

# Influence of Social Media Marketing Efforts on Brand Equity and Consumer Response to Branded Shoes in India

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## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to provide a framework that depicted how social media marketing activities influenced brand equity and consumer preference and response towards branded shoes in India. The study's primary aim was to examine the influence of social media marketing activities on consumers' responses through brand equity creation. The theoretical framework conceived for the study was tested using primary data collected from consumers who were using branded luxury shoes aged between 18 – 50 years in the state of Kerala. Partial least squares method and structural equation modeling were employed to analyze the data. The results validated that entertainment, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and interaction significantly impacted social media marketing efforts. Brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand association also significantly contributed to brand equity. The willingness to pay a premium price, brand preferences, and brand loyalty positively impacted consumer response behaviour. The derived model elaborately substantiated that the social media efforts influenced brand equity, which mediated preferential customer response, brand choice, and brand loyalty.

**Keywords :** social media marketing, brand equity, consumer response, consumer preference, brand loyalty

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Internet penetration has increased by manifolds in countries all over the world in the last few years. Social media has also evolved as a powerful and potential medium of communication for marketers and manufacturers seeking ways of engaging with customers. The quick expansion of the marketing channel, which already reaches more than two-thirds of all internet users, provides unparalleled opportunities for brands and reputation building for companies. Nowadays, social media offers immense benefits for brand management. Social media networks or microblogs are progressively replacing traditional media, and the buzz about these new media marketing opportunities seems unlimited.

Although social media provides unique marketing opportunities for brand management (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) to generate brand loyalty and brand trust, one of the persistent challenges it faces is the difficulty in measuring the impact of social media activities on key brand success factors. Nowadays, customers spend a substantial percentage of their time on the internet and online social media platforms to evaluate various products and brands. It becomes all the more important for marketers to track customers 24 × 7 through integrated marketing communication channels through social media platforms. Therefore, a study on the influence of social media marketing efforts is important to evaluate the positive and potential value creation and brand equity of products and brands, resulting in consumer responses towards purchase decisions.

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## **Research Problem and Research Question**

The study's primary aim is to examine the influence of social media marketing activities on creating consumers' responses towards products and brands through value creation and generating brand equity. Therefore, the research problem is to formulate a conceptual model, showing the influential relationships between the major variables of social media marketing efforts, brand equity, and consumer response to branded shoe products and brands. The research question is to evaluate the relationships between social media marketing efforts, brand equity, and consumer response to branded shoe products.

## **The Need, Uniqueness, and Research Gap**

Prior research has shown that marketing communication through social media channels can positively impact brand building for luxury brands. However, there is no study conducted in the Indian context on the effect of social media marketing on brand equity and customer responses to branded shoe products. This research attempts to develop a comprehensive framework connecting social media marketing, its influence on brand equity, and the mediating effect of brand equity on the consumers' preferential choice of branded luxury shoes in India.

The absence of empirical studies on the influence of social media marketing efforts on brand equity and consumer responses in the context of branded shoes in India was identified for the study. Much of the prior work tried to study the direct influence of social media on consumer behavior. Some of the previous studies considered luxury lifestyle brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, etc., in other parts of the world. The present study has considered luxury shoe brands such as Nike, Adidas, Puma, etc. There is no previous study on social media marketing efforts – consumer response relationship based on branded shoes in India. Moreover, previous studies did not consider all the four component factors of brand equity to evaluate its influence on consumer preference. Therefore, the influence of all the four factors of brand equity on consumer response is under consideration for this study.

## **Literature Review**

The two theoretical models of brand equity – Aaker's model and Keller's model – are banked upon in this study (Aaker, 1996 ; Keller, 2008). As per Aaker's model, the four categories of brand assets are brand loyalty, brand awareness, perceived quality, and brand associations. The impact of social media marketing activities is further elaborated in the following section.

### ***Social Media Marketing Efforts (SMME)***

Social media provides marketers with remarkable opportunities to reach consumers in their social communities and build more personal relationships with them. Social media has drastically changed how marketers create brand content, distribute it, and consumers experience consumption of brand communications in the virtual space. In the branded shoe sector, social media plays a key role in increasing companies' sales in India. In the branded shoe sector, social media marketing efforts comprise of four dimensions : entertainment, interaction, trendiness, and word-of-mouth. Entertainment is meant to provide fun and play through the social media experience (Agichtein et al., 2008). Social media interaction is fundamentally changing communication between brands and customers. Zhu and Chen (2015) divided social media into groups based on connection and interaction. As per Godey et al. (2016), trendy information on social media constitutes surveillance, knowledge, pre-purchase information, and inspiration. Surveillance deals with observing and getting updated on one's social environment.

It is the knowledge regarding the brand-related information that consumers obtain to capitalize on other consumers' expertise to learn about pre-purchase information of a product or brand and ultimately driving intention to purchase it (Godey et al., 2016). The creativity and informativeness of social media advertisements were found to significantly influence the positive attitude of consumers towards brands (Padival et al., 2019). One of the most widely accepted notions in consumer behavior is that electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) communication in social media plays an important role in shaping consumers' attitudes and behaviors (Muntinga et al., 2011). According to Rao and Rao (2019), a positive relationship existed between eWOM and consumers' purchase preferences, with brand trust and brand image partially mediating the relationship.

