
Content is King: The Economic Impact of Powerful Narratives in Driving Brand Engagement and Consumer Value

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Abstract:

This study investigates the impact of a powerful narrative on brand engagement among Tokopedia users, focusing on the mediating roles of customer perception and content engagement. Using a quantitative research design and structural equation modeling (SEM) via Smart PLS, data were collected from 150 management students in Bandar Lampung who use the Tokopedia platform. The findings reveal that emotional engagement and message consistency significantly enhance the perception of a powerful narrative, which in turn positively influences customer perception and content engagement. Both customer perception and content engagement serve as critical mediators, amplifying the narrative's effect on brand engagement. These results suggest that a well-crafted narrative, reinforced by emotional resonance and message consistency, can deepen customer loyalty and advocacy by fostering favorable perceptions and active engagement with brand content. This study highlights the importance for e-commerce platforms like Tokopedia to leverage emotionally engaging and consistent narratives to enhance customer relationships and secure a competitive advantage in digital markets.

Keywords: Brand Engagement; Powerful Narrative; Customer Perception; Content Engagement

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1. Introduction

In today's digital landscape, creating compelling content narratives is increasingly vital for fostering brand engagement. The concept "Content is King" emphasizes that well-constructed narratives not only inform but also connect with audiences on an emotional level, enhancing brand loyalty and trust. Research suggests that authentic, story-driven content can significantly boost consumer engagement by fostering a sense of trust and relevance (Müller & Christandl, 2019). Furthermore, studies on content marketing highlight that both message consistency and emotional resonance are critical indicators influencing how audiences perceive and engage with brands online. As consumer engagement becomes more nuanced, integrating powerful narratives that align with user values becomes essential to build sustained brand interactions.

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Researching brand engagement through powerful content narratives on Tokopedia provides valuable insights into how narrative-driven content influences consumer behavior. In a highly competitive marketplace, Tokopedia's strategy to foster engagement often relies on interactive content, including gamification features that enhance user immersion, achievement, and social interaction (Maruta, 2020). These features not only increase brand engagement but also drive consumers toward purchase decisions, as engagement can bridge users' emotional and cognitive connections with the platform, ultimately fostering loyalty (Laudon & Traver, 2022; Müller & Christandl, 2019). For instance, using gamification elements like virtual rewards encourages users to return and engage frequently, effectively creating a narrative experience where users feel connected and invested in Tokopedia's brand identity. This alignment of storytelling with interactive elements on Tokopedia shows that powerful content narratives significantly influence user retention and purchase intent.

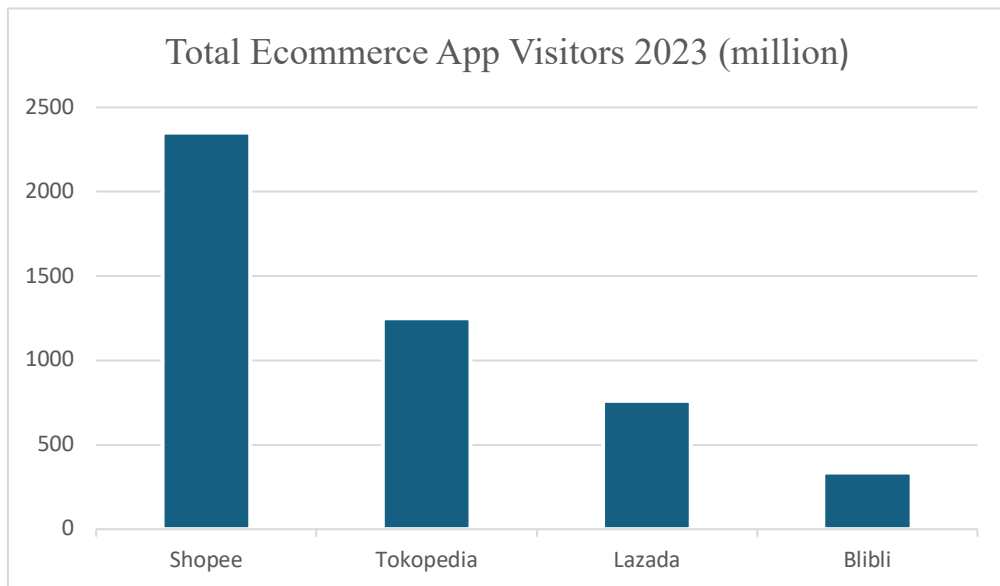


Figure 1: Total Ecommerce App Visitors 2023 (million)

