



Analysing Role of Emotional Branding in FMCG Products (pet food)

C.Rahuram¹, Swathi.P²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Business Administration, Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science, India.

²III BBA, Department of Business Administration, Sri Krishna Adithya College of Arts and Science, India.

Abstract- The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry increasingly relies on emotional branding to differentiate products in highly competitive markets. In the pet food sector, purchase decisions are deeply influenced by emotional attachment between pet owners and their pets. This study analyzes how emotional branding strategies influence brand loyalty, trust, perceived quality, and repeat purchase behavior in FMCG pet food products. Drawing upon Emotional Branding Theory, Attachment Theory, Brand Equity Model, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response framework, this study explains how storytelling, anthropomorphism, packaging design, social media engagement, and cause-related marketing create emotional bonds with consumers. The findings suggest that emotional branding enhances brand recall, reduces price sensitivity, strengthens customer retention, and increases willingness to pay premium prices. However, ethical considerations regarding emotional manipulation and misleading health claims must be addressed.

Keywords- Emotional Branding, FMCG, Pet Food, Brand Loyalty, Brand Equity, Consumer Behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

The Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) industry represents one of the most dynamic and competitive sectors in the global marketplace. Characterized by high-volume sales, low margins, rapid inventory turnover, and intense brand competition, FMCG markets require companies to continuously innovate in order to sustain consumer attention and loyalty. Traditionally, firms relied heavily on functional differentiation—such as price competitiveness, product quality, packaging size, and distribution efficiency—to attract and retain customers. However, in increasingly saturated markets where functional attributes are easily replicable, emotional differentiation has emerged as a critical strategic advantage.

In this evolving marketing landscape, emotional branding has become a dominant paradigm that shifts the focus from transactional exchanges to relationship-building. Emotional branding seeks to create meaningful psychological connections between brands and consumers by appealing to feelings, identity, aspirations, and deeply held personal values. Rather than positioning products solely as solutions to functional needs, emotional branding transforms them into symbols of care, belonging, and self-expression. This strategic shift is particularly relevant in FMCG sectors where product categories are highly standardized and consumer switching costs are low.

Among FMCG categories, the pet food industry presents a unique and compelling context for examining the role of emotional branding. Over the past decade, global pet ownership has increased significantly due to urbanization, rising disposable income, changing family structures, and heightened awareness



of animal welfare. More importantly, societal attitudes toward pets have undergone a profound transformation. Pets are no longer viewed merely as domestic animals serving functional purposes; instead, they are increasingly perceived as family members, emotional companions, and even “fur children.” This phenomenon, commonly referred to as pet humanization, has fundamentally reshaped consumer behavior in the pet care market.

The pet humanization trend has altered the psychological meaning of pet-related purchases. Buying pet food is no longer a routine or purely utilitarian decision; it is often perceived as an act of love, responsibility, and moral commitment. Pet owners frequently associate the nutritional quality of pet food with their own identity as caring and responsible caregivers. As a result, purchasing decisions are strongly influenced by emotional considerations such as trust, reassurance, and perceived well-being of the pet. This emotional dimension differentiates the pet food category from many other FMCG products.

Emergence of Emotional Branding in Pet Food

The emergence of emotional branding in the pet food industry is closely linked to the rise of pet humanization, where pets are increasingly viewed as family members. This shift has transformed purchasing decisions from functional evaluation to emotionally driven choices. Brands such as Pedigree strategically use storytelling and care-based messaging to position products as expressions of love and responsibility, thereby strengthening emotional attachment and long-term brand loyalty.

Research Objectives and Scope

This study aims to examine how emotional branding influences consumer perception, loyalty, and repeat purchase behavior in the FMCG pet food sector. It seeks to analyze the psychological mechanisms behind emotionally driven buying decisions and evaluate managerial implications for sustainable brand building. The scope is limited to conceptual analysis within the pet food category and does not include empirical data collection or cross-industry comparisons

II. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

Psychological Foundations of Emotional Branding

Emotional branding is rooted in fundamental human motivations associated with attachment, belongingness, identity expression, and caregiving instincts. According to Attachment Theory, individuals form deep emotional bonds with significant others who provide comfort and security. In contemporary households, pets increasingly occupy this emotional role, functioning as companions and family members. When brands align their messaging with these emotional bonds, they become symbolically associated with love, protection, and responsible caregiving.