### ***Creation of Brand Equity***

The model of brand equity that Keller (2008) proposed illustrates that brand equity is dominant, providing the link between its two dimensions: brand awareness and brand image. Brand awareness refers to the strength of the brand trace in memory, in which the consumer identified the brand under various conditions to make a purchase (Keller, 2008). Brand image is the perception of a brand and which stays in the mind of a consumer forever. The brand image is also articulated as to how a particular brand is positioned in the market and how the consumer perceives the product (Dichter, 1985). Brand association is related to information on what is in the customer's mind about the brand, either positive or negative, connected to the node of the brain memory. The brand association acts as a way of establishing connectivity with the brand and is thought to be an information collection tool to execute brand differentiation and brand extension (Van Osselaer & Janiszewski, 2001). It was observed that the higher the brand associations with a product, the more it will be remembered by the consumers, and the more loyal they will be towards the brand. Perceived quality is the customers' perception of the product's higher quality or superiority concerning its intended purpose related to alternative brands.

The social media marketing efforts influenced brand equity, relationship equity, and value equity in a luxury fashion brand (Kim & Ko, 2012). Social media interaction describes users who contribute to product and brand-related social media platforms, sharing their experiences and exhibiting brand loyalty. Creating this relationship can increase credibility, affinity, and brand equity (Zhu & Chen, 2015). The results of a study conducted in Hong Kong revealed that interaction, electronic word-of-mouth, and trendiness are the key elements directly influencing consumer brand engagement, then strengthening brand awareness and brand knowledge, thus leading to higher brand equity (Cheung et al., 2020). Social media communication effort was found to have an intense impact on brand equity and reflected in its dimensions such as brand awareness, brand image, customer value, brand quality, and loyalty (Stojanovic et al., 2018). The results of a study by Seo and Park (2018) substantially showed that trendiness of communication was the most important social media marketing component, having a significant impact on brand equity components such as brand awareness, brand image, brand commitment, and e-word-of-mouth in an airlines industry. As per the study conducted by Robul et al. (2019), social media activities of fashion brands incorporating the elements of entertainment, interaction, tendency, adjustment, and publicity (word of mouth) were important and effective drivers of brand capital.

Thus, based on the available literature support, it is evident that social media marketing efforts have influenced building brand equity of products. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that :

➤ **H1** : Social media marketing efforts (SMME) have a positive influence on consumer-based brand equity.

### ***Consumer Response***

Researchers have agreed that stronger brand equity will contribute to higher brand choice with customers. This study, therefore, focuses on the influence of brand equity on three important customer responses : brand

preference, ability to charge premium pricing, and brand loyalty. Brand preference indicates the customers' decision to choose a specific brand among several competing brands based on what they know and feel about it (Keller, 2008). Brand preference is generally measured by asking consumers to specifically indicate their favorite brands from a few identified categories of brands.

Compared to competing brands, willingness to pay a premium price (WTP) is the amount customers are willing to pay for their brand. In the highly competitive marketing environment, firms need to evaluate why customers are willing to pay a premium price for a brand compared to competing brands (Ligas & Chaudhuri, 2012). WTP can be regarded as a result of the customers' perceived value and qualitative judgment of the brand because of the consumer perception that higher prices will be a reflection of better quality (Davicik et al., 2015). Various studies evaluated that the influence of merchandise value, perceived uniqueness, and store effect led to customers' willingness to pay a higher price (Ligas & Chaudhuri, 2012), and brand relationship quality triggered an intention to pay premium prices (Nyffenegger et al., 2014). Brand loyalty was described as a decision-making unit's non-random behavioral purchase decision over time regarding one or more preferential brands from a set of brands and was regarded as a function of psychological processes. Integrated marketing communications play an indispensable role in convincing consumers' brand loyalty (Šerić & Gil-Saura, 2012).

The results of a study performed by Pawar and Raut (2019) indicated that the brand relationship dimensions of brand loyalty, brand attachment, and brand engagement positively influenced the brand community communications and consumer preferences. The results from a study by Tran et al. (2020) in China on dragon fruit brands supported the hypothesis that brand equity has a positive relationship with consumer responses. The results of a study on local branded sports shoes conducted in Indonesia revealed that social media marketing and perceived value had a strong impact on purchase intention (Hansopaheluwakan et al., 2020). Ziyadin et al. (2019) brought out the research findings as to how consumers' experiences were influenced by the social digital environment, highlighted by the components of digital culture, responses to digital advertising, the impact of social media on consumer behavior, mobile environments, and online rumors (WOM). A study by Sreejesh et al. (2020) analytically established the positive role of media interactivity and its influential effects on customers' reactions and responses to social media marketing advertisements. The research by Gulzar and Maqbool (2018) indicated that engagement with SMM had a positive and influential effect on consumers' brand awareness and purchase intentions. The results indicated that social media interactions indeed eased the upselling efforts and reduced the risk of churn for products and brands.

Based on the above literature support, it is evident that brand equity influences consumer responses and social media directly impacts formalizing consumer response and brand preference. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that :

➤ **H2 :** Social media marketing efforts (SMME) have a positive and direct influence on consumer response.

➤ **H3 :** Brand equity (BE) has a positive influence on consumer response (CR).

Moreover, both brand equity and social media marketing efforts are found to influence consumer responses. Accordingly, it is hypothesized that :

➤ **H4 :** Brand equity (BE) has a mediating effect on the influential relationship between social media marketing efforts (SMMEs) and consumer response (CR).