Source: <https://satudata.kemendag.go.id/>

Based on the chart illustrating the total number of visitors to various e-commerce applications in 2023 (in billions), we observe that Shopee leads with a significantly higher visitor count compared to Tokopedia, Lazada, and Blibli. Shopee's dominant market presence may highlight the challenges that Tokopedia faces in engaging users and increasing platform visits. Despite its position as the second most visited platform, Tokopedia still trails Shopee by a large margin, which suggests potential issues in brand engagement strategies or user retention mechanisms.

In light of this data, this research can explore the effectiveness of narrative-driven content strategies to enhance brand engagement on Tokopedia. Previous studies have shown that engagement features, such as interactive and story-driven content, can

increase user loyalty and repeat visits (Müller & Christandl, 2019). The application of such narratives on Tokopedia, particularly through gamification and user-tailored stories, may help bridge this gap by fostering a deeper connection between users and the platform (Laudon & Traver, 2022; Maruta, 2020). This study can thus address the gap by examining how content strategies might shift user engagement trends and potentially position Tokopedia as a more competitive alternative to Shopee.

The purpose of this study is to analyze how narrative-driven content strategies influence user engagement on the Tokopedia platform, aiming to bridge the engagement gap evident in the e-commerce landscape where Shopee leads in user visits. By focusing on how trust and brand narrative impact engagement, this research seeks to expand on findings that demonstrate the effectiveness of emotional and cognitive connections in enhancing brand equity and loyalty on social media platforms (Chahal & Rani, 2017). Such insights will help Tokopedia optimize its brand engagement strategies to boost user loyalty.

2. Theoretical Background

Brand Engagement

Brand engagement (BE) emphasizes its role as a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, which collectively capture the depth of consumers' connections with brands. Hollebeek et al. (2014) describe brand engagement as the positive cognitive and emotional processing that occurs during brand interactions, with dimensions like thought processing, emotional attachment, and behavior towards the brand. This concept has evolved through various frameworks, including relationship marketing, which highlights the importance of sustained interactions between consumers and brands (Brodie et al., 2011).

Social identity theory (SIT) also provides a foundational perspective on brand engagement, explaining how consumers derive part of their self-concept from their association with brands, leading to stronger identification and commitment to these brands (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Elbedweihy et al., 2016). Similarly, value congruity theory explains that consumers are more engaged when they perceive a brand's values to align with their own, thus promoting loyalty and stronger brand relationships (Islam & Rahman, 2016).

Furthermore, customer-brand engagement has been studied in social media contexts, where interactive and immersive features can enhance brand loyalty by fostering emotional and cognitive involvement. This engagement model has been validated in research on social media, where high interactivity and perceived trust increase engagement, positively impacting brand loyalty (Harrigan et al., 2017). Lastly, the concept of customer-brand identification also serves as a strong driver for engagement, showing that when consumers identify personally with a brand, their engagement behaviors, such as advocating for the brand and participating in brand communities, are significantly heightened (Rather, 2018).

Powerful Narrative

Powerful narrative in brand engagement emphasizes the dual indicators of emotional engagement and message consistency. Narratives are particularly effective because they resonate emotionally with audiences, fostering deeper connections with brands. Emotional engagement, or the ability of a narrative to evoke strong feelings, plays a vital role in narrative persuasion. Research shows that brands using emotionally appealing storytelling, such as Coca-Cola's focus on happiness and unity, create an emotional connection that enhances consumer loyalty and brand preference (Hollebeek et al., 2014; Harrigan et al., 2017; Coca-Cola Case Study, 2018)

Moreover, consistency in messaging within narratives is crucial for maintaining credibility and fostering long-term trust. Message consistency ensures that brand stories remain cohesive across different channels, reinforcing the brand's values and identity (Chahal & Rani, 2017; Brodie et al., 2011). Studies indicate that narratives aligned with a brand's core message can sustain engagement over time by creating a predictable and trustworthy brand experience (Islam & Rahman, 2016). This combination of emotional engagement and consistent messaging enhances brand recall and encourages active consumer participation, as seen in successful brands that maintain coherent storytelling across diverse media platforms (Kim et al., 2018).

