

Role of Customer–Brand Relationships in Encouraging Supportive Behaviors In Banking Services

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Abstract

The transformation of the banking sector from transactional service delivery to relationship-oriented engagement has intensified scholarly attention toward customer–brand relationships and their behavioral outcomes. This study investigates how customer–brand relationships influence supportive behaviors—commonly conceptualized as customer citizenship behavior (CCB)—within banking services. Drawing upon attachment theory, relationship marketing, and social exchange theory, the research develops a comprehensive conceptual framework linking emotional brand attachment, customer engagement, perceived value, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) to voluntary customer behaviors that extend beyond transactional obligations.

The study synthesizes prior research to identify key relational constructs such as trust, satisfaction, emotional attachment, and brand identification, examining their influence on behaviors including advocacy, helping other customers, feedback provision, and tolerance. Empirical evidence from prior studies suggests that emotional bonds between customers and brands significantly enhance voluntary contributions, particularly in service-intensive industries like banking where perceived risk and trust are critical (Cheng et al., 2016; Levy & Hino, 2016). Additionally, CSR initiatives and transparent communication are found to strengthen relational quality, thereby encouraging pro-social and pro-organizational behaviors (Ahmad et al., 2021; Castro-González et al., 2019).

The research further highlights the moderating role of digital engagement and social media platforms in strengthening customer–brand relationships. Digital banking ecosystems, combined with e-CRM systems, facilitate continuous interaction, enabling customers to develop stronger relational ties and participate actively in value co-creation (Hendriyani & Raharja, 2018; Hollebeek et al., 2014). However, challenges such as inconsistent service experiences and perceived unfairness can weaken these relationships, reducing the likelihood of supportive behaviors (Kim et al., 2018).

The findings underscore that customer–brand relationships serve as a strategic asset for banks, driving not only customer retention but also voluntary behaviors that enhance organizational performance and service quality. The study contributes theoretically by integrating multiple relational constructs into a unified framework and practically by offering insights into how banking institutions can leverage emotional and social connections to foster customer advocacy and engagement. Limitations and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: Customer–Brand Relationship, Customer Citizenship Behavior, Emotional Attachment, Banking Services, Customer Engagement, Corporate Social Responsibility, Brand Loyalty, Service Marketing

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Introduction

The contemporary banking sector is undergoing a paradigm shift from product-centric operations to relationship-driven service ecosystems. This transformation is largely driven by increased competition, technological advancements, and evolving customer expectations. In such an environment, banks are no longer evaluated solely on the basis of financial products but also on the strength of their relationships with customers. These relationships, often conceptualized as customer–brand relationships, have emerged as critical determinants of long-term organizational success.

Customer–brand relationships refer to the psychological and emotional connections that customers develop with service providers over time. Rooted in attachment theory, these relationships are characterized by emotional bonds, trust, and commitment (Bowlby, 1977). In the context of banking services, where perceived risk and trust play a significant role, such relationships become even more crucial. Customers are more likely to remain loyal and engage in supportive behaviors when they perceive a strong connection with a bank’s brand.

Supportive behaviors, often termed customer citizenship behaviors (CCBs), extend beyond traditional transactional interactions. These behaviors include voluntary actions such as recommending the bank to others, assisting fellow customers, providing constructive feedback, and tolerating service failures. Unlike mandatory customer roles, these behaviors are

discretionary and are driven by relational and emotional factors rather than contractual obligations (Cheng et al., 2016). The significance of these behaviors lies in their ability to enhance service quality, reduce operational costs, and strengthen brand reputation.

Despite the growing importance of customer–brand relationships, there remains a gap in understanding how these relationships specifically influence supportive behaviors within the banking sector. While previous studies have explored the role of brand attachment and customer engagement in various industries, limited research has focused on their combined effect in financial services. Moreover, the increasing role of digital platforms and CSR initiatives adds further complexity to the relationship dynamics.

Corporate social responsibility has emerged as a key factor influencing customer perceptions and behaviors. Banks that actively engage in CSR activities are perceived as more trustworthy and socially responsible, which enhances customer loyalty and advocacy (Islam et al., 2021). Similarly, digital engagement through social media and e-CRM systems enables continuous interaction, fostering deeper relationships and encouraging customer participation (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

The relevance of this study is further amplified by the increasing digitization of banking services. With the rise of mobile banking, fintech solutions, and online platforms, customer interactions have become more frequent and diverse. These interactions provide

opportunities for banks to build stronger relationships but also pose challenges in maintaining consistency and trust. Understanding how these dynamics influence supportive behaviors is essential for designing effective customer relationship strategies.

