

The Influence Of Emotional Intelligence On Consumer Behavior

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Abstract: Emotional intelligence (EI) has become increasingly relevant to consumer research because marketplace decisions frequently involve affective information, emotional appeals, interpersonal cues, and self-regulation. This paper examines the relationship between EI and four consumer outcomes: emotional processing, consumer attitudes toward brands, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. Building on ability-based models of EI and research on emotion in consumer judgment, the study positions EI as an individual-difference variable that may influence how consumers recognize, interpret, and regulate emotional information during consumption. A quantitative, cross-sectional survey design is specified, using established measures and structural equation modeling (SEM). The reported results indicate positive relationships between EI and all four focal outcomes, with the strongest reported association occurring between EI and emotional processing. The paper contributes to marketing scholarship by integrating emotional intelligence (EI) theory with consumer behavior research and by distinguishing the experience of emotion from the ability to process emotional information. Managerially, the framework suggests that consumers may differ systematically in their responses to emotionally framed communication, brand narratives, and relationship-building strategies.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, consumer behavior, consumer attitudes, purchase intention, brand loyalty, emotional processing

1. The Influence of Emotional Intelligence on Consumer Behavior

Consumer choices emerge from the interaction of reasoning, social context, situational conditions, and affective experience. Earlier decision models often foregrounded deliberate evaluation, whereas contemporary consumer research treats emotion as part of the mechanisms through which people notice information, form preferences, select alternatives, and evaluate outcomes after purchase. Consumers therefore respond not only to price and functional attributes but also to meanings, feelings, interpersonal signals, and the need to manage affect during consumption. This perspective makes emotional intelligence (EI) a relevant construct for explaining variation in marketplace judgment.

In this study, EI denotes capacities for recognizing emotional information, making sense of it, drawing on it in thought, and regulating emotional responses. Salovey and Mayer (1990) initially framed EI around monitoring emotions in oneself and others and using that information to guide cognition and behavior. Mayer and Salovey (1997) later organized the construct into four related abilities: perceiving emotion, facilitating thought with emotion, understanding emotion, and managing emotion. These abilities are pertinent to consumption because advertising, service encounters, social influence, brand narratives, scarcity messages, and satisfaction or disappointment all contain affective information that consumers must interpret.

A substantial marketing literature demonstrates that affect is not peripheral to consumption. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) broadened the study of consumption by emphasizing experiential and symbolic value alongside utility. Bagozzi et al. (1999) situated emotions within appraisal, goal pursuit, satisfaction, and behavioral response, while Pham (2007) explained conditions under which feelings become inputs to judgment. Lerner et al. (2015) further showed that distinct emotions can produce systematic differences in decision processes. Taken together, this work establishes the importance of emotion while leaving open an important question: why do consumers differ in the way they interpret and regulate emotionally charged information? EI provides one theoretically grounded answer.

Evidence from consumer research strengthens this rationale. Kidwell et al. (2008a) introduced the Consumer Emotional Intelligence Scale (CEIS), an 18-item domain-specific instrument intended to capture how effectively consumers use emotional information. Their studies supported the measure's psychometric properties and showed that consumer EI contributed to the prediction of food and product choices beyond cognitive knowledge. A related investigation by Kidwell et al. (2008b) linked emotional calibration with better consumer choices and weaker effects of impulsive eating and vivid presentation. These findings indicate that emotional abilities can add explanatory value to models of consumer choice.

Even with this foundation, the role of EI in broader marketing outcomes remains insufficiently integrated. Brand attitude, purchase intention, and loyalty are central variables in consumer research, yet they are more often examined as consequences of affective responses than as outcomes potentially associated with consumers' emotional abilities. Brand relationships themselves can involve attachment (Thomson et al., 2005), trust (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), and relationship-like bonds (Fournier, 1998). It is therefore useful to test whether EI is associated with how consumers evaluate brands and whether those evaluations extend to intentions and loyalty.

Accordingly, the study evaluates EI in relation to four outcomes: emotional processing, attitudes toward brands, purchase intention, and brand loyalty. Its contribution is threefold. It brings general EI theory into a consumer-decision framework; it separates emotional ability from the temporary experience of positive or negative affect; and it examines several stages of consumer response within one empirical model. This structure permits a more differentiated assessment of how emotional competence may relate to marketplace judgments.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1 Conceptual Foundations of Emotional Intelligence

EI has been conceptualized through several frameworks that overlap but are not interchangeable. Mayer and Salovey's ability perspective treats EI as a set of mental abilities for handling emotional information. Mixed approaches extend the construct by incorporating competencies, personality-related tendencies, or social functioning. Goleman (1998), for instance, emphasized emotional competencies associated with performance, whereas Bar-On (2006) proposed a wider emotional-social intelligence model. The coexistence of these traditions makes precise construct definition especially important when EI is used in empirical marketing research.