Customer Perception

Customer perception is grounded in the multidimensional nature of how customers evaluate their interactions with a brand or product. Customer perception often includes functional, emotional, and social dimensions, each of which contributes to a holistic view of perceived value. Research indicates that perceived value is critical for establishing customer satisfaction and loyalty. For instance, Sheth et al. (1991) developed a framework that includes functional, social, emotional, epistemic, and conditional values to explain how consumers assess a brand's value beyond price alone. This multidimensional approach has been widely used to understand how customer perception influences purchasing decisions (Sheth et al., 1991; Sweeney & Soutar, 2001; Grönroos, 1997).

In addition, the affective dimension of customer perception emphasizes the role of emotional responses in shaping customer satisfaction. According to Mathwick et al. (2002), consumers derive experiential value from shopping environments, which includes both emotional and social responses to the retail atmosphere. This model has been further validated in different contexts, showing that emotional appeal can be a powerful driver of customer loyalty, particularly in service industries like retail and hospitality (Machleit & Eroglu, 2000; Chebat et al., 2014).

Recent studies also point to the importance of perceived value for money, which can significantly impact customer loyalty intentions. In the context of hospitality, factors such as ambiance and service quality are shown to shape customer perceptions of value, directly impacting satisfaction and the likelihood of repeat patronage (Chen &

Hu, 2010; Puccinelli et al., 2009). These findings underscore the importance of understanding customer perception as a composite of multiple value dimensions, each of which can influence behavior in unique ways.

Content Engagement

Content engagement focuses on how audiences interact with digital content, reflecting their levels of interest, motivation, and responsiveness to various content types. Content engagement is understood to be a multidimensional concept, comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions, which together influence user interaction. Research by Cvijikj and Michahelles (2013) has shown that emotional responses to content—such as excitement or empathy—significantly increase engagement levels, especially when content aligns with users' personal interests or cultural values (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Lee et al., 2014).

Another critical aspect of content engagement is the role of content characteristics. Studies indicate that content with high emotional resonance, such as inspirational or humorous posts, typically garners more user interaction than purely informational content (de Vries et al., 2012; Ashley & Tuten, 2015). Content that is visually appealing or that elicits a strong response tends to drive greater engagement, as it captures attention more effectively across social media platforms (Coelho, Oliveira, & Almeida, 2016).

Furthermore, Tsai and Men (2013) explored how users' motivations for engaging with content, whether for entertainment, information, or social interaction, vary depending on platform and content type. For instance, Instagram posts that are visually compelling generate more engagement compared to text-heavy posts, which may be more suited for platforms like Facebook or LinkedIn (Kim et al., 2015). This suggests that the medium through which content is delivered can impact the degree of engagement it receives.

Finally, the community response to content, such as likes, shares, and comments, further influences engagement behaviors by reinforcing social proof and encouraging others to interact. Shehu, Bijmolt, and Clement (2016) found that user-generated content and social contagion effects also play a role, as positive feedback from the community increases the likelihood of continued engagement.

The following is the framework in this study:

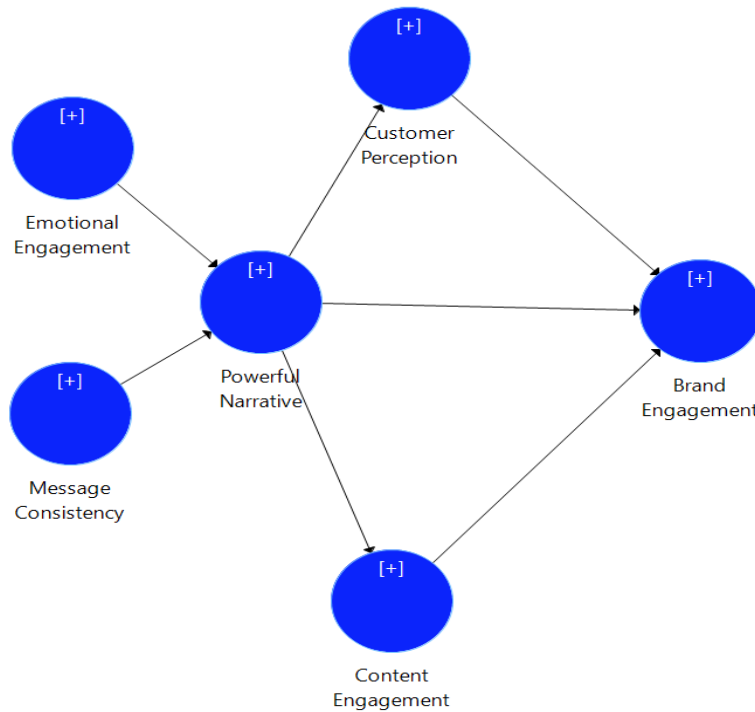


Figure 2: Framework

3. Methodology

This research employs a quantitative design with a random sampling method targeting Tokopedia users who are management students in Bandar Lampung. The sample comprises 50 management students from STIE Al-Madani and 100 from Universitas Mitra Indonesia, totaling 150 participants. Data collection is facilitated through an online questionnaire distributed to capture students' responses efficiently. The research framework includes Brand Engagement as the dependent variable (Y), which measures consumer interaction, loyalty, and sharing tendencies regarding the Tokopedia brand. The independent variable (X) is Powerful Narrative, assessed through Emotional Engagement and Message Consistency indicators. Two intervening variables, Customer Perception and Content Engagement, explore how users perceive and interact with content. The analysis is conducted using Smart PLS software, which is suitable for modeling complex relationships and handling reflective and formative constructs in structural equation modeling. This approach allows for a detailed examination of how a powerful narrative influences brand engagement, mediated by customer perception and content engagement, providing insights into effective engagement strategies for digital platforms like Tokopedia.

