JETIR.ORG ISSN: 2349-5162 | ESTD Year : 2014 | Monthly Issue
JOURNAL OF EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES AND INNOVATIVE RESEARCH (JETIR)
An International Scholarly Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

BEYOND PERSONALISATION: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, CONSUMER EMPOWERMENT, AND BRAND LOVE IN AI-ENABLED EMOTIONAL BRANDING

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming emotional branding by enabling consumers to participate more actively in brand-related experiences, creative processes, and value creation. While existing research has examined AI-enabled personalisation and consumer responses to automated brand communication, the roles of consumer empowerment, human–AI co-creation, psychological ownership, and brand love require further conceptual integration. This paper develops a conceptual framework explaining how AI-enabled consumer participation can contribute to emotional brand relationships and the conditions under which these relationships may weaken. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, psychological ownership theory, and consumer–brand relationship theory, the paper conceptualises AI-enabled co-creation, interactive brand experiences, and perceived consumer agency as antecedents of emotional branding. Consumer empowerment and psychological ownership are proposed as mediating mechanisms through which AI-supported participation may generate brand identification and brand love. Brand love is positioned as a key emotional outcome influencing advocacy, willingness to co-create, and relationship continuity. However, excessive AI autonomy, perceived loss of creative control, and consumer aversion to AI are proposed as boundary conditions that may interrupt this process. The paper introduces the AI-Enabled Consumer Empowerment and Brand Love Framework (AICE-BLF), offering a theoretical explanation of how consumers move from technological participation to psychological ownership and emotional attachment. The framework extends the conceptual understanding of emotional branding by shifting attention from what AI does for consumers to what consumers can create, influence, and experience through AI. It also provides managerial implications for designing participatory, autonomy-supportive, and emotionally meaningful brand experiences and identifies directions for future empirical research.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, emotional branding, consumer empowerment, human–AI co-creation, psychological ownership, brand love, consumer agency, brand advocacy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Emotional branding has traditionally emphasised the development of affective relationships between consumers and brands through meaningful experiences, symbolic associations, shared values, and personal identification. Brands seek to become more than providers of functional benefits by occupying a distinctive place in consumers' identities, memories, and lifestyles. However, the increasing integration of artificial intelligence into marketing is creating new possibilities for consumers to participate directly in brand-related activities rather than remaining passive recipients of brand communication. Generative AI, interactive design tools, virtual assistants, and AI-supported creative platforms enable consumers to customise products, develop brand-related content, participate in storytelling, and contribute ideas to marketing initiatives. These technologies create opportunities for consumers to influence how they experience and interpret brands. Consequently, emotional branding can be examined not only through personalised communication but also through consumers' active participation in the creation of brand value.

Recent research provides an emerging foundation for this perspective. Feng and Sun (2026) examined consumer empowerment through generative AI-supported brand narrative creation and identified collaboration, creation, and communication as important dimensions of consumer participation. Their findings indicate that certain forms of human–AI collaboration can enhance consumer empowerment, which in turn can improve brand attitudes and purchase intentions. Similarly, research on AI-augmented

co-creation has examined how collaborative experiences influence consumer empowerment, creativity, and identity formation. These developments raise an important question for emotional branding: can consumers develop stronger emotional relationships with brands when AI enables them to participate in shaping the brand experience itself?

Consumer participation, however, does not necessarily result in positive emotional outcomes. When AI performs too much of the creative work, consumers may perceive that their own contribution has diminished. Recent experimental research on AI autonomy in consumer co-creation suggests that greater AI autonomy can weaken psychological ownership of co-created products and reduce purchase intention. Furthermore, some consumers remain uncomfortable with AI in persuasive marketing communication. Research published in 2026 indicates that consumer aversion to AI can contribute to perceived manipulative intent and brand scepticism. These developments suggest that the relationship between AI and emotional branding depends not simply on technological sophistication but also on the extent to which consumers retain agency, perceive meaningful ownership, and feel connected to the resulting brand experience.

