Brand Love: Mediating Effect of the Relationship Between Social Media Marketing, Brand Loyalty and Brand Equity iPhone Brand Smartphone in Ambon City

Walter Tabelessy
FEB Universitas Pattimura, Ambon

Corresponding Author: Walter Tabelessy wtabelessy@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO
Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Brand Love, Brand Loyalty, Brand Equity

Revised: 17 April
Accepted: 22 May

Abstract

Competition between smartphone brands requires manufacturers to be able to introduce products and brands to consumers using various strategies, one of which is using social media marketing. One smartphone product that uses social media marketing as a marketing strategy is the iPhone brand smartphone through its Instagram account by prioritizing User Generated Content (UGC). This research aims to analyze the relationship between social media marketing, brand love, brand loyalty, and brand equity, and analyze brand love as a mediating variable in these relationships. To determine the sample size, the inverse square root technique was used by focusing on 100 consumers who use iPhone brand smartphones in Ambon City with a purposive sampling technique. The data analysis method uses the PLS-SEM method with the SmartPLS application ver. 4. The results of data processing prove that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand love, social media marketing does not have a significant impact on brand loyalty, social media marketing has a significant impact on brand equity, brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty, brand love has a significant impact on brand equity, and brand love can significantly mediate (full mediation) the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.
INTRODUCTION

The transformation of communication technology has changed the world's paradigm of how to interact through the presence of smartphones. (Gladden, 2018) states that a smartphone is a set of communication tools that function similarly to a computer, is equipped with a touch screen, has internet access, can operate downloaded applications, and in various situations has taken over the function of a computer. The development and innovation of smartphones have also had many impacts on various fields, for example in the world of business, education, health, and even social relations (Sarwar & Soomro, 2013).

With the rapid development of communication technology, smartphone manufacturers will try to present quality products and brands to consumers, ultimately leading to competition. To win this competition, producers must introduce their products or brands to consumers with various strategies, one of which is using social media marketing so that there is intense communication between consumers and producers without being limited by space and time (Jamil et al., 2022; Nadaraja & Yazdanifard, 2018), and can reduce promotional costs (Arsath, 2018).

One smartphone product that uses social media marketing as a marketing strategy is the iPhone brand smartphone via its Instagram account (https://www.instagram.com/apple/?hl=id). This means that iPhone brand smartphone manufacturers realize the importance of using social media marketing not only as a promotion but also to remind, provide information, and please consumers (Vinerean, 2017). Somewhat different from usual, the use of social media marketing by the iPhone prioritizes how consumers who use the iPhone upload photos from using the iPhone itself or what is called User Generated Content (UGC). Based on several studies, it is emphasized that UGC became known in 2005. It is described as content created by associations or individuals as product users, then distributed openly via social media (Naem & Okafor, 2019). Besides that, product users perceive UGC content as authentic, resulting in a more convincing story than content created by producers (IAB, 2019). With this strategy, smartphone users, especially those in Ambon City, can know that the iPhone is a premium brand. However, the use of social media marketing for iPhone brand smartphones has not been able to win the competition with other smartphone brands. This is proven by data on the Top Brand Index (TBI) as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brand Name</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2021</th>
<th>2022</th>
<th>2023</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samsung</td>
<td>37,10</td>
<td>33,00</td>
<td>32,90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oppo</td>
<td>19,30</td>
<td>20,60</td>
<td>23,40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iPhone</td>
<td>11,00</td>
<td>12,00</td>
<td>12,40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Xiaomi</td>
<td>12,40</td>
<td>11,20</td>
<td>10,60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vivo</td>
<td>7,90</td>
<td>9,70</td>
<td>9,70</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

