

The Impact of Social Media Marketing on Customer-Based Brand Equity: The Mediating Role of Brand Experience and Customer Brand Engagement

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Abstract

The increasing use of social media has changed the way companies interact with consumers. This change has led marketers to interact more with customers to create a positive experience and customer-based brand equity for themselves. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media marketing on customer-based brand equity through the mediating role of brand experience and customer brand engagement. The present study is applied and is descriptive in terms of correlation. The statistical population of the study consists of customers of the fashion brands Dersa, Mashhad, Navin Leather, Candro, and Maral in Tehran. Questionnaire data were distributed and collected among 386 customers of the aforementioned brands. Structural equation modeling and Smart PLS software were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that social media marketing has a positive and significant effect on brand experience and customer brand engagement, and these two also have a positive and significant effect on customer-based brand equity. Finally, social media marketing does not have a significant direct effect on customer-based brand equity; rather, its positive and significant effect is through the mediating variable of brand experience and customer brand engagement. The overall result shows that in the luxury leather brands mentioned, the impact of social media marketing on customer-based brand equity through customer experience and brand engagement increases their popularity and further leads to a lot of fame and reputation.

Keywords: Social media marketing, Customer-based brand equity, Brand experience, customer brand engagement

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Introduction

The recent entry of multiple fashion brands into the luxury market, along with declining sales due to the eco-

nomic recession, has created new challenges for luxury companies. Luxury brands have always been at the forefront of fashion and have influenced the rest of the



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fashion industry with their aesthetic values and innovative yet traditional business management style. This innovative style is applied not only to their core products, but also to customer management, marketing mix, customer service, retail strategies, and more. (28). On the other hand, today, branding is one of the key components of marketing, which strengthens the relationship between the company and its customers, resulting in increased market value. The main goal of a branding strategy is to increase the value of the product or service.(26). Brand equity has been studied from two perspectives: financial and customer-based. The customer-based perspective is used in this study. Customers are transferred from a commercial identity to a business relationship through brand equity. (37). Beig & Khan (2018) argue that when a brand shares an interesting post on social media, constant interaction with consumers increases the consumer brand experience. This in turn leads to increased brand equity for consumers. (30). Businesses use social media channels to improve customer-to-customer relationships, which in turn facilitates consumer-brand interaction and the creation of strong brands. On the other hand, social media can be a powerful driver that can positively impact customer goals, behaviors, and purchase decisions, and be a key factor in building brands and creating long-term relationships with customers. The expansion of social media has significantly changed marketing practices. To the extent that companies are investing to increase their presence on social media. Studies show that in the next five years, 71% of the marketing budget will be allocated to social media. (19). According to a recent report published by Statista, the global penetration of social media is estimated to be 42%. (43), The report also estimates that there are over 3 billion monthly active users of social media worldwide. (44) Despite this, existing studies have not examined the potential effects of perceived benefits and consumer experience on the specific relationship between social media marketing activities and consumer-based brand equity.

This research proposes a conceptual framework that understands the relationships between perceived social media marketing activities, social media benefits, brand experience, and consumer-based brand equity.

In other words, this research seeks to explore and develop knowledge in the field of social media marketing activities and consumer-based brand equity in the context of luxury fashion marketing by providing insights into how marketers influence consumers' perceptions of a brand.

Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Social media marketing

Social media are a collection of internet-based applications that allow users to create and share content, and to participate in social networking (46). Based on the comprehensive model of social media marketing presented by Kim and Ko in 2010, it can be measured based on the following five dimensions. These dimensions include entertainment (entertainment is the result of pleasures) [4], pleasures, and the feeling of satisfaction that is obtained through social networks [46]. Entertainment in social media is an important component that causes positive emotions, increases cooperative behavior, and creates the intention to use it continuously, interaction (sharing information and exchanging ideas with others) through social media, Trendiness (providing customers with the latest and newest information about products) [4], customization (customers can use the default search feature in social media and hashtags) customized information search. Customization is the degree to which social media channels provide customized information search services for customers [46], and Electronic Word of Mouth (positive feedback or the negativity presented by customers about products available in an internet-dependent environment shows the degree of customer recommendation and sharing of their experience of a brand in social media [16].

