

How Brand Engagement Shapes Brand Equity: Insights from Smartphone Users with Brand Love as a Mediator



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ABSTRACT: Samsung is one of the major smartphone brands in Indonesia. However, Samsung's brand index has been experiencing a downward trend from 2020 to 2024. The total brand index for Samsung has declined by 13.8% over the past five years. Currently, consumer preferences in purchasing smartphones heavily depend on brand strength, necessitating that this research is complemented with appropriate marketing communication strategies. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to determine the extent of the influence of Brand Engagement on Brand Equity through Brand Love in high-end Samsung smartphones in Indonesia. This research is a quantitative study with descriptive and causal analysis. The purposive sampling method applied in this study resulted in data from 275 individuals who have been high-end Samsung smartphone users in the last three months. This research utilizes the PLS-SEM analysis method. The findings of this investigation reveal a significant and positive influence, both directly and indirectly, of the variables brand engagement and brand love on brand equity. Future research could use the same object but in different regions and consider adding other variables that could enhance brand equity, such as brand experience.

KEYWORDS: Brand Engagemet, Brand Love, Brand Equity, Samsung

I. INTRODUCTION

In the fast-paced digital era, smartphones have significantly transformed the way we communicate, work, and navigate daily life. No longer just tools for communication, smartphones have become the hub of our digital world, providing endless access to information, entertainment, and social connections. By 2023, the global smartphone user base had reached 6.8 billion. From 2016 to 2023, there was an annual growth rate of 9.5% in this user base. Experts predict that by 2024, the number of smartphone users will climb to 7.1 billion (Gilpress, 2024). According to Canalys, 1.14 billion smartphones were shipped worldwide in 2023. Apple led the market with 229.2 million units, capturing a 20 percent market share. Samsung followed closely with 225.4 million units, also holding a 20 percent market share. Meanwhile, Xiaomi holds the third position by shipping 146.4 million units and capturing a 13 percent market share. Oppo, with shipments totaling 100.7 million units, achieved a 9 percent market share. Following closely behind, Transsion (which owns the brands Infinix, Tecno, and Itel) shipped 92.6 million units, placing it in fifth position with an 8 percent market share. (Kompas, 2024).

According to Google's latest survey, "Think Tech, Rise of Foldables: The Next Big Thing," Indonesia ranks fourth among the world's largest smartphone markets, following China, India, and the United States, which hold the first, second, and third spots respectively. The reported figures are impressive, with 354 million devices in circulation, surpassing Indonesia's total population. This means the number of smartphones in the country exceeds 100 percent of the population, specifically reaching 128 percent (Tribunnews, 2023). This suggests that many Indonesians own more than one phone. With such a vast user base, the smartphone market in Indonesia shows great potential for continued growth. Currently, Samsung is the leading brand in this market. Samsung Electronics Co., Ltd, a multinational electronics corporation from South Korea, dominates the smartphone landscape in Indonesia.

Brand strength now has a substantial effect on consumer choices for smartphone purchases. In 2020, Samsung held a brand index of 46.5%. However, this dropped sharply to 37.1% in 2021 and continued to fall to 33% in 2022. By 2023, Samsung's brand index had further decreased to 32.9%, marking a total decline of 13.8% over five years. This downward trend contrasts with the performance of other brands such as Oppo, which saw a 5.2% increase in its brand index, iPhone with a 3.4% increase, and Vivo with a 0.6% rise during the same period (Award, 2024). The downward trend in Samsung's brand index indicates an issue with brand engagement. This issue impacts other variables, such as brand love and brand equity which is the variable that is the focus of this research. If there are problems with the level of Samsung consumer processing and thought elaboration regarding the brand, as well as the positive influence, energy, effort, and time consumers invest in a brand, then Samsung brand love and brand equity will not be effectively established in the consumers' minds. To address this decline, Samsung needs to develop effective

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strategies to enhance brand engagement. By doing so, Samsung can increase brand love, thereby strengthening the brand's value and boosting product appeal.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brand Engagement

According to Heidari et al. (2023), consumer engagement with a brand is described as “a customer behavior manifestation focused on the brand or company, beyond just purchasing, driven by motivational factors.” Engaging customers through the company’s marketing initiatives can foster relationships between brand and customer, elevate brand loyalty, improve aspects of brand equity, and boost company profitability (Hamzah et al., 2021). Since brand engagement results from interactions between customers and the company's portfolio, it signifies specific consumer-brand relationships (Hollebeek et al., 2014).