https://www.topbrand-award.com

Based on the data in table 1, it can be seen that the position of the iPhone brand smartphone is in third place after the Samsung and Oppo brands, although there will be an increase in 2022 and 2023. The use of social media marketing will
have more of an impact on brand loyalty and brand equity, however, some
Previous research related to brand loyalty provides different results (research
gap). Research from (Al-Dmour et al., 2023), shows that social media marketing
is one of the factors driving the formation of brand loyalty. However, in contrast
to these results, (Daya et al., 2022) emphasized that social media marketing has
not been proven to have a direct impact on brand loyalty. The results of this
research prove that social media marketing has limitations when it is directly
linked to brand loyalty. So, to solve this research gap problem, brand love is used
as a mediator because it is more recommended for hedonic product categories
(Halilovic, 2013). In this research, apart from being a mediator of the relationship
between social media marketing and brand loyalty, brand love will also be linked
to brand equity. So this research aims to analyze the relationship between social
media marketing, brand love, brand loyalty and brand equity, and analyze brand
love as a mediating variable in these relationships. It is hoped that this research
will overcome the relationship gaps in previous studies by providing empirical
evidence.

LITERATURE REVIEW
The Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Brand Love

Digital marketing is a framework of advertising methods for promoting
and offering products and services on the internet. This type provides online
work channels such as looking at search engines, social media, and email to reach
the target buyers you want to reach. Therefore, digital marketing makes a
difference in finding buyers interested in the product, connecting with them, and
building mutual trust (Tehuayo et al., 2024). Social media itself refers to online
application programs, platforms, or any media that facilitates interaction,
collaboration, or content sharing (M. Haikal Sultana Abdullah & Aekram Faisal,
2022) because good marketing content will have an impact on purchasing interest
(Tableessy et al. al., 2022). In the current digital era, producers have begun to
prioritize social media marketing as a means of promoting their products and
brands because they are increasingly reliable in reaching potential
consumers (Saununu et al., 2024; Tubalawony:, 2023), which in itself will form
brand love. According to (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006), brand love refers to the level
of enthusiasm and passion that consumers have for a particular brand. Brand
love is also understood as a feeling of attraction that connects consumers with a
particular brand (Samekto et al., 2023). Therefore, the use of social media
marketing with interesting content will further introduce the brand which will
then convince consumers to love the brand. The relationship between these two
concepts is proven through research (Mayasari et al., 2023) which shows that
social media marketing can create and even develop brand love for clothing
among millennials. In line with this research, (Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019) found
that social media marketing can build brand love in restaurants in Pakistan. After
conducting a literature review, the first hypothesis (H1) proposed is that social
media marketing has a significant impact on brand love.

The Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Brand Loyalty

The use of social media marketing will also contribute to brand loyalty of
the products being promoted to consumers. This will really bring advantages in
increasing brand loyalty when consumers use social media, so they will be
notified to their colleagues who also use social media (Haudi et al., 2022). Brand loyalty is a strong attitude of interest between consumers and a particular brand (Algharabat, 2017). With this brand loyalty, consumers will show an attitude of not being too sensitive to price, in the sense that they will pay more for a particular brand compared to other brands in the market so that it will provide benefits for the company in the form of market advantage (Ingemansson et al., 2015). By using social media marketing to form brand loyalty, consumers tend to keep buying the same brand and do not want to switch to another brand. Brand loyalty gives consumers the impression that one brand is better than another, even if competitors encourage customers to switch to their brand. (Sharawneh, 2020) confirmed this statement with research results that telecommunications organizations must use social media marketing strategies to further increase brand loyalty. In agreement with the research above, (Smith, J., & Johnson, 2018), confirms that Samsung smartphone brand loyalty in Vietnam is formed from elements of social media marketing. After conducting a literature review, the second hypothesis (H2) proposed is that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand loyalty.

**The Relationship Between Social Media Marketing and Brand Equity**

Apart from having an impact on brand love and brand loyalty, the use of social media marketing also provides other advantages, including increasing brand equity (Ferreira et al., 2022). Brand equity is a collection of brand assets and liabilities associated with a brand, the name and symbol can increase or decrease the value provided by a product or service to a company and its customers (Jalees, T., Alam, S. H., Zaman, S. I., & Qabool, 2023). Apart from this definition, brand equity can also be interpreted as a consumer response to a brand both now and in the future (Araújo et al., 2023). Based on these things, the use of social media marketing by highlighting brands, names and symbols cannot be denied that it will optimize brand equity for a long period of time. This is confirmed by evidence by (Haudi et al., 2022) who revealed that social media marketing is a variable that positively and significantly influences brand equity. In line with the research above, (Eka Pratama et al., 2019) shows that increasing levels of social media marketing will also give rise to high brand equity. After conducting a literature review, the third hypothesis (H3) proposed is that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand equity.

