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OPTIMIZING CUSTOMER BRAND ENGAGEMENT VIA DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGY, SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS, AND BRAND EQUITY: A STUDY ON ORTUSEIGHT



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ABSTRACT

The growth of digital technology has established social media as a primary consumer touchpoint for brands utilizing influencer endorsements. This study examines how social media influencers and brand equity jointly affect customer brand engagement with Ortuseight running shoes in Indonesia. To address this objective, a survey was conducted with 202 current Ortuseight users, and the data were analyzed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The results indicate that both social media influencers and brand equity positively and significantly influence customer brand engagement, though brand equity exerts a substantially stronger effect. Specifically, brand equity dimensions serve as primary drivers of long-term engagement, whereas influencer credibility and communication prompt active consumer interaction. Overall, these findings provide valuable strategic insights, suggesting that long-term brand equity building exerts a stronger influence on engagement than influencer campaigns alone, offering clear guidance for local brands' digital strategies.

Keywords: social media influencers (SMIs); brand equity; customer brand engagement.

INTRODUCTION

The increase in usage and demand for social media personalities offers marketers an attractive opportunity to market their products fast (Syed et al., 2023). In addition, companies increasingly use influencer marketing to provide information about the product, as social media influencers are perceived as authentic and credible market experts (Aw et al., 2023). Influencers are individuals on social media platforms including Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube and TikTok with a considerable number of followers who share their subjective views and opinions about products or services (Dehyadegari et al., 2025; Jun & Yi, 2020). It is expected of influencers to produce content that increases the engagement levels of their social media pages (Wies et al., 2023). Social media influencers play a crucial role in determining how customers connect with brands because they encourage interactions in the form of likes, shares, and comments on posts about the brand (Arora et al., 2019).

The popularity of running leads to the growing running shoe market segment with various shoes adapted for different age groups, from beginner shoes prioritizing comfort and carbon-coated shoes with high elasticity for long-distance athletes (Xiao et al., 2025). In Shopee Indonesia's best-selling sports product report, the running shoe category is represented

by the brand Ortuseight, ensuring the market share of 35.5% for locally-produced goods (Databoks, 2025). Shopee's data demonstrates the effectiveness of the digital marketing strategy of inspiring brand remodeling with the assistance of sports and lifestyle influencers and increasing consumer engagement with the local-made product.

Previous research yields inconclusive results concerning the impact of social media influencers on client brand engagement. The impact of social media influencers on customer involvement has favorable outcomes (Chandra & Indrawati, 2023). The importance of influencer credibility in marketing communications on trust and repurchase intentions (Tarabieh et al., 2024). Brand-based marketing orientation is more effective than influencer-based marketing (Kumar et al., 2025). As a result, there is still confusion about how social media influencers influence the interaction process with customers. However, the literature on the link between brand equity and customer brand engagement remains scarce because most studies indicate contradictory directions. In research (Khanh & ThiHoai, 2020) it was shown that by fostering consumer trust and satisfaction, brand equity builds the fundamental foundation needed to trigger meaningful customer engagement. Consequently, it is essential to do further study on the direct impact of brand equity on customer engagement. This should encompass the function of social media influencers and the impact of brand equity on customer brand engagement.

To address this gap, this study examines how social media influencers and brand equity jointly influence customer brand engagement among Ortuseight running shoe users in Indonesia. Set against the backdrop of Indonesia's expanding running culture and digital marketing landscape, this research explores the specific mechanisms through which digital endorsements and brand strength drive consumer interactions. Theoretically, this study enriches the literature on consumer-brand relationships in emerging markets; practically, it offers actionable insights for local footwear brands to optimize their digital marketing strategies. In digital marketing literature, the definition of a Social Media Influencer (SMI) encompasses three primary perspectives: audience reach, the role of content creation, and the concept of the "human brand." At a fundamental level, an SMI is defined as a digital figure possessing a massive follower base and an extensive social network across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube (Albadri, 2023; Goanta & Ranchordás, 2020; Veirman et al., 2017). Beyond mere audience scale, other studies highlight the functional dimension of SMIs as content creators who leverage specialized expertise in specific fields such as lifestyle and health to cultivate interactive communities (Sokolova & Kefi, 2022). This expertise and interaction serve as the foundation for SMIs to influence their followers' decision-making processes (Hii & Ong, 2025). Diverging from this functional perspective, (Liang et al., 2025) expand the SMI concept through a strategic lens by viewing the influencer as a human brand. From this perspective, an SMI's standing is measured not only by content but also by unique attributes such as post, communicability, credibility, and word-of-mouth effects that shape audience perceptions. Synthesizing this literature, the present study defines an SMI as a specialized content creator who commands a massive digital audience and operates as a human brand capable of influencing consumer behavior.