Brand experience

In its simplest form, brand experience can be defined as a set of variables that collectively shape the attitude of customers towards a product, a service, a service, or a company. Such variables include shopping experience, customer satisfaction, post-purchase service, and customer behavioral response [47]. Brand experiences are a set of mental responses such as (feelings, emotions, and cognitions) and behavioral responses that are triggered by stimuli such as design, identity,

communication, and brand environment [38]. Some researchers believe that every time a consumer communicates with a brand, an experience is formed from the interaction between the consumer and the respective brand [49]. The concept of brand experience as a whole, includes a Sensory dimension (visual and tactile stimuli and stimuli related to the brand that can be understood through the senses). An Affective dimension refers to the feelings created by the brand and the emotional bond with the customer; An intellectual dimension is related to the brand's ability to attract customers through their analytical thinking and imagination. A behavioral dimension includes behavioral experiences and movement actions [46].

Customer brand engagement

Consumer involvement is focused on multidimensional behaviors and activities in which consumers are willing to invest their resources (time, energy, money) when buying or consuming brands [33]. Consumer involvement goes beyond concepts such as participation because this concept shows an active and interactive relationship of the consumer with a specific focal goal (a product or a brand) that is characterized by Cognitive processing and affection and is considered activation [14]. Cognitive processing is the level of consumers' knowledge about a brand and is defined as the level of consumer processing and thinking related to a specific brand [10]. Interest can be defined as a feeling, enthusiasm, and pleasure experienced by consumers with brands. Activation is defined as the level of energy, effort, and time of consumers to interact with the brand, which means that activation is the behavioral dimension of customer brand engagement [2].

Consumer-based brand equity

Researchers believe that the success and special value of a brand directly perceive quality, Brand awareness, and Brand loyalty. Perceived quality refers to consumers' subjective evaluation of the overall quality of the brand [14]. An expression of perceived quality is the consumer's comparison or perception of the overall quality of a specific product compared to a competitive brand [26]. The second main dimension of brand equity is brand awareness. According to Aaker (1996), awareness refers to the amount and power of presence that

the brand has in the minds of customers. Aker believes that brand awareness refers to the ability of potential consumers to identify/remember the brand in their minds. Awareness is the way customers relate to a brand. that they decide to buy from it is defined [21]. The last dimension of brand equity is brand loyalty. Brand loyalty refers to consumers' dependence on a brand from which they continuously buy [14]. In other words, despite situational influences and marketing efforts that can change consumer behavior, brand loyalty is defined as a deep commitment to repurchase a product or service continuously in the future [32].

Development of research hypotheses and conceptual model

Social media marketing and Customer-based brand equity

Today, marketers use social media as a marketing tool to create a two-way relationship to interact with customers (facilitating user interaction) and provide valuable suggestions [46]; in this way, content sharing and information dissemination are possible, and they greatly affect consumer buying behavior [16] .On the other hand, the increasing use of social media has led to an increase in consumer demand for evidence of quality and brand awareness on these channels. Social media provides evidence that consumers need to be aware of and understand the overall quality of a particular product from a brand compared to a competitor brand. This evidence is provided through content creation, electronic word-of-mouth advertising, and other channels. This, in turn, has an impact on consumers' awareness and perceived quality, and ultimately on customer-based brand equity. (35). Ibrahim et al. (2020) defined social media marketing as the use of social media platforms to provide more personalized offers to customers through online marketing, create advertising for products and services through electronic word-of-mouth advertising, reach new customers, retain and build loyalty with existing customers, and ultimately increase consumer awareness, loyalty, perceived quality, and purchase intent. This leads to the creation of customer-based brand equity. In their research, researchers such as Ebrahim (2020) and

Koay et al. (2020) showed that various and diverse social media marketing activities have an impact on different components of customer-centric brand equity.