**The Relationship Between Brand Love and Brand Loyalty**

Brand love is a consumer's emotional feeling towards a particular brand which itself will foster a strong sense of attraction to that brand so that it will create brand loyalty. This is what causes brand loyalty to be a consequence variable of brand love (Rahman et al., 2021; Robertson et al., 2022). (Maduretno & Sheellyana Junaedi, 2022) further emphasizes this relationship by stating that brand love, apart from being a mediating variable between dimensions of brand experience, also has a positive influence on brand loyalty. Likewise, (Bairrada et al., 2018) concluded that brand loyalty is the result of brand love. After conducting a literature review, the fourth hypothesis (H4) proposed is that brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty.

**The Relationship Between Brand Love and Brand Equity**

Brand love not only has a relationship with brand loyalty, but also has an impact on brand equity. The brand love that consumers have will increasingly
connect consumers with certain brands, whether in terms of name, brand or even logo, so that this will give rise to stronger brand equity. The relationship between these two variables is confirmed by (Verma, 2021) which indicates that brand love is positively related to brand equity. Not different from this opinion, (Nawaz et al., 2020) emphasized that brand equity can be strongly influenced and predicted by brand love. After conducting a literature review, the fifth hypothesis (H5) proposed is that brand love has a significant impact on brand equity.

**Brand Love as a Mediator**

In this research, one mediator is used, namely brand love. Research results (Na et al., 2023) confirm that brand love is a mediating variable in the relationship between brand experience and loyalty. Likewise, research from (Ferreira et al., 2019) proves brand love as a mediator of the relationship between brand experience and consumer satisfaction and consumer loyalty to retail fashion brands. After conducting a literature review, the sixth hypothesis (H6) proposed is that brand love can significantly mediate the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

Based on the various descriptions presented in the literature review, the conceptual framework of the proposed research can be seen in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Research Conceptual Framework](image)

**METHODOLOGY**

**Sample and Data Collection**

This research uses a data analysis method, namely Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), so that to determine the number of samples the inverse square root technique is used (Kock & Hadaya, 2018; Mumtaz Ali Memon et al., 2020). By focusing on 100 consumers who use iPhone brand smartphones in Ambon City, a questionnaire survey was conducted using a purposive sampling technique, namely determining samples based on certain criteria determined by researchers (Tubalawony; et al., 2023), with a time between November 2023 and by January 2024.

**Research Instrument**

This research was conducted through a questionnaire which was divided into four parts, namely social media marketing, brand love, brand loyalty and brand equity. Social media marketing variables are based on indicators quoted from (Stojanovic et al., 2018). The brand love variable is based on indicators quoted from (Kumar et al., 2021). The brand loyalty variable is based on indicators quoted from (Sta & Abbassi, 2018). The brand equity variable is based
on indicators quoted from (Peng et al., 2024). Variable measurement is based on a Likert scale: Strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

**Data Analysis Method**

The hypothesis proposed in this research will be proven true using the PLS-SEM method. There are several conditions to be able to use this method, including that the data to be analyzed is not normally distributed (Sarstedt et al., 2022; Tabelessy & Pattiruhu, 2024), there are complex relationships (Sarstedt et al., 2024; Tabelessy; et al., 2024 ), and there are mediating variables (Fauzi, 2022; Tabelessy, 2024). By fulfilling these three conditions, this research can use this method. To help with data processing using the PLS-SEM method, the SmartPLS application ver. 4 is used because according to (Hwa et al., 2023), this version of the SmartPLS application as a whole has advantages compared to the previous version.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Evaluation of Measurement Models**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity Test Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024