Additionally, emotional branding is closely linked to affective responses and emotional memory formation. Individuals tend to evaluate brands not only based on functional attributes such as price and ingredients, but also on the emotional reassurance they provide. The anticipation of fulfilling one’s role as a caring pet owner—imagining a healthy and happy pet—creates internal motivation to select emotionally trusted brands. This emotional reinforcement strengthens brand attachment and reduces reliance on purely rational evaluation.

Attachment Theory

The digital ecosystem magnifies emotional branding in the pet food industry through continuous social interaction and community engagement. Social media platforms, influencer marketing, and user-generated content provide constant visibility into how pet owners express care and affection toward their pets. When individuals observe others sharing feeding routines, health transformations, or celebratory pet moments, emotional identification and social validation intensify.



Pet food brands strategically integrate emotional visibility into digital platforms. Features such as customer testimonials, before-and-after pet stories, interactive campaigns, and community hashtags create an environment of shared caregiving identity. This transforms purchasing from an individual functional decision into a socially reinforced expression of love and responsibility.

Moreover, algorithmic personalization strengthens emotional branding effects by presenting consumers with highly relevant content aligned with their pet's breed, age, or health needs. Perceived personalization increases emotional reassurance and trust, thereby deepening brand attachment and encouraging repeat purchase behavior.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research has increasingly examined the intersection of emotional branding strategies and consumer decision-making processes in competitive FMCG markets. Studies in consumer psychology suggest that emotionally positioned brands significantly enhance perceived product value, strengthen trust, and increase repeat purchase intention. Emotional cues such as storytelling, warmth-based imagery, and anthropomorphic representation reduce perceived substitutability and create deeper brand attachment.

Gobé (2001) emphasized that emotional branding shifts marketing focus from product features to emotional relationships, arguing that brands that connect with consumer feelings create stronger loyalty than those relying solely on rational persuasion. His work laid the foundation for understanding how emotional resonance influences brand preference in saturated markets.

Thomson, MacInnis, and Park (2005) examined emotional brand attachment and found that strong emotional bonds between consumers and brands significantly predict brand commitment and resistance to switching. Their findings highlight that emotional attachment functions as a long-term relational mechanism rather than a short-term promotional tool.

Recent studies on pet humanization trends indicate that pet owners increasingly evaluate pet food brands based on emotional reassurance and perceived caregiving alignment rather than purely nutritional attributes. Research suggests that anthropomorphic marketing strategies enhance empathy and strengthen perceived emotional closeness between brand and consumer.

Keller (2013) expanded on customer-based brand equity theory, arguing that favorable brand associations and emotional connections significantly enhance brand awareness, perceived quality, and loyalty. In the FMCG pet food context, emotional branding strengthens these equity components by embedding brands within narratives of love, care, and responsibility.

Digital marketing research further highlights the role of social media engagement in amplifying emotional branding effects. Studies indicate that user-generated content, influencer endorsements, and community-based campaigns increase emotional validation and foster collective brand identity among consumers.

Collectively, the literature indicates that emotional branding operates as a multidimensional construct influenced by psychological attachment, identity reinforcement, social interaction, and cultural trends such as pet humanization. However, existing research often examines emotional branding in general FMCG categories rather than specifically integrating psychological theory, brand equity frameworks, and managerial implications within the pet food sector. This study addresses this gap by synthesizing behavioral theories with practical branding strategies to provide a comprehensive conceptual framework for emotional branding in FMCG pet food products.



IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Understanding the effectiveness of emotional branding strategies in the FMCG pet food industry requires a strong theoretical foundation. Emotional branding is not merely a promotional technique but a psychological and relational phenomenon supported by established branding and behavioral theories. This section integrates multiple theoretical perspectives to explain how emotional cues influence consumer cognition, attachment, and purchasing decisions.

Attachment Theory

Attachment Theory suggests that individuals form deep emotional bonds with significant others who provide comfort, security, and companionship. In contemporary society, pets increasingly fulfill this emotional role within households. The emotional connection between pet owners and their pets transforms caregiving behaviors—such as feeding—into meaningful relational acts.

When pet food brands position themselves as partners in ensuring a pet's health and happiness, they become symbolically linked to this attachment bond. Consumers may perceive choosing a trusted brand as an expression of love and responsibility. As a result, emotional branding strengthens relational loyalty, even in the presence of competing alternatives.

Emotional Branding Theory

Emotional Branding Theory, articulated by scholars such as Marc Gobé, emphasizes that brands build stronger equity when they create emotional experiences rather than focusing solely on functional attributes. Emotional branding operates through storytelling, sensory appeal, authenticity, and relationship-building.