## **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this study are the following :

- (1) To measure the relationship between social media marketing efforts and brand equity.
- (2) To analyze the impact of brand equity on consumer response.
- (3) To measure the relationship of social media efforts on creating consumer response.

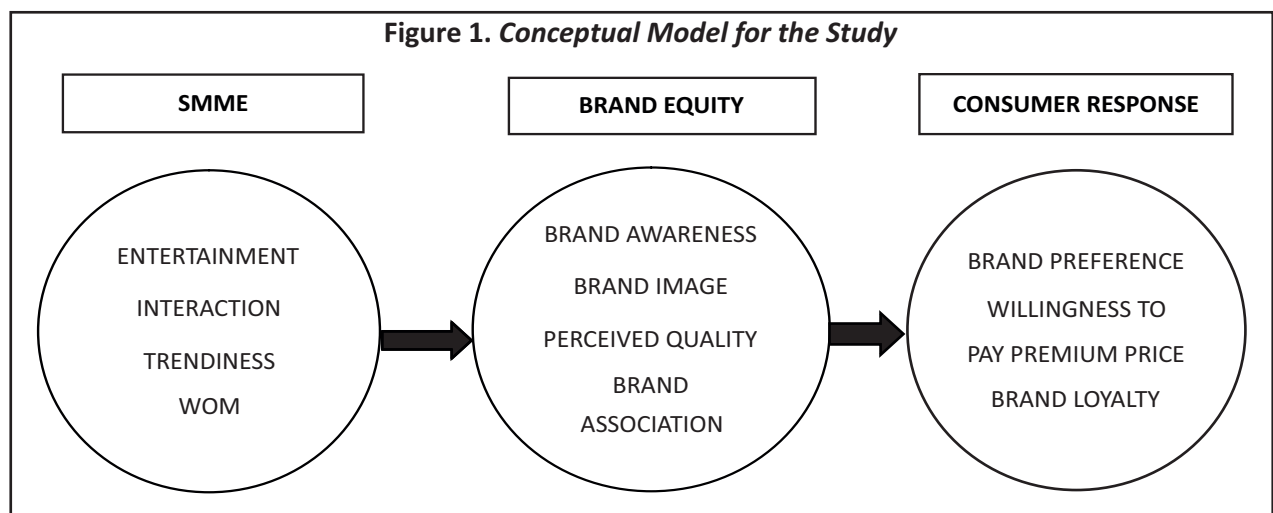
## Hypothesis Formulation

Thus, a summary of the hypotheses for testing are as follows :

- ⇒ **H01** : Social media marketing efforts (SMME) have no positive influence on consumer-based brand equity.
- ⇒ **Ha1** : Social media marketing efforts (SMME) have a positive influence on consumer-based brand equity.
- ⇒ **H02** : Social media marketing efforts (SMME) have no positive and direct influence on consumer response.
- ⇒ **Ha2** : Social media marketing efforts (SMME) have a positive and direct influence on consumer response.
- ⇒ **H03** : Brand equity (BE) has no positive influence on consumer response (CR).
- ⇒ **Ha3** : Brand equity (BE) has a positive influence on consumer response (CR).
- ⇒ **H04** : Brand equity (BE) has no mediating effect on the influential relationship between social media marketing efforts (SMMs) and consumer response (CR).
- ⇒ **Ha4** : Brand equity (BE) has a mediating effect on the influential relationship between social media marketing efforts (SMMs) and consumer response (CR).

## Theoretical Research Model

The research model conceptualized for the study is shown in Figure 1.



## Research Methodology

A descriptive research methodology using quantitative design methods was adopted for the study. The following subsections discuss these aspects of the study.

### Measurement of Variables

The independent variable, social media marketing efforts (SMME), is measured using the four dimensions – entertainment, trendiness, interaction, and word-of-mouth. The dependent variable, consumer response, is measured using three dimensions – brand preference, brand loyalty, and willingness to pay a premium price. The mediating variable, brand equity, is measured using four dimensions – brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand association. The scale used to measure all the constructs was obtained from a previous study (Godey et al., 2016). The 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the variables.

### Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

The population was chosen from the customers in the state of Kerala, targeting the age group between 18 and 50 years of age, who were using branded luxury shoes. Branded shoe brands such as Nike, Puma, Adidas, Reebok,

**Table 1. Data Sources of Variables, Dimensions, and Factors**

Variables	Factors Analyzed	Source of Scale
Entertainment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The website content is fun.</li> <li>• The content on the website is interesting.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Trendiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The website has the latest information.</li> <li>• The website is trendy enough.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The website allows information sharing.</li> <li>• Consumers can post their opinion on the website.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Word-of-Mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The customers would recommend the website to their friends.</li> <li>• The customers would recommend the website to gain information.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Brand Image	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand is a luxury company.</li> <li>• The brand is representative of the luxury industry.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Brand Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The customers are well aware of the brand.</li> <li>• Customers recall the brand easily.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Willingness to Pay a Premium Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers are willing to pay an extra amount.</li> <li>• Customers will switch if the price is increased by a bit.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Brand Loyalty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers will suggest this brand.</li> <li>• Customers visit the website regularly.</li> <li>• Customers are satisfied with each visit.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Brand Preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customers would prefer to use this brand.</li> <li>• Customers will buy this brand if there are similar brands.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Perceived Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand offers value for the price.</li> <li>• The brand represents good quality.</li> <li>• The brand is purchased for its quality.</li> </ul>	Godey et al. (2016)
Brand Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The brand has a personality.</li> <li>• Customers trust the brand.</li> </ul>	Chen et al. (2013)