In the modern marketing landscape, brand equity is generally understood as the intangible added value inherent in a product or service beyond its basic utility (Chahal, 2020; Keller, 2018). From a business performance perspective, this added value is reflected in superior marketing outcomes compared to unbranded products (Keller, 2018). The formation of brand equity relies heavily on consumer cognitive processes, wherein the accumulation of positive perceptions, strategic associations, and loyalty builds the brand's credibility and

market value (Chahal, 2020). Expanding upon this consumer-centric view, (Wei, 2022) offers a more structured breakdown of brand equity into three key elements: the brand's independent value, the level of customer loyalty, and the collective perceptions of a broader range of external stakeholders. Deeply embedded in consumer cognition, brand equity is a multidimensional construct comprising brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty (Londoño et al., 2016; Yanez-Araque et al., 2025). Together, these dimensions cultivate consumer trust, establish market credibility, and form the foundation for sustainable competitive advantage (Milman et al., 2025).

Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) is widely understood as a multidimensional construct encompassing the cognitive, emotional/affective, and behavioral engagement of consumers when interacting with a brand (Matute et al., 2019; Ooi et al., 2022; Pereira et al., 2024). More than a mere momentary reaction, this engagement reflects active cognitive processing, strong emotional bonds, and sustained personal participation (Ooi et al., 2022). From the perspective of service-dominant logic, CBE emerges as a psychological and behavioral manifestation stemming from the process of shared value creation through resource integration and service exchange between the consumer and the brand (Ndhlovu & Maree, 2022). This engagement transcends routine transactional relationships, wherein deep psychological bonds and active consumer participation in various brand initiatives ultimately serve as key drivers of long-term loyalty and brand advocacy (Salviatti, 2025). A synthesis of these perspectives indicates that CBE is a form of multidimensional, interactive engagement that creates shared value and strengthens long-term relational bonds between consumers and brands. Far exceeding routine transactional exchanges, CBE reflects a process of shared value creation and resource integration, typically manifested through conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection (Henni & Rufaidah, 2025; Salviatti, 2025). A study conducted by (Galdón et al., 2024), found that SMI had a positive and significant impact on customer engagement. This finding is supported by previous research social media influencers had a considerable impact on customer brand engagement (Ali et al., 2022). Social media influencers marketing has a positive and significant impact on consumer engagement (Zahran & Aljuhmani, 2025). Research (Ao et al., 2023) SMI traits, which encompass eight characteristics, demonstrate a moderate to strong correlation with purchase intention and customer engagement. Due to customers' significant activity on social media and their following of digital influencers, it is recommended that practitioners utilize these influencers to engage customers and stimulate buy intention. Consequently, the researchers proposed the subsequent hypothesis for this study:

H1: Social media influencers have a positive effect on customer brand engagement.

Investigations into the correlation between brand equity and client brand engagement remain comparatively scarce. Most prior research has investigated the negative link, namely the impact of customer brand engagement on brand equity. Customer-Based Brand Equity positively influences customer satisfaction and reputation. Moreover, it yields effects like as customer engagement (Cambra-fierro et al., 2021). Dimensions of brand equity, such as brand image, perceived quality, and trust, serve as significant precursors to consumer brand engagement (Algharabat et al., 2019). Customer brand involvement likely influences brand equity. Consequently, the researchers articulated the subsequent hypothesis for this study:

H2: Brand equity has a positive effect on customer brand engagement.

Although the literature surrounding consumer engagement is expanding, prior research seldom explores the dual impact of influencer marketing and brand equity on customer engagement in the context of local athletic brands within emerging markets. Grounded in these considerations, this study synthesizes social media influencer (SMI) dynamics with brand equity theory to construct an integrative framework that explains customer brand engagement (CBE) within the local sportswear market, specifically focusing on Ortuseight. The model operationalizes both Social media Influencers comprising post attributes, communicability, credibility, and word-of-mouth, and brand equity spanning brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty as multidimensional antecedents. It systematically evaluates how these constructs drive the core dimensions of consumer engagement, namely conscious attention, enthused participation, and social connection. Utilizing partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM), the study tests the underlying structural paths while comparing the relative effect magnitude of SMI and brand equity on CBE.

This research offers three distinct contributions to the marketing literature. First, it enriches consumer engagement theory by disentangling the multidimensional effects of SMI and brand equity, providing empirical proof that brand equity plays a far more decisive role than influencer communications in building long-term customer engagement. Second, it elevates digital marketing literature by embedding influencer campaigns within a relational brand equity architecture, recasting influencer tactics from standalone promotional tools into integrated assets for brand building. Third, by offering empirical insights from an emerging market context specifically the booming local running shoe segment in Indonesia, this study strengthens the external validity and contextual adaptability of integrated CBE, SMI, BE models.

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal-explanatory research design to examine and validate the hypothesized causal relationships among the variables. This design was selected because the primary objective of the study is to provide an empirical confirmation of a theoretically constructed consumer behavior model. Data collection was carried out utilizing a cross-sectional survey design, enabling the efficient capture of consumer trends, perspectives, and attitudes at a single point in time. This approach is deemed highly appropriate for observing the fast-paced and dynamic nature of social media user behavior. Furthermore, incorporating an explanatory framework allows for a deeper extraction of structural paths, ensuring that the underlying predictors of customer interactions are not merely described but robustly quantified. Consequently, this systemic configuration provides the necessary analytical rigor to validate complex structural frameworks within contemporary digital marketing ecosystems.