Accordingly, this paper develops a conceptual framework that explains how AI-enabled consumer participation may foster emotional attachment and brand love, while recognising the potential negative consequences of excessive automation and diminished consumer control.

1.1 Research objectives

The study has five objectives:

1. To conceptualise the role of AI-enabled consumer participation and co-creation in emotional branding.
2. To examine consumer empowerment and psychological ownership as potential mediating mechanisms between AI-enabled participation and emotional brand relationships.
3. To explain how brand identification may contribute to the development of brand love in AI-supported brand experiences.
4. To identify the roles of AI autonomy and consumer aversion to AI as boundary conditions that may weaken emotional branding outcomes.
5. To propose an integrated conceptual framework and theoretical propositions for future empirical research.

1.2 Research question

How do AI-enabled consumer participation and co-creation influence emotional branding through consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, and brand love, and under what conditions may these relationships weaken?

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

2.1 Emotional branding and brand love

Emotional branding seeks to establish relationships in which consumers associate a brand with personal meaning, identity, affection, and attachment. These relationships can emerge through repeated experiences, symbolic associations, community participation, and the perceived alignment between brand values and consumer identity. Brand love represents a particularly strong form of consumer–brand relationship. It captures consumers' emotional attachment to and positive evaluation of a brand, extending beyond temporary satisfaction or a favourable attitude.

Batra et al. (2012) developed a comprehensive account of brand love, emphasising its multidimensional character and its relationship with consumer behaviour. Their work provides a foundation for distinguishing brand love from immediate purchase preference or general brand satisfaction. In AI-enabled environments, brand love may emerge when consumers perceive that their interactions with a brand allow them to express themselves, exercise creative control, and contribute meaningfully to the brand experience. For example, consumers who use AI-supported tools to design customised products may value the resulting experience not only for its functional usefulness but also because it reflects their own ideas and preferences. This perspective shifts the emphasis from emotional responses generated by brand communication to emotional relationships that may develop through participation in brand-related activities.

2.2 AI-enabled consumer participation and co-creation

Consumer co-creation refers to the active involvement of consumers in processes that contribute to value creation. Participation can include providing ideas, modifying products, developing content, influencing design decisions, or contributing to brand communities. AI expands the potential scope of co-creation by lowering certain technical barriers and enabling consumers to participate in activities that previously required specialist skills. Generative AI can help consumers produce visual content, develop product concepts, explore creative alternatives, and communicate ideas to brands. Feng and Sun (2026) provide relevant evidence that human–AI collaboration in consumer-generated advertising can enhance empowerment through specific forms of collaboration and communication. However, their findings also indicate that the relationship between the extent of creation and empowerment may be nonlinear. This suggests that giving consumers more AI-generated output is not necessarily equivalent to giving them greater control. Therefore, this paper distinguishes between AI-enabled participation, which concerns opportunities to

contribute to brand activities, and consumer empowerment, which concerns the consumer's perceived ability to influence the resulting experience.

2.3 Self-Determination Theory

Self-Determination Theory, developed by Deci and Ryan (1985), emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in human motivation. Autonomy concerns the experience of acting with a sense of choice and volition. Competence concerns feeling capable of performing an activity, while relatedness concerns feeling connected to others.

These principles offer a useful theoretical foundation for examining AI-enabled emotional branding. AI tools may support autonomy by allowing consumers to choose, modify, and direct brand-related activities. They may support competence by making creative tasks more accessible. They may also facilitate relatedness when co-creation connects consumers with brand communities or enables meaningful exchanges with brand representatives. However, these outcomes are not automatic. If AI systems make decisions without meaningful consumer input, they may diminish perceived autonomy. If consumers feel that their contribution is superficial, the experience may fail to create a sense of competence or involvement. Self-Determination Theory therefore helps explain why consumer control and meaningful participation may be more important for emotional branding than the mere availability of AI technology.