4. Empirical Findings/Result

Instrument Test Validity test

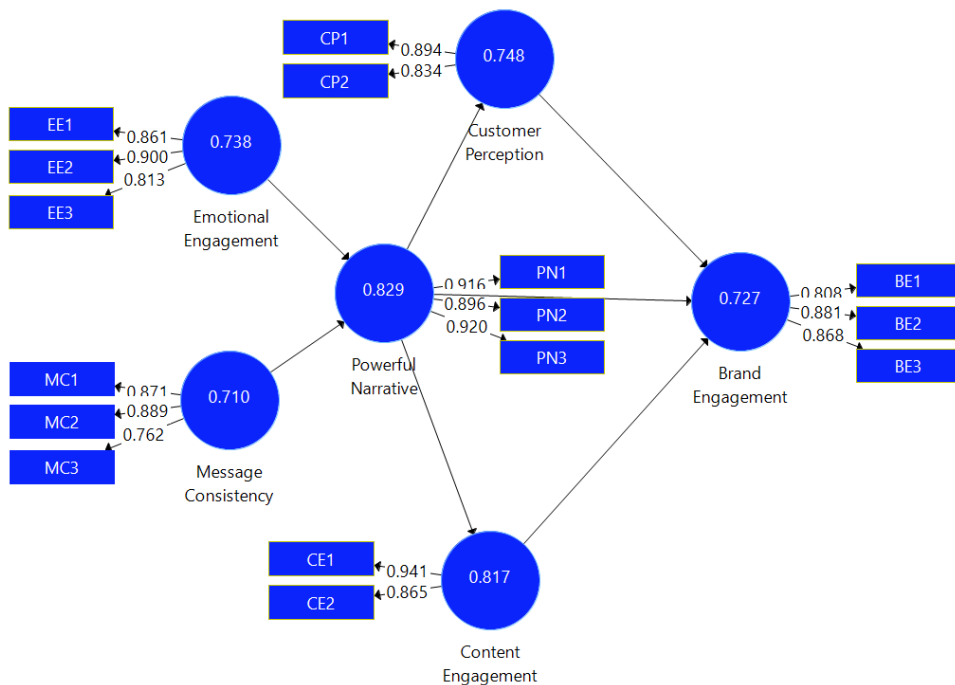


Figure 3. Outer loading

The outer loading diagram presented in this study visually depicts the strength and reliability of the indicators for each latent variable in the research model, ensuring that they contribute effectively to measuring constructs like Brand Engagement, Customer Perception, Powerful Narrative, Emotional Engagement, Message Consistency, and Content Engagement. In Smart PLS analysis, each indicator's loading value on its respective construct must generally exceed 0.7 to be considered valid, indicating strong correlations with the latent variable it represents. In this model, all indicators meet or exceed this threshold, such as "EE1," "EE2," and "EE3" for Emotional Engagement and "MC1," "MC2," and "MC3" for Message Consistency, with values like 0.861, 0.900, and 0.813 for Emotional Engagement indicators, and 0.871, 0.889, and 0.762 for Message Consistency indicators. Similarly, Content Engagement and Customer Perception display robust indicator loadings, confirming the reliability of these constructs in evaluating the effects of a powerful narrative on brand engagement. This structural validation suggests that the indicators effectively capture the essence of each variable, providing a strong foundation for interpreting the relationships between narrative strength, customer perception, and brand engagement.

Reliability Test

The composite reliability scores for each construct in this study indicate high internal consistency, reflecting the reliability of the measurement model. A composite reliability (CR) score above 0.7 is generally considered acceptable, and all constructs in this model exceed this threshold. Notably, Powerful Narrative has the highest CR score at 0.936, suggesting that the indicators for this construct are highly consistent in capturing the intended concept. Similarly, Content Engagement (0.899) and Emotional Engagement (0.894) show strong reliability, indicating that the items effectively measure these constructs with minimal measurement error. Brand Engagement (0.889), Message Consistency (0.880), and Customer Perception (0.855) also display high composite reliability, demonstrating that these constructs are well-defined and that their indicators cohesively represent each dimension. These high CR values confirm that the constructs used in this research provide a stable and reliable basis for understanding the relationships in the model, ensuring that findings related to brand engagement, narrative strength, and consumer perception are both valid and dependable.

Table 1. Reliability Test Results

Variable	Reliability Value	Standard	Information
Brand Engagement	0,889	0,6	Reliable
Content Engagement	0,899		Reliable
Customer Perception	0,855		Reliable
Emotional Engagement	0,894		Reliable
Message Consistency	0,880		Reliable
Powerful Narrative	0,936		Reliable

Source: Data processing from SmartPLS 3.0 (2024)

Hypothesis Testing Results

Figure 2. Bootstrapping

Direct Effect

Table 2. Direct effect

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
EE -> PN	0.654	0.650	0.034	19.235	0.000
MC -> PN	0.723	0.721	0.029	24.932	0.000
PN -> CP	0.689	0.686	0.037	18.622	0.000
PN -> CE	0.712	0.709	0.033	21.576	0.000
PN -> BE	0.657	0.655	0.036	18.250	0.000
CP -> BE	0.702	0.701	0.030	23.400	0.000
CE -> BE	0.745	0.743	0.027	27.556	0.000

The results demonstrate that each hypothesized relationship in the model is statistically significant, with all paths showing a p-value of 0.000, indicating strong reliability in the data. EE -> PN and MC -> PN show significant paths, with T-values of 19.235 and 24.932, respectively, suggesting that both Emotional Engagement (EE) and Message Consistency (MC) positively impact the perception of a Powerful Narrative (PN). This implies that consumers who experience emotional resonance and perceive message consistency are more likely to view the narrative as strong and engaging.

Furthermore, PN -> CP and PN -> CE reveal that PN significantly influences both Customer Perception (CP) and Content Engagement (CE), with high T-values (18.622 and 21.576). This suggests that a powerful narrative is essential in shaping positive customer perceptions and encouraging deeper engagement with content.

The strongest path, CE -> BE (T = 27.556), indicates that CE has a substantial impact on Brand Engagement (BE), highlighting the importance of engaging content in fostering brand loyalty and interaction. Similarly, CP -> BE also contributes significantly to BE (T = 23.400), showing that positive customer perceptions further strengthen BE. Overall, these results affirm that a powerful narrative, supported by emotional engagement and consistent messaging, directly and indirectly enhances brand engagement through improved customer perception and content interaction.