Hypothesis 1: Social media marketing has an impact on customer-based brand equity.

Social Media Marketing, Brand Experience, and Customer-Based Brand Equity

The Internet has revolutionized customer interactions beyond traditional media, leading to significant changes in areas such as customer experience. (49). On the other hand, marketing communications is a key driver that shapes the brand experience. Most brands use social media marketing to strengthen their online presence and create memorable experiences for consumers. (5). Some researchers believe that customer experience in an online environment is a subjective psychological response to that online environment, and is defined as "a complex and comprehensive process resulting from interactions between consumers and the online environment" [30]. In other words, social media allows consumers to voice their criticism of poor brand experiences or to share positive experiences. (49). In other words, social media creates a sharing experience for customers of the brand, which ultimately increases their brand knowledge and creates customer-based brand equity. (5). Based on this, Wibowo et al. (2021) concluded in their study that for the effective use of a social media marketing activity, a company needs to understand the importance of the content or message format that they want to deliver and its impact on consumer experience. This is because customer-perceived experiences have an impact on customer response and are involved in their evaluation process before the purchase stage, and ultimately in the creation of customer-based brand equity. Koay et al. (2020) argue that it is assumed that positive brand experience and the creation of customer-based brand equity are dependent on consumers' positive perceptions of a brand's social media marketing activities. Therefore, perceived social media marketing activities act as triggers in the e-commerce context that are expected to ultimately maximize customer brand experience and subsequently customer-based brand equity. This is because when previous brand experience brings benefits

to consumers and creates their satisfaction, consumers will have a positive motivation so that they will have a good sense of brand loyalty and increase their intention to repurchase, which ultimately results in customer-based brand equity. [49]

Hypothesis 2: Social media marketing affects brand experience.

Hypothesis 3: Brand experience affects customer-based brand equity.

Hypothesis 4: Social media marketing affects customer-based brand equity with the mediating role of brand experience.

Social media marketing, Customer brand engagement, and Customer-based brand equity

In recent years, consumer engagement through social media has received increasing attention due to its potential impact on consumer behavior. This engagement is defined as the level of interaction and connection between consumers and the brand. Therefore, marketers use social media platforms to engage consumer brands (20). The rise of social media has created new opportunities for consumer engagement with brands, and has also empowered, innovated, and creative customers. In a sense, it can be said that it has changed the role of customers. In such roles, customers are not only looking for products and services, but also participate in creating and sharing information, photos, and other marketing resources (34). They create communities where they engage other customers, interact with non-customers, and differentiate themselves from the many offerings in the market. (14). Choedon and Lee (2020) found that what makes social media unique in marketing is that it is a user-centric platform. People can create their blogs and express their thoughts on these media. This enables users to be active in the communication process with the brand, and in other words, customers are more engaged with the brand because they can provide feedback to companies and create business interactions with them. Ultimately, the results of their research showed that social media marketing has a positive and significant impact on customer brand engagement. In addition, Algharabat et al. (2020) showed that consumer engagement with a brand on social media can increase the likelihood of fu-

ture brand purchases, lead to the creation of meaningful relationships, and help to create a higher level of trust, commitment, and loyalty between the consumer and the brand, and thus lead to the creation of consumer-based brand value. They believe that social media plays an important role in creating customer-based brand equity through customer engagement. Therefore, customer interaction with the brands offered through social media is a symbol of their increased en-

gagement with the brands offered, which in turn increasingly contributes to the creation of customer-based brand equity.

Hypothesis 5: Social media marketing has an impact on customer brand engagement.

Hypothesis 6: Customer brand engagement has an impact on customer-based brand equity.

Hypothesis 7: Social media marketing has an impact on customer-based brand equity with the mediating role of customer brand engagement.