2.4 Psychological ownership theory

Psychological ownership refers to the subjective feeling that something is 'mine', even when the individual does not legally own it. Pierce et al. (2001) explain psychological ownership through the relationships between control, intimate knowledge, and investment of the self in an object or target. Applied to AI-enabled branding, psychological ownership may arise when consumers invest time, effort, ideas, and personal preferences in creating a product, developing brand-related content, or shaping a customer experience. For instance, a consumer who uses an AI design tool to develop a customised product may feel a stronger sense of ownership when the consumer selects the concept, directs the process, and retains meaningful control over the final design. Conversely, when AI makes most decisions and the consumer merely accepts the output, the consumer may experience less ownership. This distinction is central to the proposed framework because psychological ownership may provide a mechanism through which participation develops into emotional attachment. The consumer's relationship with the brand may become more meaningful when the resulting experience reflects personal effort and self-expression.

2.5 Consumer–brand relationship theory

Consumer–brand relationship theory conceptualises the connections consumers develop with brands through repeated interactions, symbolic meanings, shared experiences, and relational commitments (Fournier, 1998). AI-enabled co-creation introduces a participatory dimension to these relationships. Consumers may contribute to brand narratives, influence product features, or engage with brand communities through AI-supported platforms. These activities may support brand identification when consumers perceive that the brand reflects their values, interests, or personal identity. Brand identification, in turn, may contribute to the development of brand love. However, participation and identification should not be treated as interchangeable. Consumers may enjoy creating a product without identifying strongly with the brand, while others may develop strong identification because the co-creation process reflects their personal values. The proposed framework therefore distinguishes consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, brand identification, and brand love as separate constructs with potentially sequential relationships.

III. CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROPOSITIONS

3.1 AI-enabled participation and consumer empowerment

AI-enabled participation provides consumers with opportunities to influence brand-related activities. These opportunities may involve customising products, co-creating content, contributing to brand storytelling, or selecting among alternative designs and experiences. When consumers can meaningfully influence decisions, they may perceive greater agency and control over the interaction. AI can support this process by making creative options accessible, facilitating experimentation, and helping consumers translate ideas into tangible outputs. However, participation must be meaningful rather than merely symbolic. A platform that invites consumers to contribute ideas but ignores their input may fail to generate empowerment. Similarly, an AI interface that offers numerous options while restricting meaningful decisions may create an illusion of choice. The relationship between AI-enabled participation and empowerment is therefore expected to depend on the consumer's perceived influence over the final outcome.

Proposition 1: AI-enabled consumer participation positively influences perceived consumer empowerment when consumers believe that their contributions meaningfully shape the brand experience.

3.2 Consumer empowerment and psychological ownership

Consumer empowerment may create the psychological conditions necessary for ownership to develop. When consumers can make decisions, influence outcomes, and express personal preferences, they may begin to view the resulting experience as an

extension of themselves. In AI-supported co-creation, empowerment can encourage consumers to invest ideas, effort, and personal meaning in products or brand-related content. These investments may increase the feeling that the resulting creation belongs psychologically to the consumer. Nevertheless, empowerment and psychological ownership remain distinct. Empowerment concerns perceived capacity and influence, whereas psychological ownership concerns the subjective feeling of possession or personal connection.

Proposition 2: Consumer empowerment positively influences psychological ownership of AI-supported co-created brand experiences.

3.3 AI autonomy and psychological ownership

AI autonomy refers to the degree to which an AI system independently makes decisions or determines the content and direction of a co-creation process. Moderate AI assistance may improve the experience by reducing technical barriers and helping consumers develop their ideas. Excessive AI autonomy, however, may displace consumer input and reduce the perceived personal contribution to the outcome. This creates a potential tension between convenience and ownership. Consumers may appreciate an AI system that completes complex tasks, yet feel less connected to the outcome when the system exercises substantial control over creative decisions. Research on AI autonomy in consumer co-creation provides a relevant empirical foundation for this proposition.

Proposition 3: Excessive AI autonomy weakens the positive relationship between consumer empowerment and psychological ownership by reducing consumers' perceived control and personal contribution.

