

CUSTOMER LOYALTY OF TENUN IKAT MSMES: THE ROLE OF BRAND IMAGE, BRAND LOVE, AND CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to examine how brand image and brand affinity impact customer retention, while considering consumer engagement as a moderating factor. Positive brand image becomes one of the important factors that can influence customer loyalty levels, while brand love creates strong emotional bonds between consumers and brands. Using quantitative methods, data was collected from 150 respondents who had used specific brands for more than one year. The use of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in data analysis revealed connections between various variables. The study findings shed light that a strong brand image greatly impacts customer loyalty, and this bond is further reinforced by brand affection. Additionally, consumer interaction helps regulate the connection between brand affection and customer commitment, as increased engagement enhances the favorable impact of brand affection on loyalty. These findings demonstrate the importance for companies to enhance brand image and build closeness with consumers to drive loyalty.

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INTRODUCTIONS

In an era of increasingly fierce business competition, maintaining customer loyalty becomes a significant challenge for companies, including for MSMEs operating in the *tenun ikat* (traditional Indonesian woven fabric) industry in Bandar Kidul, Kediri. Customer loyalty plays an important role in determining business sustainability, as loyal customers tend to make repeat purchases, recommend products to others, and have higher tolerance for company mistakes (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Brand image and brand love are important factors that can enhance customer loyalty, with customer engagement playing a crucial role in solidifying this connection (Pasaribu & Achmadi, 2024).

Consumers' loyalty to a particular brand is greatly affected by their overall impression of the brand, which is formed through their experiences and interactions. Positive perceptions of a brand often lead to increased trust and

loyalty from consumers (Aaker, 2012). Additionally, brand love is when consumers feel a deep emotional connection and strong attachment to a brand, which in turn, helps in building lasting customer loyalty (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Study indicate that individuals who have a deep emotional connection to a brand are more inclined to participate actively in activities that promote that brand (Bagozzi et al., 2017).

Strong brand image becomes one of the important factors in attracting consumer interest and forming their loyalty. Brands with positive images are usually associated with good quality, trust, and compatibility with consumer lifestyles. Besides brand image, brand love also has a significant role in creating customer loyalty. Brand love is the emotional bond consumers have toward a brand, which can increase their attachment to the product. One factor affecting repeat purchase intention is Brand Image, according to Tjiptono (2015) brand image can be described as beliefs or trust held by consumers toward specific brands in consumer memory. Besides brand image, price also influences purchase decisions so products can be chosen by society. Price is the total amount or monetary value charged for a product or service to be exchanged to obtain benefits, own or use agreed products and services (Abdurrahman, 2015). Another factor that can influence repeat purchases on cosmetics is product quality (Sofjan, 2010). Product quality aims to show product durability, reliability, accuracy, ease of use and maintenance, and other valued attributes (Ahmadian et al., 2023). If a product is considered high quality, consumers will be satisfied and decide to continue using the product. This has the potential to influence consumer purchase decisions.

Brand love is closely related to irrational consumption views, where consumers build many realities experienced when using consumption experiences. Brand love is positive affection experienced by customers toward specific brands and can develop and grow along with their experiences with those brands. Brand love is observed through positive feelings such as enthusiasm or liking toward a brand and shown by giving positive evaluations to that brand. Therefore, this research was created to determine whether brand experience and brand love have roles in brand loyalty formation. Research of Huang et al. (2020); Milinia & Sri Suprati (2023) found that brand love can mediate the relationship between brand experience and brand loyalty.

Brand affection is a powerful emotional connection that impacts both personal connections and interactions between consumers and brands (Hwang & Kandampully, 2012). Albert & Merunka (2013) define brand love as the degree of emotional connection and interest an individual feels towards a brand are known as brand attachment, reflecting a person's outlook towards a particular brand and their inclinations to think, feel, and act in certain manners when interacting with that brand.

Conversely, many now understand the importance of customer engagement in cultivating lasting connections between customers and companies. Customer engagement refers to the extent of consumer interaction, engagement, and dedication to a brand, whether through digital channels or in-person interactions (Brodie et al., 2011). Study indicate that customer engagement plays a crucial role in building strong connections between the perception of a brand and customer affection, ultimately influencing customer loyalty. This highlights the significance of customer engagement as a key factor in shaping loyal consumer habits (Hollebeek, 2011).