etc. were chosen as the research context, not only because these brands were popular with the target customers of this study, but also because these popular branded shoes are designed to stimulate and satisfy customers' experiences rather than their functional usage. The sampling technique used is convenience sampling. It is a type of non-probability sampling that assumes that there is an even distribution of characteristics within the population. The sample size was targeted at 350 respondents. The questionnaire was used as a tool for data collection. The designed questionnaire had questions for the indicator variables such as entertainment, trendiness, interaction, word-of-mouth, brand image, brand awareness, premium price, brand loyalty, and brand preference obtained from Godey et al. (2016). The questions for the brand association were obtained from Chen et al. (2013). Table 1 shows the variable dimensions, factors, and meta-data sources.

Google Forms were sent to the respondents for the data collection. The number of completed responses received was 302 out of the targeted 350 respondents, and the response rate was 86%. Constant follow ensured a higher response rate. The period of the research study was from January – July 2019.

Partial least squares (PLS) analysis with WARP PLS is applied to test the measurement model, determining the internal consistency and reliability of the multiple-item scales used to measure the variables. Structured equation modeling is also used to analyze the mediating effect of brand equity between the relationship of social media marketing efforts and consumer response.

## Analysis and Results

### Sample Statistics

Data were received from 302 respondents. The customer age distribution shows that the age group of 22 – 25 years was found to comprise of 50% of the total respondents, followed by the age group of 26 – 30 years (comprising of 22% of the respondents), 18 – 21 years (11%), 31 – 40 years (9%), 41 – 50 years (5%), and above the age of 50 years (3%).

The descriptive statistics results are shown in Table 2. The mean values of the variables are much higher than

**Table 2. Descriptive Statistics Showing the Mean and Standard Deviation of the Indicator Variables**

	<i>N</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Entertainment	302	3.767	.7846
Interaction	302	3.877	.7152
Trendiness	302	3.793	.7090
W-O-M	302	3.752	.7622
Brand Awareness	302	3.854	.7417
Brand Image	302	3.868	.6505
Perceived Quality	302	3.914	.6447
Brand Association	302	3.876	.7484
Brand Preference	302	3.889	.7001
Willingness to Pay Premium Price	302	3.705	.7835
Brand Loyalty	302	3.768	.6639
Valid <i>N</i> (Listwise)	302		

the central value of 2.5 of the measurement scales, and the standard deviations are all much below the value of 1.0, which indicates that the indicators are good enough measurements of the variables.

### ***Data Reliability and Validity***

Table 3 shows the Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR) values of the variables of measurements. As per the research findings of Hair et al. (2011), the acceptable values need to be above the threshold value of 0.70. Thus, it establishes the reliability of the measurement of variables used in the model.

**Table 3. Cronbach's Alpha Values**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>Composite Reliability (CR)</b>	<b>Acceptable Value</b>
Entertainment	0.72	0.87	0.70 and above
Trendiness	0.715	0.83	0.70 and above
Interaction	0.69	0.84	0.70 and above
Word-of-Mouth	0.65	0.851	0.70 and above
Brand Image	0.71	0.83	0.70 and above
Brand Awareness	0.72	0.80	0.70 and above
Premium Price	0.66	0.81	0.70 and above
Brand Loyalty	0.69	0.79	0.70 and above
Brand Preference	0.67	0.82	0.70 and above
Perceived Quality	0.68	0.82	0.70 and above
Brand Association	0.76	0.89	0.70 and above

### ***Discriminant Validity***

Table 4 shows the square root of the average variance extracted, which is a measure of discriminant validity. As shown, the diagonal elements, representing the square root of average variance extracted (SQRT (AVE)), are the highest across the respective rows and columns. Hence, discriminant validity has been proved. Thus, the respondents were able to psychologically distinguish and discriminate the variables from one another.

**Table 4. Square Root of the Average Variance Extracted Values**

<b>Variables/ Square Root of Average Variance Extracted</b>	<b>SMME</b>	<b>Brand Equity</b>	<b>Consumer Response</b>
SMME	<b>0.808</b>	0.693	0.656
Brand Equity	0.693	<b>0.829</b>	0.706
Consumer Response	0.656	0.706	<b>0.806</b>

### ***Convergent Validity***

The normalized combined loadings and cross-loading values of the variables are provided in Table 5. Normalized factor loading results are used to establish the convergent validity of the variables. The ideal value for factor loading of the indicators is acceptable at the threshold value of 0.50 as per Hair et al.'s (2011) research findings