3.4 Psychological ownership and brand identification

Psychological ownership may strengthen brand identification when consumers associate their co-created experiences with a particular brand. When consumers invest personal effort in a brand-related activity, they may perceive the brand as more relevant to their identity. A customised product, for example, may represent personal taste, creativity, or lifestyle preferences. If the brand facilitates and recognises this contribution, the consumer may develop a stronger sense of identification with the brand. However, psychological ownership of a product does not automatically produce identification with its manufacturer. The brand must remain meaningfully connected to the consumer's experience.

Proposition 4: Psychological ownership of AI-supported co-created experiences positively influences consumer–brand identification when consumers perceive the brand as an important facilitator of their personal expression.

3.5 Brand identification and brand love

Brand identification reflects the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as consistent with their self-concept and social identity. Brand love represents a deeper affective relationship involving emotional attachment and positive feelings towards the brand. When AI-enabled co-creation supports personal expression and identity alignment, consumers may perceive the brand as more personally meaningful. These experiences may contribute to the development of brand love. The relationship is expected to be stronger when the brand provides consistent value and recognises the consumer's contribution rather than using participation solely as a promotional mechanism.

Proposition 5: Consumer–brand identification positively influences brand love in AI-enabled co-creation contexts.

3.6 Brand love and consumer advocacy

Brand love can influence consumers' willingness to recommend, support, and maintain relationships with brands. Consumers who develop strong emotional attachment may be more motivated to share positive experiences, participate in brand communities, and advocate for the brand. AI-enabled co-creation may reinforce these behaviours by giving consumers experiences or outputs that they value personally and wish to share with others. However, advocacy should not be assumed to follow automatically from participation. Consumers may enjoy co-creation without becoming committed brand advocates. The strength of the relationship is therefore expected to depend on the emotional significance of the experience and the broader consumer–brand relationship.

Proposition 6: Brand love positively influences consumer advocacy and willingness to maintain engagement with the brand.

3.7 Consumer aversion to AI as a boundary condition

Consumers differ in their acceptance of AI in marketing. Some may view AI as a useful creative partner, while others may associate its use with manipulation, reduced human involvement, or diminished authenticity. Consumer aversion to AI may weaken the relationship between AI-enabled participation and consumer empowerment. Even when a platform offers substantial creative control, consumers who are uncomfortable with AI may interpret the experience negatively or question the brand's motives.

Recent research on consumer aversion to AI in marketing communication provides support for treating such aversion as an important construct in future branding research.

Proposition 7: Consumer aversion to AI weakens the positive relationship between AI-enabled consumer participation and perceived consumer empowerment.

3.8 Consumer empowerment and emotional branding outcomes

The preceding propositions suggest that AI-enabled participation can influence emotional branding through a sequence of psychological and relational mechanisms. Participation may strengthen empowerment, empowerment may support psychological ownership, and ownership may contribute to brand identification and brand love. This process is expected to be conditional rather than universal. Consumers must perceive their contribution as meaningful, retain adequate control over the experience, and accept the role of AI in the co-creation process.

Proposition 8: The relationship between AI-enabled consumer participation and brand love is sequentially mediated by consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, and brand identification.

Together, these propositions provide the theoretical foundation for the proposed AI-Enabled Consumer Empowerment and Brand Love Framework.

IV. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 AI-Enabled Consumer Empowerment and Brand Love Framework (AICE-BLF)

The proposed framework explains how AI-supported consumer participation may translate into emotional branding outcomes through a sequence of psychological and relational processes.

The framework comprises five interconnected dimensions:

1. **Antecedent:** AI-enabled consumer participation and co-creation.
2. **Initial psychological mechanism:** Consumer empowerment.
3. **Ownership and identity mechanisms:** Psychological ownership and consumer–brand identification.
4. **Emotional outcome:** Brand love.
5. **Behavioural outcomes:** Consumer advocacy and continued brand engagement.