In the pet food industry, emotional branding enhances perceived warmth and trust. Advertisements featuring joyful pets, nurturing owners, and heartwarming narratives stimulate positive affective responses. These emotional cues influence memory formation and brand recall, increasing the likelihood of repeat purchase behavior.

Social Identity Theory

Proposed by Henri Tajfel, Social Identity Theory states that individuals derive part of their self-concept from their membership in social groups. In the context of pet ownership, consumers often identify themselves as responsible and caring pet parents.

Purchasing premium or emotionally positioned pet food reinforces this identity. Brands that align with values such as compassion, animal welfare, and responsible caregiving allow consumers to express their social identity through consumption. Thus, pet food purchases extend beyond nutritional utility to symbolic self-expression.

Digital communities further intensify this identity reinforcement, as pet owners share feeding practices and brand preferences on social media platforms, transforming consumption into socially visible affirmation.

Dual-Process Theory (System 1 vs. System 2)

Dual-Process Theory distinguishes between two modes of thinking:

Process	Characteristics	Role in Emotional Branding
System 1 (Emotional)	Fast, intuitive, affect-driven	Triggered by cute imagery, storytelling, and nurturing cues
System 2 (Rational)	Slow, logical, analytical	Evaluates ingredients, nutritional value, and price



Emotional Value–Trust Model

The Emotional Value–Trust Model explains how emotional branding builds long-term consumer commitment in the pet food industry. Emotional cues such as warmth-based storytelling, caregiving imagery, and reassurance messaging first create perceived emotional value.

This emotional value strengthens consumer trust, which then leads to repeat purchase intention and brand loyalty. Unlike purely rational evaluation, this model highlights that trust is formed through consistent emotional satisfaction combined with reliable product performance.

Thus, emotional branding works not only by attracting attention, but by converting emotional meaning into sustained relational trust.

V. MECHANISMS OF EMOTIONAL BRANDING IN PET FOOD

Emotional Storytelling (Narrative Bonding)

Emotional branding in pet food frequently relies on storytelling to create narrative bonding between the brand and the consumer. Through advertisements depicting rescued pets, nurturing families, and joyful companionship, brands position themselves as facilitators of love and care rather than mere product providers.

Storytelling reduces cognitive resistance and increases affective immersion. Instead of evaluating ingredients analytically, consumers emotionally relate to the narrative. This reliance on affective processing enhances empathy and strengthens brand recall, thereby increasing the likelihood of repeat purchases.

Humanization and Anthropomorphism (The Pet-as-Family Effect)

Modern marketing strategies increasingly portray pets as family members rather than animals. This anthropomorphic framing elevates the emotional stakes of purchasing decisions.

Visual Cues: Packaging featuring smiling pets, heart symbols, and warm color palettes enhances emotional warmth.

Language Framing: Terms such as “pet parent,” “loving care,” and “family nutrition” reinforce relational identity.

Care Alignment: Brands emphasize safety, natural ingredients, and health benefits to align with parental responsibility.

By humanizing pets, brands transform product choice into an expression of caregiving competence and affection.

Identity Reinforcement and Community Belonging

Emotional branding extends beyond individual attachment to collective identity formation. Pet owners increasingly participate in online communities where brand usage becomes socially visible.

User-Generated Content: Sharing feeding routines or pet transformation stories validates brand trust.

Influencer Endorsements: Pet influencers create aspirational caregiving standards.

Cause-Related Marketing: Supporting animal shelters or adoption drives strengthens moral identity alignment.

This mechanism shifts purchasing from functional consumption to symbolic participation in a caring community.

Table 2: Comparison of Emotional Branding Mechanisms

Mechanism	Characteristics	Role in Consumer Response
Emotional Storytelling	Narrative-driven, empathy-based communication	Enhances emotional immersion and brand recall



Anthropomorphism	Pet-as-family framing, warmth-based imagery	Increases attachment and caregiving motivation
Identity Reinforcement	Community engagement and value alignment	Strengthens loyalty and repeat purchase intention

VI. EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL BRANDING ON PURCHASE BEHAVIOR

The “Emotional Value” Shift

Psychologically, emotional reassurance often outweighs rational evaluation in caregiving-related purchases. Emotional branding reframes buying pet food as an act of love rather than a routine transaction. Consumers do not merely purchase nutrition; they purchase emotional security.