Brand Love

Previous studies conducted by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) have shown that a focus on making consumers or users feel satisfied with a service or product is no longer able to create a guarantee of sustainable success in today's competitive and mature markets. Currently brand love becomes trending topic because consumers who feel a strong affection for a brand are more likely to purchase, spend money on, and speak positively about it, which can lead to increased brand loyalty (Albert and Merunka, 2013; Verma, 2020; Sohaib et al., 2023; Batra et al., 2012). Often defined as a sentimental bond with the brand that is the focus of attention, brand love involves a range of positive emotions such as passion or excitement that consumers experience when they engage with the brand (Carroll and Ahuvia, 2006). It also refers to the emotional bond that consumers develop towards objects representing the brand, and the distress they might feel if separated from it (Thomson et al., 2005).

Brand Equity

Brand equity from a business perspective is regarded as the most essential brand management construct, vital for sustaining a competitive edge over other brands (Verma, 2020). Brand equity is characterized by the different responses consumers exhibit towards a branded product compared to other brand, given identical attributes of product and exposure marketing stimuli (Yoo and Donthu, 2001). Recently, researchers have highlighted brand love as a crucial factor in shaping brand equity from the consumer perspective (Cho et al., 2018; Ferreira et al., 2022; Machado et al., 2019). When consumers are unsure about a purchase, brand equity frequently serves as the decisive element. Furthermore, brand equity encompasses the overall knowledge customers possess about the brand (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). Essentially, it represents the additional value linked to a specific product or service, derived from consumer cognition or behavior (Leone et al., 2006).

Framework and Hypothesis Development

Batra et al. (2012) and Siu et al. (2023) highlighted that brand engagement consistently takes a very active role in cultivating brand love. Studies conducted in different contexts, such as self-expressive industry (Wallace et al., 2014), smartphone industry (Verma, 2021), functional industry (Borges et al., 2016), have indicated that brand love emerges from brand engagement. Drawing from these explanations and findings, the following hypothesis can be delivered:

H1: Brand Love is positively and significantly impacted by Brand Engagement.

An essential role has been taken by brand engagement in the prioritization of brand strategies for marketers, particularly in enhancing brand equity. (Nyadzayo et al., 2020). When individuals engage more with a brand, they gain more knowledge about it, which helps them develop strong, positive, and unique associations. These associations influence their purchasing decisions, making them more inclined to buy and contribute to building brand equity (Ali and Alqudah, 2022). Research that has been done by Mishra (2019), Machado et al. (2019), Ali and Alqudah (2022), Supotthamjaree and Srinaruewan (2021), Heidari et al. (2023), and Sohaib et al. (2023) suggests a positive link between these two concepts. Based on these insights and findings, the following hypothesis can be delivered:

H2: Brand Equity is positively and significantly affected by Brand Engagement.

Recently, researchers have identified brand love as a key factor in shaping brand equity from the consumers or users perspective (Cho et al., 2018; Ferreira et al., 2022; Machado et al., 2019; Sohaib et al. 2023). Machado et al. (2019) propose that brand love is an crucial element of brand equity. In the smartphone industry, Verma (2021) posits that brand equity is a result of brand love. Strong brand love produces positive outcomes, which in turn improve long-term performance for both tangible and intangible assets, including brand equity (Hafez, 2021). Taking these explanations and discoveries as a basis, then the hypothesis can be delivered as follows:

H3: Brand Equity is positively and significantly impacted by Brand Love.

Machado et al. (2019) propose that brand love can be a variable that mediates the connection that occurs from brand engagement to brand equity, in addition to its direct effect on brand equity. Similarly, Verma (2021) highlights that brand love is crucial in mediating the connection between brand engagement and brand equity within the smartphone industry. Taking these explanations and discoveries as a basis, then the following hypothesis can be delivered:

H4: Brand Equity is positively and significantly impacted by Brand Engagement through Brand Love.

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Here the theoretical framework was developed based on the connections between variables and insights from previous studies.

