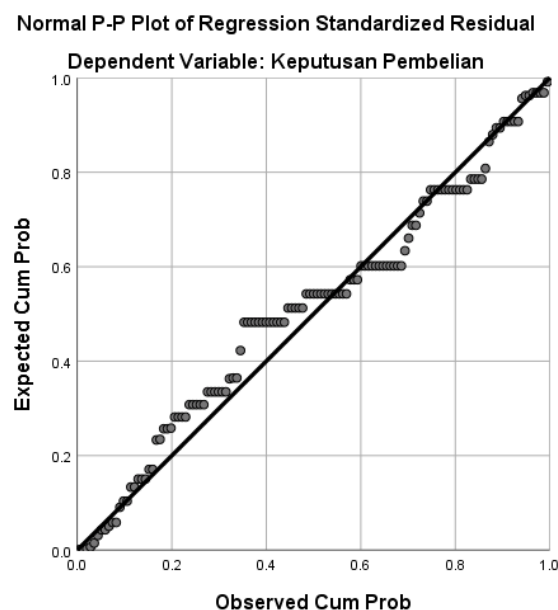


Figure 2: Normal P–P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
Source: Processed Data, 2025

Heteroscedasticity Test

Heteroskedasticity was assessed using a scatterplot of residuals against predicted values. Figure 2 shows that the residual points are randomly dispersed above and below the horizontal axis without forming any discernible pattern. This suggests the absence of heteroskedasticity in the model.

This conclusion was further supported by the Glejser test, which produced a significance value of 0.837 (> 0.05). Based on both approaches, it can be concluded that the regression model is free from heteroskedasticity.

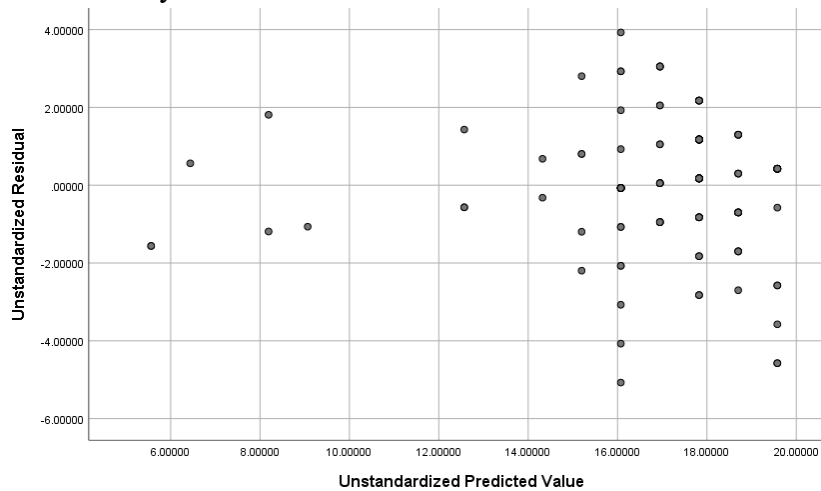


Figure 3: Scatterplot Residual vs Predicted Value
 Source: Processed Data, 2025

Simple Linear Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression was employed to test the effect of Emotional Branding on Purchase Decision. The summary of the model is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Model Summary

Model	R	R Square
1	0.85	0.723

Source : Processed Data, 2025

The R Square value of 0.723 indicates that Emotional Branding explains 72.3% of the variance in Purchase Decision, while the remaining 27.7% is explained by other factors outside the model. This value is categorized as high, suggesting that Emotional Branding has strong predictive power for Purchase Decision.

Table 4. ANOVA Results

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	895.233	1	895.233	331.816	0.000
Residual	342.643	127	2.698		
Total	1237.876	128			

Source : Processed Data, 2025

The ANOVA results show an F-value of 331.816 with $p < 0.001$, indicating that the regression model is statistically significant. This confirms that Emotional Branding has a significant overall effect on Purchase Decision.