In the context of tenun ikat MSMEs in Bandar Kidul, Kediri, the roles of brand image and brand love are very relevant. As local products with high cultural value, building strong brand image and creating emotional bonds with consumers can be effective strategies for increasing customer loyalty. The study seeks to examine how the brand image and brand affection impact customer loyalty through customer engagement. The goal is for tenun ikat MSMEs to strengthen marketing strategies for attracting and retaining customers by understanding this relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Image

Brand image refers to the collection of thoughts, perceptions, and ideas that individuals hold about a particular brand (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). The perception of a brand by consumers is influenced by its brand image. Put simply, how consumers see a brand is shaped by the image it portrays. According to Surachman (2008) the perception of a brand can evolve over time. When there is a need for a change in brand perception, it is important to discover new figures to embody the brand. These figures should encompass the fundamental characteristics of the brand as part of their representation. According to Salinas & Pérez (2009), brand perception is evaluated through three measures: the functional image, the emotional image, and the reputation of the company.

Brand love

As outlined by Ting & Basiya (2024), brand love can be identified as the level of full emotional attraction toward specific brands that creates established bonds, compliance, and positive word-of-mouth for those brands. Customers displaying strong emotional attachment tend to be more compliant, engage in extensive brand advocacy, and are willing to spend more on products. According to Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), there are 5 indicators to measure brand love: Passion for the brand, Attachment to a brand, Positive Evaluation, Positive emotions in responding to brands, Statements of love for brands.

Customer Loyalty

In today's competitive market, it is essential for companies to develop effective strategies to attract the right customers. By focusing on consumer-oriented marketing, businesses can foster customer loyalty. S. Hasan et al. (2022) states that company strategic planning aims to achieve consumer loyalty in the long run, serving as a competitive edge for the company. Citing Kotler & Keller (2012), loyalty can be described as a deep dedication to purchasing or signing up for particular goods or services in the future. In order to achieve long-lasting competitive edge, customer loyalty will play a crucial role in success, even in the face of external factors and marketing campaigns that could lead to shifts in behavior. Griffin (2005) states that loyal customers can be identified by their consistent buying habits, willingness to refer others to a product or service, and positive feedback about a particular brand.

Customer Engagement

Customer engagement is the measure of how connected people feel to a company's offerings or events, and can start from either the customer's side or the company's side. These individuals may already be customers, or they may be considering becoming customers in the future (Vivek et al., 2012). Customer engagement can be said to exceed participation scope, as it involves active and interactive customer relationships with specific objects like brands (Brodie et al., 2011). Another definition of customer engagement is a mechanism where customers add company value through direct or indirect contributions (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). Customer engagement is voluntary resource contributions from customers to be used as marketing functions by companies, and exceeds financial sponsorship (Harmeling et al., 2017). Customer engagement marketing involves creating meaningful connections between brands and consumers, encouraging ongoing participation from customers in shaping brand conversations, experiences, and community involvement (Kotler et al., 2017).

Marketing emphasizes meeting the needs of customers to build long-term relationships by providing exceptional value compared to competitors and focusing on customer feedback and preferences. The goal is to establish trust and loyalty through effective communication and personalized interactions with customers (Sashi, 2012). Customer engagement is formed through consumer engagement with brands, which then creates psychological conditions according to interactive and creative consumer experiences with brands, thus creating good relationships (Żymkowska et al., 2017). There are nine customer engagement indicators as said by Putri & Zuhra (2023) which are user problems solved, users conduct brand searches, share information and knowledge, share experiences, recommend brands, recommend products, develop attention to brands, contribute to product development.

Relationship Between Brand Image and MSME Customer Engagement

Brand image has a strategic role in shaping perceptions and emotional relationships between consumers and brands, which ultimately affects customer engagement, especially for Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises

(MSMEs) operating in competitive markets. Research by Wong & Sijabat (2022) shows that strong brand image significantly influences customer engagement, impacting increased competitive advantage for MSMEs. Customer engagement can function as a mediating variable connecting brand image with customer loyalty, as proven by Nurfitriana et al. (2020), who found that positive brand image can drive more intense and continuous customer interaction toward brands.