The target population for this study consists of active consumers and running enthusiasts in Indonesia. Specifically, users of the local footwear brand, Ortuseight, were selected as the primary target respondents. The selection of Ortuseight is justified by the fact that this brand represents one of the most rapidly growing domestic sportswear companies in the market, which aggressively leverages digital marketing strategies and running influencers to maintain its competitive edge. Furthermore, the explosive growth of running as a lifestyle trend among Indonesian youth provides an ideal backdrop for this investigation. By focusing on this specific demographic, the study captures the behavioral nuances of a highly engaged

consumer segment that relies heavily on peer recommendations and digital content. Investigating how Ortuseight successfully navigates this highly competitive landscape through targeted social media campaigns offering valuable, generalizable insights into contemporary brand-consumer relationship dynamics in emerging markets.

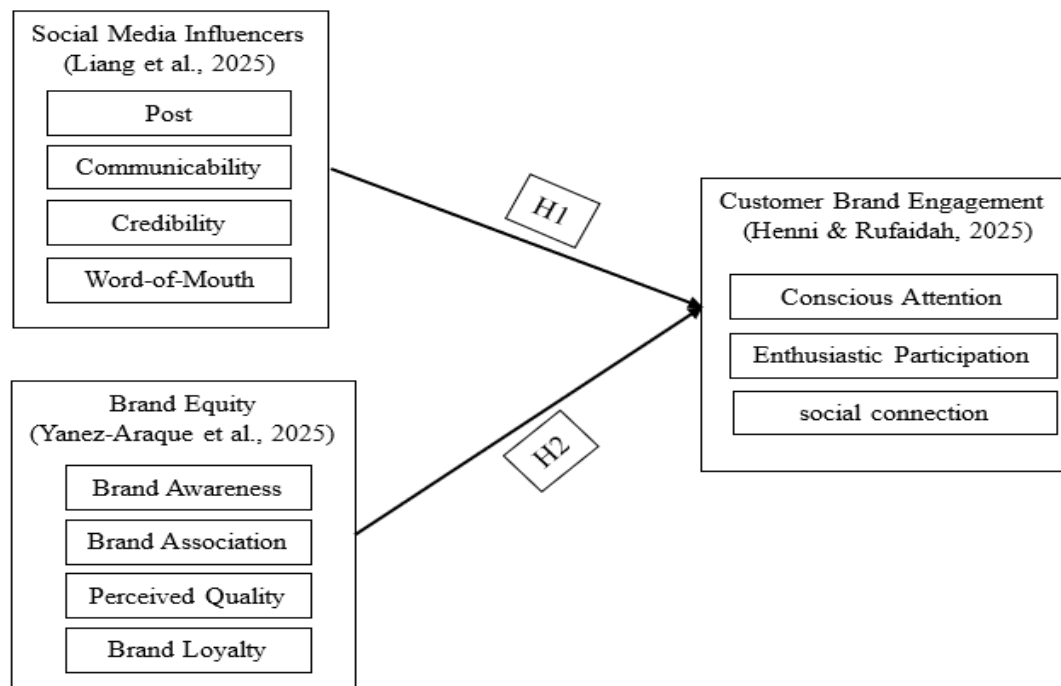


Figure 1 Proposed Research Model

Source: Authors, 2026

A total sample of 202 respondents was successfully gathered for this study. The sampling procedure relied on a non-probability convenience sampling technique combined with a self-administered questionnaire approach. The utilization of convenience sampling was justified based on practical feasibility and the researcher's ease of access to the running community within a limited timeframe (Nunan et al., 2020). However, it is explicitly acknowledged that this non-probability approach entails inherent methodological trade-offs, particularly regarding restricted generalizability to the broader population of casual footwear consumers and potential self-selection bias among respondents with stronger initial brand affinity or higher social media engagement. To mitigate potential sampling bias and maintain data relevance, two strict screening criteria (purposive filters) were applied at the beginning of the questionnaire: (1) respondents must actively follow running influencers on social media, and (2) respondents must have seen or interacted with Ortuseight promotional content within the last three months.

The primary data collection process was carried out over a 30-day period using a dual-channel distribution approach. First, the questionnaires were distributed physically at various sports hubs and recreational venues, such as running tracks and sports complexes. Second, the questionnaires were administered digitally via Google Form links, which were shared across numerous running community groups on social media platforms, including Threads, Instagram, Facebook, and X. The characteristics of the captured respondents were then comprehensively mapped based on their demographic profiles (gender, age, educational

background, and occupation) and their behavioral patterns regarding social media content consumption regarding brand and influencer content.

Furthermore, rigorous ethical considerations were maintained throughout the data collection phase. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was digitally or physically obtained from each respondent prior to questionnaire administration, ensuring complete anonymity and confidentiality of personal metrics. Regarding data preprocessing, a meticulous data screening procedure was executed to address potential missing values and unengaged responses. Since the Google Form required answers for all structural items, no missing values were present in the digital dataset, while physical entries were manually audited. Standardized statistical checks confirmed that the final dataset containing 202 clean responses was completely robust, verified, and eligible for structural equation modeling analysis.