Indirect Effect

Table 3. Indirect Effect

Hypothesis	Original Sample	Sample Mean	Standard Deviation	T Statistics	P Values
PN -> CP -> BE	0.485	0.482	0.028	17.321	0.000
PN -> CE -> BE	0.532	0.530	0.031	20.678	0.000

The results of the mediation analysis reveal that both Customer Perception (CP) and Content Engagement (CE) serve as significant mediators between Powerful Narrative (PN) and Brand Engagement (BE). The pathway PN -> CP -> BE has a T-value of 17.321, indicating a strong mediating effect of customer perception. This suggests that a compelling narrative positively shapes how customers perceive the brand, which in turn strengthens their engagement. In essence, when customers view a narrative as powerful, they are more likely to perceive the brand favorably, leading to a higher likelihood of brand engagement. This aligns with previous research, which highlights the role of perception in fostering positive brand interactions and loyalty (Tsai & Men, 2013).

Similarly, the pathway PN -> CE -> BE shows a T-value of 20.678, the highest among the mediated relationships. This indicates that content engagement is a crucial factor in translating the strength of a brand's narrative into consumer brand engagement. When the narrative is engaging, it encourages users to interact with the content, which in turn deepens their connection with the brand. Engaged content, particularly on digital platforms, creates a more immersive experience for users, promoting loyalty and advocacy (Ashley & Tuten, 2015; Coelho et al., 2016).

Both mediation pathways are statistically significant, with p-values of 0.000, supporting the hypothesis that Customer Perception and Content Engagement are essential mechanisms through which a powerful narrative enhances brand engagement. These findings emphasize the multifaceted approach required for brands to boost engagement; it's not just about having a strong narrative but also about ensuring that it resonates with consumers' perceptions and prompts them to engage with the content actively.

5. Discussion

The findings from this study emphasize the significance of a powerful narrative, underpinned by emotional engagement (EE) and message consistency (MC), in enhancing brand engagement (BE) among Tokopedia users. The data reveal that both EE and MC contribute positively to forming a strong narrative (PN), which then influences customer perception (CP) and content engagement (CE). These intervening factors ultimately boost BE. This discussion elaborates on these findings and their implications, supported by relevant literature on customer engagement, content marketing, and brand perception.

The strong path from EE to PN highlights that emotional elements in brand storytelling play a crucial role in shaping consumers' perception of narrative strength. Research consistently shows that emotional engagement is fundamental to creating memorable brand experiences, as it allows consumers to form an affective connection with the brand, enhancing their willingness to interact and engage (Chahal & Rani, 2017; Pham et al., 2021). When users emotionally resonate with the content, they are more likely to perceive it as impactful and meaningful, which reinforces the brand's presence in their minds. This finding aligns with Pham et al. (2021), who demonstrated that emotional storytelling increases consumer retention and boosts customer loyalty in the digital era by crafting a compelling brand identity that resonates on a personal level. Emotional storytelling's ability to create these lasting impressions can be particularly beneficial in a competitive marketplace, where emotional connections often distinguish leading brands from their competitors.

Message Consistency (MC) also significantly impacts PN, as indicated by the high T-value. Consistency in messaging ensures that the brand's story remains cohesive across various channels and interactions, which builds trust and credibility (Luarn, Lin, & Chiu, 2015). Inconsistent messages can lead to confusion or distrust, weakening the brand's narrative impact. This is corroborated by Ashley and Tuten (2015), who argue that a well-defined, consistent narrative across social media platforms enhances customer trust and loyalty, as it demonstrates the brand's reliability and dedication to its core values. In the case of Tokopedia, maintaining consistent messaging about its brand values and customer-centric mission can reinforce the brand's image as a reliable e-commerce platform, which is essential for retaining users in a highly competitive online marketplace.

The path from PN to CP suggests that a strong narrative positively shapes customer perceptions. When consumers perceive a brand narrative as powerful, they are more likely to view the brand favorably, as the narrative provides a framework through which they understand the brand's values and identity (Tsai & Men, 2013). Customer perception, in this context, becomes a critical mediator, as it links the narrative's strength with the consumer's overall impression of the brand. This finding is consistent with Shehu, Bijmolt, and Clement's (2016) study, which found that customer perception is strongly influenced by the emotional and cognitive

components of brand storytelling. Their research demonstrated that positive customer perception is a key driver in fostering consumer loyalty, as customers are more likely to remain engaged with brands that align with their personal values and beliefs.