Research conducted in the past indicates that the perception of a brand has a strong impact on customer interaction (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Quynh, 2019). In strategic context, Setiawan (2021) emphasizes that MSMEs need to build strong brand image to maintain and increase customer engagement, especially amid rapid market changes. However, studies by Wahyono (2021) remind that relationships between brand image and customer engagement are complex, so mediation roles like satisfaction or customer engagement need deep consideration. Based on theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, the proposed hypothesis is:

H1: There is influence between brand image and MSME customer engagement

Relationship Between Brand Love and MSME Customer Engagement

Brand love is strong emotional feelings, positive affection, and deep attachment consumers have toward brands. These feelings encourage consumers to engage more actively in various forms of interaction with brands, both online and offline. According to Islam & Rahman (2016) and Nurfitriana et al. (2020), brand love has positive and significant influence on customer engagement, where consumers with emotional bonds to brands tend to be more active in activities like giving reviews, sharing experiences, and participating in brand campaigns. Brand love directly significantly influences customer engagement (Ismail & Spinelli, 2012), even fully mediating relationships between social media marketing and brand image toward consumer engagement (Ghafoor et al., 2012). In MSME contexts, emotional relationships become crucial given tight market competition and resource limitations, so building brand love can be effective strategy for encouraging sustainable customer engagement. Based on theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, the proposed hypothesis is:

H2: There is influence between brand love and MSME customer engagement

Relationship Between Customer Engagement and MSME Customer Loyalty

Customer engagement describes levels of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral customer involvement toward brands or businesses, reflected in active interaction, recommendations, and purchase loyalty. In MSME contexts, customer engagement becomes key in building sustainable long-term relationships, given resource limitations and high market competition. Numerous research studies have shown a significant correlation between customer interaction and customer devotion. Kristanti (2022) found that high customer engagement levels can significantly increase customer loyalty. Similar findings were also revealed by Hasan et al. (2025), where intensive interactions and positive customer experiences directly contribute to increased retention and customer recommendations. Based on theoretical foundations and empirical evidence, the proposed research hypothesis is:

H3: There is influence between customer engagement and MSME customer loyalty

Relationship Between Brand Image and MSME Customer Loyalty

Brand image is representation of perceptions, beliefs, and associations consumers have toward brands based on experiences and information they obtain (Kotler & Keller, 2016b). Referring to Loureiro et al. (2012), positive brand image can form consumer trust toward product or service quality and consistency. This positive perception will encourage consumers to continue using products and recommend them to others, ultimately resulting in increased customer loyalty.

Islam & Rahman (2016) emphasizes that brand image not only influences purchase decisions but also creates deep emotional relationships between consumers and brands. These emotional relationships play important roles in creating loyalty, as consumers tend to stay with brands providing consistent emotional and functional values. In MSME contexts, strong brand image can become main differentiation amid fierce competition, while strengthening consumer commitment to remain loyal to offered products.

H4: There is influence between brand image and MSME customer loyalty

Relationship Between Brand Love and MSME Customer Loyalty

Brand affection is a deep emotional connection that consumers feel towards brands, characterized by feelings of fondness, connection, and enthusiasm (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). These bonds usually form after consumers consistently obtain positive experiences, resulting in satisfaction and encouraging emergence of love toward brands. When consumers love brands, they tend to express higher involvement toward brands, for example through active participation in marketing activities, sharing positive experiences, giving recommendations, to becoming brand advocates in their environments (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

In MSME contexts, brand love can become important driver for customer engagement, as consumers with love toward brands will feel emotionally connected and encouraged to actively interact with MSMEs. This aligns with research findings showing that brand love has positive influence on consumer engagement, both in cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement forms (Roy et al., 2013). The greater consumer love toward brands, the more brand loyalty increases (Ting & Basiya, 2024). Research results conducted by Hajjid et al. (2022), Cici & Mardikaningsih (2022), and Stefany et al. (2021) show positive effects of brand love on brand loyalty. Therefore, the higher the level of brand love consumers feel toward MSME brands, the higher the level of customer engagement they show.