Data analysis was executed using SmartPLS 4.0 via Partial Least Squares-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) following the two-stage analytical procedure recommended by (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022). PLS-SEM was selected due to the presence of complex second-order constructs, the primary objective of maximizing explained variance in Customer Brand Engagement, and its robustness with moderate sample sizes ($n = 202$) without requiring multivariate normality. The first evaluation focused on the measurement model (outer model) to establish the validity and reliability of the research instrument. At this stage, indicator reliability was evaluated using outer loadings (≥ 0.708) to ensure that each indicator explained more than 50% of its construct variance. Internal consistency reliability was subsequently assessed via Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (≥ 0.70), indicating that all items consistently measured the same latent construct without redundancy. Meanwhile, convergent validity was established through Average Variance Extracted ($AVE \geq 0.50$), demonstrating that the latent construct accounted for more than half of its indicators' variance on average. Finally, discriminant validity was tested using the Fornell-Larcker criterion and cross-loadings, where the Fornell-Larcker criterion required the square root of the AVE for each construct to be greater than its correlations with other constructs, while cross-loadings required an indicator's loading to be highest on its intended construct. This procedure confirmed that each construct uniquely shared more variance with its own indicators than with any other construct in the model.

The second evaluation stage examined the structural model (inner model) to test the hypothesized relationships and the model's predictive capability. The assessment began with multicollinearity analysis using Variance Inflation Factor ($VIF < 3.0$) values to guarantee the absence of excessive correlation among independent variables, ensuring that path coefficient estimates were unbiased. A non-parametric bootstrapping algorithm with 5,000 resamples was then applied to evaluate structural path coefficients (β), where the magnitude and direction of the coefficients reflected the degree of influence between constructs, while t-statistics (> 1.96) and -values (< 0.05) determined the statistical significance of the hypotheses. Furthermore, the model's explanatory power was evaluated through the coefficient of determination (R^2), reflecting the percentage of variance in Customer Brand Engagement explained collectively by the predictor variables. Effect size (f^2) was also calculated to assess the relative contribution of each predictor variable, categorized as small (0.02), medium (0.15), and large (0.35). Concluding the structural model assessment, predictive relevance ($Q^2 > 0$) was evaluated to confirm the model's out-of-sample predictive accuracy. Consequently, the application of the PLS-SEM approach through the evaluation of both outer and inner models proves to be appropriate and highly relevant for testing the relationships among variables in this study.

This method effectively accommodates the complex measurement of the relationships between Social Media Influencers and Brand Equity on Customer Brand Engagement. The strength of PLS-SEM in consumer engagement based predictive analysis and perceptual relationship modeling provides a solid methodological foundation to test the research hypotheses while illuminating the extent to which social media influencers and local brand strength foster holistic customer brand engagement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The profiles of the respondents feature gender, age, personnel education and type of employment as well as how they use and react to influencer content on social media. The results of the research confirmed that gender (62.9% male) and age from 18 to 25 years old (54.65%) constituted a majority of the respondents. This indicates that the main wearers of shoes are relatively young persons. Most of them held a high-school diploma, or its equivalent (41.6%), but 26.7% were attending school at the time they completed the questionnaire. Thus, the brand is familiar for respondents who were students and college goers. All individuals in the sample were customers of this shoe line, with nearly all (99.5%) exposed to influencer content on social media about the brand. At the same time, more than half of the sample respondents reported (52%) that they bought a brand they already know for a second time because an influencer made it attractive. Influencer content, therefore, is very influential for young consumers. This shows the vast impact of influencer -generated content on consumer engagement and buying decisions.

Evaluation of a reflective measurement model Reflection reflects two aspects of the measurement reliability: indicator level and construct level J. F. J. Hair et al. (2022). There is a rule of thumb that the standard external load should be 0.708 or higher, indicating that the construct can explain over one half (50%) of the variance of an indicator (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022). The guideline for evaluating convergent validity stipulates that the factor loading must exceed 0.7 for confirmatory research and fall between 0.6 and 0.7 for exploratory research, while the average variance extracted (AVE) should surpass 0.5 (Hamid & Anwar, 2019). In this study, indicator reliability testing was conducted through an analysis of the outer loading values in the reflective measurement model. In this study, the internal reliability of the construct was tested using Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite reliability (ρ_a), and Average variance extracted (AVE) values. The following are the results of measuring the loading factors for each variable indicator.

The measurement model test results show that all indicators in the social media influencer, The loading factor values for brand equity and customer brand engagement variables exceed 0.708. All items satisfy the criteria for convergent validity as stipulated by (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022; Hamid & Anwar, 2019). Elevated loading factor values (0.826–0.928) demonstrate that all indicators effectively describe the social media influencer construct. The dimension of social media influencers exhibits a robust correlation with the construct, suggesting that the quality of information shared, communication proficiency, credibility, and positive influence of influencers accurately represent respondents' beliefs of an influencer's function on social media. The consistently high loading factor in the brand equity variable signifies that the indicators from the dimensions of brand awareness, brand association, perceived quality, and brand loyalty effectively represent the construct. This indicates that respondents have a strong and positive brand attitude in terms of awareness, association, quality and loyalty to the brand being studied. Like the customer brand

engagement construct, all indicators in the three aware attention dimension, captive affection and social bonding constructs have very high weights. This trend holds a particular significance in that it means respondents were truly engaging on a cognitive, emotional and even social level with the brand. Therefore, we can say that all indicators on this research possess strong evidence of convergent validity and also are acceptable to further analysis such as the evaluation for measurement reliability and inquiries into the relationship between variables in structural model.