**Table 5. Factor Loading Values of the Variables**

	SMME	Brand Equity	Consumer Response
Entertainment	<b>0.990</b>	-0.108	0.084
Trendiness	<b>0.972</b>	0.234	-0.009
Interaction	<b>0.970</b>	0.065	-0.222
Word-of-Mouth	<b>0.974</b>	-0.159	0.153
Brand Image	0.110	<b>0.986</b>	-0.127
Brand Awareness	0.333	<b>0.927</b>	-0.175
Perceived Quality	-0.196	<b>0.960</b>	0.199
Brand Association	-0.174	<b>0.983</b>	0.067
Brand Preference	-0.138	0.432	<b>0.891</b>
Brand Loyalty	0.006	0.071	<b>0.997</b>
Price Premium	0.083	-0.336	<b>0.938</b>

to establish the strong validity of the variables. As shown in bold in Table 5, the factor loading values are much higher than the threshold value of 0.50. The AVE values, which are the square of the diagonal elements in Table 4, are all higher than the threshold value of 0.50, as required by Hair et al. (2011), to establish convergent validity. Moreover, it is found that the AVE values are lesser than the corresponding composite reliability (CR) values shown in Table 3. Thus, from these results, it is established that there is sufficient convergent validity, which means that the variables are effectively measured using the used indicators.

### **Measurement Model**

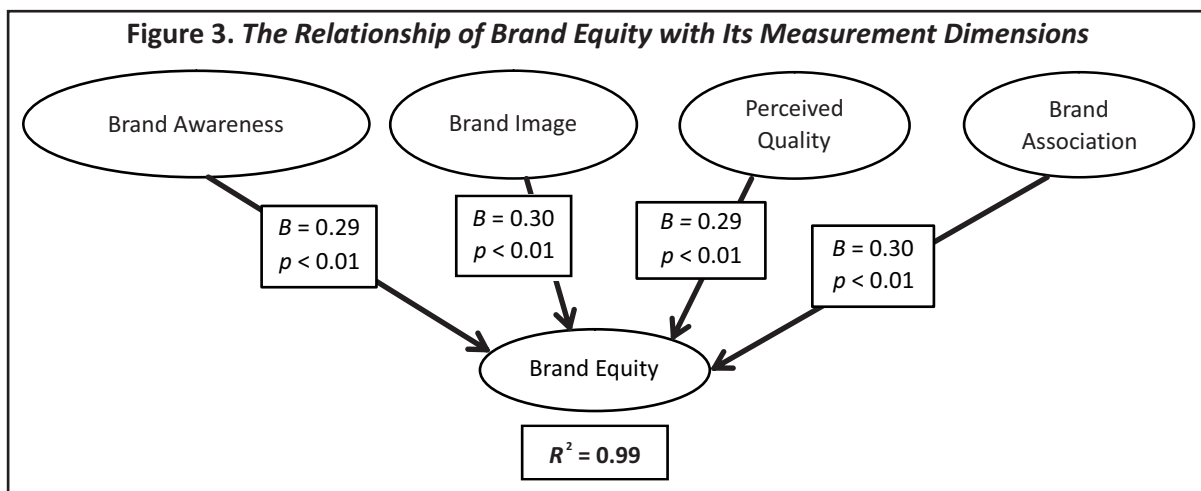
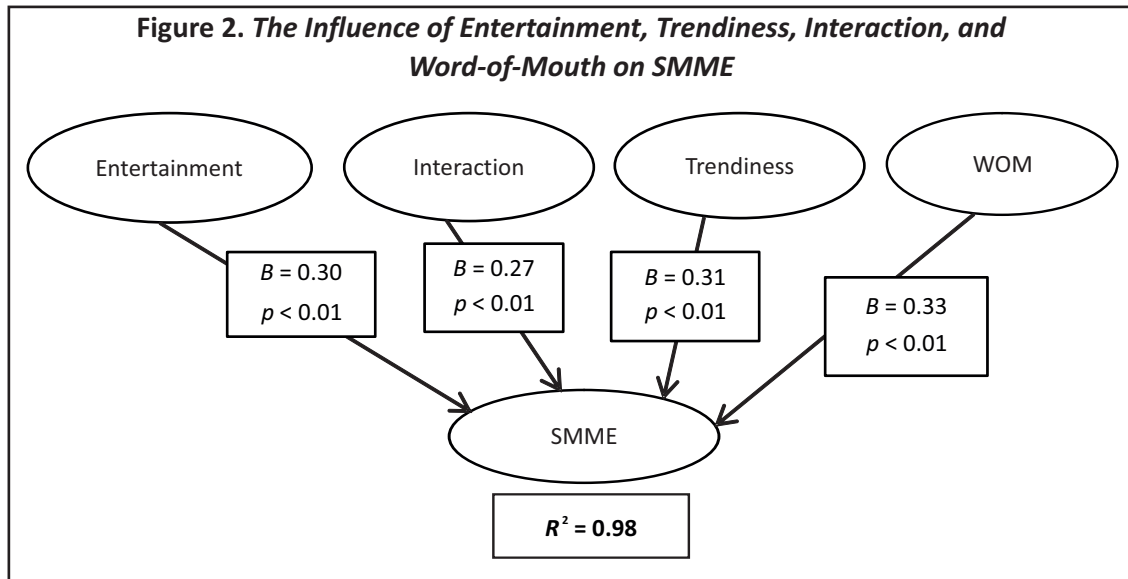
The measurement model quality indices are shown in Table 6, which shows the acceptance of the proposed model of variables in the study.