H5: There is influence between brand love and MSME customer engagement

Relationship Between Brand Image and Customer Loyalty Through MSME Customer Engagement

Brand image is consumer perception of brands formed through experiences, interactions, and expectations toward offered products or services. Positive brand image can increase consumer trust and sense of belonging toward brands, which in turn affects their behavior in making repeat purchases and recommending to others (Kotler & Keller, 2016b). Customer engagement refers to the extent of involvement and interaction from consumers towards brands or companies, encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects (Brodie et al., 2011). Previous research by Vivek et al. (2012) shows that engaging with customers can lead to positive outcomes in marketing, including building loyalty, generating word of mouth referrals, and increasing cross-selling opportunities.

In MSME contexts, strong brand image can encourage customer engagement because consumers tend to be more actively interactive and supportive of brands they trust. Furthermore, such engagement will contribute to increased customer loyalty, as customers feel emotionally connected and have strong bonds with brands (Hollebeek, 2011). Based on this thinking, customer engagement can act as mediating variables bridging relationships between brand image and customer loyalty. This means positive brand image not only directly influences loyalty but also influences it indirectly through increased customer engagement.

H6: There is influence between brand image and customer loyalty through MSME customer engagement

Relationship Between Brand Love and Customer Loyalty Through Customer Engagement

Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010) shows that brand love is one of the strong emotional factors in forming customer engagement toward brands. In the context of Bandar Kidul Kediri tenun ikat MSMEs, brand love can emerge because customers feel proud of motif uniqueness, weaving quality, and local cultural values contained within. Love feelings toward brands not only form from functional satisfaction with products but also from deep emotional relationships between customers and brand identity.

When brand love has formed, customers tend to show higher customer engagement levels, for example by actively seeking product information, interacting with owners or artisan communities, and sharing positive experiences to others. This high engagement will strengthen emotional bonds and encourage customer loyalty toward MSME brands. Thus, it can be assumed that brand love not only directly influences customer loyalty but also indirectly through customer engagement mediation roles. This aligns with relationship marketing theory emphasizing that strong emotional relationships will create engagement and ultimately produce long-term loyalty.

H7: There is influence between brand love and customer loyalty through customer engagement in MSME products

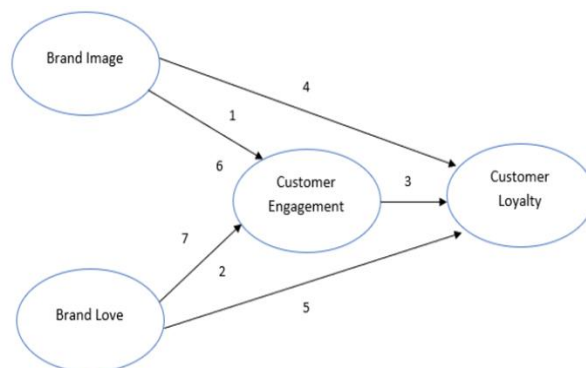


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODS

Data analysis methods conducted quantitatively, namely research describing studied variables quantitatively. By collecting data containing descriptions about objects conducted by examining each variable and discussing research results then connecting between variables with the aim of providing clear descriptions in conducting research analyzing the influence of brand image, price and product quality on repeat purchase intention. The main focus of this study is on causality. According to the data from kedirikota.bps.go.id, the total population of Kediri City is 298,820 individuals. The method of sampling used in this research is purposive sampling, which is based on specific criteria: 1) consumers at Bandar Kidul Kediri tenun ikat MSMEs 2) Domiciled in Kediri City.

Samples in this research are men and women aged 18-35 years. Using Hers formula, samples in this research total 150 respondents. Data collection methods used are questionnaires. Brand image consists of 3 indicators adapted from Salinas & Pérez (2009). Brand love consists of 5 indicators adapted from Carroll & Ahuvia (2006), customer loyalty consists of 3 indicators adapted from Griffin (2005), and customer engagement consists of 9 indicators adapted from Bening & Kurniawati (2019). Questionnaire scales use Likert scales 1-5 (Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree).

RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

Respondents in this research were obtained through purposive sampling techniques with criteria of Bandar Kidul Kediri Tenun Ikat MSME consumers domiciled in Kediri City and aged 18-35 years. The number of samples used is 150 respondents, obtained based on Hers formula calculations.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics

| Characteristics | Category | Total (n) | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------|----------------|
| Gender | Male | 65 | 43,33 |
| | Female | 85 | 56,67 |
| Age | 18-25 years old | 90 | 60 |
| | 26-35 years old | 60 | 40 |

Based on gender, 65 respondents (43.33%) are male, while 85 respondents (56.67%) are female. In terms of age, the majority of respondents are in the 18-25 age range, namely 90 people (60.00%), while the remaining 60 respondents (40.00%) are in the 26-35 age group. All respondents are domiciled in Kediri City according to research criteria. These characteristics show that the majority of Bandar Kidul Tenun Ikat consumers come from young people,

with female respondent dominance, who potentially have high interest in culture-based products and local fashion trends.

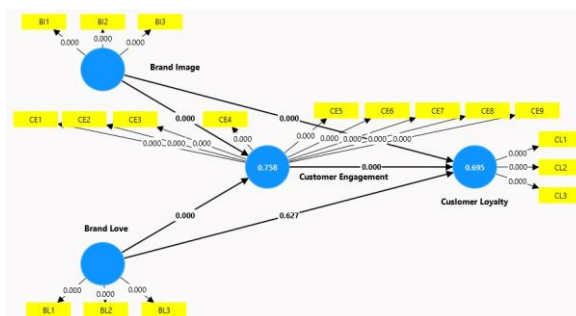


Figure 2. Structural Model Results

Table 2. Path Coefficient Analysis Results and P-Value

| Variable Relationships | Path Coefficient | P-Value |
|--|------------------|---------|
| Brand Image → Customer Engagement | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Brand Image → Customer Loyalty | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Brand Love → Customer Engagement | 0.000 | 0.000 |
| Brand Love → Customer Loyalty | 0.627 | 0.000 |
| Customer Engagement → Customer Loyalty | 0.000 | 0.000 |

According to research findings, the positive impact of Brand Image on Customer Engagement is statistically significant (p-value = 0.000). This suggests that customers are more engaged with brands that have a strong and favorable image in their minds. Positive brand image provides trust, builds value perceptions, and triggers active interaction, both in purchase forms, participation in brand activities, and social media interaction. Additionally, Brand Love also proves to have positive and significant influence on Customer Engagement (p-value = 0.000). Strong emotional bonds between customers and brands encourage customers to be more actively engaged. Customers who love brands tend to seek information, share experiences, and recommend brands to others. This shows that customer engagement is not only triggered by rational perceptions like brand image but also by deep emotional bonds.

Direct influence of Brand Love on Customer Loyalty is also found significant with a coefficient of 0.627 (p-value = 0.000), showing strong positive relationships. Customers with love feelings toward brands will be more loyal, tend to make repeat purchases, and have high resistance to competitor offers. This brand love feeling can become important sustainable assets for companies. Furthermore, Customer Engagement has positive and significant influence on Customer Loyalty (p-value = 0.000). Customers actively engaged with brands, both offline and online, have greater possibilities to remain loyal. This confirms that customer engagement can function as a connector between emotional factors and brand perceptions with long-term customer loyalty.

Overall, R² values of 0.758 for Customer Engagement and 0.695 for Customer Loyalty show high model predictive capabilities. These findings strengthen conceptual frameworks that customer loyalty in MSMEs is not only formed by brand image and brand love directly but also through important customer engagement roles.

DISCUSSION

Research results reveal that Brand Image has positive and significant influence on Customer Engagement in MSMEs. These findings align with Wong & Sijabat (2022) research emphasizing that strong brand image can increase customer engagement while providing competitive advantages, especially for MSMEs competing in competitive

markets. Positive brand image forms perceptions of trust, credibility, and product quality in consumer minds, thus encouraging higher engagement. Nurfitriana et al. (2020) also found that good brand image can trigger more intense and continuous customer interactions, both in repeat purchase forms, participation in brand activities, and word-of-mouth promotion. In MSMEs, building strong brand image becomes important strategy given resource limitations and rapid market changes (Setiawan, 2021).