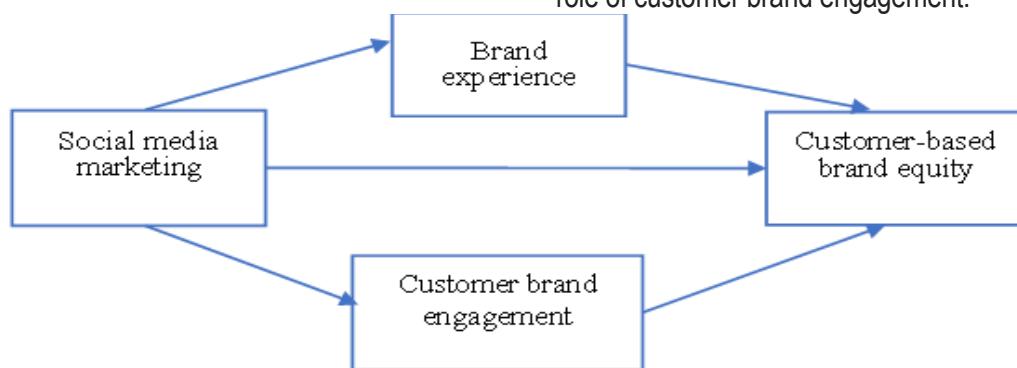


Figure 1. Research conceptual model

Research Methodology

Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of social media marketing activities on brand equity with the mediating role of brand-customer engagement and brand experience, this study is a descriptive correlational and causal-comparative study. The target population of this study consisted of clothing customers of the Dersa, Mashhad, Navin Charkh, Kandro, and Marall brands in Tehran. Given the unlimited nature of the target population of the study, the sample size was 384 using the Cochran formula. To be more certain, 400 questionnaires were distributed among the members of the target population and finally, 386 questionnaires were fully collected. In this study, a set of standard questionnaires from previous studies were used to measure the variables under study. Brand experience was measured using a 12-item scale developed by Brakus et al. (2009), which includes four dimensions sensory brand experience, emotional brand experience, behavioral brand experience, and rational brand experience. The customer-based brand equity (CBBE) construct is measured using a scale developed by Dwivedi et al. (2018), which consists of 10 items and

assesses the construct along three dimensions: brand loyalty, perceived quality, and brand awareness (brand associations). Customer brand engagement was measured on three dimensions cognitive, affective, and behavioral engagement using the Hollebeek et al. (2014) scale, which includes 10 items. Social media marketing activities were ultimately measured using the Kim and Ko (2012) questionnaire, which includes 11 items and dimensions of entertainment, customization, engagement, word-of-mouth advertising, and timeliness. The validity of this questionnaire was confirmed by professors and experts in the field of marketing and branding. To measure the variables under study, a set of items was used in which respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement with each item on a five-point Likert scale in this study, partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the data. The reason for using this approach was the non-normal distribution of the collected data. In this approach, which is implemented using the SmartPLS software, to analyze the data, the fit of the two measurement and structural models must be examined. To ensure the fit of the

measurement model, the internal consistency (reliability) and validity of the data collection instrument must be assessed. To this end, Cronbach's alpha coefficient and composite reliability coefficient are used to assess the internal consistency of the data collection instrument. The internal consistency of items is considered acceptable when Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability coefficients are, respectively, greater than 0.7 and 0.8. (22). Convergent validity was also used to assess the validity of the data collection tool. The most important indicator of convergent validity is the average variance extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al.

(2012), the optimal threshold for ensuring convergent validity is at least 0.5. The variance explained (VE) index was used to assess the fit of the structural model of the study. According to Hair et al. (2012), the amount of variance explained index (VE) indicates the ability of independent variables to explain changes in the dependent variable. If the VE is greater than 0.25, 0.50, and 0.75, respectively, it indicates a low, medium, and significant ability of independent variables to explain changes in the dependent variable.