The present study treats EI principally as an individual difference in emotional appraisal, use, understanding, and regulation. The Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS) operationalizes four corresponding domains: appraisal of one's own emotions, appraisal of others' emotions, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion (Wong & Law, 2002). Law et al. (2004) subsequently examined the construct and criterion validity of this approach. Although the WLEIS originated outside consumer research, its dimensions are applicable to consumption settings in which individuals interpret their own affective reactions, read social-emotional cues, and regulate responses during choice.

It is also necessary to distinguish broad EI from emotional intelligence defined specifically within the consumer domain. Kidwell et al. (2008a) argued that domain-specific emotional abilities can improve prediction of consumer outcomes and developed the CEIS for this purpose. Their results suggest that a measure tailored to marketplace decisions may capture variance not represented by a general EI instrument. Because the original empirical design of the present study uses the WLEIS, that measure is retained here; nevertheless, comparison of WLEIS and CEIS measures represents an important avenue for future validation.

2.2 Emotion in Consumer Judgment and Decision-Making

Affect can enter consumer judgment at several points in the decision process. Emotional reactions may change what receives attention, how risk is perceived, what is remembered, how alternatives are evaluated, and whether a person is willing to act. Hirschman and Holbrook (1982) challenged narrowly utilitarian accounts of consumption by emphasizing experiential responses. Bagozzi et al. (1999) later synthesized evidence linking emotion with appraisal, goals, satisfaction, and behavior, reinforcing the view that consumption cannot be understood solely as cognitive calculation.

Pham (2007) described multiple routes through which affect enters judgment, including situations in which people treat their feelings as diagnostic information about an option. Such affective shortcuts can be useful, but their value depends on whether the feeling is relevant and correctly attributed. EI may matter precisely at this point: a consumer who can identify the origin and meaning of an emotional reaction may be better positioned to decide how much weight that reaction deserves.

Emotional effects also extend beyond a simple positive-versus-negative distinction. Lerner et al. (2015) showed that discrete emotions can generate different appraisal patterns and, in turn, different judgments about risk and choice. Consumer models should therefore consider not only whether affect is pleasant or unpleasant but also whether individuals can discriminate among emotional states and regulate them. EI offers a mechanism through which these person-level differences can be represented.

Regulatory ability is particularly salient when purchase environments involve temptation, time pressure, vivid presentation, or social influence. Kidwell et al. (2008b) found that emotional calibration was related to higher-quality food choices and reduced sensitivity to some impulsive and presentation-based influences. The implication is not that EI makes consumers immune to bias; rather, emotional skill may provide resources for evaluating affective information more deliberately.

2.3 Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Processing

For this study, emotional processing refers to how consumers notice, interpret, and regulate affective cues generated by marketing stimuli and consumption experiences. Because this outcome closely reflects the core abilities represented in EI, a positive association is theoretically expected. Consumers who identify emotional states more accurately may be more attentive to the affective tone of advertising, service interactions, and their own responses to products or brands; regulation may also help them separate a momentary feeling from a more enduring evaluation.

This expectation follows from both general EI theory and consumer-specific research. Mayer and Salovey's (1997) framework emphasizes perception, understanding, and management of emotion, while the WLEIS captures appraisal, use, and regulation dimensions (Wong & Law, 2002). Kidwell et al. (2008a) additionally showed that emotional abilities have predictive relevance in consumer choice. These streams of evidence support testing whether higher EI is associated with stronger self-reported emotional processing in marketing contexts.

H1: Emotional intelligence is positively associated with consumers' emotional processing of marketing stimuli.

2.4 Emotional Intelligence and Consumer Attitudes Toward Brands

A brand attitude represents an overall evaluation that can incorporate both beliefs and affective reactions. Spears and Singh (2004) provided established measures of attitude toward the brand and purchase intention. Because contemporary brand communication often relies on narrative, imagery, symbolism, and emotional positioning, consumers' skill in interpreting affective information may influence the way such communications are evaluated.

Research on consumer-brand relationships provides an additional basis for this proposition. Fournier (1998) described brands as potential relationship partners in consumers' lives; Delgado-Ballester (2004) examined brand trust; and Thomson et al. (2005) operationalized emotional attachment to brands. Collectively, this literature establishes that brand evaluation can contain strong relational and affective components. It does not, however, prove that EI necessarily creates favorable attitudes, making the relationship an empirical question rather than a presumed causal effect.