When brands successfully position themselves as symbols of affection and responsibility, the purchase becomes a moral and relational decision. Consumers buy primarily to reinforce their identity as caring and responsible pet parents.

Attachment Activation and Cognitive Bias

Emotionally charged advertisements featuring happy, healthy pets activate attachment-based responses. This can lead to affect-driven decision-making, where emotional warmth influences perception of product quality.

When packaging displays phrases like “made with love” or “complete family nutrition,” it triggers emotional heuristics. Consumers may focus more on relational meaning than ingredient comparison, creating mild cognitive bias toward emotionally positioned brands.

Emotional attachment can therefore narrow evaluative focus, reducing sensitivity to price differences and alternative comparisons.

The Post-Purchase Emotional Cycle

Emotion-driven satisfaction in pet food purchases operates differently from impulse-based retail behavior. Instead of regret, emotional branding typically produces reassurance and relational validation. Emotional Relief: Confidence that the pet is receiving proper care.

Identity Reinforcement: Validation of being a responsible pet owner.

Long-Term Loyalty: Positive emotional outcomes increase repeat purchases rather than product returns. Unlike urgency-driven buying, emotionally grounded purchases are less likely to result in regret and more likely to strengthen long-term brand attachment.

VII. ETHICAL ISSUES AND CONSUMER WELL-BEING

The increasing sophistication of emotional branding strategies in the FMCG pet food industry raises important ethical considerations. While emotional storytelling and attachment-based marketing are legitimate persuasive tools, excessive emotional manipulation may compromise informed decision-making. Ethical evaluation of emotional branding must consider transparency, authenticity, emotional vulnerability, and long-term consumer trust.

Emotional Manipulation and “Sentimental Overreach”

One major ethical concern is the potential for sentimental overreach—where brands exploit emotional attachment between pets and owners to drive higher sales. When advertising excessively dramatizes fear, guilt, or parental inadequacy, consumers may feel pressured rather than reassured.



Emotionally responsible branding requires that claims regarding health benefits, nutrition, and safety remain accurate and evidence-based. Misleading emotional exaggeration can erode brand credibility and damage long-term trust.

Authenticity is therefore central to ethical emotional branding. Emotional appeal must complement factual integrity rather than replace it.

Psychological and Emotional Impact

Emotional branding in pet food generally aims to evoke warmth and reassurance. However, repeated exposure to emotionally intense messaging may amplify feelings of anxiety about pet health or well-being.

Consumers may experience:

- Caregiver Anxiety: Fear of not providing “the best” nutrition.
- Guilt Sensitivity: Emotional discomfort when choosing lower-priced alternatives.
- Emotional Dependency: Strong reliance on specific brands for psychological reassurance.

When emotional messaging intensifies insecurity rather than confidence, it may negatively affect consumer well-being. Balanced communication should empower informed choice rather than induce emotional pressure.

Impact on Financial Decision-Making

Premium emotionally positioned pet food brands often carry higher price points. While consumers may willingly pay more for perceived quality and care alignment, excessive emotional influence can reduce price sensitivity and rational comparison.

Younger consumers or highly attached pet owners may prioritize emotional satisfaction over financial planning. Over time, repeated premium purchases may strain household budgets, particularly in multi-pet households.

Thus, ethical responsibility extends beyond advertising tone to pricing strategy and claim transparency. Brands must consider whether their communication encourages responsible consumption or fosters unnecessary financial burden driven by emotional persuasion.

VIII. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

Managers must deploy emotional branding as a strategic relationship-building tool rather than a short-term emotional trigger. In the FMCG pet food sector, long-term trust and credibility are more valuable than temporary emotional stimulation. Sustainable emotional positioning requires alignment between brand messaging, product quality, and operational capability.

Brand Equity and Trust Management

The most significant managerial risk in emotional branding is authenticity erosion. If emotional narratives exaggerate claims or create unrealistic expectations, brand credibility may decline.

Emotional messaging must be supported by:

Verified nutritional quality

Transparent ingredient disclosure

Consistent product performance

Trust is cumulative in caregiving-related markets. Discovering inconsistencies between emotional claims and product reality can rapidly damage brand equity. Managers should therefore ensure that emotional positioning strengthens, rather than substitutes, functional reliability.



Operational and Supply Chain Alignment

Emotionally successful campaigns may significantly increase demand, especially during promotional launches or cause-related initiatives. Sudden demand spikes require careful inventory planning and distribution efficiency.