Table 1. Fit indices of measurement and structural model (validity and reliability)

Variable	Dimensions		Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE	R ²
Brand experience			0/68	0/79	0/53	0/39
	Brand sensory experience		0/75	0/87	0/77	
	Emotional brand experience		0/75	0/85	0/70	
	Brand behavioral experience		0/74	0/86	0/65	
	A rational brand experience		0/69	0/79	0/65	
Consumer-based brand equity			0/88	0/90	0/54	0/73
	Brand loyalty		0/92	0/95	0/86	
	perceived quality		0/86	0/93	0/87	
	Brand awareness/associations		0/71	0/81	0/49	
Customer brand engagement			0/92	0/85	0/52	0/72
	Cognitive processing		0/87	0/92	0/80	
	affection (love)		0/89	0/92	0/75	
	Activation		0/74	0/85	0/65	
Social media marketing			0/90	0/92	0/64	

	Entertainment		0/80	0/91	0/83	
	Customization		0/83	0/92	0/85	
	Interaction		0/84	0/90	0/76	
	Word of mouth		0/70	0/87	0/77	
	Trendiness		0/73	0/84	0/65	

As is shown in Table 1, all indicators except for a few that have a slight difference from the desired value and are acceptable with a little leniency, show a good fit for the measurement and structural models. To examine the fit of the overall model, the GOF criterion is used, which is calculated using the following formula. Considering the three values of 0.01, 0.25, and 0.36, which were introduced by Wetzels (2009) as weak, medium, and strong values for GOF, obtaining a value

of 0.614 for GOF confirms the strong fit of the overall model.

Findings

In this part of the research, the research findings are presented. For this purpose, first, the demographic characteristics of the sample members are presented in Table 2

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of the statistical sample members

Variables	Components	Per- cent	Varia- bles	Components	Per- cent
Gender	Man	39%	Job	free	48%
	Female	61%		Government employee	25%
	20-30	38%		private employee	27%
Age	31-40	51%	educa- tion	Bachelor's de- gree	51%
	41-50	7%		Master's de- gree	40%
	Above 50 years	4%		PHD	9%
Amount of income (million tomans)	Less than 5	35%	Brand used	Darsa leather	26%
	5 to 7/5	37%		Mashhad leather	31%
	7/5 to 10	22%		Novin Leather	29%
	Above 10	6%		Kandro leather	4%
				Maral leather	10%

In the following, the output of the software is presented in two outputs, path coefficient and t-value significance coefficient in figures 2 and 3.