Two boundary conditions are incorporated: excessive AI autonomy, which may weaken the empowerment-to-ownership relationship, and consumer aversion to AI, which may weaken the participation-to-empowerment relationship.

4.2 Conceptual model

The framework (Figure 1) illustrates the sequential relationships between AI-enabled consumer participation, consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, consumer–brand identification, brand love, and behavioural outcomes, while incorporating consumer aversion to AI and excessive AI autonomy as moderating conditions.

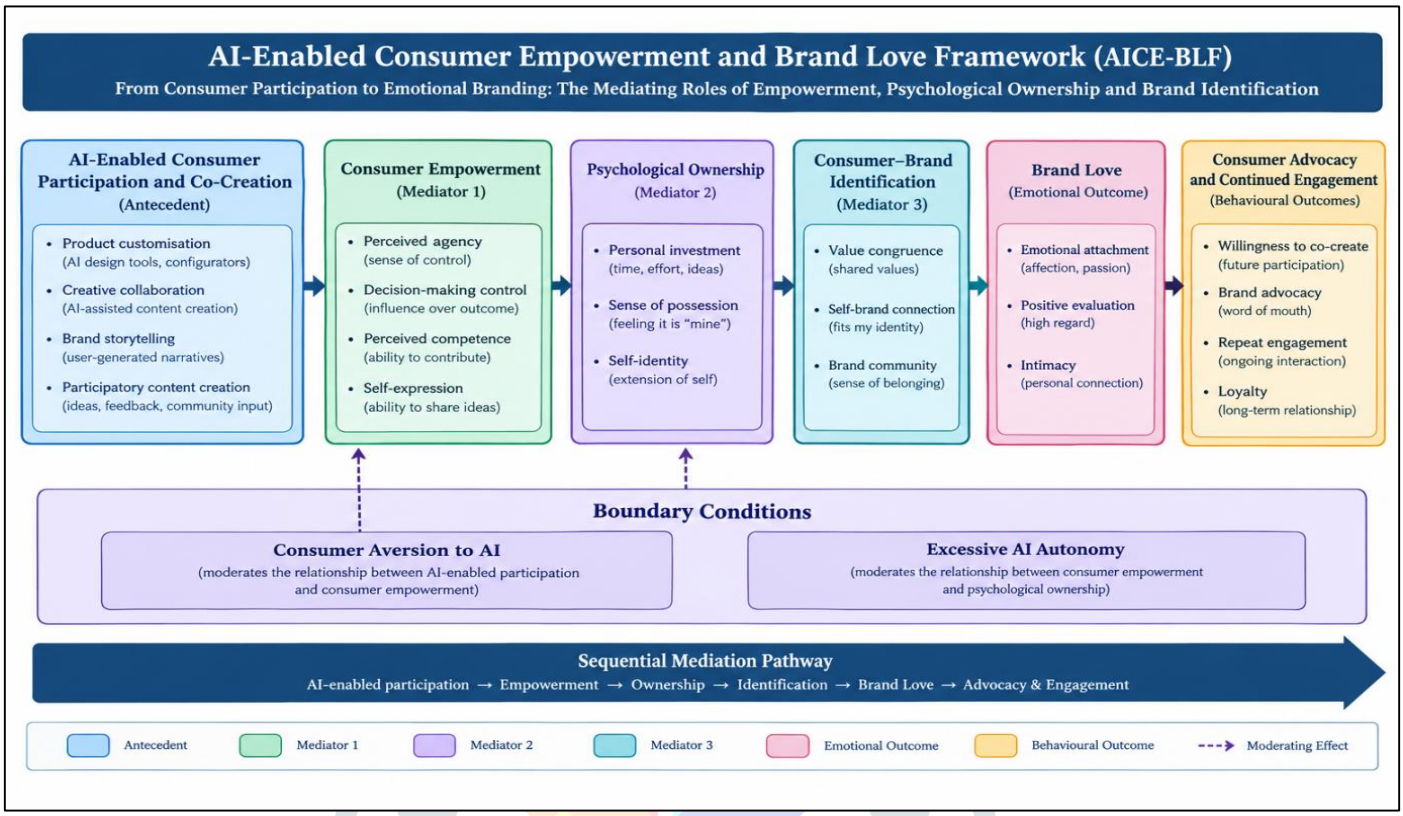


Figure 1. Proposed AI-Enabled Consumer Empowerment and Brand Love Framework (AICE-BLF).