**Table 6. Quality Indices Derived from WARP PLS for the Model**

Fitness Indices	Value Derived	Expected Value
Average Block VIF (AVIF)	1.836	$\leq 3.3$
Simpson's Paradox Ratio	1	1
R Squared Contribution Ratio	1	Ideally 1
Statistical Suppression Ratio	1	$> 0.7$
Nonlinear Bivariate Causality	1	$> 0.7$
Direction Ratio		

### **Assessment of the Derived Structural Model**

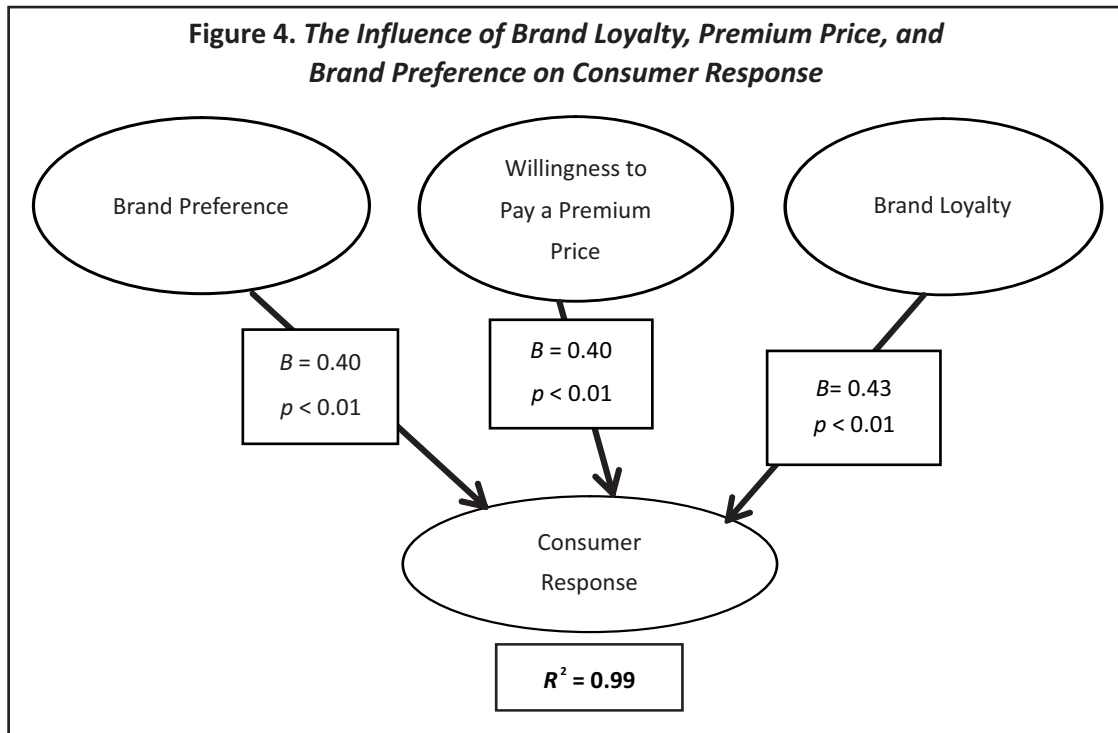
SEM analysis is carried out to analyze the mediating effect of brand equity in the relationship between SMME and consumer response and to analyze the influences of indicator variables such as entertainment, brand awareness, brand loyalty, etc., on the major variables such as SMME, brand equity, and consumer response. The level of significance was chosen at 5% for acceptance for all the relationship validations for all paths of the derived model. The results are as follows.



The indicator variables – entertainment, trendiness, interaction, and word-of-mouth-significantly influence social media marketing efforts (SMME), and Figure 2 indicates this relationship. The beta values and  $p$ -values show a significant relationship between the independent variable SMME and its dimensions (which are used to measure it). The  $R^2$  value is 98%, showing that these dimensions primarily account for the contribution of SMME.

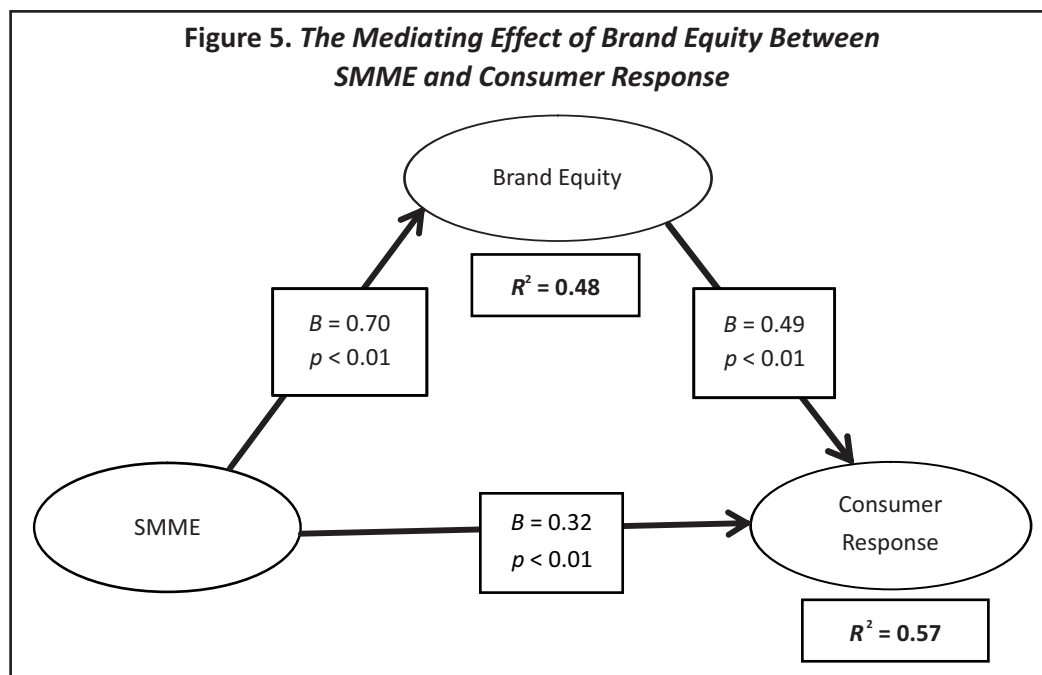
As seen in Figure 3, the beta values and  $p$ -values indicate the significant relationship between the indicator variables and brand equity. Here, all the  $p$ -values are below 0.05, which indicates that a significant relationship exists amongst the variables at a 5% significance level. The  $R^2$  value is 99%, showing that these dimensions mainly account for the contribution of brand equity.