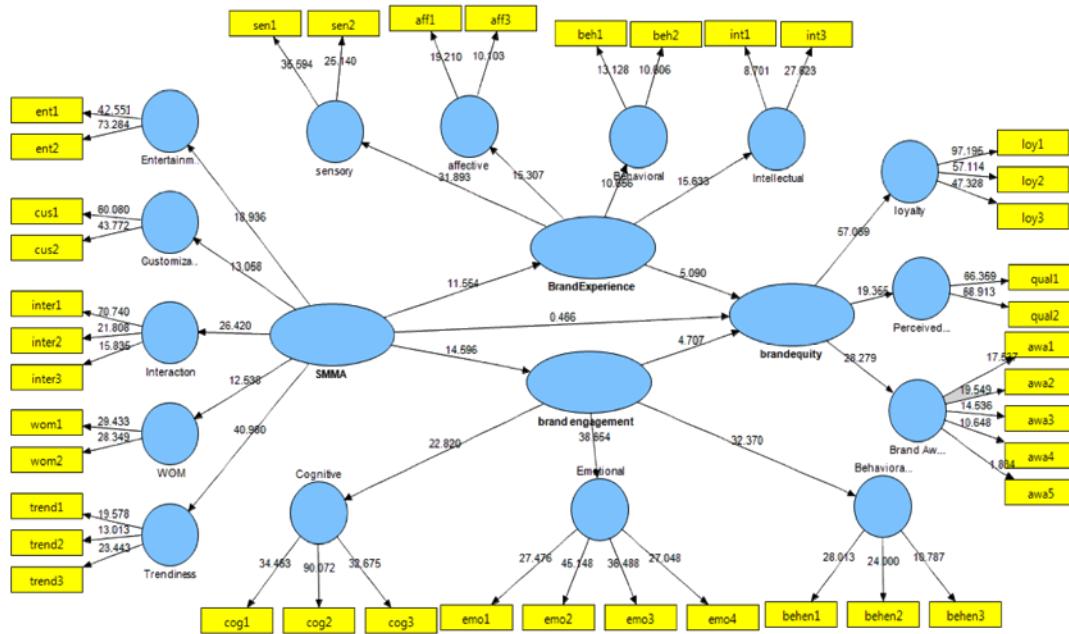


Figure 2. Path coefficient (β)

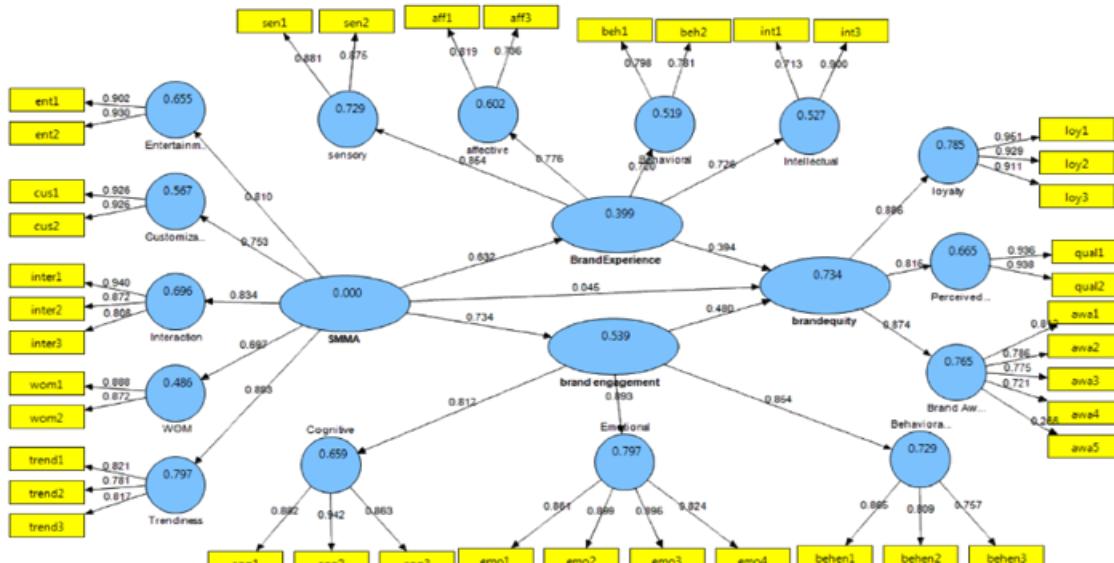


Figure 3. Significant number

The following table summarizes the results of the research hypotheses. To test the significance of the hypotheses, two parameters, t-value, and path coefficient, were used. The t-value index measures the significance of the path coefficient, which is between

1.96- and 1.96+. If the value of the statistic obtained is greater than the standard value of 1.96, the hypothesis is accepted, and if it is less than 1.96, the hypothesis is rejected.