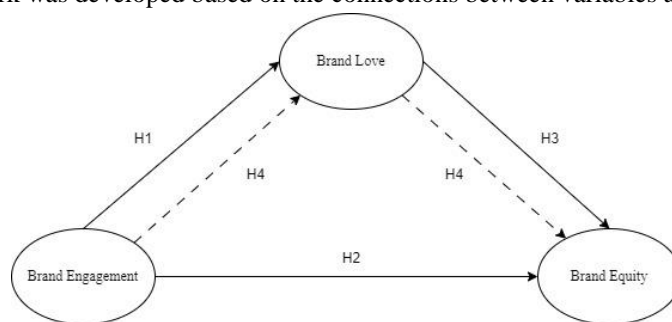


Figure 1 Research Framework

III. RESEARCH METHOD

Inspecting the effect of brand engagement on brand equity with the mediating role of brand love among high-end Samsung smartphone users is the reason for conducting this study. A quantitative approach was taken, using PLS-SEM for data analysis. By distributing data using Google Form tools that are distributed through social media platforms which consists of Instagram, Telegram, Facebook, Line, WhatsApp and X to Indonesian users who had used high-end Samsung smartphones in the past three months. This method yielded 275 respondents. Respondents' answers to the questionnaire given to them were measured using a 5-point scale referred to as the Likert scale. The data from the 275 respondents will be analyzed using the PLS-SEM method by utilizing SmartPLS version 3 tools. SEM-PLS analysis involves two stages: the outer model for the first stages and the inner model for the second stages. The outer model evaluates the validity criteria and reliability criteria of the data collection instruments, using three measures: convergent validity applied factor loading for the first method which requires exceed of 0.7 and AVE for the second method which requires exceed of 0.5, discriminant validity applied Fornell Larcker for the first method and HTMT for the second method, and reliability applied composite reliability for the first method and Cronbach's alpha for the second which both have thresholds > 0.7 (Hair et al., 2022). The inner model examines the interactions between latent variables, with two measures: R Square, classified by Chin (1998) as > 0.67 strong explanation power, > 0.22 moderate explanation power, and > 0.19 weak explanation power, and the path coefficient (β value, p-value, and t-statistic; the t-statistic threshold at α 5% is > 1.65 and p-value < 0.05) (Hair et al., 2022).

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Convergent Validity

Convergent validity is utilized to assess how effectively the indicators measure a variable. For convergent validity to be met, factor loadings must be exceed of 0.7 and AVE must exceed of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2022; Dewitasari and Hidayah, 2024). As shown in Table 1, the factor loading values in this study are all exceed than 0.7, and the AVE values are above 0.5, indicating that all constructs are valid. The table below provides the specific scores for each variable:

Table 1. Convergent Validity Result

Variable	Item	Factor Loading (FL)	AVE	Critical Value	Result Evaluation
Brand Engagement	BE1	0.741	0.590	FL > 0,7 AVE > 0,5	Qualifies the validity requirement
	BE2	0.763			
	BE3	0.757			
	BE4	0.755			
	BE5	0.793			
	BE6	0.772			
	BE7	0.740			
	BE8	0.771			
	BE9	0.812			
	BE10	0.774			
Brand Love	BL1	0.772	0.600		
	BL2	0.791			
	BL3	0.757			
	BL4	0.762			
	BL5	0.779			
	BL6	0.787			
Brand Equity	BEQ1	0.810	0.614		

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BEQ2	0.789
BEQ3	0.767
BEQ4	0.768

Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity measures how distinctly a construct differs from other constructs based on empirical evidence. Thus, demonstrating discriminant validity shows that a construct is unique or completely different so that encompasses aspects not covered by other constructs that are the focus of this study (Hair et al., 2022; Chandra and Indrawati, 2023).

Table 2. Fornell Larcker Result

	Brand Engagement	Brand Love	Brand Equity
Brand Engagement	0.768		
Brand Love	0.671	0.775	
Brand Equity	0.659	0.680	0.783

This criterion evaluates the value of square root from the AVE at convergent validity criteria against the correlations of the other variables that are the focus of this study. This method is required the square root of the AVE for each construct should exceed its correlations with other constructs (Hair et al., 2022; Chandra and Indrawati, 2023). Table 2 illustrates that the Fornell Larcker criterion yields favorable results, as the square root value of each construct surpasses that of the other constructs.

Table 3. HTMT Result

	Brand Engagement	Brand Love	Brand Equity
Brand Engagement			
Brand Love	0.748		
Brand Equity	0.760	0.817	

For good discriminant validity, the correlation value of the HTMT method is necessary to be < 0.85 (Hair et al., 2022). According to Table 4, each variable's correlation has an HTMT value below 0.85, indicating that all variables meet the discriminant validity criteria.

Reliability Test

The consistency of a measurement tool in assessing the intended concept is evaluated through reliability test. (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Two methods for evaluating reliability are Cronbach's alpha for the first method and Composite Reliability for the second method. To meet the required reliability standards, the values of the first method which Composite Reliability and second method which Cronbach's Alpha must exceed 0.70 (Hair et al., 2022; Indrawati et al., 2023).

Table 4 Reliability Test Result

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Critical Value	Evaluation
Brand Engagement	0.923	0.935	0,7	Qualifies the validity requirement
Brand Love	0.867	0.900	0,7	
Brand Equity	0.791	0.864	0,7	

Table 4 clearly indicates that the items used in this study exhibit good reliability, as the values of the two method exceed 0.70.