The primary objective of this research is to examine the role of customer–brand relationships in encouraging supportive behaviors in banking services. Specifically, the study aims to:

1. Analyze the theoretical foundations of customer–brand relationships and supportive behaviors.
2. Identify key relational constructs influencing customer citizenship behaviors.
3. Examine the role of CSR and digital engagement in strengthening these relationships.
4. Develop a conceptual framework linking relational variables to supportive behaviors.

The scope of this study is limited to the banking sector, with a focus on both traditional and digital banking environments. By integrating insights from multiple theoretical perspectives and empirical studies, the research provides a comprehensive understanding of how relational dynamics influence customer behavior.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both academic research and practical applications. From a theoretical perspective, it advances the understanding of customer–brand relationships by integrating various constructs into a unified framework. From a managerial perspective, it offers actionable insights for banking institutions to enhance customer engagement and foster supportive behaviors.

In conclusion, as the banking sector continues to evolve, the importance of customer–brand relationships cannot be overstated. These relationships not only drive customer loyalty but also encourage behaviors that contribute to organizational success. Understanding and leveraging these dynamics is essential for banks aiming to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.

2. Literature Review

The concept of customer–brand relationships has been extensively studied within the domain of marketing and

consumer behavior, with its theoretical roots grounded in attachment theory and relationship marketing. Bowlby (1977) introduced the notion of attachment as a psychological bond that influences behavior, which has been adapted in marketing to explain emotional connections between consumers and brands. In the banking sector, such emotional bonds are particularly significant due to the intangible nature of services and the reliance on trust.

Cheng et al. (2016) provide empirical evidence linking brand attachment to customer citizenship behaviors, demonstrating that emotionally attached customers are more likely to engage in voluntary behaviors that benefit the organization. Similarly, Levy and Hino (2016) highlight the role of emotional attachment in strengthening customer relationships in banking contexts, emphasizing its impact on loyalty and engagement. These studies collectively suggest that emotional attachment serves as a key driver of supportive behaviors.

The role of customer engagement has also been widely explored as a critical component of customer–brand relationships. Hollebeek et al. (2014) conceptualize customer engagement as a multidimensional construct encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. This perspective is further supported by De Oliveira Santini et al. (2020), who identify engagement as a mechanism through which customers co-create value with organizations. In the banking sector, engagement is facilitated through digital platforms and personalized services, enabling continuous interaction between customers and banks (Hendriyani & Raharja, 2018).

Corporate social responsibility has emerged as another important factor influencing customer behavior. Ahmad et al. (2021) argue that CSR communication through social media significantly enhances customer loyalty and trust. Similarly, Castro-González et al. (2019) emphasize the role of emotions and moral values in shaping customer advocacy behaviors in response to CSR initiatives. These findings indicate that CSR not only enhances brand image but also strengthens customer–brand relationships, leading to increased supportive behaviors.

The relationship between perceived value and customer behavior has also been extensively examined. Itani et al. (2019) propose that perceived value influences

relationship quality, which in turn affects customer engagement and behavioral outcomes. This relationship is particularly relevant in banking services, where customers evaluate both functional and emotional benefits. Kumar and Kaushik (2018) further highlight the mediating role of brand identification in linking brand experience to customer behavior.

Customer citizenship behavior, as a concept, has been defined as voluntary actions performed by customers that are not required for service delivery but contribute to organizational effectiveness (Nyadzayo et al., 2015). These behaviors include helping other customers, providing feedback, and advocating for the brand. Kim et al. (2020) demonstrate that CSR initiatives can significantly enhance such behaviors by improving corporate image and relationship quality.

Digital transformation has further reshaped customer–brand relationships. The rise of social media and mobile banking has created new avenues for interaction, enabling customers to engage with brands in real time. Fletcher-Brown et al. (2020) highlight the role of social media in facilitating customer engagement, particularly among vulnerable consumer segments. Similarly, Ibrahim and Aljarah (2021) emphasize the importance of aligning social media marketing activities with customer relationship quality to enhance brand loyalty.

Despite the extensive research on individual constructs, there remains a lack of integrated frameworks that examine the combined effects of emotional attachment, engagement, CSR, and perceived value on supportive behaviors in banking services. Most studies focus on specific aspects, such as brand attachment or CSR, without considering their interrelationships.

Another critical gap lies in the contextual application of these theories to the banking sector. While studies in hospitality and tourism provide valuable insights, the unique characteristics of banking services—such as high perceived risk and regulatory constraints—necessitate a more focused analysis.

Furthermore, inconsistencies in findings regarding the impact of digital engagement highlight the need for further research. While some studies suggest that digital platforms enhance engagement, others point to challenges such as information overload and reduced personal interaction.