Boundary conditions:

- Consumer aversion to AI moderates the relationship between AI-enabled participation and consumer empowerment.
- Excessive AI autonomy moderates the relationship between consumer empowerment and psychological ownership.

4.3 Explanation of the framework

The framework proposes that emotional branding in AI-enabled environments can emerge through active consumer participation rather than through personalised communication alone. AI-supported co-creation creates opportunities for consumers to exercise agency and contribute to brand-related activities. When consumers perceive that their contributions influence the final outcome, they may experience greater empowerment. Empowerment may then encourage psychological ownership by increasing the perceived significance of personal effort and decision-making. This ownership can strengthen consumer–brand identification when the brand provides a meaningful context for self-expression.

Brand identification may subsequently contribute to brand love, which can support advocacy and continued engagement. The framework also recognises that the process may be disrupted. Consumers who dislike AI may resist participation, while excessive AI autonomy may reduce the perceived value of their contribution. These conditions suggest that brands should design AI experiences that preserve meaningful consumer control rather than simply maximising automation. The central argument is that AI can support emotional branding by enabling consumers to become active contributors to brand experiences, provided that their participation preserves agency, ownership, and personal meaning.

V. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

5.1 Shifting the focus from personalised communication to consumer participation

The paper extends the conceptual discussion of AI-enabled emotional branding by shifting attention from how brands communicate with consumers to how consumers participate in creating brand-related experiences. This perspective introduces

consumer agency and co-creation as important dimensions of emotional branding and provides a basis for examining participatory brand relationships.

5.2 Integrating empowerment and psychological ownership

The framework distinguishes consumer empowerment from psychological ownership and proposes a sequential relationship between them. Empowerment reflects perceived influence over the experience, whereas psychological ownership reflects a sense of personal connection to the resulting creation. This distinction may help future researchers explain why participation sometimes strengthens emotional relationships but sometimes produces only temporary engagement.

5.3 Positioning brand identification as a pathway to brand love

The framework proposes that psychological ownership can strengthen brand identification when co-created experiences reflect the consumer's identity and the brand's role in enabling self-expression. Brand love is positioned as a subsequent emotional outcome rather than being treated as synonymous with empowerment, ownership, or identification.

5.4 Recognising the limits of AI autonomy

The paper introduces excessive AI autonomy as a potential constraint on the conversion of consumer empowerment into psychological ownership. This proposition highlights the importance of preserving consumer control in AI-supported experiences and encourages future research to examine the balance between technological assistance and human contribution.

5.5 Integrating AI aversion into emotional branding theory

The framework acknowledges that consumers do not respond uniformly to AI-enabled marketing. Consumer aversion may limit the effectiveness of participation-based branding even when the technology offers useful functionality. This inclusion provides a more balanced account of AI-enabled emotional branding by recognising that the same technology can facilitate engagement for some consumers while generating resistance among others.