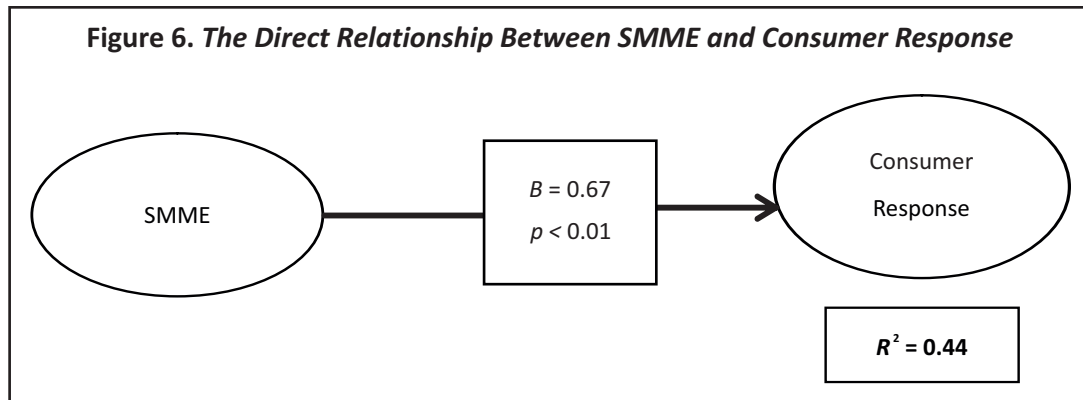
As can be inferred from Figure 4, the indicator variables – brand loyalty, willingness to pay a premium price, and brand preference significantly influence consumer response. The beta values and  $p$ -values indicate the presence of a significant relationship between the indicator variables and the consumer response. Here, all the  $p$ -values are below 0.05, indicating a significant relationship among the variables. The  $R^2$  value is 99%, showing that these dimensions mostly account for the contribution of consumer response.



### ***The Mediating Effect of Brand Equity***

The mediation test was carried out as per process by Baron and Kenny (1986), and the results are shown in Figure 5, which indicate the presence of a mediating effect. The mediating relationship can be explained using





**Table 7. Hypotheses Testing Results**

Hypotheses	Variable Path	<i>p</i> -value	β Beta	Result
Ha1	SMME to brand equity	<0.01	0.70	Supported
Ha2	SMME to consumer response	<0.01	0.32	Supported
Ha3	Brand equity to consumer response	<0.01	0.49	Supported
Ha4	Brand equity has a mediating effect between SMME and consumer response	<0.01	0.343 (= 0.70 × 0.49)	Supported

the beta values. The beta value indicates the change in the dependent variable due to the independent variable. Figure 5 depicts the beta value of the mediating relationships as equal to  $0.70 \times 0.49 = 0.343$ , which is higher than the beta value of 0.32 of the direct relationship between SMME and consumer response. This implies that SMMEs have a significant role in creating brand equity and that brand equity, in turn, mediates to influence consumer response.

Figure 6 depicts the direct relationship between SMME and consumer response without considering brand equity as a mediator component. Since the beta value is 0.67 and the *p*-value is less than 0.05, the direct relationship between SMME and consumer response is indicated to be significant. However, from Figure 5, it is shown that the multiplied beta value  $0.70 \times 0.49 = 0.343$  is still lower than 0.67 while taken along with brand equity as a mediator component. Therefore, it is proven that brand equity partially mediates between SMME and consumer response.

Table 7 shows the hypotheses testing values and results. The testing was conducted at the 5% significance level. The *B*-value and *p*-value for the paths are extracted from Figure 5.

From Table 7, it can be seen that all the four alternate hypotheses Ha1, Ha2, Ha3, and Ha4 are accepted as the *p*-values for each of the paths is < 0.01 at the 5% significance level and beta values are all positive. This proves that there is a significant contributory relationship between SMME and brand equity, SMME and consumer response, and between brand equity and consumer response. It can be also inferred that there is a mediating effect of brand equity between SMME and consumer response. The beta value of 0.70 means that one unit change in the SMME brings about 0.70 units of positive change in brand equity. The beta value of 0.32 means that one unit change in SMME brings about 0.32 units of positive change in the consumer response. The beta value of 0.49 means that one unit change in the brand equity brings about 0.49 units of positive change in the consumer response.