Higher EI could plausibly be associated with more differentiated and stable brand evaluations because emotionally skilled consumers may identify whether a brand's emotional message is congruent with their values and experiences. At the same time, higher EI might also make consumers more critical of emotional persuasion. Thus, the proposed positive association should be understood as a testable relationship within the study's model, not as a universal property of emotionally intelligent consumers.

H2: Emotional intelligence is positively associated with consumer attitudes toward brands.

2.5 Emotional Intelligence and Purchase Intention

Purchase intention captures a consumer's expressed readiness or likelihood to buy and is frequently used as a prospective behavioral indicator. Dodds et al. (1991) linked product, brand, and store information to buyers' evaluations and willingness to purchase, and Spears and Singh (2004) offered a concise purchase-intention measure alongside brand attitude. Intentions remain distinct from actual behavior, but they are useful for examining how evaluations may develop into planned action.

EI may be related to purchase intention through emotional appraisal and regulation. Consumers who understand their affective reactions may be better able to integrate emotional and cognitive information when evaluating a product. This does not mean that higher EI should always increase purchasing. In some contexts, emotional awareness could reduce intention by helping consumers recognize an irrelevant or manipulative appeal. In the model examined here, however, the hypothesized direction is positive because EI is expected to support coherent evaluation when emotional information is relevant to the consumer's judgment.

H3: Emotional intelligence is positively associated with purchase intention.

2.6 Emotional Intelligence and Brand Loyalty

Brand loyalty encompasses continued preference and patronage as well as favorable relational and advocacy intentions. Zeithaml et al. (1996) demonstrated the importance of loyalty-related behavioral intentions and word-of-mouth in service research. Trust and emotional attachment offer additional mechanisms through which brand relationships may persist over time (Delgado-Ballester, 2004; Thomson et al., 2005).

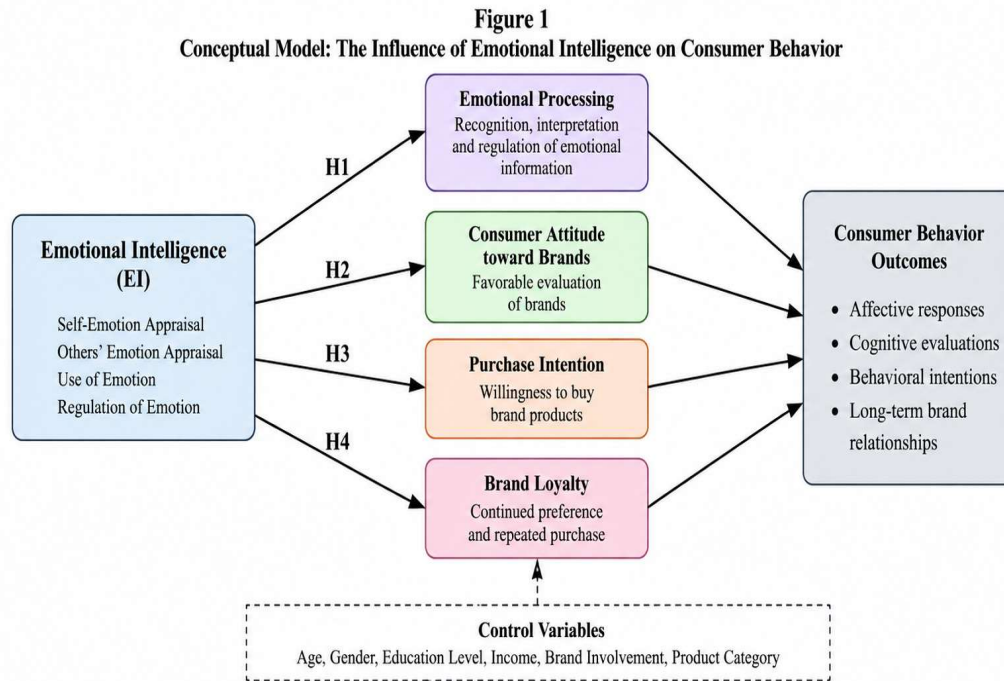
EI may be associated with loyalty when consumers use emotional information to interpret repeated brand experiences and regulate temporary negative reactions. A consumer who can distinguish an isolated frustrating incident from the broader quality of a brand relationship may evaluate the relationship differently from a consumer whose judgment is dominated by an immediate affective state. Conversely, emotional skill may also facilitate disengagement from brands that repeatedly violate expectations. For this reason, loyalty should not be assumed to follow automatically from EI; the proposed relationship must be evaluated empirically.