The criteria for good reliability according to (Chua, 2023), are seen from the Composite Reliability (rho_a) value ≥ 0.7, and for convergent validity seen from the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value ≥ 0.5. As seen in table 2, all variables have good reliability and convergent validity because they comply with the specified criteria.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Results of Discriminant Validity Testing (HTMT)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variable</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Love &lt;-&gt; Brand Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty &lt;-&gt; Brand Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty &lt;-&gt; Brand Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing &lt;-&gt; Brand Equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing &lt;-&gt; Brand Love</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Media Marketing &lt;-&gt; Brand Loyalty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024

Criteria for good discriminant validity according to (Chua, 2023), seen from the Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) value ≤ 0.90. As seen in table 3, all variables have good discriminant validity because they comply with the specified criteria.
Structural Model Evaluation

Table 4. R-Square Test Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>R-Square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brand Love</td>
<td>0,273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>0,315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brand Equity</td>
<td>0,391</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024

The criteria for the R-Square (R2) value in modeling according to (Chua, 2023), consist of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 which means strong, moderate and weak. As seen in table 4, there is 1 variable, namely brand love, which has an R2 value in the weak criteria, while 2 variables, namely brand loyalty and brand equity, have an R2 value in the moderate criteria.

Table 5. Results of Direct Hypothesis Testing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>T statistics</th>
<th>P values</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Social Media Marketing -&gt; Brand Love</td>
<td>6,559</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social Media Marketing -&gt; Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>0,781</td>
<td>0,435</td>
<td>Not Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Social Media Marketing -&gt; Brand Equity</td>
<td>2,323</td>
<td>0,020</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Brand Love -&gt; Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>4,600</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Brand Love -&gt; Brand Equity</td>
<td>3,932</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024

The results of data processing to test the five direct hypotheses proposed in this research are shown in table 5. In other words, H1 is accepted, namely that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand love with a T statistics value of 6.559 (> 1.96) and a P value of 0.000 (< 0.05). However, on the contrary, H2 was rejected, namely that social media marketing did not have a significant impact on brand loyalty with a T statistics value of 0.781 (< 1.96) and a P value of 0.435 (> 0.05). Meanwhile, H3 was accepted, namely that social media marketing had a significant impact on brand equity with a T statistics value of 2.323 (> 1.96) and a P value of 0.020 (< 0.05). Likewise, H4 is accepted, namely brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty with a T statistics value of 4.600 (> 1.96) and a P value of 0.000 (< 0.05). And H5 is also accepted, namely brand love has a significant impact on brand equity with a T statistics value of 3.932 (> 1.96) and a P value of 0.000 (< 0.05).

Table 6. Mediation Hypothesis Testing Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>T statistics</th>
<th>P values</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Social Media Marketing -&gt; Brand Love -&gt; Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>3,803</td>
<td>0,000</td>
<td>Significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data Processing Results, 2024
The results of data processing to test the mediation hypothesis proposed in the research are shown in table 6. In other words, H6 is accepted, namely that brand love can significantly mediate (full mediation) the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty with a T statistics value of 3.803 (> 1, 96) and P value 0.000 (< 0.05).

![Figure 2. Hypothesis Testing](image)

**The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Love**

Data processing results to prove the truth of the first hypothesis with the SmartPLS application ver. 4 confirms that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand love. This means that when consumers see various content regarding iPhone brand smartphones via Instagram accounts on the internet, this content increasingly convinces consumers that the iPhone is a fantastic brand. Apart from that, various content also really helps consumers in deciding to use an iPhone brand smartphone because they like that brand. As the content becomes more interesting, consumers will also be more deliberate when buying an iPhone brand smartphone because they are very interested and become attached to the brand. The results of this research are fully supported by previous research from (Mayasari et al., 2023) and (Sikandar & Ahmed, 2019).