Table 1. Profile Respondent Information

Indicator		N	%
Gender	Male	127	62,9%
	Female	75	37,1%
Age	18 – 25 Year	110	54,5%
	26 – 35 Year	46	22,8%
	36 – 45 Year	26	12,9%
	46 – 55 Year	18	8,9%
	>55 Year	2	1%
Education Level	Senior High School	84	41,6%
	Diploma	38	18,8%
	Bachelor's Degree	77	38,1%
	Master's Degree	2	1%
	Other	1	0,5%
Occupation	Civil Servants	13	6,4%
	Entrepreneur	34	16,8%
	State-Owned employee	19	9,4%
	Students	54	26,7%
	Freelance	24	11,9%
	Private Employee	45	22,3%
	Unemployment	11	5,5%
	Other	2	1%
Do you use this brand running shoes	Yes	202	100%
	No	0	0
Do you follow running influencers on social media	Yes	193	95,5%
	No	9	4,5%
Have you ever seen influencer content about this brand shoes on social media	Yes	201	99,5%
	No	1	0,5%
How often do you see videos of running influencer content about this brand shoes on social media	Never	0	0
	Seldom	9	4,5%
	Sometimes	72	35,6%
	Often	72	35,6%
	Very often	49	24,3%
How often do you buy this brand shoes recommended by running influencers on social media	Never	4	2%
	1 time	73	36,1%
	2 times	105	52%
	3 times	12	5,9%
	More than 3 times	8	4%

Source: Authors, 2025

Table 2. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Variable/Dimension	Item	Outer Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
Post	PS1	0.876	0.837	0.839	0.755
	PS2	0.868			
	PS3	0.862			
Communicability	COM1	0.874	0.853	0.853	0.773
	COM2	0.887			
	COM3	0.876			
Credibility	CDB1	0.911	0.883	0.884	0.811
	CDB2	0.900			
	CDB3	0.891			
Word-of-Mouth	WOM1	0.879	0.845	0.846	0.764
	WOM2	0.866			
	WOM3	0.876			
Brand Awareness	BA1	0.826	0.825	0.833	0.741
	BA2	0.875			
	BA3	0.880			
Brand Association	BAS1	0.831	0.809	0.809	0.724
	BAS2	0.873			
	BAS3	0.847			
Perceived Quality	PQ1	0.858	0.858	0.860	0.780
	PQ2	0.906			
	PQ3	0.884			
Brand Loyalty	BL1	0.867	0.851	0.852	0.770
	BL2	0.870			
	BL3	0.895			
Conscious Attention	CA1	0.910	0.882	0.885	0.809
	CA2	0.911			
	CA3	0.878			
Enthused Participation	EP1	0.847	0.854	0.857	0.775
	EP2	0.902			
	EP3	0.891			
Social Connection	SC1	0.911	0.892	0.894	0.823
	SC2	0.928			
	SC3	0.882			

Source: Authors, 2025

The internal consistency of the construct was evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha (α), Composite Reliability (ρ_a) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). For all thresholds tested, the construct did not go below 0.70. To be considered credible in additional analysis, the Cronbach Alpha should be more than or equal to 0.70 for the latent variable (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022; Kamal et al., 2020). Convergent validity is tested through the average variance extracted (quantifying that an AVE greater than 0.50 implies that a construct explains more than half of the variance in observed variables) (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022).

The results show that Cronbach's Alpha and composite reliability (ρ) of all constructs are above 0.80, ranging from 0.809 to 0.937. At least, overall statistics show that constructs failed to surpass 0.95 as an indication of high dependability since the internal consistency is solid for all constructs in this study. For all constructs, the AVE exceeds 0.50:

AVE = 0.568–0.823. Accordingly, all constructs are claimed to have been convergent validity benchmarks which could account for over 50% true variance of the constituents and could be labeled as convergent valid. As a result, the study findings indicate that all formative indicators of Social Media Influencer, Brand Equity and Customer Brand Engagement as well as their dimensions have satisfied rules for internal reliability and convergent validity suggested by (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022; Kamal et al., 2020). Thus, they are good constructs with reliability and validity and can be confidently moved to a phase of structural analysis for testing the relationships between variables in proposed model.