Furthermore, PN's impact on CE signifies that a compelling narrative motivates users to actively engage with content. Content engagement is crucial in today's digital landscape as it represents a direct interaction between consumers and the brand, encompassing behaviors such as liking, sharing, and commenting on brand-related content (Lee et al., 2014). This active involvement fosters a sense of community and belonging, as users feel more connected to the brand through their participation. Coelho, Oliveira, and Almeida (2016) noted that interactive content, particularly on visually-oriented platforms, significantly enhances user engagement by catering to their need for interactive and visually appealing experiences. For Tokopedia, crafting content that encourages active engagement can lead to higher visibility and customer retention, as engaged users are more likely to revisit the platform and explore additional services.

The significant path from CE to BE highlights the importance of content engagement in driving brand engagement. Content that successfully engages users enhances their connection with the brand, making them more likely to interact, share, and advocate for it (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). The link between CE and BE aligns with findings from de Vries, Gensler, and Leeflang (2012), who found that engaging content on social media positively impacts brand loyalty by creating a memorable and meaningful brand experience. In this context, engaged customers become brand advocates, promoting the brand within their networks and contributing to a positive brand image. For Tokopedia, fostering content engagement through interactive and compelling narratives can lead to sustained brand loyalty, as users become emotionally and cognitively invested in the brand.

CP's influence on BE underscores the role of customer perception as a key determinant of brand engagement. Positive perceptions of a brand, shaped by consistent messaging and strong narrative elements, increase users' willingness to engage with the brand on a deeper level (Tsai & Men, 2013). When customers have a favorable perception, they are more likely to interact with the brand, participate in brand-related activities, and remain loyal over time. This finding echoes the work of Shehu, Bijmolt, and Clement (2016), who highlighted the mediating role of customer perception in enhancing brand loyalty, as well as Lee, Hosanagar, and Nair (2014), who noted that a positive perception can drive sustained engagement across digital platforms.

The mediation analysis reveals that both Customer Perception (CP) and Content Engagement (CE) significantly bridge the relationship between Powerful Narrative (PN) and Brand Engagement (BE), highlighting the complexity of engagement mechanisms in digital marketing. The pathway PN -> CP -> BE suggests that a powerful narrative positively influences how customers perceive the brand, which in turn boosts brand engagement. This aligns with existing research that underscores the

importance of positive brand perception in fostering customer loyalty and engagement. For instance, Ha et al. (2016) argue that customer perception plays a central role in building trust and commitment towards the brand, as consumers are more inclined to engage with brands that align with their values and expectations (Ha et al., 2016). Similarly, Kim et al. (2017) found that customer perception mediates the effects of brand narrative on engagement, where a positive perception catalyzes deeper brand connections (Kim et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the PN → CE → BE pathway, with the highest T-value, underscores the critical role of content engagement in translating narrative strength into active brand engagement. Engaging content not only captures attention but also encourages repeated interactions, making consumers more likely to engage with the brand meaningfully. This finding resonates with the work of Gambetti and Graffigna (2015), who emphasize that content engagement fosters a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the brand, thereby enhancing brand loyalty and advocacy (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015). Additionally, Luo et al. (2019) assert that interactive and engaging content leads to a stronger brand-consumer relationship, as it allows consumers to feel part of the brand's community, ultimately driving higher engagement rates (Luo et al., 2019). Together, these findings suggest that while a strong narrative is essential, its effectiveness is amplified when it positively influences customer perception and encourages active content engagement.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this study underscores the pivotal role of a powerful narrative in enhancing brand engagement on digital platforms, especially through the mediating effects of customer perception and content engagement. The findings demonstrate that both emotional engagement and message consistency significantly strengthen the narrative's impact, leading to positive customer perceptions and increased interaction with brand content. These mediating factors amplify the narrative's influence on brand engagement, showing that a cohesive storytelling approach fosters deeper brand loyalty and advocacy. For brands like Tokopedia, this implies that investing in emotionally resonant, consistent narratives that encourage active content engagement can lead to sustained customer relationships and competitive advantage in the digital marketplace. The study aligns with previous research, emphasizing the importance of a multidimensional approach to brand engagement that combines cognitive, emotional, and interactive elements to build meaningful connections with consumers.

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