Besides brand image, this research finds that Brand Love has positive and significant influence on Customer Engagement. Strong emotional bonds encourage customers to actively engage, both through giving reviews, sharing positive experiences, and following brand campaigns. This aligns with Islam & Rahman (2016) and Nurfitriana et al. (2020) research emphasizing that Brand Love triggers higher customer engagement. Ismail & Spinelli (2012) even emphasizes that consumers loving brands tend to engage in various interaction forms, both online and offline. In MSME contexts, which generally highlight product uniqueness and cultural values, Brand Love can become emotional assets maintaining long-term customer engagement (Ghafoor et al., 2012).

Furthermore, this research proves that Customer Engagement significantly influences Customer Loyalty. Customers engaged emotionally, cognitively, and behaviorally have stronger tendencies to stay with brands. This is consistent with Kristanti (2022) who found that high customer engagement levels can increase retention and loyalty. Hasan et al. (2025) also revealed that intensive interactions and positive customer experiences directly contribute to increased retention and recommendations. In MSMEs, maintaining customer engagement becomes more efficient strategy compared to attracting new customers, given high acquisition costs.

This research also shows that Brand Love has quite strong direct influence on Customer Loyalty. This aligns with Carroll & Ahuvia (2006) concepts that brand love encourages repeat purchases, recommendations, and brand advocacy. Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen (2010) and Roy et al. (2013) also state that strong emotional bonds produce loyalty resistant to competitor influences. In MSME contexts with quality-based differentiation and cultural values, Brand Love becomes important factor in building solid long-term relationships.

Additionally, Customer Engagement mediation roles in relationships between Brand Image and Brand Love toward Customer Loyalty are also confirmed. These findings support Hollebeek (2011) views that customer engagement is emotional and cognitive bridges connecting brand perceptions with loyal behavior. Strong Brand Image creates trust encouraging engagement, while Brand Love strengthens emotional attachment maintaining such engagement. This is consistent with Vivek et al. (2012) emphasizing that customer engagement can produce positive marketing results like word-of-mouth promotion, repeat purchases, and additional sales.

R^2 values on Customer Engagement of 0.758 show that 75.8% of customer engagement variations can be explained by Brand Image and Brand Love. Meanwhile, R^2 values on Customer Loyalty of 0.695 show that 69.5% of customer loyalty variations can be explained by Customer Engagement and Brand Love. This indicates that Customer Engagement plays important mediator roles in relationships between Brand Image and Brand Love toward Customer Loyalty. In other words, positive brand image and brand love feelings will be more effective in increasing customer loyalty if accompanied by active customer engagement toward brands.

Based on research results, MSMEs need to position Brand Image and Brand Love as main pillars in marketing strategies. First, brand image must be built consistently through product quality, excellent service, and relevant brand communication. This step can create positive perceptions encouraging customer engagement. Second, building Brand Love can be done through emotional approaches, such as storytelling, preserving local cultural values, and personal loyalty programs. This strategy will strengthen emotional bonds and trigger deeper engagement. Additionally, Customer Engagement must be optimized as long-term strategy for building loyalty. MSMEs can create various interactive programs, such as community events, participatory social media content, and collaboration with customers. This active engagement will become bridges toward higher and stable loyalty, and increase organic word-of-mouth promotion potential.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this research confirms that Brand Image and Brand Love play important roles in forming Customer Engagement, which in turn influences Customer Loyalty in MSMEs. Research results provide theoretical contributions by strengthening conceptual models positioning customer engagement as strategic mediators in building loyalty. From practical sides, these findings provide guidance for MSME actors to integrate brand image strengthening strategies and emotional bond development with customers to create deep engagement and long-term loyalty. By managing these three variables synergistically, MSMEs can strengthen competitiveness, retain existing customers, and increase growth potential through positive word-of-mouth promotion.

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