Table 3. Test of research hypotheses

	Variables			path factor t (β)	A signifi- cant num- ber (t- value)	Result
	Independent	mediation	Independent			
1	Social media marketing ac- tivities		Customer-based brand equity	0/045	0/496	rejected
2	Social media marketing ac- tivities		Brand experience	0/632	11/472	accepted
3	Brand experience		Customer-based brand equity	0/394	4/788	accepted
4	Social media marketing ac- tivities	Brand experience	Customer-based brand equity	0/249	4/385	accepted
5	Social media marketing ac- tivities		Brand engage- ment	0/734	13/804	accepted
6	Customer brand engagement		Customer-based brand equity	0/480	1/674	accepted
7	Social media marketing ac- tivities	Customer brand engagement	Customer-based brand equity	0/352	4/616	accepted

1. The Sobal test was used to test the mediation hypotheses.

According to Table 3, as mentioned above, the p-values of all hypotheses except the first hypothesis are greater than the standard value and are approved.

Therefore, the revised and final research model is presented in Figure 4.

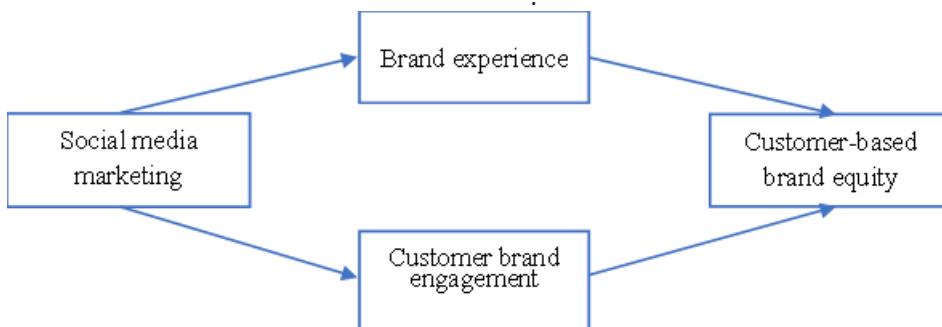


Figure 4. Research conceptual model (verified relationships)

Discussion

Considering the increasing interest of luxury fashion brand companies in providing luxury values to customers, using social media for marketing seems to be a smart thing. Therefore, more luxury brands should engage in social media activities to anticipate positive

contributions to brands by providing new luxury values to customers. Nevertheless, despite the general use of social media in marketing, the lack of understanding of the impact of social media marketing on various products and services needs to be investigated. (3). This study has tried to investigate the impact of social media marketing on customer-based brand equity, emphasizing the mediating role of brand

experience and customer brand engagement. Studies show that using social media improves customer experience and brand engagement during the early stages of information search and alternative evaluation. The results of testing research hypotheses using significant coefficients showed that six out of seven research hypotheses were confirmed, while the first hypothesis was not confirmed. In the first hypothesis, it was stated that social media marketing has a positive effect on customer-based brand equity, which was not confirmed despite the results of researchers such as Koay et al. (2020) and Colicev et al., (2018). The non-alignment of this research with the results of previous studies can be explained by the fact that in addition to the cultural and structural differences in the statistical population of these researches, the impact of social media marketing on customer-based brand equity is not direct and other variables act as mediators or Moderators have played a role in this effect. In the second hypothesis, it was stated that social media marketing has a positive effect on brand experience. The result obtained is consistent with the research results of researchers such as Koay et al. (2020). Marketing managers are actively focusing on brand experiences because consumers want a memorable experience that includes a pleasant interaction in every contact with the brand (Beig & Khan, 2018). To explain the result of this hypothesis, the researches of Sheng and Teo (2012) and Yuan et al. (2016), show that employing a social media strategy enhances consumer experience because the consumer learns about the brand depending on their positive experience. Therefore, understanding the role of customers' previous experiences with a brand is important for developing brand perception and value through social media.

The third hypothesis examines brand experience on customer-based brand equity. Several studies clearly show that customer experiences have a positive effect on brand equity [30, 41, 9, 7]. Biedenbach and Marell (2010) show that customer experience has a significant impact on the formation of all dimensions of brand equity, namely brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality, and brand loyalty. Tynan et al. (2009) also stated that personal brand experiences and interactions between brand owners,

customers, and members of their networks help differentiate luxury brands and create superior value propositions. Brand experience ensures brand equity as it increases the likelihood of customer engagement.