In summary, the literature indicates that customer–brand relationships are influenced by multiple interrelated factors, including emotional attachment, engagement, CSR, and perceived value. These relationships, in turn, drive supportive behaviors that contribute to organizational success. However, there is a need for a comprehensive framework that integrates these factors within the context of banking services.

3. Conceptual Framework and Model Development

Building upon the theoretical foundations discussed, this study proposes a multi-dimensional framework integrating key constructs that influence supportive customer behaviors in banking services. The framework is grounded in attachment theory, social exchange theory, and relationship marketing principles, emphasizing the interconnected roles of emotional attachment, customer engagement, perceived value, CSR, and digital interaction.

At the core of the framework lies **customer–brand relationship quality**, which is conceptualized as a higher-order construct comprising trust, satisfaction, commitment, and emotional attachment. Emotional attachment, derived from attachment theory, reflects the depth of psychological bonding between customers and banking brands (Bowlby, 1977). Empirical findings indicate that such attachment significantly enhances voluntary behaviors such as advocacy and cooperation (Cheng et al., 2016; Levy & Hino, 2016).

Customer engagement is positioned as both an antecedent and mediator within the framework. Engagement reflects the intensity of customer participation in brand-related interactions, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Hollebeek et al., 2014). Digital platforms, particularly social media and mobile banking applications, facilitate this engagement, allowing customers to actively co-create value (Hendriyani & Raharja, 2018).

Corporate social responsibility acts as a critical external driver influencing relational quality. CSR initiatives enhance corporate image and foster emotional and moral connections, thereby encouraging customer advocacy behaviors (Ahmad et al., 2021; Castro-González et al., 2019). The framework also incorporates perceived value as a determinant of relationship quality, highlighting the role of both functional and emotional benefits in shaping customer perceptions (Itani et al., 2019).

The proposed model hypothesizes that:

- Emotional attachment positively influences customer citizenship behavior.
- Customer engagement mediates the relationship between relational quality and supportive behaviors.
- CSR initiatives strengthen customer–brand relationships and indirectly promote supportive behaviors.
- Digital engagement moderates the relationship between customer–brand relationships and behavioral outcomes.

This integrative framework addresses existing research gaps by combining multiple relational constructs into a unified model, offering a comprehensive understanding of how customer–brand relationships drive supportive behaviors in banking services.

4. Core Analysis: Key Drivers of Supportive Customer Behaviors

4.1 Emotional Brand Attachment and Behavioral Outcomes

Emotional brand attachment represents a deep psychological bond that influences customer attitudes and behaviors. In banking services, where trust and reliability are paramount, emotional attachment serves as a critical determinant of customer loyalty and advocacy. Hung and Lu (2018) distinguish between positive and negative emotional attachments, highlighting their differential impact on customer behavior.

Customers with strong emotional attachment are more likely to exhibit supportive behaviors such as recommending services, defending the brand, and assisting other customers. This is consistent with findings by Cheng et al. (2016), who demonstrate a direct link between brand attachment and customer citizenship behavior. Furthermore, emotional attachment reduces sensitivity to service failures, enhancing customer tolerance and long-term retention.

4.2 Customer Engagement and Value Co-Creation

Customer engagement plays a central role in fostering supportive behaviors. Engaged customers actively participate in service delivery processes, contributing to value co-creation. Hollebeek et al. (2014) conceptualize engagement as a multidimensional construct, while De

Oliveira Santini et al. (2020) emphasize its role in enhancing customer experience.

In banking, engagement is facilitated through digital platforms such as mobile applications and social media. These platforms enable continuous interaction, allowing customers to provide feedback, share experiences, and influence other customers. High levels of engagement are associated with increased advocacy, knowledge sharing, and participation in service improvement initiatives.

4.3 Corporate Social Responsibility as a Relational Catalyst

CSR initiatives significantly influence customer perceptions and behaviors. Banks that actively engage in CSR activities are perceived as more ethical and trustworthy, which strengthens customer–brand relationships. Ahmad et al. (2021) highlight the role of CSR communication in enhancing customer loyalty, while Islam et al. (2021) emphasize its impact on trust and satisfaction.

CSR also triggers moral and emotional responses, encouraging customers to engage in pro-social behaviors such as advocacy and environmental responsibility (Ansari et al., 2021). Castro-González et al. (2019) further argue that emotions and moral virtues mediate the relationship between CSR and customer advocacy behaviors.

4.4 Digital Banking and Relationship Intensification

The digital transformation of banking has redefined customer–brand interactions. E-CRM systems and mobile banking applications enable personalized services and real-time communication, enhancing relationship quality (Hendriyani & Raharja, 2018). Social media platforms provide additional avenues for engagement, facilitating information sharing and community building.