Managers must consider:

Forecasting demand from campaign-driven engagement

Maintaining consistent stock availability

Ensuring quality control across batches

Operational gaps can undermine emotional trust. For example, stock-outs or inconsistent product quality may create anxiety rather than reassurance among pet owners.

Thus, emotional branding must be integrated with operational readiness to protect long-term loyalty.

Strategic Emotional Branding Framework

Table 4: Strategic Framework for Managers

Strategy	Recommended Use Case	Managerial Focus
Storytelling Campaigns	Brand awareness and emotional positioning	Focus on authenticity and value alignment
Cause-Related Marketing	Animal welfare partnerships, adoption drives	Ensure transparency and measurable impact
Community Engagement Programs	Building loyal pet-owner communities	Strengthen two-way communication and trust
Premium Product Positioning	Health-focused or specialized nutrition lines	Balance emotional appeal with scientific credibility

IX. FUTURE PERSPECTIVE

The evolving dynamics of consumer psychology and digital marketing present significant opportunities for future research on emotional branding in the FMCG pet food industry. As pet humanization trends continue to expand globally and digital platforms integrate advanced personalization technologies, emotional branding strategies are likely to become more sophisticated and data-driven.

Future studies should explore how emotional attachment mechanisms evolve across cultures, economic contexts, and technological environments. Understanding these shifts will help establish responsible branding standards that balance emotional resonance with ethical transparency.

Empirical Validation Across Demographics

Future research should conduct large-scale empirical investigations across diverse demographic segments, including variations in age, income level, education, and degree of pet attachment.

Understanding generational differences in emotional responsiveness can help determine whether younger consumers exhibit stronger attachment-based purchasing tendencies compared to older pet owners. Cross-cultural comparisons between emerging and developed markets may also reveal how societal values influence emotional brand perception.

Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how emotional brand attachment develops over time and whether it translates into sustained loyalty or fluctuates with competitive alternatives.

AI-Driven Personalization and Ethical Boundaries

Artificial intelligence and predictive analytics increasingly enable hyper-personalized emotional advertising based on browsing behavior, purchase history, and engagement patterns. While



personalization enhances relevance, it may intensify psychological targeting by leveraging attachment-based vulnerabilities.

Future research must investigate the ethical boundaries of algorithm-driven emotional branding.

Questions such as:

At what point does emotional personalization become manipulation?

How can transparency be embedded in AI-driven emotional messaging?

Can digital well-being indicators be integrated into marketing algorithms?

Systematic exploration of these issues will help design ethical frameworks for emotionally intelligent marketing systems.

Developing emotionally engaging yet ethically responsible branding models represents an important direction for both academic research and managerial practice.

X. CONCLUSION

This study critically examined the role of emotional branding as a dominant strategic approach in the FMCG pet food industry and analyzed its influence on consumer purchase behavior. By integrating Attachment Theory, Emotional Branding Theory, Social Identity Theory, Dual-Process Theory, and the Stimulus–Organism–Response model, the research demonstrates that emotional branding primarily functions through affective activation rather than purely rational evaluation.

Emotional cues such as storytelling, anthropomorphic imagery, community engagement, and cause-related marketing strengthen attachment, reinforce identity, and enhance perceived value. These mechanisms contribute to higher brand loyalty, premium willingness, and positive word-of-mouth behavior.

While emotional branding significantly enhances long-term customer relationships and brand equity, it also raises ethical considerations. Excessive emotional manipulation, exaggerated claims, or fear-based messaging may undermine consumer trust and psychological well-being. Therefore, sustainable emotional branding depends on authenticity, transparency, and alignment between emotional appeal and product integrity.

Ultimately, emotional branding should be viewed as a strategic relational tool rather than a purely persuasive instrument. Responsible implementation that respects consumer autonomy can balance profitability with long-term brand credibility and societal trust.

REFERENCES

1. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179–211.
2. Gobé, M. (2001). *Emotional Branding: The New Paradigm for Connecting Brands to People*. Allworth Press.
3. Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic Brand Management* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.
4. Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*. Brooks/Cole.
5. Thomson, M., MacInnis, D. J., & Park, C. W. (2005). The ties that bind: Measuring the strength of consumers' emotional attachment to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 15(1), 77–91.
6. Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., & Priester, J. (2006). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(4), 1–17.



7. Escalas, J. E. (2004). Narrative processing: Building consumer connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(1–2), 168–180.
8. Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139–168.
9. Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343–373.
10. Solomon, M. R. (2018). *Consumer Behavior: Buying, Having, and Being* (12th ed.). Pearson.