**The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Loyalty**

Data processing results to prove the truth of the second hypothesis with the SmartPLS application ver. 4 confirms that social media marketing does not have a significant impact on brand loyalty. This means that consumers consider that not all content regarding iPhone brand smartphones uploaded by users can be meaningful and accepted as a reason to remain loyal to using this brand. Consumers feel that these posts are very limited and do not represent the brand as a whole, so they are still considering this to remain loyal to iPhone brand smartphones. The results of this research are fully supported by previous research from (Daya et al., 2022) but are not in line with research from (Sharawneh, 2020) and (Smith, J., & Johnson, 2018).
The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Brand Equity

Data processing results to prove the truth of the third hypothesis with the SmartPLS application ver. 4 confirms that social media marketing has a significant impact on brand equity. This means that through various content regarding iPhone brand smartphones on Instagram accounts on the internet, in consumers' minds it will make more sense to choose to buy this brand compared to other brands even when other brands have the same features. Apart from that, the information obtained through content really helps consumers to plan what they will do with that brand, thus making consumers prefer buying iPhone brand smartphones even though there are other brands that are good or that are not different in any way. Thus, consumers consider it a smart choice to continue buying iPhone brand smartphones based on the content they view. The results of this research are fully supported by previous research from (Haudi et al., 2022) and (Eka Pratama et al., 2019).

The Impact of Brand Love on Brand Loyalty

Data processing results to prove the truth of the fourth hypothesis with the SmartPLS application ver. 4 confirms that brand love has a significant impact on brand loyalty. This means that consumers who already love iPhone brand smartphones are increasingly united and feel that the brand is extraordinary so they will be loyal to buy again in the future. The feeling of love for iPhone brand smartphones increasingly strengthens consumers' stance to continuously use this brand, thus creating an increased commitment to this brand. Consumers who love iPhone brand smartphones feel very attached to this brand which has the impact of being willing to pay higher prices to continue using this smartphone brand compared to other brands. The results of this research are fully supported by previous research from (Maduretno & Sheellyana Junaedi, 2022) and (Bairrada et al., 2018).

The Impact of Brand Love on Brand Equity

Data processing results to prove the truth of the fifth hypothesis with the SmartPLS application ver. 4 confirms that brand love has a significant impact on brand equity. This means that the assessment that the iPhone smartphone is an extraordinary brand will influence the thinking of consumers who think that it makes sense to buy this brand over another brand if both are the same. Even consumers who love the iPhone smartphone brand will still buy it even if other brands have the same features as this brand, so that fanatical consumer interest results in consumers preferring to buy this brand even though there are other good brands. Therefore, consumers become emotionally attached to the iPhone smartphone brand with no other choice but to continue using this brand. The results of this research are fully supported by previous research from (Verma, 2021) and (Nawaz et al., 2020).

Brand Love as a Mediator

Data processing results to prove the truth of the sixth hypothesis with the SmartPLS application ver. 4 confirms that brand love can significantly mediate (full mediation) the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty. This means that consumers who see iPhone brand smartphone content will not necessarily be loyal to that brand, but must have emotions, especially love, to be able to use this brand. Apart from that, consumers' interest in iPhone brand smartphones is formed from the content they see, so they will continue to
be committed to using this brand. The strong emotional feelings in consumers who love and are attached to iPhone brand smartphones when viewing content increasingly ensure that these consumers will spend more money than using other brands of smartphones. Thus, the results of this research further emphasize the function of brand love as a mediating variable and are fully supported by previous research by (Na et al., 2023), and (Ferreira et al., 2019).

**CONCLUSIONS**

The research results obtained as proof of the hypothesis have been achieved and are in accordance with the objectives of this research. With confirmation that accepting the 4 direct hypotheses proposed, namely social media marketing has a significant impact on brand love, social media marketing has a significant impact on brand equity, brand love has a significant impact on brand equity, and brand love has a significant impact on brand equity. However, 1 direct hypothesis proposed was not accepted, namely that social media marketing does not have a significant impact on brand loyalty. Meanwhile, the sixth hypothesis proposed was also accepted, namely that brand love can significantly mediate (full mediation) the relationship between social media marketing and brand loyalty.

**FURTHER STUDY**

The results of this research have limitations, so in the future it is necessary to carry out further research involving other brands of smartphones so that more comprehensive results can be obtained on different brands. Apart from that, several variables need to be added, considering that the results of this research are still in the weak and moderate criteria, for example the variables personal selling, customer satisfaction, consumer experience and brand image.

**REFERENCES**


4219-2


Halilovic, D. (2013). Crazy little thing called brand love! Universiteit Twente, 0–58.