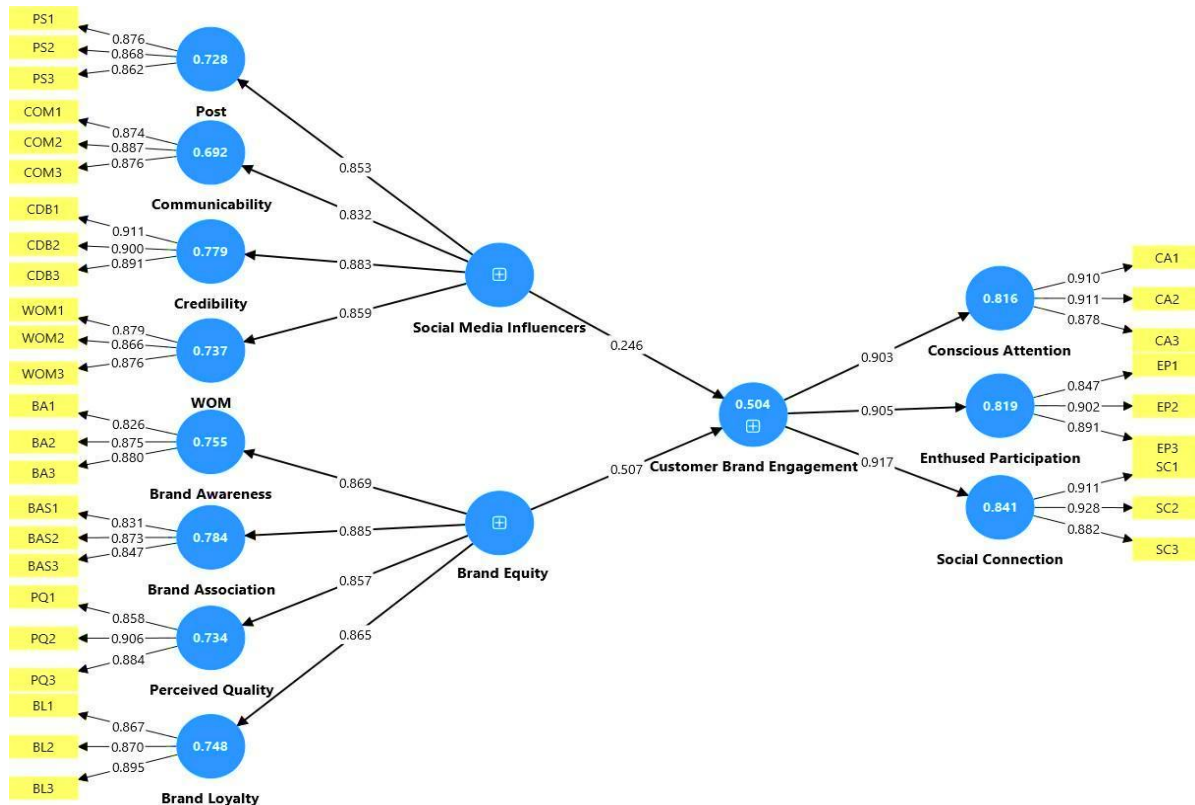


Figure 2. Outer model

Source: Authors, 2025

Discriminant validity is the extent to which a construct is distinct from other constructs on empirical grounds. For reflecting indicators, the cross-loading value indicates if the variables achieve discriminant validity. Each variable's value must exceed 0.70. In my work, the assessment of discriminant validity using different weights is conducted by the Fornell-Larcker criterion, which will be satisfied when the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of the construct is considered. The Fornell-Larcker criterion is met when the square root of a construct's Average Variance Extracted (AVE) exceeds the correlations with other constructs (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022).

Table 3. Discriminant validity Fornell-Larcker criterion

	BAS	BA	BE	BL	COM	CA	CDB	CBE	EP	PQ	PS	SC	SMI	WOM
BAS	0.851													
BA	0.730	0.861												
BE	0.885	0.869	0.754											
BL	0.696	0.638	0.865	0.877										
COM	0.575	0.520	0.613	0.524	0.879									
CA	0.561	0.534	0.635	0.622	0.484	0.900								
CDB	0.547	0.651	0.688	0.557	0.670	0.504	0.900							
CBE	0.600	0.575	0.691	0.689	0.551	0.903	0.550	0.813						
EP	0.532	0.515	0.627	0.619	0.479	0.720	0.509	0.905	0.880					
PQ	0.657	0.661	0.857	0.659	0.512	0.484	0.636	0.531	0.510	0.883				
PS	0.516	0.564	0.598	0.445	0.582	0.528	0.669	0.542	0.475	0.557	0.869			
SC	0.540	0.516	0.619	0.635	0.535	0.738	0.485	0.917	0.754	0.455	0.473	0.907		
SMI	0.649	0.682	0.744	0.591	0.832	0.586	0.883	0.624	0.556	0.669	0.853	0.557	0.755	
WOM	0.587	0.596	0.649	0.494	0.605	0.491	0.663	0.494	0.441	0.583	0.682	0.414	0.859	0.874

Source: Authors, 2025

The results indicate that the test outcomes for all constructs satisfy the Fornell- Larcker criteria. The square root of the AVE value for each construct surpasses the association with the other constructions. All constructs performed favorably on the uniqueness assessment. In other words, any construct can measure a definite concept without much being the measurement of another concept. These results imply that discriminant validity in the current research model is satisfactory by the guidelines of the literature as (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022; Hamid & Anwar, 2019).

The bootstrapping approach was employed to test the hypothesis using t-values, in conjunction with the path coefficient values, to ascertain the significance of the link between variables. To evaluate the statistical significance of the hypothesized paths, both t-statistics and p-values are examined. In accordance with the criteria established by (J. F. J. Hair et al., 2022), a relationship achieves statistical significance when the t-value exceeds the threshold of 1.96, or alternatively, when the corresponding p-value falls below 0.05. This study's structural model analyzes the interaction among social media influencers, brand equity, and customer brand engagement.