H4: Emotional intelligence is positively associated with brand loyalty.

Emotional intelligence can contribute to brand loyalty by influencing how consumers recognize, interpret, and regulate emotions arising from their interactions with brands. Consumers with stronger emotional abilities may process brand-related experiences more effectively and integrate emotional information into their evaluations and decisions. Consumer emotional intelligence has been shown to influence decision-making processes beyond purely cognitive knowledge, indicating that emotional capabilities can play an important role in shaping consumer responses (Kidwell et al., 2008).

Brand loyalty also contains an important emotional and relational dimension, as continued preference for a brand can develop through accumulated positive experiences, trust, and emotional connections. Emotional intelligence may facilitate this process by enabling consumers to understand their affective responses and manage emotions generated during brand encounters. Research further indicates that emotional intelligence can contribute to marketing relationships and exchange outcomes, supporting its relevance to the development of enduring consumer–brand relationships (Kidwell et al., 2011).

More specifically, empirical research has identified a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and brand loyalty within consumer decision-making contexts (Kankam & Charnor, 2023). This evidence suggests that consumers' ability to understand and regulate emotions may contribute to sustained brand preference and relationship continuity.



Source: Author's own conceptualization based on the theoretical framework and hypotheses of the study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design is used to evaluate the proposed relationships. This design permits latent psychological and marketing constructs to be measured with multi-item scales and examined statistically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because observations are collected at one point in time, the analysis is suited to estimating associations rather than demonstrating temporal or causal ordering (Bryman, 2016). Consequently, the structural paths are interpreted as relationships among constructs rather than as definitive causal effects.

3.2 Population and Sampling

The target population consists of consumers aged 18 to 45 who engage in both digital and offline marketplaces. Respondents are recruited through non-probability convenience sampling. As Etikan et al. (2016) explain, convenience sampling prioritizes accessibility and feasibility rather than probabilistic representation. This approach can support exploratory model testing, but it restricts population-level generalization and should therefore be acknowledged explicitly when interpreting the findings.

The study design specified a minimum target sample of 300 consumers aged 18 to 45. A non-probability convenience-sampling strategy was adopted because it provides practical access to respondents in consumer research. Because convenience sampling does not provide probabilistic representation of the target population, the findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution regarding external validity and population-level generalization (Etikan et al., 2016).

3.3 Empirical Analysis

EI is operationalized with the 16-item Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS; Wong & Law, 2002), covering self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion. Brand-attitude items are adapted from Spears and Singh (2004), purchase intention from Dodds et al. (1991), and loyalty-related intentions from Zeithaml et al. (1996). Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

3.4 Data Collection and Ethical Considerations

Data collection was designed around an online survey distributed through social media platforms, email invitations, and targeted consumer groups. The research protocol also incorporated a pilot study of 30 participants to evaluate questionnaire clarity, scale reliability, and survey flow before the main data-collection stage. Pilot testing is useful for identifying ambiguous wording and procedural difficulties before full implementation (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

3.5 Participation was voluntary. The study protocol provided participants with information about the purpose of the research, confidentiality of responses, and the right to discontinue participation at any time. Informed consent formed part of the survey procedure prior to participation. The study did not involve the collection of sensitive personally identifiable information.

3.6 Data Analysis

The empirical analysis is structured using SPSS and structural equation modeling (SEM). Internal consistency is assessed through Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR), while convergent validity is evaluated using average variance extracted (AVE; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The structural relationships corresponding to H1-H4 are evaluated through standardized path coefficients, t-statistics, and p-values.

Because the constructs are measured using self-reported survey responses, common-method variance represents a potential methodological limitation. Podsakoff et al. (2003) recommend procedural and statistical remedies for addressing this issue. In the absence of a reported common-method diagnostic in the available results, this limitation is acknowledged rather than treated as empirically resolved.

3.7 Measurement Model

Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity Indicators

Construct	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Emotional Intelligence	.91	.93	.68
Consumer Attitude	.89	.92	.75
Purchase Intention	.88	.91	.72
Brand Loyalty	.90	.93	.74

Table 1 reports strong internal-consistency and convergent-validity indicators across the measured constructs. Cronbach's alpha values range from .88 to .91, composite reliability values from .91 to .93, and AVE values from .68 to .75. These values exceed commonly applied thresholds of .70 for reliability and .50 for AVE, providing evidence of satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity for the reported measures (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).