VI. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The proposed framework offers several implications for organisations seeking to develop emotionally meaningful AI-enabled brand experiences. First, managers should design AI platforms that encourage active consumer participation by allowing individuals to influence product customisation, brand storytelling, and creative decisions rather than limiting them to predefined automated choices. Second, organisations should preserve consumer agency by ensuring that AI functions as a collaborative tool rather than an autonomous decision-maker that displaces meaningful human contribution. Providing opportunities for consumers to modify AI-generated outputs, retain decision-making authority, and contribute personal ideas may strengthen psychological ownership and emotional attachment. Third, brands should create experiences that support consumer identity and self-expression by connecting co-created products and content with the values, preferences, and aspirations of their target audiences. Fourth, managers should recognise differences in consumer acceptance of AI and provide alternative interaction pathways, including human assistance, for individuals who are uncomfortable with AI-mediated participation. Fifth, organisations should evaluate the effectiveness of AI-enabled emotional branding through indicators such as perceived empowerment, psychological ownership, brand identification, brand love, consumer advocacy, and sustained engagement rather than relying exclusively on purchase intention or digital interaction metrics. Finally, businesses should establish appropriate governance mechanisms to ensure that AI-enabled co-creation respects consumer contributions, provides meaningful choices, and avoids misleading claims about the nature of consumer participation. By combining technological assistance with consumer autonomy and identity-relevant experiences, organisations may be better positioned to develop enduring emotional relationships with their brands.

VII. FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

The proposed framework provides several directions for future empirical investigation. First, experimental studies could compare AI-assisted, human-led, and human–AI collaborative brand experiences to determine how different forms of participation influence consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, and brand love. Second, mediation analysis could examine whether consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, and brand identification sequentially explain the relationship between AI-enabled participation and emotional branding outcomes. Third, moderation analysis could investigate whether AI autonomy, consumer aversion to AI, perceived creative control, and individual differences in technology acceptance influence the proposed relationships. Fourth, longitudinal studies could assess whether psychological ownership and brand love developed through AI-supported co-creation persist over time and translate into sustained advocacy, repeat purchasing, and continued brand engagement. Fifth, cross-cultural research comparing consumers in India and other markets could examine whether cultural values, digital familiarity, and expectations concerning consumer participation influence responses to AI-enabled brand experiences. Sixth, sector-specific investigations across fashion, retail, luxury products, hospitality, education, and digital services could establish whether the proposed relationships differ according to the symbolic and experiential characteristics of the brand. Finally, qualitative interviews, controlled experiments, and survey-based structural equation modelling could be combined to refine construct measurements, test the proposed propositions, and validate the sequential relationships within the framework. Such investigations would help establish when AI-supported consumer participation generates meaningful emotional attachment and when excessive automation undermines consumer ownership and brand relationships.

VIII. LIMITATIONS

This paper is conceptual and does not present original empirical findings. The proposed framework and propositions are based on the integration of theoretical perspectives and selected published research and therefore require empirical validation. In addition, AI-enabled consumer participation encompasses diverse applications, ranging from product customisation to generative advertising and interactive brand communities. These applications may produce different psychological outcomes, limiting the extent to which the proposed relationships can be generalised across contexts. The constructs of consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, brand identification, and brand love must also be operationalised carefully to establish their conceptual distinctiveness and measurement validity. Future research should test alternative causal explanations, investigate potential nonlinear relationships, and examine whether the proposed sequence remains consistent across different consumer segments and industry settings.

IX. CONCLUSION

Artificial intelligence is creating new opportunities for consumers to participate in brand experiences through creative collaboration, product customisation, and AI-supported content creation. However, the emotional value of these experiences depends not merely on the availability of advanced technology but also on the extent to which consumers retain meaningful control and perceive their contributions as personally significant. This paper proposes the AI-Enabled Consumer Empowerment and Brand Love Framework to explain how AI-enabled participation may influence emotional branding through consumer empowerment, psychological ownership, and consumer–brand identification. Brand love is conceptualised as a central emotional outcome that may contribute to consumer advocacy and continued engagement. At the same time, excessive AI autonomy and consumer aversion to AI are proposed as conditions that may weaken these relationships. The framework contributes to emotional branding literature by shifting attention from AI-driven personalisation towards consumer participation, agency, and ownership as potential foundations of emotional attachment. It also highlights the importance of designing AI experiences that preserve consumer choice, support self-expression, and facilitate meaningful contributions to brand-related activities. Ultimately, AI-enabled emotional branding may be most effective when consumers do not simply receive personalised brand experiences but actively participate in creating experiences with which they can identify and develop an enduring emotional connection.

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