In the fourth hypothesis, it was stated that social media marketing affects customer-based brand equity with the mediating role of brand experience. The results obtained in support of previous studies by researchers such as Kim and (2012); Yuan et al. (2016), Koay et al. (2020) are aligned. According to the research background, brand experience in social media is a powerful tool for forming customer equity. According to Yu and Yuan (2019), social media allows consumers to be storytellers, thus they may criticize bad brand experiences or express positive ones. Sheng and Teo (2012), also focus on the mediating role of customer experiences on brand equity and found that useful features, entertainment, and beauty of products increase brand value through customer experiences.

In the fifth hypothesis, it was stated that social media marketing has a positive effect on customer brand involvement. The results of this hypothesis are in line with the results of a previous study by Cheung et al. (2020). In connection with the interpretation of the fifth hypothesis, Cheung et al. (2020), believe that businesses use social media platforms to transmit brand-related information such as sharing, updating, and creating feedback, as well as obtaining information about consumer preferences and management. relationships with customers, all of which facilitate customer-brand engagement and the creation of strong brands. Also, Solem and Pedersen (2016), also believe that service marketing professionals have realized that understanding how customers engage and interact with brands on social media when developing brand and communication strategies to create emotional bonds, such as great experiences Brand satisfaction, and brand loyalty are very important.

The sixth hypothesis examines customer brand engagement on customer-based brand equity, which is in line with previous studies by researchers such as Cheung et al., (2020). In confirming the results of this hypothesis, Algharabat et al. (2020) state that the interaction of customers with the brands presented on

social media is a symbol of their greater involvement in the presented brands, which contributes increasingly to brand equity. Consequently, consumers' engagement increases their knowledge of the brand, which in turn creates strong, favorable, and unique brand associations, influences their purchase decisions, and builds brand equity. Hollebeek et al. (2014) also define online customer engagement as a promising concept that offers higher predictive and explanatory power of consumer behavior outcomes, including brand loyalty.

In the seventh hypothesis, it was stated that social media marketing affects customer-based brand equity with the mediating role of customer brand engagement. The result obtained is in support of previous studies by researchers such as Algharabat et al. (2020). In explaining the result of this hypothesis, Bruhn et al. (2012) state that the direct participation of customers in social media gives them the power to influence brands and create challenges for brand managers trying to manage their brands. Various social media interactions on the company's brand page increase brand knowledge among customers and also affect customers' preferences or purchase decisions [8]. Therefore, customers' response to a company's brand-based activities and their response to other customers' brand-based communications on social media platforms lead to greater value creation about brand equity. Schivinski and Dabrowski (2015), showed that company-generated content only affects brand awareness, while user-generated content affects all dimensions of brand equity, such as brand awareness, brand loyalty, and quality. Perceived effects. Similarly, Brodie et al. (2011) asserted that customers who are more engaged have higher brand satisfaction, participation, awareness, image, and loyalty. The results of this study show that social media marketing creates brand value in consumers through customer brand engagement and brand experience, so marketing managers should pay more attention to empowering customers to experience the brand in social networks. Not only does a company need to have a social media presence, but it also needs to develop effective social media marketing activities as well as align its social media marketing efforts to create customer experiences with the potential to create more

favorable brand perceptions and strengthen future brand equity. Creating social media as a communication tool that allows marketers to participate in the brand value creation process can enhance positive brand perceptions.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggest several areas for future research. First, the study could be extended to a larger geographic region by considering more than one city. Second, the scope of the research could be expanded by including other product categories, such as electronic products or luxury products. Third, this study has examined social media marketing through various social media platforms, future studies could focus on a specific social media platform. Fourth, a comparative analysis could be conducted between different industries or product categories to see if social media marketing has a differential impact on brand experience. Finally, a larger sample size could be considered for future studies to demonstrate the generalizability of the findings in the leather clothing industry.

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