3.8 Structural Model

Table 2. Reported Structural-Path Results

Hypothesis	Path	β	t	p	Decision
H1	EI → Emotional Processing	.62	12.44	< .001	Supported
H2	EI → Consumer Attitude	.47	9.31	< .001	Supported
H3	EI → Purchase Intention	.39	7.88	< .001	Supported
H4	EI → Brand Loyalty	.41	8.52	< .001	Supported

The structural-path results are positive and statistically significant for all four hypothesized relationships. The strongest association is observed between EI and emotional processing ($\beta = .62$, $t = 12.44$, $p < .001$). EI is also positively associated with consumer attitude ($\beta = .47$, $t = 9.31$, $p < .001$), brand loyalty ($\beta = .41$, $t = 8.52$, $p < .001$), and purchase intention ($\beta = .39$, $t = 7.88$, $p < .001$). On the basis of these reported coefficients, H1-H4 are supported.

4. Discussion

The pattern of reported coefficients is compatible with the proposed role of EI in consumer decision processes. The largest association is observed for emotional processing, which is theoretically coherent because appraisal and regulation are central components of EI. Consumers who report stronger emotional abilities also report greater capacity to identify and interpret affective marketplace information. This pattern is broadly aligned with consumer-EI research linking emotional ability with decision quality (Kidwell et al., 2008a, 2008b).

The reported positive association between EI and consumer attitude suggests that emotional ability may be relevant to brand evaluation. This finding should be interpreted in the context of research showing that brand relationships contain important emotional and relational components. Consumers can form emotional attachments to brands (Thomson et al., 2005), develop trust in them (Delgado-Ballester, 2004), and relate to brands through relationship-like structures (Fournier, 1998). EI may help consumers interpret these affective signals, although the present design cannot determine whether EI causes more favorable attitudes or whether other unmeasured variables account for part of the association.

The positive relationship with purchase intention is also noteworthy. Purchase intention is closer to prospective behavior than general attitude, yet it remains an intention rather than observed purchasing. The reported coefficient therefore suggests an association between EI and willingness to purchase within the study's measurement framework, not proof that emotionally intelligent consumers purchase more frequently. Future research should incorporate actual behavioral measures, transaction data, or experimental choices to examine whether the relationship extends beyond self-reported intention.

The reported association between EI and brand loyalty extends the framework to longer-term relational outcomes. Loyalty is influenced by repeated experiences, satisfaction, trust, switching costs, alternatives, and contextual factors. EI may contribute by helping consumers interpret and regulate affective reactions across repeated interactions. However, emotionally intelligent consumers may also disengage efficiently when a brand repeatedly violates expectations. Future studies should therefore investigate boundary conditions rather than assuming that higher EI necessarily increases loyalty in every context.

A broader implication of the findings is that emotion in marketing should not be conceptualized solely as a stimulus. Much marketing research asks whether an advertisement, service encounter, or brand story generates emotion. The EI perspective adds a complementary question: how capable is the consumer of processing that emotional information? Two consumers exposed to the same emotional appeal may differ in their ability to identify its source, understand its meaning, regulate its intensity, and decide whether it is relevant to choice. This individual-difference perspective can enrich models of persuasion and consumer response.

Conclusion

The empirical evidence of this study demonstrates a consistent positive association between emotional intelligence and the consumer outcomes examined. Emotional intelligence showed its strongest relationship with emotional processing ($\beta = .62$, $t = 12.44$, $p < .001$), followed by consumer attitude ($\beta = .47$, $t = 9.31$, $p < .001$), brand loyalty ($\beta = .41$, $t = 8.52$, $p < .001$), and purchase intention ($\beta = .39$, $t = 7.88$, $p < .001$). Accordingly, all four proposed hypotheses were supported by the reported structural-model results.

These findings provide empirical support for considering emotional intelligence as a relevant individual-difference factor in consumer behavior. In particular, the comparatively strong association with emotional processing indicates that consumers with higher levels of emotional intelligence may be better positioned to recognize, interpret, and manage affective information encountered in marketplace settings. The significant relationships with brand attitudes, purchase intention, and brand loyalty further indicate that emotional competencies are associated not only with the processing of emotional cues but also with consumers' evaluative, intentional, and relational responses to brands.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reinforce the value of distinguishing between the experience of emotion and the capacity to process emotional information. This distinction extends the role of emotion in consumer research by suggesting that consumer responses may depend partly on differences in emotional appraisal and regulation. From a managerial perspective, the results indicate that emotionally framed communication, brand narratives, and customer-experience strategies may not be processed uniformly across consumers. Marketing strategies should therefore recognize heterogeneity in consumers' emotional capabilities rather than assuming homogeneous responses to affective stimuli.

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