Hypothesis Testing

The path coefficients are used to determine the significance and strength of the relationships between constructs, which also enables hypothesis testing (Hair et al., 2022; Rudy Hermanto et al., 2023). A hypothesis is considered supported or accepted at a 5% significance level if the p-value obtained is more smaller than 0.05 and the t-statistic is greater than the t-table value of 1.65. Conversely, if the p-value exceeds 0.05 and the t-statistic is below 1.65, the hypothesis is not supported or is rejected (Hair et al., 2022; Rudy Hermanto et al., 2023).

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Result

	Path Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Decision
Brand Love ($R^2 = 0,448$)				
BE -> BL	0.671	14.932	0.000	Accept
Brand Equity ($R^2 = 0,534$)				

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BE -> BQ	0.368	5.448	0.000	Accept
BL -> BQ	0.434	5.822	0.000	Accept
BE -> BL -> BQ	0.291	4.997	0.000	Accept

According to the hypothesis testing results shown in Table 5, all hypotheses are confirmed, with an R2 value of 53.4% for Brand Equity and 44.8% for Brand Love. Connection that represents brand love that is affected by brand engagement shows a t-value of 14.932, which is exceed 1.65, and a p-value gained is 0.000, which is more smaller than 0.05. This shows that brand love is positively and significantly affected by brand engagement. Therefore, H1: Brand Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Brand Love is accepted.

For the connection that represents brand equity that is affected by brand engagement, the t-value is 5.448, passed the treshold of 1.65, and the p-value obtained is 0.000, which is more smaller than 0.05. This demonstrates that brand equity is positively and significantly affected by brand engagement. Thus, H2: Brand Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Brand Equity is accepted.

The connection that represents brand equity that is affected by brand love yields a t-value of 5.822, exceed 1.65, with a p-value gained is 0.000, which is more smaller than 0.05. This confirms that brand equity is positively and significantly affected by brand love. Hence, H3: Brand Love has a positive and significant effect on Brand Equity is accepted.

Lastly, the mediation effect of brand love on the relationship between brand engagement and brand equity shows a t-value of 4.997, exceed the treshold of 1.65, and a p-value gained is 0.000, which is more smaller than 0.05. This indicates that brand engagement has a positive and significant influence on brand equity through brand love. Therefore, H4: Brand Engagement has a positive and significant effect on Brand Equity through Brand Love is accepted.

Discussion

The data obtained from hypothesis testing support the four hypotheses in this study. The first finding indicates that brand engagement positively and significantly impacts brand love, aligning with previous research by Wallace (2014), Borges et al. (2016), and Verma (2021). This suggests that greater brand engagement exposure leads consumers to develop emotional attachments to a brand. The second finding demonstrates that brand engagement has a positive and significant effect on brand equity, corroborating the studies by Mishra (2019), Sohaib et al. (2023), Machado et al. (2019), Heidari et al. (2023), and Supotthamjaree and Srinaruewan (2021). This implies that increased brand engagement causes consumers to perceive their brand as distinct and superior to competitors, even if the features are objectively the same. The third result shows that brand love positively and significantly influences brand equity, supporting the research by Cho et al. (2018), Ferreira et al. (2022), Machado et al. (2019) and Verma (2021). Hence, brand equity is enhanced when consumers develop emotional bonds with a brand. The fourth finding reveals that brand love can be a variable that mediates the connection that occurs from brand engagement to brand equity, consistent with previous studies by Machado et al. (2019) and Verma (2021). Based on the insights found in this study, it is stated that is the first step in increasing brand equity, as it fosters brand love, which in turn enhances brand equity. These findings clearly illustrate that brand engagement, brand love, and brand equity are interconnected and form a relational pattern in the smartphone industry, particularly for the Samsung brand.

V. CONCLUSION

From the research results, it is evident that brand engagement has a positive and significant impact on both brand love and brand equity. Additionally, brand love significantly influences brand equity and mediates the relationship between brand engagement and brand equity. To capitalize on these findings, Samsung could establish an online community platform where users collaborate on creative projects, exchange tips and tricks, and receive recognition through gamification features such as rewards and badges, thus enhancing brand engagement. Organizing impressive product launch events, both online and offline, with live demonstrations and interactive experiences, can attract widespread attention. Furthermore, Samsung can initiate campaigns that encourage users to share unique, special, or creative moments captured with their Samsung smartphones. By incorporating compelling storytelling elements into marketing campaigns, such as inspirational stories from Samsung product users, Samsung can create a strong emotional connection and enhance users' affective attachment to the brand.

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