A VIF value of 5 or higher indicates a significant collinearity problem. Early signs of collinearity typically begin to appear when the VIF is between 3 and 5. Therefore, the most desirable condition in an analysis is to achieve a VIF below 3 (J. Hair et al., 2019). Referring to the criteria, a model is declared ideal and free from multicollinearity constraints if it has a VIF score below 3. Conversely, the emergence of early indications of collinearity disturbances should be watched out for if the value is in the range of 3 to 5. Based on the test results in this study, the VIF values for the first (H1) and second (H2) hypotheses are all below 3. Thus, it can be concluded that both relationship models are completely safe from collinearity problems.

Table 4. Result of Hypothesis testing for Direct and Indirect Effect

Hypotheses	Models	Beta	SD	T statistics	F ²	VIF	P values	Comment
H1	Social Media Influencers -> Customer Brand Engagement	0.246	0.092	2.686	0.055	2.243	0.007	Accepted
H2	Brand Equity -> Customer Brand Engagement	0.507	0.092	5.529	0.231	2.243	0.000	Accepted
Second-order construct	Brand Association <- Brand Equity	0.885	0.021	41.741	3.623	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Brand Awareness <- Brand Equity	0.869	0.024	35.943	3.078	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Brand Loyalty <- Brand Equity	0.865	0.020	43.773	2.973	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Perceived Quality <- Brand Equity	0.857	0.027	31.767	2.759	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Conscious Attention <- Customer Brand Engagement	0.903	0.018	50.982	4.421	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Enthusied Participation <- Customer Brand Engagement	0.905	0.019	47.058	4.511	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Social Connection <- Customer Brand Engagement	0.917	0.013	70.048	5.290	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Communicability <- Social Media Influencers	0.832	0.031	26.551	2,247	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Credibility <- Social Media Influencers	0.883	0.022	39.336	3,521	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	Post <- Social Media Influencers	0.853	0.029	29.655	2,678	1.000	0.000	Accepted
	WOM <- Social Media Influencers	0.859	0.027	32.314	2,803	1.000	0.000	Accepted

Source: Authors, 2025; note: all P value were accepted

Structural path evaluation yields nuanced findings across the tested relationships. Specifically, (H1) was marginally supported at the 10% significance level ($\beta = 0.246$; $t = 2.686$; $p = 0.007$, $p < 0.10$), indicating that social media influencers exert a positive effect on customer brand engagement. This finding is consistent with prior research (Ali et al., 2022; Galdón et al., 2024; Zahran & Aljuhmani, 2025), which highlights the strategic role of social media influencers in driving consumer engagement. Path coefficient analysis suggests that higher perceived influencer effectiveness corresponds to increased customer interaction with the brand. While this impact is positive, its marginal significance implies that while influencers serve as a meaningful catalyst for engagement, they are not the sole or primary

determinant. In contrast, (H2) demonstrated a highly significant result, with brand equity emerging as the primary and most dominant predictor of customer brand engagement ($\beta = 0.507$; $t = 5.529$; $p = 0.000$, $p < 0.001$). This finding aligns with previous empirical studies conducted by (Cambra-fierro et al., 2021), demonstrating that brand equity is strongly correlated with consumer engagement. Substantively, when consumers hold favorable brand evaluations encompassing brand awareness, associations, perceived quality, and loyalty they are significantly more inclined to actively connect and interact with the brand on social media platforms. It is important to note that the impact of brand equity goes beyond mere influencer effectiveness. In other words, consumers who have a positive attitude toward a brand (involvement, association, recognition, and perceived quality) engage and interact with it on social media, resulting in positive engagement.

The same results are achieved considering the second-order construct; these dimensions have many relationships that demonstrate strong consistency. It is evident from the results of the second-order construct, in which the four dimensions of brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality have very high t-statistics values, more than 30, with a p-value = 0.000; as such, all four dimensions are very valid indicators in forming the brand equity variable. Similar results are also achieved by the constituent dimensions of customer brand engagement; conscious attention has a β value of 0.903, enthused participation has a β value of 0.905, and social connection has a β value of 0.917, and a p-value of 0.000 for all the 3 variables. The construct of social media influencers is also significantly shaped by four aspects. these aspects include communication, credibility, posts, and word of mouth. according to the results, these constructs are very significant because consumers view influencers based on their ability to interact, their reputations, the quality of the content they upload, as well as their role in disseminating the information. To sum up, both social media influencers and brand equity have positive effect on consumer brand engagement, while the impact of brand equity is more prominent.

Table 5. R^2 , Q^2 dependent latent variable

Model	R^2 Adjusted	Q^2 (=1-SSE/SSO)
Customer Brand Engagement	0.499	0.329

Source: Authors 2025

To evaluate the explanatory power and predictive relevance of the structural model, the adjusted coefficient of determination (R^2 adjusted) and Stone-Geisser's Q^2 metric were assessed following Hair et al. (2019), where R^2 values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 represent substantial, moderate, and weak explanatory levels, respectively. Specifically, the model yielded an R^2 adjusted value of 0.499 for Customer Brand Engagement (CBE), indicating a robust, moderate-to-strong explanatory capacity wherein the hypothesized antecedents account for 49.9% of the variance in CBE. Furthermore, the blindfolding resampling procedure produced a Q^2 value of 0.329 for CBE. Exceeding the benchmark threshold ($Q^2 > 0$) and falling squarely within the 0.25 to 0.50 range, this result confirms medium out of sample predictive relevance for the target endogenous construct.