Based on these results, the regression equation can be formulated as follows:

$$\text{Purchase Decision} = 2.059 + 0.876 (\text{Emotional Branding})$$

This equation indicates that for every one-unit increase in Emotional Branding, Purchase Decision increases by 0.876 units. The standardized beta coefficient of 0.850 further confirms that Emotional Branding exerts a very strong influence on Purchase Decision.

Table 5. Regression Coefficients

	Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Beta	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error			
1	(Constant)	2.059	0.831		2.477	0.015
	Emotional Branding	0.876	0.048	0.850	18.216	0.000

Source : Processed Data, 2025

Discussion

The findings of this study empirically demonstrate that Emotional Branding has a positive and significant effect on purchase decisions of smartphones among Generation Z consumers. The coefficient of determination (R^2) of 72.3% indicates that the majority of the variance in purchase decisions can be explained by emotional factors embedded in branding. This suggests that rational aspects such as price or technical specifications are no longer the sole or dominant considerations for consumers, particularly Gen Z. Instead, emotional attachment to the brand plays a more decisive role.

The emotional dimensions of branding examined in this study such as emotional attachment, brand personality, storytelling, and brand experience were found to significantly shape consumer perceptions and beliefs. These findings are consistent with Sasmita and Suki (2015), who argue that emotional brand attachment is a key determinant in purchase decision-making among young consumers. Similarly, Yoo and MacInnis (2018) confirm that emotion-driven branding strategies strengthen the psychological bond between consumers and brands, thereby enhancing purchase intentions and ultimately influencing actual purchase behavior.

Furthermore, this study reinforces the perspective of Priporas et al. (2017), who highlight that Generation Z is more responsive to emotional messages, authentic brand narratives, and interactive digital experiences. Growing up in a digital environment characterized by high exposure to visual and emotional stimuli, this generation values brands that offer not only functional products but also values, identity, and experiences relevant to their lives. In the increasingly saturated smartphone market, where technical features tend to be homogeneous across brands, emotional branding serves as a critical differentiation strategy that enables brands to stand out from competitors.

The practical implications of these findings are significant. Smartphone companies should design marketing strategies that not only emphasize functional advantages but also cultivate emotional bonds with consumers. Approaches such as emotionally engaging storytelling, immersive brand experiences, and the creation of brand personalities aligned with Gen Z values may serve as key success factors in capturing consumer loyalty. More importantly, these

strategies have the potential to foster long-term brand loyalty, since emotional attachment often endures longer than mere functional satisfaction.

In conclusion, the proposed hypothesis is supported: Emotional Branding has a positive and significant impact on smartphone purchase decisions among Generation Z. This not only strengthens existing literature but also provides practical contributions for marketing managers in formulating strategies relevant to the dynamics of modern consumers.

5. Conclusions

This study provides empirical evidence that emotional branding exerts a positive and significant influence on the purchase decision of smartphones among Generation Z consumers. The findings demonstrate that emotional factors such as brand attachment, storytelling, brand personality, and user experience play a dominant role in shaping consumer decisions, explaining 72.3% of the variation in purchase behavior. This indicates that, for Generation Z, purchasing decisions are no longer driven solely by functional attributes such as price or technical specifications, but are strongly shaped by the psychological and emotional bonds established with the brand. Such results reinforce the theoretical perspective that emotional branding serves not only as a differentiation strategy but also as a critical determinant of consumer loyalty and long-term engagement.

At the practical level, these findings highlight the importance for smartphone companies to design marketing strategies that prioritize emotional connection with consumers. Firms are recommended to develop campaigns that integrate authentic storytelling, foster immersive brand experiences, and project a brand personality aligned with the values and aspirations of Generation Z. By doing so, companies can create stronger consumer-brand relationships that lead not only to higher purchase decisions but also to sustainable loyalty. Moreover, leveraging digital platforms and social media as emotional touchpoints will be crucial in reaching this generation of digital natives. Future studies are recommended to expand this research by including cross-generational comparisons or exploring additional variables such as brand trust and social influence, which may further enrich the understanding of emotional branding's impact on consumer behavior.

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