## Findings

The analysis of the research model indicates that entertainment, trendiness, word-of-mouth, and interaction have a significant impact on social media marketing efforts. Brand awareness, brand image, perceived quality, and brand association significantly impact brand equity. The willingness to pay a premium price, brand preferences, and brand loyalty have an impact on consumer behavior. The SMME variable has a positive influence on the brand equity mediator component. Brand equity has a positive influence on consumer response. It is also observed that brand equity partially mediates the relationship between social media marketing efforts and consumer response. The mediating effect is less compared to the direct impact between social media marketing efforts and consumer response.

## Theoretical and Managerial Implications

In this section, the impact of the research study and its theoretical and managerial implications are discussed.

### *Theoretical Implications*

This study tries to provide empirical evidence for the influence of SMME on brand equity and, in turn, the influence of brand equity on consumer response in the Indian context of branded luxury shoes. This study result is different from the results of previous studies (Godey et al., 2016), which analyzed brand equity on two elements of brand awareness and brand image. However, the present study analyzes the influence of all the component attributes of brand equity. This research also observes that various efforts of social media marketing activities positively influence all the elements that constitute brand equity. The study results indicate that the indicator variables have significant relationships with the major variables and display positive correlation and regression values. This research also confirms a mediating effect of brand equity between SMME and consumer response relationship of branded shoes in India. Another study charted the theoretical and practical implications of social media for brand building and the many management opportunities and challenges this entails (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). The results from this study of the positive influence of SMME on brand equity is substantiated by other studies (Cheung et al., 2020 ; Kwahk & Ge, 2012 ; Seo & Park, 2018 ; Stojanovic et al., 2018 ; Zhu & Chen, 2015). Thus, it validates that social commerce encourages consumers to interact with each other and generate valuable content.

Therefore, social influence is considered an important factor for the success of social commerce initiatives. In this context, this study firmly provides empirical evidence of the influence of social media marketing efforts on brand equity measurements, which mediate to create positive consumer response, specifically in the luxury shoe brands in India. The study proves that brand equity positively influences consumer response, which is substantiated by other studies (Pawar & Raut, 2019 ; Tran et al., 2020). The study empirically proves that there is a positive and direct impact between social media marketing efforts and consumer response. This result is substantiated by other studies (Hansopaheluwakan et al., 2020 ; Jibril et al., 2016 ; Sreejesh et al., 2020). The present research addresses the gap in the literature by offering empirical evidence on pioneering luxury shoe brands in social media in the Indian context. Thus, this is a positive theoretical contribution from this study to the literature on branding efforts and building brand equity through social media marketing activities, which leads to evoking positive customer response resulting in product purchase of branded luxury shoe brands in India.

### *Managerial Implications*

The study adds to the academic knowledge base and supports practical applications in brand marketing,

specifically to the luxury shoe segment in India. The results would also facilitate substantial brand-building benefits through social media efforts, complementing value creation to customer-based brand equity and generating positive customer response. Companies could bank on the social media marketing efforts to build up customer relationship marketing and management of customer expectations. Marketing managers could strategize their digital marketing activities based on the consumer responses towards their social media campaigns, and based on the consumer response, product managers could effectively channelize customer relationship management efforts.

Brand managers could develop new strategies through social media to attract more customers to use the digital platform for their product experience. Marketing managers will be able to analyze the post-purchase behavior of the consumers that will guide them in retaining existing customers and attracting new customers because, from a marketing perspective, customers are the most important as they lead to revenue generation for a company. The findings of this study will help marketers analyze the strengths and potential of their marketing actions. The marketing managers/product managers could also take their retailers to go beyond the advertising aspect of social networking sites and find groundbreaking ways to use them to conduct conversations with consumers. Firms should consider social media as an inseparable part of their integrated marketing strategy for building brand equity and strengthen customer relationship marketing efforts. Feedback from customers should be included, and customers should feel that they are forming a part of the company's strategy to build their brands.

## **Conclusion**

Social media has created a whole new creative opportunity for companies and brands to engage their customers. This study contributes to prior literature by offering a comprehensive framework that shows how social media marketing efforts influence brand equity and consumer response behavior towards branded shoes in India. The study results corroborate that any social media marketing strategy should pay special attention to content that is entertaining, up-to-date, and is likely to stimulate more customer engagement and social media interaction. The results corroborate that SMME activities influence consumer response through brand equity, but their role appears to be more relevant in terms of brand loyalty and brand preference. The study enriches the literature on brand building through SMME, generating positive consumer response in luxury branded shoe segments worldwide. The study also provides marketing strategy directions for product and brand managers in luxury branded shoe segments across the world.

## **Limitations of the Study and Future Recommendations**

The study was conducted within the Kerala state in India. Understanding the factors affecting brand equity and customer response in the online luxury branded shoe marketplace is still an open issue. Further studies should modify existing variables in a broader context or consider a broader range of relevant variables in India or other countries.

## **Author's Contribution**

Dr. P. Balakrishnan Menon conceived the idea and developed qualitative and quantitative design to undertake the empirical study, extracted research papers with high repute, filtered these based on keywords, and generated concepts and codes relevant to the study design, verified the analytical methods, conducted the study, and performed the data analysis and interpretation. He also performed numerical computations using WARPPLS.



## Conflict of Interest

The author certifies that he has no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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