Building upon these robust empirical results, this study makes several key theoretical contributions to the digital marketing and brand management literature in emerging markets by operationalizing Social Media Influencer (SMI), Brand Equity (BE), and Customer Brand Engagement (CBE) as higher-order (second-order) multidimensional constructs. This comprehensive framework not only elucidates how interactions between SMI sub dimensions

(posts, communicability, credibility, word-of-mouth) and brand equity components (awareness, association, perceived quality, loyalty) drive distinct dimensions of customer engagement (conscious attention, enthused participation, social connection), but it also validates the model's applicability within Indonesia's local sportswear industry an emerging market setting contrasting the historically dominant focus on developed economies.

Furthermore, these empirical findings enrich engagement theory by affirming the hierarchical primacy of brand equity, demonstrating that core brand equity exerts a far more dominant influence on consumer engagement than the short-term communication effectiveness of social media influencers. Translating these theoretical insights into practical application, these findings offer actionable strategic guidance for brand managers of local footwear and sports equipment companies (such as Ortuseight) competing in emerging markets. To optimize marketing resource allocation, brand managers must avoid over relying on social media influencers as the primary driver of growth. Rather than chasing short-term buzz and conscious attention, budget allocation should prioritize strengthening core brand equity such as elevating perceived product quality and enriching brand association while deploying influencer campaigns as complementary amplifiers. In executing this strategy, companies should prioritize influencer credibility and communicability over the mere reach of macro influencers, ensuring that authentic demonstrations of product performance convert fleeting social media impressions into enduring brand loyalty. Finally, because enthusiastic participation and social connection are vital dimensions of customer engagement, influencer partnerships should be leveraged to activate local running communities and grassroots sports events, thereby bridging digital narratives with real world experiences that cultivate deeper emotional connections and foster long-term brand advocacy.

CONCLUSIONS

This study concludes that digital marketing strategies via social media influencers (SMIs) and brand equity simultaneously exert a positive and significant effect on customer brand engagement (CBE) among Ortuseight running shoe users in Indonesia. Although both variables demonstrate a positive impact, brand equity exhibits a substantially more dominant and fundamental direct effect ($\beta = 0.507$; $p = 0.000$) compared to the influence of social media influencers ($\beta = 0.246$; $p = 0.007$). Multidimensionally, brand equity is most strongly formed by brand association, brand awareness, brand loyalty, and perceived quality. Meanwhile, the role of influencers is predominantly reflected by credibility, communicability, post quality, and word-of-mouth. Overall, the integration of brand equity and influencer marketing accounts for 49.9% of the variance in customer engagement toward the local brand, demonstrating adequate out-of-sample predictive accuracy ($R^2 \text{ adjusted} = 0.499$; $Q^2 = 0.329$).

These findings offer significant theoretical implications by enriching the literature on customer engagement in emerging markets, where brand equity serves as the primary foundation for long-term relationships, while social media influencers act as short-term amplifiers. From a managerial perspective, brand managers and marketers are advised against over-reliance on standalone influencer campaign tactics. Although influencers are effective in capturing initial conscious attention and driving interaction, sustainable emotional engagement and customer loyalty ultimately originate from the strength of brand equity inherent in product reputation and quality.

Despite offering comprehensive insights, this study possesses several methodological limitations. First, reliance on a non-probability convenience sampling approach limits the

generalizability of the results, as the sample predominantly represents accessible running community members and may not fully capture the broader population of casual athletic footwear consumers or non-community runners across different geographic regions. Second, the self-administered survey design introduces potential self-selection bias, wherein individuals with stronger brand affinity, higher social media engagement, or greater emotional involvement with Ortuseight may have been more motivated to complete the questionnaire compared to average consumers. Third, the study relies on a cross-sectional survey design with a sample size of 202 respondents and focuses exclusively on a single brand within the sportswear industry. To enhance external validity, future research should consider employing probability sampling designs and expanding the sampling frame to encompass broader demographic and regional cohorts. Additionally, future studies are encouraged to employ longitudinal designs to observe the evolution of customer engagement over time, replicate the model across different product categories or industries, and compare the effectiveness of various influencer tiers (such as nano/micro-influencers versus macro-influencers).

As a practical recommendation for local brands and Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) operating under budget constraints, resource allocation should prioritize strengthening brand equity foundations, such as maintaining consistent product quality and building a strong brand perception. When leveraging influencer marketing, MSMEs are advised to shift away from merely pursuing costly macro-influencers for reach toward strategic partnerships with micro-influencers or local community advocates who possess high credibility and authenticity. Furthermore, local brands need to integrate digital promotions with offline community activations (online-to-offline) to foster meaningful and sustained enthused participation and social connection among consumers.

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