However, digital engagement also presents challenges, including reduced personal interaction and increased expectations for service quality. Fletcher-Brown et al. (2020) note that while social media enhances engagement, it also requires careful management to avoid negative customer experiences.

4.5 Perceived Value and Relationship Sustainability

Perceived value is a key determinant of customer satisfaction and relationship quality. It encompasses both functional benefits, such as service efficiency, and emotional benefits, such as trust and security. Itani et al. (2019) demonstrate that perceived value influences relationship quality, which in turn affects customer engagement and behavioral outcomes.

In banking services, delivering consistent value is essential for maintaining long-term relationships. Customers who perceive high value are more likely to remain loyal and engage in supportive behaviors.

5. Results

The analysis reveals that customer–brand relationships significantly influence supportive customer behaviors in banking services. Emotional attachment emerges as a primary driver, with customers exhibiting stronger advocacy, cooperation, and tolerance when they feel emotionally connected to the brand. This finding aligns with prior research indicating that emotional bonds enhance voluntary customer actions (Cheng et al., 2016).

Customer engagement is identified as a critical mediating factor. The results indicate that engaged customers are more likely to participate in value co-creation activities, provide feedback, and assist other customers. Digital platforms play a significant role in facilitating engagement, enabling continuous interaction and enhancing relationship quality (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

CSR initiatives are found to have both direct and indirect effects on supportive behaviors. Directly, CSR enhances corporate image and trust, encouraging advocacy behaviors. Indirectly, CSR strengthens customer–brand relationships, which in turn promote supportive behaviors (Ahmad et al., 2021). The findings also highlight the importance of CSR communication, particularly through social media, in influencing customer perceptions.

Perceived value is identified as a foundational element influencing relationship quality. Customers who perceive high value in banking services are more likely to develop strong relationships and engage in supportive behaviors. This underscores the importance of delivering both functional and emotional value to customers.

Digital engagement is found to moderate the relationship between customer–brand relationships and supportive behaviors. While digital platforms enhance engagement, their effectiveness depends on the quality of interactions and the consistency of service delivery. Poor digital experiences can weaken relationships and reduce supportive behaviors.

Overall, the findings suggest that customer–brand relationships act as a central mechanism through which various factors influence supportive customer behaviors. The interplay between emotional attachment, engagement, CSR, and perceived value creates a dynamic system that drives customer participation and advocacy.

6. Discussion

The findings of this study provide important insights into the mechanisms through which customer–brand relationships influence supportive behaviors in banking services. The central role of emotional attachment supports the theoretical propositions of attachment theory, emphasizing the importance of psychological bonds in shaping customer behavior (Bowlby, 1977).

The mediating role of customer engagement highlights the dynamic nature of customer–brand relationships. Engagement not only reflects the strength of relationships but also serves as a pathway through which relational factors translate into behavioral outcomes. This finding is consistent with prior research emphasizing the role of engagement in value co-creation (De Oliveira Santini et al., 2020).

The impact of CSR initiatives underscores the importance of ethical and social considerations in shaping customer behavior. CSR not only enhances corporate image but also fosters emotional and moral connections, which drive supportive behaviors. This aligns with the growing emphasis on sustainability and social responsibility in the banking sector.

However, the findings also reveal potential challenges associated with digital engagement. While digital platforms facilitate interaction, they also increase customer expectations and the risk of service failures. Banks must therefore balance technological innovation with service quality to maintain strong relationships.

The study also highlights the importance of perceived value in sustaining customer–brand relationships. Delivering consistent value is essential for maintaining customer satisfaction and loyalty. This finding reinforces the need for banks to focus on both functional and emotional aspects of service delivery.

Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. The reliance on secondary data limits the ability to establish causal relationships. Additionally, the focus on the banking sector may limit the generalizability of the findings to other industries.

Future research should explore the role of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence and blockchain, in shaping customer–brand relationships. Longitudinal studies could also provide deeper insights into the evolution of these relationships over time.

7. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that customer–brand relationships play a crucial role in encouraging supportive behaviors in banking services. Emotional attachment, customer engagement, CSR initiatives, and perceived value collectively influence customer citizenship behaviors, creating a dynamic system that enhances organizational performance.

The research contributes to the existing literature by integrating multiple relational constructs into a comprehensive framework, providing a deeper understanding of how these factors interact to influence customer behavior. From a practical perspective, the findings offer valuable insights for banking institutions seeking to enhance customer engagement and foster supportive behaviors.

To achieve sustainable competitive advantage, banks must focus on building strong emotional connections with customers, leveraging digital platforms for engagement, and implementing effective CSR strategies. By doing so, they can not only enhance customer loyalty but also encourage behaviors that contribute to organizational success.

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